

The Fiction Lover's Devotional Series

Rag Doll

by Kathy Ide

SAMPLE CHAPTER

“Really, Mom?” Megan raised an eyebrow at the picture her mother had cut out of a magazine. The little girl with dark-brown braids held a Raggedy Ann doll like it was her most treasured possession, despite the marker scribbles on its cloth legs and the frazzled red yarn on its head. “This is how you see me?”

Her mom beamed as she ran a glue stick along the back of the picture. “Don’t you remember? I made you a doll just like that. You took it everywhere. No matter how ratty it looked, you loved it with all your heart.”

The other guests at Megan’s bridal shower heaved a collective “Awwww.” So into the collage it went, along with cut-outs of wedding rings, waterfalls, pizza, chocolate, and other things her friends had found that reminded them of special memories they shared.

Megan’s maid-of-honor-to-be placed a glass square over the hodgepodge of pictures, twisted the metal tongs on the back, then presented Megan with the gift, to the delighted squeals of her friends.

The opening notes to “Here Comes the Bride” rang from Megan’s purse. “Sorry. I know the guest of honor shouldn’t take a call in the middle of her own party, but—”

They all urged her to answer, knowing she’d set that ring tone exclusively for Patrick.

While the hostess directed everyone toward the cake table, Megan ducked into the hall for privacy. “Hey, lover,” she cooed into the phone.

“Miss York?”

She started at the unfamiliar voice. “Yes,” she choked out. “Who’s this?”

“Do you know Patrick McKenna, ma’am?”

Her stomach knotted. Pat should be on a plane right now, headed for his old neighborhood. His best friend from high school had offered to throw him a bachelor party. Had someone found—or stolen—his cell phone?

“Ma’am?”

She cleared the lump in her throat. “He’s my f-fiancé. How did you get his phone?”

“I’m sorry to have to tell you this, ma’am, but . . . Mr. McKenna’s plane crashed.”

The caller kept talking, but Megan didn’t hear another word.

“No!” Megan glared at her parents, fists clenched around the brand-new white nightgown she would never wear. “I’m sick of your lies.” She tossed the silky abomination into a black trash bag.

Her father reached for her, but she shrank from his touch. His misty eyes revealed a pain deeper than any she’d ever seen.

“Sweetheart.” Mom wrung her hands. “We don’t understand why this happened any more than you do. Sometimes God’s ways are—”

“Stop it!” Megan’s rapid breaths and shaky legs nearly caused her to collapse, but angry determination kept her standing. “I told you, I don’t want to hear another word about God. Ever.”

Turning away from her parents’ grief-stricken faces, she went back to stuffing marriage-related items into large plastic bags and personal possessions into a suitcase.

How many years had she wasted following the God her parents believed in? Her entire life they’d filled her brain with stories about a loving heavenly Father. One who sent His Son to live a perfect, sinless life on earth. And how Jesus intentionally let people mock, torture, and finally kill him in the most inhumane way known to mankind. All to pay the penalty for the sins of every human who ever lived. So the Holy Spirit could dwell in their hearts, bring them joy on earth, and give them eternal life in heaven, where there would be no pain, no sorrow, no ... death.

Stupid fairy tale.

She’d willingly swallowed the propaganda spoon-fed to her by a long line of Sunday school teachers, pastors, and youth leaders. She and Patrick met on a mission trip to Oaxaca. Dated for two years—most of their “dates” being Bible studies and prayer meetings. When Pat proposed, he said he knew their marriage was God’s will.

Like a blind fool, she’d shouted, “Yes!” and leapt into his arms, convinced the Creator of heaven and earth had handpicked him for her.

So much for divine direction.

Megan pulled on the zipper of her overstuffed suitcase. When it caught on a corner, she nearly collapsed in frustration. As she yanked to free it, old patterns of thinking kicked in. Was this setback God’s way of trying to get her to reconsider her plan? Mentally tossing that crazy idea into the nearest trash bag, she unzipped an inch or two, freed the T-shirt sleeve that had gotten caught in the metal teeth, then closed the suitcase.

“Are you sure you won’t change your mind?” Dad’s normally polished pastor’s voice sounded gravelly and strained. “Carmen and Jeanne would love to have you stay with them for a while.”

Megan tugged the bulging suitcase off the bed. She loved her aunt and uncle. But they’d only give her more of the same dog-and-pony show she’d been duped with her whole life. It was time to grow up.

“I’ll call when I get to LA.” Everyone in her little Illinois hometown considered California “the land of fruits and nuts,” and Los Angeles the moral armpit of the world. What better place to get as far away from religious fanaticism as possible?

When Megan reached her bedroom doorway, Mom stepped into her path, holding out Megan’s study Bible. “At least take this with you.”

For years that book had been her most valued possession. She’d read it from cover to cover, multiple times. So many pages were dog-eared, verses underlined, and passages highlighted, it looked as tattered as the Raggedy Ann in her bridal collage.

