



JERRY JENKINS PRESENTS

A
MILLION
LITTLE
CHOICES

A NOVEL

TAMERA
ALEXANDER

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

“In *A Million Little Choices*, Tamera Alexander deftly blends the story of a contemporary marriage—on the brink due to shattered trust—with a breathtaking historical saga set in the same location. With the flair for which the critically acclaimed *USA Today* bestselling novelist is famous, Tammy thrills us anew with the mysteriously parallel stories of two heroic women, generations apart.”

JERRY B. JENKINS, *New York Times* bestselling author

“I couldn’t put the book down. It was that good! Tamera Alexander does a masterful job at showing a marriage on the brink, and that what we do in our minds and hearts matters—not just what we do with our bodies. *A Million Little Choices* is a wonderfully rich story woven through with love, humor, and spiritual insights that simply will *not* let you stop reading!”

FRANCINE RIVERS, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Redeeming Love* and *The Lady’s Mine*

“*A Million Little Choices* was one of those rare, engaging novels that I simply couldn’t put down. Tamera Alexander’s characters lived and breathed, thoroughly immersing me in their lives and struggles. As the plots of two time periods intertwine, Christ’s power to redeem even the most tragic circumstances shines through. Don’t miss this compelling novel.”

LYNN AUSTIN, bestselling author of *Long Way Home*

“With poignant honesty, Tamera Alexander has penned a timeless tale of marriage and family, brokenness and betrayal, faith and forgiveness, reminding us that every decision a person makes has ripple effects, sometimes lasting for generations. In *A Million Little Choices*, Alexander skillfully weaves the past with the present, bringing out long-buried secrets that

captivated me and had me turning pages well past my bedtime. This hope-filled story will undoubtedly serve as a beacon of light for each and every reader.”

MICHELLE SHOCKLEE, *Christianity Today* Book Award–winning author of *Count the Nights by Stars*

“This engrossing, redemptive story kept me guessing and hoping as I followed a fascinating cast of characters on their journeys toward healing and faith. Tamera Alexander digs deep into the myriad seemingly small choices we each make every day—choices that can lead to devastation or to triumph, depending on the path we choose. A lush and moody setting and Alexander’s consummate skill with words draw you in and don’t let go.”

DEBORAH RANEY, author of *Breath of Heaven* and *Bridges*

“In *A Million Little Things*, Tamera Alexander tells a story that will lift your heart to the heavens even as it drives your knees to the floor. I laughed and I cried. I despaired and I rejoiced. Don’t miss this one. It’s a masterpiece.”

ROBIN LEE HATCHER, bestselling author of *I’ll Be Seeing You*

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**TAMERA
ALEXANDER**

**FOCUS
ON THE FAMILY[®]**

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*Therefore, since we also have such a
large cloud of witnesses surrounding us,
let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us.
Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us,
keeping our eyes on Jesus.*

HEBREWS 12:1-2A, HCSB

*We sow a thought and reap an action.
We sow an action and reap a habit.
We sow a habit and reap a lifestyle.
We sow a lifestyle and reap a character.
We sow a character and reap a destiny.*

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

*For Rabbi Jesus—
who never changes,
yet who changes everything*

1



FRIDAY, MAY 24, 2019

DENVER, COLORADO

Surely I'd misunderstood. Stephen wouldn't do this to me. To us. Disbelief washed over me in a numbing rush. After twenty-two years of marriage, the last ten with us supposedly living *redeemed* lives, had we not made it any further down this road?

I slammed my SUV to an ungainly stop—inches from the red compact cowering beneath my bumper. I waved an apology, and the ponytailed teenager responded with an all-too-familiar hand gesture. My patience thinned.

“Claire. Are you still there?”

Deep breaths, the counselor had said.

“Yes, but . . . I think you cut out there for a second.” Truth is, I wanted him to repeat it. An unfair tactic, admittedly, and one rusty from disuse. But I was free-falling.

