
When the
Heart Aches
By L. Richardson

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In Loving Memory of My Mother

You Were Loved. You Mattered. And Your Pain Mattered, Too.

Mom,

I began writing this little book while you were still here. I wanted you to read these pages and know something that perhaps I didn't say often enough.

You were truly loved.

Not just for everything you did for us. Not just for the sacrifices you made, the burdens you carried, or the strength you showed when life was difficult.

You were loved simply because you were you.

I wanted you to know that your heart mattered. The tears you cried, the disappointments you endured, the dreams you may have quietly set aside, and the pain you didn't always have the words to express—all of it mattered.

I wish I could place this finished book in your hands. I wish we could sit together once more, talk about the things we never quite finished talking about, and perhaps share a little laughter along the way.

But since I cannot, I will finish what I started in your honor.

And my hope is that somewhere, a young girl or a woman with an aching heart will read these pages and discover what I so wanted you to know:

You are loved. Your pain matters. Your life matters. And even when your heart aches, there is still hope for healing.

With all my love,

Your daughter

Her Favorite Scripture

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

Psalm 23:1 (KJV)

Words she held close to her heart.

A Note About This Story

When the Heart Aches is inspired by true-life experiences.

Although some names have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved, the emotions, experiences, and heart behind these pages are real.

This story began as a way to honor my mother and acknowledge the pain she carried throughout her life. It is shared with love, not to assign blame or reopen old wounds, but to offer understanding, encouragement, and hope to women whose hearts are aching.

My hope is that somewhere within these pages, you will recognize a little of yourself and be reminded that your story matters, your pain matters, and you are worthy of love and tenderness.



Chapter One

The Front Porch Conversation

The room was filled with laughter.

Children were talking over one another, familiar voices filled the house, and for a little while, everything seemed as it should be.

But Ruth couldn't bring herself to laugh.

She loved having her family around. There was something comforting about hearing her grandchildren playing and knowing her daughter was home for a visit. These were moments she cherished, especially since Abbey didn't get to come home as often as Ruth would have liked.

Still, something weighed heavily on her heart.

Quietly, Ruth stepped away from the laughter for a moment. She reached for the apron she was wearing and gently wiped the tears from her cheeks.

"Pull it together," she whispered.

She had become quite good at doing just that.

Over the years, Ruth had learned how to smile when she didn't feel like smiling, how to keep going when she was exhausted, and how to tuck away feelings she didn't have the time or energy to explain.

After a few moments, she regained her composure and returned to her family.

But the ache hadn't gone anywhere.

It was a hot summer afternoon, and a gentle breeze was moving through the trees. Ruth decided to step outside and sit on the front porch in her favorite rocking chair.

She settled into the chair and began rocking slowly.

For a moment, she simply enjoyed the breeze.

Then the tears came.

She thought about her life, the years that had passed, the things she had endured, and the things she had never quite found the words to say.

She wiped her cheeks.

My daughter is here, she reminded herself. *I should be enjoying this time with her.*

But sometimes, even the happiest moments cannot quiet a hurting heart.

Inside the house, Abbey noticed her mother was missing.

She looked around and eventually spotted her through the front window, sitting alone on the porch.

Something about the way her mother sat caught her attention.

Abbey stepped outside.

"Mother?"

Ruth quickly wiped her face, but Abbey had already noticed the tears.

She pulled the extra rocking chair closer and sat beside her.

"Mother, what's wrong?"

Ruth looked away for a moment. She had carried so much for so long that she hardly knew where to begin.

Finally, she spoke.

"I've just been sitting here thinking about my life, Abbey."

Abbey waited.

"When you get to be my age, and you've been through as much as I have, you get tired of hurting. You don't want to hurt anymore."

Her voice softened.

"You just want some peace."

Abbey felt something tighten in her chest.

She knew her mother had experienced difficult times. She knew life hadn't always been kind to her. But sitting there, looking into her mother's tear-filled eyes, Abbey began to wonder how much she really knew.

"Tell me, Mother," she said gently.

Ruth took a deep breath.

"You know, Abbey, I've lived here practically all my life, except for the time I went up North to take care of my mother. And would you believe, after all these years, this place has never truly felt like home?"

Abbey turned toward her.

"What do you mean?"

"I've always felt like an outsider. Like I didn't quite belong."

Ruth paused, gathering her thoughts.

"We didn't have much when I was growing up. There were a lot of us children, and we lived in a little two-bedroom wooden house. We worked hard, and times were difficult."

