

The Lorraine Inn, excerpt

How did Allen end up in Maple Leaf? *Lorraine Dantly* would've liked to know!

Lorraine and Ty had enjoyed exactly *five days* of post-New-York-reunion-lovemaking. Ty had dropped the subject of marriage for a time, seeing that it upset her so much, but Lorraine had changed since their talk. Just the day before, Ty stole up behind her and surprised her while she was folding clothes in the laundry room. Jude happened upon them both giggling while Ty embraced her from behind.

"Hey, this is the laundry room!" Jude interrupted in mock offense.

The lovers looked at him smiling, and still embracing.

"What's *this*? No quick separations or fabricated conversations?" Jude asked, commenting on this change. Ty's arm was about his mother's waist, his hand beneath her blouse.

"No," she said with laughing, contented eyes, "there'll be no more hiding."

Jude wasn't sure what he thought about that. He'd known for months that his mother and Ty were lovers, but the sight of Ty's hand touching his mother in that possessive, familiar manner still made him a little uncomfortable.

But, on the other hand, Jude truly liked Ty, and he had no doubt that Ty loved Lorraine, for he had overheard his whispered proposals of marriage and Lorraine's refusals on more than one occasion. Jude just wanted his mother to be happy, and Ty definitely made her happy, but he still had reservations about their relationship.

Not knowing what else to do, he shrugged. "OK," he said, continuing on to get what he had wanted and then leave. He heard whispered giggles when he shut the door behind him. *God, they're so goofy*, he thought!

On the sixth day, Ty was in Stanton for his final tattoo removal treatment and Lorraine was walking through the dining room on her way to the registration desk when she noticed someone familiar eating at one of the dining tables.

"Allen?" she asked, moving toward his table. She was looking right at him but was sure that she had to be mistaken. "*Allen?*"

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“Lorraine!” he looked up with a smile of surprise, as if he hadn’t expected to see *her in her own inn!*

“Allen... what are you *doing* here?”

“Recuperating,” he answered simply, offering her a seat at his table. He returned to his food, enjoying the taste of Lorraine’s cooking again. “I had forgotten what a good cook *you are!*”

“Recuperating?” she asked incredulously, sitting down without even thinking. “Allen, you can recuperate anywhere! I told Dr. Bradley you couldn’t come here.”

These words reminded Allen of the tongue-lashing he had gotten from Dr. Bradley that night after the doctor had spoken with Lorraine...

“Ms. Dantly didn’t appreciate your trickery, either!”

“I’m sorry, Dr. Bradley,” Allen said with some contrition.

“No, you’re not,” the physician replied tersely, as he plopped down into the chair beside Allen’s bed. “You’re sorry you were caught.” Dr. Bradley, for some reason, wasn’t as angry as he should have been.

Allen burst into laughter upon hearing the truth of the doctor’s words.

“I’ve watched you the last few days, Allen Dantly, and it wasn’t until I talked to your wife that I realized you’ve been manipulating that poor woman during your whole stay here, and probably long before that. I was just drawn into the act out of necessity.”

Allen didn’t even try to deny it. Manipulating people had always come easy for him, so when it came to needing the doctor’s help, using shrewd yet subtle influence had been his natural inclination. It hadn’t been a fully formed plan, nor had it been his intention to use the doctor, but this was the end result anyway.

Any relationship Allen was involved in, business or personal, was marked by his maneuvering people to suit himself. He had recently come to this realization, and it didn’t make him feel very good. In fact, part of him felt unworthy of Lorraine’s love and loyalty, he had put her through so much, and yet, she *still* came when he needed her. This was part of her beauty, she didn’t require

people to change, or fit neatly into *her* world. *After all*, thought Allen, *she had deeply loved me, faults and all.*

“Do you love her, Mr. Dantly?” Dr. Bradley asked plainly.

“Call me Allen.”

“I’m Lloyd. Do you *love* her, Allen?”

“Yes,” he answered earnestly, looking at this doctor whom he had known only a few days.

Lloyd studied him for a while and decided he was telling the truth.

“Mrs. Dantly thinks your interest in her now is because you’re alone and not feeling well – you just need her.” Dr Bradley watched for Allen’s response. “She’s afraid of you, and I can’t say that I blame her.”

“I know,” Allen replied softly, deeply hurt by this obvious truth. “She’s afraid to love me again.”

