

Name: Brandy  
Genre: Love story  
Word count: 5000  
By: Jay Miller

## Brandy

It was a cold October morning as Jeff, a handsome young newlywed, awoke. He felt across the bed for his wife, but she was not there.

He got up, went into the kitchen and poured himself some coffee. Then he walked out onto the deck which overlooked the barn and horse corral below. Pablo, his horse, stood sadly alone waiting for him to come down for a ride.

He finished his coffee then slowly his eyes drifted away to the narrow riding trail that led up into the forest above.

Moments later, he was fighting to hold back tears, as he remembered it was only a few days earlier when he had been standing there with his beautiful wife, Brandy, before taking their morning ride up to their special place. In their brief two month marriage, they had ridden there daily, had picnics, and made love many times. That day however, was very different.

“Would you like more coffee?” his mom asked, walking out on the deck to join him.

“Thank you,” he muttered, trying to cover up his sad emotions.

She took his cup and refilled it for him.

“Accidents happen you know?” she whispered, giving him a little hug from the side. “You never can predict what a horse is likely to do.”

“I know,” he sniffed. “I just miss Brandy so much.”

“She was special,” replied his mom, with tears in her eyes too. “I’m so thankful for the short time we all had together.”

“I remember our wedding day in June,” he said. “It was just a small wedding, but that’s what she wanted. She made me wait until then to make love to her.”

“I still miss your dad too,” his mom said. “The Lord took them both from us, but we have to go on with our lives until it’s our time to go.” Then they stood there quietly, alone in their thoughts, for a long time.

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It had been several days since Jeff had buried Brandy with her horse, Celia, after a terrible riding accident. They had been racing uphill to a cliff that overlooked their favorite picnic spot, a small grassy meadow next to a stream just below. Near the top of the ridge stood two large pines, one on each side of the narrow trail. On one side was the tall cliff that overlooked the meadow below, and on the other, a slanting ravine that twisted downwards with many jagged rocks. There was only room for one horse to pass through the small opening.

Many times in the preceding months, while racing there, he had always let Brandy beat him and she would always laugh and giggle with childish laughter because she had won.

That day, however, she wanted more effort on his part. “Can’t you at least even try a little to beat me?” she asked, giggling.

Jeff spurred his horse and Pablo lunged forward, galloping past them at full speed. He turned and glanced back once and saw them coming on fast. As they approached the small opening between the trees, he caught a glimpse of Celia making a late effort charge to pass him on the outside. He could also hear the childish laughter coming from Brandy as she thought she could beat him, but, it was too late. Celia suddenly realized the danger ahead and tried to pull up. Brandy flew forward, hitting the outer tree head first, breaking her neck. Celia stumbled backwards and lost her footing, causing her to tumble sideways over the edge of the cliff. Brandy’s foot was still in one of the stirrups and she was yanked down with her.

Jeff watched in horror as they landed hard onto the grassy meadow thirty feet below. Brandy lay lifeless with her neck twisted to one side, and Celia lay next to her bellowing out in pain. He could see her left front leg was badly broken. He carefully, but quickly rode his horse down the sloped pathway to where they lie. His only comfort then was in knowing that Brandy would not be able to see him shoot her horse. It was necessary however, that he use his rifle to put her out of her misery.

Later that morning, after holding Brandy’s body in his arms and sobbing, he returned to the ranch for a rope and shovel. Then he rode back up and buried them together, right beside where they had fallen. He planned to make a wooden cross later and place it on their grave.

As he returned alone back at the ranch again, his mom was standing on the deck above him. She could see that he had been crying.

“What happened?” she yelled. “Where are Brandy and Celia?”

Jeff answered her with tears in his eyes. “They’re dead mom! I buried them up in those hills.”

“What?” she screamed. Then she saw the shovel strapped to his saddle. “My God!” she cried, “what happened?”

“There was an accident mom. Brandy was killed and I had to shoot her horse. Then I buried them in the same grave.”

Jeff’s mom looked at him in disbelief and said, “You can’t mean that Jeff. Please tell me that is not true.”

