

MALLARY MITCHELL

MINIATURE
ROSE



THE
HOMECOMING
OF
REECE FLYNN



"You have a beautiful voice, Ms. Harmon," he said hoping to ease the tension.

"Maybe for singing in the shower," she muttered and turned even redder. "Thank you, Mr. Flynn, but how about calling me Molly?"

"I'd like that. Call me, Reece." He picked up the notice she was copying. "Lock in Saturday for Girls' Junior Class." It was for next week. "Am I invited?"

"No way, and I'd appreciate it if you didn't crash the party this time. No pun intended." Her little smirk was positively adorable.

As he gave a little laugh a memory previously lost to him was stirred. Like a dying ember brought back to a burning fire, he remembered her. He did know Molly Harmon. He looked back to her face. That mouth, *those lips*. He'd felt those lips on his. He took a sharp breath and a step backwards as the horror of the accident came back to him in a whirlwind of sounds and images—all playing simultaneously.

"You're the one who saved me."

The
Homecoming of
Reece Flynn

by

Mallary Mitchell

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The Homecoming of Reece Flynn

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Contact Information:

titleadmin@whiterosepublishing.com

Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

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For my mom who loves to sing.
And to all the pastors' wives and children out there.

Praise for Mallery Mitchell

Snakes and Jails and Puppy Dog Tails ~

There is something so sweet and charming about a book that can make you smile, laugh and almost cry within so few pages. Ms. Mitchell is talented as evidenced by her ability to describe such imaginative scenes that transport her readers into her settings and emotions effortlessly. I loved the beginning, middle and the ending of this tale, it all flowed together so seamlessly. If you are looking for a great time, this is the book to read.

~ Mikey, You Gotta Read Reviews

1

“Guilty as charged.” The judge’s gavel came down hard on the bench, punctuating the finality of the statement.

Reece Flynn gave a sidelong glare over to his lawyer and tried to ignore the overwhelming aftershave the man was wearing. Which was impossible. What was the last thing Ty had said before they’d entered the courtroom? Reece was certain it had involved something about rural counties and lenient judges.

The judge began to speak again, his eyes narrow slits of doom. “I sentence you, Mr. Flynn, to a fine of sixty thousand dollars and forty hours community service.”

He had been waiting for this sentence for six months now. Six months since the accident. Six months since he was charged with careless and reckless driving. Six months since his career had ended on a low, discordant note. It was unbelievable that no one in that church had been injured. He pondered the miracle a moment, then let out a deeply held breath.

It was finally over. He had some closure. At least he hadn’t gotten any jail time. At least the teacher and the little girls at the church sleep-over hadn’t been in the fellowship hall. Still, the fact that he’d plowed through a church full of sleeping little girls wasn’t

good. What could have happened was unthinkable. Reece shook his head and rubbed a tired hand over his eyes.

His lawyer had been sure he'd get off with just a fine, but the judge had seen his record. While he hadn't been in trouble since he was twenty-one, there were three years when he'd managed to accrue a long list of offenses.

Reece's brain worked rapidly. He would arrange to pay the fine today—money wasn't a problem—and the community service would be a breeze. He could work in a Nashville soup kitchen; that would be good publicity, or...

A sharp voice shattered the plans in his mind. "You will perform your community service in Dillard County," the judge stated.

"But, sir, I don't have the time," Reece objected.

"Mr. Flynn, you may think that your celebrity gives you certain rights in this court. It doesn't. Here, you are just like everyone else. Now, I do not recall giving you permission to speak."

"But I'm really busy. People are counting on me. I have a schedule. I tour. Can't I just do the time where I actually live?"

"What about my last statement made you think you had permission to speak?"

The judge's warning didn't reach his brain before he spoke again. "I have a career. It was an accident. I went to sleep at the wheel. No one was injured. I wasn't drinking or..."

"Mr. Flynn." The judge gave him a look he hadn't seen in years. It sent him right back to the principal's office in grade school.

