

SECRETS IN A BOX

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for the degree

Bachelor of Fine Arts

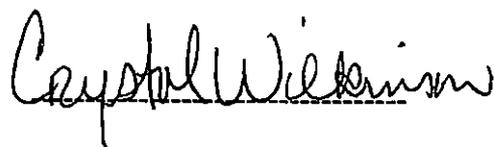
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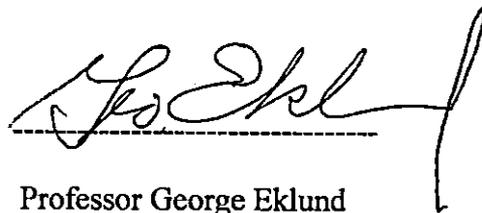
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Accepted by the faculty of the Creative Writing Program, Morehead State University, in
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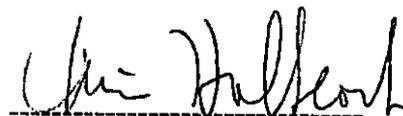


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My thesis is an excerpt from a novella, I have been writing, a fictional story set in the regions of eastern Tennessee and northern North Carolina starting during the depression era and moving forward until present time. The story examines the themes of secrets, betrayal, love, acceptance, social taboos, abuse, economic station, and forgiveness. The characters merge to make a complex story about the strength and fortitude of a lasting love over a several decades of time. I have presented these themes in a different way than what has been done before. I have added twist and circumstances that make these themes my own in regard to how they are presented.

The over all design of this work is to provoke feelings of intrigue, sympathy, concern, anger, and to realize the judgment of another is reserved for a higher power. To perceive that love is a force so great that it can withstand the test of life over and over and only get stronger.

While there are times when the characters seem to be defeated and have resigned themselves to live with out love they are constantly reminded that they can not exist for long without each other.

In the untangling of the secrets that the main character is trying to understand, she is faced with more and more obstacles and questions than she started with. The revelation of one secret only leads to the discovery of another. The whole of which will change her life and the life of those she loves forever.

The story parallels some truths within my own family history. Although I have been careful to not reveal which are true and which are fictional in the telling of this story I have

taken great care to be careful to mix fictional characters and circumstances to weave a completely fictional story. I hope that I have created a story that will capture the attention of the reader from the start and hold their interest to the very last page. To cause the reader to take stock of their own life and deem what is truly important in life.

My goal in writing this story was to create a set of characters that will be remembered long after the story is finished, but also to make it realistic enough that it is believable. To touch a hidden part of a person's heart that makes them long for the essences of the love shared by the star crossed lovers. To reach for the kind of love that many only have dream of and few have actually shared.

I hope to be able to create characters that will match those of Emily Bronte', Jane Austin, Margaret Mitchell, Shakespeare, and Charlotte Bronte'. A set of characters to rival Heathcliff and Katherine , Mr. Darcy and Miss Bennett, Rhett and Scarlett, Romeo and Juliet, Mr. Rockchester and Jane Eyre. A love story that will last through the ages of time after it has been experienced by the reader.

All of these writers have made an impact on me and how I view what makes a love shared by two people so strong and what keeps pulling the two people together.

In Secrets in a Box I hope that I have redefined the same kind of characters that I have always admired. The tension in this piece has been steady and keeps the reader pushing forward to find out what happens next and I hope also wanting more. It is a piece that I started on as a lark doing a class room apparatus on doing dialogue and snowballed into the story presented in my thesis. It has been a story that I have not had to work hard on. The

inspiration has always been there each time I have sat down to work on it. The need to tell this story is important to me in a weird kind of way. The characters are alive in my head and they need their story told. They need for someone to understand that although in the end their love for each other was a forbidden thing, it did not start that way and it only grew over the years and decades of their lives. The characters in this novel did not intend for anyone to be hurt by their love for each other or to suffer because of it.

My third grade teacher read *Idylls of the King* to us and I have had a life long love for all stories about King Arthur, Gwenevere and Lancelot. These characters have inspired me in ways that are not easy to describe. Arthur's ability to forgive Gwenevere and Lancelot and still love them after they both betrayed him, was always something that I have admired. It was a quality of human nature that is rarely seen.

Then I read *Gone with the Wind* when I was in the eighth grade of school and I fell in love with this story and those characters. The foolish escapades of Scarlett and Rhett's willingness to overlook her ways up to Miss Melanie's death have always filled me with romantic notions of what a true love relationship was suppose to be about. Ashley's inability to be a man that did not chase after the past and his unwillingness to betray Melanie is commendable, they showed he had great loyalty to what he held sacred, but his toying around in his pursuit of his forbidden lust for Scarlet are a contradiction to his masculine ego. This is exactly what made this character so remembered. I have engaged in a love affair ever since with characters that made me feel what I believed the star crossed lovers felt. These characters have made me want to write a story that could match some great literary work.

They also made me long that I had lived in a different time than the one in which I was born. A time in life when things were simpler than the one in which I live.

I always loved listening to my Grandmother tell me stories of her childhood and her life during the early part of the 20th century and wish that I had lived back then. Her stories inspired me to be a writer so I could capture her stories and her life on paper and save our family history for future generations.

I have been influenced by Victoria Holt, Verna Mae Sloan, James Still and Gurney Norman as well. I was influenced by Victoria Holt and her ability to capture my attention with the historical details she wrote in her stories, yet at the same time I was also fascinated by the mystery aspect of many of her stories and how she was able to keep the tension in her stories high.

When I started wanting to write about the life style of the Appalachian region I read everything by Vera Mae Sloan I could find. Her easy armchair story telling manner was easy to follow and you felt like you were sitting on the porch next to her and she was simply telling you about her life and all the things her family went through and what made their way of life special and desirable. Her writing helped me to be able to start experimenting with that style of writing and explore the possibility of mastering that genre.