“She didn’t tell me everything, but she said enough to make me understand why she’s trying to avoid you,” Lloyd spoke frankly. “Are you sure Mrs. Dantly isn’t right about all of this being a passing fancy or need?”

“I’m sure,” Allen answered after some thought. “The other morning, just as she leaned against that windowsill, watching the sun come up, I was struck dumb by the emotions inside of me. It was like poetry, every part of her – the way she stood, the way her hair was done, the way her hand rested gracefully over her crossed arm, the twist of her waist, the bend of her knee...”

Lloyd laughed. “She’s a *beautiful* woman, Allen!” He recognized lust when he heard it.

“I know she’s beautiful!” Allen retorted impatiently, a bit stung by the doctor’s attitude, and by the fact that the man had looked at his wife in any way even *approaching* sexual appraisal.

The doctor held up his hands in mock surrender at Allen’s angry response. “OK, OK... I was just stating the *obvious*.”

Allen accepted the doctor’s response, then calmly continued speaking. “I knew she was beautiful the first time I saw her, but she was just a *conquest* then. In the entire 16 years of being married to Lorraine, I had never looked at her as if... as if I’d die if I couldn’t be a part of her life!

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I was so *angry* with her for getting pregnant and forcing me into marriage – as if she had somehow *ruined* all the wonderful things that were supposed to happen to me and for me.” Allen paused, having never *spoken* of these things... having never *thought* about it before. “Maybe I loved her all along... and was just too... *angry* to face it,” he sighed, rubbing his forehead. He remembered the persistent thought he used to have that said he deserved better than Lorraine. “I don’t *know*...” Allen knew he wasn’t feeling well because his cogitations were much more laborious. “All I know is that I’ve never felt this longing inside me when looking at, or even *thinking* about, Lorraine.”

*Deserved better than Lorraine*, Allen angrily thought to himself! Now, he knew he had been blessed with the best and had thrown her away and was now using *all* his talents to try and get her back.

Lloyd Bradley didn’t know if Allen Dantly loved his wife before, but he believed he had fallen *in love* with her over the past few days. This idea made him smile and he had to mentally shake himself at his emotional involvement with these people. He rose from his chair. “You’re going to have an uphill battle, Allen. Mrs. Dantly said you couldn’t go home with her.” This had been the purpose for the doctor’s visit in the first place. “Is there someone else we can call, or someplace we can take you to recuperate?”

“I’ve already made arrangements to stay at Lorraine’s inn for a month.”

Lloyd Bradley burst into laughter.

“So, even if she doesn’t take me, I’ll eventually be in Maple Leaf with her.”

“You’re something else, Allen Dantly,” Lloyd announced still chuckling. “I want to know how this turns out.”

“I’m planning on keeping in touch with you, Dr. Bradley.” Allen liked him, as a friend. That’s something else that changed in Allen – he’s no longer rushing past random interactions with people. He learned from his friendship with Theo Maryland that he would’ve missed out on knowing a wonderful individual if he stayed focused solely on their business relationship.

“I’m glad!” Lloyd smiled back. He had the feeling that he and Allen were going to be friends. “Allen,” he cautiously broached a question, knowing it might anger his new friend. “What if Mrs. Dantly has another man in her life?”

“She *does*.”

“She *does*?” The doctor’s eyes grew large with surprise.

“Yes,” Allen said without a doubt, even with Lorraine’s prevarications, “but not for *long*...”

“Lorraine!” Allen responded in some impatience. “I told you at the hospital: God has given me this opportunity to get things back on track with my *children*.”

Lorraine gave him a long, steady stare, trying to gauge the veracity of his words, but she wasn’t going to be manipulated by him again. “You were working on things with the kids long before the attack, Allen. Why are you *here*?”

“Jude was the only one that I hadn’t gotten through to. He was always too busy to speak with me or come and visit with me.”

Lorraine didn’t have an immediate response because she, indeed, *knew* his words to be true.

Allen seeing an opening began to build upon it. “So, you see, it was that mountain and Mohammad-*thing*.” It sounded plausible to him. “I didn’t come here to be a thorn in your side or *anything*, Lorraine.” This was a boldfaced lie! “I just want to know my children again.” And this also was true.

Actually, the idea of moving into Lorraine’s inn came to him while he was arguing with his family about her. He had tried to tell them good, positive things about his wife; he tried to explain this love for her that had grown up within him, to his own great surprise! But everything he said was met with *rude* cynicism. It was then that Allen realized that his family was always full of support when he was breaking off relationships, but when he mentioned wanting to work things out with his wife, they had nothing but vile, *loathsome* things to say. Only his brother James seemed to be listening to him.

