

8th in HETTY series

Deliriously Yours



Martha Sears West

PREVIEW

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by
Martha Sears West



CLEAN KIND WORLD
Los Angeles

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Deliriously Yours
Eighth in Hetty Series

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CHARACTERS

Pippa Morganthal, age 22, *recent college graduate*

Val Ostler, age 20, *Pippa's closest friend since childhood*

Katrinka Wallace Ostler, *Val's mother; former beauty queen*

Beverley Ignatz "Natz" Gorman, *a widower with at
two-year old daughter*

Pippy Lou, age 2, *daughter of Natz Gorman; Pippa
Morganthal's namesake*

Olga Norman, *Natz's mother-in-law*

Hetty and Morgan Morganthal, *Pippa's parents*

Bob Beadle, *an elementary school teacher*

Deedee Dorne, *a lifelong school friend to both Val and Pippa*

Guffy, *a hobo*

Tike Wind Horse, age 13, *a Cherokee boy traveling
with Guffy*

This story begins in the spring of 1981.

CHAPTER ONE

Pippa Morganthal

The air in the woods was soft and sweet, and the sky was still rosy with the rising sun. Pippa sat on a log, waiting. At any moment Val would come, take her hand, and make their engagement official. Then they would laugh and dance without words. Their marriage couldn't happen soon enough.

Closing her eyes, Pippa breathed deeply and listened for his footsteps. Soon she heard his quiet breathing as he approached from behind. He led her to their talking place beneath the giant oak, where they sat together on a soft bed of leaves. Pippa's excitement grew. Putting her hand in his, she waited for his words.

After a long pause, he began. "Pippa, it's about my mother. Now that Dad's gone, she's worried about having me leave her too. I'm so sorry."

Pippa waited for him to say his parents' divorce wouldn't make any difference—that he was desperate to marry her anyway. But he didn't.

He leaned forward, clenching the muscles of his jaw. His sandy-colored hair curled over his collar, and she loved everything about him.

A dull ache replaced her dreams. "Natz lives close by," she said. "Couldn't he help Katrinka in your place?" She hoped Val might agree, but he remained silent.

Pippa continued. "I know your mother doesn't like Natz. They're like oil and water."

She blushed. Maybe that sounded a little gossipy. "I mean . . . I understand. It's *you* she needs."

Val had given Pippa a locket after his high school graduation, and she wore it always. She loved having his picture inside and seeing the thoughtful kindness of his green eyes. For two years it had been a comfort and a reminder of their understanding. But now she had to resist feeling it with her fingers. If he saw how much it meant to her, it would only make things harder for them both.

In addition to his having various jobs that paid well, Val had a four-year scholarship to study environmental science. It covered all his expenses. He hadn't attended Pippa's college graduation, as his exams were on the same day. He needed to remain at the top of his class. Val was in the class of 1983 and wouldn't graduate for two more years. But Pippa tried not to think about such things.

Val had been her dearest friend since childhood. A memory washed over her. When she was sixteen and Val was only fourteen they lay on their backs, in this very place, looking up through the canopy of trees. As they watched the puffy shapes of elephants and hippos in the clouds, she wondered aloud why none of the boys she liked were as fun and interesting as he was.

She declared it was a shame he was still a child, and he tried to stretch himself tall like her. Then she told him his pimples made him look more mature, and his voice squeaked with appreciation.

During the years that followed, Val spent as much time in the Morgenthal home as in his own. Whenever Pippa went out with older boys, she wanted him to come along as a



Pippa breathed deeply and listened for his footsteps.

chaperone. Now those days were over. He was taller than Pippa, and the only boy who mattered to her.

Her thoughts were interrupted as she watched an inchworm struggle across the hairs of his forearm. He chuckled and said, "I'm being measured for my coffin."

Pippa knew he was referring to an old Kentucky myth—nothing more. He appeared to be in excellent health and wasn't using his cane. Even so, she was not amused.

Val was wise and responsible, and Pippa wanted to be worthy of him. She would try to act like an adult. Taking a gasping breath, she heard herself say, "Maybe we shouldn't get married. I wouldn't want your mother to feel abandoned."

The air was heavy with silence, and Pippa felt a sickening fear. Maybe her words had come as a *relief* to Val! She turned her face away so he couldn't see her eyes fill with tears.

"After all," she said, "we're not really engaged."

She was stunned by her own words and waited for him to undo them. Instead, all he said was, "It's kind of you to consider my mother's feelings."

