

Lanie suffered an abusive marriage with a prominent surgeon and divorces him to begin anew. After her ex-husband's death, she uncovers the depth of his crimes and depravity threatening her mental well-being, her new life, and her new love.

The Original Wife

By Deborah Wynne

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*The
Original Wife*

Deborah Wynne

Praise for *The Original Wife*

A love story, a thriller, joy and heartache, this one has it all. Although I am a voracious reader, I can remember very few books that I've had to stop during reading, to walk away and get my emotions under control. *The Original Wife* is one of those books. I can feel Lanie's pain, shame, and her all-encompassing need to be loved. She and Brock are so good together, but Lanie has so much to learn and accept about herself before she can successfully be one of a couple. I laughed, I cried, I railed, and I could even feel the punching bag as I raged against Stanley. I've read Wynne's other books and loved them all, but *The Original Wife* is, quite simply, a masterpiece. Anyone looking for romance with a twist—but definitely not a sappy sweet beach read—needs to read *The Original Wife*.

—Linda Thompson, *Host of TheAuthorShow.com*

Riveting...Wynne is in top form. *The Original Wife* demands to be read, urgently and thoroughly. In the second half, Wynne tugs and exposes each delicate thread from the first, demonstrating her narrative mastery and the horrific truth of our protagonist's past. At the heart of this beautiful and haunting story is Lanie and Wynne's realistic and wrenching portrait of Lanie is of a woman hurting and healing from unimaginable cruelties. Lanie's bravery, humility, and ultimately even her flaws serve to elevate an enthralling, dark tale into a unputdownable and meaningful contribution to the genre. Magnificent, dark, and totally unmissable.

—Sam Hendricks, *Author and Publisher,*
Kyanite Publishing, LLC

A powerful love story with many twists and turns. *The Original Wife* captured my reading spirit and I couldn't put it down. Compelling and beautifully written. Loved this book. Another win for Ms. Wynne.

—Kathleen Allen, *Retired Educator*

Dark, twisty, brutal romance that takes your breath away in more ways than one! *The Original Wife* is hard to put down, as you are drawn in to learn how the story will unfold. Each page has you on the edge of your seat as you await the final resolution and ending. Ms. Wynne has created a one-of-a-kind masterpiece. Grab your tissues and brace yourself for an unforgettable journey into one woman's redemption and search for happiness.

—Samantha Dahl Cummings, *Banking/Lender Exchange Specialist*

The Original Wife is a beautifully written story of love, loss, and triumph over adversity. Wynne manages to wring every drop of empathy from your soul as you follow Lanie Spenser on her quest for acceptance and self-forgiveness. As each development of Lanie's past unfolds, Wynne's artful work of fiction becomes real—a rich and tangible life and love story that captures your heart. Powerful, insightful, hopeful, and at times disturbing, *The Original Wife* is an important story to be told and read.

—Alyssa Bueno, *Paralegal*

Ms. Wynne nails it again. *The Original Wife* was not only engaging, entertaining and clever but it also seemed to precisely capture the long-term impact of abuse on a warrior of a woman without being too heavy or clinical. It has balls, authenticity and a beautiful voice throughout. Its poignant messages often spoke right to me and brought me to tears or laughter. I particularly loved the complex arc of the three main characters and love the way I feel personally related to the protagonists of all of Wynne's novels. The twist that thickens the plot two-thirds the way through came to brilliant resolve. I couldn't put the book down.

—Sara Morrow, *Realtor, Sellstate Peak Realty*

The Original Wife

The Original Wife is a roller coaster of emotions. Your feelings will run the gamut as Lanie uncovers the devastation left behind by her deceased ex-husband, Stanley. This is a book you will not be able to put down until you reach the last page. Along with Lanie, you will fall in love with her new boyfriend, Brock, and share the anticipation of what the relationship will bring. When an unthinkable twist of fate occurs, the roller coaster ride begins as Lanie struggles to hang on to everything important to her. You will laugh and cry, feel joy and sadness. This story is so real and captivating, it should be a movie!

—*Brittany Jensen, Parks Supervisor*

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Chapter 1

Lanie Spenser twirled her pearls around her forefinger and fidgeted on the hard wooden chair. Seven gorgeous blonde women surrounded her. All had perfect hair, perfect white teeth, and perfect bodies. It looked like each had been plucked from the same celebrity look-alike contest. Also in the room were nine tow-headed children. The cleft in each child's chin, high forehead, and brilliant blue eyes indicated they were all offspring from her now deceased ex-husband, Stanley Greystone. She'd had verifiable proof during her marriage that two of the ladies had been in his life, but the other five were a complete surprise to her. She wondered how many others he'd slept with while they were still married.