“Could you please put Pablo away for me?” he asked. “I’m too exhausted and I need to take a hot shower.”

“I’ll take him,” she answered, heading down the stairway. She first wanted to wrap her arms around her son and comfort him, but he shrugged himself away and ran up the stairway.

“Please talk to me Jeff,” she pleaded.

“I have to go into town,” he turned and yelled back. “We’ll ride up to their gravesite in the morning.”

“Can I at least fix you something to eat first?” she asked.

“No thanks mom. You always take good care of me and I appreciate it, but right now, I just need to shower and then go into town for some supplies.”

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It was six months earlier that he had first met Brandy. He had been driving his pick up truck back from Albuquerque with supplies when he spotted a beautiful young lady running out of the forest with her thumb stuck out for a ride.

He recalled how radiant her face was when he pulled over to give her a lift. She looked to be an angel of about nineteen or so.

“Where are you headed?” he asked, smiling, as he leaned over and opened the door for her.

“I’m not sure,” she replied. “I tried to find some work in town yesterday, but things are slow and I didn’t find anything. Now, I guess I’ll just move on to the next town.”

“Were you sleeping out in the forest?”

“Do I look terrible?” she asked.

“You’re beautiful!” he replied. “It’s just that there are bears in the area.”

“Well, I had to go potty,” she said, blushing. “Nature was calling.”

“My name is Jeff,” he said. “What’s your name?”

“Brandy,” she answered.

“What type of work were you looking for?” he asked, as he drove ahead.

“Mostly anything, as long as it was honest and paid a decent wage. I’m pretty good at cooking and house cleaning, plus I’ve done lots of other small jobs too.”

“You ever been married?” he asked.

At first she seemed stunned at his question, but then she answered.

“No, my parents were killed in a car accident when I was a baby, and my grandparents raised me up in Arkansas. I wound up taking care of them until they passed away a few years ago. I’ve been on the road every since.”

“No other relatives you could live with?”

“None!” she replied. “I’m all alone now.”

“Do you go to church?” he asked.

“If I have a job and a place to stay where I can clean up, I like to go. I’m a Christian if that’s what you are asking.”

“Have you ever worked on a ranch?”

“Not exactly a ranch, but my grandparent’s farm had pigs, goats, a milk cow and some chickens. I took care of them also.”

“What about horses? Have you ever been around horses?”

“My best friend, Carol, who I grew up with, had two. She worked as a waitress, but she was struggling to make a living. My grandparents let her come live with us and I helped her with them. We use to ride together.”

“Did you help groom them and keep their stalls clean?”

“We didn’t really have a barn with stalls for them. It was more like an open shed.”

“But you still helped take care of them, right?”

“You’re asking a lot of questions. Is this like a job interview, or something?”

“Tell me more about yourself if you don’t mind,” Jeff said, smiling.

“Well, I left school in the tenth grade when my grandparents died. They left me the farm, but it wasn’t worth any money, so I just gave it to Carol. My grandparents left me a few hundred dollars, but I had no other income. I decided to go find a better life. I promised Carol I’d stay in touch.”

“Have you ever been pregnant?”

Again, Brandy was appalled, and laughed at his line of questioning.

"I told you, I'm a Christian, so I'm waiting until I get married."

"I live twenty miles up the road on a large ranch," said Jeff. "By large, I mean only by property size. We've only got three horses now and a small herd of Black Angus Cattle. Of course there's a milk cow, a rooster, and some laying hens too."

"No little piggy's?" giggled Brandy.

"Nope, no little piggy's," blushed Jeff, "we buy our bacon."

"Are you married?" she asked, "because I don't see a ring on your finger."

"No, I live on the ranch with my mother. My Dad passed away several years ago and he left everything to her, which will all go to me when she dies. I got discharged a year ago from the Army and this is where I've been since. I have big plans for the ranch when it all reverts over to me. My mom is holding up my plans for now, but I'm trying to convince her to go ahead and let me take over. She's getting pretty feeble in her old age and is quite stubborn about it. I mostly just wind up helping her with all the household chores and cooking for now."

