



*Terry Odell*

*A  
Winter's  
Day*

## A Winter's Day

A prologue to *Finding Sarah*

by

[Terry Odell](#)

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## A Winter's Day

A prologue to *Finding Sarah*, not included in the novel, by Terry Odell

Putting the final touches on wrapping David's present lifted Sarah's spirits. Another argument about his sister and her never-ending requests for money had put a damper on their afternoon. But on her way home, she'd seen a sale on the digital camera he'd had his eye on, and she couldn't pass it up. Too expensive for a make-up present, it would be perfect for Christmas. Now, where to hide it? Someplace where he wouldn't find it for the next three weeks.

She decided on the closet behind the toilet paper—the last place David would ever look. Despite his many endearing qualities, he couldn't even bother to put a new roll on the spindle when it was sitting on the back of the john. No way he'd go to the closet to find a new one.

His kiss before he'd left *That Special Something*, their gift boutique, had been perfunctory. Hers hadn't been any warmer.

"I'll be back by six," he'd said. "If I don't sign the contract with Anjolie today, she'll take her silver to Pandora's." He started to pull the door closed, then popped his head back in. "I forgot. Call Chris Westmoreland and tell him thanks for the reference."

She was determined to put this afternoon's fight behind them, starting with a special welcome when he got back from the coast.

She peeked at the clock as she cleaned up the scraps of ribbon and wrapping paper. Almost six. She could call Chris later. She tuned the stereo to a soft jazz station

and peeked out the window. A curtain of rain obscured everything until a flash of lightning illuminated the street below. The immediate clap of thunder set her heart thumping. Thunderstorms were a rarity in Oregon.

The moaning of the wind between her apartment building and the one next door made her wish they had a fireplace. It would be a perfect night to snuggle together in front of a fire with some hot chocolate.

Well, she might not have the fireplace, but she could provide the cocoa, and she and David were damn good at the snuggling part, too. She smiled as she went to the kitchen.

Once she had everything simmering on the stove, Sarah searched the linen closet for the winter throw for the couch. The storm carried a nice blast of Arctic air along with it. Oh, yes. Definitely a snuggle night.

The sound of the doorbell intruded into her daydreams. Probably Maggie from across the hall. She tried to wipe the grin off her face before she opened the door, or at least come up with some plausible answer to the inevitable, "What are you smiling at, Sweetie?"

She yanked the door open and found herself staring into the face of a uniformed police officer. She felt the smile drop from her face as her heart raced. Had there been a robbery in the building? Had something happened to Maggie? Or Mrs. Pentecost downstairs?

"Sarah Tucker?" the officer said. "Mrs. David Tucker?"

"Yes. That's me. Is something wrong?"

"I'm Officer Cunningham. May I come in, ma'am?"

"Of course. I'm sorry. Come in." Sarah motioned him inside, her mind still whirling.

"Ma'am, a green Saturn went off the road between here and Tillamook."

Something registered in her brain, and she studied the uniform. Not a police officer. Highway Patrol. "Oh God. David. Where did they take him? Is he all right? I need to go to him." She dashed to the closet and pulled her coat off the hanger. "My purse. Bedroom. I'll be right back."

Sarah grabbed her purse and raced back to the door. "I'm ready. You'll take me to him, right?"

"Mrs. Tucker," the officer said. His voice was sharp enough to cut through her frenzy.

Sarah stopped and looked at him. Read the expression in his eyes. Waited for him to speak the words, knowing what he would say next.

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Tucker. He didn't make it."

She nodded, too numb to think.

"I'm going to have to ask you to identify the body. Is there someone you'd like to have with you?"

The room grew bright, and then darkened around the edges. She tried to say, "No," but nothing came out. She fought the dizziness. No. This was all a mistake. She'd go with this man, and he'd show her the body of some stranger. David was part of her. No way could he be dead. She'd know it. She straightened her shoulders. "No. Let's go."

"Ma'am, I think it would be better if you weren't alone. What about Mr. Tucker's relatives?"

"No. Only his sister—but she's in Salem."

"A neighbor?"

"Umm. . . Maggie Cooper. Across the hall. But I'm sure it's all a mistake. We don't need to bother her."

"Will you wait here for a moment? I'll be right back."

Sarah stood in the doorway and watched the officer step across the hall and knock on Maggie's door. This was a waste of Maggie's time. David was alive. People didn't die at twenty-six. Besides, she hadn't given him Christmas present yet. He couldn't die before Christmas. Not when she had the perfect present. He'd be home when she got back.

Maggie appeared at Sarah's side. "Come on, Sweetie. I'm here."

Sarah allowed herself to be escorted to the officer's car. "I didn't leave a note," she said to Maggie as they drove. "David will worry about me when I'm not home."

"You'll be back soon," Maggie said.

The next thing she knew, she was at the hospital. Maggie looked at some pictures, nodded her head. Put her arm around Sarah's shoulders.

