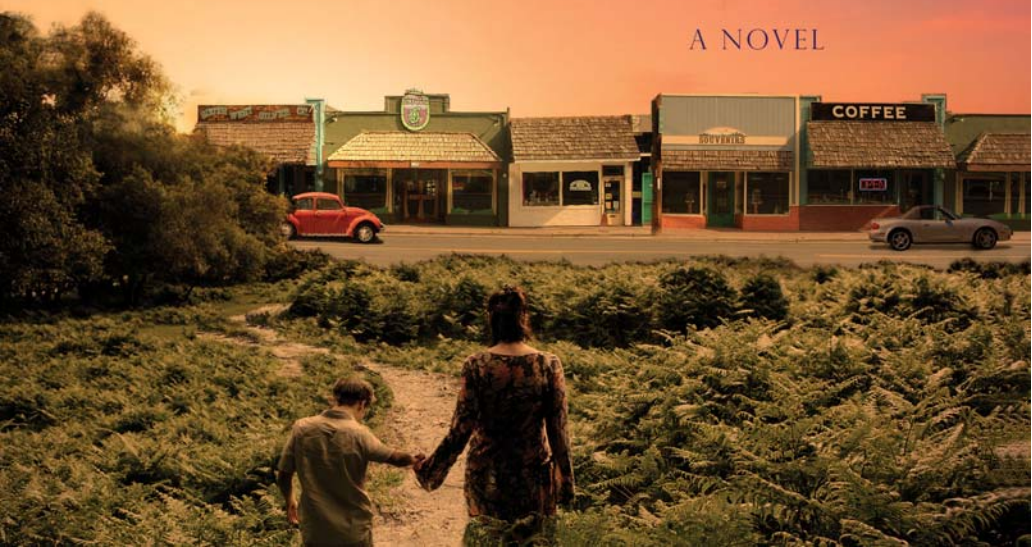




MARLO SCHALESKY

SHADES
of MORNING

A NOVEL



Praise for
Shades of Morning

“Will Marnie and Taylor, torn apart sixteen years ago, find a way to overcome, seemingly impossible barriers and find happiness? *Shades of Morning*, superbly crafted by veteran author Marlo Schalesky, presents a sense of family and love that will touch the reader’s soul. The book is a memorable journey into a woman’s heart and the lessons she learns about real family loyalty. Reader, prepare yourself for a surprise ending!”

—IRENE BRAND, best-selling author of *Love Finds You in Valentine, Nebraska*, and *Made for Each Other*

“*Shades of Morning* is magical! Full of the wonder of love, *true* love. It surprised me on every page. I loved it!”

—DEBORAH RANEY, author of *Almost Forever* and the Clayburn Novels

“Each of Marlo Schalesky’s inspirationally unique stories are ‘like a box of chocolates—you never know what you’re gonna get’ and *Shades of Morning* is no exception. From the first page, I fell for the beautifully drawn and flawed characters, and by the end, I wanted to hug them, especially Emmit. What an angel.”

—TAMARA LEIGH, author of *Nowhere, Carolina*, and *Leaving Carolina*

“*Shades of Morning* is a gripping story of grace and forgiveness in the face of years of secrets, half-truths, and running. Yet it is so much more. Marnie and Taylor became people I cared about from the opening pages, yet I wondered how the tangled web of their past could ever unravel to

show the promise of a future. And the image of God revealed in the prose speaks to me even now after I've reached the end.”

—CARA C. PUTMAN, author of *Cornhusker Dreams*

“Poignant. Heartfelt. Compelling. This latest novel by Marlo Schalesky is a touching testament to the power of love, forgiveness, and second chances. *Shades of Morning* is an unusual love story with a twist—and what a twist! You'll love it. But be sure to have a box of tissues close at hand. This would make a great movie! (Are you listening, Hollywood?)”