"Can't you give me a break here?" Reece realized

he should have remained silent by the judge's angry gaze.

"Make that fifty hours, and you're still serving the time in Dillard County."

"Can't I just pay an extra fine?" Reece offered.

"Mr. Rollins, are you going to advise your client he can't just speak out in my courtroom?" The judge banged the gavel. "Sixty hours."

"Your Honor, Mr. Flynn is more than willing to pay for punitive damages, but sixty hours of community service may interfere with his upcoming tour schedule."

Great. Ty Rollins finally found his tongue. Some lawyer he was.

The Honorable Zee Dixon leaned over his bench and pushed his glasses up on the bridge of his nose. That wasn't a good sign. Reece looked at the floor. That was the same look he'd seen right before he'd been expelled.

"I know quite well Mr. Flynn is a singer. I also know community service is not convenient. If it were, it wouldn't be much of a punishment."

The judge had a point there.

Reece looked up at the man's steely expression.

Judge Dixon leaned on his elbows. "This is a court of law, and you do what I say. While Mr. Flynn here may not wish to serve his time in this county, this is where he committed his crime. And if he doesn't show up when ordered he will be thrown into jail so fast his head will spin. Is that clear, or do I need to write that down for the two of you?"

"You, Mr. Flynn, took the fellowship hall clean off Piney Mountain Community Church. It took you less than five minutes to destroy what it took that

community fifteen years to build. So, Mr. Flynn, you, will recompense these good folk for the damage you have done, but that is the easy part. What is sixty thousand dollars to a man like you?" Judge Dixon paused a moment to glare at him.

Reece wanted to squirm as he felt the blistering heat of the old man's gaze, but he didn't move a muscle as the judge appraised his intentionally messy-looking hair, leather jacket and pants with obvious disdain.

The judge gave a sniff of a laugh and shook his head. "Paying a fine is hardly punishment, but it will do you a world of good to see how real people live. Therefore, on September twenty-first at eight a.m., you will report to Reverend Paul Harmon, who is the director of the program in Piney Mountain, and you will perform your community service. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand." Reece rolled his eyes. "You have a problem with me." He muttered the last part under his breath. And of course the judge had remarkable hearing.

"Make that eighty hours."

Reece opened his mouth to protest, and the judge's eyes narrowed. The old man inclined his head and like an auctioneer rang out, "Do I hear one hundred sixty hours?"

"Shut up, Flynn!" The lawyer hissed. "You want to move to Dillard County permanently?"

"Going once, going twice...eighty hours for the man in black." His gavel came down hard.

Eighty hours in Dillard County. Oh boy, Reece could hardly wait.

"Zee called me today, Molly. He's sending over a worker." Reverend Paul Harmon spoke as he perused the newspaper.

Molly turned her head from her black wrought iron frying pan of sizzling chicken to look back at her father. She should never have taken over the job of community service coordinator.

School had just started back. Homecoming was approaching at the church. She'd been involved with the repairs and renovations to the sanctuary and fellowship building. That alone was taking most of her spare time. Now she had to babysit some degenerate. Suddenly the chicken that had smelled so appetizing lost its appeal. She scowled and pondered which one of the town drunks it would be this time.

"Neils Jackson or Junior Whitcomb?" She glanced back over her shoulder.

"Neither." The paper crinkled as her father turned the page. He paused and his brow furrowed. "I didn't know Artie Pegram passed away. I went to school with him." Then, with his face still hidden by the paper, he finally answered. "You remember that man who demolished the fellowship hall back in the spring?"

"Reece Flynn?" She dropped the leg she was turning. Hot oil popped out and landed on her thumb, eliciting a cry of pain. She quickly pulled back her hand and put it to her mouth. She examined the growing blister. Fried food was a health hazard in more ways than one.

"Um huh." Again a crinkle as her father turned a page.