James Still showed me that you could write about a certain region to such an extent that the reader of his works felt they were living right next door to him in Eastern Kentucky. Reading the works of Gurney Norman twice during my years at MSU only served to reinforce my desire to write Appalachian stories. Many stories of this genre deal with hardships, but

they also deal with life with all its ups and downs and human frailties' and strengths. The simple ways of life that are a part of my early childhood and that I find myself drawn back to over and over again. A time when people had time for each other and were not wrapped up in the technology that consumes the younger generations now. When women had a more domesticated view of things and the things that I was raised to believe were a woman's natural job and place in the home to take care of.

I believe that all members of a house hold should carry their own weight, but there was a time when the house was totally a woman's domain, in concept at least, but we all know that children have always helped with those chores and that now it is just as normal for a man to participate in household chores as women, which in the society we live in now makes it possible for women and men to share the load of raising children and keeping a house going, especially if both work outside the home. But the stories of Sloan, Still, and Norman show a lifestyle that offered just as many blessings as it did problems. They showed the strength of character that so many people lack now and that hardships should make a family unit stronger and these are influences that I hope I will always be able to put into my work as a writer.

The final author that I believe has had an influence on me is Amy Green and her novel *Bloodroot*. Amy Green wrote this family saga in multiple POV and this has challenged me to try to do the same thing in several stories that I have written during the last two semesters. I am sure there have been many more that have influenced me in one way or another, but none as much as those mentioned previously.

My goal in my writing career is to write and create something that is memorable. Be able to write something that will touch the very core of someone and causes them to think about their own life in some way. Through my writing I hope to be able to express the life experiences that have changed me as a person forever. At the age of 57, I have been down many roads that many people do not face until they are much older, if ever and each of these experiences changed me and left a lasting impression on me and how I view life, love and death. They have also left me filled with great sorrow at times and the overwhelming need to love in a greater way once more in my life.

I know that as a human being with a mind, I have to constantly be learning something new and diversify myself even more. I need to continue to grow until I can no longer find the energy to do so. To always embrace life and knowledge and seek out new experiences that will make me a better person in some way and perhaps along the way help someone else. To continue to reach for new goals that will enable me to be a better person. To be able to use the written word to touch the heart of one person would be reward enough for all I have experienced and what I have learned.

Being published is one of two goals I have. The other is I hope to be able to reach a new goal of teaching others how to use the written word to express themselves and to pursue my MFA are the next things on my agenda.

SECRETS IN A BOX

BY CHARLOTTE JOANN CAIN

Annie sat in the chaise lounge on her parents deck hoping that she could control her emotions long enough to say good-bye to her parents. The scene in the dining room was just about more than she could bear and it had been going on for as long as she could remember, with never knowing the why. Annie had been discussing her wedding plans with her parents and how she wanted both of her grandmother's there, when her parents gave each other this look that she could not read and started telling her she would have to choose which one she wanted there the most, because they would not both come. What had happened that would not allow these two women to be in the same room at the same time. Annie had always thought it strange, but could never get a straight answer from any one when she asked that question a million times while she was growing up. Annie finally rose and entered the house to tell her parents she was leaving and would see them in Knoxville in a few months.

"Where did the box come from?" Bill asked. He picked the box up and shook it, but no sounds were made. "What's in it anyways?"

"None of your business", Annie said. "Why do you want to know anyways?" Annie grabbed the box from Bill's hands and clinched it tightly against her chest.

"I was just curious. You've been acting really strange lately" as he released the box into her hands. Annie gave him an angry look and shrugged her shoulder.

“I’m sorry. The box is from my mother, but I have not wanted to open it. My mother called me and told me she was sending it to me and that all my questions about things would be answered and told me it held *secrets* from a long time ago.” Bill looked at Annie a bit strangely.

“Why haven’t you opened it?”

“I guess I’m afraid of what is in it”, she said. Bill placed his hand on her shoulder and told her,

“Perhaps it’s time to find courage and open the damn thing”. Annie looked up into his face and smiled.

“Perhaps it is time.”

Annie picked the box up from the table where she had laid it and tore off the brown paper wrappings. She gently lifted the flaps of the box and peered inside. Inside the box were several bundles of letters, all tied together with different colors of ribbons, packed tightly in the box, wedged tightly from side to side like a can of sardines. It was no wonder it made no noise when you shook it. It couldn’t, there was no room left in the box to allow any movement. It was like someone had packed them in here for safe keeping and didn’t want anything to happen to them. Annie looked at Bill, “I really don’t feel right, reading someone else’s letters.” she told him.

“Well I think it will be alright or your mother wouldn’t have sent them to you.” She gently dislodged the first bundle of letters. They were tied together with a pale blue ribbon. Annie pulled the first letter out of the bundle. It was addressed to her grandmother Pearl Fox. That in it’s self was not strange, but it was from her

grandfather Joseph Roberts. This letter was from her mother's father to her father's mother. Why would they be writing to each other? She was under the impression they didn't even know each other until her parents married. Her grandfather Robert's had died when she was a very young child, some kind of terrible accident that no one wanted to talk about.

Annie explained all of this to Bill as she debated with herself if she should read the letters or not. Bill said, "I know it doesn't seem right for you, but you need to read them. If this is going to answer all your questions about your two grandmothers' refusal to be in the same room at the same time, then you need to do this."

Bill sat down on the couch and Annie sat next to him with the box in her lap. Annie pulled the first letter out of the envelope and gently unfolded it. It was dated September 1, 1939. It began:

My darling Pearl,

I have been so anxious about writing to you, but I could not let you think that I had forgotten you.

Annie knew her face must be showing the shock that she was feeling for Bill gently reached out his hand and touched her on the arm. "What ever the letter says, just remember your mother felt you needed to know what secrets they hold," With her hands trembling ever so slightly she nodded her head and continued reading.

