

Autumn's Summer  
Not Your Typical Love Story

By

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A Bridges of Madison County romance with a fantasy twist.  
What if you were given up for adoption NOT because your  
mother didn't want you, but because she was trying to protect  
you from a curse?

*Great loves come and go*

*Profound Ones Mark your soul*

*In ways that take the rest of your lifetime to comprehend.*

While comprehension is one thing,  
being brave enough to break other people's hearts is another.  
Sometimes the best is left unsaid.  
That way only my soul cries in dismal agony.

## Prelude

*Unexpected moments come, sometimes once in a lifetime.  
Unfortunately not when planned or expected. That's the magic and  
the beauty of them.*

*Is it possible to love two people at the same time and not have the  
courage to reveal the truth to one or leave one for the other?*

**Richard;** if you are reading this, I am dead, and even in death this is  
the hardest thing I have ever had to do. My hand shakes; not from the  
cancer, but from my innermost hurt.

First of all, I have loved you deeply. You made my life the happiest it  
has ever been, or could have ever been. I could never have asked for  
more wonderful man, husband, or partner than I had in you.

And, as always, I was a coward, as you know.

But there was a part of my soul that was unfulfilled, I have  
discovered. This has nothing to do with you, but everything to do with  
me.

I would never have left you, would never have broken your heart in  
that way, but neither could I leave her.

I am only telling you to put my soul to rest and hope that, in yours,  
you will find a way to forgive me.

Please don't hate me.

Or her.

It wasn't her fault.

Some things, I've learned, are destiny.

One's never meant to be, but once set in place, can't be altered  
by either party.

And for that I'm sorry, truly deeply sorry.

Please.

Love, Always

Autumn

March 31st, 2011

Richard stared at the brief four-page cover letter, the handwriting rough. *She must have written this letter just before she died.* From the padded envelope he pulled out a thick leather-bound diary, the cover an engraved Celtic Tree Of Life, a pink opal heart at its center. His hand shook as he unwound the leather lace binding it and stared at the first page; My Journeys With Summer.

The package had been delivered this morning; one year and one day after Autumn had succumbed to that dreadful disease that had swallowed her so rapidly. A brief letter from their lawyer's office accompanied it; they'd been given instructions to so do. He held the book, shaking, unable to turn a page, not knowing what to expect. Not knowing if he wanted to read any of it. It wasn't a man she was with, but it was someone she loved and... he swallowed; made love to?

He made himself comfortable on the loveseat they had so often shared and stared at the large writing on the four handwritten pages again. Breathing deeply, he turned to the first entry.

Dear Richard;

This journal begins the tale of another romance. One I shouldn't have started, yet called to me every day; it haunted my every dream and pulled at me whenever I saw a woman with red lipstick. You will read some shocking and intimately explicit parts, but after I'm gone I just want to be fully and completely open and honest with my feelings and you. Maybe it will give you some idea of why I did what I did and, once started, why I couldn't go back to my former life and the person I once was.

I began a diary on my computer after first meeting Summer, to process my thoughts, realizations and learnings. I had read it helps if you write down what you are going through, it helps the mind to process. When the cancer was discovered, I began writing this journal, a record for your eyes, written by me now as I read back through my original diary. Some details you will already know as I would have shared them with you at the time,

but I am adding them in as well to show the whole picture, and I want the complete story to be told to whomever you choose to share it with. I cannot bear to leave this world without confessing all to you, not in a bid to hurt you but, as you will find out about this eventually, to be the one to tell you. It is so important to me that you know, no matter what had happened between Summer and me, that you were always the love of my life and that I would never have left you. I just couldn't bear to let her go either.

I do not know, and now never will, if you ever suspected. But, if you ever did, it was with Summer, not another man. I am unsure whether that will make a difference to you as I still cheated on you and for that I am deeply sorry. That is something I have to deal with wherever we go in the afterlife.

Richard paused and stared at their wedding photo on the mantel. We were so in love. *Or so I thought.*

*Nope, she hid it well, I had no idea other than she and Summer had become very good friends, and neither had ever alluded to anything more.*

Summer took me to places that I didn't know existed and, in the end she saved my life, as you will read, before I found out about the cancer.

Summer knows nothing of this journal. I hope when you are done reading it, you have the courage to allow her to read it as well.

I bought and planted the lilac tree and the lavender to be reminded of her when I was at home. If I shut my eyes it was just like being with her, in her backyard.

Richard wandered over to the French doors and stared out at the lilac; it had grown quite large over the years. How long, he wondered? *If memory serves me right, was what nearly three or four years ago?*

As per Autumn's request, her cremated remains were interned under the lilac. A Celtic ceramic cross marked the location of the modest wooden box. He had sprinkled some of her around the tree as well. She said she loved the sweet scent of the blossoms and wanted to be close to him.

