

Alexandra's Adventure



By Deborah Nevel Drecksler

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	3
Chapter 2	5
Chapter 3	7
Chapter 4	9
Chapter 5	11
Chapter 6	13
Chapter 7	15
Chapter 8	17
Chapter 9	18
Chapter 10	21
Chapter 11	23
Chapter 12	25
Chapter 13	27
Chapter 14	30
Chapter 15	32
Chapter 16	34

Chapter 1

Alexandra had it all planned. Her suitcase was packed and hidden in the extra closet, the laundry was caught up, meals were made for at least a week (with instructions for defrosting) and the house was spotless. Nothing left undone...just like always.

She found the room online. "Available short term weekly or monthly. Steps from the ocean. No smoking, no pets and no misbehaving. I'm old and eccentric, but still capable of kicking you to the curb if you break the rules. Feel free to call me for more details."

Shirley and Alexandra hit it off from the first phone call.

"Escaping from prison?" Shirley teased her when she heard she was traveling solo.

"I just need some time to think about my life" Alexandra replied, hoping the woman would let it go at that.

Shirley persisted and before she knew it, Alexandra was telling her thoughts she had kept hidden for years. In an odd way, it felt comfortable to talk to this complete stranger.

"Been there, done that" Shirley said. "I once packed a bag and took off to England just because I wanted to see the birthplace of an author I loved. I think it was two days before my husband noticed I was missing."

Alexandra laughed and tried to imagine her husband's face if she pulled a stunt like that. Then she felt sad because she knew how afraid she was to do anything that adventurous by herself.

Shirley immediately broke the silence that followed. "Don't bring too many clothes" she said. "It is 95 degrees down here and you'll probably live in

your bathing suit. You own one, don't you?"

Alexandra answered, "A nice boring one piece suit that I promise won't attract any attention."

Shirley chuckled. "Oh, honey, I'm going to take you shopping at the place I call the Tourist Trap and find you an itsy bitsy teeny weenie yellow polka dot bikini...just like the song says! If you got it...flaunt it!"

The very thought of that made Alexandra laugh so hard she had to cross her legs not to pee in her pants.

Later that afternoon (when her nosy next door neighbor drove off) she left an envelope with her husband's name on the kitchen table and slipped out the back door to the cab that was waiting on the corner.

As they drove to the bus station, the cab driver said, "So lady, where are you heading?"

"On an Adventure" she replied. She could see the cab driver smiling in the mirror.

"Actually" she added with a touch of mystery to her voice, "It's already started!"

Chapter 2

Alexandra got off the bus and heard someone calling her name. Standing there in front of a very old, faded green Cadillac was a tall woman with the brightest red hair she had ever seen, piled up on top of her head like a bird's nest. She was dressed in a bright floral mumu and hot pink sunglasses.

"How's this for door to door service?" Shirley said as she grabbed Alexandra's bag from her hand and threw it in the trunk.

"How did you know it was me?"

"Not too many pale faced, middle aged women getting off that bus honey." Shirley laughed at her comment as if it was the funniest one in the world.

"Open your window and inhale some fresh air," she said as they got into the car. "Enjoy the ocean breezes before we get our afternoon thunderstorms."

Moments later, they pulled up to a white clapboard house with a picket fence. The yard was filled with trees brimming with tangerines and oranges. Wild flowers grew everywhere and perched on each side of the front steps was a big pink plastic flamingo. "Welcome to the finest bed and breakfast in the South" Shirley said as she opened the door. Alexandra's eyes grew wide when she walked into the living room. She felt like she had stepped into a postcard of Florida. Everywhere Alexandra looked there was an explosion of pastel colors. The room was overflowing with memories from her childhood. Plastic dolphins, a tropical nativity scene made of driftwood, painted sand dollars, a coconut penny bank, and dozens of trinkets created from sea shells.

"Shirley, where did you get all these collectibles?" Alexandra asked.

"Collectibles...That's funny. I never thought of my stuff like that. To me,

they're just old things that I keep because they represent my life. I can remember where I was and what I was doing when I bought or was given each one of them. I'm sharp like that...just don't ask me what I did yesterday!"