There wasn't room for one more mother or child in the attorney's office. Every lady was wearing the same cologne, J'adore. At one point Stanley became obsessed with the fragrance. Lanie had always assumed it was because of the blonde movie star featured in its commercials. Lanie had nothing against the perfume in itself, it was only what it represented and in a stifling hot room this small, it was overwhelming. Sweat beaded on her forehead. It was so sweltering; her thighs were sticking together. She would've thought the other women's icy expressions would lower the temperature, but instead their pent-up hot anger added to the steamy heat. Above her, a ceiling fan whistled cool air on the gathering. She found the rhythmic whirring soothing and it helped drown out the incessant sniffing from the other occupants in the room, but did nothing to relieve the muggy atmosphere.

This was the last place she expected to be today. That evening she was hosting a wedding shower for her best friend and fiancé, Jess and Riley, and had hundreds of preparatory tasks left to do. There were no emotions left for Stanley and she felt no sense of loss. She'd cried all the tears allowed for him years ago. She no longer felt anger or jealousy and had even mostly forgiven herself for being such a pushover. Additionally, she held no guilt she hadn't provided a child for him. After years of post-divorce therapy, she'd accepted that his

indiscretions and affairs had been because of his own deep-seated emotional issues and were not her fault.

With her plain brown hair, ordinary face, and unremarkable hazel eyes—having to face his collection of women that looked nothing like her should've rubbed salt in the wound, but instead she felt profound sadness. He'd broken so many hearts it was staggering. She didn't have a lick of sympathy for the women, but the kids—damn—it was just text-book sociopathic behavior to bring so many children into the world with no intention of being a full-time father to them.

She shouldn't have been surprised. Nothing had ever been good enough for him. He was completely insatiable. At one time she'd thought he might have been different when she'd first met him, but after reflecting on the red-flags that had always flown high and much retrospective digging, she knew he'd never really changed. She was the one that suddenly grew up/woke up and saw him for what he was. Being charming, smart, handsome, and overly affectionate was just his shtick. Stanley had honed each of his God-given attributes to get exactly what he wanted. She doubted he'd ever felt one smidgen of empathy or regret on how he'd hurt people.

At the cemetery earlier, it must have appeared to onlookers as something out of a movie. Women draped in black, short veils shrouding eyes, hankies pressed to faces—all were clutching a red rose to deposit on his casket. Lanie remained on the fringe of the others, dressed in azure blue, and was completely dry-eyed as Stanley was lowered into the earth. She hadn't bothered with the whole rose thing—it seemed hypocritical and fake.

The cloned women of his mistress-club sobbed and the children looked befuddled by the situation. The oldest child, a boy, had clung to his mother's legs and cried huge crocodile tears mimicking his mom's. He looked to be about ten or eleven. Since Lanie had been divorced from Stanley for over six years, this boy's mother obviously had preceded the two that finally broke up her marriage.

The first woman Lanie knew about produced a court order for parental support and then fifteen months later a second issued the same kind of court order. The latter woman ended up marrying Stanley two days after the ink dried on Lanie's divorce papers. She'd heard through

the grapevine his marriage to her only lasted a few years. Apparently still long enough to bear a couple of children for him.

One of the women sitting closest to her was sporting a glacier sized diamond ring and matching wedding band, so apparently he'd swung for the mirror ball at least once more. The others had merely been baby mamas for him. He'd been obsessed about the continuation of his bloodline.

After an unbearable wait, which in reality had only been about fifteen minutes, Stanley's attorney, Kellam York, came into the room wrinkling his nose at the slam of fragrance that hit him squarely in the face. His rumpled shirt and shabby suit matched her mood.

"Good morning ladies. Sorry to keep you waiting." Kellam caught Lanie's eyes and continued, "Nice to see you Lanie. Tough situation I've brought you here for."

Lanie was the one that had originally introduced Stanley to him. Kellam had been at the last foster home she'd been in when they were youngsters. They'd maintained a cordial relationship through the years, but Stanley scooped Kellam up as his personal attorney when he found out he could pay pennies on the hour for a malleable and docile lawyer. Because of Kellam's long standing relationship with her ex, she'd been forced to find another attorney to represent her for the divorce. On the day the decree was finalized, Kellam's haunted eyes were burned in her memory. He'd appeared devastated he couldn't support his friend instead of Stanley.

