

# RANSOMED

*d r e a m s*



SALLY JOHN



*Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.  
Carol Stream, Illinois*

Visit Tyndale's exciting Web site at [www.tyndale.com](http://www.tyndale.com).

Check out the latest about Sally John at [www.sally-john.com](http://www.sally-john.com).

*TYNDALE* and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

*Ransomed Dreams*

Copyright © 2010 by Sally John. All rights reserved.

Cover photo of Mexico copyright © by Russell Monk/Masterfile. All rights reserved.

Cover photo of couple and rosary copyright © by Masterfile. All rights reserved.

Author photo by Elizabeth John. All rights reserved.

Designed by Jennifer Ghionzoli

Edited by Kathryn S. Olson

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920, [www.alivecommunications.com](http://www.alivecommunications.com).

Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons living or dead is entirely coincidental and beyond the intent of either the author or the publisher.

---

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

John, Sally, date.

Ransomed dreams / Sally John.

p. cm. — (Side roads ; 1)

ISBN 978-1-4143-2785-3 (pbk.)

1. Married people—Fiction. 2. Life change events—Fiction. 3. Victims of violent crimes—Fiction. 4. Invalids—Care—Fiction. 5. Americans—Mexico—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3560.O323R36 2010

813'.54—dc22

2009054157

---

Printed in the United States of America

16 15 14 13 12 11 10

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*In memory of*  
*Kyle John,*  
*1981–2008*

*Your own ears will hear him.  
Right behind you a voice will say,  
“This is the way you should go,”  
whether to the right or to the left.*

ISAIAH 30:21

# Acknowledgments

The characters in this book know much more than I do about the Spanish language, art, Chicago, Mexican food, Catholicism, cartoons, Scriptures, words in general, and phrases in particular. For help in these areas and more, I am hugely indebted to Sue Laue, Karlie Garcia, Kelly Paige Standard, Yolanda Larez, Troy Johnson, Joe and Laura Irrera, Carrie Younce, and the John ladies—Aliah, Kaiya, Tracy, and Elizabeth. Thank you all!

Thank you to those who make possible my dream of turning a story idea into a book with pages, cover, and a place on a bookshelf so that others might read it: Lee Hough, Alive Communications, and the entire Tyndale family.

Thank you to the gifted editors who refined the work and cared as much as I did for it: Karen Watson, Stephanie Broene, Lorie Popp, and Kathy Olson.

And as always, for their unfailing support and prayers, thank you to friends at Church of the Advent; my son, Christopher; and my husband, Tim.

# Prologue

CARACAS, VENEZUELA

At precisely twelve minutes, thirty-five seconds past ten o'clock in the morning Venezuelan time, Sheridan Montgomery's world ceased to exist.

She lay on a sidewalk, not quite facedown, not quite on her side. A crushing weight pinned her against the flagstones. A hand gripped her head viselike, pressing her cheek into the cool, rough surface. Her left arm protruded from beneath her at an awkward slant, aligning her wrist mere centimeters from her eyes.

She gazed at her watch. Its crystal was a web of fine veins. The second hand did not move.

Twelve minutes, thirty-five seconds after ten.

Eliot had given her the watch four years before, on their fifth anniversary. She had protested at the sapphires that ringed its face, at the twenty-four-carat-gold and silver band. It was too beautiful, she said. Too elegant.

"Elegant?" He had laughed. "With numbers big enough for Big Ben?"

"Still," she had said. "Sapphires?"

"Small ones. For a touch of sparkle."

*A touch of sparkle.* It was how he described her. The nickname began

when they got engaged. She didn't want a diamond ring, just a simple gold band. He honored her choice, saying she was the only touch of sparkle needed.

She had kept the watch for his sake. Eventually she grew to appreciate its large numbers that helped her notice the time. She was still late to everything, but not *as* late. The graceful sweep of the second hand became a reminder to slow down and savor the moments.

She blinked again. The watch still read twelve minutes, thirty-five seconds past ten.

Pain ripped through her, an excruciating wrench from stomach to chest to throat. She opened her mouth, but the scream would not come. She had no breath.

"Let's go!" a voice above her roared.

Air slammed into her lungs, searing her throat. She gagged.

"Sher!" The voice again, softer, a rush of hot air at her ear. "Sher!" It was Luke. The grip on her head loosened. The weight shifted.

