

***Ashes
in the
SNOW***

Ashes in the Snow

Alyce Holmes'

"YELLOW ROSE NOVELS COLLECTION"



Ashes in the Snow

Alyce Holmes

Ashes in the Snow

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First Edition
Published December 2020
E-BookTime, LLC
6598 Pumpkin Road
Montgomery, AL 36108
www.e-booktime.com

Alyceholmesbooks.com

Ashes in the Snow

To The Memory

Of My Mother

Maxie Rene Holmes

The Lady of the Yellow Rose

Always Giving

Encouragement



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There were signatures missing from the bottom of the pages that would once and for all sever the Reynolds marriage. After months of waiting Camille's temper reached a fevered pitch since she believed Victor was using every excuse he could to avoid her. By now the forms should be back in the hands of her attorney. Soon after that a decree of final divorce would arrive and she'd be a free woman.

Camille and Victor were married four years and within their social circle they were thought of as a super couple. She received her undergraduate degree and her doctorate from Stanford before starting her practice as a psychologist. Victor was a pediatric oncologist after completing studies at both Columbia and Cornell.

As his career grew, so did his ambition. He was a man on the rise and she wanted to be the woman at his side as his support, confidant and rock steady anchor. She gave him all he needed, asked for and craved, but in return she'd received very little. He never acknowledged a time came when the pendulum of support should rightfully swing in her direction.

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It wasn't long before Camille saw she was suffocating and drowning in a sea of all things Victor Reynolds. It became so glaringly obvious, it could no longer be ignored. It took the last year of their marriage for the fabric to shred at the seams and several months more for her to gather enough courage to hire an attorney.

Camille walked into the living room where the fresh smell of paint clung in the air. The furniture that sat in that room was replaced from the sofa and chairs to end tables, lamps and draperies. She'd remodeled the kitchen by adding new flooring and a backsplash. The bathrooms and all the bedrooms, except one, had a fresh coat of color. She loved working in their home and although Victor knew that, he rarely acknowledged it.

She clenched her hands into tight fists as memories pressed in and those legal documents mocked her. At this point there were no words to convince her to change her mind and the day Victor found his packed bags at the front door was the day he finally understood. She cringed when she walked into their bedroom closet and saw his other clothing still on hangers and shelves and eventually she'd pack all the rest. It was past time to make a clean break so she could begin to heal and move forward.

Camille pulled her cell from her pocket and tried Victor's number one more time. Again, there was no answer so she slammed the phone down and almost shattered the screen. He couldn't drop off the radar since he had to leave word with his service and she tried that number instead. She was told his patients were being referred to another physician and she found that unusual. During the entire length of their marriage, they didn't have a proper vacation and she couldn't imagine he was taking one now. The best they could manage were weekend trips to the cabin. It was their only asset that wouldn't be divided. It belonged to Victor's father and as

angry as she was with him, she didn't have the heart to take something he loved so much.

In that moment, every instinct told her exactly where Victor went. Camille grabbed her keys and the envelope and rushed from the apartment. After two hours on the road, the muscles along the base of her neck felt the strain. Darkness was falling and she was sorry she'd set out that evening instead of waiting for day light.

She'd been too angry to sit still and her temper was starting to abate as she squinted through the windshield. Frosty, billowing flakes clung to the roadway causing her to lower her speed. At this time of year, the season had changed from fall into winter. She could picture the cabin with a fire in the living room casting wafting shadows against the walls.

Victor stood near the hearth. One booted foot was probed against the stones at the base of the fireplace while he stared into the flames. He'd been there for three days because he needed to feel the isolation the cabin provided.

It had been a while since he and Camille were there together. They'd hike in the surrounding woods and fish on the lake. There was a boat tied to a long dock that extended from the shoreline. Pole lights around the perimeter were lit at night and the view from the water with the backdrop of the mountains was breathtaking.

Built with one hundred year old redwood timbres, the cabin was beautifully picturesque in springtime with trees full of colorful leaves of red and gold. Today the weather crept in and brought cold air and chilling snow. Victor moved to the window and held back one side of the curtain. By morning, the powder would be at least three inches deeper if the sprinkling continued at its present pace.

He let the curtain fall into place and picked up his mug. Just the way he liked it, the coffee was hot and black and he added a shot of brandy. He'd come out there for a reason and

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so far nothing helped pull the heavy weight from his chest. It was unusual for him to take time off to clear his head. The afternoon Lisa Hartley died was the same day he received another voice mail message from Camille urging him to sign their divorce papers and the pain from both shattered his already weakened resolve.

Lisa was five years old when she was first diagnosed with cancer. She and her parents fought every step of the way and Victor couldn't imagine finding a little girl with so much courage, spunk and tenacity. He came to know her and he cared for her family. She went into a two-year remission and they had reason to hope until the cancer returned. The second time it was highly aggressive and after another brave battle, she succumbed.