"What are your plans?" she asked.

"Raising a lot more Black Angus," he said.

"That sounds interesting," Brandy remarked. "I guess I would like doing something like that too if I had the chance."

"Would you like to see the ranch?"

"Sure!" Brandy said. "I'd love to see it."

"You'll get to meet my mother as well, but I'm sure you'll like her."

"So, are you offering me a job?" she asked.

Jeff had fallen in love with her from the very first moment he saw her. He couldn't just let her get away.

"Maybe," he responded. "I'll talk to mom."

"Well, before you do that, I'd like to know what the benefits would be and how much the job would pay."

"If you are willing to help me out with everything, I'll ask her to pay you fifteen dollars an hour for each eight hour day you work."

"How would I get back and forth to work?"

"I'm sure she'll let you stay at the ranch."

"Would I have my own private room and bathroom facilities?" she asked.

"Of course," Jeff said. "And we could share everything else."

"Do you think your mom will go along with all of this?"

"I'm pretty good at convincing her on most things."

"Did I just die and go to Heaven?" she asked, smiling.

"One more thing," said Jeff. "I'm a young, healthy man, and I'm looking for a good woman to take care of my physical needs."

She looked over at him with a questionable look.

"You're not starting to go weird on me are you?"

"What do you mean by weird?" Jeff smiled.

"Surely you don't mean you'd expect me to sleep with you when those needs come up, do you?"

"No," laughed Jeff. "That's not what I meant at all. I only meant that I'd be interested in getting married to the right woman."

“Hey, well I’m looking for a good man too,” smiled Brandy, relieved to hear his answer, “But, surely that would depend on how things turn out between us over a period of time.”

“Do you at least find me attractive?” Jeff asked.

“Yes!” she giggled. “You are very attractive. But, you’re kind of weird at the same time.”

“I find you quite attractive as well,” he smiled. “It’s just that I find you very, very attractive and I don’t want to let you slip away from me.”

“So, are you planning on kidnapping me?”

Again, Jeff burst into laughter. “No!” he assured her. “I just mean I plan on doing everything I can to keep you around.”

“Why?”

“Because you seem like you are the one for me.”

“Will there be any type of courtship or anything for us?” she asked, giggling, “Or do you just plan on setting a date for our wedding?”

“This is where we turn into the ranch,” Jeff said smiling. “I think today is my lucky day.”

“Well, as fate would have it, a trucker stopped to give me a lift earlier, but he had whiskey on his breath and a wink in his eye, so I told him to forget it, I’d walk, and then I stepped out into the forest to water the bushes. Then when I stepped back out, you came along and gave me a ride.”

“God is good!” Jeff replied, grinning.

“This might be my lucky day too!” she said.

“With God’s blessing, it could be lucky for both of us,” Jeff responded.

Slowly, they drove up the driveway towards the ranch house. Brandy was in awe at the beauty of the ranch. As they drove past the corral, two beautiful thoroughbreds ran out to meet them.

“That’s Pablo and Celia,” Jeff said. “They both need a good run.”

“Where’s the other one?”

“She’s in the barn. She’s an old gray mare named Maude May. She belongs to my mom, but she hardly ever rides her anymore since dad died.”

“That’s sad.”

“Want to go riding in the morning?”

“I can’t wait!” answered Brandy, excited, “They’re beautiful.”

As they got closer to the ranch house, they saw Jeff’s mom sitting out on the deck sipping a cold glass of dark tea.

“Come on, I’ll introduce you,” he whispered, as they exited the truck.

“Hello young lady,” Jeff’s mom said, as she reached out to shake her hand. “My name is Maude.”

“This is Brandy,” said Jeff. “I’ve been interviewing her for a job here.”

“I think I should be the one to do that,” replied Maude.

“Of course mom, that’s why she is here.”

“Would you like coffee or tea while we talk?” asked Maude.

“I’m fine for now,” said Brandy. “I’d like to tell you about myself and my qualifications.”

“Please do,” said Maude.

