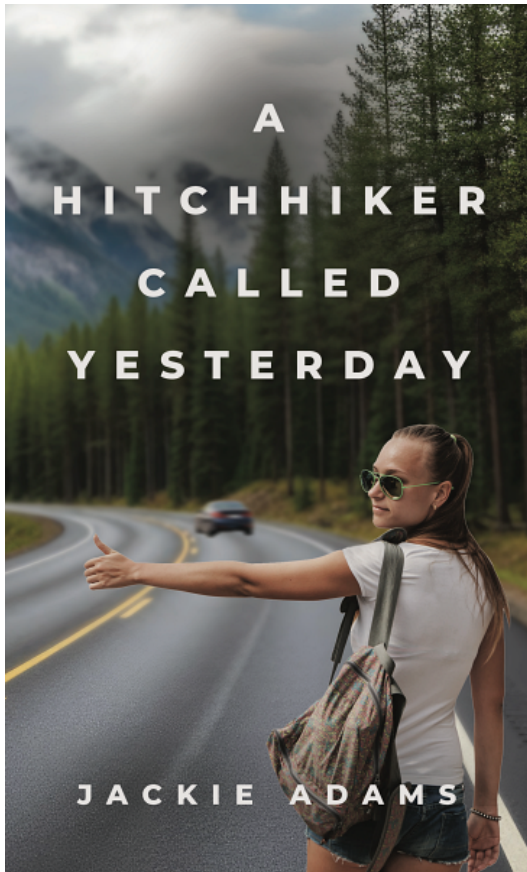




Michelle's husband pushes her out of the car onto the highway. Her mother died in a car accident. Terrified, she puts her thumb out and ends up hitchhiking to a fresh start thanks to her new friend.

A Hitchhiker Called Yesterday

By Jackie Adams

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A woman with long brown hair in a ponytail, wearing sunglasses, a white t-shirt, and denim shorts, is hitchhiking on the side of a winding asphalt road. She has a large, patterned backpack on her back and is giving a thumbs-up gesture. In the background, a dark car is driving away on the road, which is flanked by a dense forest of tall evergreen trees. In the distance, snow-capped mountains are visible under a cloudy sky.

A
HITCHHIKER
CALLED
YESTERDAY

JACKIE ADAMS

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Chapter 1

Maybe I wasn't in the perfect marriage, but I loved him like there was no other. That is, until there was no love from him. Let me say, one way love is never true love. It's more of a crime really, to be the only one loving. Maybe in his own way what he gave me was the only way he knew how to love.

My husband parked on the side of the highway and pushed at me until I was no longer in the car. I now have my thumb out on the interstate. Again, hitchhiking! The interstate is busy. The vehicles are whizzing right past me. At times, I'm afraid a vehicle will curb a shoulder and hit me! Finally, an old Toya Carova pulls over. The elderly gentleman asks, "Do you want a ride?"

I hesitantly climb into his front seat hoping he's not some sort of pervert or any other kind of weirdo. I whisper, my voice barely audible, "Thank you."

He waits a few minutes before trying to enter back onto the busy interstate. “Where are you headed?” He asks as he peers out the window.

I can’t look him in the eyes, maybe I’m afraid of what I might see. Maybe I’m afraid of who I got in the car with. I tell him, “I’m not really sure. He, he left me stranded. I don’t know what to do next.” Normally, my husband would be headed to work. He might decide to go home, either way this isn’t the first time he’s pushed me out of the car. Last time, the car was still moving. I’ve decided this will be the last time he does it.

The man has a chance to pull his car out on the highway, and he does. As he drives, he asks, “Are you hungry?”

I ask myself when was the last time I had eaten, and when was the last time someone cared if I ate? I let him know, “I’m always hungry.”

He says, “My wife made the best chicken and dumplings with potatoes. Best I ever had

and believe me I had a mother that could cook. Nothing comes close to my wife's though."

I ask him, "Did she pass on?"

He shakes his head as he watches the road, "No, she's bedridden. She's very sick. Which is why I'd like to take you back home, if you're not too scared of me that is. I'd enjoy a meal with some conversation. Don't worry, my wife's nurse is always with her. There will be four in the house."

I ask him, "Doesn't the nurse eat with you?"

Again, he shakes his head, "No, she eats while tube feeding my wife." He pauses a great deal and then adds, "They think I should let my wife... die peacefully. It's only a matter of days before..." His voice trails off.

I know what he's getting ready to say, and I gulp down my displeasure of the awkwardness it leaves hanging in the air. I was never much of a talker. I'm more of a thinker. I'm not sure how to reply to his sadness. I say, "I'll have dinner with you. I haven't had

chicken and dumplings since... Actually, I don't know if I ever have."

He looks at me for a second, "What will you compare them too?"

I shrug, "I'm not really sure."

We go back to his place, which starts to suddenly scare me. He doesn't live in the overpopulated city like most of us. He lives down a bunch of windy roads that leads to a gravel road, which we are driving on now. Finally, he pulls on to a circle blacktop drive in front of a beautiful one-story home. He smiles and says, "This is it."

A woman steps out in a nurse's uniform, while the man sitting next to me says, "I texted her to meet us at the door." He pats my hand with his, "I thought it might take some of the fear out of you."

I look over at him, knowing he's right. It does take the edge off. I tell him, "Thanks for being so thoughtful."

He gets out of the car and walks to the woman. I can't hear what he's telling her, but she waves at me and holds her arms out. She says to me, "You must be awfully cold and hungry. I'm Lauren, his wife's nurse." She pulls me in for a hug.

After she finally lets me go, we walk inside the home, well, it's the most beautiful home I've ever been in. It's warm and welcoming as we make our way to the oversized kitchen with a breakfast bar to die for! I love it here already.