—LAURA JENSEN WALKER, author of *Becca by the Book* and *Turning the Paige*

“Marlo wrote an engrossing story told with her signature richness and beauty. Her characters lived and breathed—I connected with them immediately—even as they displayed the messiness of real life. *Shades of Morning* will touch your heart and remind you of God's enduring hope, love and redemption. It's a treasure!”

—CINDY MARTINUSEN-COLOMA, author of best-selling novel *Orchid House* and *Beautiful*

MARLO SCHALESKY

SHADES
of MORNING

A NOVEL



MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

Other Books by Marlo Schalesky

Fiction

If Tomorrow Never Comes

Beyond the Night (Christy Award–Winner
for Best Contemporary Romance)

Cry Freedom

Freedom's Shadow

Only the Wind Remembers

Veil of Fire

Nonfiction

Empty Womb, Aching Heart

SHADES OF MORNING

PUBLISHED BY MULTNOMAH BOOKS

12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200

Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

This is a work of fiction. Apart from well-known actual people, events, and locales that figure into the narrative, all names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to current events or locales, or to living persons, is entirely coincidental.

ISBN 978-1-60142-025-1

ISBN 978-1-60142-287-3 (electronic)

Copyright © 2010 by Marlo Schalesky

Published in association with The Steve Laube Literary Agency, LLC, 5501 North Seventh Avenue #502, Phoenix, AZ 85013.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

Multnomah and its mountain colophon are registered trademarks of Random House Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schalesky, Marlo M., 1967–

Shades of morning : a novel / Marlo Schalesky. — 1st ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-60142-025-1 — ISBN 978-1-60142-287-3 (electronic)

I. Title.

PS3569.C4728S53 2010

813'.54—dc22

2010001948

Printed in the United States of America

2010—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



To Jayden
My own unexpected gift

*The Sun of Righteousness shall arise
With healing in His wings.*

MALACHI 4:2, NKJV

Prologue

Autumn snow fell like fat angels fluttering to earth. Emmitt sat on the snowbank, his eyes closed, his head tipped back. He was a snowflake too, drifting on the breeze. Cold nibbled at his wings. Ice kissed his lashes. He stuck out his tongue and caught a flake. Why did the snow always melt away just when he finally got some? He reached up and scratched his too-small ears with a too-small hand. Then he adjusted his heavy, Coke-bottle glasses.

Something whispered in the wind. He held his breath and listened with all his might. He could almost hear the voices telling him that today he was fifteen years old. It was a big number. They all said so. He was a big boy now. All grown up.

And that meant it was time for the prayer to be answered. Not some little prayer about sniffly noses and friends at school. Not one about nice weather or where to park a car. This prayer was important. It was about love. It was about family. And God always answered those.

Especially today.

Emmitt wiggled deeper into the snow. The flakes fell in heavier clumps. He opened his eyes and waited.

The pretty light would be coming soon. The big whirring one on top of the truck that picked up the garbage from the cans on the street. He liked the light. Round and round. Round and round. It would come.

A screen door slammed. He looked back over his shoulder. A puffy white coat stood on the doorstep with a matching hat perched atop wisps of brown hair. The coat waved.

Emmit waved back. That's how a mom should look. White coat, pink smile peeking from between collar and hat.

"Mighty cold out here, sweetie." She motioned toward the snow as she spoke.

Emmit grinned. "I wait for pretty light."

She nodded and trudged to the mailbox by the street. The box creaked when she opened it.

Then the pretty light came with a chug, a squeal, and the grinding of gears. The light turned and turned, made its way around the corner and up the street.

Emmit watched it. "Pretty light! Pretty light!" He called out to her, but she didn't turn.

She stood there, hunched over a stack of white envelopes in her gloved hand.

The wind gusted.

The whirring light rumbled closer. Closer.

Then it happened. A little thing. A simple thing. It shouldn't have mattered at all. But it did.

An envelope skittered from her hand and blew into the street. She went after it.