*Only it wasn't just me she wanted to be close to, was it?*

He remembered the few times they had fought. It was rare; that was why he loved her so much, they got along so well together. Soulmates, he'd told her. She'd storm out of the house and sit under that tree crying, on the ceramic bench adorned with flowers and hearts. It never occurred to him it was for another reason. Most of the time she'd sit out there, and write or read, usually with a glass of red wine or herbal tea, looking so peaceful.

Richard sat again and poured another glass of red wine from the bottle on the small side table. He drank back half of it and stared at the journal on his lap. He wanted to cry, but had done enough of that already in the last year and a half or so.

*I don't want to, but I need to know that side of my wife, the woman I thought I knew so well. Apparently, hardly at all when I wasn't here but out on my business meetings.* Taking a deep breath he turned once again to the journal, and continued to read as tears oozed from his eyes and down his cheeks, their faithful Jack Russell, Jackson, peacefully sleeping in front of the fire.

He wondered if he'd ever sleep as peacefully again.

*April 12th, 2011*

Easter had passed and you were gone on another road trip. The kids had stopped by for Easter Sunday dinner and now the house was quiet again. How many times after Julie and David were gone did I walk into their bedrooms, one after another, run my hands over already pressed sheets wishing they were all scrunched up. Or stare at their desks hoping to give them heck for leaving a mess that wasn't there, or hear their voices giggling talking to

a friend over the computer or I-phone? Sounds I never thought I'd miss.

I sat down and cried yesterday beside Julie's bed wishing I could see her face looking up at me as she woke up. She was the lazy one of the two that dragged the bed hours out as long as possible, unlike David.

"Hurry, David, get off your computer. The school bus will be here in less than an hour." In my mother's scolding voice that I no longer was or needed to be and never knew.

Even just to see them there and know they were mine and I loved them and loved looking out for them? A parent's remorse over knowing they were out there living their own lives and my job was done. Was this what so many mothers went through? I didn't truly know as I never had a mother to know if this was normal.

A part of my lifetime that had ended and I hadn't accepted nor wanted to end in the realization that another phase had to begin. But a phase into what?

Closing doors that didn't need opening, yet I still did, wishing for something to fill my life again.

You'd be gone for days, Richard, sometimes a week or more on business trips. Yes we had a well-established habit you'd call around eight every night, our suppers done just to talk, hear your voice before watching some detective show or thriller crime drama relaxing with wine to dull my senses.

What I realized is that it didn't matter what I watched. Nothing mattered, I was supposedly happy, content in this self-contained, non-eventful life.

One where the highlight of the day involved walking Jackson, our dog. Sipping wine before a fire, waiting for your voice on the phone and making sure the beds were made and all your clothes ready for your return and making sure I had on



clean clothes after a long shower. The rain of water felt good most of the time, reminding me what it was like to be alive. Which I know now I wasn't inside.

Living the life that many working women aspire for.

I should have gone out to find a job, perhaps help in a pet shelter or food bank. Although I knew if I did that I'd be bringing home dozens of strays. That was it, I was a stray.

Untied to anything, especially after finding out I was adopted.

A being sitting in a wonderful shelter, safe protected, but with no one to love me, protect me or guide me or just someone besides you Richard to say thanks for being in my life. The kids had me, loved me immensely and occasionally they'd call or I'd call them when I was lonely, which I know now was most of the time.

I had no one to call, say hello mom, I love you and miss you. No one to kiss me on the forehead and wish me a good night, sweet dreams like I did with the kids. Only you Richard and two kids that weren't there anymore.

And you weren't here half the time and no mother that wanted me was ever here. I think that made me sink into my shell even farther after I finding out I was adopted, which in my soul, I already knew.

As it was I rarely called my step parents. My mom, Alma was okay, except I knew she only adopted me because she couldn't have any kids and due to her strict Catholic up-bringing had to be a real mother otherwise she'd feel like a failure to her husband, to the church and to herself.

She wasn't overly affectionate, her strict religious upbringing prevented that and she wanted to be in the higher echelons of the local church group, so I was often sent away off to schools, to quote get a better education, only I realized

later to not have to deal with the crazy red headed daughter that didn't look remotely like her or her well to do husband.

It was funny, he travelled a lot for his job as well. Something I learned later from Summer a thing called the comfort zone. I attracted into my life a man that was just like my stepdad who wasn't there.

Don't get me wrong Richard, I'm just spilling out realizations now as they come to me. Part of the opening up of Autumn, as Summer called it.