She looked out across the yard.

"I wish I could tell you there were more happy days than sad ones."

Her voice grew quieter.

"But I can't."

Abbey didn't interrupt.

"My father was a hard man. He drank, and when he drank, things were worse. He was abusive toward my mother and us children. Sometimes we'd get beaten because somebody in the neighborhood said we'd done something wrong. It didn't matter what we said. He wouldn't believe us."

Ruth shook her head slowly.

"We worked in the fields, and no matter how hard we worked, it never seemed to be enough."

For a moment, neither woman spoke.

Then Ruth continued.

"But we had a praying mother. Oh, Abbey, your grandmother prayed."

Ruth paused.

"But you know, Abbey, even with all that praying, I never really felt loved by my parents. And I think what hurt the most was not feeling loved by my own mother."

She looked down at her hands.

"A little girl needs to feel loved. She needs to know that she's wanted, that she's important, that she matters."

Ruth grew quiet for a moment.

"I carried that feeling with me for a long time."

Abbey listened, beginning to understand that some of her mother's deepest hurts had started when she was just a little girl.

"Back then, women didn't have much of a voice. You did what you were told, and you kept going. We didn't call it a dysfunctional home back then. We just called it life."

Abbey listened as her mother spoke about childhood memories that had remained tucked away for decades.

"But don't think every day was sad. We children found ways to have fun."

A little sparkle appeared in her eyes.

"You should've seen us in those overalls, with our hair all plaited up. Sometimes those plaits stuck out every which way!"

Ruth chuckled.

"I believe I've still got a picture somewhere in one of those boxes."

Abbey laughed.

"Mother, now that's a picture I need to see!"

"Oh, you'd get a good laugh out of it."

For the first time that afternoon, Ruth smiled without forcing herself.

She went on to remember the little jukebox place where the neighborhood young people gathered to dance and enjoy themselves.

"And would you believe," Ruth said, leaning toward Abbey, "I used to smoke cigarettes and drink a little, too."

Abbey turned toward her in surprise.

"Mother! You?"

Ruth burst into laughter.

"Yes, me!"

"Well, now, what else haven't you told me? You're full of surprises!"

Ruth laughed again.

"Oh, Abbey, there are some things about your mother you wouldn't believe."

And just like that, the heaviness lifted for a moment.

The two women sat laughing together, the rocking chairs moving gently back and forth.

Abbey treasured the sound of her mother's laughter.

But she hadn't forgotten the tears.

As the afternoon began to fade, Abbey reached for her mother's hand.

"Mother, I know I don't come home as often as I'd like. But I love you. And I don't ever want you to feel that you're alone or that nobody cares."

Ruth looked at her daughter.

"I know you love me, Abbey."

"I mean it, Mother. I need you, too. More than you know."

Abbey had her own troubles, things she hadn't yet found the courage to share. She didn't want to add to her mother's worries, especially now.

So instead of saying more, she moved closer.

For a while, they simply sat together.

No questions.

No explanations.

Just a mother and daughter, holding hands as the afternoon breeze moved gently across the porch.

There would be more conversations.

More memories.

More truths Abbey had yet to discover.

But for that moment, being together was enough.

And perhaps that was something both their hearts had needed for a very long time.



Chapter Two

Behind the Smile

As the afternoon faded, Ruth and Abbey made their way back inside. The house was still filled with the familiar sounds of family life, and before long, it was time to prepare dinner.

Abbey smiled as she remembered their conversation on the porch.

"Mother, I sure hope you find that picture of you and those hairstyles!"

Ruth laughed.

"Oh, Abbey, you just wait."

For a little while, everything felt lighter.

Later that evening, after the kitchen was cleaned and the children were settled, Abbey went into her mother's bedroom to say goodnight.

She leaned down, kissed Ruth, and whispered, "Mother, I know there's more to your story. And one day, I want to hear it all."

Ruth smiled.

"Goodnight, Abbey."

But as Abbey drove to her daughter's house, the smile faded from her face.

Tears began to fall.

How did I miss it?

She had visited her mother many times. She had cleaned the house, washed clothes, prepared meals, and done everything she thought would make her mother's life easier.

Yet somewhere in all that doing, had she forgotten simply to sit with her?

Had she been so busy taking care of things that she'd missed the woman who needed caring for?

Abbey remembered the tears on the porch and the weariness in her mother's voice.

She wondered how long Ruth had been hurting without anyone truly noticing.

That night, sleep did not come easily.