He stood. "Stop!" But he couldn't stop it. Couldn't stop her. And worse, he couldn't stop the lights.

Her boot hit ice. It slipped from under her. Envelopes mixed with the angels in the air. Fluttering, flying, drifting on the breeze.

But they weren't angels. Not at all.

Emmit yelled and yelled. But it didn't help. So he closed his eyes,

plugged his ears. He held his breath. But that didn't matter either. He still heard the terrible squeal. The dull thud.

And then, the awful silence.

He peeked out and saw her, a still, white blob on a dirty, white street.

The whirring light stopped.

Emmit sat down and cried into the drifting snow. But that didn't make any difference either. She didn't get up. She didn't move. No matter how much he cried.

Later other lights came. Red and blue and more yellow. Lights on a black-and-white car. Lights on a big red fire engine. Lights on a white van with the letters A-M-B-U-L-A-N-C-E printed real big on the side.

They weren't pretty lights. He didn't like them at all.

He shivered. But no one noticed him. They just buzzed around the new lights like bugs. They weren't bugs. But they still buzzed and shouted and flew away.

And he just sat there, tears freezing on his cheeks, a cold fist rubbing his wet nose. How could this be the answer to prayer? This didn't seem like any answer at all.

This seemed like everything gone all wrong.

He wiped the ice from his face, lay back in the snow, and moved his arms and legs up and down, up and down. Three times to make the image of an angel in the bank.

A perfect angel. A snow angel. Just for her. Because she was what a mom should be. Because he loved her too. Because she was gone.

The new lights took her.

And then the snow stopped falling.

Marnie Helen Wittier hated baby showers. She also hated her middle name, but that was another story. What mattered now was that despite her intense dislike of powder pink balloons, little crocheted socks, and cheap plastic baby bottles, she now wove in and out of handmade tables at her own coffee shop, offering floral-dressed women fresh pumpkin-shaped cookies and specialty lattes.

The only thing worse would be if she had to wear one of those foo-foo dresses. But a gal had to draw the line somewhere. If not at pink balloons and pastel teacups, then at least at swaying dresses and—gasp!—high heels. She wouldn't be caught dead in heels.

But she could put up with pretty tulips on the tables, the pink and white streamers, and that ridiculous It's a Girl! papier-mâché sign, because this shower was for Kinna Henley. And if anyone deserved the perfect baby shower, that woman did. After all last year's troubles piled onto years of infertility, Kinna had earned the best shower Marnie could think of. That's the only reason she'd said "of course" when those ladies from the church asked to hold the event here.

Still, that didn't stop her from snatching a pink napkin, scrawling the words *Hosting a baby shower...what was I thinking???* on it, and stuffing it in her pocket. The napkin would go into her box of regrets later. A reminder to never, ever do anything this stupid again.

Marnie delivered her last latte to a woman dressed in a particularly agonizing shade of fuchsia, then hurried back to her spot behind the coffee bar. Her reflection shot back at her from the mirror behind the bar—short, spiked hair, dyed jet black, and dark plum eye shadow to match. The look would have worked perfectly with a nose ring, except she couldn't stand to get one. How on earth did people blow their noses with that thing sticking in there? So she'd settled for an extra sterling silver stud in her ear and called it good.

She supposed she ought to try out a more conservative look, now that she was turning thirty-five, but so far she hadn't gotten up the nerve. Besides, it was too fun shocking the old ladies at church. She grinned, then stuck her tongue out at the image in the mirror. That was more like it. Marnie Wittier would not let one baby shower get her down.

She put her hands on her hips and turned back toward the room. Half was a coffee shop, the other half a small bookstore, separated by a wall and wide french doors. Marnie smiled. Her favorite things: books and coffee. And people enjoying both. Right now the crowd of pink-cheeked church women gathered on one side of Marnie's Books and Brew while a few other customers lingered on the other. Kinna was opening gifts. At least the baby was a girl. Marnie could handle a shower full of pinks and yellows.

