

# *When Love Ends Romance Begins*

First novel in The Narrowboat Romance Series

An excerpt...

Chapter One

Divorced

“Divorced!”

Katie Saunders stared at the official letter announcing that she and John were no longer married. Why couldn't he have just died? Smashed that ridiculous mid-life crisis sports car or contracted some terrible disease—a long, lingering, debilitating disease? John deserved both.

She wondered, exactly, when she had developed such a dark side. A grieving widow was preferable to a pitiful divorcee. Hot tears spilled onto her face but not because of the divorce or his infidelity. Those tears had dried up weeks ago. But for the shame of wishing John dead - the man she loved, with whom she had shared the past thirty years.

Katie had watched John change. Desperate to re-ignite his youth and terrified by his own mortality, compounded by the shock of losing a friend to a heart attack, he'd indulged in self-gratification—fast cars and beautiful young women. Katie had tried to ignore it as a phase, even attempting to reassure him by putting a spark in their marriage. It hadn't helped.

When her suggestions of marriage counselling were met with contempt, she sought counselling alone. It seemed she was always alone these days, except for Buddy-Boy, the three-year-old white fur ball of a dog usually curled up warmly on her feet. The counsellor advised her to stand up for herself and tell John to give up the women or else. Or else what? She didn't know. Had she pushed him into the arms of yet another thirty-year-old? Had the counselling changed her? She didn't like being bitter and vindictive. Wishing someone dead was not the real Katie. She wanted to be her old self again, happy, caring and loving but, except for Buddy-Boy, she had no one to love. The kids had flown the nest. Melanie, a botanist, was living in the wilds of Peru studying trees and Ben... well, keeping him on the straight-and-narrow was still a challenge. John said Ben was a free spirit and to leave him alone.

She worried about Ben.

John had settled in a modern downtown condo loft not big enough to swing a cat in, but that was the modern trend for young professionals. He could claim *professional* as a

solicitor but at fifty-five, young he was not. She felt sorry for him; new neighbours looked at him with amusement, old friends shook their heads in disbelief—although, she suspected some of his male friends envied him.

John was happy. Katie was not.

The house echoed with emptiness now. The furniture, ornaments and paintings were unchanged John had left everything, but the place was sterile, empty of the important things—love and laughter.

Katie had chosen to be a stay at-home mum. She had no interest in being a career woman; wife and mother was her career. Financially, they hadn't needed a second income and Katie had wanted to be home for the kids, bake apple pies for John and entertain friends. Dinner parties were the Saunders' signature, both in the neighbourhood and with the law partners. Although attractive, Katie had always been quiet and mousy but John had enough vitality for them both; a complementary combination of introvert and extrovert, or that's what she had thought. She had been wrong. And now, without John, the friends had disappeared. Friends and acquaintances from the law practice were understandable, but Katie's women friends from the neighbourhood, *that* she did not understand.

Two exceptions were Judy Clayton and Phil Williams. She had met Judy when they were both pregnant with their sons and she'd been her best friend for the thirty plus years since. Sadly, Judy had moved away from the neighbourhood when her husband ran off with a wealthy older woman. The divorce had strengthened their already strong friendship. The other person was a tall, handsome young bachelor living amid suburban families and the subject of much gossip. Phil was an unlikely friend, but he'd been the only person on Autumn Road that had shown Katie any kindness or empathy.

Buddy-Boy gave a soft woof, but stayed at her feet. Katie looked up from the letter as a familiar voice called, "Knock, knock! Is anyone home?"

Katie brushed the tears from her face and patted her hair. *Not that it makes any difference*, she thought.

"Phil, come in. I'm sorry, I was miles away. I just received this." Katie pushed the letter into his hand, determined not to cry as Phil had already witnessed too many tears. "Have a seat. I'll make tea, or would you prefer coffee?" she called from the kitchen.

"Tea's fine. So, it's official. How do you feel?"

"I'm fine. I'm over it," she yelled into the lounge, only to see Phil leaning against the kitchen doorway, his arms crossed.

"You don't look fine."

Katie shrugged and coughed away tears that stuck in the back of her throat. "I'm okay. I can get on with life now." Katie gave a tortured grin. "If I had a life. I don't know what to do. My life was John and the kids and they're gone. It's just Bud and I now." She leaned over and patted the dog. Buddy put his head to one side, his gentle eyes fixed on

Katie.

“You need a purpose. Have you considered going back to school or getting a job?”

“This may sound shocking but I’ve never thought beyond the kids, except maybe we would travel and retire somewhere. I’ll need to work, eventually.” She gave a sharp laugh. “I’ll be fifty-one at my next birthday and instead of retirement I’m looking for work. At least the court ordered John to pay alimony for three years, giving me a chance to train for a career and get a job.”

“So, why don’t you?” he said bluntly and smiled to soften his words.

“What skills do I have? Raising kids, sewing, cooking and entertaining are not exactly sought after corporate career skills. And going back to college with a bunch of kids younger than my own children is not appealing. I can’t even use a computer beyond email and shopping on Amazon.”

“You are bright, intelligent and could learn all kind of skills if you put your mind to it. What about teaching people how to entertain? No one in the neighbourhood can come close to your dinner parties. I can teach you some basic computer skills or you could go to night school. Most of the evening students are older people in the work force.”

Katie didn’t answer. As a professor at the college, Phil was enthusiastic about teaching and learning, which made her feel cornered and inadequate. She couldn’t explain why, although leaving the house and meeting people scared her because she thought she would look like a fool. Everybody knew how to use a computer and nobody cooked anymore. She could never stand in front of a bunch of people and teach. What was Phil thinking? *I thought he was a friend. Some friend...*

“Katie, talk to me. What’s wrong? I’ve upset you.”

“No, its me. I feel raw. I can’t plan for the future right now. Phil, I’m sorry but I need to be alone. Can we talk another time?”

Phil frowned. “Of course, but Katie are you sure you’re all right?”

Katie gave a weak smile, “Honestly, I’m fine. I just need to be alone.”

“O...k...ay,” Phil said slowly and hesitated, “if you’re sure. I’ll drop by tomorrow.”

Katie led him to the door and closed it. She cleared away the still full teacups. He hadn’t even had time to drink his tea. *Is there something wrong with me? Pushing away a good friend who only wants to help.*

She loved entertaining but the idea of teaching strangers how to do it was frightening. It was different when she was hosting; she felt confident and in control, making her guests comfortable and feeding them good food. Was it even possible to turn entertaining into a skill?