Pearl, I still can see your sweet face, when I came to tell you good-bye. The sun touching your hair of gold and the red that tried to peek through. Your cheeks so pink against the alabaster skin of your face. I can't forget the way your blue eyes filled

with tears as you tried to smile and wish me a happy journey. Pearl, I am miserable without you. I don't know why my grandfather insisted that I make this trip or why I agreed to it. This is a lonely place. Everywhere I go here in Europe there is talk of Hitler's Nazi's. The fear is evident. I know my grandfather wanted me to see his homeland, but it would have been more tolerable had I been allowed a traveling companion, but he insisted that I must take this journey alone. He said it is so I will understand better how he felt when he was fleeing his homeland to come to America when he was a young boy.

I long to come home soon so that I can see you and hear your sweet voice in laughter. My journey is to take me to Ireland, Spain, Austria, and England. Austria is where my grandfather was born, but my grandmother is from Ireland so he said I might as well see her homeland as well. I leave England in a few days for Ireland. Please write to me at the address I have enclosed.

Sincerely,

Joseph

This was all so strange. Annie folded the letter and returned it to the aged envelope from which she had taken it. Bill asked, "What was in it"?

Annie replied, "Not much really, it's just that I had not realized that the two of them had known each other before my parents married." Annie could not tell Bill that it appeared to be some kind of love letter between them. She wanted to tell Bill this, but she was a bit stunned at the moment. She gently pulled the next letter from the

ribbon and opened it. It was in the same hand writing, written a few months after the first.

November 12, 1939

Dearest Pearl,

I have waited patiently to hear from you. I do not understand why you have not written to me. Have I misjudged how we felt about each other? Was not our hearts filled with the same sweet joy? I beech you to please write, for I long to know you are well and nothing is wrong.

Sincerely,

Joseph

Annie neatly folded the letter and returned it to its place. Bill could see that she was getting a bit upset over what ever she was reading. Annie pulled the next letter out. Finally this letter was from Pearl to Joseph. Annie's hand trembled more as she unfolded the letter and began to read;

December 15, 1939

My dearest Joseph,

I know I should have written to you sooner, but I did not know the words to tell you what has happened. It seems a lifetime ago that you were here with me. I often lay in my bed at night trying to remember every word we ever spoke to each other, every time we laughed, every gentle moment we shared. Your face is forever etched in my mind and in my heart.

Joseph for under my heart now lays the evidence of our love for each other. In April our child will be born. My father has sent me to stay with his sister Lilly in Kingston. For here I can live the lie they have told everyone, without anyone being the wiser. I must pretend that I was married for just a short time and that my husband was killed in a terrible farming accident. Joseph I am so miserable without you. Please return and rescue me from this prison.

Your true love always,

Pearl

Annie wanted to cry for her beloved grandmother. How horrible things must have been for her. Annie replaced the letter and took out the next one. It was written in January 1940. The postmark was from Austria. Her grandfather had made it to Europe now. From what she remembered of her school history classes this would have been when Austria had just been occupied by Hitler's army. World War Two was just breaking out. Her grandfather was Jewish. It would not have been safe for him to have been there.

January 31, 1940

My Dearest Sweetheart Pearl,

I will return to you and our unborn child as soon as it is humanly possible to do so. When I arrived in Austria things here were not good for an American and certainly not for a Jewish American. I have been detained for the time being. The police have taken my passport. Something about needing to make sure I am not a spy or something. They assure me they will return it to me in a matter of a few days, but I

fear they won't. Please know that I am doing everything I can to return to you and that I love you and our unborn child with all my heart. Pray for my safe return to you.

Forever yours,

Joseph

“Oh no!” Annie said the words out loud.

Bill at once asked her “What’s wrong?” Annie ignored his words. She grabbed the next letter out of the ribbons without even putting the last letter away.

February 12, 1940

My darling Pearl,

The police have released my passport to me and I will be traveling to Stockholm tomorrow. I should be home in a few weeks. I will go from Sweden to Spain and then home. By the time you receive this letter I should be on the last leg of my journey home to you and our child.

Stay faithful in my love for you. I will not fail you.

With my whole heart,

Joseph

Again Bill asked, “What is wrong your face is white as a sheet?”

Annie replied, “Things are complicated, but it seems my grandfather was being held by the Nazi’s in Austria and he and my grandmother were in love with each other”. She did not want to reveal any more then that to Bill at the time. After all these were her family’s secrets. She knew she would eventually share them all with

Bill, but right now she needed to digest them for herself. She returned the two letters to their rightful place. Bill urged Annie to tell him what was wrong, but she insisted that it was nothing really. She took out the next envelope it wasn't a letter, but a telegram. Annie removed it from the envelope.

March 15, 1940 Dearest Pearl, stop, I am boarding the ship in one hour. Stop. I have also telegraphed my father...stop....I will be boarding a train as soon as I reach New York...stop....I have requested my fathers help to get to you....stop. I will be there soon....stop...Love Joseph. Stop

Annie returned it to the envelope and then told Bill most of what she had read up to this point for she couldn't keep secrets from the man she was planning on marrying. Bill told her to go ahead and read the next letter, it was from Pearl to Joseph. As she opened it she saw that it was dated in the summer.

June 10, 1940

My Dear Joseph,

Why didn't you come back to me like you promised? My father has arranged for me to marry in two weeks. I am to marry a man by the name of Jeffery Fox. He is a mill owner and operator over in Morristown. He and his family are considered to be well to do. Jeffery is in his 40's and has never been married. My father has known him for a long time and they have come to an agreement of a dowry being paid. I do not know where the money came from that my father paid to Mr. Fox for my father's business has not been doing so well lately. Mr. Fox has agreed to marry me and to

adopt our child as his own. Since you have failed to return to me, I don't see what else I am to do. I have heard nothing from you since you sent the telegraph.