Stephen sighed. “You know exactly what I said, Claire. Let's not play this game. We're supposed to be past this.”

“All I asked was—”

“Hang on, will you, honey?” Muted voices—one of them Stephen’s, the other unrecognizable.

“Sure,” I said beneath my breath, feeling dismissed like one of his corporate litigants.

I stared out the windshield of the Lexus, a recent gift from Stephen in what seemed a blatant attempt to appease his guilt. I inched forward in the noontime traffic, wondering if he was still at the Atlanta Hilton. It was so like him to pull out a fighting-fair tactic. I hated backsliding into behavior I’d vowed to leave behind, but at times I still preferred to throw on the gloves and go at it.

The deliciously sharp responses tingling my tongue turned to acid. I never wished for those youthful days of marriage again—the constant power struggles, making sure everything was even, that everything was fair. I did not want to be that woman again.

My eyes watered. God was slowly, achinglly fashioning me into his likeness, however faint the resemblance so far. He had led me beyond the selfishness and pride that had nearly eclipsed my love for Stephen. But there were still moments when the boxing gloves seemed to beckon for one more round. I briefly closed my eyes, resisting the urge.

“Okay, honey. I’m back.”

I waited for more, but apparently Stephen expected me to respond. It was all I could do to breathe past the hurt clawing the back of my throat.

“Claire, look . . . I’m sorry. I know you’re not happy about this.” He spoke slowly, each word measured. “But I *did* verbally accept the offer from the Atlanta firm about an hour ago—a full partnership. I haven’t signed anything yet. But do you realize what this means for me? For *us*?”

I could well imagine the practiced tilt of his head and the engaging stare of those blue-gray eyes that still made me go weak in the knees. Age looked good on him. And his kind nature and dry wit only added to the appeal. Not surprisingly, I wasn’t the

only woman who found those qualities attractive. Not hardly. I'd grown accustomed to the lingering looks Stephen drew. Yet I'd always trusted him implicitly—until he gave me the reason not to.

“You still there, Claire?”

I blinked to clear the image that still came to mind all too frequently. “Yes, I'm here.” *And I plan to stay right here too.* “Stephen, please, before you sign anything—”

“Listen, my cab will be here any minute. I should be home around seven. We'll talk about it then.” He paused. “Okay, babe?”

I turned into the parking lot of Schaffer & Associates Design. Janine, the youngest interior designer, waved as she folded her model-worthy legs into her little coupe. Then she gave me a look. One I understood.

I searched the lot. Patrice Yancey's white Tesla. My jaw tightened. Patrice was uncustomarily early.

“Yeah, okay,” I finally said, eager to get off the phone.

“I've missed you this week, Claire. I wish you'd have come with me.”

Suddenly I wished I had too, certain I could've warded this off.

“This is a huge step for me, honey. For us both. And I think it's coming at a perfect time. I really do.”

“But why Atlanta?” I said with more bitterness than I'd intended. “Of all the choices open to you. You know how I feel about that city. And the South in general.”

He didn't respond, and I began to wonder if he'd heard me.

“Because it's a world away from where we are now,” he finally answered. “I need this fresh start. We both do.” Was he affecting a sympathetic tone only to aid his argument? A handy trait for a lawyer. “You remember what Richard said a few sessions back. It'll help us to leave behind some of the . . .”

What he had finally confessed to me Christmas Day came crashing back in torrents, wounding me all over again, and suddenly I didn't care in the least about trying to fight fair. What was

a *near* affair anyway? You were either faithful or you weren't. Since when was fidelity measured on a sliding scale?

And the way I'd found out—from an acquaintance I hadn't seen in forever, or since, who had seen them together at the gym where Stephen was a member. All those times he'd told me he was going to work out. The evenings he claimed a late dinner meeting at the office. All the lies. He'd told me they'd been *physical* but had never had sex. I wanted to believe him. But was that a lie too?

“Claire, you still there?”

“Yes. But Stephen, Richard also said we should make this decision *together*. So how do you get off not discussing it with me first?”

