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*Deep in your hearts you know
that every promise of the LORD your God
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JOSHUA 23:14



Prologue

Some dreams and wishes, I believe, are of the dormant, time-released variety. They aren't forgotten over many years or through many changes in life. They don't shrink during their hibernation. They simply wait to come true when the dreamer and the wisher need to believe all over again.

Kellie and I definitely needed to believe all over again.

Kellie's dream was to have an interior-design business.

My wish was to go to England. Ever since I was fifteen, I had wished I could stand on Westminster Bridge in London and gaze up into the golden face of Big Ben. Silly, I know. But that was my wish.

Never did either of us imagine that Kellie's dream would overlap my wish when we were both fifty-four years old. We were, by our own unspoken rules, past the point in life at which one should venture out in a new direction.

But that was before we met Opal.

A bright-eyed, seventy-nine-year-old pixie of a woman, Opal slipped her silken hand into mine on the doorstep of her English cottage and said, “Elizabeth, my dear, do you know what the dearest kindness is that a woman can offer herself in the autumn of her years?”

I shook my head.

“It is the gift of giving herself permission to take risks.”

And then she winked at me.

That’s when I understood that sometimes a hibernating dream or a dormant wish must be ushered out of its cavellike sleeping chambers and nudged right up to the cliff’s edge of possibility. It must take a deep breath and step off the edge into nothing but untamed air. In that risk-taking moment, the wish just might discover its wings and fly. I’ve seen it happen.

I never would have known any of this if I hadn’t been late to meet Kellie for coffee two years ago. I dashed into Brew-La-La to escape the jellybean-sized drops of warm, Floridian rain.

Right behind me was a petite feather of a woman dressed in a bright green jogging set. She was shielded from the drops by a spotted gray umbrella, making her look like an overgrown mushroom.

I held the door for her and located Kellie across the café, ensconced in one of the cranberry red chairs in our usual corner. She waved to me with a beckoning “over here” sort of hand motion. The walking mushroom responded by striding across

the room and planting herself in the cranberry red chair intended for me.

In that moment my dormant wish was nudged toward the mouth of its cave, only I didn't know it. Kellie's dream was about to be ushered right to the cliff's edge of reason, but she had no clue what was coming.

All I did was hold open the door. All Kellie did was wave. Everything else happened at a blink-of-an-eye speed after that.

Several months ago Kellie and I were retelling our story to one of Kellie's clients. As usual, we started with the encounter at Brew-La-La. Kellie described the winsome way Opal walked through the open door and made herself at home in the middle of our lives.

Kellie's client said, "She sounds like your fairy godmother in disguise."

"Disguised as a mushroom," I said and quickly added the description of Opal's green "stem" and toadstool-colored umbrella.

I also said that while we didn't consider Opal to be fairy godmother material, she did qualify for the British sort of fairy. "In English literature fairies are known for their mischievous antics. What Opal did right before our eyes was as quintessentially pixie as you can get."

Then Kellie said, "I don't think it was Opal the Fairy Godmother who granted my dream and Liz's wish. I think it was our heavenly Father."

I nodded in agreement.

“He’s the One who knows what dreams lie dormant in the cave of every human heart,” Kellie added. “He’s the One who nudges us forward and invites us to trust Him.”

I watched Kellie’s client tear up, and I knew my friend was working in her vein of gold. Women invited her into their homes to rearrange their furniture. Before she left, Kellie often rearranged their hearts.

As for my wish, in many ways I’m still living it. My husband, Roger, said, “You always did like getting lost inside a good story.” My life does feel like a good story. Only I don’t feel lost inside it. I feel at home.

Sometimes I think about how it felt, stepping off the cliff’s edge into that untamed air. I remember the sense of being embraced by the everlasting arms of the Maker of all dreams and all wishes. He held both Kellie and me close in that free fall of faith, and it was there, in that closeness, that I could hear His heart more clearly than I had in years.

All of this because of Opal and her reminder that we’re never too old to take a risk.

That Opal.



One

On that pivotal day at the Brew-La-La, the first thing I noticed about the tiny, determined woman as she assumed command from the cranberry red chair was her British accent.

“I do appreciate your willingness to meet with me here on rather short notice. I’m Opal. I spoke with you yesterday.” She adjusted her trifocals and with an open palm patted the side of her poofed-up white hair.

Kellie gave me a what-is-going-on-here look. All I could do was shrug.

“As I indicated on the phone,” Opal continued, “I’m fully prepared to pay your regular fees. My only question is, when might you be able to provide me with an estimate?”

“I’m sorry,” Kellie said in a tone that revealed her instinctively smooth and professional demeanor. “I think you might have me confused with someone else.”

Opal blinked. “Are you not an interior designer?”

The truthful answer for Kellie was yes. She was, as a hobby, an interior designer.