But not blue. Lord knew she'd never be able to face blue.

On her right, Marcus wandered the aisles of the book section, straightening and shelving the latest box of Christian fiction she'd ordered. He had a piercing—in his eyebrow, not his nose—and his hair stood out in all directions. Good kid. Honest. Even if his head looked like the wrong end of a mop. He grinned at her and she smiled back.

Old Joe cleaned the table they'd use for a book signing that evening. And just coming through the door was the new girl from Oklahoma she'd

hired. Poor thing, mother named her Daisy. Daisy from Oklahoma, with corncob-colored hair and cornflower blue eyes. She'd be lucky if she survived two weeks in California. But everyone deserved a chance. Even a girl named Daisy.

Marnie sighed and gathered some cookies from the tray on the counter. She glanced at her employees and customers. They were her friends, her family. What a family should have been. Not that she knew anything about that. Foster homes didn't teach her a whole fat lot about family. But she was great at packing a suitcase in forty-five seconds flat. So the whole foster-home thing wasn't a total waste.

She threw the cookies on a plate, then scooted out into the room. Pretty soon she'd have to add another table in the coffee part of the shop. She had plans for two more. One made from, of all things, coffee cups and another covered with crayon drawings from her customers' kids. She'd protect the drawings under a glass tabletop. The cup table would sit next to the driftwood table, and the crayon concoction would nestle between the auto-parts table and the one made out of toothpicks. She loved those tables. All of them. They were hers. They were special. They were...they were home.

Laughter drifted from the group of women. Marnie smiled. She couldn't help it. Yeah, this was a baby shower. But it was worth it to see the change in Kinna. And not just in the size of the woman's belly, but in her eyes. In her soul. Something that happened last year. A miracle, she'd said.

Well, Marnie didn't know much about miracles. Mistakes maybe. And accidents. And stupid, monstrous mess ups. She knew a lot about those. But miracles? Those were for other people. Good people. Like Kinna and Jimmy. Not for single coffee-shop owners who a long time ago had run away from the place she'd hoped to call home.

Don't worry, God, I'm not looking for any miracles. Her gaze shot up to the ceiling, and she winked.

Half a second later, the floor jolted. The walls shook. Glasses jiggled, the row of autumn pumpkins shuddered, and two stacks of paper cups tipped and fell. Marnie widened her stance and allowed the ground to rumble beneath her.

Conversation stopped, and in the jingling quiet came a sharp squeal. Daisy. The floor stilled. Voices took up where they'd left off. And life rolled on, just as before. Except for the cornflower girl huddled beneath the tinfoil table.

Marnie suppressed her grin as she sauntered toward Daisy and helped the girl up from beneath the shiny table. You could always tell who the out-of-staters were. Poor kid.

The girl's eyes were as big as the pumpkin cookies. "Th-that was a big one, wasn't it?"

Marnie patted her arm, then cocked her head toward the church women. "Listen."

A moment later, the numbers came.

"Four-point-three." That guess came from Kinna.

A sharp voice spoke next. "Naw, that was at least a five-point-six."

"Five-point-zero even, mark my words."

A Vietnamese woman named Mai stood, though you could barely tell she was standing. "What earthquake?" She shook her head and put on her thickest accent. "I no feel a thing. You white girls such pansies."

They all laughed.

Then a single, old, trembling hand rose from amid the group. Josephina.

Marnie leaned closer to Daisy. "Are you listening? Here it comes."

Josephina's quavering voice silenced the others. "Four-point-eight."

She stuck her gray head out from the group of women. “Turn on the radio, *mija*.”

Marnie clicked on the news. After a few minutes, it came. A deep-timbered voice said, “Reports of a four-point-eight earthquake centered outside Castroville.” Not too far from Marnie’s in Pacific Grove.

Everyone clapped, including the customers on the far side of the room.

Marnie put a finger under Daisy’s chin and closed the girl’s mouth.

