

...until love lasts.

by Erin Zulkoski

She didn't know why she thought the ring wouldn't fit her finger, but it slid on easily and effortlessly, coming to rest in the old familiar place it always had, the groove that had worn in her finger after seven years of wearing it.

She hadn't worn it in a few months, but the small callous that had formed was still there.

She stared down at the slightly worn gold band, the reddish-pink stone, the diamonds flanking the ruby; two of them had fallen out a few years ago, but she never had them replaced, because that would mean she would have had to of taken the ring off, and back then, the thought of going without wearing the ring made her anxious, so on it stayed.

She started twirling the ring around her fourth finger with her thumb, an old nervous habit that resurfaced the instant she put the band back on.

A sad smile spread across her face, the left corner of her mouth turning up slightly, as she recalled when he had given the ring to her.

It was early in the morning; he had to be to work by 6:00 a.m., and he woke her up by nuzzling her neck and kissing it softly.

Awoken from a deep sleep, she remembered being slightly annoyed with him for messing with her at such an early hour. Groaning and trying to turn away from him, he persisted, moving closer to her, his hand resting on her hip.

"Wake up, baby," he said between kisses. "I have to give you something."

Again she groaned, and said in a tired voice, "can't it wait until you get home? I want to sleep."

"No," he whispered in her ear, tugging her earlobe in between his lips. "It's important and I want you to have it now."

With a deep sigh, she kicked the blanket off her feet and stuggled slightly to sit upright in bed. He sat up beside her, his hand now

resting on her thigh. He stretched over to the night stand and pulled the drawer open. He pulled something out, and set it behind him on the bed. He then grabbed her glasses and handed them to her, as she was virtually blind without them.

“Here, put these on,” he said softly. She did and looked at him, his face more clear now. His eyes were twinkling, even in the early morning light, and a nervous smile crept across his lips.

“I love you, and I want to prove that to you.” He had pulled both of her hands into his, and brought them up to his face, where he planted soft kisses on her fingers.

If she had been groggy with sleep before, she was wide awake now, realizing what was happening. She stared at him, wide-eyed and blinking rapidly.

He reached around, and pulled what was hidden from behind him. A small white box.

He handed it to her shyly and said, “Will you marry me?”

Stunned, she sat with the box in her hand, terrified to open it. With a deep breath, she lifted the lid to the box and inside was the most beautiful ring she had ever seen in her life. The same ring that she wore right now. She remembered staring at it for a few minutes, speechless. She looked up at him and saw tears welling up in his eyes.

Looking down at the ring again, she pulled it from the velvet lining and put it on her ring finger. It slid on just as easily then as it did now.

She still hadn't answered his question because no words would come from her throat. Instead, she grabbed his scratchy face with both of her hands, pulling him into hers, and they kissed, once, twice, three times; each kiss lasting longer than the one before. By then, tears were slipping down her cheeks, as well as his, as she felt his landing on her hands.

She pulled away from him, but still held his face in her hands and looked long and hard into his brown-grey eyes. She wanted to remember this exact moment for the rest of her life and how he looked. It was almost ethereal—the sun was starting to rise and

stream in through the bedroom window, casting a soft glow on both of them. The light reflected off his curly brown hair, and she reached up to touch it, wanting to grab the sunlight from it. A bright twinkle distracted her—the ring. In the morning sun, the ruby looked like it had caught on fire from the inside and emitted a brilliant deep pink glow. The diamonds shimmered.

Looking between him and the ring, the ring and him, she spoke much more softly than she intended, but it was all she could manage: “yes, a millions times yes.”

He pulled her towards him once more and they embraced.

Now, today, she recalled that morning with both sadness and fondness. She had remembered him exactly as she hoped she would, eight years later.

Her eyes welled with tears and her bottom lip quivered. A single tear fell and landed on the front of her shirt. She tried to look at the ring, but her vision was blurred by the tears.

Eight years ago, the world was theirs...now it feels like it has ended. He's been gone for three months to the day. She sits alone in their bedroom, and she looks around at how different it is. There is nothing left to remind her of him, save the plaque they had gotten as a wedding gift: “All because two people fell in love.”

She never thought of it this way before, but that statement can be both sentimental and cynical. The sentiment arises with all the usual thoughts about love, the vapid sweetness of it all...but the cynicism is made clear by their present situation. “All of this could have been avoided had these two not fallen in love.”

There are no regrets, no ill-will beared, just a deep, aching sadness that does not relent. It tears away at her daily. As she sits on the bed, recalling the day he proposed, she wonders why she had put the ring on in the first place. Maybe she hopes there is still some magic left in it by putting it on, she can conjure up some spirits to fix what has been broken.

Despite all these things, she still sits on the bed, ring on her finger and wouldn't change a thing...