Today Kellam's eyes looked equally as tormented. She nodded at him. "Good to see you too, Kellam. What's all this about?"

He surveyed the room, acknowledging each woman by name and a small smile. "I called you together so that I may read Dr. Greystone's will. Because of the intricacies and the number of minor children, I need to warn you all that it may be months before we can settle his estate. We'll have to post notice, liquidate assets and of course, go through probate. He left small monthly stipends for all of the children until the estate can be finalized." Kellam sighed, "Although the time delay may not make much of a difference."

Lanie's head was spinning. My God, there were so many children to provide for. Stanley had been very successful as an orthopedic

surgeon and inherited a small fortune from his father a few months after their divorce was finalized, but still...this was unbelievable.

The office door squealed open and another woman came through. She'd not been at his graveside service earlier. A carbon copy of the other women in the room, she looked to be about seven months pregnant. Her face was passive, but her lips were set in a grim smile. The smile completely left her face as the newcomer gazed around the room and saw all the other women that looked just like her, cradling babies or holding a child's hand. And that makes ten, Lanie thought. Ten innocent children left fatherless. Stanley had always been fond of even numbers.

Lanie stood and moved to lean on the wall near the side of Kellam's desk so that the newest member of the exclusive Greystone baby factory could sit in her chair. She motioned to the girl, who appeared to barely be in her twenties. "Take my chair," she offered. "You should probably be sitting."

"Yes, Miss..." Kellam consulted his notes before finishing, "Miss Logan, please sit. We were just getting started. You haven't really missed anything yet." He summarized quickly what he just had told the room a few minutes prior and then continued, "There are a few complications to be sorted out." He turned to the woman still wearing a wedding ring and said, "Since your divorce was only finalized a few weeks before Stanley's death, his will reflects the terms outlined in your divorce settlement and therefore stipulates you will be allowed to remain for a period of six months in the house that you shared with him. It will then be sold and liquidated to be dispersed with his other assets."

Kellam looked up at Lanie with sympathetic eyes before looking around the room and continuing, "So I'll just cut to the chase. Stanley has set up trust accounts for all the children that will be funded when his assets—his stocks, rental houses, the latest marital home, and his newest primary residence—are liquidated so I don't have final numbers for you yet. The children will receive the trusts when they turn eighteen provided they use the proceeds for college, university, or a trade school. Upon graduation from their higher education, any funds remaining may be retained by the child. If they don't enroll in higher

education by their nineteenth birthday, their trust will be split amongst the remaining offspring.

“Stanley has left nothing to any of the mothers, other than the initial stipend broken into monthly payments for six months. Since prior to his death, he had legally relinquished responsibility for all of the children, except for the unborn child, his estate is not required to provide for continuation of any child support. As you will all recall, he relinquished his rights when the relationships were terminated, which included all future parental responsibilities including child support. You will find the language specifically outlining this reality in your initial settlement papers. Stanley felt that the six-month stipend and education trusts were generous on his part, since he had no obligation to provide for anything.”

Lanie suspected the ladies had already burned through their settlements by the looks of their designer clothes, expensive handbags, and collagen injected lips. She heard sobs break out in the room but didn't want to look any of them in the face. Damn this was cruel.

The pregnant girl looked shell-shocked and shakily interrupted Kellam, “What about anything for my baby? He promised to pay for medical expenses.”

Kellam nodded and said patiently, “Yes Miss Logan, your stipend is different from the others, in that it has enough funds to pay for your medical expenses. It includes a settlement identical to what he provided the rest of the mothers upon severance of their relationships.”

Lanie noticed Miss Logan looked relieved and perhaps was holding back a smug smile knowing she was about to receive a large check. You always knew how to choose them Stanley, Lanie thought.

Dropping his head to read from notes, Kellam continued, “The balance of Dr. Greystone's estate including his 401K, life insurance proceeds, some of his personal effects, the contents in his safety deposit box as well as his vacation home in Aspen are all left to Lanie. There's no use in fighting against this ladies, this aligns with established estate law since Lanie is designated as the 'original wife' and Stanley purposely and voluntarily signed off on it. With the gift of the trusts for the children's educations combined with your prior

generous voluntary settlements, in all likelihood no court would consider a challenge to his estate.”

