

THE
NOVELTY
POST
CARD

GILT EDGE
POST CARD

PUBLISHED BY M. T. SHEAHAN
297 CONGRESS ST. BOSTON.

PLACE STAMP
HERE
UNITED STATES
AND CANADA
ONE CENT
FOREIGN
TWO CENTS

THIS SIDE FOR MESSAGE THIS SIDE FOR ADDRESS

FOREVER FRIDAY

A Novel

*...work is hard.
...small indeed is
...reward. But great
...my love for you.*
Houston—Texas' Largest City

*Houston 5
Texas*



TIMOTHY LEWIS



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WATERBROOK
P R E S S

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FOREVER FRIDAY

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The characters and events in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons or events is coincidental.

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For Dinah:
my wife, my soul mate,
my Forever Girl

Hope is not a granted wish or a favor performed; no, it is far greater than that. It is a zany, unpredictable dependence on a God who loves to surprise us out of our socks.

—Max Lucado, *God Came Near*

Summer 2006

Adam Colby

Some great romances worth the telling are never told, their lovers slipping silently between life's timeworn cracks only to be pitched with yesterday's trash. As owner of a small estate-sale business, I'd witnessed evidence over the years of various couples' love lives. So I'd learned to sift through the piles of forgotten memories. Learned to appreciate a second look...and perhaps ease my pain.

That was how I discovered the postcards.

Bargain hounds and treasure hunters pushed through the heavy front door of Gabe and Pearl Alexander's beloved home early before rushing away to their next classified find. Antique buyers, who were more savvy, missed the cards because they were camouflaged among several dozen identical photo albums. Inside their vinyl maroon covers, these albums held not the usual faded family snapshots, but hundreds of colorful postcards revealing six decades of married passion recorded in rhyme beside canceled postage stamps.

Surprised to find postcard poems instead of photos, I began reading them in between my dealings with customers. As a thirty-eight-year-old man who had once committed to "forever," I was intrigued. What was

this couple's secret? In a fast-food world of abbreviated relationships, what supernatural love potion kept Gabe and Pearl enamored with each other for more than half a century?

So I continued reading through lunch and into the sale's afternoon lull. I'm not sure I believed in love anymore, especially married love, but found myself becoming more entranced as each minute passed. Even though the Alexanders had lived together in the same house, the post-cards were sent over the years from Gabe to Pearl, beginning in 1926. Each unique card was signed "Forever, Gabe," the poem connecting an episode of their love to the picture on the front.

My guess was Gabe died in the mid-1980s, because that's when the cards stopped.

One of the earliest cards was dated September 4, 1927. On the front was a picture of two colorful seashells. On the back, this poem:

Two tiny shells, together side by side
Wandering to and fro about the morning tide.
Two tiny shells, now picked up by a man
Who sets them out to dry upon the glistening
 sand.
Two tiny shells, how delicate, how proud
To be created by the One whose throne's above
 the clouds.
And these two tiny shells are sent to you
 by me
Because I know you understand God's wonders
 by the sea.
Forever, Gabe

I was curious if he'd mailed Pearl two actual seashells along with the postcard and, if so, what had happened to them. Surely she'd have treasured them, but the only seashells in their belongings were large and obviously store-bought. The ocean must have played a significant role in their marriage because there were several cards with sailboats and beach scenes, and with Galveston so close by.

"What kind of man invests this much time in his marriage?" I said aloud, feeling a little betrayed by a guy I'd never met. Love wasn't a competition, but Gabe had left me floundering in the dust, and most other men as well. Men who loved their wives, or *said* they did, even though many times their actions proved otherwise.

At least I wasn't a hypocrite.

Or was I?

Just before the sale ended, a customer declared himself the Alexanders' next-door neighbor, so I discreetly asked about their interest in the sea.

"Wouldn't know," he said, then shrugged. "Gabe died shortly after I bought my place. Pearl would speak to me from across the yard, but she wasn't keen on in-depth conversations."