Our daughter was born on April 2, 1940 and she is beautiful. She has my fair blond hair and blue eyes, but her face constantly reminds me of you. She has your nose and mouth, and when she is cross I can see you so plainly in her. For the most part she has a wonderful happy disposition. I have named her Josephine Anna and her last name will now be Fox. I hope that someday our paths will cross again. I do not understand why you failed me and our child, but I do know I will always love you. Forever in my heart,

Pearl

As Annie folded this letter and returned it to the worn and faded envelope she kept thinking about her beloved Aunt Jo. Aunt Jo was the child that the letters were speaking about.. Dear sweet loving Aunt Jo, who was a strong willed and independent woman. She always spoke her mind, no matter what. If Aunt Jo happened to hurt your feelings, she did not seem to care. She had never married, but it was rumored that she had been engaged once and had turned down several other offers over the years. Perhaps the reasons for never marrying would also be in the letters. After all she had just been going through the first bundle and there were several more.

How many secrets were buried in this box? What other secrets were buried inside the contents of these letters waiting to be revealed to her? She would only know the answer to these questions after reading them all. Annie knew she would read them, but she did not want to read anymore of them today. She needed time to think about

what she had learned so far. She wondered about what her father and mother thought about all this, or if they had even read the letters themselves.

What had kept Joseph from returning to Pearl? So many questions were now in her mind. Would the letters answer them all? She did not know, but for now she must rest. Annie needed to think about things and how strange this all was and why she had never been told any of these secrets until now.

Annie asked Bill if he would mind going home early tonight instead of staying with her until ten like he usually did and he agreed. Annie told him she would call him before she went to bed and she would see him tomorrow when they went to the bakery to taste samples for their wedding cake at noon.

“Ok Annie, it’s ok, I know you have had a bit of a shock and want to be alone to think. I’ll see you tomorrow, sweet heart.” Bill then took Annie in his arms and kissed her good-night and left.

Later that evening Annie lay on her bed thinking about her Grandpa Joe and what she could actually remember about him. She could remember what he smelled like most of all. Peppermint and cigars mixed up with a hint of old spice cologne. She could remember his smile and laugh and how he would swing her around and hug her. He seemed such a stranger to her now.

She thought about Grandma Pearl and could almost picture her as a young woman and in love for the first time. Grandma Pearl was kind and cared about those around her, but most of all she even cared about people she didn’t know personally. Every year while Annie was growing up she would go stay with her Grandmother and

she would always make her help her bake cookies and cakes and go with her when she would take them to the nursing homes, and to the neighbors that had small children that were struggling. Grandma Pearl always told her it was good to show love to strangers. She always found a way of having a toy for every child they visited and a few dollars for those in need. Annie could not think of one person she admired more than her Grandma Pearl.

Annie called Bill as she had promised and they talked for two hours about all Annie had learned so far and she told him she was afraid of what else she would learn from the letters. “ Bill maybe I would be better off not knowing why my two Grandmothers won’t have anything to do with each other.”

“ Annie, you are being silly. I am sure that what ever secrets those letters hold your parents feel strongly that you need to know so you will understand things better and maybe not ask so many questions.”

“ Maybe so. I just know that I can’t believe I never knew that Aunt Jo was both of my parents sister. How could they have kept that from me? And if they kept that from me what else did they keep hidden?”

“ I don’t know Annie, but honey you will find out soon enough. Just read the letters and I’m sure you will find out all there is to know.”

“ I guess you are right. Well honey I guess I better say goodnight. I love you. Sleep well and I’ll see you tomorrow. I know we are going to be busy tomorrow with work and having to fit the tasting in during lunch. Don’t eat too much breakfast or you won’t be able to taste all the cake.”

“Speak for your self I won’t have no problem eating all that cake.” Annie laughed. “Good night, love.”

“Good night” Bill hung up the phone and Annie did the same and rolled over and snuggled down in the bed between the covers and closed her eyes and went to sleep.

The next morning when Annie woke up she felt like she was on edge, not only physically, but on the edge of discovery of something that she knew would stay with her for the rest of her life. She could just barely remember a dream she had last night about her two Grandmothers and she felt like the dream was trying to tell her something, but she couldn’t remember what it was. She put the rest down to the excitement of the day and the wedding preparations.

Annie got up and rushed around getting ready for work and as she was about to leave remembered that she had several errand that day after work to take care of. She grabbed her list off the night stand and looked over it.

Noon Meet Bill at Suzy’s Bakery and pick out cake flavor and design.

4:30 Stella’s Bridal Shop for alterations.

Pick up wedding invitations from Brooks Brother’s Stationary

Pick up Bridesmaids gifts from Taft Jewelers.

Annie smiled as she raced down the stairs and out the door to make it to work on time. Thankfully she only had to walk two blocks to work and it was a beautiful sunny morning and it was going to be a good day.

At noon Annie was waiting outside Suzy's bakery on Bill. Where could he be? He knew they only had an hour to do this. Annie was pacing up and down in front of the shop when she heard Bill yell at her. "Annie, I'm here, sorry I'm late, I had to deliver an order across town and got hung up in traffic." as he rushed up to her.

"Well you made it, now let's go eat some cake." Annie looped her arm through Bills as they entered the bakery.

The owner Suzy greeted them as they entered and seated them at a small table in the far corner of the room. "So are you ready to taste some of the special cakes we do?"

"That's what we came for." said Bill.

"Well I will be right with you. Let me go get the tray."

When Suzy returned a couple minutes later she had a tray with two large plates with seven different pieces of cake on each one. She placed the plates in front of Annie and Bill and sat down in the remaining chair.

"The first cake I would like you to try is the pink cake. It is raspberry rum red velvet cake and it has a rich cream cheese icing between the layers and the outside icing is butter cream." Annie and Bill each tasted the cake. As they tasted the smooth hint of rum and the chocolate and raspberries they looked at each other and smiled.

"I would like you to rate each cake on this sheet of paper I have prepared for you to help you make your decision." said Suzy, as she took the paper out of her folder and placed the paper on the table for them.

Annie and Bill each placed a number by the cake name and proceeded to taste the next one.

“ This next sample is the orange flavored one and we have apricot preserves between the layers and butter crème icing.”

Annie and Bill rated this sample.

“The next is the chocolate cake. This is a sweet German chocolate and the icing is fondant. “

Annie and Bill rated this cake. “ I really don’t think chocolate would be a good choice Annie. Remember Julie is allergic to chocolate.”

