

Happy Ending

One look into her mother's eyes, and Kim Fuhrmann could feel the tears edging in her own. I must look even worse than I feel, 37-year-old Kim sighed as Dolores Davis took a seat on the edge of her daughter's bed.

"Hi, sweetheart, how are you feeling?" Dolores managed, though a shiver ran down her spine as she gazed at her once-vibrant daughter, now so gaunt her bones jutted out.

"Oh, Mom, why can't the doctors figure out what's wrong?" the Indian Trail, North Carolina, woman cried.

Oh, honey, Dolores sighed, I would heal you myself if only I had a clue!

When a mysterious ailment left Kim Fuhrmann bedridden, wasting away and facing death, her loving husband begged her to hang on, praying baffled doctors would find an answer. But it was Kim's mother who solved the riddle—with a clue from a crossword puzzle!

Cured—by a crossword puzzle!

Little did she know, she would soon find one, in a most surprising place . . .

Kim was only 14 when her joints swelled painfully—and nothing the doctors tried seemed to help.

"We just don't know why . . ." they said. It was the same refrain Kim and her mom would hear as she struggled with painful menstrual periods lasting months; as

Why can't anyone help her? Dolores anguished

she developed a thyroid condition in her 20s.

To Kim, life began to feel like nothing more than a series of doctors' appointments. Then Gary, a police officer, swept her off her feet.

Longing to relieve Kim's aches, Gary suggested they move from Cleveland to Florida. "Maybe the warm weather will be good for you," he said.

"But your job's here—and the boys!" Kim protested. She adored being a "step-monster," as Gary's three sons from a previous marriage laughingly called her.

"I'll find work, and the boys'll love the beach," Gary insisted.

The day they moved, Dolores sniffled, "We'll talk every day."

"That's a promise," Kim nodded through her own tears.

So each morning, after Dolores settled down with the newspaper cross-

word puzzle, she'd call her daughter. But instead of things getting better; by 30, Kim required a hysterectomy to stop severe bleeding.

"Now we'll never have a baby of our own!" Kim cried to Gary.

"We have each other," he soothed.

Later, when Gary was offered a job that required a move to Indian Trail, Kim enthused, "The mountain air might do us good!" And for a while, it seemed so. Kim landed a receptionist job and felt strong enough to go on nature hikes.

Then one morning, Gary noticed a cluster of brown blotches spreading across Kim's face.

Kim's dermatologist diagnosed vitiligo, a common skin condition. But as time passed, the spots increased. Even more frightening, Kim's weight began dropping.

When the needle of the scale sprang up to just 104, Kim's breath caught. At 5'8", her ribs poked through her skin. Worse yet, her arms and legs constantly burned.

"I'm wasting away!" Kim cried to doctor after doctor. "What's happening?"

But no one seemed to know. In weeks to come, Kim endured blood tests, MRIs, brain scans. But tests for everything from epilepsy to multiple sclerosis came back negative. Already too frail to work, Kim soon became too weak to even brush her hair, so weary she needed a wheelchair.

Gary took time off to care for Kim. Yet as tender as he was, Kim felt



"My mom's love of crossword puzzles is the reason I'm alive today," says Kim, right.

below seemed to jump off the page: Addison's disease—a hormone deficiency characterized by weight loss, fatigue and darkening of the skin . . .

Those are Kim's symptoms! Dolores realized. Trembling, she dialed her daughter and cried, "I know what's wrong with you!"

Dolores caught the first plane and marched Kim into her doctor's office. "My daughter has Addison's disease!" she announced.

"You may be right," he agreed, sending Kim to an endocrinologist, who treated her with steroids while they awaited blood work results.

The doctor explained that Addison's disease occurs when the adrenal glands located behind the kidneys don't produce enough required hormones. It's extremely hard to diagnose because the symptoms often mirror other ailments.

And as if by a miracle, Kim awoke two mornings later feeling better than she had in ages! Then the endocrinologist called with her results.

"It is Addison's," he marveled. "If your mom hadn't found that cross-

Tears sprang to Kim's eyes. "You saved my life!"

word answer, you might not have made it more than a month or two." Tears sprang to Kim's eyes. "You saved my life, Mom!" Kim wept.

Today, with daily steroids, Kim is expected to live a normal life. And she's cherishing every minute, strolling hand-in-hand with Gary and being "step-monster" to the boys.

And these days, Kim knows a few puzzle solutions of her own: *affection*, *devotion*—each a word for love.

Not that Dolores needs any help. "After all," Kim beams, "it was love that kept me going. But it was the queen of crosswords who solved the puzzle. Thanks, Mom!"

—Elizabeth Holzemer

worse. "There doesn't seem to be any hope," she cried.

"There's always hope where there's love," Gary insisted. "And nobody's loved more than you."

Soon, though, Gary had to return to his job or he'd lose it—and the benefits for Kim's care. So Dolores and her husband, Jim, began shuttling back and forth from Ohio to North Carolina to help.

Now, as Kim dozed fitfully, Dolores' eyes brimmed with tears. Why can't anyone help her? she anguished.

But soon after, Dolores had to fly home. It didn't seem right, but even as her daughter's world was falling apart, life went on; there were bills that needed tending to. Yet she couldn't stop fretting. Is Kim okay?

So to take her mind off things, Dolores picked up the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, flipping to the crossword puzzle. *Addison's partner*, she read, stumped.

Turning to her puzzle dictionary, she scrolled to "Addison's partner." *Richard Steele*, she read.

Steele fit! But suddenly, the entry

What working crosswords can do for you!

Would you believe it can actually keep your brain healthier and reduce your chance of getting Alzheimer's? It's true! says Gary Small, M.D., author of *The Memory Bible*.

Dendrites, the branch-like cells in the brain that pass along messages, operate under the use-it-or-lose-it principle. If they're not forced to work, they weaken or die, studies show. "But doing crosswords is a great way to get a mental workout," Dr. Small says.



Do you have a joyful story to share? Please send the details along with your name, address and phone number to: Happy Ending, *Woman's World*, 270 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632.

If we print your story, we'll pay you \$250. Submissions may be edited for style.