

A Gift of Love

By Judith McNaught, Jude Deveraux, Andrea Kane, Judith O'Brien, Kimberly Cates

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A Gift Of Love captures holiday magic as it transports us...to New York City, where a schoolteacher slips an antique gold ring on her finger and travels back in time to a man who desperately needs her love...to a village in Victorian England, where an embittered earl seeks a governess for a lovely, defiant little girl named Noelle...to a starry London night, on which a Christmas pony heralds a gift greater than any king's ransom...to the snow-covered hills of Virginia, where a young widow learns during a holiday trip that miracles really do come in the least expected packages...and to a reclusive tycoon's Newport estate, where a determined young woman sets out to unlock the secrets of a man's heart.
Let *A Gift Of Love* open the door to worlds of passion and adventure, where love -- and miracles -- are always in the air!

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- Sales Rank: #2102283 in Books
- Published on: 2014-04-12
- Released on: 2014-04-12
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x 1.20" w x 5.00" l, 1.00 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 464 pages

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Editorial Review

About the Author
Judith McNaught is the *New York Times* bestselling author who first soared to stardom with her stunning bestseller *Whitney, My Love*, and went on to win the hearts of millions of readers with *Once and Always*, *Something Wonderful*, *A Kingdom of Dreams*, *Almost Heaven*, *Paradise*, *Perfect*, *Until You*, *Remember When*, *Someone to Watch Over Me*, the #1 bestseller *Night Whispers*, and other novels. There are more than thirty million copies of her books in print. She lives in Houston.

Jude Deveraux is the author of more than forty *New York Times* bestsellers, including *Moonlight in the Morning*, *The Scent of Jasmine*, *Scarlet Nights*, *Days of Gold*, *Lavender Morning*, *Return to Summerhouse*, and *Secrets*. To date, there are more than sixty million copies of her books in print worldwide. To learn more, visit JudeDeveraux.com.

Andrea Kane's psychological thriller THE GIRL WHO DISAPPEARED TWICE became an instant New York Times bestseller, the latest in a long string of smash hits. THE LINE BETWEEN HERE AND GONE is the next exhilarating installment in the Forensic Instincts series. With a worldwide following and novels published in over twenty languages, Kane is also the author of eight romantic thrillers and fourteen historical romances. She lives in New Jersey with her family.

Writing romance novels has got to be the way to make a living in the world. What other career allows you to send the kids off to school, walk the dog, and vanish into the most fascinating of historical times and places, with the most glorious of men, to escape danger and find everlasting love for the rest of the day?
Like most writers, I knew early on that I wanted to be a writer. Well, almost. Actually, writing was the third choice on my short list of career possibilities, right after Fairy Princess and Prima Ballerina. The first two didn't work out. So after college I moved to New York, where I worked for *Seventeen Magazine.* Not only had I never really been to New York before, but I believe I was the only editorial assistant in the magazine industry who still wore knee socks. Soon I was promoted to Editor of the "Letters to the Editor" department. Yes, there really IS an editor for the letters to the editor column. But it allowed me to write articles, answer the personal problems of teens (boys and zits were the big topics of concern), and rummage through the back files of the magazine. I found Sylvia Plath's original carbon of a short story she submitted while still in high school. There were articles on up-and-coming talents with names like Judy Holiday, Marlon Brando and Elvis. And very occasionally I was employed as a last-minute makeover subject. That was me looking miserable after getting the "Brideshead Revisited" bob.
Then I lucked into a fabulous job - as a jacket copy writer at a publishing house called Pocket Books. There I first read Jude Deveraux, Judith McNaught and Julie Garwood in manuscript form, and from those I would compose the blurbs for the book covers. It was heaven. I would read straight through my lunch hour, thus accounting for the chicken salad and iced tea on the returned manuscripts. But as much as I loved reading those marvelous stories, what I really wanted to do was to write one. Just one. Just to see what would happen.
Life interfered. I went back into magazines, this time at *Self* as an editor and writer. I got married, then had my son. I was still on maternity leave, writing general health articles while bouncing a newborn on my knee, that I began to dream once again of writing a romance novel. So that is exactly what I did. And I modestly claim to have written the most horrendous first three chapters of ANY book, in ANY genre, at ANY time in history. Unfortunately, still addled by the turmoil of being a new mom (hey, it's an excuse), I actually sent the wretched chapters to agents and publishers.

The rejections were polite form letters. Dozens of them. I shoved them into a bottom drawer and stuck to articles, becoming a free-lance writer and full-time mom. A few years later I gave romance writing another try. This time I sent it to only one person, Linda Marrow, with whom I had worked at Pocket Books years earlier. I certainly did not expect her to accept the manuscript. But I did hope she would let me know which editor at whatever house just might be interested in my time-travel romance.
Instead, I received a call from Linda three days later, offering me a two book contract.
Now I am a single mom. My son is twelve. I live in Brooklyn. And I'm lucky enough to write romance novels for a living. So please excuse me while I slip into something more comfortable. Such as Civil War Atlanta, or Tudor England, or Georgian Ireland, or....Did I mention how much I love this job?