Lanie’s knees buckled as gasps and whimpering filled the room. “I don’t understand,” she murmured.

Kellam’s face was ruddy as he leaned over the side of the massive desk and handed Lanie an envelope. “Stanley left this for you. He told me it explained everything.”

Warily, with shaking fingers, she took the envelope from his hand. “Is that all for today?” She waited to see Kellam nod. “Okay,” she whispered and pushed past the disappointed bawling women and fidgeting children to leave the room.

She was claustrophobic, confused, angry. How could Stanley be so heartless to his children? What about braces or eyeglasses? Or clarinet or ballet lessons? What if one of the children became really sick? There was no health insurance available that paid for everything in a life-threatening illness. Why had he insisted on producing so many children when he had no intention of ever being a regular father? When she was calmer she’d call Kellam and talk to him. Maybe he’d have some answers.

She couldn’t feel her feet or legs as she left the building. It felt like the earth was moving underneath her, similar to one of those long walkways at the airport. Once she finally burst through the doors to the outside, she practically jogged to the security of her SUV in the parking lot and slipped into the driver’s seat. Her hands were shaking and both her heart and head were pounding. Her chest felt like it was bound by steel bands, she couldn’t breathe.

The rest of her morning coffee was still resting in the console holder; with shaking hands, she lifted the travel mug to her lips and took a sip. It was still sweet and warm and reassured her that life was still the same as it was this morning, before Stanley was buried and he’d reached his hand from the grave to pull her under with him.

She drew several deep breaths and felt her heartbeat reset to a normal rhythm. Turning the envelope over and over in her hands, she finally decided she needed to read it. She wanted to put today past her as soon as she could and it wasn’t possible until she knew what he’d written.

After ripping open the flap, unexpected tears filled her eyes as she saw his familiar handwriting. She'd worked out all her damaged baggage regarding their relationship years ago and concluded that she'd be alright going forward with her new life. The salty drops plunking to his monogrammed stationary disputed that thought. Stanley's repeated betrayals, as well as his hateful and demeaning words as he was leaving, flooded back. Other than acknowledging his presence at the hearing for their divorce finalization, she'd never talked to him again. Not even once. Seeing his casket covered in dirt this morning was somehow liberating, but she also realized she could never, ever be completely free of the wounds he'd inflicted. There would always be scars. No matter how hard she worked at it, she'd never completely forget how he'd treated her in their marriage. She'd wear the blemished tissue as a twisted badge of battle until she died.

Once more she sipped her coffee to help gain center and began reading. *"Dear Lanie, I've instructed Kellam to leave everything to you—other than what is required to set up trusts for my children's education. I don't want any uneducated and moronic Greystones running around destroying my good name. I never loved any of their mothers and I believe they were only interested in me so I'd support them into infinity. They're all just lazy freeloaders, but at least I produced beautiful children with them. Something you were never able to do. Anyway, I know this is probably confusing to you, but I always trusted you to do what's right. You were the only one that tried to obey me and see beyond your pride to keep moving in the right direction. After you left me..."*

Lanie stopped reading and looked out the window. What in the hell did he mean, 'after she left him'? The end of their marriage was the complete opposite of that. Admittedly, with the help of the sheriff's department, she'd kicked him out and sent him packing, but at the time he'd been shackled up with his second mistress for weeks. And now, because of that older boy, she knew he'd had at least three affairs while they were married. What a prick. Did he presume that somehow she'd be understanding of not one but two court orders for DNA tests to determine if he was responsible for two different children? Did he think since she couldn't bear babies that she'd somehow sanctioned

his affairs? At every opportunity, he'd reminded her that she was lucky to have him because no one else would ever want her. This letter just proved he'd been far more psychotic than she'd previously concluded.

The entire time they'd been married, all she'd ever been good for was keeping a perfect house and waiting patiently for him to come home in the middle of the night, ready to be punished for some imaginary misbehavior. He'd never thanked her for all the term papers she'd researched and typed for him. Or for working three jobs to pay for his tuition at medical school because for a while he was too resentful to take his father's money. Or for acting as a buffer when his father yelled at him. The list was endless. All the excuses she'd made to his office staff for rescheduled appointments. Or the cooking of precise meals—no gluten, perfect carbs, acceptable fat—always hot, never just warm. All the lies she told to his business partners to cover his indiscretions. No, all she'd ever gotten from him was that she was too barren, too fat, and too old to be anything other than a glorified housekeeper that submitted to his twisted sexual needs.