As a doctor, it wasn't the only life that passed through his hands. Lisa wasn't the first child with soulful eyes that pleaded with his as he tried to find a treatment to save her life. Her loss hit him like a stone because he had a hard time seeing such youthful spirit leave this earth. There was a line most physicians didn't cross since you shouldn't get so personally involved. That could make things difficult and in this case, it was impossible.

He'd been living in a hotel by then and he hated it. It was cold and impersonal. He spent those months thinking about the years of his marriage and believed everything was fine until the day he returned home and found his packed bags. He tried to talk and make Camille see reason, but it was too little, too late. Victor balled his fists into tight knots. His wife was everything to him and he was angry with himself that he didn't show it enough and apparently she didn't feel it.

Sudden, steady light pulled his attention when the glare from a set of headlights shone through the windows as a car pulled beside his Tahoe. It had been in the driveway for several days and the hood and bonnet were covered with fresh powder.

Camille saw no signs of footprints on the snow covered stairs. A fire was crackling in the hearth from the signs of curling, black smoke that drifted from the chimney above the thatched roof. She walked up the stairs to the front porch where several ceramic plant stands stood empty next to abandoned rocking chairs. Pressing the brass handle, she heard movement inside and heavy footsteps walked across planked flooring before the door opened.

“Camille.”

The object of Victor’s thoughts was standing two feet away. The gaze of sultry black eyes traveled slowly up her body. Tiny snowflakes clung to her hair. She was wearing a brown leather jacket that came to her waist and her hips curved provocatively in a pair of dark jeans.

Camille’s breath got caught in her throat when she looked at him. Victor was a handsome, black man, tall and broad and the bulk of his chest couldn’t be hidden under a knitted sweater.

“You came a long way. Why?”

She held up the folder. “I don’t want to fight with you anymore, but I’m here to get your signature on these.”

Victor stared at the envelope. “If I wanted to be bothered with those, you’d already have my copy.”

“The drive out here was too long to be met with hostility. I’m ready for this to be over.” She pressed the envelope against the wall of his chest. “For goodness sake. Can I come in or do you expect me to freeze to death out here?”

“I get a choice?”

“Victor!” she breathed.

He stood back and waved her inside. “I’m not in the mood for this.”

“I no longer care about your moods or your problems. I want these filed as soon as possible.”

“Just like you, I don’t care either,” he lied.

“When did you ever so what’s the hold up?”

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He ran a hand over his face in frustration. “You’re unbelievable. You actually drove two hours to make me sign a piece of paper?” He looked at her for what seemed a long time. “I’m having a cup of coffee. Do you want one?”

“No! I don’t want any coffee. Really?”

He leaned against the back of the sofa. “Then we need to talk.”

“Now you want to talk?” Camille sputtered. “It’s too late. When you had the chance, you were unapproachable. There were things we needed to discuss months ago.”

He nodded. “Like having a baby?”

“Yes,” she whispered. “I wanted a child and you didn’t.”

“That’s not entirely true,” he began. “It just wasn’t the right time. A baby wouldn’t have fit into the picture.”

“I wasn’t trying to create a picture. Victor. I was trying to create our life. I wanted a family.”

“Weren’t we a family? A team?”

“No. We were two people living in the same home and growing further apart with every passing day. That’s why we’re at this point.”

“I disagree,” he insisted. “You already knew that so you wasted a trip.”

“I don’t think so. Why are you up here anyway? It’s the middle of the week.”

Victor couldn’t discuss Lisa with her. “I don’t want to talk about that. It doesn’t matter.”

“I suppose you’re right. What you do is no longer any of my business,” she shrugged. “I don’t want to be married to you anymore. It’s time to face that. Please Victor. Just let this go.”

He stared across the room at her and every word she said went through him like a knife. He loved this woman with his whole heart and he couldn’t believe she wasn’t willing to fight. His shoulders slumped and he felt totally defeated.

“You know what? You’re absolutely right. What’s the point in prolonging this? The sooner I sign these, the sooner you can be on your way.”

He opened the envelope and her rings slid out. Victor caught them in the air and watched them sparkle in the palm of his hand as the light flickered against the jewels.

“You’re giving me your wedding rings?” he choked, as he flexed his left hand and glanced at his silver band.

“I thought it would be best,” Camille responded. “I’m not trying to make this more difficult than it has to be. You didn’t return the calls from my lawyer and you’ve been avoiding me.”

“I’ve been busy, Camille.”

“That’s the recurring story of your life.”

“So you’ve said,” he nodded. “I’ll get a pen.” He walked to the desk and searched through a drawer.

Camille impatiently watched him before she fished through her oversized handbag. She pulled out her wallet and a cosmetic bag and one anxious hand burrowed to the bottom of her purse.