"Have you lived here a long time?"

"This house belonged to my Daddy," Shirley said. "I've never lived anywhere else except when husband number two dragged me off to California. Crazy man almost got me killed in an earthquake back in 71'."

"What happened after that? Did you move back home?"

"Two days later, I was on a bus headed back to Florida. So much for that marriage."

Alexandra couldn't resist asking. "How many times have you been married?"

Shirley gave Alexandra a mischievous look. "Enough times to know that it's not something I ever want to do again! Enough talk about marriage and husbands. Let me fix us a pitcher of lemonade and we'll go sit on the porch and talk about more important things like....What are you going to do for fun while you're down here?"

Alexandra followed Shirley into the kitchen hoping the woman had some ideas up her sleeve. She wasn't sure she remembered how to have fun. It had been a very long time...

Chapter 3

Alexandra pedaled the bike slowly down the street to enjoy the scenery... The laughter of children playing in sprinklers, a young woman pushing a sleeping baby in a stroller, an elderly couple walking hand in hand.. It was a visual delight after such a long, bitterly cold winter.

When she arrived at the beach, Alexandra parked the bike and took her beach bag out of the basket. Shirley had filled it with everything she thought Alexandra would need...sun tan lotion, a purple thermos filled with iced tea, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a romance novel and a bright yellow towel that said I LOVE FLORIDA.

The ocean was magnificent. Alexandra found a comfortable spot on the deserted beach and spread out her towel. Slipping off her sandals, she made her way to the water, loving the feel of the wet sand under her feet. A voice in her head started singing... "I'm so excited and I just can't hide it, I'm about to lose control and I think I like it!" There was no way she could sing her beloved Pointer Sisters without dancing so she let loose, throwing all inhibitions to the wind.

A deep voice jolted her back to reality. "You're gathering a crowd with that dance you know." Alexandra spun around and looked up into green eyes, the color of the ocean on a clear day. "Alright, I'm kidding, " the man said. "It's just me and my nephew, Nick." Alexandra saw a young boy with sun-kissed hair chasing waves along the shore. "I'm Michael and you are....?"

"Alexandra" she said. She could feel her face turning crimson.

"Oh, you're Shirley's latest house guest. She told everyone in town you were coming."

Alexandra laughed at the thought of her arrival being a big deal. "How do

you know Shirley?" she asked.

"Everyone knows Shirley. She makes sure of it but in a good way." Michael smiled and Alexandra couldn't help but notice the sprinkling of freckles across his finely chiseled nose.

"She told us you were running away from home and going on an adventure. She made it sound exciting." He paused and stared at her for a moment. "I envy you. My wife used to love adventures. We were planning a trip to Costa Rica when she became terminally ill. I promised her that trip and I kept on putting it off, telling her I had to finish a project at work." His voice trailed off...

"I am so sorry." Alexandra felt her eyes tearing up under her sunglasses.

"Thanks. I don't usually talk about it to someone I just met. Please forgive me."

"No apologies need."

They stood there for a moment in silence until Nick came running up.

"Uncle Mike, you promised me an ice-cream cone. I'm hungry!"

"Alright, let's go. Alexandra can I bring you back something? It's just down the street. Better yet, why don't you walk down with us."

"Do they have strawberry ice-cream?"

"The best you've ever tasted. You'll be so happy you didn't turn down my invitation."

Alexandra went and grabbed her bag and towel. Suddenly the thought of strawberry ice-cream sounded very appealing.

Chapter 4

When Alexandra pedaled up to the house, Shirley was outside pulling a red wagon piled up with tangerines. "Want to go for a walk with me? I'm dropping off tangerines at all the neighbors. I can't eat them fast enough."

"Sure," Alexandra replied. She pulled the bicycle up to the storage shed and joined Shirley.

"Your phone was ringing off the hook while you were gone. I was tempted to answer it but didn't want to interfere."

"I purposely left it back at the house," Alexandra confessed. "I'm pretty sure I know who called that many times."