“Who were you expecting to meet?” I asked.

Flustered, Opal reached for her pocketbook, undid the clasp, and rummaged around. Instead of a note or a business card, she extracted a handkerchief and held it in her left hand as if for moral support. “I have the name here somewhere.” She looked at Kellie again. “Are you certain you are not a designer? I thought I recognized you from Sunshine Manor.”

Kellie smiled. “My aunt used to live at Sunshine Manor. Did you know Martha Wojcicki?”

Opal’s expression lifted. “Yes, of course I knew Martha. Her apartment was beautifully decorated. Which is exactly why I’m meeting with a designer. I’m afraid I’ll go mad if I don’t have a change of color on the walls soon. Do you happen to know who designed your aunt’s apartment?”

Kellie blushed. “Actually, I did.”

Opal sat up straight. “Then I should like to engage you for the work needed on my apartment.”

“I’m not a professional interior designer,” Kellie said quickly. She looked to me for backup, but I didn’t agree. Kellie had done wonders with my small home, and her home was a masterpiece. She had wanted to pursue designing for well over a decade but had never taken the first step toward that dream. If Opal was going to push Kellie off the cliff by inviting her to take this risk, I wasn’t going to stop her.

“You did such a lovely job with your aunt’s apartment. If you’re available, I would certainly like to hire you.”

“What about the other designer you were going to meet here?” Kellie asked.

Opal looked around and glanced at her watch. “I don’t think she’s coming. We only had a tentative meeting arranged, which is why I was so hopeful when I saw you wave. In her message yesterday she said she was reluctant to take on the project since I live at Sunshine Manor. Apparently there are difficulties in working within the limitations set by the association.”

While Opal was talking, I had been giving Kellie all the non-verbals I thought she needed to recognize this as a golden opportunity she had better snatch.

Kellie may have had one eye on my affirming expressions, but she definitely had both ears open to Opal.

“I know,” Kellie said to Opal. “They do have some strict rules. I found a way to work around some of the restrictions. They aren’t that complicated. We just have to file the necessary forms.”

“Does this mean you’ll come to give me an estimate?”

Kellie swallowed.

I gave her my most encouraging smile.

“All right,” Kellie said with a hesitant sort of nod. “Sure. Why not? When would you like me to come?”

The next afternoon I accompanied Kellie to Opal’s apartment. My presence was partly for support and partly because I was

fascinated by Opal. Her accent reminded me of Mrs. Roberts, a woman who had been important to me during high school.

Sunshine Manor was all of two blocks from Brew-La-La. We found number 2017 and knocked. Opal opened the door, and I offered one of my best smiles to Kellie's first unofficial client.

I don't have a lot of stunning attributes like Kellie with her gorgeous, thick auburn hair and her warm, perceptive eyes. My hair is flyaway and fair like my skin. But I do know how to smile. I can almost always get others, even pouting children, to smile back when I give them a generous grin.

Opal invited us inside. "May I offer you some tea?"

Kellie and I slid into straight-backed chairs at a round table in the corner. A pudgy, rose-strewn china teapot and a plate of gingersnaps awaited us. We sipped Earl Grey from china teacups balanced on saucers, and I felt like we were little girls playing dress-up. This was a stretch for us. Kellie and I were decaf-grand-triple-nonfat-latte-in-a-to-go-cup kind of women.

I tried out what I hoped was proper British tea-party conversation. "Have you lived here long, Opal?"

"Not long. Sixteen years. My husband lived in Orlando as a child. He was determined to return and spend his final days in the sunshine. He did exactly that. I've been alone the past eight years."

"Where did you live before coming here?" Kellie asked.

"I lived nearly all my life in a small town in England called Olney."

Sisterchicks Go Brit!

“I always wanted to go to England.” I sat up a bit straighter. “Especially London.”

“Is that so?”

I nodded with the same eagerness I had felt about England since I was fifteen.

“Do you have plans to visit London soon, then?” Opal asked.

“No, not soon. Someday maybe.”

“Maybe sooner than later,” Opal said cheerfully. “You’ll find London to be a delightful city.”

I leaned forward in my best tea-party posture and shared my small secret with Opal. “I’ve always had a hopeless crush on Big Ben.”

Opal studied me as she swallowed a nibble of her gingersnap.

Kellie, of course, knew of my fascination with all things British but particularly the top tourist sights of London. However, when the disclosure of my long-held wish was followed by a pensive silence, she moved the conversation to another topic.

“What sort of decorating ideas did you have in mind for your apartment, Opal?”

Turning her attention to Kellie, Opal said, “I am ready for a complete change. I would like a more cheerful color for these walls. Yellow, I think. One can live within the belly of a pale salmon for only so long.”

She unfolded a prepared list and read to us her extensive changes.