"He's doing community service? I mean, he's,

well, kind of famous. Couldn't they do something else with him?" She checked the green beans and turned the heat of the cook top down to simmer.

"I've never heard of him."

As if the fact he didn't know Reece Flynn meant anything. Her minister father hadn't heard of anybody who wasn't featured on WBLL, the local gospel station, or in his other source of information, the *Dillard County Gazette*.

"He's a singer, Daddy."

"He doesn't sing anything I've ever heard."

"He doesn't exactly make it on the stations you listen to. He's a country musician. He's kind of like, hmmm..." Now this was difficult. How far back in time did she need to go? "Kind of bluegrassy, you know like Nickel Creek."

Her father gave a blank look.

"Allison Krauss and Union Station?"

Still nothing.

"Flat and Scruggs."

"Oh." He nodded.

"He's a good singer. Pretty voice, well, masculine pretty. You know what I mean. And he can play anything with strings. He's really quite amazing. Not only does he sing, but he's also an accomplished musician, and he writes all his material. You don't see that a lot. He's—" Molly stopped short. She was gushing over this guy like a groupie. "He's, um, blessed with many talents."

Her father peered over the paper. The furrow between his brows and his tightly pursed lips told Molly he was pondering her words, weighing them carefully. She'd said too much, as usual.

"So, because he can sing and play, he shouldn't be

held responsible for his actions?"

"No, I just thought since he paid to have a new fellowship hall built, he'd done enough. It was an accident. It wasn't intentional. The man almost died. I really think anything over a few hours would be too much."

"He was convicted of careless and reckless driving. No one intends to have an accident, but he did. Had he checked into a hotel and gotten some sleep instead of trying to drive through here after some party, none of this would have happened." Her father put down the paper and looked her in the eye. "He's coming tomorrow to start on his community service, and from what I hear he racked up quite a bit of time."

"Oh?" Her voice waned even smaller.

"Had a bit of a miscommunication with your Uncle Zee. He's going to stay here a while. He rented that cabin Herb Anson has up on the mountain."

Something close to fear gripped her. Reece Flynn was going to live beside her. "Great, I not only have to supervise his community service, I have a new neighbor."

"I thought you held this man in high esteem."

Oh, why did her father have to be so astute? "I do, but I'm not going to be holding him in esteem. I'm going to be holding him prisoner." She placed the lid on the frying pan.

"Stop being so negative. There's a reason for everything that comes our way. Remember to be thankful for all things." Her father laid down the paper and rose from the chair. He walked over and patted her shoulder before leaving the room.

*In everything give thanks...*The verse popped into her head. Her father always had a gentle way of

reminding her to live by faith. Sometimes it was much easier said than done.

She would be positive, but finding something positive about spending time with Reece Flynn was difficult. He was way too handsome, too charismatic, and much too much of everything she wasn't. Just thinking about him made her feel...inadequate.

She shuddered as she remembered how the whole church had shaken with the force of the crash, waking her and the girls at the sleepover. She tried not to picture the unconscious man she'd found slumped over his broken steering wheel.

It was a miracle he was still alive after plowing through a brick wall the way he did. Had the building not stopped him, however, he would have gone over the edge off the steeply sloping hillside and dropped about fifty feet into the creek bed.

An orange September sky outside the kitchen window drew Molly's gaze, and she focused on the sunset and tried not to remember the silly attraction she'd felt for Reece that night or the fear that he might not make it. She could still feel his still mouth beneath hers as she performed CPR. "Well, I hope he can paint and lay carpet. I've certainly got enough work of my own to keep him busy," she murmured.

Actually, with his help she might even be ready by homecoming. Positive. Think positive.

Her new crop of first graders was a challenge, and her second graders needed to go faster. She could use him there, too. Maybe he could grade papers.

She lifted the golden-brown chicken, piece by piece, from the pan with a meat fork, placing it in a paper towel-lined bowl.