The inchworm appeared confused. Val let go of her hand and used a leaf to coax the little creature over his watchband.

His parting smile was warm, but he made no mention of a future meeting. What had been the meaning of their talk? Always in the past they had been comfortable with speaking frankly, so why was she afraid to ask?

As he disappeared into the thicket, Pippa felt herself drowning in loneliness.

At the Cottage

Pippa remained in the forest for a short time, uncertain of her circumstances. Did she and Val still have an understanding?

Or maybe they never did, and that's the way he wanted it.

Suddenly she was desperate to be with her parents, in the comfort of the cottage. Running along a path worn by forest creatures, she was oblivious to the low-hanging branches that snatched at the pale puffs of her hair. If only she could get home in time for breakfast!

Soon she sat breathlessly at the kitchen table, grateful that it was Saturday, with the usual slow beginning. Her mother stood at the stove, humming. It was early enough that the sun still streamed through the windows of the Dutch door.

The hinges of the front door creaked as her father reached for the newspaper on the porch. A sparrow flew past the window, roused from its nest in the ivy above the door. The little cast iron bell on the door tinkled as it closed, and Pippa listened for the kitchen floor to squeak under Morgan's footsteps.

He entered just as Hetty turned over the sizzling bacon. Much as he loved the smell of breakfast, Morgan said he was there primarily to collect two morning hugs, which he did.

Pippa played a little game with herself. Whenever Hetty was at the stove, Morgan would come up from behind and nuzzle her neck. She would laugh softly, as if surprised. Pippa guessed it would happen by the count of fifteen.

As if on cue, there he was—holding Hetty's soft, flyaway hair away from her neck. Pippa got a lump in her throat. Did her parents ever have a care in the world? She doubted it. As far as she knew they simply met, fell in love, and got married. End of story.

Maybe courtship wasn't as complicated when they were her age. So how could her own future be so impossible to control?

Pippa had neglected to count to fifteen. She was sick of numbers. Numbers came between her and Val. First it was

the number of years between them. Then it was the years of school. Then it was the number of jobs he had. Then the difference between the wealth of her family and the shortage of money in his.

Why had he insisted on being able to support her? The money he made would have been plenty for them to live on, but he also took on the care and management of the Morganthal estate for her grandparents.

As Pippa's mind wandered, she set a fourth place at the table. Val had often joined the three of them for breakfast. He was welcome anytime because his mother didn't cook—though he never mentioned things like that about Katrinka.

Pippa became aware of her mistake and removed the extra place setting.

Hetty must have noticed. She asked, "Will Val be helping you with the fundraiser this year?"

"I didn't ask him. Besides, I think his mother will be keeping him busy."

Morgan usually slipped away when Katrinka was discussed. Val's mother was his former fiancée. Pippa didn't want him to leave the breakfast table, so she changed the subject. "Mom, do you think Natz would like to be in a play?"

Hetty nodded. "I'm sure he would. Is that how you plan on raising funds? Natz still maintains their vans at his own expense, you know. Hubbard House is a good cause, and he would do anything for you and Val."

It was Hetty's turn to switch the topic. "Pippa, don't forget, until last week Val was still a teenager. He's awfully young to take on a wife." She put an arm around her daughter's shoulders. "Even if he needs to take care of . . . of things at home, love will find a way. If it's for the best."

The word *if* stunned Pippa. Why would her mother say *if* it's for the best? Hadn't they always agreed Val was mature

beyond his years? She feared the longer the wait, the more likely outside circumstances could damage their relationship. Couldn't even the most intense friendship fall apart if it went on too long?

Pippa was wearing her blue flowered blouse. Val once said it was his favorite, and she had worn it today to please him. It was, however, becoming threadbare. At breakfast she noticed a tiny rip that began at the elbow and threatened to spread. Excusing herself from the table, she ran to her room and carefully removed the fragile article.

Curling up on the bed, she held the blouse to her cheek until her emotions were under control. Somehow, she must find a way to repair it!

After a time, Pippa wiped her tears, straightened her spine, and resolved to start the day afresh. She then wrapped the blouse carefully in tissue paper for protection and tucked it away.

For now she must unpack her trunks and suitcases. Later in the afternoon she would drive over to her grandparents' compound and talk to Natz about the play.

Val might be cleaning the pool, so she would need to steel herself in case of running into him. Unless her mom would go with her.