All part of the lessons of learning who I was or wasn't even if they were lessons I didn't want to learn.

As I mentioned, part of the Autumn you never got to see, who cried by her kids beds wishing they were there to look after, tuck in, to give back the love from someone that I never had in my comfort zone.

From the Autumn that didn't exist in any comfort zone I never had. Nor ever could until I became aware of what I wanted, yet had never experienced, hence why my life became what it was.

The empty part inside that I'd grown up with, which I now had begun to reclaim due to Summer.

## Chapter One

April 24, 2008

My eyes had been inexplicably drawn to the ad on the grocery store's corkboard and for an unknown reason my heart pounded. I was staring at it, lost in thought, when a wave of ylang-ylang or Patchouli washed over me like a soft fleece blanket.

"I see my ad has caught your attention." Her voice, soft, sincere, washed into me and something inside jumped as I turned to stare for the first time into soft blue eyes with oceanic depths.

So it began.

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It was late spring, just before the beginning of Summer. That was her name by the way; Summer.

I had stopped on the other side of the Sammamish Lake at the Lakeside Full Line Grocery store. I usually hit the big city store on the way home, but had realized I'd forgotten a couple of things for dinner. On the way out, postings clipped to a corkboard caught my attention. One for canoe lessons, something I'd been meaning to learn, and wanted to surprise you with. Our two kids, David and Julie, had flown the nest and had begun their own lives. With your career in sales you were often gone for days or weeks and, although I wanted to return to my writing, to the journalistic career I'd put on hold for domesticity, I wasn't sure where to begin. Learning to canoe would at least be an achievement. I'd love to go out on the lake to pass the hours without you. When we went together, I was

submissive, happy to let you paddle. I enjoyed it, letting you be in charge of me. Or so I'd thought. I tore off the strip of paper from the bottom of someone called Jason's ad, meaning to phone as soon as I returned home.

But another ad caught my eye, and my spirit, as I picked up the heavy shopping bags. A hand-drawn picture of someone meditating, legs crossed and a heart erupting over them. 'Yoga classes, meditations, spiritual readings, etc. Sign up and find your inner voice and spirit. Fulfill the deeper meaning of your life.' The words hit rather hard. I had no deeper meaning, other than cooking, washing, cleaning the house and looking after the kids that were no longer there. I realized right then and there how empty I was inside. I should be happy; your well-paying job provided very well and had bought the lovely house on a gorgeous lake. And I was very happy, or so I thought. But perhaps there was something more?

The words called to me again and again as I stared like a deer dazzled by headlights. I stood lost in the knowing that what I was about to do, no, wanted to do, would change something inside me. The weight of the shopping bags pulled at me, calling me back to my humdrum, yet peaceful life. *Go now!* Cried out from my mind as I put them down.

Did I want to complicate it? Still a part of myself called from within. At the moment I had nothing, was nothing, only a housewife.

*Most likely some crazy hippy chick doing woo-woo stuff to make a buck out of us richer folk out here at this lake. Or, perhaps, a more down-to-earth person connected to herself and the planet.* Since college, marriage and two kids I'd not had much time to indulge in what I liked or wanted to do with myself. Quite frankly I wasn't really sure what that was or who I really was anymore.

I picked up my bags ready to turn and exit the store, allowing that cynical voice to take control once again.

"I see my ad has caught your attention." Her voice, soft, sincere, washed into me and something inside jumped as I turned to stare for the first time into soft blue eyes of oceanic depths. A moment of sheer co-incidence, only as I learned later, nothing is co-incidence.

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This was the meeting that prompted the computer diary. For the first time in an age, I was compelled to write, wanting to put down my thoughts while they were still fresh. Meeting Summer had awoken my muse and questioning realizations. *This was a positive start.*

I stared into her eyes as rivers ran into me, through me, waves thundered into the cliffs of my existence. Journeys never traversed in this lifetime, but I've dwelled in others, calling to this life in the serenade of water splashing on my canoe or the dust of an old country road humming along the heat of a summer's morning. Time, love, and, ultimately death come to us all. Amongst the haunt of lilacs wafting in a warm breeze and crackles of a cozy winter fire, seduced by acrid smoke and chilled wine there is a need or want that calls hauntingly to our souls. *To mine.*

At that moment I was utterly stunned, those words came to me again and again, later after a couple of lessons. I heard them calling like being dared to fly and thrust off a cliff's edge. I remember being scared and thrilled at the same time, but

more scared at finding out the true me; the me I'd never really known.