A deep exhale. “I've tried, Claire. You never want to listen. You made it clear you wanted to stay in Colorado. For your friends, for your own career. But in two weeks, Maggie will be off to that special summer session, then fall will be here and—”

“But she'll still need us. You make it sound like we'll quit being her parents the day she starts college.” I softened my tone. “And what about your mother, Stephen? She's in no condition to be moved right now.”

His silence felt like a victory, but I knew better than to celebrate prematurely, facing so skilled a negotiator.

“Bev has found a great assisted living place for Mom, and—”

“You've spoken to your sister about this? Before talking to *me*?”

“It's there in Savannah, not far from her and Michael. And that's only four hours from Atlanta, so you and I can easily get there to see her. Maybe explore Charleston and Hilton Head. Get some great seafood.”

I hated the forced brightness in his tone and begged God to change my attitude. I still loved my husband. But at the moment, liking him was out of the question.

“Stephen, I—”

“Listen, my cab's here. I'll see you soon. I love you.”

I closed my eyes again. “Love you too. Safe travels.”

I pulled into a parking space and cut the ignition. I'd chosen to wear the saffron Veronica Beard jacket Stephen had purchased for me, knowing it would please him. He said it was sexy. Now I planned on changing as soon as I got home.

2



I MANAGED A SMILE as I greeted Patrice Yancey in the lobby, her perky little bichon frise powder puff dog poised in her lap. Patrice rose, jewelry dripping from nearly every appendage. *Britney Spears as a great-grandmother*. Bottle blonde, false lashes, skin too long in the sun, and a fondness for push-up bras that revealed plunges scary enough to frighten the most daring of cliff divers. Yet at eighty-five, she could still run mental circles around most people. Pair that with a stubborn streak, and the woman had been a real challenge for the six years I'd had her account.

But the reason behind the incessant redecorating of her nine-thousand-square-foot home softened my heart toward her—that and the handsome stream of revenue, of course.

“Claire! The refrigerator drawers absolutely must be moved. I lay awake all night thinking they'd be better off in the island, which is where you suggested I put them in the first place, but—”

I listened, hearing both what she was saying and what she wasn't.

“—as you always tell me, this house is an extension of myself, and I need to be pleased with it. Which I am certainly not at present! And that cabinet man of yours isn’t returning my calls—seven since last night!”

She took a breath, and I broke in. “I’ll happily reach the subcontractor for you, and we’ll work together until everything is to your absolute satisfaction.”

She shook her head. “Frankly, I don’t think he’s coming back. And I’m not sure I want him to.” The little puffball in her arms growled as though in agreement. “Last time, he told me I should stick to the choices I’d already made. The audacity! We need someone else, Claire. Today. Now!”

Having ridden these rapids before, I motioned toward the meeting room. “Let’s get you and Beatrice settled first.” I turned to Andrew at the reception desk. “Would you be so kind as to get a raspberry lemonade for Mrs. Yancey—extra ice and two slices of lemon. And a demitasse of whipped cream for Beatrice, too, please.” He and I shared a discreet wink.

If the cabinet contractor had really said those things to Patrice, I’d need to have a conversation with him. In high demand, he was also young and rough around the edges. And a wealthy, loyal client had the right to change her mind, no matter how frustrating it might be.

I excused myself to grab Patrice’s file from my office. I could hardly wait to share with my boss, Sandra Schaffer, the outcome of my appointment earlier that morning. Stephen hadn’t even asked about it, and I’d reminded him of it the night before on the phone.

It seemed he and I passed each other coming and going these days. Actually, for years now. Yet it hadn’t always been this way. He used to make me laugh. We even hid little sticky notes around for each other. We’d leave them in drawers, inside shoes and clothes. I even recalled shampooing my hair and glimpsing one barely clinging to the tile. I had to smile even now at what Stephen had written, grateful Maggie hadn’t seen it. *That man . . .*

I loved him despite what he'd done. Yet trusting him again, making myself vulnerable with him—that was far more difficult. Neither of us had left notes for the other in a long time. It seemed he should be the one to start that again.

