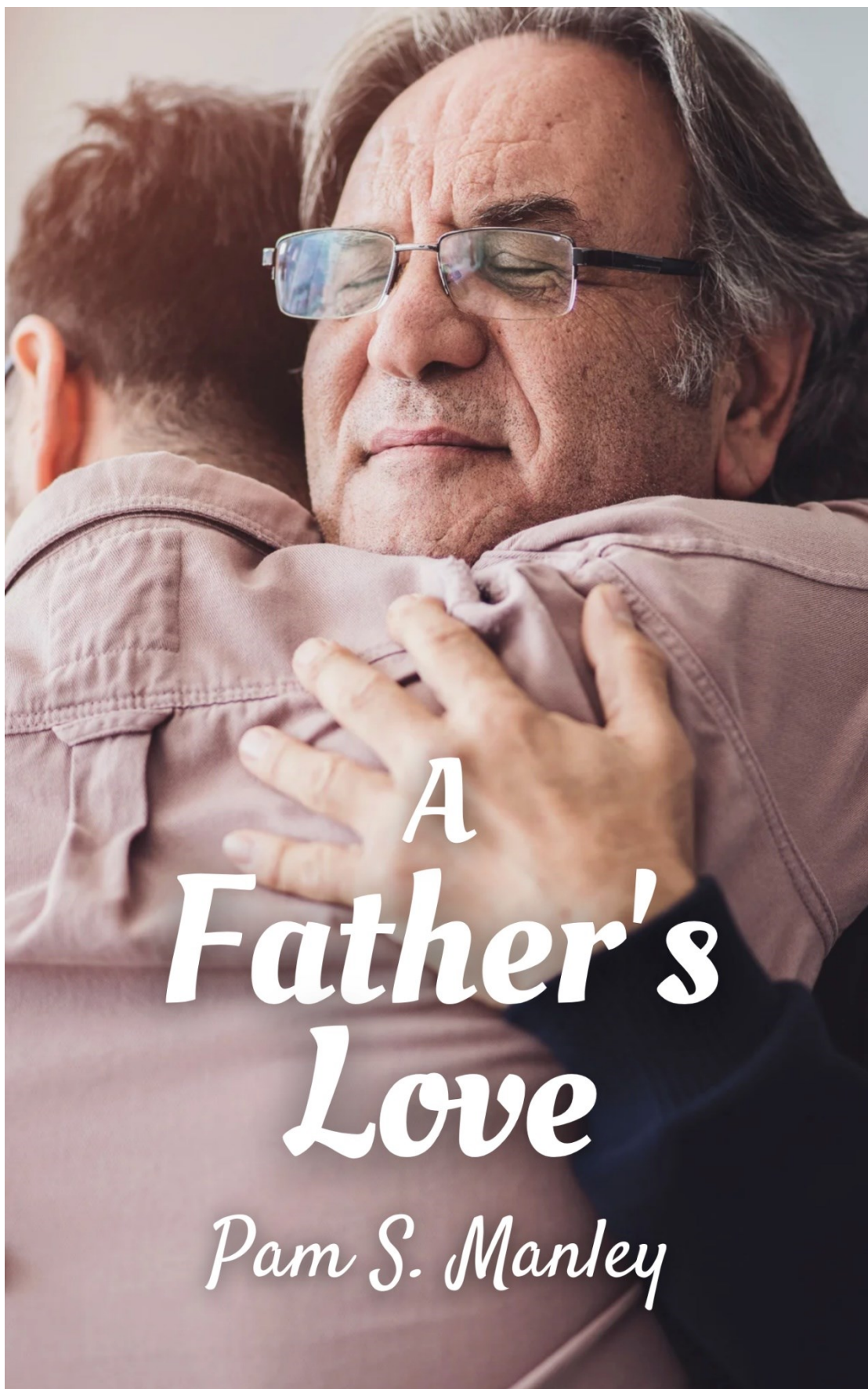




A
*Father's
Love*

Pam S. Manley

A Father's Love

by Pam S. Manley

The following story is completely fictional. Any similarities to a real story are purely accidental.

