

THE NATIONAL BESTSELLER

CATHERINE
RYAN HYDE

REUBEN

January 1992



The woman smiled so politely that he felt offended.

"Let me tell Principal Morgan that you're here, Mr. St. Clair. She'll want to talk with you." She walked two steps, turned back, "She likes to talk to everyone, I mean. Any new teacher."

"Of course."

He should have been used to this by now.

More than three minutes later she emerged from the principal's office, smiling too widely. Too openly. People always display far too much acceptance, he'd noticed, when they are having trouble mustering any for real.

"Go right on in, Mr. St. Clair. She'll see you."

"Thank you."

The principal appeared to be about ten years older than he, with a great deal of dark hair, worn up, a Caucasian and attractive. And attractive women always made him hurt, literally, a long pain that started high up in his solar plexus and radiated downward through his gut. As if he had just asked this attractive woman to the theater, only to be told, You must be joking.

"We are so pleased to meet you face-to-face, Mr. St. Clair." Then she flushed, as if the mention of the word "face" had been an unforgivable faux pas.

"Please call me Reuben."

"Reuben, yes. And I'm Anne."

She met him with a steady, head-on gaze, and at no time appeared startled. So she had been verbally prepared by her assistant. And somehow the only thing worse than an unprepared reaction was the obviously rehearsed absence of one.

He hated these moments so.

He was, by his own admission, a man who should stay in one place. But the same factors that made it hard to start over made it hard to stay.

She motioned toward a chair and he sat. Crossed his legs. The crease of his slacks was neatly, carefully pressed. He'd chosen his tie the previous night, to go well with the suit. He was a demon about grooming, although he knew no one would ever really see. He appreciated these habits in himself, even if, or because, no one else did.

"I'm not quite what you were expecting, am I, Anne?"

The use of her first name brought it back, but more acutely. It was very hard to talk to an attractive woman.

"In what respect?"

"Please don't do this. You must appreciate how many times I've replayed this same scene. I can't bear to talk around an obvious issue."

She tried to establish eye contact, as one normally would when addressing a coworker in conversation, but she could not make it stick. "I understand," she said.

I doubt it, he said, but not out loud.

"It is human nature," he said out loud, "to form a picture of someone in your mind. You read a résumé and an appli-

cation, and you see I'm forty-four, a black male, a war veteran with a good educational background. And you think you see me. And because you are not prejudiced, you hire this black man to move to your town, teach at your school. But now I arrive to test the limits of your open mind. It's easy not to be prejudiced against a black man, because we have all seen hundreds of those."

"If you think your position is in any jeopardy, Reuben, you're worrying for nothing."

"Do you really have this little talk with everyone?"

"Of course I do."

"Before they even address their first class?"

Pause. "Not necessarily. I just thought we might discuss the subject of . . . initial adjustment."

"You worry that my appearance will alarm the students."

"What has your experience been with that in the past?"

"The students are always easy, Anne. This is the difficult moment. Always."

"I understand."

"With all respect, I'm not sure you do," he said. Out loud.



AT HIS FORMER SCHOOL, in Cincinnati, Reuben had a friend named Louis Tartaglia. Lou had a special way of addressing an unfamiliar class. He would enter, on that first morning, with a yardstick in his hand. Walk right into the flap and fray. They like to test a teacher, you see, at first. This yardstick was Lou's own, bought and carried in with him. A rather thin, cheap one. He always bought the same brand at the same store. Then he would ask for silence, which he never received on the first request. After counting to three,

★

"An inspiring novel, fascinating in its implications."

—RICHARD PAUL EVANS, author of *The Christmas List* and *The Christmas Box*

Catherine Ryan Hyde's international sensation, *Pay It Forward*, is the moving story of Trevor McKinney, a twelve-year-old boy who accepts his social studies teacher's challenge to come up with a plan to change the world.

Trevor's idea is simple: Do a good deed for three people and ask them to "pay it forward" to three others who need help. He envisions a vast movement of kindness and goodwill spreading beyond his small California town and across the world. However, when Jerry, a bum to whom Trevor gave his allowance, returns to a life of dissolution, the project seems valuable only as a lesson on the dark side of human nature. But ultimately Trevor is vindicated. At first people don't know how to explain the odd dip in crime rates across the nation, but a journalist with a story of his own tracks down the source of the epidemic of random acts of kindness and makes Trevor a celebrity.

Yet Trevor has problems closer to home: he wants his pretty, hardworking mother to see the softer side of his beloved teacher, Reuben St. Clair, a scarred Vietnam veteran who seems to come alive only when he's in front of his class.

Anyone who has ever despaired of one person's ability to effect change will rejoice in Trevor's courage and his determination to see the good in everyone.

PRAISE FOR *Pay It Forward*

"A quiet, steady masterpiece with an incandescent ending."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"[Hyde's] fable speaks to the hunger so many of us feel for something to believe in that can give us hope. . . . Many of us yearn for magic. Hyde's book delivers an even more profound vision of what it may be: the simple magic of the human heart."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"The philosophy behind the book is so intriguing, and the optimism so contagious, that the reader is carried along with what turns out to be a book that lingers long after the last page is turned."

—*The Denver Post*

"Catherine Ryan Hyde accomplishes a very difficult job, with an easy, beneficent wisdom about the ways of the world."

—*Chicago Tribune*



CATHERINE RYAN HYDE is the author of many novels, including *Becoming Chloe*, *Love in the Present Tense*, *The Year of My Miraculous Reappearance*, *Chasing Windmills*, *The Day I Killed James*, and *Diary of a Wren*. She lives in California with her dog, Ella. To learn how you can help change the world, visit www.payitforwardfoundation.org.