
RETURNING TO US

Back to Corbin's Bend

PK COREY

Blushing Books

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.
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advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

*To Rosie Dee who went far beyond editing to help pull from me everything I
wanted to say in this book.*

Chapter 1

Susan woke as they pulled into the garage a little after two am. The first clear thought she had was, *that's that*. Her third child's wedding day had gone beautifully, but since all three kids had married in the past eighteen months, all Susan could really feel was exhaustion.

Hal hopped from the car and went in without speaking, not that that was unusual. They rarely spoke these days. She knew Hal was getting ready to leave her. All the signs were there, the lack of communication, the loss of intimacy, and in the last few months she would catch him staring at her for no reason. She'd also heard snatches of phone conversations when he didn't know she was around.

Colorado. That's where he was going. Colorado was *their* dream, but he seemed to be going on his own. She wondered if he knew what had happened to them after thirty-five years of marriage.

They had been so close at one time. Married young, they had grown up together, it seemed. Both sets of parents had been against their marriage, so they had no one but each other to turn to. But as time went on and life became busier and busier, they

hadn't continued to pull together. They had drifted apart. Now it was all gone, the love, the passion, the closeness—all gone. *And I never even realized it was going.*

Although she knew it was coming, it was a shock when the next morning Hal woke her before he left for work. "I need to talk to you about something important. Can you plan on being home this afternoon?"

Anger hit her harder than she expected. *Got the kids married off and you're getting the hell out of Dodge. Is that it?* Susan thought to herself. To Hal she answered, "Yes, I'll be here." She couldn't say more without crying and she wasn't crying about this in front of him. If he wanted out so damn bad, then good riddance.

Try as she might to stop it, her mind pulled her back to the old days. They had begun dating when she was only fifteen. Hal had seemed like a grown man to her even though he was only seventeen at the time. Her mother said she was too young to be dating. She said Hal was no good, but Susan knew better. To her, Hal was perfect.

Her parents had been old when Susan was born. So, even though her mother fussed, neither of her parents seemed to want to put forth the effort to make Susan listen to them. Most nights, shortly after dark, she was out the window and up to the little grove of trees where Hal would be waiting.

She'd lost her virginity on the damp bank of Blackwater Creek one July evening after they'd first had a fight. Later, they'd gone skinny-dipping. After that, they'd do it anywhere they could find—the back seat of his parent's car or the floating platform in the small lake where everyone swam during the day. The first school year that they were together, they'd twice snuck out to a school bus when they should have been in class, and once they'd made love on one of the science tables after they'd stayed late to work on a 'project.'

Hal graduated and went to work in construction. He would sometimes come by her house for some early morning loving.

She'd often wondered what her parents would have said if they'd ever caught them, but that never happened. When Hal didn't have time to come in, he would often leave a flower or a note on her windowsill. Susan had felt he was the most romantic man in the world.

She tried to drag her mind to the present. What she really wondered was, *what in the world happened? Do I still love Hal?* He was still easy on the eyes. He stood almost six feet. She thought the gray now liberally spread through his dark hair and neatly trimmed beard had improved his looks over the years. Working outside so much had given him a permanent tan and years of working in construction kept him lean and fit. Susan had to acknowledge to herself that he was better looking than in the early days. But he wasn't the man she had married. He seemed to be a pale copy. She still loved the Hal she had married.

Thinking of Hal's looks drew Susan to the mirror to study her own image. She had recently lost weight getting ready for all the weddings. She was in better shape than she'd been in for years. She didn't think the gray trying to sneak into her hair improved her looks as it did Hal's, so she had it professionally colored, a bit lighter than her original brown and with a few red highlights. Her daughters helped her to keep her fashion current. Classy was what she went for. She wasn't trying to look like an eighteen-year-old. Susan admitted she looked fine for a woman of her age, but she didn't feel that was going to be enough to keep her marriage intact.

She still wanted love. Romance. Passion. But at fifty-three, would she be able to find it again? Was she going to be alone for the rest of her life? Bitterly, she realized that Hal would have no problem finding some young thing. But how many men were looking for a middle-aged, mother of three and grandmother of one with no remarkable talents to her name? Tears came then, and Susan found herself sobbing for the changes that were coming.