Kellie listened thoughtfully. “You have some lovely pieces of furniture. Once the walls are painted, these dark woods will look much different than they do now. I know an excellent upholsterer who could re-cover your wingback chair and give it a new look.”

“That would be fine. Just so long as none of the colors is pink. Nothing pink.” Opal rose from her chair with surprising agility and reached into her pocketbook. “For what amount should I draft the check?”

“How about if we draw up an agreement first?” Kellie suggested. “It will take me a little time to put together a preliminary proposal. I could return later this week, if you like.”

“Lovely. I will expect you on Friday at the same time. Would that suit you both?”

Kellie and I exchanged glances. I wasn’t part of the arrangement, but I didn’t have a particular reason to bow out at this point.

“Friday would be fine,” Kellie answered for both of us.

And that’s how our regular teatimes with Opal began.

Kellie poured herself into the transformation of Opal’s little nest, and I assisted in small ways. I hit an excellent sale at a fabric store and found the exact material we were after for the cushions on the four straight-backed chairs. I also was able to snag superior quality sheets at an outlet store and a gorgeous pale yellow matedé bedspread from Portugal.

The entire redecorating process took a little over a month, and the results were stunning. Kellie and I were greeted by name

at the front desk whenever we arrived at Sunshine Manor, and Kellie soon had requests for renovations from two other residents.

We were on our way to pay our final official visit to Opal when Kellie pulled into the parking area and said, “You know what I like about doing all this for Opal? I like helping someone who can’t drive around town or pick up a paintbrush and make these changes on her own. It was the same way with my aunt. If this is the last home she’ll have, she needs it to be lovely.”

“I agree. And you know what I’ve loved about this past month? I’ve loved watching your creative side run free. I think it’s time for you to get a business license.”

Kellie’s soft brown eyes always gave away her secrets long before her lips agreed to participate in any sort of confession. “I think so too. I even have a name for the business.”

“Really? Let’s hear it.”

“K & L Interiors.” She watched my reaction closely as we walked toward the entrance of Sunshine Manor.

“It’s a simple name,” I said, doing an on-the-spot evaluation. “It’s easy to remember. K is for Kellie, right? And L is for...”

“You.”

“Me?” I stopped walking. “Me?”

“Yes, you. Liz, we could do this together just like we did for Opal. No one can hunt and gather like you. The bedspread and sheets you found were perfect. And that table lamp was ideal. We’re a team. We’ve always been great together on projects.”

“But this is a business, Kellie.”

Her eyebrows raised in an expression that said, “So?”

“I’ll think about it,” I said, even though I already knew my answer. I didn’t want to do anything that could jeopardize our friendship. Kellie and I had thirty-two years of friendship to our credit. However, two of those years had been absolutely terrible. I didn’t want to be in that terrible place ever again.

“Just think about it, Liz, okay? I talked to Martin, and he thinks it’s great. His actual words were ‘It’s about time.’ Will you talk to Roger and see what he thinks?”

I nodded. My affable husband probably would say it was a good idea. But I knew I wouldn’t join Kellie’s endeavor.

We took the elevator up to Opal’s floor and stood by her front door with a gift basket brimming with new tea towels and a tin of loose-leaf Earl Grey to replace all of Opal’s tea we had drunk during the past few weeks.

Opal let us in with a Mary Poppins sort of efficiency and invited us to have a seat on her reupholstered sofa. She thanked us for the gift basket and then proceeded to hand an envelope to each of us.

“Go ahead and open them.” Opal grinned in her innocent-as-a-lamb way.

This was awkward. I shouldn’t be paid for any of the work. It was Kellie’s gig. “I can’t accept this.” I slid the unopened envelope back across the coffee table. “Thank you, though, for considering me.”

“How can you say you can’t accept it when you don’t even know what’s inside?” Opal was on her feet, rosy faced with excitement. “Open it. Please.”

Kellie and I opened the envelopes in unison. Inside we found airline tickets to what I always had considered the most romantic-sounding airport name in the Western world: Heathrow.

I was holding a ticket to my childhood wish in my hands. Too stunned to cry, I gleamed. That’s what Kellie said later. She said my face was so red and radiant I was shooting gleam-beams all over the room.

Kellie immediately began the string of questions. All the answers from Opal started with yes. Yes, this was for real. Yes, Opal was sure she wanted to do this. Yes, she remembered my saying on our first visit that I had always wanted to go to England. Yes, the tickets were booked for next Monday. And, yes, she knew that we had current passports because she had slipped that question into a conversation two weeks ago.

I calmed down, but my smile stayed at full sail. Opal poured the tea. Kellie sat in sweet, stunned silence. Both of us had just put the china teacups to our lips when Opal pulled out her final surprise of the day.

“We are going to have such a lovely time.”