Once he'd entered his medical practice, he hadn't allowed her to work or attend college or even socialize with other people. When she'd spent hours on her hair, face, and clothing in an attempt to look nice for him, he'd never offered a compliment. Instead, he'd continually told her that her nose was crooked, or her stomach was too flabby, or her legs lacked proper muscular definition. His preferred term of endearment for her had been 'lard ass'. When she'd expressed any displeasure at his choice of words—even what he just perceived in her facial expressions—she'd ended up bare assed over his knees at the mercy of his belt. He never used his hands, since he called them his money makers, but he always had something nearby he could use to flail her backside unmercifully. He'd usually conclude his discipline by roughly penetrating her doggy-style until he came, while screaming out hateful obscenities directed at her. He said she was too ugly to ever look her in the face during sex, so on her hands and knees was his preferred position.

Anytime they had, what he called regular sex, it was after an extended verbal berating or vicious spanking. After he'd blistered her butt, he'd force himself on her and would complain between every

angry thrust that it was a waste of his seed since she couldn't have babies.

After a while, she'd learned how to act around him so not to pull his ire as frequently. It didn't matter, because then he introduced scheduled maintenance spankings. He would gleefully choose his instrument of pain—a strap, cane, or bath brush—before pulling an arbitrary number from his imagination and beating the hell out of her bottom until he reached that magic number she counted out loud. His preferred time to deliver his maintenance discipline was early on a Monday morning before he left for work. He said it was to remind her to be a good little wife all week and be grateful that he was supporting her.

Afterward he'd hold her and kiss her and tell her how lucky she was to have him to make her a better woman. When he administered his post-discipline affections, it was all she could do to keep the bile from rising in her throat. She'd known better than to vomit because the one time it had happened... she shook her head and swallowed past the gag reflex at the memory. It was still too gross and painful to think about. After that horrible incident he'd beat her again. There'd always been another beating waiting for her, no matter how hard she'd tried to please him. In retrospect she was amazed at how easily she'd adapted to living in such vitriolic conditions.

Fury rose from inside of her and she pounded her hands several times on the steering wheel in frustration. She wanted to just throw the note away but hoped if she kept reading, perhaps in his dying days he'd found his better angel and apologized for how he'd treated her.

“After you left me, I was lost. You always took care of everything for me.” Now would be a nice point to actually apologize to me Stanley, she thought, but held little optimism he'd actually written a single kind word. *“So, since you will have most of my money, if any of my children need anything important, I'll leave it up to you to provide for them. I also want you to have my car, none of the rest of my bitches know how to take care of it properly. Kellam will arrange to have it delivered to you sometime after my funeral. Regarding the Aspen house; live in it, sell it, rent it. I don't care.”*

Lanie had never been to the Aspen house. He'd gone there frequently to ski or golf. He even took long weekends there year-round—in between seasons that didn't offer either activity—but she was never allowed to go with him. She didn't even know what it looked like. Privately she'd always been relieved to have a few days to herself without him around. She already knew she'd sell it. Keeping it would just be another reminder of him to keep it.

She took another deep breath and once again looked out the window. The leaves were starting to turn to the oranges and reds of fall; she thought their splendid beauty was a stark contrast to the ugliness she was currently feeling. She'd always wanted to see Aspen in the fall, she'd seen incredible pictures of the trees glittering gold and bronze coins in the breeze. Maybe she could fit in just one quick visit before she put it on the market.

The unfinished letter was like a car wreck to her, she couldn't turn away. Inhaling deeply, she started reading his note again. *"I know you didn't appreciate the domestic discipline in our marriage, but I take comfort that you learned something and came out stronger than when I found you. Hopefully you've also lost weight and have done something with that horrible brown-helmet hair of yours or you'll never be able to hold onto a man. I guess this is goodbye. Take care of my car and my money. I have confidence that even with your limited capabilities you'll do things to my liking."* It was signed simply, "Stanley."

She wadded up the paper and threw it behind her head where it landed on the floorboard of the backseat. She wiggled her head quickly, like a bobble-head doll on a roto-milled road, and exhaled loudly in an effort to expel her anger. After turning the key in the ignition, she carefully backed out and methodically used side streets to reach the highway.