Allen ended up cussing them all out and put them out of his hospital room! He sat, feeling frustrated and *angry*, wanting to move, wanting to stay still and think, wanting to hit something, and he suddenly burst into tears! He put his hands to his face and just *sobbed*... not loud wracking sobs or anything. He just *felt* his family's words about Lorraine... they tore at his soul... because they were words that he himself had used against her. And Allen felt something unfamiliar – *shame* and *regret*.

Never being one to spend a lot of time contemplating painful things, Allen, once he was in control of his emotions again, got busy wracking his brain, trying to come up with a way to spend more time with Lorraine.

She had kept her promise to return to visit him at the hospital whenever his family wasn't there; and she had even brought *Iris*, with her *wonderful news!* Allen nearly burst into tears again at Lorraine's generosity. Now, he truly understood her wisdom in minimizing her interactions with his family. Allen had known how tender-hearted Lorraine was, remembering how she just cried after that first family gathering as his wife, when she was made to feel like an outsider, and fielding insults... veiled and not so veiled. And she received no defense there, nor even mercy when she got home.

Tears did slip from his eyes at these memories, but he didn't give in to them. He refocused his mind on developing a plan to ingratiate himself with Lorraine. Once he was back in her life, *he* will be her defender, even against his own family, and he will work like crazy to soothe any and every hurt that even *dares* to bruise her spirit. First things first! How was he going to get more time with Lorraine?

James called back, later, to apologize to Allen for his mean words. Allen opened up about wanting to get his wife and family back.

"Have you considered going and staying at the Inn?" James asked. Allen thanked his brother through his tears.

Allen called his secretary as soon as he got off the phone with James and had her rearrange his schedule and reserve a room for him at The Lorraine Inn and pay for one month in advance.

Lorraine had been explaining why it was better for Allen to go somewhere else to recuperate while Allen was off in another reverie. Fortunately, he caught the last part of what she was saying.

“You’re up to something.”

“You’re so *paranoid!*” Allen responded with an easy laugh.

“You’ve *made* me this way, Allen.” Lorraine wasn’t laughing. “I think you should find somewhere else to recuperate.”

Allen was suddenly very tired, and he looked it. “OK,” he said, “but I need some time to rest.” He didn’t have the energy to keep up the repartee. “In case you’ve forgotten, I had a *heart attack* about a week ago! It’s taken me two days just to recover from the travel here.” These sudden bouts with fatigue were frustrating for him and his efforts.

“Two days?” Lorraine asked in some surprise. “You’ve been here *two days?*” *And I didn’t know about it?* She didn’t voice this latter thought.

“Yeah,” Allen answered nonchalantly. “This was my first day up and about... *Lorraine,*” he interrupted himself, remembering all that he had seen, “this place is *great!* Theo Maryland wasn’t exaggerating when he *raved* about your inn!”

“You know *Theo?*” Lorraine was flattered by Allen’s words.

“Yeah,” Allen said, impressed by his own ability to smoothly change the subject. “I’ve been doing business with him for years.”

“Oh,” Lorraine was surprised to learn that she and Allen kept the same business company, considering that they each were in such different fields of commerce.

“He has nothing but wonderful things to say about The Lorraine Inn...” he said. Just talking seemed to take so much effort. “Lorraine, could we talk about this after I get some rest, and when you have more time?”

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“Oh... yes... I’m sorry, Allen.” Lorraine looked at him in concern and embarrassment. “I did forget about your heart attack.”

Allen scowled at her.

“It’s your own fault!” Lorraine explained facetiously. “You look the absolute picture of health... The wheelchair looks like a prop.”

“I wish!” Allen had to bite back a laugh, for the wheelchair was indeed a prop to gain peoples’, or at least Lorraine’s sympathies. “I just get really exhausted at times.”

“I understand. I’m sorry,” she said again. “Do you need help getting back to your room?”

“Yeah... I think I might,” he said, thinking *she* would be the one to help him.

“OK... hold on. Let me get someone for you.” Allen was somewhat disappointed until he looked up and saw Lorraine returning with their son, *Jude*, following. His love for her deepened in that moment, and he thought, as he watched his son walk toward him, *I’ll lay siege to all your defenses and capture your heart again, Lorraine Jessica Dantly... just give me time!*

He wisely kept this thought to himself.