“ Yeah, that’s right. Wouldn’t be a good thing to poison a bridesmaid would it.” said Annie.

Annie and Bill proceed to taste the remaining pieces and decided that they liked the raspberry rum red velvet the best and asked if they could have three different flavors. “ Why that would be a wonderful idea.” said Suzy. That way we don’t have to worry about Julie’s chocolate allergy. They could just tell her to just stay away from the pink cake.

Annie and Bill decide to have the white cake with butter cream icing as the top layer and the orange cake with apricot jam filling as the middle layer, and to do the grooms cake in lemon with strawberry filling between the layers with the cream cheese icing.

Suzy then showed them several styles of cakes and Annie chose a three tier square cake with a large bow that streamed down the sides and with flowers nestled

around the bow and around the base of the cake. The top layer would be the white cake, the middle layer would be the orange and the bottom layer raspberry rum red velvet cake. This cake would feed 150 people and they were inviting 140 people to the wedding and reception. So this would be the perfect size cake. Annie did not want to save the top layer for their first year anniversary.

Suzy told Bill and Annie she needed a 25% down payment on the order and the remainder to be paid a week before the wedding. Bill took out his check book and paid for the cake in full. “ Bill, I told you my parents were going to pay for the cake.”

“ This is our wedding Annie. We will pay for as much as we can afford and I can afford to pay for the cakes. “

“ Alright. Bill honey I have to get back to work. I’ll see you this evening ok?”

“ You go a head, I’ve got this. See you later.” Annie bent down and gave Bill a quick kiss and headed out the door and back to work.

The rest of Annie’s work day went by fast and as she was getting ready to leave she remembered that she had forgotten to tell Bill that their prenuptial marriage counseling meeting with Pastor Lee had been changed to Saturday afternoon at 1:00. She would have to tell him tonight. Why did Friday’s have to be so busy? Now I have to take care of those errands or I will not have things done in time, she thought as she raced out the door.

Annie first stopped at Brooke’s Brothers stationary and picked up the invitations and then Taft’s jewelers to pick up the bracelet, necklace and earrings she had gotten for Julie, Jan, and Nicole..

She had had an inscription put inside each of the bracelets. They were sterling silver and engraved with hearts and leaves around the center of the bracelet. Inside each was engraved, my best friend for life. I love you and the date. She knew they would all like the choice. The necklace and earrings were sterling silver as well with pink ice settings. They would look beautiful with the soft pink dresses they would be wearing. Annie had always loved the color pink and so her wedding colors were going to be pink and white. The girls would each be carrying a bouquet of pink and white sweetheart roses. The dresses were made of pink taffeta with a softer pink overlay of dotted swiss. The neckline was a boat neck and they had little cap sleeves. A fitted bodice and a full circle skirt that stopped at the knee. Annie knew they were a bit old-fashion, but she loved the retro look. The girls would be wearing white sandal high heels and have a white headband on their heads with a pink flower on one side. All the girls had long hair so this would look great on all of them.

Annie's next and final stop was Stella's bridal shop for the alterations. Stella greeted Annie as she entered the shop. "Hi Annie, I bet you are getting excited, what is it now six more weeks until the wedding?"

"Yes, just six more weeks and I am going crazy with all the last minute stuff I need to get done. I believe we have two or three more prenuptial counseling sessions with Pastor Lee, I have to mail the invitations out, once I put the address labels and stamps on them, I still need to get my going away outfit, order the flowers and some way get both of my grandmother's to agree to come, which is probably going to be the hardest thing to accomplish."

“ Annie, I am sure you will persuade them both to come, I will say a prayer for you and ask God to help you with this.”

“ Thank you Stella, I will probably need it. They have never been in the same place at the same time as far back as I can remember.”

“ Well let’s get you into that wedding dress and get it fitting right.”

“ I’m ready”

Annie went into the dressing room and put on the gown and Stella pinned and marked the alterations. Annie removed the gown and redressed.

“ Stop back next week and try the gown on again and if it fits right, you can take it home.”

“ Thank you Stella. See you next week.”

Annie raced home and when she got there Bill was waiting on the stoop. “ Why didn’t you go on upstairs?”

“It was to nice outside to wait for you up in the apartment. I love this weather. You want to go down to Lakeside diner for supper tonight?

“ Yes that would be great, we haven’t been there for awhile. Let me take these bags in and change my clothes.”

“ Ok, I’ll wait for you here and enjoy this beautiful sunshine.”

Annie took the bags upstairs to her apartment and changed into shorts and a top and then she and Bill got in his car and drove to the Lakeside diner. The diner was situated next to Cherokee Lake which is near Morristown, Annie’s hometown. It would be nice to take a short drive to the lake on a beautiful day like this. The scenery

was beautiful. Annie loved the glimpse of the mountains as you travel east from Knoxville. “ Annie you want to stop and see your folks?”

“ No not really. I just want to have a nice evening with you.”

“ Ok if that’s what you want.”

So they drove up to the lake. The diner parking lot was nearly full when they pulled into it. “ Guess everyone else had the same idea we did.” said Bill.

“ Well that’s alright, they still have outside seating available and I’d rather sit outside anyways,” said Annie.

“ Do you know what you want to drink?” asked the waitress as she came up to them.

“ We’ll both have sweet tea, one with lemon , one without. “ said Bill.

“ I’ll get your drinks while you look over the menu”, and the waitress walked off.

“ Not real friendly is she?” said Bill.

“ Doesn’t appear to be.” said Annie.

“ Well ,what looks good to you? I think I’m going to have the fried catfish, hushpuppies, cottage fries, coleslaw and lemon meringue pie.” said Bill.

“ Are you hungry tonight or what? “ asked Annie.

“ Hey I haven’t had anything this afternoon except cake.”

“ That’s right, we didn’t did we? Well then I think I will have the Rainbow trout, a baked potato with the works and a salad. For dessert I want the cheesecake with strawberries.”

