



ILLUSTRATION TODD SPICER

Transported By Love

By Kimberly Gadette

MY MOTHER USED TO PRAY THAT BY THE TIME I WALKED DOWN THE aisle, she'd still be ambulatory. As the decades wore on, however, she amended that prayer to hope that it would be me who was still ambulatory. I heard an unsubstantiated rumor that Mother was doing some serious research on wheelchairs that could easily fit down the aisle, replete with an extra-large cutaway back to keep the wedding gown's train intact.

When I was 29, the man in my life proposed. I thought, "Gee, finding a good man to marry isn't all that difficult." The fact that it turned out he was still married at the time was a little discouraging. But after all, I was only 29 and still had some years left to find The One.

Two decades later, six months shy of 49, I met a wonderful new guy. I wasn't all that shaken when he cooked dinner for me in his pristine kitchen, adorned with a paisley oven mitt and matching apron. But then he mentioned he was from Salt Lake City. Though he quickly added that he wasn't a Mormon, my right eyelid was already twitching triple time. And it twitched even faster when he told me he was a part-time musician.

No dummy, I figured a slightly gay, no-account musician bigamist was not husband material. Even worse, he was much too nice. I tried to end it. But he sent flowers. And I noticed that when he smiled, my knees buckled. I didn't know knees could actually buckle, but there they were, buckling to the band. His band. Insisting on paying his share of the expenses, next thing I knew he moved into my house. With his dog. He told me she was twelve, but she looked too good to be that old. God knows, after 20

years of dating, I knew old dogs—and she wasn't one of them.

Ah well—if I had to live under the same roof with a gay around the edges, no-account musician bigamist, so be it. I was almost 49. I couldn't afford to be choosy—or so my mother said. And then she called another wheelchair rental company.

Turns out that he preferred women, and only one marriage at a time. He'd been gainfully employed in the educational system since he'd graduated college. He showed me his divorce certificate, employment contracts, and investment portfolio. Just to prove everything was on the up-and-up, his 12-year-old volunteered her files as well, stretching all the way back to puppyhood. They were the real deal. Both of them. So much for snap judgments.

A few months later, he took me to a lovely restaurant and proposed. Thank goodness I was sitting, because by now, all he had to do was fix his look of love at me and my knees would threaten to do that buckling thing again. I quickly accepted before he could change his mind and while I could still walk/buckle down the aisle, unaided by some company's pricey wheelchair.

The next morning we celebrated with friends. As we were standing in line to order our food inside the heavily-populated, airless eatery, my brand new fiancé fainted dead away. One minute his eyes were filled with love; the next, they were rolling back in his head, his face a pale shade of green as he fainted, falling backward on to the sawdust-covered floor. Two terrible thoughts simultaneously sprang to mind: I'd lost the love of my life, and all those articles I'd read about the impossibility of women finding men after their 30's were right—I was too old to have a shot at love after all. At the same time, I thought, well, thank goodness, we won't be able to mess it up. He'll be dead, but the promise of the happy-marriage-that-could-never-be would carry me into the future, an old maid lovely in grief, a dog of undetermined age limping at her side.

It turns out it was heat exhaustion, and he lived to love me yet another day. And another. We married and our dear pet just recently passed away after five happy years with her new mother and loyal dad.

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He says we will be together for another half-century. I'm starting to believe him. And to prove our faith in the future, we just got ourselves a brand new puppy.

So here's the thing: There's no expiration date for finding true love. Not if you keep your heart wide open. They say that sometimes believing in the Almighty takes a leap of faith. These days, with naysayers blaring a steady stream of "no" from every corner, that leap of faith may take, at the very least, a trapeze, two jet skis and one sturdy rocket.

A note to all my high-flying friends: Carry on. And if you need a wheelchair to get you down that aisle...call my mom. She's got all the info you need. ■