Hal came home early in the afternoon. She didn't rush to greet him. She stayed in the den on the computer, but she could hear him moving around upstairs and wondered if he was packing to leave. Nearly an hour passed before he came to find her.

"Would you close the computer so we can talk?" he asked.

Susan hesitated, then slowly closed her laptop. Setting it aside, she saw that her hands were trembling and she felt vulnerable with the computer off her lap. The computer had become a security blanket. She turned to face Hal.

He began at once. "Susan, our marriage isn't working. I think we've both known this for a long time. We're leading separate lives. I'm feeling like we're both here out of habit and that's no reason to be married. Have you felt that way too?" Hal felt like he was talking too fast and took a deep breath trying to calm his nerves.

Susan stared at him. "This is *your* conversation, Hal. I have nothing to say," she answered coldly.

Hal could feel his heart racing. *Dammit!* he thought, as he looked at Susan. She looked so cool and composed. He felt like nothing he was going to say would affect her. But he was going to tell her what he was thinking anyway.

Clearing his throat, he began again. "We used to be so good together. I still love you. But I know I haven't been the husband I should be." He saw the tiniest flicker of interest in Susan's face. "I've thought a lot about the old days lately. We've changed so much that I don't know if we can get it back. But what I want to know is, are you willing to try?" His heart was still beating fast as he awaited her answer.

"You're not leaving? I thought you had already made up your mind."

Hal hoped he was getting this right. He'd thought of little else in the past few months. He'd practiced what he wanted to

say, but he didn't want it to sound rehearsed. Hal not only wanted Susan to listen, he needed her to *hear* him.

"I admit, I'd thought of just leaving by myself," he told her. "I don't want to leave you, but we can't go on like this. I want to try to get back what we've lost, and I believe we can. Are you willing to listen to my ideas and at least think about them? Do you agree our marriage is worth that?"

Hal seemed sincere, but what ideas could he have that would change their reality?

"I... I don't know," she answered truthfully.

It wasn't a 'no' and Hal took that as a good sign. "I've moved some things into the guest room. Come with me, please." He held out his hand. Susan hesitated as anger flared again. *He wants to work on the marriage by moving into the other bedroom?* Perfect.

Hal stood looking at her steadily and repeated, "Please?"

Susan breathed deeply and took his hand. At the guest room, Hal opened the door for her and stood back as she entered the dark room. Stepping in and closing the door behind him, Hal flipped on the light.

Susan gasped and stood stock still. *Where? What? How?* The bed was covered with items. Many were from their past, but some were obviously brand new. Her eyes couldn't take it all in at once. Some she remembered vividly. The paddle with the holes in it. The wicked hairbrush. She remembered it often left bruises. His old black belt. She thought it had been thrown away long ago. There were spatulas, wooden spoons, ping-pong paddles, paint stirrers—her ass tingled as her eyes passed over each one. But that wasn't all that was on the bed. There were restraints, several new plugs and a few items Susan couldn't even identify.

Strangely, among all these things, her eyes settled on a bar of soap in the center of the bed and her mind flew back to a day when they had been married less than three months. They had been in the yard of the little house they'd rented. She had been so mad. She couldn't remember what she had been mad about,

but she did recall that she had screamed and cussed at Hal for all she was worth. Neighbors sitting out enjoying the cool evening had turned to look as she had pitched her temper tantrum.

Hal had upended her in a fireman's carry and stalked into the house. He had been nearly as mad as Susan. "What did I say I was going to do the next time you cussed at me like that?" he demanded in an angry voice, as he stood her on her feet.

"You said you'd wash my mouth out with soap, but that ain't happening you son-of-a-bitch! Let me out of here!" she yelled.

Hal's muscular frame completely blocked her way out of the kitchen. Mad as she was, *he* seemed to be calming down.