Brandy began her story, making sure to smile as often as possible and soon she felt that she had secured the job.

“What type wages do you expect?” asked Maude.

“I’ll work for fifteen dollars an hour,” she answered.

“That sounds fair enough,” replied Maude. “What time would you like to start work in the mornings?”

“That’s a problem,” said Brandy. “I have no place to stay or any transportation.”

“You seem like an honest person,” said Maude. “I guess I could provide you room and board also, but only if you’d agree to help with the cooking too.”

“I understand from Jeff that he does a lot of the cooking now,” Brandy replied.

“Jeff’s specialty is parched, crispy eggs, and burnt toast,” Maude giggled. “He’ll never get the hang of cooking.”

“I’m a good cook,” replied Brandy. “I think you’ll like my cooking.”

“We’ll need to go riding early mornings,” said Jeff. “Then we can get all the other work done after that.”

“I’ll be able to keep up,” replied Brandy.

“Jeff’s dad and I use to ride every morning. We really enjoyed it.”

“You named your horse after yourself?” Brandy asked.

“Yes,” she answered. “She’s such a good horse too.”

“Maybe you can ride with us then,” Brandy said.

“Maybe one day I will.”

“We’ll have so much fun here,” said Brandy, excited.

“Well I guess you’re hired then,” said Maude.

“Oh thank you so much,” said Brandy. “I promise to work hard and make you both happy.”

“I’m already happy,” said Jeff. “I’ll be happy just having you here to look at!”

“Patience is a virtue you’ll need to learn Jeff,” Brandy said, laughing. “However, I appreciate the compliment.”

“By golly, you’re going to work out just fine here,” laughed Maude. “Could you help out with the laundry too?” she asked, “we’re way behind in that area.”

“I can do that,” smiled Brandy.

“I love your smile,” said Maude. “You are so cheerful.”

Within a few hours, she had all the laundry caught up and hung properly in its place. She even had all the socks and underwear folded and put away. Maude was quite impressed.

Then she went to the kitchen and started a meal for them to eat later.

“Do you like sun tea?” she asked Maude.

“I haven’t had that in years,” she stated. “That sounds wonderful.”

The next couple of months went smoothly. Maude had grown to appreciate all the extra things that Brandy generously did for her. She especially loved the foot rubs, nail grooming, and hair styling that came as a pleasant surprise. More than once, Maude had commented to Jeff that if he didn’t marry her that she would.

Jeff was quite pleased as well and really enjoyed their horseback rides every morning.

He had reminded his mom several times that first day that they would be riding first thing every morning.

“I think that’s a wonderful idea,” she said. “Why not take her up in the hills through the forest. There are lots of nice places to ride up there.”

Early the next morning, they saddled up and headed for a trail that led uphill. Brandy was excited and wanted to race the horses. Jeff allowed her to ride ahead on the new trail which led them up to a peak where a nice grassy meadow lay below a cliff. There was a running spring deep enough that they could dip their feet into and cool off. As they sat there, they noticed a mama bear and her two cubs enter the water about a quarter mile downstream.

“Oh look!” Brandy said, excited. “Let’s ride down and get a closer look. Maybe we could follow them and see where they go.”

“It’s best we don’t do that,” said Jeff. “Next time we’ll bring binoculars with us.”

“Are you scared?” she asked, giggling.

“Just cautious!” he replied.

“This is wonderful,” said Brandy. “We have our own private hideaway.”

Jeff slid his arm around her and kissed her on the lips. She responded by parting her lips and kissing him back, at first by the stream, and then Jeff spread a blanket down on the grass and they lay down and kissed even more.

“May I make love to you now?” he asked.

“We’re not married,” she responded.

“But don’t you feel the closeness that’s developing between us?” he asked.

“This is sort of like courting,” she stated. “This is where we can start to get to really know each other.”

“I know enough about you already,” said Jeff.

“No, you have to wait and court me properly. You have to prove to me that you’re my man and will stick by me.”

“What can I do?” he asked.

“You haven’t even begun to fight,” giggled Brandy. “Don’t you think I’m worth the effort?”

