

## **Surrendered Hearts**

### **Carrie Turansky**

Published by Flowing Stream Books  
Lawrenceville, New Jersey 08648

ISBN 978-1-888685-40-4  
Copyright 2011 by Carrie Turansky  
Cover design by Ellen Cranstoun

All rights reserved. Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the written permission of the editorial office, Flowing Stream Books, 76 Hopatcong Drive, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648.

Books By Carrie Turansky  
Novellas Published by Barbour Books:  
“Wherever Love Takes Us” in WEDDED BLISS?  
“Tea for Two” in KISS THE BRIDE  
“Moonlight & Mistletoe” in A BIG APPLE CHRISTMAS  
“A Shelter in the Storm” in a BLUE & GRAY CHRISTMAS  
“A Trusting Heart” in CHRISTMAS MAIL-ORDER BRIDES

Novels published by Love Inspired:  
Along Came Love  
Seeking His Love  
A Man to Trust (March 2012)  
A Fairhaven Christmas (December 2012)

### **Carrie Turansky**

Carrie Turansky is the award-winning author of eight novels and novellas. She has been a finalist for the Inspirational Readers Choice Award, the Genesis, the Carol Award and winner of the Crystal Globe Award. She has been a member of American Christian Fiction Writers since 2000. Carrie currently writes contemporary and historical romance for Barbour and Love Inspired. Her latest releases are Christmas Mail-Order Brides and Seeking His Love. Love Inspired will release a Man to Trust in March 2012. She lives in central New Jersey with her husband, Scott, who is a pastor, author, speaker and counselor. They have five young adult children and three grandchildren. Carrie leads women’s ministry at her church, and when she is not writing she enjoys gardening, reading, flower arranging, and opening her home to friends and family. Carrie invites you to visit her website: [www.carrieturansky.com](http://www.carrieturansky.com).

#### Dedication

This book is dedicated to my daughters, daughter-in-love, and daughter-in-love-to-be:  
Melissa, Elizabeth, Megan, Melinda, and Galan,  
Each of you is beautiful in my eyes and in the eyes of the One who created you!

*“Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth;  
give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, O Lord my God,  
with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever. For great is your love toward me;  
you have delivered me from the depths of the grave.*

Psalm 86: 11 – 13 NIV

## Chapter One

A wisp of smoke curled through the tall evergreens and drifted toward Jennifer Evans like a ghostly snake. Her steps stalled, and she clutched the handle of her duffle bag until her nails bit into the palm of her hand. The scent of burning wood filled her nose. Her throat tightened, and her heart raced as if some primitive survival instinct had kicked in.

Stop! It's just smoke from a fireplace or wood stove. She inhaled a calming breath and forced her frightening memories back into their hiding place.

Shifting her focus away from the trees, she searched the quiet Vermont road ahead of her. The man at Wild River Resort said it was only about a mile to her brother's house. But the weight of the duffle bag pulling on her tender right arm made her feel like she'd already walked twice that far.

She could see why her brother liked Vermont. Birds darted through the trees, calling to each other. A slight breeze lifted the evergreen branches in a swaying dance. The refreshing scent of pine and cedar replaced the offensive smoky odor.

It was wild, beautiful, and peaceful. Her heart ached at that thought. Peace seemed like a dream she could never quite grasp no matter how hard she tried, and the turmoil of the last few months had only heightened the needs in her heart.

Sighing, she shook her head. She had to find her brother. Switching her bag to the other hand, she started off again.

The road curved to the right and she spotted a house set back under the shady trees. Number 427 was painted on the mailbox. That was it. A tremor passed through her fingers as she reached in her jeans pocket and pulled out the folded letter from Wes inviting her to his wedding. She checked the return address. His scratchy, almost illegible handwriting brought a small smile to her lips. He should have been a doctor instead of a missionary, she mused. Then she reminded herself he wasn't a missionary any more. Now he worked as an assistant naturalist at the Wild River Resort Nature Center.