"What I said was that I would wash your mouth out with soap and then bare your ass and give you the whipping you deserve. And that's exactly what I'm going to do," he told her in a calm matter-of-fact tone. Hal took a clean cloth from the drawer, wet it and rubbed it vigorously over the soap. "Now open your mouth."

"You are out of your fucking mind, asshole!" She'd snarled, starting to panic. "Get out of my way."

Hal grabbed her and quickly bent her over the counter. He reached into the drawer for a wooden spoon and began laying into her ass full force.

The pain was intense. Susan screamed at him to stop. He was killing her!

"I'll stop," Hal told her over her shouts, "as soon as you're ready for me to wash your mouth out. I told you cussing at me would lead to this. Did you think I was kidding?"

The assault on her ass was too much to take. "Stop, stop! I'll open my mouth!"

Hal stopped and laid the spoon down. He re-wet and lathered the cloth again and Susan, her eyes still blazing with anger, opened her mouth. He rubbed the cloth with the vile tasting soap on her tongue, cheek and even the roof of her mouth before he stopped. It was as horrible as she had expected, though it wasn't

as bad as the spoon had been. A minute later, longer by Susan's count, he let her rinse out her mouth.

Taking her hand, he walked her to the living room and over to the corner. "You stand right here until I'm ready for you to come out. Then you'll get your whipping."

"You just whipped me! You can't do it again!"

"That was for not opening your mouth."

"I hate you!" She cried. "I'm leaving you!"

"Well, I love you," was his answer. "But you screaming and cussing at me ain't how our marriage is gonna be." Turning her to face the corner, he'd continued to talk. "You stand here and think, and you think hard. Do you really want to leave? You think we'd be better off apart? If you stay, are you gonna let me be the head of the family? We've talked about this before. I told you your temper and your mouth would cause you to get your ass busted. But the least little thing gets you mad and you act like a fool. I told you I'd whip your butt if it happened again."

"I didn't think you really meant it. I thought you were just mad at me for yelling at you," Susan had whined.

"I was mad," he'd told her. "But I meant what I said. You need to learn some self-control. And until you get some, I'm in control and you're going to do like I say. You got some important decisions to make and you're going to stand right here in this corner and make them."

Hal had gone on, "In a little bit, after you've done some thinking, you're going to have to make a choice. You can come out, get your things and leave me, or you can bare your butt and take the whipping you've got coming."

She'd heard Hal sit down in a chair behind her. Her mind had been spinning. She had only said that about leaving him because she was so mad. She loved Hal. He'd treated her so well and he'd really cared about her since they'd started dating. Her parents had let her run wild and she'd been tired of it all. They'd never cared. Hal did. She would never leave him.

Ten minutes later Hal spoke, "Susan, it's time to decide. What's it going to be?" Susan hadn't said a word, she just pulled her pants down and waited...

Susan brought her mind back to the present. That had been so long ago. They had been kids with little education and no money, nothing but a deep love for each other. Now they were middle-aged, they had college degrees, careers; they were affluent; they were parents, grandparents... how could they go back to this?

This lifestyle had come up several times over the years, mostly at Susan's request. Hal would seem willing enough, but only for a week or two, then it would die out again. Susan had dreamed of it for so many years. It never lasted. Now, the memory brought tears to her eyes and she remembered the love and passion that had followed that night so very many years ago.

Hal touched her shoulder and she turned to him. "Oh, Hal we're not kids anymore. We stopped this a long time ago."

"That was my fault. Even when you'd ask for it, I didn't do it. I let you down when we stopped." Hal paused, he took Susan's face in his hands before continuing. "I want you and I want our marriage. Are you willing to give it a try? Will you give me a chance to make it up to you? Will you give me, *us*, one more chance? Will you at least think about it?"

Susan stared at Hal. *How long has it been since we've looked into each other's eyes for more than a second? Could this possibly work? Can we handle all that it implies?* She didn't know, but she knew that whatever she decided could change their lives. Taking a deep breath Susan said quietly, "Hal, this is a big decision. I wish I had somewhere quiet to think."

Hal understood at once. "I've got the perfect place," he said and led her to the corner.