



# Magnolia Publishing

"Books for those Southern or Southern at Heart"

## “FOR MOLLY”

*Author Vicki Allen’s debut novel, For Molly is contemporary fiction novel with southern flair, set in multiple locations around the Deep South. It is a story of friendship, love and loss; centered around the book’s heroine, Ashley Stewart, a typical small-town girl, feisty, strong, and independent, secure in the love of her family, and surrounded by a close-knit circle of lifelong friends. When a speeding truck erases the only truth she’s ever known, Ashley flees her hometown, denying her past, ultimately meeting up with the one man who holds the key to her destiny.*

*The beloved characters and story line found in the For Molly trilogy—which includes The Return, the second novel in the series—developed a loyal following of multi-generation fans and launched the writing career of Allen. It also established Magnolia Publishing’s as the publisher of “Books for those Southern or Southern at Heart.”*

### Chapter One

Hearing the rev of an engine and the screeching of tires, Ashley Stewart raised her head, waving goodbye as Doug Fairchild, Mitch Guidry and Scotty Jeansonne roared away in Scotty’s mustard yellow GMC pickup. They headed in the direction of Kincaid Lake to fish and drink beer; hauling behind them the old Ranger bass boat and an ice chest full of clandestinely obtained Budweiser and Miller ponies. She grinned as she watched them disappear from sight, and then closed her eyes, laying back and relaxing, content just to soak up the warm rays of late August sun.

“I heard Doug ask you about the Back to School Dance. You going?”

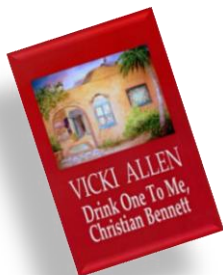
Ashley turned her head, glancing over to where her best friend Kate Ducote floated next to her on the muddy waters of Indian Creek, lounging comfortably on her back atop a rubber raft, peeking out at Ashley from beneath drowsy eyelids.

“Dating Dougie would be almost incestuous, don’t you think?” Ashley asked her lightly, her eyes dancing with good humor behind dark Ray Bans.

“You’re avoiding the issue.”

“There’s no issue, Kate.”

“Sure there is, Ashley, and you’re dancing all around it.”



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“You’re not going to start that again, are you?” Ashley sighed heavily, flopping onto her stomach and burying her face in the crook of her tightly folded arms, muttering unhappily at the thought of another one of Kate’s well-meaning lectures. “I get awfully tired of your constant badgering about my social life.”

“It’s more your *lack* of a social life that really bothers us.” Roused from a lazy catnap by Ashley’s whining, Susanna Robicheaux spoke up indignantly, lifting her head from the pillow of her raft and shading her skeptical eyes with her freckled forearm. “What is it with you, Ashley? Are you going to miss every important social event we have for the rest of your life?”

“I haven’t missed all of them. I go out all the time.”

“Yeah, right, maybe in a group of twenty! Why don’t you break down and have a real date?”

“With who?” Ashley asked, raising an interested brow to Susanna as she rolled off her raft into the waist-deep water.

“How about one of those stud-muffins who just left for Kincaid Lake?”

“Scotty, Mitch and Doug are all like brothers to me. Just because their voices have changed and they’re sporting a little more testosterone than usual doesn’t mean that I want to date them.” Ashley leaned down, splashing some of the murky creek water over her shoulders to cool the sun-kissed skin on her back. “Besides, it’s pretty hard to see any true romantic possibilities in someone you shared a sand box with.”

“They don’t see it that way. They think you’re just frigid,” Susanna informed her in a voice loud enough to wake the dead. “They call you *The Ice Princess*, for crissakes! Jeez, Ashley, is that how you want to be remembered?”

Susanna jumped in, pushing through the water to stand next to Ashley, waving her arms wildly in the air as she illustrated her point. “I can just hear them now, ‘Ashley Stewart, remember her? She was the girl so frosty that we called her the Ice Princess!’ ”

“Susanna, I wish you’d get your own life and leave mine alone.”

“Not gonna happen, sweetheart.”

“Give it a rest, Susanna,” Kate intervened on Ashley’s behalf, frowning at Susanna. “There’s nothing wrong with Ashley. She just has high dating standards.”

“Yeah, they’re high all right,” Susanna scowled, flopping ungracefully back onto her raft, drenching Kate with the splash of her wake. “Ashley has the dating standards of a nun.”

“Now Suz, I’m not saintly. I’m just selective.”

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“Whatever, Ash. Just stay home with your folks and miss all the fun. See if I care.”

Ashley Stewart was a true child of the South, born and bred in Louisiana, the fertile green land of rolling rivers and marshy bayous. She grew up in Pineville, a picturesque little town nestled in a thick forest of sweet-smelling pines along the banks of the Red River, and was the only child of Remy and Maggie Stewart, being hellacious enough as a toddler to prevent them from ever wanting another. From the time she was a year old, Ashley knew her parents simply as Maggie and Remy, and Maggie, being the open-minded soul that she was, saw no reason to teach her any differently.