She tucked the letter back in her pocket. How would he feel about her arriving a few weeks early for his wedding?

Lifting her gaze, she studied her brother's two-story house. It looked more like a summer cabin with the outside walls covered in cedar shakes washed soft gray in the late morning sunlight. Wild flowers and untrimmed grasses filled the front yard except for the area around a neat stone path that led to a modest porch and a front door painted dark green. Two large wooden bird feeders hung from a tree near one of the windows, and a shiny new black pickup sat in the gravel driveway.

Not bad for an ex-missionary. Her brother must be doing better than she'd imagined.

She studied at the small house again, doubt stirring her stomach into a nervous stew. What if he didn't have an extra bedroom, or he was uncomfortable with the idea of her staying until the wedding? She didn't need her own room. She could sleep on a couch or the floor if she had to. With less than eighty dollars in her pocket and everything she owned in her duffle bag, she didn't have too many options.

She tugged at her long-sleeved shirt, checking to be sure the cuffs and top button were securely fastened, then followed the path to the house. With one more curious glance at the new truck, she climbed the three steps to the porch and knocked on the door.

It had been almost three years since she'd seen her brother. He was five years older, so they'd drifted apart after he left for college. But their disagreements about faith had created the largest gap between them.

She knocked again and studied the silent door. A warm breeze lifted her long blond hair, and she tucked it behind her ears. Uneasiness tightened her chest as she rapped loudly a third time.

The door creaked open about a foot. A sleepy eyed man, who was definitely not her brother, squinted out at her. "Can I help you?"

She sucked in a startled gasp. "I'm sorry. I thought this was 427 Shelton Road."

He rubbed the dark bristles on his square chin. "It is. What can I do for you?"

Confusion stole her words as she looked at him. He seemed to be about the same age as her brother, but he was leaner and a bit taller. His dark-brown, wavy hair brushed the back collar of his rumpled T-shirt, and the baggy, green plaid flannel pants he wore made it look as though he'd just climbed out of bed.

"I'm looking for my brother, Wes Evans," she finally managed to croak.

His blue-gray eyes widened, and a slow smile lit up his face. "Jennifer?"

She nodded, her mind spinning. Did she know him?

He laughed and looked her up and down with a bold grin. "Wow, you look so different, I didn't recognize you."

Heat flashed up her neck, and she clutched the collar of her shirt closed.

His dark brows dipped, his smile fading. "I'm sorry. I'm Bill Morgan, Wes's roommate. We met when you came out for his college graduation."

Biting her lip, she tried to recapture the foggy memory of the event she'd attended seven years earlier. She'd met several of Wes's friends, but she'd been only seventeen at the time. She'd felt totally out of place and couldn't recall any of their names or faces now.

He waved his hand, dismissing her poor memory with a chuckle. "It's okay. Don't worry, I won't take it personally. That was a long time ago, and I'm sure I looked different in a cap and gown."

"Is my brother here?" She leaned slightly to the right and tried to catch a glimpse past his shoulder.

"No, he's probably over at Lauren's. But come in. I'll give him a call." Bill stood back and held the door open for her. He cocked his head and assessed her again. "Did he know you were coming today?"

She hesitated on the threshold. "Well . . . he invited me for the wedding."

Bill lifted his dark eyebrows, questions reflected in his blue eyes. "The wedding. Right. Well, I'm sure he'll be glad to see you."

She hoisted her duffle bag higher and tried to look confident as she followed him inside. They passed a small bathroom on the right and then a bedroom or den with a couch, computer, and overflowing bookshelves. A large map hung on the wall opposite the open door along with framed photos of a stunning sunset and another of a rocky coastline and lighthouse.

As they moved into the kitchen, Bill stopped and turned to her. "I didn't see a car. How did you get here?"

Discomfort prickled through her, but she straightened and looked him in the eye. "I took an overnight flight from Portland, Oregon to Boston, then I caught a bus to Wild River. I thought I'd find Wes at the Nature Center, but it's closed today, so the man at the desk in the lodge gave me directions here."