The back door opened, and the wooden screen

door slammed shut with a metallic twang of the spring as her mother entered. "Mmmm. That chicken sure smells divine. Thank you for getting supper done. Grandma sends her love." Junie Harmon leaned over the bowl and broke off a piece of the crispy outer layer. She blew on it then popped it in her mouth. "Mmmm, it is delicious. You sure inherited my cooking skills." Her mother's eyes twinkled as she gave the backhanded compliment.

"Thank you." Molly placed the bowl on the flowery tablecloth covering their worn, well-used round table.

"Mama nearly worked me to death in that garden of hers." Her mother sighed. "You'd think at eighty-nine, she would have slowed down a bit. I have late tomatoes and corn in the car, and we must have put up ten quarts of green beans, but that was the last of them. I also have five pumpkins. Would you want one for your classroom?"

"That would be great. We're getting ready to go into plants in the science book. We could turn the pumpkin carving into a dissection and plant the seeds too." She couldn't help but get excited about teaching. She loved it so.

"Molly, one more thing, Grandma needs you to help her with her VCR; she can't get that thing to work. You think you can drop by there tomorrow?"

"I'll try. I would really like her to get a DVD player or something else other than that old thing, but I'll try to get over there tomorrow. I'm getting a new helper from Uncle Zee tomorrow."

Her mother raised one brow. "And just who is my brother sending over this time?"

"The man who mowed down the church." Her

father spoke from behind his wall of paper.

"Really?" Her mother put her hand to her cheek. "He had the fellowship hall rebuilt for us. It's beautiful. Why would Zee do that?"

"I imagine for the same reason that brother of yours does anything, Junie, because he wants to." Her father folded the newspaper and put his reading glasses into his shirt pocket.

"Now what was that boy's name?" Her mother poured a tall glass of sweet tea and took a long drink.

Molly gave a rueful grin as she set her mother's Royal Albert dinner plates on the table. She'd called Reece Flynn a boy. He was a man—all man.

"His name is Reece Flynn." Molly grabbed the green beans and a bowl of mashed potatoes, and she and her mother took their places at the table.

"Isn't he a musician or something?"

"Yes." Again her mother was off by miles. Musician didn't begin to describe him. Molly thought of Reece Flynn with his enigmatic blue eyes and tousled hair, then of him in his car unconscious and bleeding, clinging to life. What had happened to her that night? Why was she so drawn to that man?

She scarcely heard her father's prayer over the meal, nor did she taste her food. She ate mechanically. Nodding here and there as her mother monopolized the conversation. Molly's mind was back at the scene of the accident. She'd testified on his behalf in court. There was no smell of alcohol, and no indication of drugs. There was nothing in the car but a cup of coffee.

When she'd crawled in, he hadn't been responsive. She adjusted his seat back as far as it would go and got the airbag out of his face. She then released the seatbelt, awkwardly reached the lever that made the

driver's seat recline, and pushed him back to lie as flat as possible. He hadn't appeared to be breathing, so she started CPR. There had definitely been no alcohol taste to his lips when she had given him mouth-to-mouth.

He'd started coughing after the fourth or fifth breath. Her first aid training paid off big time that day. He had a wound in his side where the steering wheel had cut a deep gash. She kept pressure on the injury. That meant unbuttoning his shirt and touching his muscular stomach.

She rubbed thumb to her forefinger together remembering the tingle that shot through her arm when she touched his bare skin—how could she have been attracted to an unconscious man?

Before the rescue squad had arrived, he awakened and muttered a bit incoherently. He'd called her an angel and smiled, making her practical little heart nearly skip a beat. Then he'd prayed to live. She stayed with him until the paramedics had taken him away. He'd held to her hand even as they put him in the ambulance.

And now he was coming back. Here.

Since then, she had been harboring a stupid infatuation for him. She'd be a fool to think any one like Reece Flynn could ever be interested in a mouse like herself, and her mama didn't raise any fools.

Reece Flynn was going to be trouble—she just knew it.