“Here you go.”

He took the ballpoint and wrote in loose sprawl on the line above his typed name and turned over the last page. She watched him sign the forms knowing he’d place a jagged slant over the ‘i’ in his first name and tap the page with the tip of the pen when he was finished. He did that now and something in her lurched. Camille knew everything about this man including his ethical standards and firm sense of morality.

As Victor slid the signed papers inside the envelope, his soul shattered. He avoided her calls because he’d been searching his heart to find the words to make her stay and every time he picked up the telephone, those words failed him.

“Thank you.” She turned to go. “My attorney will contact you in a few days.”

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“Not out here he won’t. The landline is out and my cell isn’t picking up a signal.”

“You have very effectively isolated yourself.”

“That was the plan until you showed up,” he smirked.

“I’m about to remedy that. Good night, Victor.”

She opened the door as he came up behind her and looked over her shoulder. The weather was much worse and driving conditions would be poor.

“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but leaving now might not be a good idea.”

“Make up your mind. Ten minutes ago you didn’t want me to come inside. Now I’m being invited to stay.”

“Get over yourself,” Victor moaned.

“You first,” she returned. “There’s no way I intend to spend the night in this cabin with you.”

She couldn’t help but think of the weekends they’d shared and all the times they were curled together on the thick rug in front of that fireplace. There were too many memories here and she had to leave because they were starting to cave in on her and she wanted to scream.

“I need to go home. I’ll be fine.”

“It’s not a good idea. The roads are difficult enough to navigate on a clear day.”

“I got here, didn’t I? I’ve driven these roads a dozen times.”

“Stubborn. Willful. Pigheaded.”

“I’m all those things and more. So are you. That’s why we have this.” She lifted the packet. “Maybe one of the reasons we didn’t work was we’re too much alike. Neither one of us ever wanted to give an inch.”

“You knew what we were getting into when we got married. Nothing that happened should have surprised you.”

“We wanted to fight the good fight,” she returned. “You were going to save lives and I was going to cure minds.”

“That’s right. We were drawn together because of the drive and ambition we both have. How many times did you take a call from a patient in trouble and run out on dinner? How many calls did you take in the middle of the night and put your patients above me?” Victor insisted.

“You can’t compare anything I did with you. At the end of the day I remembered I had a husband,” she stressed. “I didn’t think our drive to have these blessed careers and material things would always get in the way of us. It was a good thing we took this step.”

It took all the willpower at his disposal not to explode. How could she stand there and imply the dissolution of their marriage was a good thing? What she said was only partly true. The compromising had come from her. Camille wanted a nice home in the suburbs. He wanted to maintain an apartment in the city. She wanted to socialize with several friends and close acquaintances. He wanted to work at the hospital or spend time in the research lab.

Camille spoke of traveling to see different parts of the world before starting their family. He knew having a child was something most women dreamed of and she was no exception. He had plans and couldn’t see adding a child into the mix. That single topic was something they never fought over. It was met with icy silence and a chill that permeated to his bones. He felt that biting cold again. It was a piercing ache almost as fierce as the wind that whipped across his face.

“I should know better. There’s no sense trying to change your mind once you’ve made it. Have a great drive back.”

Camille hiked the strap of her handbag further up her shoulder. “I plan to.”

He followed her onto the porch and watched her car back out the driveway and move down the path. He stayed put until he could no longer see the bright scarlet of her taillights. Heavy hands gripped the wooden fencing until his knuckles cramped. Somewhere in the back of his mind, Victor didn’t

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think she had the heart to go through with it and he turned and went back into the cabin

He just let the love of his life walk out the door. Was he supposed to act as if he didn't feel anything? It should be simple and easy for him because he was a man and showing a glitch in the armor was never allowed. Maybe that worked for some people. To a great extent that was his rule too until this last week that forced him to throw a bag into the back of his SUV and head out of town to the one place he found peace.

It was ironic that he stood there now and didn't feel its warm effects. His eyes looked around the living space. This was the first room he and Camille tackled when they decided to renovate the place. It took months to refurbish the kitchen and bathroom and lay new flooring. Camille made sure to keep the rustic feel, but also worked to bring other features up to date.

As his eyes scanned the room he noticed a leather wallet that was pushed to the back of the desk near a stack of books. Opening it, he saw Camille's license and credit cards. He snatched his coat from a rack near the door before bolting down the stairs. She hadn't been gone long. If he hurried, he should be able to catch her before she reached the main highway. He searched his coat and located his keys.

The truck was cold. It was sitting for days and he was forced to take a moment to heat it and allow the defrost to clear the windshield. Victor cursed as slow trickles of ice slid from the glass. He opened the door and one gloved hand impatiently pushed the rest away. Finally, he set the vehicle in motion and it was twenty minutes before he spotted the taillights that moments ago he watched disappear.