"This is exactly why I don't buy one of those wireless phones," Shirley said. "I don't need anyone bothering me when I am out and about. Take now, for example...There are at least six good conversations with real live people waiting to happen on our little trip around the neighborhood. You'll have a lot of new friends by the time this wagon is empty."

New friends...Just the thought of it sounded interesting to Alexandra.

When Alexandra got out of the shower, she stretched out on the big fluffy bed with the lime green chenille bedspread and made the phone call.

"What the hell are you doing Alexandra?" was the first thing out of Robert's mouth.

"I explained it all in my note."

What are you, some rebellious kid? This is ridiculous...I demand you get back on a bus and come home!"

Alexandra took a deep breath and exhaled it slowly. "No Robert," she

answered, "I'm staying for the week as planned."

"Did you conveniently forget that I have the most important clients of my career coming in this week? I expect you to prepare an elegant dinner for them."

Alexandra bit her lip until it bled.

"Alexandra, are you there? Robert yelled, the frustration building in his voice.

"You never mentioned this dinner to me Robert." Alexandra paused and wiped the blood off her lip before she continued." I suggest you make a reservation at one of your favorite elegant restaurants. I am sure your boss will not question you putting it on your expense account."

"Have you lost your mind? Pack and come home now!"

Alexandra stood up and walked to the window. Shirley was on her knees pruning roses. A soft breeze with the sweet scent drifted in the window.

"Goodbye Robert" Alexandra said." Have a wonderful week."

Chapter 5

Shirley was taking the carrot cake out of the oven when the doorbell rang. "Alexandra, can you get that," she hollered into the living room. Alexandra opened the door and found a tall lanky man with a patch over one eye. His long grey hair was pulled back into a pony tail. Alexandra immediately thought of pirates and hidden treasures.

"Good afternoon young lady. It is a pleasure to meet you. My name is William but everyone calls me Billy." He took Alexandra's right hand and gave it a light kiss. "You are as pretty as Shirley described."

"Let the old geezer in," Shirley yelled from the kitchen. "If you don't, he'll keep those compliments coming until he makes his way into the house."

Billy poked his head in the kitchen. "It sure smells good in here. What's on the menu?"

"It's a surprise, so out of my kitchen! Go sit with my house guest and stay out of trouble!"

Billy made himself comfortable on the flowered love seat while Alexandra sat on an oversized wicker chair across from him.

"I have a regular Saturday night invitation for dinner," Billy told Alexandra. He leaned over and whispered loudly, "Don't listen to anything Shirley says about me. I'm a perfect gentleman and she's crazy about me. That woman is going to marry me one day!"

"Only in your dreams old man," Shirley said, as she walked in with a platter of fresh vegetables. "Stick a carrot in your mouth and quit filling this girl's head with nonsense." Alexandra noticed that Shirley had put on coral lipstick and a beautiful freshwater pearl necklace. She watched as Billy smiled at Shirley and could instantly feel the connection between them.

Alexandra wondered how old they both were. She figured at least late 70's and smiled at the thought of the two of them engaged in a passionate romance. She thought back to her Father who couldn't keep his hands off her Mother right up to the day she died. He once told Alexandra, "When I look at your Mother, I see that beauty I married 50 years ago."

Alexandra wanted that kind of marriage, too. Not a man who suggested when she turned 50 that she schedule some plastic surgery. She remembers walking into her bathroom, looking in the mirror and suddenly feeling very old. The sad eyes of the woman staring back at her made her cry.

Something inside her had died...

Chapter 6

Alexandra was paying for her purchase at the fruit stand when she saw Mike. He was dressed in khakis and a black shirt that complimented his muscular build. Alexandra started to walk away when he caught up with her. "What a coincidence," he said. "I had a craving for strawberries, too. Must have been that ice-cream we shared the other day!"

Alexandra smiled. "Do you work near here?" she asked, offering him a strawberry.

"Right across the street," he replied, popping the succulent fruit into his mouth. "I try to go for a walk after lunch every day. One of the fringe benefits of living in this tropical paradise."

"Lucky you," she said. "I worked for years in a school right off a major highway. The only place to take a walk was in the parking lot."