"Why?"

"Valued her privacy, I guess." He shrugged again. "Spent the last year of her life confused and in an extended-care facility."

"Can you tell me anything else?" I asked.

"Pearl had an unusual nickname."

"Nickname?"

"Yeah, like a man's, but I can't remember it." The neighbor paused. "Do you know what happened to their car? A big 1940s model Oldsmobile. Mint condition."

I shook my head, wondering if the postcards contained Pearl's nickname.

"The old gal probably needed the money and sold it," the man continued. "Shame. I'd have bought it." He rubbed his chin. "Any tools left?"

"Out in the garage," I replied.

"The Alexanders were nice folks," the man added before walking away. "Too bad you never met them."

The neighbor was correct. I'd never met them, but had heard from the attorney who hired me that they had no children and were donating the bulk of their estate to charity. However, their will included detailed instructions that certain sentimental items be delivered to various relatives still living in the Houston, Texas, area. I usually contracted that job to a moving company, but since the Alexanders' home was only a few miles from mine, and the items were small, I elected to deliver them myself. After reading the postcards, I felt strangely invested in Gabe and Pearl and was more than happy to oblige.

Over the next few weeks I made deliveries and asked questions. Some thought it odd that a total stranger would take such an interest in their kin. Others spilled all they knew to me, even digging up yellowed newsy letters. I selfishly decided not to mention the postcard albums unless someone asked about them, and no one did. So I concluded they were kept secret. In some ways, it even seemed the postcards had been written for me. But I couldn't keep them, not in good conscience anyway. At the end of my quest, I'd take them to an Alexander relative as "accidentally overlooked."

Gabe's typewriter went to their niece, Alice Davis. Alice recently had knee replacement surgery and was, in her words, "convalescing

nicely.” I spent a rainy afternoon wrapped up in her thoughtful recollections. She also told me about the Alexanders’ deceased longtime housekeeper, Priscilla Galloway, whose daughter, Yvette, looked after Pearl during that final year. I contacted Yvette and scheduled an appointment to meet with her the following week.

I suppose my obsession with the postcards was as much a matter of timing as anything. The stinging loneliness of my divorce still lingered, the blunt ache of a failed marriage. As I sent a confirmation e-mail to a somewhat reluctant Yvette, my eyes settled on a folder I’d saved with messages from my ex-wife. I opened it and clicked on her final e-mail. Even though it was dated approximately two years prior, devastation washed over me as though I were reading it for the first time.

Adam,

Today we’re officially over. Thanks for respecting my wishes. If you’re still hoping I’ll change my mind, don’t. I need my own life. You need to move on. So please, no more questions. When did I stop loving you? I’m not sure. Is there someone else? Yes. That’s why I didn’t contest the house. I never intended to hurt you.

Haley

The words “someone else” were, unsurprisingly, still the most painful.

Someone else?

In twelve years of marriage we’d had our share of difficulties, but hadn’t everyone? I had never doubted our love, nor envisioned a life

without her. Other than what couldn't have been helped, where had we gone wrong? What could we have done to prevent disaster?

For each hour I pored over the Alexanders' postcards, I wondered if I could ever love another woman. Worse, after striking out in my first marriage, did I deserve a second chance?

I didn't know. I thought I should have the best that life offered until the woman I loved walked away. At first I blamed her. Then I blamed myself. But one thing was clear: Pearl and Gabe knew something Haley and I'd missed. So I'd seek the source of the Alexanders' wisdom. And learn from past mistakes. My gut told me that time was my friend *and* my enemy. If I bogged in my quest, despair could scar into bitterness.

Years ago I discovered that jotting my thoughts on paper, then punching them into a computer, helped me organize. Helped me process. So by recording the Alexanders' story, I hoped to uncover their secret. I suspected that something Gabe called "The Long Division" in the poems was key to their marital longevity. But I still had many postcards to contemplate, along with a few loaned letters and whatever I might glean from Yvette. If feeling bold, I'd fill any remaining blanks in the Alexanders' story with my own interpretations...or longings.