“I’ll wait as long as it takes,” he said.

“Promise?”

“Yes!”

“Then kiss me again like you did before. Make me feel all tingly inside.”

After a few hours, they reluctantly got up to leave.

“This will be our special place,” she said. “We must come here often.”

“You just want to race the horses and beat me,” he laughed. “That’s all you’ll want to do!”

“How’d you guess?” she answered. “Want to race home?”

“Better give the horses a break,” he said. “Besides, we want them to recognize this trail as the place where they run fast to get here.”

“Maybe next time we can pack a lunch and stay longer,” she suggested.

“I’d like that,” he agreed.

During the next several months, Jeff took her out for romantic candlelight dinners and moonlight walks around the lake in the downtown area. Their feelings toward each other began to grow stronger and soon they fell deeply in love. Shortly after, they were married.

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Early the next morning, Jeff saddled up Pablo and Maude May and got everything ready for a ride up the trail that led to the gravesite.

He helped his mom climb aboard her horse and they slowly made their way up the hill.

When they got there, Jeff planted the wooden cross he had made the night before. Attached to it was another small wooden plaque on which was carved, "Brandy, Beloved wife and Daughter." Then he carefully placed a dozen roses he had picked up from town.

They stood there for awhile as Maude prayed in a low whisper, and Jeff just watched with tears in his eyes.

Before leaving, they decided to water their horses and rode down to the nearby stream. As the horses were drinking, Jeff looked downstream at a movement he saw coming from where the mama bear and cubs had been seen before.

"L...Look!" he stuttered, pointing in that direction.

Standing in the middle of the stream stood Celia with Brandy on her back. She raised her hand and waved at them.

"My God... It's her!" stammered Jeff. "How can that be?"

"I s...see her too!" stuttered his mom, raising her hand to wave back.

Moments later, Brandy spurred Celia and they dashed away.

"Did we really see her?" Jeff asked, trembling.

Maude put her hands together and began to pray aloud. Jeff put his hands together too and listened, as his trembling continued.

They remained there for a long time staring back and forth at each other and then back towards where they had seen her last. Then they rode silently home.

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Several days passed without them discussing what they had seen.

"I have to go back up there," Jeff finally muttered at the supper table one night. "Do you want to go with me?" he asked.

"It's best you go alone," his mom answered. "We were just seeing things," she said. "But, I don't think I could do it again."

"I'll leave early in the morning,"

"I'll pack you a lunch," she said. "I'll pray about it while you're gone."

Jeff rose at five o'clock the next morning and headed out. Halfway there, he heard Brandy's voice calling him.

"Come on Jeff, I'll race you!"

He glanced ahead and saw her racing uphill on Celia. He pulled Pablo up and sat trembling for several minutes. He started to turn back, afraid, but then decided he needed to go on. He slowly rode the rest of the way. As he approached the two pine trees, he glanced down over the cliff at the gravesite below. Everything was as they had left it days before. Then he slowly rode down and dismounted. He sat quietly beside the grave and started whispering things that popped into his head. None of it made any sense, but he felt the need to talk. He later walked down to the nearby stream, looking in both directions. Nothing out of the ordinary was there. He felt emptiness about him and decided to leave. As he climbed back up the pathway and went between the two pine trees, he heard her voice again.

"Come back soon," she said. "I'll miss you!"

He stopped and looked over the cliff below to see where the sound had come from. There was nothing there. He called out her name, but there was no answer. Then he continued home.

“Well?” his mom asked, as they later sat out on their deck. “Did anything unusual happen today?”

He cautiously explained what had happened so as not to frighten her.

“Did you ever experience anything like that after dad died?” he asked.

“There were moments that similar things happened, but I wrote it off as having day dreams. It was nothing like this however.”

“It’s hard to say you don’t believe in ghosts when you’re seeing and hearing them,” he said. “I’m getting more use to it now though. I’d love to hold her in my arms again.”

“I’m riding back up again tomorrow.”

“You should take her some more roses.”