Then someone showed her a picture of a man wearing David's clothes. Dark brown hair matted with blood, cuts and bruises on his face. David's face.

"Is this your husband, Mrs. Tucker?" someone asked.

"It can't be. No. It can't be." They kept holding the pictures in front of her. She blinked and looked again, then nodded. A barely audible, "Yes."

She dug deep into herself. "I want to see him. I have to see him. Please."

She felt the arm across her shoulders guiding her into a room. "Take all the time you need," a woman said and folded back a sheet.

"I'm right here, Sweetie," Maggie said.

Sarah stepped up to the body—to David—lying on the gurney. She waited for the blank, staring eyes to blink. Those beautiful dark brown eyes. How dare he scare her like this!

Her mind swirled with a kaleidoscope of images. David on their wedding day, beaming as she walked down the aisle toward him. How gentle he'd been that night, her first time. David sleeping, smiling at a dream she knew included her. The day they signed the papers on the shop. The time she'd had the flu and he'd tried so hard to make her feel better.

Finally, she leaned down and placed her index finger on his lips. "Good-bye. I love you." She straightened and tossed her hair back from her face.

"Thank you," she said to the woman in a white lab coat, who had positioned herself by the door. "That's him. My husband."

She marched out of the room and into the corridor. "I'd like to go home now, please."

"Of course. I'll have Officer Cunningham give you a ride. Come with me."

Sarah, Maggie at her elbow, followed the lab coat down the hall. "Wait," Sarah said. "I need to make funeral arrangements, right?"

"The coroner will have to determine the cause of death, and yes, then they will release the body to a funeral home. Do you know which one?"

"I've never given it much thought," Sarah said. She felt like someone else was speaking. As if someone had taken over her body. Someone strong enough to deal with this.

"Do you belong to a church, a synagogue? Maybe someone there can help."

"Right," Sarah said. "I'll call them when I get home. I can let you know."

"That will be fine." She handed Sarah a card. "You can call this number when you know how you want us to dis—take care of the body."

Body. Sarah refused to let the word penetrate. "I will."

She stared out the window as Officer Cunningham drove them home. The rain had eased into a heavy mist. Haloed traffic lights and car headlights sped by, interspersed with the bright neon of storefront signs. Da-vid. Da-vid. Da-vid. The windshield wipers seemed to beat out his name as they swung back and forth.

Officer Cunningham pulled his car alongside the curb at the front of her building. She climbed the stairs to the small entryway, and then up the flight to her apartment, hardly aware of Maggie's presence. The key seemed to find its own way into the lock, and she was inside.

Maggie found the telephone numbers. The strong Sarah called her mother. David's father. Her pastor, who recommended a funeral home and promised to call the hospital.

When she hung up, Sarah stood up and kissed Maggie. "Thanks. I think I need to be alone now."

"I understand. Call me. Any time."

Sarah closed the door behind Maggie, and walked to the bedroom. She looked at the bed. Their bed. Mechanically, she pulled back the covers and sat down. On David's side of the bed. Picked up his pillow and hugged it to her face. Inhaled his scent, and the tough, detached Sarah who had commandeered her body disappeared, leaving only the naked, frightened Sarah in her place. She allowed the tears to flow, and wept until she fell asleep.

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Sarah clutched her mother's hand as David's coffin was lowered into its final resting place. Clods of earth struck the polished wooden box. She heard a gasp and realized it was her own. She swallowed and felt her mother's arm around her shoulders.

The next thing she knew, she was at her apartment, letting people hug and kiss her and put food in her kitchen.

"You and your mom sit down right now," Maggie said. "Let me take care of everything."

Sarah sat on the couch, watching people mingle. She hid behind a wall she had constructed for herself, her fortress, and pasted a frozen smile on her face. Thank goodness no one expected more than a polite, "Thank you" from her.

"Let me know if I can do anything, Sarah. I want to help."

"Thanks, Chris," Sarah heard her mother say. "I'm sure she will."

Finally, the last well-wisher left.

"I'll be across the hall," she heard Maggie say in the distance.

"Thank you so much for everything," her mother replied.

Sarah heard the click of the door closing, felt herself being led to her room, felt her clothes slipping from her body, and felt the cool sheets against her face.

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"Wake up, Sweetie. It's Maggie."

"No. Go away." Sarah buried her head under her pillow.

"Honey, you have to get up. At least let me bring you something to eat."

"Not hungry."

A blinding light stabbed her eyes. She squinted them open and saw Maggie pulling back the bedroom drapes. "Leave them closed. I like the dark," she said.

"It's been over a week since the funeral, Sarah. You haven't left your room, and I don't think you've had a real meal, since your mother left. I know it hurts, but you have to get on with your life."

"What's the point? Half of me is dead anyway. Who cares about the other half?"