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She had soft red lips, high, wide cheek bones, longer blonde hair that trailed over her shoulders with in curly waves; a single braid strung with colored beads laced her right cheek. I inhaled, my breath taken away, like I'd seen her in some of my dreams or in some erotic visions. "You okay?" she asked, a puzzled look on her face.

"I, er yes, I guess I didn't expect to meet the... er author of the ad," I lied, hearing words whispering to me from inside my mind.

Her smile held, a twinkle of mirth crossed her lips. She shifted her shopping bags to one hand and reached out with her other. "I'm Summer."

Warmth, tingles ran in electric waves as I felt a touch I'd felt forever for the first time. I didn't want to let go as sensations of mists calling to forests below slide down granite cliffs. Still somewhat even more stunned. "I'm... ah... Autumn." Finally finding my breath.

"I love the autumn, colors exploding, spirits going to rest before the numbing caress of winter begins."

Her words added further to my incredulous astonishment, which happens to some of us when we hear and become aware internally of a song verse or a phrase unexpectedly on a TV show. I didn't expect, nor would ever forget, what she said that day. The light in her eyes told me I'd caught her attention as well. Like when you meet someone and know instantly you'd like to befriend them or in some perverse erotic dream spend time with them alone.

I realized I was still holding her hand and, blushing, reluctantly relinquished it. I said something inept like, "nice meeting you. I was thinking of signing up for one of your classes."

Summer smiled back as an older couple shoved their way by as we'd somewhat blocked the exit of the store by our meeting.

"Excuse us," they both grumbled, miserable looks on miserable faces, spent in what was obviously miserable lives now too lazy and late to change; stuck in what they were and too afraid to venture into the unknown. *Was that me the realization hit hard?*

Did I want to become that person? Without having to answer, I already knew I was.

"Hope to see you there." She smiled affectionately, her blue eyes widening, and I felt my heart tremble as she shuffled her heavy bags and sedately strolled to her car, turning once to catch me staring at her. I could see a slight smile cross her lips and felt the loss of the brief moment of contact. Wishing for more.

I stood there long moments as others shuffled behind me before I snapped a picture of her ad, then tore one of the information strips from the bottom, obviously for those not-so-tech-savvy types.

I stared at that strip of paper in my hand, and already knew the question it asked couldn't remain unanswered. There was something that had haunted me my whole existence. I dreamt it sometimes, knew there were closed doors I couldn't open, not even in my dreams and hadn't wanted to until now. Something missing from my life and not just because I was adopted. I had always thought my mother, the one I couldn't ever find abandoned me.

So yes, Richard, I am a coward. But not that day. I put the paper into my pocket and picked up the small bag; it didn't feel so heavy now. As I waited for another couple to scoot by me, I knew a great weight, some forgotten weight from this past life, had been lifted from me and I was about to start something, what, though, I had no idea. Only a purpose, one involving her helping me find myself.

Later in one of our meetings she talked about how people wake up in the morning and have a set number of energy points to go through the day with, say, for example, a hundred. But they have so many threads of past events that are unresolved or things they've regretted doing, or regretted not doing, that they have already used one hundred and twenty points, and that's why they have no desires or driving force in them. They are dragged down, weighed down, burnt-out before even rising to brush their teeth, let alone dress.

She didn't have to tell me; I knew that I'd expended my hundred energy points before I got out of bed every morning denying what I wanted to be or do with my life and maybe some of that was from feeling abandoned, not worth anything to the woman that bore me into this life. I immediately felt so much lighter just because I'd made the decision to attend her classes and learn about myself. Threads of me, attaching to me, melting away. Suddenly the shopping bags felt weightless as I strolled out the door. I looked around, intoxicated, like a spell had been put over me, but she was already gone. Vanished into the mystical realm of bizarre happenings, like an apparition that I thought I'd seen, but hadn't. I touched the paper in my pocket, the smell of patchouli still sang in my nose and the memory of her blue eyes connecting and touching mine. She was real.

Back in my car, I mused for long moments, wondering at what had just happened. Her touch on my hand; I still felt it, the



memory of her warmth sending shivers deep within me. Tingles of wants, cravings to be fulfilled. Wondering how a single unexpected moment, could change your entire lifetime. I didn't fully realize it then, but I just experienced an epiphany, at my local supermarket of all places. I thought enlightened moments came only when you meditated for long hours in some holy place, inhaling the heady scents of special oils and incense, not holding grocery bags of all things.