“I’ll do that,” he agreed. “Want to run into town with me?”

“I’ll stay here and rest,” she answered. “That really drained a lot out of me the other day. Besides, I have lots of chores to do again.”

“I’ll try to be more help to you mom.”

“When you feel up to it son, I can use your help.”

The next morning, Jeff left early and rode up again. He laid the new roses on the grave and knelt down at the foot to talk to her.

“Thank you for the beautiful roses,” he heard her say.

“Where are you?” he asked.

“I’m standing right beside you,” she answered.

Jeff reached out and felt for her, but could not feel anything.

“You just swiped your hand through my legs,” she laughed.

“Are you a ghost?” he asked.

“Not really,” she answered. “I’m just still here for a short while,” she said.

“Are you okay?” he asked. “You and Celia both looked as though nothing even happened.”

“We’ve been restored to new again, but we’re waiting on our place.”

“What place?” he asked.

“It’s hard to describe, Jeff, but hopefully, you’ll get to come there someday also.”

“Can I at least see you and hold you?” he asked. “I want to hold you in my arms and kiss you again.”

“You have to forget me now,” she said. “Please don’t come to see me again because I probably won’t be here.”

“I love you and miss you so much,” he said. “I don’t want to live without you.”

“You have to move on, Jeff. Go find another love and continue living your life.”

“I only want you,” he said. “You’re my true love.”

“That’s sweet, but it’s not possible anymore. Do you want me to find someone for you?” she asked, giggling.

“Will I ever see you again?”

“For now, you’ll just dream about me, but I won’t be here much longer. I’m going to a special place above.”

“I want to go too,” he said.

“One day soon,” she promised, “we’ll be together again.”

“I love you so much,” he said.

“Goodbye Jeff, I’m being called right now. I’ll always love you and I’ll be waiting for you.”

Then she was gone. He watched as her nearly transparent form lifted off the ground and faded away in an upward direction.

“Goodbye my love,” he whispered. “I’ll always love you too.”

Jeff rose slowly and looked around at their special place for the last time. How beautiful and wonderful it had been for them. While it would always remain in his heart and mind, he knew he would never come back again.

He rode home and discussed what had happened with his mom.

“Praise the Lord!” Maude said. “I believe she’s with Him!”

“God is good!” Jeff whispered. “I’ll start preparing myself today for when He calls me too.”

“I’ve already prepared myself for when He calls for me,” Maude said.

“Please don’t you leave me too,” he begged. “I can’t run this place all by myself. Besides, I’d miss you too much.”

“I’m signing the ranch over to you next week,” she replied. “You’ll be in full control then.”

Moments later, a truck turned into their driveway pulling a horse trailer. It continued until it reached the parking area below.

“Who could that be?” asked Jeff, as he went down to see.

“Are you Jeff,” a beautiful, young girl about twenty stepped out and asked. “I’m Carol, Brandy’s friend from Arkansas. I had a strange feeling that she needed me, so I decided to surprise her. Is she around?”

Jeff started to answer, but was interrupted by his mom.

“Won’t you join us for tea?” Maude yelled from above.

“That’s my mom,” he said

“May I unload my horses first?” Carol asked. “They’ve been inside the trailer a long time and they need to stretch their legs.”

“Of course,” said Jeff, “Let’s take them down to the corral.”

Maude watched as they walked down and put her horses in the corral. Then suddenly Carol began crying. Jeff consoled her as they walked back up to the deck.

Maude reached out and put her arms around her.

“I’d like you to stay here,” she said.

“Thanks, but I’ll need to go look for work somewhere,” Carol cried, sadly.

“Brandy told me all about you,” said Maude. “You can work for us.”

“I would really like that!” sniffed Carol. “You have a nice ranch here.”

From somewhere high above, Brandy looked down and smiled, as she knew everything would soon be okay for the loved ones she had left behind.

“Want to race?” Brandy turned and asked her new friend.

“My child, my burro is very, very old, but still, he is also very, very fast,” and away they sped off, gracefully gliding through the Heavens, leaving sounds of childish laughter behind.

The End