"Don't talk like that." Maggie sat down on the bed and took Sarah's face in her hands. "Look at me."

"I keep thinking it's all a bad dream. That if I stay in bed, eventually I'll wake up and... he'll be lying next to me. I'm safe here in my room." She couldn't even say David's name aloud.

"Tell you what. You let me bring you something to eat. Then you can take a shower, and I'll put some clean sheets on your bed."

"I don't want clean sheets on my bed! He slept on these sheets."

Maggie pulled Sarah to her chest and patted her back. "I know. I know. And I know it doesn't help to tell you it'll get easier with time. You just have to trust me."

"You've been great, Maggie. Honest. It's just...I can't...can't do anything. I feel so empty. And it hurts. Really hurts. I didn't know how much it could hurt." The tears returned.

Maggie held her until she stopped sobbing. Sarah wiped her eyes and looked at her. Saw the worried expression. She couldn't remember a time when Maggie didn't have a bright smile on her face. A retired schoolteacher, Maggie had practically adopted them when she and David moved into the building. She had been coming by every day since her mother had to go back to Indianapolis. Forcing soup, tea, toast into her. No matter how angry Sarah got, or how much she withdrew, Maggie stayed by her side.

"I might be able to handle some toast," Sarah said.

"Coming right up." Maggie patted Sarah's hand and gave her a peck on the cheek before she disappeared.

Sarah took a quavering breath and pulled back the covers. She swung her legs over the side of the bed and made her way to the bathroom.

A week, Maggie had said. Sarah braved a peek into the mirror. Good Lord, it looked more like a month had passed. She scrubbed her face and winced with pain as she ran a brush through the tangled mat of her hair. Her knees began to give way, and she padded back to bed.

"Here you are, Sweetie." Maggie placed a tray on the night table beside Sarah. "Tea with lots of milk and honey, orange juice, and toast. And homemade blackberry jam. I think you'll like it."

"Thanks." Sarah nibbled at the toast and took a sip of juice. "I think you're right about the shower, too."

"That's my girl. Your mom left some CDs. She said they'd helped her when she was down."

"Simon and Garfunkel, right? You've been playing them every day, haven't you?"

"Yes, although I don't know if they did any good."

"I heard them. They didn't register, but I do remember hearing them. Before Mom's divorce, she'd play them all the time. Comfort songs."

Nothing had any taste, but Sarah managed to finish her breakfast while Maggie sat with her. Afterward, she showered and washed her hair. She reached for her robe, hanging on a hook on the bathroom door. When she pulled it down, David's plaid flannel robe fell to the floor. She slipped it on, surrounding herself in one last vestige of David's presence. The soft fabric, still smelling of David, filled her with both sadness and comfort. She went out to the living room, welcomed by "I Am a Rock."

"Hi, Sweetie. Feeling better?"

"A little," Sarah said.

"Come over here. Look." Maggie stood by the window.

Sarah joined her and gazed to the street below. As if the heavens had heard the

music, a shroud of freshly fallen snow blanketed the lawn, branches swayed, covered in frost, and swirling flakes dropped silently from the sky.

"The first snow we've had in two years. Isn't it lovely?" Maggie asked.

"Everything looks so clean."

"It's so quiet," Sarah said, remembering the storm of the previous week.

"Come on. We'll talk." Maggie led Sarah to the couch and arranged the throw over her. She sat down next to Sarah and put her arm around her.

"Not yet. I can't. If I let go, I'll fall apart." Sarah leaned into Maggie and listened to the familiar lyrics. "They're right, you know," she whispered. "If I never loved, I never would have cried."

"A few tears is a small price to pay for love, Sarah. What you had with David is yours forever. Keep him in your heart. Just don't close it to the rest of the world. A world without the highs and lows would be a very sad place."

"Maybe. But later. Right now it's all I can do to manage the middles."

"You have the shop, Sarah. A piece of David."

Sarah burrowed deeper into David's robe, inhaling his scent. *That Special Something*. Hers and David's. Hers now. "You're right. And it's going to be the most successful shop in all of Pine Hills." She glanced upward. "No matter what it takes."

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***Finding Sarah*** is available in both print and digital formats, as is its sequel, ***Hidden Fire***. More information [here](#).

For more Randy and Sarah short stories, look for *A Summer's Eve* and *Coping Mechanisms*.

### About the Author

Terry Odell began writing by mistake, when her son mentioned a television show and she thought she'd be a good mom and watch it so they'd have common ground for discussions.

Little did she know she would enter the world of writing, first via fanfiction, then through Internet groups, and finally with groups with real, live partners. Her first publications were short stories, but she found more freedom in longer works and began what she thought was a mystery. Her daughters told her it was a romance so she began learning more about the genre and craft. She belongs to both the Romance Writers of America and Mystery Writers of America.

Now a multi-published, award winning author, Terry resides with her husband in the mountains of Colorado. You can find her online at:



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