I grabbed Patrice Yancey's folder, certain the refrigerator drawers could be moved with no issue. I first met Patrice a month after her husband's heart attack that ended their sixty-eight-year marriage. No warning. No opportunity to say goodbye. Irving Yancey had apparently gotten up during the night for a glass of juice. Patrice found him sprawled on the kitchen floor the next morning.

This was Patrice's third time remodeling her kitchen since burying him. No matter what you did, some mental pictures could never be erased.

Sixty-eight years . . .

Stephen and I had only twenty-two under our belt, and if things didn't change, I couldn't imagine an additional forty-six. My entire lifetime again? Sobering. I'd be ninety-two. Based on current circumstances in my life and the world in general, I wasn't certain I wanted to live to that ripe old age.

My desk phone rang. It was Sandra.

"How did the Bellingham appointment go, Claire? Success, I'm betting?"

"Very well! We met with the architect, and I brought back signed contracts for the house, the pool house, and the guest cottage. We agreed to look at plans for the boathouse later. I wouldn't be at all surprised, considering the Bellinghams' influence in this city, if this doesn't end up on the cover of *Denver Homes & Lifestyles*. It's going to be spectacular!"

"Correction, Ms. Powell. Your skills will put that house on the cover, and I expect another uptick in clientele like we gained from your first cover."

I smiled beneath her affirmation. "Listen, can we talk in a bit? I have Mrs. Yancey waiting."

“By all means, see to our lovely Mrs. Yancey, then come see me. It’s important.”

“Will do.”

To say I admired Sandra was an understatement. Recently named as a recipient of *Network Journal’s* annual 25 Influential Black Women in Business Awards, she’d built Schaffer & Associates Design from the ground up, and I was proud to be one of three senior associates. I still had to pinch myself that I got to do what I loved for a living.

I wondered why she wanted to see me. Issues with the Patricks’ condo renovation perhaps? Or the Stewarts’ “Victorian Beast,” as we’d nicknamed the massive nineteenth-century-style home the couple was building? Thank goodness that project was near completion. Leaving my office, I spotted the cube of sticky notes on my desk and hesitated, then tucked a few in my purse.

An hour later, I accompanied a far-more-contented Patrice Yancey to the lobby, then headed to see Sandra.

Muted tones of white and whisper-light green decor evoked an understated elegance that was the hallmark of Schaffer & Associates Design, one of Denver’s top five residential design firms six years running. Sandra’s energy and business savvy made her an excellent mentor, and over the past decade I’d made it my goal to learn everything I could from her—even if she didn’t like my shopping at T.J. Maxx for the trendy items a client wanted. But why spend more money if you didn’t have to? She finally agreed, as long as I agreed not to advertise the fact. It became a running joke between us.

We’d become friends too, mostly due to her needing an ear during a messy divorce a few years back. But I was careful to keep our office relationship strictly professional. “Friendship should be reserved for outside of work,” Stephen always said—advice he’d promptly forgotten.

Sandra looked up from her laptop as I sat across from her.

She pointed to her screen. “The Bellingham deposit just landed

in the account, and with quite a thud, I might add. You're the best closer I've got."

"Thank you. I learned from the best." My cell phone vibrated. I sent it to voice mail without looking.

"I do see a lot of myself in you, Claire. For better or worse." Smiling, she cocked a brow and leaned forward. "You're my best designer, and the most prolific. You handle yourself the same way, *unpretentious and enduring*, as it says on your business card. Clients trust you. Which is why"—she stood and extended a hand—"I'm thrilled to announce a change in partnership. From now on, we'll be known as Schaffer, *Powell* & Associates Design. How does that sound?"

"Sandra, I-I don't know what to say."

But more than that, what would Stephen say? I was quite certain he would react to my good news with as much enthusiasm as I had to his.