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Chapter 1 from "Double Exposure" by Jude Deveraux in *A Gift of Love*
Oblivious to the spectacular view beyond the glass wall of the Houston high-rise that housed the offices of *Foster's Beautiful Living* magazine, Diana Foster paced in front of her desk with a telephone cradled between her shoulder and ear.
"Still no answer at the house?" asked Kristin Nordstrom, a production assistant at the magazine.
Diana shook her head and hung the phone up, already reaching into the credenza behind her desk for her handbag. "Everyone is probably out in the garden, reinventing mulch or something," she joked. "Did you ever notice," she continued with a rueful smile as she shrugged into a lime green linen jacket trimmed in white, "that when you have really exciting news, the people you want to share it with are never where you can reach them?"
"Well, how about if you tell me the news in the meantime," Kristin suggested teasingly.
Diana paused in the act of smoothing wrinkles from her white skirt and flashed the other woman a smile, but she had to look up to do it. At thirty-two, Kristin was two years older than Diana and a full six feet tall, with the fair skin and blue eyes of her Nordic ancestors. She was also conscientious, energetic, and detail-oriented, three traits that made her an ideal member of the production department.
"Okay, you've got it. I've just decided to shoot some of the photos for the 'Perfect Weddings' issue on location in Newport, Rhode Island. The opportunity dropped into my lap this morning, and it's going to put us under tremendous deadline pressure, but it's too good to pass up. In fact, if you're available I'd like to send you to Newport a week before the wedding to help our crew. Mike MacNeil and Corey will arrive a few days later. You can work with them while they shoot the actual photos. They're going to need an extra pair of hands, and it will give you an opportunity to find out what it's like to work on location, under pressure, in difficult conditions. How does that strike you?"
"Like a bolt of lightning," she said, her face illuminated by a broad smile. "I've always wanted to go on location with Corey's crew. Newport should provide a gorgeous setting for the layout," she said as Diana started for the door. "Diana, before you go, I want to thank you for everything you've done. You're a joy to work with -- "
Diana waved off her gratitude with a smile. "Just keep trying to find Corey. Oh, and keep calling the house. If anyone answers, tell them to stay put until I get there. Tell them I have great news, but I want Corey there to hear it."
"I will. And when you see Corey, please tell her I'm excited about the chance to work with her." She paused, a funny, uncertain smile on her face. "Diana, does Corey realize how much she looks like Meg Ryan?"
"Take my advice and don't mention it to her," Diana warned with a laugh. "She gets accosted all the time by strangers who refuse to believe her when she tells them she isn't Meg Ryan, and some of them become downright unpleasant because they think she's trying to trick them."
The telephone rang, interrupting them, and Kristin reached across the desk to answer it. "It's Corey," she said, holding the receiver toward Diana. "She's on the car phone."
"Thank heaven!" Diana said as she hurried forward and took the phone. "Corey, I've been trying to reach you all morning. Where have you been?"

Corey registered the excitement in her sister's voice, but at the moment her attention was concentrated on the driver of an orange pickup truck who was determined to merge into a space on the expressway that was already occupied by Corey's car. "I was at the printer's all morning," she said, deciding it was wiser to change lanes and let him win the bluff than to have an orange "pin stripe" embossed on the door of her burgundy car. "I wasn't happy with some of the shots I got for the barbecue layout for the next issue, and I brought him some different ones."
"Don't worry about that issue, it'll be fine. I have something more important to tell you -- it's great news. Can you meet me at the house in twenty minutes? I'd like to tell everyone at once."
"Did I just hear you say not to worry about an issue?" Corey teased, amused and surprised by this unusual attitude of optimism from her eternally cautious sister. Glancing in the rearview mirror, she changed lanes so that she could take the exit for River Oaks, rather than continuing to the office as she'd originally intended. "I'm heading for the house, but I insist on some sort of hint now."
"Okay, here goes: What would you say if I told you an unbelievable opportunity for the 'Perfect Weddings' issue just fell into my lap! The mother of the bride, who is clearly anxious to further bolster her social status, wants us to feature her daughter's wedding in *Beautiful Living.* If we are willing to do that, she is willing to guarantee us that it will be done in authentic 'Foster Style,' under our supervision, and she is willing to pay whatever that costs, as well as all travel expenses for our staff."
For months, Corey and Diana had been discussing possible locations and themes for the "ideal" wedding they wanted to stage and feature in that issue, but so far they'd discarded all of them either because Diana thought they were too expensive or because Corey thought they were artistically unacceptable. Diana bore the full burden for all Foster Enterprises' financial matters, but the responsibility for the beautiful photographic layouts that appeared in Foster's publications was Corey's. "It sounds good from a budget standpoint, but what about the location? What sort of setting would we have?"
"Brace yourself," Diana said.
In the car, Corey smiled with helpless anticipation. "I'm braced. Tell me."
"The wedding is to take place on the lawn of the bride's uncle's home...a lovely little forty-five room 'cottage,' built in 1895, complete with frescoed ceilings, fabulous plasterwork...and undoubtedly hundreds of other little architectural goodies you could include in our next coffeetable book -- you know," she said, "those big, fancy, beautiful books that you turn out in your spare time?"
"Don't keep me in suspense." Corey laughed, her enthusiasm soaring. "Where's the house?"
"Are you ready for this?"
"I think so."
"Newport, Rhode Island."
"Oh, my God, how perfect!" Corey breathed, her photographer's mind already envisioning scenic shots with fabulous yachts floating on sparkling blue water in the background.
"The bride's mother sent me pictures of her brother's house and grounds and then called me this morning after the package arrived. Based on something she let slip, I got the funny feeling he may be paying for the entire wedding. Oh, I forgot, she promised to provide us with six local people who'll work under our supervision. That should enable us to put some special touches in a few of the main rooms, so you'll have even more to photograph. All materials and freelance labor are at their expense, of course, and our people will have private rooms at the house. The hotels are already booked for the season, and you'll all need to work late anyway, so that's a practical solution. Also, they have servants and they'll have houseguests, so staying there to make certain no one tampers with our handiwork becomes a necessity."
"No problem. For an opportunity like this, I would work and sleep in Bluebeard's house."
Diana's voice lost a little of its happy confidence. "Yes, but can you do that in Spencer Addison's house?"
Corey's reply was instinctive and instantaneous. "I'd prefer Bluebeard."
"I know." "Let's find another wedding to feature."
"Let's talk about it when you get home."

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