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The What-If Guy

Taylor G. Wilshire
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Twenty-something Ryley McKenna thinks she has it made. She's finally got the corner office with a view and all the rewards that come with corporate success. Thing is, she seldom has a chance to savor the life she'd hungered for when she traded a floundering company in upstate New York for the high-tech phenomena in coastal California. At a time when most young women are out "clubbing," going from one trendy nightclub to another, Ryley pours herself into work, "like a waterfall spilling into a deep pool." She wonders how she got there, and how she could shift the "tension and lack of solution that went beyond Band-Aids."

The simple answer to her self-analysis is making terrible choices. A heart-rending relationship with a dance-away lover a "What-if guy") paralyzes Ryley so completely that it renders her "still and numb," locked inside a "dead hollow tree" with branches "ready to snap in a moment." Intense grief propels her into a volatile, abusive liaison with a man as commitment-phobic as the guy who'd mangled her heart. Yet even when Ryley escapes the clutches of the "rebound-guy" and is at the top of her game in her career, she wakes up "hollowed out and empty."

What sets this author's tale apart from the edgy "Chick lit" genre of books like *Sex in the City* is Wilshire's reframing of the bleak postmodern terrain of twenty-first century lives into a firmly grounded transformation of the mundane into the miraculous. Ryley stops looking for salvation in relationships or a demanding career and steps into a deep faith, built not on blind belief, but on results. Guided by a childhood friend, Ryley makes a "conscious priority to journey into the light." Even though "Some days it worked; most days it didn't," Ryley's trajectory into a life of mindful awareness gains momentum, until she beholds what she is made of: "a piece of God." The impact of her transformation spills into every aspect of her life, and nothing is ever the same. A whole new vista, teeming with possibilities but anchored in acceptance, lies before her.

The author's choice to use quotes from the *Course in Miracles* to head each chapter for example, "Let all things be exactly the way they are" and "Love is the way I walk in gratitude") puts the reader right into Ryley's journey. Indeed, the author's own path as an ordained minister and former vice president of marketing for a Fortune 500 company brings an authenticity to this book; her characters and settings are vivid and Ryley's transformation is not only believable, it is inevitable. For readers who are hungry for fiction that is a blend of real modern life with a spirituality that is palpable, this book is a keeper.
CAROL LYNN STEWART (October 4, 2006)

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