So many horrible memories kept circulating. She knew it was important to just get on with life. Stanley was dead now. For years he'd been her ex-husband and just a bad memory. There was nothing he could say or do beyond the grave that would hurt her anymore so she needed to shake the morning off. She forced herself to smile. There was a party at her home tonight; the house that she'd lovingly and

painstakingly restored. She had real friends, a job that she loved, and an amazing art studio over her garage. The days of being weak, insecure, and unable to stand on her own were over. Stanley actually had been right about something. The beatings and verbal abuse she'd endured had indeed strengthened her. She'd finally stood up to him and kicked him out of her life. No one would ever treat her that way again. She was stronger; resilient enough to live a wonderful and fulfilling life. Fuck Stanley. She hoped he rotted in hell, but even that seemed too good for him.

She cranked up the radio and rolled the window down, allowing the wind to rush through the car and upbeat music blaring to exorcise her memories. She was hoping to scare away the demons that still threatened to chase her.

About the Author

The Original Wife is the third book by award-winning author Deborah Wynne. She began writing as a young girl, filling dog-eared spiral notebooks with whimsical stories and terrible poetry. A University of Colorado alumna, Ms. Wynne entered the workforce listening to the advice of her parents who said, “Get a good government job.” She subsequently had two distinctly different careers in municipal government before becoming a private sector consultant.

Unlike other authors that have long lists of interesting hobbies, Ms. Wynne claims to have left such things in her past in order to focus on writing and creating the perfect cup of coffee. Using music as her inspirational backdrop, she tends to listen to her favorite artists in repetitive loops—Neil Diamond, Imagine Dragons, Frank Sinatra. Her writing marathons allow her to live vicariously through her characters and stories which bear no recognizable similarity to her real life. Ms. Wynne is married and lives at the foot of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. She has two grown daughters and four grandchildren.

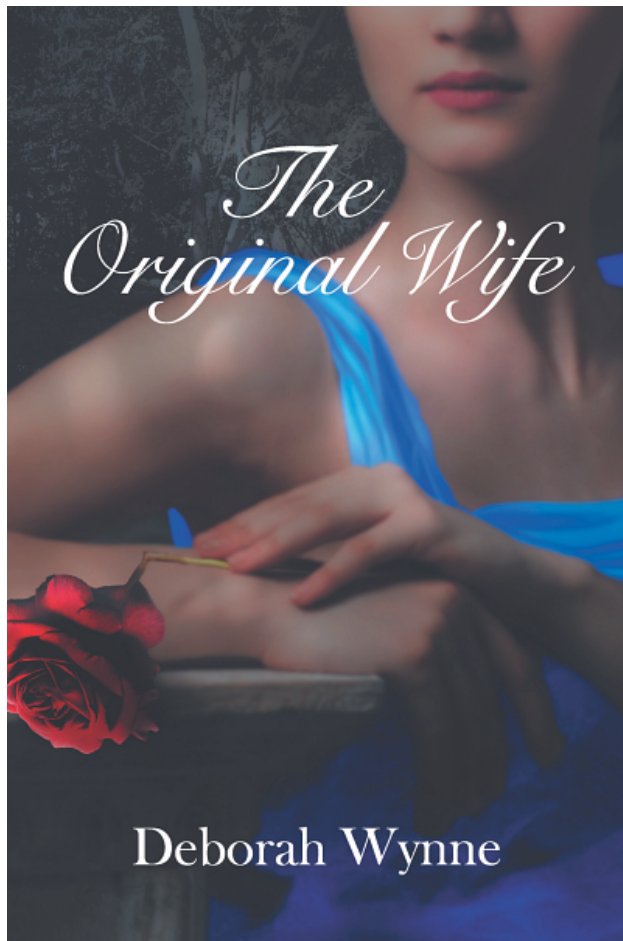
Prior to *The Original Wife*, Ms. Wynne published two books. Her debut novel, *Opening Act (Book One of the Pirouettes and Promises Series)* is a 2021 Winner of the Firebird Book Award for Contemporary Fiction as well as a 2021 Winner of the Firebird Book Award for New Fiction. She also released *Intermission*—the sequel to *Opening Act (Book Two of the Pirouettes and Promises Series)*. *Encore*, the third installment in the *Pirouettes and Promises Series*, is scheduled for release in the near future. One of her very short stories was included in *VSS365 Anthology: Volume One 2019*. Currently, she is working on *Cassie’s Woods*, a conspiracy thriller, as well as a yet-to-be titled sequel to *The Original Wife*.

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