Chaos bombarded her senses. Loud shouts. Shrieks. People a blur of motion. A pungent scent. A dryness like a mouthful of cotton. Arms encircling her, roughly jerking her upright.

And then she saw it.

The scream still would not come, only a mewling, its sound lost in the raging clamor.

Luke held her tightly to himself, moving them as one, her feet scarcely touching the ground. He rushed them away.

Away from the pandemonium.

Away from *it*.

Away from the sight of her husband sprawled facedown, the back of his ivory linen suit coat turning to a brilliant shade of scarlet in the morning sun.



# PART

*one*





## CHAPTER I



TOPALA, MEXICO

EIGHTEEN MONTHS LATER

Like everything about the small village tucked into the foothills of the Sierra Madres in central Mexico, sunrise was a leisurely event.

Sheridan waited for it, tea mug in hand, shawl over her cotton nightgown, bare feet chilled against the tile floor of the second-story balcony. Alone, she listened in the dark to the squawk of roosters and clung to their promise that the world would once again know light.

“Oh, good grief,” she murmured to herself with a groan. “That is so maudlin. Truly and hopelessly maudlin. You might try something more chipper. Something like . . . Something like . . .” Her foggy brain offered nothing.

She scrunched her nose in defeat. The morning had shuffled in on the heels of a sleepless night. *Chipper* was not going to happen, no matter how hard she tried to talk herself into it.

If she could turn the calendar back eighteen months, she would not be talking to herself. No. Eliot would be right next to her, responding, most likely pointing out a dozen chipper thoughts in that funny way of his.

Nostalgia and regret hit her, a powerful one-two punch that still took her breath away. She clenched her teeth, waiting for it to pass, mentally spewing forth a verbal attack at the counselor who had promised her that time healed all wounds, that month by month they would see improvement.

What drivel that was! Eighteen months—or to be more precise, seventeen months, three weeks, and two days; but who was counting? All that time had passed and only one thing was healed: Eliot's gunshot wound. His other wounds, the invisible ones, still oozed like toxins from a waste dump site. He was not the same man she had married.

Sheridan took a deep breath and let the bitter argument go. Nostalgia and regret settled back down into whatever corner of her heart they'd found to hide out in. Their impact, though, lingered.

Would time ever erase her longing for the Eliot she had married? The animated one, the one others adored, the one who was *engaged* in every detail of life, whether simple or complex, with every person who crossed his path. The one from B.C.E., Before the Caracas Episode. Now, in their A.C.E. days, he might as well be a deaf-mute for all the interest he showed in the world around him.

Sleep deprived, she totally blamed him. She didn't mean to. It wasn't like he had much of a choice. The bullet that shattered his nerves shattered their life. Everything about it was over. Health, career, home, friends. All gone. Kaput. Some days she barely recognized herself and Eliot. Where were the Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery she once knew? These routines, hometown, health, acquaintances, and even personalities seemed lifted from the pages of some stranger's biography.

"Oh, honestly. Get over it already, Sher." She forced a swallow of tea and focused on the scene before her.

A lone sunbeam pierced between two mountain peaks and sliced into the distant mists. Another followed. And another and another until finally pure light broke free. Valleys and canyons burst into sight. Loud birdsong erupted. Then, as if God had uncurled His fist, long fingers of sunlight shot forth and touched the wrought-iron railing where she stood.

It was achingly gorgeous.

Sheridan flicked at a tear seeping from the corner of her eye. “You should have stayed in bed, you foolish, stubborn woman.”

Sunrises were the worst because they represented the best of what had been.

Most days she could ignore that thought. Evidently not today. She and Eliot were morning people. *Had been* morning people. Their daily ritual of tea and conversation at an east-facing view, awaiting dawn, was seldom missed. With crazy-full schedules, they needed such a time to relate on the deepest levels. Some days their hearts positively danced and sang in union. Naturally, through the years the tune changed now and then, the tempo sped up and slowed down, but the music never stopped. It never stopped. They always talked. They always connected.

Until that day in Caracas.

Now she watched sunrises by herself.

“You really should’ve stayed in bed.”

But it was so beautiful. And it went on and on like a slow waltz. At the bottom of her street now, purple haze still shrouded the town square. The sky brightened in slow motion above it, the fiery ball itself still hiding behind a peak.

Something moved in the semidarkness below. A person. Early risers were not uncommon, but she was startled. Something felt off about this one.