"You walked from the lodge?" Frowning, he crossed his arms.

She nodded and felt her confidence melt away under his penetrating gaze. Though her desperate financial situation wasn't totally her fault, she still felt embarrassed by it.

His expressions softened. "That's a long trip." He reached for her duffle bag. "Let me put your bag over here for now." He set it on the floor by the couch where the kitchen and dining area connected with the living room. "Why don't you sit down, and I'll give Lauren a call and see if I can track down Wes."

He motioned toward the couch, but she walked to the sliding glass door that overlooked the back yard, hoping for a moment to collect her thoughts.

The house looked larger than she'd first believed, but she doubted Wes would want her to stay. He had a roommate, and it would probably be an imposition on both of them.

This was a mistake. She shouldn't have come.

Tears blurred her vision as she stared at the quiet forest and stone path leading downhill to a small stream. Yellow and white wild flowers peeked out around the rocks lining the walkway. It was a beautiful spot—the perfect place for her to rest and recover while she made plans for a new life she couldn't begin to imagine.

She heard Bill walk away and shut a door. The sound of his voice carried through the wall. His words were unclear, but she could hear the whispered intensity of his voice.

Her arrival had obviously caught him by surprise, and though he pretended to be friendly, she could tell he didn't want her to stay. Why should he? He didn't know her. To him she was probably an irritation and a nuisance.

\* \* \* \*

Bill clicked the hair dryer on high and pointed it at the steamy bathroom mirror. He had heard Wes's car pull in the gravel driveway before he climbed in the shower about ten minutes ago. Hopefully that had given Wes and his sister time for a private reunion.

The dryer cleared a large circle, and he checked his reflection. Wow, three days with the flu had left him looking pale and haggard. No wonder Jennifer had been so startled when he'd opened the door. She had no idea he'd been sick and probably thought he was a lazy guy who stayed in bed until noon every day. He blew out deep breath. Well, it wouldn't be the first time a woman had misunderstood him and it wouldn't be the last.

He frowned at the mirror. He definitely needed a shave. A haircut wouldn't hurt either. He combed his wet hair back and turned to check the view from the left and right. This longer look wasn't so bad. Maybe he'd leave it this way.

Groaning, he shook his head. What was the matter with him? He didn't usually spend more than a couple minutes in front of the mirror each morning, but Jennifer's arrival had thrown him for a loop. And he had a feeling his roommate was going to be surprised too.

Wes and Lauren's wedding wasn't scheduled until mid-August, more than two months away. Did Jennifer expect to stay with them all summer? He grabbed the can of shaving cream and squirted some in his hand.

Sharing his house with Wes had worked out fine. But where would they put Jennifer? He had three bedrooms, but he used the third as an office, and he'd already shifted a lot of his belongings to the attic to make room for Wes in the second bedroom upstairs. It wouldn't work. The house was too small for a third person.

Guilt hit him hard. His name might be on the title, but this house belonged to the Lord. That commitment had prompted him to invite Wes to move in after he had been released from prison in the Middle East for his undercover missionary work.

If Jennifer needed a place to stay, he should be willing to do the same for her. But the idea of a woman living under his roof, especially an attractive woman like Jennifer, didn't seem right.

The memory of another woman with long, honey-blond hair and haunting hazel eyes too much like Jennifer's flooded his memory.

He glared in the mirror, disgusted with the path his thoughts had taken. Get over it! Kelsey Moore was not the one for you and neither is Jennifer Evans. Let it go. You've got a good life with your work and church and friends. You don't need that kind of trouble.

He pulled a clean navy-blue T-shirt over his head and checked the mirror once more. It looked like he'd lost a few pounds since he'd been sick, but at least his stomach wasn't giving him fits today. It felt good to be hungry again. He could probably put away a big plate of scrambled eggs and toast with no trouble at all.

He'd whip up some long overdue breakfast and have a talk with Wes. Jennifer could stay for a few days. A week or two tops. Then she'd have to go. No way was he opening his home or heart to someone like her.