Ignatz Gorman to the Rescue

At the Morgenthal compound, Natz glanced through his kitchen window. He squinted at the morning sun then checked his pocket watch again. It wasn't like Katrinka to be late. Just yesterday she had agreed to babysit Pippy Lou.

What am I s'posed to do? A widower with a two-year-old kid can't just up and take off for work. Besides, my mother-in-law deserves a break.

Katrinka lived in the gatehouse near the entrance of the Morgenthal estate. From the servants' quarters where Natz lived, he could see her place and everything else he and Val were responsible for maintaining. Looking across the manicured lawns and gardens, he saw no sign of activity.

I don't trust that crazy dame—not with our history. At least she's nuts about my daughter. Guess I should be glad of that.

Natz phoned the gatehouse. No one answered, so he walked over to see what was up. Around the side of Katrinka's house, steam billowed from the bathroom window. He would wait for her to stop showering.

When the steam didn't stop, he tapped on the window. No response. Alarmed, he entered by the front door. Photographs of her were everywhere. *Man, oh man!* He rolled his eyes. *Fancy-schmancy*, he thought. *She'll never let us forget what a looker she was!* More pictures decorated her all-pink boudoir.

After banging on the bathroom door and yelling without success, he opened it a crack. The shower door was ajar, and Katrinka lay unconscious, bleeding from a head wound.

What would his hero, movie star John Wayne, do in such a situation? Wayne was an expert on chivalry. Natz knew Katrinka would be humiliated at being seen like that, so he did his best not to look. It was no small trick getting her dry with his eyes sort of closed.

A pink satin negligée was draped over the hassock by her dresser. After wrapping her in it, Natz called an ambulance. He hoped she would never learn he was the one who found her, or how pitiful she looked.

Was he expected to go with her in the ambulance? Natz tried to remember what people did in the movies. Some official-looking person told him where to park at the hospital, so he figured he was supposed to follow them there. When he arrived, Katrinka was still unconscious, so he had to do all the talking.

“Heck no, I ain’t her next-of-kin! Sure, we live at the same address. My name’s Beverly Ignatz Gorman. I just found her gushing blood, that’s all.”

Visitors

It was noon by the time Natz left the hospital. He went home, hoping to tell Val about his mother as soon as possible. He looked everywhere on the Morganthal estate, but Val was nowhere to be found. Natz had to leave a note on their door.

Back at his own place, Pippy Lou was sitting in her highchair. She laughed with glee when her father appeared, then became enthralled with pushing a pea through the gravy with one finger. Her grandmother, Olga, made choo-choo train noises, to encourage her mouth to open like a tunnel.

Natz felt lucky that Olga had come to live with him and help out. Thanks to her, a terrific lunch of mac and cheese with meatloaf and gravy was waiting for him. While eating, he told her all about Katrinka’s accident. Olga was a great lady. Best of all, she reminded him of Louisa.

Natz was studying up to be a gentleman like Morgan Morganthal. Morgan wouldn’t lick his plate after lunch, so Natz didn’t either. Instead, he mopped up the gravy with his bread. Contented, he rocked back in his chair and said, “Real good grub, Olga!”

Natz flashed a smile of appreciation at his mother-in-law. "You know what?" he said, "the more I see of your nose, the less it seems like a beak. It looks . . . well, important. I sure hope when Pippy Lou grows up, hers is just as big and extinguished looking as yours."

Satisfied that the compliment expressed his gratitude adequately, Natz excused himself to take off for work at the garage.

Before he could leave there was a knock at the door. It was Hetty Morgenthal and her daughter Pippa. They hoped their visit wasn't interrupting anything.

"No, not at all!" He quickly hid the car keys in his pocket. If they realized he was about to leave, they might cut short their visit.

"What a honor!" he said. "Come see your namesake. We were fixin' to put Pippy Lou down for a nap."

Seeing Pippa, the child squealed and slapped the tray with her pudgy hands, splashing Olga with applesauce. Natz wiped her hands and picked her up. "Hey, kid," he laughed, "have a little respect for yer elders!" He explained his mother-in-law was terrific at making gourmet baby food, while his only specialty was weenie wheels.

Olga carried the baby off to bed so they could talk.

Hetty said, "I haven't seen enough of you since Louisa's funeral. We've been thinking about you and wondering how you're doing.

"Thanks," he said.

Pippa added, "When we got to the gate, the guards told us Katrinka's had a concussion."

"Yeah, I hope she'll be okay. She fell in the shower." He shook his head. "Awkward, huh? I didn't tell them it's me what found her."

