

Synopsis for **As Long As We Both Shall Live** for Heartwarming.

ALEX WAGNER, a funeral director, takes a call from his estranged wife, TAWNY, afraid she's going to cancel his upcoming weekend with their daughter, CALLIE. Instead, he learns Tawny has a brain tumor and is dying. He demands that she come home where he can care for her.

Tawny grew up with a mother who always ran from trouble, and when Tawny's marriage floundered, she ran away, too. Now she has to decide if she'll go back. She quits her job and takes Callie to Alex's home. She'll get Callie settled in, but she won't promise Alex she'll stay.

Alex and Tawny talk to Callie, explaining that her mother will die. Callie is upset, but she decides they should just ask for a miracle. Alex is determined to make Tawny understand how much he loves her before she dies. He walks in on Tawny playing the guitar and singing. She starts to put it away, but he says he likes her singing. She's avoided singing around him since a fight years before about her singing in a bar.

Alex realizes their life together was all about his wants, and he'd never considered that Tawny might want something different. He goes to her and asks her to tell him some things she's always wanted to do, admitting yes, it's a bucket list. With his urging, she comes up with five items.

The first is a drive-in movie, which Alex finds two hours away. They have fun, but Tawny isn't ready to trust him yet. The next day Tawny has a horrific headache and Alex spends the day taking care of Callie and of her, disturbed at seeing her in pain. Alex goes to his friend, a doctor, and shows him Tawny's x-ray. The doctor gives him the name of a brain surgeon and strongly encourages him to seek a second opinion.

Tawny is furious that Alex has gone to a doctor behind her back. She hates doctors and hospitals, and doesn't want to waste her time shopping for second opinions. But he convinces her, for their daughter's sake, she should at least follow up.

For bucket list item two, in spite of Alex's fear of heights, they go skydiving. She loves it. Alex doesn't, but he admires her courage. She finds it ironic that he thinks she's courageous, when she spent their entire marriage afraid of disappointing him and then ran away.

Tawny insists on going to the brain surgeon alone, but at the last minute asks Alex to be with her for the consultation. The surgeon confirms the tumor is inoperable. She suggests that Tawny might be a candidate for an experimental treatment using a genetically engineered polio vaccine in the cancer center in Houston. Tawny is afraid this is just a dead end.

Alex hears her singing sad songs in her room. She has a seizure, which terrifies him. He convinces her to at least see if she is eligible for the trial. After testing, there is some doubt as to whether she's a good fit for the study. Alex says if this doesn't work, they'll find something else. She argues, determined to make her own decisions and not let Alex railroad her.

Alex arranges for bucket list item number three: a sampling of exotic foods Tawny has never tasted. They get word Tawny has been accepted into the study. Upon reading the possible side effects, Alex is ready to back out, but Tawny decides it's worth the risks. Callie is convinced this is the miracle. Tawny and Alex travel to Houston for the treatment. Tawny drifts in and out of consciousness for two weeks. Every time she wakes up, Alex is beside her.

They return home. The tumor isn't shrinking. Tawny is depressed, and Alex tries to cheer her up. They talk about what went wrong in their marriage. She was so grateful to him for marrying her, she buried her own needs and played the part of perfect wife until she couldn't take it anymore. She writes a song about their reunion.

Alex tells her it's time for bucket list item four, to see her favorite singer, Travis Hart, in concert. Travis invites her onstage and has her sing a duet with him. That night, she has another horrid headache, and Alex feels guilty for putting her under too much stress. She assures him it was worth it. She falls asleep in his arms.

Tawny talks with Alex about planning her funeral. He protests, but she insists. She finds the courage to share the song she wrote with him. He cries.

At her next checkup, they find the tumor is shrinking significantly. The treatment is working. They celebrate. Tawny is grateful to Alex for all he's done for her. She continues to heal. Alex says it's time for number five from the bucket list. She says there's no need now, but he insists. Since she can't leave the country, he takes her to Paris, Texas to eat croissants at the bakery. Someday, he'll take her to Paris, France.

Tawny gets an offer to play the lead singer in a Patsy Cline tribute tour. She's excited but turns it down. She's grateful to Alex and she won't leave him again. He finds out, and realizes history is repeating itself. He hints that now that she's well, he wants her to move out. She takes the job.

Alex and Callie miss Tawny. Meanwhile, Tawny is enjoying performing in front of audiences, but it's not as fulfilling as she expected. Once again, she's playing a part. She talks to Travis Hart, confiding that she likes songwriting best. She sings him the song she wrote about Alex.

When Tawny's six-week commitment ends, they want her for another tour, but she declines. She comes home and tells Alex she loves him and wants to be with him and Callie. If she has to choose between music and him, she chooses him. He says she doesn't have to choose, that he'll support her in anything she wants to do. She'll come first.

Tawny gets word from a music publisher that Travis Hart wants to record the reunion song she wrote, and they're eager to look at more of her songs. She and Alex celebrate together.

Editor's Critique:

The author did a good job of including just enough information on what the story will be about, without overwhelming the synopsis with every detail of the plot. We can clearly expect to see varied scenes—sweet “bucket list” dates mixed with heartbreaking hospital visits—that will help to grab the readers' interest. In addition, it seems that these moments will successfully move the story forward, while fulfilling the promise of the hero and heroine's reunion.

As for that reconciliation, I do suggest that the author raise the stakes and the overall conflict by making the hero and heroine not just estranged, but by having a heroine who ran away with their daughter years before. The author did a great job in sustaining the heroine's conflict throughout the story; making sure that the heroine doesn't quickly forgive the hero for always making the

decisions in their marriage. We still see her battling with this, especially when the hero tries to take over her care and she's emphatic about making her own choices. That's great!

This angst should also exist within the hero, but as it stands now we're missing his internal conflict; he's still in love with her, realizes his past mistakes and automatically wants to make everything better. He's just a bit *too* understanding. If on the other hand the heroine left him and took his daughter, and he hasn't heard from her in years, then the first stages of their reconciliation will be charged with resentment and distrust from both sides. And the ultimate forgiveness and reunion will be that much more satisfactory.

Some smaller things to note:

- Suggest the hero not be a funeral director—it's just a bit too morbid and not a very sellable or attractive profession. This is a great opportunity for the author. An ill heroine, a young daughter, a reunion romance—these are great hooks. Why not add one more with the hero's occupation?
- And in line with that, I suggest removing the scene where he's planning her funeral. The plot centers around a scary and heartfelt topic, but the story should still have an uplifting tone. This is just a bit too depressing.
- Involve the daughter in the heroine's "dates." Readers respond well to stories featuring children, so this would be a great selling point. In addition, if as I suggest above, the hero is slow to let go of the bitterness caused by the heroine's abandonment, then it should be the daughter (at least for the first couple of outings), who strategizes to bring them back together.