“ Sounds good to me.” said Bill

When the waitress returned Bill gave her their order and she didn't say another word to them.

“ That waitress has to be the most unfriendly waitress I have ever seen”

“ Bill, maybe she's just having a bad day.”

“ Maybe, but she could at least try to smile. It's a beautiful day . How could you have a bad day on a day like this?”

“ Bill, you just don't understand that people have bad days. You are always so up.”

“ Not always, I've had my own bad days before, plenty of them before I meet you. Since then I choose to try to find something good in everyday, even when things aren't going well. God gives us each new day as a blessing and that is how I want to look at life.”

“ And that is one of the things I love about you. Your positive outlook is something I wish I could have all the time.”

“ You can Annie, you just have to stop allowing your emotions to control your mind.”

“ That is a typical male attitude if I ever heard one.”

“ Here we go again.”

“ No we aren't , there comes our supper.”

Bill was saved from another discussion of what it's like being a woman vs. being a man by the arrival of their waitress and the food they had ordered.

“That has got to be the best catfish I have ever eaten.”

“ Same here with the trout.”

“ We really should come up here more often.”

“ I would like that.”

“ You know I use to live up at Newport and my mom would bring me and my grandmother here every summer for the fourth of July. We would eat supper here and then watch the fireworks off the dam. She would always get us a cabin for the night. That was the only vacation we ever had.”

“ That sounds nice. She must of loved being around water.”

“She always said she just wanted to be close to where her father was.”

“ Her father, did he live around here?”

“ He use to, but he died shortly after she was born.”

“ That’s to bad.”

“ So what’s on the calendar for tomorrow?”

“ Oh, I nearly forgot again. We have to meet with Pastor Lee tomorrow afternoon at 1:00.”

“ Glad you told me, or I would have been out playing golf.”

“ Ha, Ha, you know good and well you don’t play golf.”

“Well I might one day.”

“ Not as long as you play softball.”

“ You’re right, I do love softball.”

“ Well I guess we better head back to the big city of Knoxville.”

“ Guess so, but I sure hate to. I love the quiet here and the sound of the birds and the crickets and frogs at night as the sun starts going down.”

“ Me too, but we have a long day tomorrow..”

Bill paid the check and they left and went back to Knoxville. All the way home Annie and Bill talked about what they would be discussing with Pastor Lee. When they arrived back at Annie’s apartment Bill told Annie he was going on back to his place and would see her at noon tomorrow. They kissed goodnight and Annie went up to her apartment and went to bed.

When Annie woke the next morning she realized it was Saturday and she didn’t have to go to work, so she decided to just stay in bed until she had to get up and get ready for the afternoon with Bill and Pastor Lee.. She pulled the box out from under her bed where she had placed it the other night after she reread a couple of the letters to Bill when they talked and opened it. When Annie pulled the next bundle of letters out; it was tied in a black silk ribbon that was frayed on the ends. The first letter had tiny spots of discolored stains on it. She opened it and began reading;

September 19, 1940

Dear Pearl,

I have heard from my grandfather that you are now married to Mr. Fox and that you are residing not to far from him. He has told me that you came to visit him and that you brought Josephine with you. He says she is a very beautiful little baby. I’m sorry Pearl that I did not come to you. My father met me at the train station and he forbade me to come. He would not give me any money and he said that he and my

grandfather had seen to everything. Pearl what does that mean? I still love you! I hope you can forgive me.

Love,

Joseph

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Annie returned the letter and reached for the next one it was also from her grandfather

January 15, 1941

Dear Pearl,

I am writing to you to inform you that I have recently married a Miss Georgia Smith of Ashville, North Carolina. Her father is a one Matthew Smith esquire. He is now a judge and a man of great power there in certain circles. Her mother is Susannah Funkhouser Smith from Roanoke, Virginia. Her mother's family is originally from Holland. Mrs. Smith is a piano teacher. Georgia has been raised in a very rigid household and sent to very good schools. She is at present time a piano teacher herself at a small private school on the outskirts of Knoxville in Maryville.

She and I became acquainted on my return trip to the states from Sweden. She had been visiting her ancestor homelands as well. Pearl, Georgia and I never were anything, but fellow travelers until I received news of your marriage. My father had done some business with Mr. Smith and their family was invited to our home for dinner one night, while they were in town. I was surprised to see Georgia. Our families encouraged the match. My father thinks the connections will help us all. I'm

sorry Pearl that I failed you, but it seems we both have to move on, but I will always love you.

As always,

Joseph

Annie put the letter away and thought about her grandmother Georgia. She had always been a very quite distant person most of the time, but she did have her moments when she would be sassy with Annie. She couldn't remember if she had ever seen her really smile. Annie remembered so little of her grandfather. The only thing she did remember clearly was that his death caused a lot of chaos in the house at the time. Her mother told her they were all living in the same house then, but she couldn't remember that.

Annie pulled out the next letter. It was very short. It was really no more than a note.

December 15, 1942

Dear Pearl,

This note is to let you know that I am very happy about the birth of your son this past summer. I hear he is a fine looking boy named John. My grandfather said Mr. Fox was showing the boy off all over the county. Georgia and I are now the parents of a daughter, born three days ago. She has dark hair like her mother and we have named the child Charlcie Maud. I am thankful that she appears to be healthy. I have enlisted in the Army Air Corp and will be leaving at the end of the month. It is

such a horrible thing that has happened to our country, but I am glad that F.D.R. has now declared war. I hope this thing is over quickly, but I feel I must do my part.

Please write to me from time to time, for I so enjoy hearing what is new with you and how Jo is growing.

Sincerely,

Joseph

Well that was certainly straight to the point. Annie had never realized how close to the beginning of World War II her parents had been born. It must have been very hard on her grandmother Georgia. Annie knew that Grandpa Jeff didn't serve in the War for he was too old to enlist or be drafted.

Annie snuggled down deeper into the bed and pulled the next letter from the bundle. It showed a great deal of wear. It must have been carried in something, folded in half, for the crease was still evident. It was from Pearl to Joseph.