A frown worked across his forehead when he noticed the lights were still with no flicker of movement through the trees. He circled one last bend and saw the rear end with the tail section precariously arched at an incline in the embankment. Victor's heart started pounding as he pulled off the road as far

as his large truck would allow. He couldn't see inside the vehicle and craned his neck trying to tell if Camille was still behind the wheel. All he could see from that distance was the dashboard lights shining in the panel.

Victor rushed back to his truck and searched through the glove compartment for a flashlight. The round beam sent a reflection against the ground and he used it to guide his footsteps down the left hand side of the embankment near the driver's door. The snow in this area had an under coating of ice and he slipped before his feet burrowed into solid ground beneath. He was able to grip the door handle and shine his light through the window.

Camille was slumped over the wheel. The door was locked and he beat against it with his hand, but couldn't shatter the glass. He shut his eyes and turned his head before taking the flashlight and pounding it against the rear pane until the glass broke, then he reached inside and found the lever.

When he opened the door the car slid further forward until it was blocked when it became wedged by flanking trees. He leaned in as far as he could. Checking her wrist for a pulse, he breathed a sigh of relief when he found it. He knew it was dangerous to move her since there could be internal injuries to her body and possible damage to her neck and spine.

Victor couldn't leave her there and he couldn't call the paramedics. Left with no choice, he carefully maneuvered her against the seat cushion before running his hand across her neck. He thought he heard her moan, but the sound mixed with the wind and he couldn't be sure. He reached for her handbag and saw the manila folder that was sitting next to it.

He took both and pulled Camille from the car; hoisting her into his arms. It took every ounce of strength to climb out the ravine. Finally, he was back on even surface and hurried the short distance to his truck. Victor set the vehicle in motion and drove further down the hill until his headlights picked up a fallen log that was stretched across the roadway. He reacted

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quickly and hit his brakes in time to miss it. The Tahoe skidded across the road and the back tires screeched and slid against the asphalt. He turned in his seat and heard Camille moan again.

That log was blocking access to the main road that led to the highway and the nearest hospital. He cursed in the darkness before jamming into reverse. They would have to return to the cabin and wait until the storm blew over and the streets were cleared. Cruel gusts blew across the sky in a thick blanket as he turned the truck around and headed east. He slowed to a crawl and it took twice as long to retrace his steps.

Parking close to the front door, he got Camille into the cabin, kicked the bedroom door open and laid her on the bed. She didn't move as he began to undress her. The only outward sign of injury was the blood on her forehead and the knot that was forming near her hairline. He had to get her warm again. Victor took a quilt from the foot of the bed and covered her.

There were stacked logs sitting next to the hearth and he took a moment to build a fire before going back outside to get his medical bag. He picked up the envelope and her handbag and brought both inside. He took his time and examined every inch of her body before preparing an ice compress. The bruise on her forehead was already turning an ugly color and she'd probably have a terrible headache when she did awaken.

Too much time was passing as he sat on a chair by the bedside and watched the steady rise and fall of her chest. Staying in the cabin wouldn't be a good move if she had a concussion that required hospital care he couldn't give. An hour went by and his anxiety increased.

"Camille," he said, quietly. "It's time to open your eyes. It's time to wake up."

She finally stirred and Victor reached for her hand as her eyelids fluttered and dark brown pools stared up at him.

"Welcome back," he smiled. Her eyes darted around the bedroom before she tried to sit up.

“Don’t move. You had a bad knock to the head and you’ve been unconscious for a while.”

“I don’t understand,” she whispered and licked the tip of her tongue over her bottom lip.

“You were in a car accident.”

She pushed back against the pillow, gripped the spread and pulled it to her chin. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I didn’t wreck any car.” She became dizzy as the room tilted. “I have to get out of here.”

“Easy, Camille,” he warned. “You’re not going anywhere. I shouldn’t have let you drive tonight and this wouldn’t have happened.”

“Why are you calling me Camille?” she groaned. “That’s not my name.” Victor’s hand tightened on hers. “Who are you? You’re hurting me. Let go.”

“Look at me,” he urged. “That is your name. Don’t you remember?”

“No, I don’t.” She snatched her hand back. “I don’t know you. I’ve never seen you before in my life.” She stared around the room again. “My name is.....my name....”

“It’s Camille Reynolds,” he insisted.

“No. It’s not.” She lifted a shaky hand to her head and felt the bandage he’d placed there. “I don’t know who I am,” she cried. “Oh, my God. I can’t remember anything.”

You’ve just finished reading the first chapter of Alyce Holmes’ *Ashes in the Snow*. If you want to know more about Camille and Victor Reynolds, please purchase a Paperback or CD on our website. Thank you for becoming an Alyce Holmes fan.