Her words rang in my head, *'I love the autumn, colors exploding, spirits going to rest before the numbing caress of winter begins.'* The realization hit hard. She, Summer, I knew was something I wasn't; deep. I had no depth, just someone going through life like those two miserable elders at the store. Fixed into the motions of just existing and not living, only to die one day nothing but a husk, more empty than the shell I'd leave behind. I wanted to be more like her. I knew nothing about myself, I was merely a stranger in a strange body. It didn't help that we'd found out from my parents I was adopted; and just before our wedding. Great timing. Abandoned and, sorry to say this, made to look after and please others her whole entire life, including you, Richard. Tears ran down my cheeks as I started the car. The learnings had already begun.

As I said, this was when I started the diary, as soon as I reached home. I wanted to record the whole experience before any of it faded away, and then I signed up for one of her courses on meditation and awareness. Knowing somehow the course of my life had just hung a wicked left down Mulberry Lane or some such, to a place I never had imagined, and on to an adventure I could never have dreamed of.

I also remember staring at your picture and saying to myself that day, *so sorry, but I need to do this, even if it means disconnecting from you.*

Being true to yourself is one thing, hurting others that love you is another. I will use that phrase many times through this journey, Richard. On the one hand, I am so sorry. But on another note, somehow I am not. I needed to find my true self, the self I'd kept hidden from me all those years ago and hopefully you will understand and still love when you read this journal.

Please forgive me.

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Richard left the journal open, upside down with both covers splayed, and walked back to the French windows, staring unseeingly at the garden. He felt a sudden urge to hurl the wine glass at the window with all of his might. But didn't.

"Fuck!" He yelled to the universe, and the remaining spirit essences of Autumn dwelling here, and changed his mind and threw the glass against the wall. Sharp springs of exploding glass and redness seared the area running like scarlet tears down the yellow wall; *like the red aching tears going through my heart, even more raw now than when I held her hand and felt her pass away from me, from us.*

*Or what I thought was us.*

*She is right, I am cut beyond all belief. I never even suspected anything like this, let alone with another woman. Shit, I am such an idiot.*

*I think that hurts even more.* He grabbed a broom and began to sweep the mess up as tears continued to stream down his face.

*It didn't matter, nothing mattered now. She was gone and whatever she did, didn't matter. My wife is gone, my heart has shattered since then and no matter what she has to say in this journal make anything better.*

He fell in a heap onto his knees, not caring if any glass cut into him. *She was making love to someone else all of these years.*

Wearily rising, Richard finished sweeping the shards of glass, berating himself for causing the mess he now had to attend to. He stumbled out to the Celtic cross in their backyard

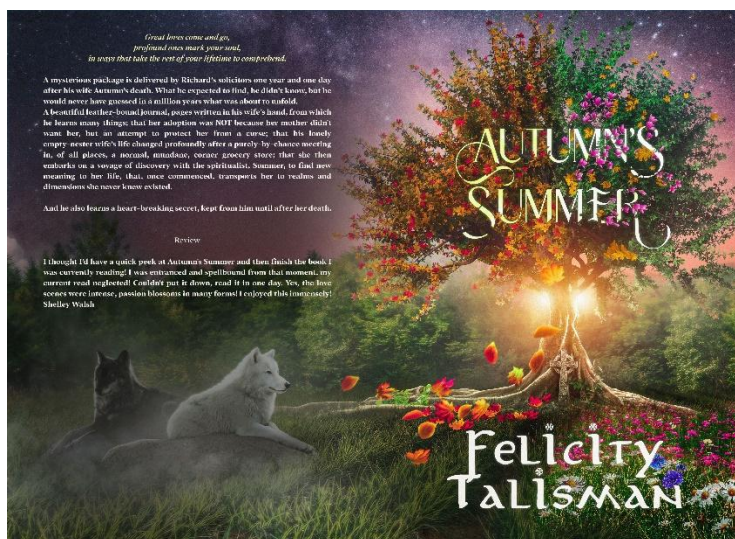
and sank heavily onto the ornate bench sobbing, listening to the rustle of branches as a storm threatened.

Sometime later, he realized it was now near dark and quite cold. He was chilled through but hadn't noticed. The sound of a wolf or coyote howling called from the dark and, as he listened, trying to stop the tears splattering on his jeans, a great warmth surrounded him like a blanket. As if she had put her arms around him, like she had so many times, giving her deep grounding hug she did so well.

Richard sobbed long and hard some more before rising.

*Thanks for that,* he said to the Celtic marker and took a deep breath. *Now to continue. Like she said, no matter how much this is going to hurt, I have to finish her journey in order to be true to her heart; to find out what I didn't know about the woman that I loved all of these years.*

Back in front of the fireplace, Richard stared at his wristwatch; time for bed. He glanced down at Jackson, who was happily chewing on a rawhide bone, oblivious to his master's heartache. *Okay another few pages and off to bed.*



**Possible Cover**