Daisy’s tone dropped to a whisper. “How does she do that?”

Marnie chuckled. “She’s lived in Monterey County since her *familia* came over the border in the early 1930s. Rumor has it Josephina was three years old, and she hasn’t set foot out of the county since. Been here for every last earthquake that’s shaken the coast. The woman’s a phenomenon.” Marnie slapped her hands together and raised her voice over the dwindling applause. “Okay, Josephina’s special tea for everyone, on the house.”

They all cheered.

It had taken Marnie eight tries to get the tea just right. “You have to make it just like *mi madre* used to make it,” Josephina kept saying, and ever since it had been a customer favorite. Marnie’s special mix.

The bell jingled from the front door. Marnie looked up. A purple-shirted man pushed through the opening. He turned. No, not a man, just a kid. A pimply-faced boy with a silly purple hat to match his plum purple shirt, with an electronic clipboard balanced on his arm.

He waved at her. “Hey, Marnie.”

She lifted her eyebrows. “Scott? You got a new job?”

He grinned and pointed at some tiny lettering on his shirt. “We do it faster.”

Marnie stepped toward him. “Who are you looking for?”

“You.”

Marnie blew her bangs off her forehead with a quick puff of air. Thank goodness. She'd been waiting and waiting for that new bean grinder from Italy. She rubbed her hands together. “Well, where is it?”

Scott pulled a slim envelope from beneath the clipboard and held it out to her. “Here ya go.”

“That's not a bean grinder.”

“Huh?”

Figured. “That it? Just an envelope?”

“Yep. Sign here.”

Marnie took the plastic pen, signed, and watched as Scott tucked the clipboard back under his arm and strode toward the door. He threw another jaunty wave over his shoulder.

“Got a new toffee nut,” she called after him. “Come back later and try it out.”

“New books too?”

“A whole shipment came in just this morning.”

“It's a date.” The door thudded shut.

A date. She shook her head. Her friends were always teasing her about dates, because everyone knew Marnie Wittier never, ever went on a date. And she didn't go to the beach either. Those were her rules.

A series of *ooo's* and *ahhh's* rose from the women. Marnie glanced at them. Kinna held up a complete set of pink Onesies. Striped pink, flowered pink, pink polka dots, and even one with little pink monkeys. Good grief. Call out the pink police.

Marnie turned away and reached for the letter. It was in a beige linen envelope, heavy, official. Expensive. Who would be sending her something like that? She flipped it over to the front.

The air escaped the room. Time sucked in an empty breath. And

Marnie sensed her world tipping around her. *No*... Slowly, so slowly, she extended her finger and touched the fancy attorney's logo on the envelope's upper-left corner. A crescent wave, a block *C*, and a flat line like the shore on a calm day. Her arm moved as she traced the name beneath. His name. But it couldn't be. Shouldn't be. Must not be. And yet...

Marnie blew out a long breath. The earthquake had come. The real one, more real than any earth tremor, than any tipping cups, than walls that shuddered and stopped. A single logo, a single name. They rocked her world. And if she were to measure, she'd call it an eight-point-oh for sure.

She closed her eyes. *It's not real. It can't be.* Her life was good now. Finally. She was surrounded by people who cared. People who just knew her as Marnie, the friendly Books and Brew owner. That's all they knew, all they needed to know. But the man whose name would be inside that envelope knew something else. He knew who she used to be. He knew everything. Well, almost everything anyway, including the fact that she'd once loved him.

Or maybe he didn't, because she never did tell him so. She'd run away from him first. Run away and left love, left hope, behind. But she brought the pain with her. The pain, the guilt, the regret. She'd kept those locked in a seashell-covered box on a top shelf in her little cottage too close to the bay.

Marnie snatched up the letter and stuffed it into her pocket. It burned there like hot espresso. But she couldn't open it. Not here. Not now. Seeing that logo was enough. Because after all these years, it had happened.

He found me.