Apparently, when he counted four, he wasn't counting me, because I see another woman in the kitchen. He tells me, "I also have help around the house. This here is Martha." He points at her, "She's heating up some chicken and dumplings. You still want some, right?"

I nod my head not saying a word.

He looks from me over to Martha who has her back turned to us. She's facing the stove. He asks, "Martha, can you make my new friend here some food, too?"

“Sure thing, Mr. Wilcox.” She says as she pulls down another plate from the very tall cabinets.

He looks back at me, “I don’t know why she insists on calling me Mr. Wilcox. I keep telling her to call me Henry. She doesn’t listen, but it’s not because I don’t try.” He shakes his head as he smiles. He says, “You’ll have to forgive me for not asking sooner, but what is your name young lady?”

“My name’s Michelle, Michelle Turner.” I hold my hand out, and he reaches over the table and shakes it.

“Good meeting you, Michelle Turner. You’ve made for quite an interesting evening for me. I usually come home to a sad, forlorn house. Don’t get me wrong. My nurse, Lauren, and Martha keep me company, but they’re usually very busy keeping up with my wife and the house.”

Martha sets two plates in front of us. “Now you enjoy this here food, Miss Michelle.” She

walks away with a big smile leaving the platter on the table.

Henry says, “You just wait til you taste the chicken and dumplings. It’s been frozen for a few months. My wife grew sicker and sicker too fast. It may not taste the same as fresh made.” He takes a bite, “But then again I guess I’m wrong.” He looks towards me expectantly waiting for me to take my first bite.

I grab a roll from the platter and scoop the chicken and dumplings with it onto my fork. I take a bite, and he wasn’t kidding. I smile big as I chew, “Oh, how I love that you weren’t wrong! This has to be the best meal I’ve ever eaten.” I’m not lying either. My mother was never much of a cook. Don’t get me wrong, it’s not because she couldn’t. She worked two jobs to keep my brother and myself fed and clothed. She never had time to cook. It was always left to me, and I wasn’t very good at it. As for my husband, he tried, but he isn’t very good at it either.

Speaking of him, I’m so mad at him I could care less if I ever see him again. I can’t believe

he left me stranded on the side of the highway again. He never even looked back. He sped off like there's no tomorrow. What if I had been hit??? He never came back for me! Jerk!

"Michelle, what is it that you do? You know, to make money?" He asks as he takes another bite. He peers over his plate waiting for me to answer.

I quietly say, "I haven't worked since marriage." I don't know why my mouth keeps talking, "My husband never let me work. He said since I met him at the gas station, I was working at that I'd meet another man. He said he wasn't having it."

"Gas station?" He says, "That's a very tiresome job. A lot of work, no doubt. Did you like working there?"

I tell him, "It was more that I liked working with people more than anything."

He looks up from his plate. "And that black eye you have there? Where'd you get that?"

I feel like he already knows the answer, but I humor him with a lie, “Oh, well, I was putting things away in the pantry.” I wish we had a pantry. Our studio apartment above the bar is so small our bedroom is the pantry. “And I must have bumped it on a shelf.”

He asks, “Must have, huh? I see.” I know he knows my husband gave it to me. Neil always had a quick hand when my mouth got smart. I should learn to keep my mouth shut more. I’m always causing him to hit on me. You’d think I’d learn sooner or later, but nope, I don’t.

Henry stretches his arms out. “It’s getting late, Michelle. I’d like for you to stay here for the night, and we’ll figure out what to do in the morning over breakfast. How’s that sound?”

I look over at Martha who is nodding her head yes.

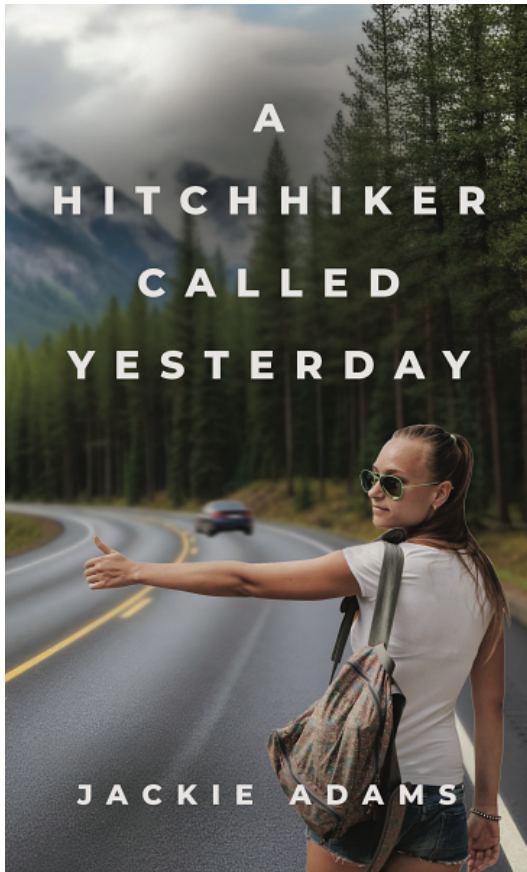
He adds, “Lauren and Martha, they stay the nights, too. They live here. You won’t be alone with me, Michelle. There’s no reason in the world for you to feel scared. This house has

so many rooms. You can either sleep on the couch or in the guest room. It's up to you."

"If you don't mind, I'd prefer the couch." Something about the couch just makes it seem safer and more comfortable. "Are you sure I'm no trouble?" I don't want to go back to the apartment with the jerk. Let him sleep on what happened to me. We're an hour away from there anyway. I don't want to trouble Henry having to drive me home this late.

"Martha, will you get Michelle a pillow and a cover?"

She says, "Sure thing, Mr. Wilcox."



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