Or was that just her hypervigilance? Compliments of the incident in Caracas, it kicked into gear at times without warning, filling her with anxiety and suspicion.

Now she could see that it was a man. He passed the bandstand, his strides too deliberate for a villager, too American. He headed straight for the steep incline that led up to her house. In city terms, the distance was perhaps a block. In Topala terms, it was simply up beyond the sculptor’s shop.

The sun overtook the peaks and the man came into view.

“No way.” Her heartbeat slowed, but not quite to normal.

Even with his face concealed by a ball cap, his body clothed in a generic khaki jacket and blue jeans, a city block separating them, she recognized him. She recognized him simply because the air vibrated with him.

Luke Traynor owned whatever space he occupied.

Sheridan set the mug on the table beside her, tightened the shawl around her shoulders, and massaged her left arm. She felt no surprise at his unannounced arrival nor at the early hour. It was as if she had always expected him to show up sooner or later.

But as he climbed the narrow street, an uneasiness rose within her. Her muscles tensed. Why was he here? He had promised not to come. Sixteen months ago he promised. Not that she was keeping track. . . .

The sound of a soft whistle drew her attention back toward the square. Javier, the young sculptor, stood on the porch steps outside his shop. Behind him, the handicraft shop owner emerged from his door.

Javier raised his chin in question.

Sheridan gave a half nod. They needn't be concerned. The stranger was, so to speak, a known quantity. Not that she felt the least bit glad to see Luke. Eliot would most likely be severely distressed at his arrival.

Wishing Luke were an apparition did not make it so. He continued his steady pace, arms swinging gently, head down as if he studied the cobblestones, making his way to her house.

Since that day in Caracas—the day her husband died in every sense except physically, the day this man saved her life—Sheridan had understood intuitively that Luke would always be a part of her life. And there he was, out of the blue, ascending her street in the middle of nowhere on a spring day as if he visited all the time.

She suddenly remembered the date. “Good grief.”

It was Annunciation Day, a day of remembrance, of celebration for when the angel Gabriel visited Mary and announced her future. How apropos. Luke appeared without warning. He would not have come unless he had something to tell her, some message that would irreversibly change her future.

Was this his joke or God's?

Luke neared and looked up, straight at her.

She saw not the man whose presence had always triggered apprehension in her, but rather the guardian angel who had saved her life.

Sheridan turned and made her way inside, down the stairs, and through the house.



Sheridan opened the front door and stopped.

Luke Traynor stood less than six feet away, at the low gate in the stone wall where her front terrace met the steep hill.

She returned his steady gaze, knowing full well her own expression did not mirror the one before her. While dread, relief, and excessive gratitude rearranged every muscle on her face, his remained perfectly composed. The sharp nose, thin lips, and deep-set eyes could have been made of the same cobblestone he stood on.

He flashed a rakish grin. "I was in the neighborhood."

"That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard."

He cocked his head, somber again. Always the gentleman, he waited for her to make the first move.

Sheridan clutched her shawl more closely and resigned herself to riding out the emotional disarray rumbling through her. She both loathed and loved this man. Of course he knew that, so it didn't matter how she reacted to him except that she'd like herself better if she were polite.

With a quiet sigh, she walked to him, planted a kiss on his scruffy, unshaven cheek, and eased into his embrace. Nestled against the rough collar of his jacket, she smelled the familiar scent of him, an indescribable mix of earth, sun-drenched air, and confidence that bordered on lunacy. She felt the hardness of his body, always unexpected given his average height and build.

"Sheridan. How are you?"

"Fine." She backed away, crossing her arms.

“And Eliot?” he said. “How is he?”

“Fine.”

Luke blinked, a slow movement of lids indicating he could take the truth.

She wanted to shriek obscenities at him. The disconcerting thing about angels, though, was that it was impossible to keep up any sort of pretense. Like an angel, Luke had stayed close beside her for long weeks after the shooting. He had gone with her to the edge of hell, holding on to her until she came back. He knew her better than she knew herself. Glossing over answers was a waste of time with him.

She tried another phrase. “We’re doing about as well as could be expected.”

He nodded.

“Eliot is still asleep.”

“It’s early. Perhaps I can greet him later.”

The resistance drained from her. Yes, Gabriel had come to deliver a message, and he would not leave until he’d done so.