The following morning, Abbey returned, eager to spend more time with her mother.

She found Ruth resting in bed.

"Mother, how are you feeling today?"

"I'm all right, Abbey."

"Well, then, I'm going to lie here with you for a little while. We don't have to do anything today."

Ruth chuckled.

"Where are you planning to lie with all this stuff on my bed?"

Abbey laughed and began moving a few things aside.

"Mother, one of these days, we're going to get all this organized!"

They settled in together, watching one of Ruth's favorite television programs.

Abbey wanted to ask more questions about her mother's past, but Ruth wasn't ready.

"Not today, Abbey. Let's just enjoy ourselves."

So Abbey let the conversation rest.

Sometimes love means listening.

And sometimes it means knowing when to be quiet.

But the peaceful morning didn't last.

A grandson entered the room asking Ruth for money. When she refused, his frustration quickly turned into anger.

He raised his voice, called her names, and moved toward her in a threatening manner.

Abbey immediately stepped between them.

"She said no. And no means no."

The young man continued arguing. In his anger, he punched a hole in the wall.

Abbey stood her ground.

"You will not treat my mother this way."

After confronting him and insisting that the behavior stop, Abbey returned to Ruth's room.

Her mother was crying.

"Mother, what's wrong?"

Ruth shook her head.

"Abbey, I'm just so tired."

Her voice trembled.

"This is what I deal with. If it isn't one grandchild, it's another. Everybody needs something. Everybody wants something. And I can't seem to get any peace."

Abbey sat beside her.

For the first time, she was beginning to see what her mother's days were really like.

Ruth was caring for younger grandchildren while older family members came and went, often leaving behind arguments, disorder, and responsibilities she no longer had the strength to carry.

She loved her family.

But she was exhausted.

And beneath that exhaustion was something deeper.

A lifetime of feeling that she had to keep giving, keep helping, and keep holding everything together, even when she had very little left to give.

Abbey looked at her mother.

"Have you eaten anything today?"

Ruth shook her head.

"Well, we're going to change that."

Abbey headed into the kitchen and began preparing lunch.

Later, as they sat together eating, Ruth talked a little more about her daily life.

Abbey listened.

This time, she wasn't thinking about the laundry, the dishes, or everything else that needed to be done.

She was thinking about her mother.

The woman who had spent so much of her life caring for others.

The woman whose own needs had so often been pushed aside.

The woman who had smiled through more heartache than Abbey had ever imagined.

And as Abbey watched her mother, she began to understand something.

Sometimes the strongest woman in the family is the very woman who needs someone to notice that she's tired.

For years, Ruth had been there for everyone else.

Now Abbey wanted her mother to know that someone was there for her, too.



Chapter Three

The Moments That Matter

That evening, Abbey decided to stay with her mother.

It wasn't the most comfortable night. The house was crowded, the children were restless, and there was little opportunity for quiet. But Abbey didn't want to leave.

She had seen too much that day.

And now, more than anything, she wanted to be near her mother.

Sleep was difficult. Abbey found herself awake throughout the night, thinking about the things Ruth had shared and the struggles she had witnessed.

How long has Mother been living like this? she wondered.

By morning, Abbey was determined to make the day a little easier for her.

"Mother, you stay in bed a while longer," she said. "Let me get the children settled, and then I'm going to give you a nice bath and fix something good to eat."

Ruth smiled.

Abbey chuckled. "I'm going to make something so good you'll be singing that Campbell's soup song—mmm, mmm, good!"

Ruth laughed.

And Abbey laughed with her.

It was such a small moment, but after the heaviness of the previous day, hearing her mother laugh felt wonderful.

Later, Abbey helped Ruth bathe, changed her bedding, and tidied her bedroom. She found her a clean, comfortable house dress and prepared her favorite chair so she could sit in the living room.

There was something especially tender about caring for her mother this way.

For so many years, Ruth had been the one caring for everyone else.

Now Abbey had an opportunity to care for her.

She prepared a warm meal of vegetables, beef, and rice, along with a cold Pepsi she knew her mother would enjoy.

"Now, Mother, let's see if this passes the taste test!"

Ruth smiled as she settled down to eat.

There were no difficult questions that afternoon.

No pressure to revisit painful memories.

No attempts to solve everything that was wrong.

They simply spent time together, watching television, talking about ordinary things, and laughing whenever something struck them as funny.

Abbey was beginning to understand that love didn't always require a grand gesture.

Sometimes it was a clean bed, a favorite meal, a little laughter, or simply sitting beside someone without expecting anything in return.