January 30, 1943

Dear Joseph,

I know you will be leaving the States soon to go over the waters to the war in just a few more weeks. I hope that this letter finds its way to you before you leave.

I must tell you what a beautiful little girl our "Jo" is becoming. She is so smart and pretty and she adores her new little brother. John is a strong healthy boy, and he is

already trying to walk. Jeffery is very proud of him to be sure. Jeffrey has agreed that I will not have to have any more children unless I want them. The agreement he and my father made with each other was I had to have children until he had a son. So now that John is here that part of the arrangement is fulfilled.

Jeffery is a kind man, he is good to me and to Jo, but what I feel for him is different in so many ways from what I feel for you, my heart is with you.

Please keep yourself safe. If I never hear from you again I want you to know that I will always love you. You are my one true love. Even if we are never able to say those words aloud to each other again, I can not let you go off to fight in this war without knowing that my feelings for you have not changed in any way, except to grow. The time we had and our daughter are the most precious things in the world to me.

Be assured that Jeffery will continue to take good care of me and our Jo. I am presuming that Georgia and Charlcie will be staying with her folks in Ashville while you are away. Don't worry about any of us, just keep yourself safe and return to us as soon as you possibly can.

With my whole heart, forever

Pearl

As Annie looked at the gentle tears in the letter, she knew her grandfather must have read this letter over and over while he was away. That he had carried his first

love's declaration with him into war, much the same way as knights had carried a ladies handkerchief. He carried Pearl's love with him into battle and in his heart. Again her thoughts went to her own parents and how they must have felt if they read these letters. She could not see herself asking her father about them, but perhaps her mother.

She took the next letter out and it appeared to have water spots all over it. The letter was terribly soiled as well.

September 10, 1944

My dearest Pearl,

As you may be aware I was assigned to the 398th Bomb Group, 600th Bomb Squad. We had to fly a mission over Misburg, Germany. Shortly after my plane called "bombs away" we were struck by flak. We had no other choice, but to bail out. We were met on the ground by local townsmen. They herded us along like a bunch of cows to the Dulag Luft and turned us over to the Nazi's. After many long hours of interrogation I was taken to Stalag Luft 3 where I am now. I have met a man by the name of J.J. who says we will escape from here one day, but I do not see how that will ever be possible for the place has so many guards.

They have given us permission to write home, but I do not know if this letter will ever reach you. How much they are in accord with the Geneva Convention is to be left to be seen. I wanted you to know that I am still alive and so far have not been treated to badly. I received an injury when we bailed out, but I am seemingly

January 2, 1946

My dearest darling Pearl,

I can not tell you how happy I am to have my feet back on American soil. I was much distressed for sometime that the German's would not release us, after the armasis, but finally they did. I was sent to England first and then home.

I must admit I am a bit worse for wear, but the Dr. has assured me that I will fully recover from my captivity with lots of good food and love. I wish that I could see you and Jo, but I know that at least for now that is not possible.

Pearl I have done much soul searching and I feel I must divorce Georgia. I want to come back to Tennessee, to you and to our daughter. It is not fair to Georgia to be with a man that is not in love with her, for my heart is with you as it has always been.

I long for us to be a family and to have an even larger one. Surely Jeffery will release you from that pretense of a marriage as well. Please write and let me know if it is what you want as well. I will not proceed until I have heard from you.

Love,

Joseph

Annie folded the letter and was in turmoil as to what must have happened, if anything, for she knows that they stayed married to Georgia and Jeffery. As she pulled the next letter from the bundle she saw that it was different hand writing. The address

indicated it was from Georgia to Pearl. Annie opened the letter with somewhat of a feeling of foreboding that she knew what ever was in this letter it was what sealed the fate of the star crossed lovers forever.

May 12, 1946

Dear Mrs. Fox,

We have not met, but over the years I have been very much aware of your existence. Joseph spoke of you several times when we first met, such a long time ago now. As you know Joseph needed some time in the hospital when he first returned to the states. He was able to return home the last week of February.

Joseph has terrible dreams at night now. It must have something to do with his being a prisoner for so long. He calls out to a Pearl all the time in his sleep. At first I was not overly troubled by it, but then I remembered one day about the young lady he was smitten with as a young man. I then found a letter from you among his things.

I do not understand why you and he are writing to each other, but rest assured that Joseph is a very married man. We have a child as you must know. A little girl and we are expecting another child this coming winter. What ever you think your hold on him is, forget it. I will never release him to be with someone else. He took a vow "till death do us part" and that is how it will be.

Sincerely,

Georgia Roberts

Annie remembered that when her Grandpa was alive he and Georgia seemed to always be mad at each other and she heard them sometimes at night in their room arguing and then Grandpa would slam the door as he left the house. Annie began to wonder what kind of marriage they had and how it all affected her mother while she was growing up..

Annie began to have a bad feeling that there must have been something more to her grandfather's terrible accidental death. Just what it was she was not sure and so far there was no proof his death had been anything, but an accident, just a feeling that something happened that no one wanted to talk about.

Annie wondered if she called her mother if she would talk about it now, but she decided against it until she had more of the story. This letter from Georgia was the last one in the bundle. So she neatly replaced them all in order and retied them with the black ribbon.

The next bundle was tied in yellow. It was bright yellow and made her think of spring, new beginnings. As she unfolded the first letter she was surprised that the letter was from Pearl to Joseph.

July 25, 1946

Dear Joseph,

This letter has been very hard for me to write. After your last letter I too had to search my soul. Nothing would make me happier then to be able to be with you and our Jo as a family, but I do not believe that will ever be possible. At one time it might have been, but that was before we both had children with other people. Our being

together now would be selfish and hurtful to our children and others. I will not be party to that. Joseph we must never speak of this again. Our time is over. You are more then welcome to write and ask about Jo and to share your everyday life with me, but only as a friend. What secrets we hold in our hearts will always be there, but that is where they must stay. They must stay locked away and hidden in our hearts for no other to ever know about.