She had no inkling how to shield Eliot and herself from this unexpected source of distress but gave a lame attempt. “I don’t suppose you’re passing through town and simply must be on your way right now, this very minute?”

“Sorry.”

She inhaled, her shoulders lifting with the effort, and blew the breath out with force. “Coffee?”

“Love some.”

## A Note from the Author

DEAR READER,

Thank you for choosing to read this book. I hope that it entertained as well as encouraged you in your own faith journey.

Sometimes a story idea presents itself like a whisper in my ear. “Psst. Pay attention. There is a story here.” Such was the case with *Ransomed Dreams* as I stood on a cobblestone street in Copala, Mexico, falling in love with a time-forgotten village. When I spotted an adobe house for sale, I was truly smitten. What sort of American would move here? To want to live so far off the map, she would have to be carrying a heavy burden indeed. She would most likely have lost something dear and desperately want to hide away and nurse her wounds.

Although the characters (and some of the towns) in this story are fictitious, my goal was for the characters to mirror reality. Sheridan and Eliot experienced an event that instantaneously split their lives into a “before” and “after.” It forced them onto a path of lost dreams, a side road of pain they would never have chosen to travel. Ultimately, they recognized God’s healing touch and the ways in which He was continually speaking love, forgiveness, and hope into their hearts.

May our hearts always be open to such mercy.

*Peace be with you.  
Sally*

E-mail: [sallyjohnbook@aol.com](mailto:sallyjohnbook@aol.com)

Web site: [www.sally-john.com](http://www.sally-john.com)

## Discussion Questions

LIFE SOMETIMES THROWS us for a loop. People who love us hurt us. Illness wreaks havoc. Disaster—natural or otherwise—strikes. As when we must follow a detour off a highway, we are forced onto a side road of life, one we had not planned on taking.

1. The shooting changes everything for Sheridan and Eliot. What are some of the short-term effects on them? long-term effects? physically, emotionally, spiritually?
2. Have you ever experienced an event that upset your life in a profound way? What happened? What was your response to it? How did it impact relationships?
3. Discuss the relationship between Sheridan and Calissa. If you have siblings, how is your relationship with them similar to these two? How is it different?
4. Putting aside for a moment the mutual attraction between Sheridan and Luke, how might his love for her reflect the way Christ loves us?
5. What do you think of Sheridan's response to the attraction between her and Luke? Luke's response? How should people react



when they find themselves drawn to individuals other than their spouses? What can a person do to prepare for or prevent this?

6. In what ways did you identify with Sheridan? What did you admire about her? What did you disagree with? You may not want to share details with others, but have you been faced with forgiving someone for deeply wounding you? How was your experience similar to or different from Sheridan's?
7. Forgiveness occurs in several relationships in this novel: husband-wife, siblings, daughter-father. What was its effect on the different characters and relationships?
8. Sheridan's detour brings her to the realization that her marriage is not what she signed up for. She must choose whether or not to stay in it. At first it is a decision of her will: she will stay because that is what she promised and what she believes God wants her to do. At what point does her decision become heartfelt as well as intellectual?
9. Many marriages reach a similar point at some time: "My marriage is not what I signed up for." How does this happen? Is it a normal "season" of marriage? What are some possible ways to get through such a season?
10. Sheridan wants what she has lost: her marriage as it once was and the work she found so meaningful. Discuss the balance between clinging to a dream and letting it go and trusting God with it. Have you faced a similar situation at some point in your life? How can we tell if our dreams have become more important to us than the God who inspired them?

## About the Author

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH—or weird or wonderful—the daydreamer gets going on a new story. Sally John has been tweaking life's moments into fiction since she read her first Trixie Belden mystery as a child.

Now an author of more than fifteen novels, Sally writes stories that reflect contemporary life. Her passion is to create a family, turn their world inside out, and then portray how their relationships change with each other and with God. Her goal is to offer hope to readers in their own relational and faith journeys.

Sally grew up in Moline, Illinois, graduated from Illinois State University, married Tim in 1973, and taught in middle schools. She is a mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother. A three-time finalist for the Christy Award, she also teaches writing workshops. Her books include the Safe Harbor series (coauthored with Gary Smalley), The Other Way Home series, The Beach House series, and In a Heartbeat series. Many of her stories are set in her favorite places of San Diego, Chicago, and small-town Illinois.

She and her husband currently live in Southern California. Visit her Web site at [www.sally-john.com](http://www.sally-john.com).