As the week drew to a close, Abbey prepared to return home.

Before she left, Ruth handed her an envelope.

"Abbey, I want you to read this when you have some quiet time," she said.

Abbey looked at the envelope.

"What's this, Mother?"

"Just something I want you to have. But don't rush through it. Find yourself a quiet place where you can sit and really take in what's written."

Abbey accepted the envelope and promised she would read it.

When she returned home, she placed it inside a special chest she kept tucked away in the back of her closet.

She intended to read it.

But life continued moving.

There were responsibilities to meet, people to care for, and days that seemed to pass more quickly than she could keep up with.

The envelope remained unopened.

Neither Abbey nor Ruth could have known just how much those pages would one day mean.

Or how deeply Abbey would wish she had read them sooner.



Chapter Four

The Letter Left Behind

Abbey never imagined how much she would one day regret leaving that envelope unopened.

She had placed it carefully inside her special chest, intending to read it when life became a little quieter.

But life rarely slows down simply because we need it to.

Days passed. Responsibilities continued. And the letter remained tucked away.

Then came the day Abbey wasn't prepared for.

Her mother's health had been declining, but Abbey hadn't imagined that the end would come so quickly.

After Ruth was brought to Abbey's home, mother and daughter were able to spend several precious hours together.

There were so many things Abbey wanted to say. So many conversations she wished they could have had.

And then Ruth asked a question Abbey would never forget.

"Abbey, did you ever read the letter I gave you?"

Abbey's heart sank.

"Not yet, Mother."

Ruth grew quiet.

Then she asked something even more tender.

"Abbey, I was a good mother, wasn't I? Did I love enough? Did I do enough?"

Abbey climbed into bed beside her mother.

She looked into the face of the woman who had given so much of herself, often while carrying wounds of her own.

"Mother, you were the best mom any child could ask for."

Her voice softened.

"We all make mistakes. That's why God gives us grace. But don't ever doubt that you were a good mother."

Abbey held her hand.

"Your unconditional love has helped me through so many difficult moments in my life. No one could love me more than you, except God Himself."

Ruth cried.

And Abbey held her hand as the final moments slipped quietly away.

When her mother took her last breath, Abbey gently wiped the tears from her face.

The woman who had survived loneliness, years of heartache, and betrayal—who had spent so much of her life longing to feel loved and to find peace—was gone.

And Abbey's heart would never be quite the same.

It would be another year before Abbey finally opened the envelope.

Perhaps she was afraid of what she might discover.

Perhaps reading it would make her mother's absence feel even more real.

Whatever the reason, she waited.

When she finally unfolded the pages, she began to understand her mother in ways she never had before.

There were experiences Ruth had carried silently. Painful memories, difficult choices, regrets, and wounds that had shaped the woman she became.

Abbey read the words of a woman who had suffered deeply, yet had continued loving.

A woman who had made mistakes, acknowledged them, and wanted her daughter to learn from the paths she had traveled.

Ruth hadn't written the letter to invite pity.

She wanted Abbey to understand.

And perhaps, more than anything, she wanted her daughter to avoid some of the heartaches she herself had endured.

At the end of the letter, Ruth asked that it be buried or burned after it was read.

Abbey honored her mother's wishes.

But she couldn't erase what those pages had revealed.

She began looking back over her own life and recognizing choices she had made, some of them painfully similar to the ones her mother had hoped she would avoid.

Oh, Mother, she thought. *I wish I had read your letter sooner.*

There were questions she could no longer ask.

Conversations they would never have.

And words she wished she could speak just one more time.

Yet something remained.

Her mother's love.

The memories of their laughter.

The lessons hidden inside their conversations.

And the understanding that behind the woman Abbey had always called Mother was a little girl who had once longed to be loved, too.

Ruth had also experienced the heartbreaking loss of a son. His sudden passing left an emptiness in her heart that words could never fully describe. It was another grief she carried, another loss that became part of her story.

For years, Ruth had carried an aching heart.

Abbey couldn't change the pain her mother had experienced.

She couldn't rewrite her childhood or take away the years when Ruth felt unseen.

But she could honor her mother's life by remembering something that mattered deeply.

Ruth was more than the pain she endured.

She was a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother, a grandmother, a friend, and a woman whose life had meaning beyond the struggles she faced.

She had loved.

She had laughed.

She had given.

And she had mattered.

Even in the places where she hadn't always felt loved, she had always been worthy of love.

Abbey wished her mother could hear those words one more time.