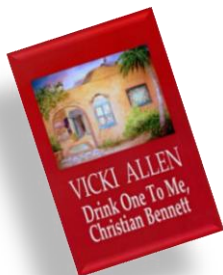
Maggie was an Alabama beauty, outgoing, energetic, with a dazzling smile, and contagious laugh, brought home to Louisiana by Remy when he graduated from Auburn University. She was a registered nurse and had worked forever for crazy Pete Gautreaux, the local family practice doc, running his office efficiently and professionally, her intuition and careful hands saving him time and time again from certain malpractice.

Remy was a pharmacist and owner of an old-fashioned drugstore on the corner of a downtown intersection across from city hall. The renovated old Walgreen’s was a place of fascination for a young girl, filled with perfumes and body lotions, dime candies and Coca-Cola, and a place where Ashley spent many Saturday mornings. Bypassing both the temptations of the fountain area and the candy aisle, Ashley would head directly to the prescription counter at the very back of the store. There with the wide, adoring eyes of a Daddy’s girl, Ashley would watch him work, the tall, handsome pharmacist so openly beloved by all his customers. She observed his easy smile and the kind, patient manner in which he dealt with people, absolutely convinced that her father was the smartest man in the world.

The Stewarts had lived in the same house all of Ashley’s life, a two-story, white plantation-style house on four tree-filled acres right outside the city limits, with huge picture windows draped in lace, interior walls dabbled in soft pastels and antique furnishings of maple and cherry.

Just across a grassy field lived the Ducotes and Ashley’s best friend, Kate. Tall, willowy Kate was a fair-haired knockout with the face of an angel and wisdom beyond her years, becoming at a very young age the exclusive keeper of Ashley’s innermost thoughts and deep, dark secrets. Ashley told Kate everything, knowing that Kate would take it to the grave with her if necessary.

In kindergarten, Ashley and Kate met up with Susanna Robicheaux and the three became best friends for life, weathering the usual girlhood activities together: tap dancing and girl scouts, Barbie dolls and bicycles. They were inseparable, considering themselves to be the perfect trio.



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Susanna was short, cute and freckled, notorious for both her loud voice and long, russet-colored curls. She was outspoken, opinionated and rebellious, battling continuously with her father and constantly grounded for her attitude, her grades, her smoking or any combination of the three.

Despite her loud-mouthed hardheadedness, Susanna did have some very redeeming qualities. She was lively and she was fun; her devil-may-care stance on life kept everyone around her in stitches, and, excluding the fact that she was impossibly abrasive most of the time, Susanna was, for the most part, a passionately devoted, true-blue friend.

Ashley was middle-of-the-road, the perfect complement to either Kate or Susanna, soft-spoken yet ambitious, a good listener yet vivacious and flirtatious. Despite popular opinion, Ashley wasn't an angel. She had her defiant moments, the most memorable being the three days of her eighth-grade year she spent at home after being suspended for smoking with Susanna in the girls bathroom. It was a very proud moment for Maggie and Remy, and one that they didn't let Ashley forget for a very long time.

But, unlike Susanna, Ashley wasn't purposely rebellious; her greatest downfall was her impulsiveness. Independent and stubborn, she tended to act first and think later, usually while suffering the consequences of her actions.

Pineville was small, and life was simple, yet the perfect trio always found something to hold their terribly short attention spans. Autumn brought hayrides, pig roasts and the Rapides Parish Fair, with high school football games dominating Friday nights.

Thanksgiving marked the beginning of deer hunting season and the disappearance of virtually every male in a hundred-mile radius. Attired in camouflage and fluorescent orange hunting vests, they left town for hunting camps on Friday night and returned on Sunday afternoon, too tired or hung over to be much good to anyone.

Spring and summer were sultry, long, hot and humid, officially beginning with the ear-splitting crack of the bat and sound of cheering crowds from the overflowing softball and baseball fields. Of all the seasons, summer was their favorite, and the teens of Pineville littered the lakes around town, lazily enjoying their freedom from the shackles of required education.

Ashley, Kate and Susanna retreated to Indian Creek to bask in the rays of the hot summer sun, lounging on inflatable rafts atop the muddy brown waters, slathering their bikini-clad bodies from head to toe with baby oil in an effort to become as darkly tanned as possible. It was during those Indian Creek summers that Kate and Susanna discovered boys, gladly casting aside Saturday night slumber parties in favor of pizza dinners and drive-in movies with their suddenly attractive childhood schoolmates.

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Kate and Susanna were in hog heaven, dating abundantly and frequently, and after significant pressure from both of them, Ashley quickly followed suit, accepting a few invitations from well-meaning classmates, and attending the required social functions. She went through all the motions, but could not have cared less. No one really piqued her interest; she'd known them all too long for anyone to truly hold her fascination. If all had remained the same, Ashley would have been content to spend her remaining year in Pineville without establishing a romantic connection with anyone.

Everything changed the day she met Jimmy Moreau.

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**COMING in 2010—"The Other Brother!"**

***The eagerly anticipated third book in the For Molly trilogy.***



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