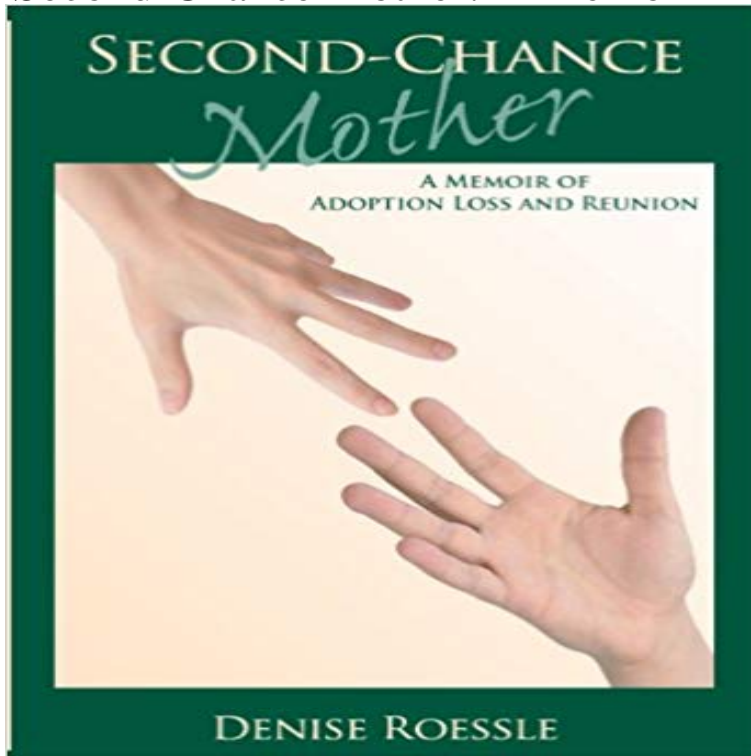


Second-Chance Mother: A Memoir



When Denise Roessle became a mother at 45, her long-held dream came true. She felt as if she were 19 again, the age at which she got pregnant out of wedlock and relinquished her newborn son for adoption. Suddenly, he was back this stranger she had given birth to and he wasn't just searching for his roots. Joshua was looking for a mom. Eager to embrace the second chance she had been granted, Denise leapt wholeheartedly into the role. It's a BIG boy, she announced to her family and friends, setting free her twenty-six-year secret. But Joshua was not a boy. He was a grown man, with a history that fell far short of what she had envisioned for him when she'd been assured he would be better off without her. His adoptive parents had essentially given up on him at age thirteen, sending him away with only an eighth-grade education. He drifted through a series of institutions and group homes, and ultimately onto the New York City streets, where he fell into drugs and crime. When an early marriage failed, he and his young wife surrendered an infant and toddler to adoption. By the time Denise and her son reunited, he was in his second marriage to a teenaged runaway who was six months pregnant with their first child. Despite her disappointment and his obvious problems, Denise was determined to restore their severed bond and give him the unconditional love that had been lacking in her own childhood. At the same time, she struggled with her parents' adverse reaction to her reunion and their refusal to acknowledge their grandsons' existence. The shameful event that they had worked so vigorously to bury was back to haunt them. They could not accept their daughters' happiness at having found her lost child. Still reeling in the overwhelming mix of joy and grief, gratitude and guilt triggered by reunion with her son, Denise received a letter from an aunt she never knew existed. Aunt Mabel revealed some

startling information about Denise's mother, who had claimed to be an only child raised by a kindly couple after both her parents passed away. In truth, she was one of nine siblings tossed to the winds by their mother after the death of their father in 1929. As she got to know her new-found aunts, uncles and cousins, Denise became obsessed with understanding how her grandmother could desert her children and how her mother, who so clearly bore the scars of abandonment, could then force her own daughter to give up a child. A year into their reunion, after Josh's wife left him with their ten-month-old daughter, the rage that he had initially denied surfaced. Denise went from feeling like a new mom to the frustrated parent of an out-of-control teenager. In the face of his angry outbursts and threats to cut her off, she remained intent on fixing him, believing that, in time, she could heal his wounds. Once more, she put her own pain aside and stood by him as he married twice more and fathered another child. Only when Josh and Denise reached an impasse in year five, did she recognize how emotionally shutdown she had been since relinquishing her son and how she had let her fear of losing him again hold her hostage. In the silence of their estrangement, she began the hard work that ultimately allowed her to resolve her own issues, reclaim the young woman she had left behind after surrendering what turned out to be her only child, and make peace with the past. She found acceptance and forgiveness for her mother, her son, and ultimately herself.

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