Hetty looked into his eyes. “Whether it’s awkward or not, she’s very lucky you did. We’ll go see her later, but it’s you we wanted to hear about. Are you doing all right?”

Mostly he wasn’t. But knowing they cared was comforting.

Natz didn’t know how to reply further, so he looked down at his shoes. Back when he used to chauffeur for Morgan’s parents, he had pride in his appearance and polished his shoes every evening. The Morgenthals had invited him to stay on in the servants’ quarters the following years, in exchange for keeping an eye on things.

The big house sat empty now that Max and Mimi Morgenthal were almost always traveling. Pippa and her parents could easily have moved in, but Morgan and Hetty preferred the simplicity of their small stone cottage over the opulence of his parents’ mansion.

Natz repeated Hetty’s question. “You asked how’m I doing?” He sighed, then gave her a truthful answer. “It seems kinda like it was *me* what died. Till Louisa come along, I wasn’t real crazy about myself, but she loved me anyways.” His thumb traced a circle on the table. “What she knew of me—that’s the part that died when she did. So, it’s like everything good about me went *poof!*”

Hetty’s expression invited him to continue, but Natz figured the word *poof* had pretty much summed it up. He tried to smile so they wouldn’t feel like their visit left him worse off.

As Hetty shook her head, her pale curls floated lightly around her face, just like Pippa’s. “We all see the good in you,” she said. “It’s always been there.”

“Well, I ain’t no saint. I mean, I oughta forgive the doofus what killed her. But how can I, when nobody knows who he was, including me? It shoulda been *his* funeral instead. If

it was, I'd have gave him a piece of my mind. Right there in front of God and his friends and family."

He shook his head. "A copycat crime, they calls it. The guy could at least have the decency to do something original! My Louisa was s'posed to win in the Paralympics, not die from taking poison Tylenol."

Natz cleared his throat to disguise his emotions. "Hey, sorry to blabber on like that."

Hetty extended her hand. "Some things are good to talk about."

He felt friendship in the warmth of her hand. "Well, hey!" Natz hoped those two words adequately expressed his gratitude for her visit.

"Oh, where's my manners! Pippa's a brand-new college graduate, and I ain't said congrats!"

Pippa tilted her head. "Well, I just got home last night. I'm already working on a project."

"Ah hah!" He winked at her. "A matchmaking project, I bet! You're why me and Louisa got matchmade, for which I'll be internally grateful."

Pippa laughed. "Not this time. I'm raising funds for Hubbard House."

"Mm, a real terrific charity. They do a whole lot for sick people. But I hope your interest ain't on account of Val's multiple, uh . . . his multiple whatever-it's-called . . . getting worse."

"You mean his multiple sclerosis?" Pippa volunteered. "No, it's not that. But Mom says a friend of mine is staying there now. Deedee Dorne. I'm not sure if she has MS, but Val's been visiting her."

Was some strange girl horning in on them? Natz quickly shifted gears.

“Say, after Val got your gypsy wagon all redd up, you sure painted it pretty! Will you be needing it anytime soon? I mean, like for a honeymoon cottage, if you don’t mind me asking.”

As if to find the answer, Pippa looked to her mother.

Hetty cleared her throat. “It makes a perfect display right where it is, in your window. Morgan says you have the best-looking autobody shop he’s ever seen.”

Natz wished he could tell Louisa about the compliment. “Well,” he blushed, “it was super nice of Val to let me use it.”

Pippa blinked as if shocked then appeared ready to say something more. Natz feared he had poked his nose into her private affairs. Maybe Val hadn’t consulted with her about sharing their wagon. Were those tears in her eyes? Maybe not. He was relieved when she sat up straight and explained what was on her mind.

“We need you to take part in a play.”

Natz stroked his chin. “Uh . . . who’s *we*?”

She hesitated. “Well, me,” she confessed.

He nodded. “That’s what I figured.”

She began again. “Of course, everybody else would want you too, but I’m the one who thought of you. We’ll perform on the stage at Hubbard House. The people who stay there can see it free, but we’ll publicize it throughout the community. The teacher who runs the drama club at Haxton Academy is almost through writing the script. Anyone in the school can be in it. So, if all their friends and relatives come, you know we could have a huge audience. Will you do it?”

“Naw, I ain’t no John Wayne.”

Hetty said, “Don’t be so modest, Natz. Remember, we’ve heard you imitate him. Besides, I doubt if John Wayne ever performed Shakespeare.”