You were loved, Mother.

Your pain mattered.

Your life mattered.

And you will never be forgotten.

The Quiet Aches We Carry

Maybe you can identify with Ruth, or perhaps you see a little of yourself in Abbey. Maybe, in some ways, you recognize yourself in both.

Perhaps, like Ruth, you've spent years carrying heartaches that few people know about. You've loved, given, sacrificed, and continued showing up for others, even when your own heart was quietly aching.

Or maybe, like Abbey, you've looked back over your life and wished you'd noticed something sooner. Perhaps there were conversations you wish you'd had, questions you wish you'd asked, or words you wish you'd spoken while there was still time.

And maybe your story is entirely different.

Maybe your heart aches because of a relationship that ended, a friendship that changed, a childhood that left you feeling unloved, or the absence of someone whose presence you still miss.

Whatever brought you to these pages, I hope you'll remember something.

Not every aching heart looks broken.

Some hearts ache quietly.

Behind a smile. In the middle of a crowded room. While preparing dinner, driving home from work, or lying awake long after everyone else has fallen asleep.

Sometimes we become so accustomed to carrying our pain that we stop asking ourselves how we're really doing.

We learn to keep going, to be strong, to show up for everyone else.

But what about you?

Who sees the tears you wipe away before anyone notices?

Who knows about the disappointments you've quietly tucked away?

Who asks about the dreams you've set aside or the memories that still bring tears to your eyes?

Dear heart, I want you to know something.

Your pain matters.

You don't have to compare your heartache to someone else's or convince yourself that what happened wasn't important.

It was important because it happened to you.

Giving Ourselves Permission to Grieve

And you matter.

There's something else I want us to talk about. Something we don't always give ourselves permission to do.

Grieve.

When we hear the word *grief*, we often think about the death of someone we love. And while losing someone can leave an ache that words cannot describe, grief reaches far beyond death.

Sometimes we grieve the childhood we never had, the love we desperately needed but never received, a marriage that didn't turn out the way we hoped, a friendship that ended, or dreams that quietly slipped away.

Sometimes we grieve the woman we used to be before life became so complicated.

And sometimes, we grieve the years we spent simply surviving when we wanted so much more than survival.

But instead of allowing ourselves to feel that pain, we push it aside.

We tell ourselves to be strong, to move on, to stop thinking about it. We convince ourselves that enough time has passed and we should be over it by now.

But dear heart, **grief doesn't disappear simply because we refuse to acknowledge it.**

We must give ourselves permission to grieve.

Permission to hurt.

Permission to cry.

Permission to acknowledge that something happened in our lives that left an ache we haven't quite known what to do with.

There can be healing in our tears. Sometimes crying is the first time we've allowed ourselves to be honest about just how deeply something hurt.

And that's okay.

You don't have to rush through grief to prove that you're strong. You don't have to pretend something didn't matter simply because other people have moved on.

Take the time you need.

Talk about what hurts with someone you trust. Allow yourself to remember, to feel, and to acknowledge what you've lost.

And when anger or bitterness begins to settle in your heart, don't ignore that either. Those feelings may be telling you that something still needs your attention and care.

You deserve the opportunity to heal, not spend the rest of your life imprisoned by what hurt you.

Healing doesn't mean forgetting what happened. It doesn't mean excusing the people who wounded you or pretending the pain wasn't real.

Sometimes healing begins with something as simple as whispering, *That hurt me. It mattered. And I need time to grieve.*

There may still be difficult days. There may still be tears.

But there can also be laughter again. Peaceful moments. New memories. Unexpected joy.

And slowly, as you make room for both your sorrow and your hope, you may discover that your aching heart still has room for beautiful things.

So give yourself permission to grieve. Give yourself permission to heal. And give yourself permission to live again.

A Little Encouragement for Your Heart

Give yourself permission to feel what you feel.

Allow yourself moments of rest, laughter, and tenderness. Reach for someone safe when the burden feels too heavy to carry alone.

And remember, the fact that your heart has been wounded does not mean your story has ended.

There is still love to experience, joy to discover, and life waiting to be lived.

I began writing these pages for my mother. I wanted her to know that she was truly loved, that her pain mattered, and that her life mattered.

I couldn't finish them while she was here.

But perhaps these words have found their way into your hands at a moment when your own heart needs a little encouragement.

So let me leave you with what I wanted my mother to know.

You are loved.

Your pain matters.

Your life matters.

And even when your heart aches, you are still worthy of beautiful things.