Sincerely,

Pearl

As Annie read this letter she could some how feel the pain that grandma Pearl must have felt as she put those words to paper. How she must have struggled with each word. For the one thing she knew about her grandma Pearl is that she is a woman with a big heart and she gives love to everyone freely without question, unconditionally.

Annie looked at the time and decided she was terribly hungry. She decided to get up and call Bill to see if he wanted to go get some food before they meet with Pastor Lee.

Bill just lived around the corner from her and up two streets. There was a small diner at the corner they often went to that was about half way between their apartments. When Bill answered he told her he'd meet her at the diner in ten minutes.

Annie threw on her clothes and raced out the door. She needed a break from the letters. She was getting depressed reading about this love that her grandparents had

for each other that couldn't be shared. Annie was totally in love with Bill and couldn't wait to spend the rest of her life with him. She could only image how it would feel if she couldn't be with him.

Annie and Bill had a nice meal and talked about their wedding and the letters Annie had read so far that day and how complicated the situation was for them. Annie told Bill she didn't know how she was going to be able to get her grandmothers together for her and his wedding, but she would have to find a way to do it.

Bill told Annie that it would work out, but he didn't really know if he believed that Annie could make this happen, but he wanted to encourage her to follow her heart about this situation. Besides Bill knew that God could help them make it happen if they put their faith in Him with this just like they put their faith in him regarding the rest of their life.

The one thing Annie and Bill completely agreed about was that they wanted their marriage to be starting out on a firm foundation and they both believed that putting their marriage in God's hands would help make their marriage strong. They had started attending church together shortly before Bill proposed to Annie. They knew that they both wanted to serve God and had made the decision to become Christians and accepted Christ as their savior and were baptized by Pastor Lee six months ago.

After they finished their dessert they took a short walk in the park across the street from the diner and then they each went home to get ready for their pre- marriage counseling session agreeing to meet at the church. Annie gathered together her book

and Bible and headed out the door to meet Bill at the church which was only three blocks away. Once there they entered the church office and Pastor Lee was already there waiting for them.

“Hello, so are you ready to start today’s session?” said Pastor Lee.

“ Hello Pastor Lee and yes I’m very much ready.” said Bill.

“Yes I am,” said Annie.

“ Let us start with a prayer and then we will begin to discuss the next section of the book and read a few scriptures that will help you understand your roles as husband and wife according to what God’s word says you should do.

“ Heavenly Father, we ask that you would help Bill and Annie to keep an open mind and an open heart and to listen to your voice. Help guide them in every decision they need to make , always wiling to turn to you when they have questions and doubts about what they need to do and bless them with understanding and wisdom in their actions toward each other. Allow them to always be willing to compromise with each other. Bless their love for each other and allow it to grow and the covenant they make with each other and you to be as strong as possible. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

“Annie and Bill please be seated and we’ll start. The first thing we need to talk about is how you will handle money and financial matters in your marriage. Bill how do you think this should be handled?”

“ Pastor Lee , I think it is my place to provide a living for my family. All decisions about how the money is spent should be based on a budget that will allow us a savings, but also allow us to pay our tithes to the church that we have made out

together. We need to make any major decisions together as well, but I believe a woman should have control over household expenses, like groceries, ect. “

“ Good answer Bill, and what about you Annie, how do you think things should be handled?”

“ Well I think pretty much the same as what Bill has just said. I think we are pretty much in agreement with this. The only thing I would like to do different is I think we each should have a small amount of money each month to spend any way we want or to save for something big that we want.”

“ I think if you will set down and make out a budget and stick to it allowing for the things you have mentioned that you will do well with your finances. Now how do you each feel about who should be in charge of the money.?”

“I think we should have only one check book and that we should make sure that if we use a debit card it is written down right away so as not to over draw the accounts. “ said Bill.

“ Well I think we should keep only one account with a check book to pay bills out of that we jointly control and each of us have a separate account to spend out of daily and each be responsible for that account.” said Annie.

“ Bill what do you think about this idea of Annie’s?”

“ I could see that it would help us by avoiding fights over money, since we are going to budget money for the separate spending. So I guess I would not have a problem with any of this.”

“ Good it sounds like you will be in agreement about the handling of your finances.”

“ I think the same thing, Pastor Lee.” said Bill.

“Let us now look at what God’s word says is your duties as a husband and a wife. “

“ Lets us turn in our Bible’s to Ephesians the fifth chapter starting at verse twenty-two and read through verse thirty –three.

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it.

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That he might present it to himself a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh: but nourisheth and cherisheth it ,even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body , of his flesh, and of his bones. FOR THIS CAUSE SHALL A MAN LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED UNTO HIS WIFE, AND THEY TWO SHALL BE ONE FLESH. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every

one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”

“Now Annie and Bill, you see clearly that God wants you to love each other as you love yourself and that you should love Christ and each other with the same amount of commitment as what Christ has for the church. No one should come between you. You no longer own yourself alone, but each other as yourself. Only God comes before you and no one else. You will be joined as one from here after.” said Pastor Lee.

“ I never thought of marriage in this way before. I only thought of marriage as being a contract between me and my wife.” said Bill. “ Now I see that my marriage and love for Annie is only a continuation of my love for Christ. If I fail Annie I am also failing God. That certainly puts things in a different light.”

“ Well I believe we have covered enough for today. I feel good about the decision to marry that you have made. We will meet one more time before the wedding. I would like for you to read the following scriptures before we meet again. Colossians 3:18, 1 Timothy 3:11 ,1 Peter 3:1, 1 Corinthians 7 and 2 Corinthians . 1:2. We will have plenty to talk about the next time and we will also go over the type of wedding vows you wish to make to each other at your wedding.”

“ Thank you Pastor Lee, we’ll see you tomorrow at church and thank you for everything. You have certainly given us a great deal to talk about and to help us make our marriage the best that it can be.” said Bill.

“See you tomorrow Pastor.” said Annie.