Megan’s eyes cut to the shattered glass and ripped paper in the corner of her room. She’d made a mess of the gift her family and friends had lovingly put together for her. But the God she’d always believed in had made a mess of her life. Seemed only fair.

Gazing at the Book in her mother’s hands, Megan whispered, “Sorry, Mom.” Then left the room.

“We’ll be praying for you,” her parents called after her.

Go ahead. Knock yourselves out. Never again would she speak to a God who, if He even existed, would lead her into supreme bliss, only to steal it away in such a cruel, heartless manner. Especially after she'd given her whole life to Him.

"Hey, chubby, where's that coffee I asked for—twice?"

Megan bit back the retort that came to mind. She couldn't risk losing her job at this cheesy dive. It didn't pay squat, but it came with insurance. If she got fired, no new employer would cover her "preexisting condition."

She pasted on a half-smile as she poured the nasty-smelling brew. "Sorry for the wait. Can I get you anything else, sir?" She hoped he didn't notice the sarcasm she couldn't keep out of her tone.

"Just the check."

After handing him the bill, she headed back to the kitchen, rubbing the small of her back. There were days when she wished she'd taken her girlfriends up on their offer to pay for an abortion.

A grip on her forearm stopped her. "What does this say?" Her boss waved an order slip in her face.

"Ham-and-cheese omelet, hold the peppers."

"Well, that's not what the lady at table six got. And she says you never came back to check on her, so she couldn't correct the order."

Megan sighed. "I'll go talk to her."

"Too late," he growled. "She just stormed out of here, after chewing me out ... without paying her bill."

"Sorry."

"So am I." He handed her an envelope. "I took the cost of her meal out of your last paycheck."

"Hank, please—"

"Don't argue. This isn't the first time you've messed up. Turn in your apron. And don't ever come back."

Megan woke up slowly, head pounding, unable to open her eyes. When she tried to roll over, her right arm felt as if it were tied to something. She forced her lids to raise a bit. Through tiny slits, she saw bright lights and a room full of white. Was that smell ... disinfectant?

"She's coming around." An excited voice. Vaguely familiar.

"M-m-mom?" The word came out weak and thready.

A warm hand grasped hers. "I'm here, sweetie. So's Dad." Sniffling.

A spasm of shivers overtook her. Megan felt like she'd been poured into a blender on high speed. Her entire body went into convulsions. "Oh, God, help me!"

The pain became unbearable. Mercifully, she lost consciousness.

Megan gazed in her bedroom mirror at the reflection of her stomach—flat, except for a small mound of residual "baby fat." Her heart clenched.

She hadn't wanted to bring a child into her lousy world. But she'd looked forward to giving her baby to a loving couple who wanted to adopt. In her attempt to end her own life with an overdose of pills, she'd stopped another beating heart ... and deprived a family of a child they desperately longed for.

With a soft knock on the open door, her father entered. “How are you feeling, honey?”
“Okay.” Physically, anyway. Emotionally, she wasn’t sure she’d ever recover.

If she did, her parents would get the credit. They’d flown in the day she was rushed to the hospital, and one or both of them had been at her bedside 24/7. After she was released, they’d brought her home. They took care of her, even when she went through dramatic mood swings, severe anger, and clinical depression.

“Why have you and Mom been so patient with me?” Megan asked. “I’ve given you nothing but grief since the day I left.”

He wrapped strong arms around her trembling frame. “You’re our daughter. We’ll always love you, no matter what.”

Megan’s throat closed up. As she melted into Dad’s embrace, she sensed God saying the same thing to her heart. In spite of everything, she was His child. And He loved her ... unconditionally.

Over her father’s shoulder, Megan gazed at the collage on the wall. Behind a new pane of glass were all the pictures from her bridal shower. In the center, a smiling girl in braids held a ratty-looking doll—scuffed, worn, bedraggled. But completely and purely loved.

Life Application

When bad things happen, we may question God’s love, His sovereignty, even His existence. But like a loving earthly father, whose heart never changes even when his little girl tries to run away from home, or his teenage son hollers, “I hate you,” or his grown children decide they don’t need him anymore, God continues to love us.

Though His heart grieves when His children turn away from Him, His love never changes. His grace is not dependent on our actions, thoughts, or feelings.

Some people think they’re too messed up for God to love them. Others are so confident in their self-achieved morality, they don’t believe they need God. But our heavenly Father loves all His children equally—no matter how bad, or good, they are.

In spite of what you’ve done, or what you’ve thought about God—even if you’ve denied His existence—He is waiting, with open arms and a forgiving heart, to welcome you home and fill your life with joy and peace that surpass circumstances.

Author Bio

Kathy Ide, author of *Proofreading Secrets of Best-Selling Authors*, is a freelance editor/mentor for new writers, established authors, and book publishers. She speaks at writers’ conferences across the country. She is the founder and director of The Christian PEN and the Christian Editor Connection. For more, visit KathyIde.com.