For being thrown together at the last minute—literally—this is one kickin' party! The spread is just out of this world. There's every type of beef imaginable. Succulent prime rib grilled to perfection. Juicy barbecued short ribs. The thickest T-Bone steaks anyone has ever seen. Even the basic hamburger patties are going on the grill. To go along with the incredible meat selection, there's the usual cookout fare: coleslaw, potato salad, macaroni salad, watermelon. Oh, and the dessert! Where did all this food come from on such short notice? It's amazing! And let's talk about the music & dancing! The band is smokin' with people dancing everywhere around the house!

Of course, after practically starving to death over the past few months, I would eat

anything. No, seriously, I mean anything. Just last week, the slop I was feeding the pigs on a farm a few states away looked great to me. It certainly wasn't a moment of crowning glory for me, which became my "ah-ha" moment. I realized it was time to return home.

About a year ago, I went to my dad and asked him for my inheritance now – while he was still alive. It really wasn't selfish on my part. Well, I guess it was. I used the reasoning that I was trying to avoid paying the government's inheritance tax. Besides, I'm young. It was time to get out on my own and see what was out there, away from my father's massive estate on Long Island and my big, overbearing brother. To my surprise, Dad actually agreed! Yes! Sweet! Now it was time to say, "Adios! Hasta la vista, baby!"

I got as far as I could from home—about 3,000 miles. Found a beautiful house right on the beach and met some new friends. I did say I was young, right? My friends helped me spend money on all the latest electronics, on girls, expensive clothes, and threw all kinds of boozing parties. Now this is the life! Or so I thought at first. As it turns out, my choice in friends wasn't the best decision I've ever made, but I didn't know that right off the bat. Unfortunately, it took me too long to realize these "friends" only liked me for my money. Because once it was gone, they were gone.

And then tragedy hit. The largest typhoon in history destroyed everything within a 100-mile radius, including my beloved beach house; and it caused the cost of everything to skyrocket. I tried to get a job so I could pay for a new place and to buy food. But because I had no work history (who needed work when your dad was loaded?), no one would hire me. I couldn't even get a job at McDonald's, which is the lowest place on the totem pole of desirable places to work. Or at least I thought so. It was humiliating.

So I decided my next step was to hitchhike eastward, out of the typhoon stricken area, to

see what kind of work I could find. With no actual skills to speak of, I became a migrant worker. It was one of those hard knocks of life to discover that the only thing you're good for is digging up potatoes or detasseling corn. But I kept moving on and eventually the only job I could find was feeding pigs on what seemed like the largest pig farm in the country. Oh the madness! Since I had finally hit bottom in my life – and I was already halfway home to my dad's house – I decided I might as well complete the distance to the east coast.

This morning, as I entered the ritzy neighborhood of mansions and large estates, I'm sure there were millionaires who thought I was a thief. I looked—and felt—horrible! I was covered in torn, ratty clothes, and a dirty, scruffy beard completed the ensemble. I hadn't had a bath or a shower in weeks, so I know I smelled worse than the pigs I had been feeding a couple of weeks ago. Fortunately, no one called the cops on me! Before I knew it, I began walking up the long driveway to my childhood home. I felt ashamed and guilty, knowing my dad was going to be disappointed in me and would reject me. With my luck, he would be the one to call the authorities.

A noise caused me to raise my head up from looking at the ground to see someone running toward me. Could it be? Yes! It was my dad, running with his arms wide open. He nearly knocked me to the ground as he threw his arms around me. I was overwhelmed with this kind of homecoming. But why? I didn't deserve this. And I certainly don't deserve the enormous party he's throwing right now at this moment.

But he did it anyway. He commanded the estate staff to make the arrangements for the party he would give in my honor. Quickly, he ran up the stairs to his bedroom. When he came back down, he put his favorite and most valuable hat on my greasy, sweat-matted head of hair and gave me his own clothes for me to change into. This sent me over the edge. I just couldn't

control it any longer; the tears finally gushed down my cheeks. It was too overwhelming and humbling. Because of my stupidity and foolishness, I pleaded for my dad's forgiveness and offered to become like one of his paid employees. His reply? "I missed you and am thrilled you have finally returned home. I will always love you no matter what, and you will always be my son."