

# The Bridge's Siren Song

By Myrtle Archer

*Myrtle spent her childhood in the primitive north of Idaho and now lives near San Francisco, where she partakes in the literary community. She teaches "Writing for Publication" and does consulting on creative writing.*

Natalie, driving quiet-souled and competently towards the Golden Gate, in her mind's eye saw the grandiose yet graceful Golden Gate bridge again, and she yearned to already be on it. She saw its distant, blue-gray waters, which would be, from that height, like hitting cement, and a good contentment blossomed in her. She would soon be over its railing and headed into the water's depths far, far below. And her fatal disease—she could not say its name and award it stronger strength, even though she'd been an EMT and then a trauma nurse for thirty years and had seen enough to give Superman forty or fifty deep, psychic scars—would vanish under the water. But, at work, she had hardly dealt with that—that disease—but with mangled accident victims, with still hot-skinned burn victims and with other horrors beyond description. So why couldn't she deal with her disease, see it through to its painful end?

Well she knew why: Michael, with his steady, loving husbandly heart, was dead, of viral pneumonia, and she'd had no chance even to lovingly nurse him 'til the end, he'd been gone so suddenly. Her cherished son, Troy, was dead, killed in the Gulf War, and what awaited her in her fatal disease surely couldn't be worse than losing a son. Her beloved sister, Marcene, was dead. Everyone she'd loved was dead—gone to memories and gravestones and green grass—six feet above them.

She braked at a red light. San Francisco had so many traffic lights, and she'd driven for an hour before crossing The Bay Bridge and descending into the turmoil, noise, tall buildings, racial variety and financial might of San Francisco. Long ago, she and Michael had honeymooned there within walking distance of the colorful Fisherman's Wharf, and in early married life they'd attended the theaters here and enjoyed the city's Mother Lode of attractions. But those days are gone... gone... gone.

She would not leap from The Bay Bridge. Somehow that two-pronged bridge didn't look right for leaping.

Of course she had colleagues at work: neighbors, acquaintances. And in ordinary times they comforted her, kept her busy, but what could they do with this disease inside her, growing... growing? She loved them—in a slimmer way from her beloved dead—but they could not help her now. And soon, if they should need her in any way, she would be too ill to be of any help to them. Soon she would probably have to quit work entirely and wait... wait... for the end.

And why should she wait?

She didn't need those last few days. She'd left a note on the dining room table stating, "I've done this of my own free will. No one is even a trifle to blame, or could have prevented it. I have had a good, full life. Please remember me with fondness. I have appreciated you all. Love and blessings to every one of you."

She expertly maneuvered through the claustrophobic, noisy traffic. She'd always been good with her hands, had skilled hands even. She had been told that often.

Her profession, to be really good at it, required skilled hands. And an excellent memory. Her years of other training flowered before her. She yet remembered the details of almost every class. Her future job would be to do all humanly possible, under various

circumstances, to stop bleeding, do CPR if needed, clear breathing passages—a myriad of hopefully-helpful actions to stabilize trauma victims, and she had worried she'd never even pass the tests, though she had never flunked a test in her life. But the classes presented so many acronyms to remember, long ones, and she must never make an error in an acronym's meaning or in anything. How she, with pinched-in breath, had waited for the results of the final test and how exultance had danced in her when she'd learned she had passed and would soon get her Certification in the mail! She and Michael, with Troy beside them, had lofted triumphant glasses of champagne and laughed and sipped. After that she seldom had parted from her private trauma kit, labeled her First Aid kit, and which she'd assembled for her accompanist for all but everywhere. It lay on the front passenger's floorboard this instant. But... all done with that now.

Natalie had loved her profession—no, that was not the word for seeing such sights—she had hugged to herself the satisfaction of knowing she was helping those suddenly under her charge, helping for the most part, of course. For there were those, too, who unfortunately lay beyond earthly help. But now all that training, knowledge and experience would disappear under the waves. And that was what she wanted.

She braked so that a white Subaru ahead could safely wiggle into the rarest of delights: a parking space on a street in San Francisco.

They'd brought Troy here to see the Cable Car Museum, the three-masted sailing ship, the Balchutha, to see The Carousel Museum, the Presidio lording its military strength over the Golden Gate, to Ft. Mason (nearly under the bridge) built during the Civil War.

Would she shortly see Troy again, hidden as he was in Four Crosses Cemetery, where the Veterans of Foreign Wars decorated his grave and battalions of others every Memorial Day? In memory, he waved his last goodbye as he'd left for the Middle East and all its bloody killings. He'd locked a smile on his face for them. He was as brave as his father, and for him, she'd successfully dammed back her fountain of tears. He'd looked what he was: a blond, young Greek God, hormonized for some lovely and intelligent young woman to love him, for forever.

If she herself did see him again shortly, she hoped it would be as of that last moment with her and his father, but this time he would turn and run back into her arms, instead of into death. He had been such a beautiful baby.

Memories recaptured her, though she saw the thronged road before her, the red or green traffic lights, the pedestrians, the buildings, and everything before her clearly. They camped again in the High Sierras. They backpacked further up to where the three of them were all alone in the resplendent spirituality of the wilderness. They camped at Lost Lake and marveled at the mirror-like splendor of it, laughed at how awful the canned chicken spread they'd brought with him as a camping experiment looked and tasted. They sat in the evening's coolness around a Sonora Pass campfire and roasted marshmallows and sang—even "This Old Man" for Troy's sake—and the fire popped and even the black burns on the marshmallows tasted ambrosial. After Troy had gone to his tired, early sleep, they, in their sleeping bags, which fortunately zipped together into one—made love. Always they had sought to make love in the outdoors, with the stars above them and the strength of Michael's arms around her and the hard ground beneath them. Soon his arms would be around her...

**Will Natalie fall to death's embrace? Order a copy today to find out!**