"I know, but he could have." He had a new thought. "Now, if it was *Hamlet* yer talking about, I got that mostly memorized."

Pippa nodded. "I know. Word for word. That's what made me think of you. But in this one, you'll be playing a schoolteacher."

"You're kidding! Me a teacher? Man, teachers are real heroes!" He tapped the table and reconsidered briefly. "Well, I ain't got the time. There's no way my mother-in-law can watch Pippy Lou more than she already does."

To settle the matter, Olga returned to the room and said, "He'll do it."

The day was turning out a whole lot better than it began. Hetty and Pippa believed in him! Natz would do his best to make everyone proud, and someday, Pippy Lou would remember he had starred as a teacher on stage.

Thoughts of Katrinka's accident seemed less troublesome to Natz now.

Confusion

Katrinka drifted in and out of consciousness. Why was she in a hospital bed? Through waves of nausea, she tried to piece together the distant past.

She recalled an absolutely stunning picture of herself in the society page. The headline said, *Morgan Morganthal, Popular Heir to Business Empire, Will Wed Beauty Queen Katrinka Wallace.*

She sighed. *Our fathers had it arranged from the beginning. And Morgan adored me because I was so beautiful.*

Or did he?

Another memory returned: the handsome Morgan Morganthal was trampled by an elephant the night before the wedding.

But Morgan has been a big influence on my son Val. Why is that? Did he marry me after all?

No, I remember. He married that scrawny Hetty Lawrence, and they had Pippa.

Katrinka sensed the nurse was asking her something. But listening and thinking took too much effort. Her memories faded to a murky gray, and she drifted far away, into a fitful sleep.

When Katrinka next opened her eyes, a bouquet of wildflowers was on the nightstand. A note next to it said,

Dear Mom,

*You were sleeping, and I didn't want to
wake you up. Natz explained what happened.
I'll be back later.*

*Love,
Val*

The nurse shined a light in her eyes then arranged the covers. "How are we doing this evening? Let's open our mouth." With a thermometer under her tongue, Katrinka couldn't answer.

The nurse's voice was raspy, but authoritative. "Your son was here, and I can see he takes good care of you. Let him pamper you for a while. You'll need it."

Katrinka nodded. It was high time other people looked out for her happiness and well-being. She was quite sure things hadn't been going so well. Her divorce from Joseph

was still a source of sadness, and he had moved away to the elephant sanctuary.

She lost her job as CEO of LuvCon Cosmetics when Morgan sold the company. He offered her another position, almost anywhere within the immense Morgenthal conglomerate—in manufacturing, insurance, food services, or the circus, to name a few. But nothing was a good fit. Possibly he had made the offer out of guilt. She hoped he felt guilty about a lot of things.

But she turned down the job so she could help Hetty with Val and Pippa's wedding plans. She sighed.

Morgan can afford just about anything. But Val and Pippa want something simple in the woods, and Morgan and Hetty agree with them. The wedding should be spectacular, to reflect their wealth and importance.

What's the point of my son marrying a Morgenthal, if I can't show it off? It would be better to have no wedding at all.

Suddenly, Katrinka felt tired just thinking about it. Talking them into a suitable wedding could be an uphill battle.

She turned over and looked at the flowers. Wild and mixed, they probably had unpronounceable names. Flowers for sick people were supposed to come from a real florist that sold cultivated things like pink roses.

Her gaze fell on the name *Natz*. *How could that horrible man know what happened to me?*

She asked the nurse, "Who brought me in here?"

"Let's see. His shirt had a *Gorman's Garage* badge on the pocket. He followed you in the ambulance, so I thought he was your husband. Your hair was wet."

"Maybe I got caught in the rain?"

"Wearing that?" the nurse indicated the pink negligee hanging from a hook by the nightstand. "We haven't had rain."

How odd! Katrinka knew she would never wear that uncomfortable negligee. The label was scratchy. She only bought it because it would look elegant draped over the satin hassock.

“If you’ve kept a diary,” the nurse suggested, “maybe you can figure out some things—like who that man was.”

Keeping a journal had never occurred to Katrinka. But she reasoned plenty of things worth writing about must have happened, even if she couldn’t remember them.

She smiled as an idea formed in her mind. If she filled in the blanks from her past, it could be far better than if she had recorded life as it happened.

She would start on a journal immediately!

The nurse patted Katrinka’s hand. “There’s one thing I know,” she said with authority, “Men are no good.”