Could a man turn an about-face after marching in the wrong direction for more than a dozen years?

At this point, I could only hope.

Bayshore Extended Care Facility, 2004

Mrs. Alexander

Mrs. Alexander lay in her hospital bed at Bayshore Extended Care and daydreamed of being anywhere but there. She despised the bland food, her beige room, and the incessant talk-show tripe from a television across the hall. Living in the same building with a bunch of elderly people was taxing at best.

To make matters worse, the patient roster listed her as Pearl Garnet Alexander. She'd hated the name for most of her ninety-nine years. Not the Alexander part. Alexander was her married name and had been since 1926. Before that she'd been a Huckabee.

Pearl Garnet Huckabee.

One jewel-encrusted name was bad enough, but she'd had to endure two. That was until her seventh summer birthday when she decided her family must call her Huck.

Huck Huckabee.

Her mother, Annise, refused at first, saying she'd spent many precious hours considering a fancy name for each of her thirteen children. And now her youngest daughter insisted on a plain name like Huck. A boy's name. It would remind folks of that poor orphan in

Mark Twain's novel who smoked, drank, and caroused up and down the Mississippi with a runaway slave.

But Pearl argued that slavery, thank goodness, had ended during the last century and borrowing a name from a grand tale like *Huckleberry Finn* only made one appear just as grand.

So at age seven and a half, the name Huck stuck.

Stuck like globs of grammar school paste, gently smoothed, then hardened over time. Somewhere in that half year, the glorious transition occurred. Family first, then friends. By Thanksgiving, using her given name was unthinkable.

Huck sat up in her bed. She adored the name Huck; its carefree, adventuresome aura defined her. Lamar, her good-natured twin brother who was six minutes older, had wanted a nickname too, but nothing caught on until they were in high school. He was a natural at baseball, especially when it came to hitting well-placed grounders. And since a fast ground ball was labeled a *daisy cutter*, Huck had immediately dubbed him Cutter. A few of their classmates had mischievously tried to call him Daisy, but without success. He carried the name Cutter for the rest of his life. After Huck married Gabe Alexander, they'd ardently followed Cutter's career from the minor leagues into the majors.

So just where was Mr. Gabe Alexander? It was Friday. He would leave work soon and she should be ready. The nurses had lied about last week's postcard. Said there was no mail, even though she'd later heard snippets of truth sprinkled among condescending little whispers. And here it was Friday again. There would be a new card with a lovely picture on the front. On back, a wonderful verse composed just for her. Over the years Gabe had missed only one Friday...that dreadful week he'd slept alone in intensive care.

Huck peered out the window. A budding mixture of pink and white azaleas signaled the end of the mild Houston winter. She smiled, recalling a glorious spring day from long ago. She'd boarded a Main Street trolley engaged to Clark Richards and disembarked enamored with Gabe, falling heart-long in love that night on a deserted Galveston beach. Each time he breathed her name his eyes twinkled. Even after sixty years when he could barely catch his breath.

She refocused her attention back inside the room and reached for the phone, thankful to have it back. The nurses had removed it until she'd promised them—and Yvette—that any future calls would be made in a responsible manner. It was embarrassing to have bothered that sweet child with such trivial matters. But an entire month without a trip to her own hairdresser had been a true emergency. A lady's hair style and color set her image.

The current postcard situation was equally dire and Yvette must agree. Hiding someone's private mail was the same as stealing. It was a federal offense and there was only one responsible thing left to do.

For the second time within a week, Huck Alexander dialed 911.

It took only minutes for the wail of sirens to reach her ears. She lay back and smiled...remembering the first time she saw Gabe.



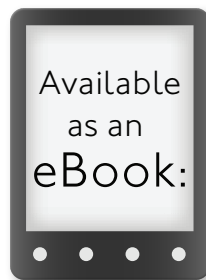
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