Mike took off his sunglasses and stared at Alexandra. "Two days in Florida and you already look like one of us. Nice tan. He paused for just a second. "Do you have plans tonight?"

"I did mention that I was married, didn't I?"

"I think you slipped that in the conversation the other day. I thought you might like to join me for dinner at my favorite hangout. A girl needs to eat, doesn't she?"

Alexandra's heart skipped a beat. Suddenly she heard a voice say, "Sounds nice. What time will you pick me up?"

"At seven," Mike answered. "Wear comfortable shoes because after dinner, I'm taking you for a walk on the pier. The view is incredible and there's usually some kind of music playing. You'll get a real taste of our little town."

As Alexandra walked back to Shirley's house, she remembered how at the last minute, she packed the new red dress she bought to wear on an anniversary cruise with Robert...a trip that he ended up cancelling.

Tonight she would wear that dress and bring it to life!

Chapter 7

Mike and Alexandra were seated at a cozy booth with a view of the water. The colors of the sunset illuminated the sky. Alexandra whispered, "How breathtakingly beautiful!" As she gazed around the restaurant, Mike explained how the walls were filled with photographs of all the famous people who had eaten there since it opened 50 years ago.

The owner, a gentleman in his 80's was dressed in a bright plaid jacket, dark green slacks and a canary yellow bow tie. He saw Mike and immediately came over to the table. "It's always a pleasure to see you Mike," he said, flashing a big smile at Alexandra. "And who is this lovely lady, if you don't mind me asking?"

Mike made the introductions and then the owner went into the kitchen to get them a basket of freshly baked rolls.

"Wait until you see this menu," Mike said. "The selections are endless. Whatever you are in the mood for, I guarantee you will find."

A few minutes later, while enjoying appetizers and a glass of Florida Key Lime wine, Mike asked Alexandra how long she was planning to stay.

"I had planned to vacation for one week. Actually, my bus ticket home is an open ticket. I thought it would be better to do it that way."

"I hope I am not out of line asking this, but I'm curious. Why isn't your husband with you?"

Alexandra looked away briefly to compose her thoughts. "I'm trying to spend some time figuring out what to do for me not us. I haven't done that in many years." Alexandra saw the expression on Mike's face and it made her comfortable enough to continue. She told Mike about her 28 year marriage including her two miscarriages. She expressed how unhappy she

felt when her husband announced that he was through trying to have a baby." He refused to consider adoption," she said. "He said if he wasn't the biological father, he could never love the child." Alexandra talked about the loneliness and how her teaching career became her life." Twenty five years of teaching language arts to sixth graders. Those children became my life!"

Mike smiled but his eyes looked sad." Sandra and I wanted a family but I knew before I asked her to marry me that we would be adopting children. She had cancer as a young woman that left her barren. We started the adoption process two years after the wedding and then the cancer returned with a vengeance."

Alexandra reached over and softly touched Mike's hand. "It sounds like you were very much in love."

"We had nine years together...From the moment we met and fell in love, almost instantly, to the moment she passed away in my arms."

They suddenly realized that the food server was patiently holding their dinner entrées waiting to place them on the table. The young woman looked at Mike and Alexandra and said," I hope that you enjoy your dinners, but most importantly, I hope the two of you have a wonderful evening."

Alexandra and Mike both smiled and said, almost simultaneously, "Thank-you...We will."

Chapter 8

The pier was almost deserted except for a few fishermen and a lone guitarist strumming a soulful tune. Alexandra and Mike stopped for a moment to listen and then continued walking. Mike took off his jacket and wrapped it around Alexandra's shoulders. "The ocean breezes can make it chilly this time of night," he said.

Alexandra could smell Mike's scent on the jacket and it was intoxicating. "It feels delicious," she answered "I keep thinking I'm in a dream and I'm going to wake up and find myself back home."

"Let's keep that dream going," Mike said as he took Alexandra's hand and twirled her around. Then he pulled her against his chest and whispered, "Dance with me." Alexandra placed her head against his shoulder and they danced, the faint music of the guitarist setting the mood.

Alexandra closed her eyes and tried to stop the tears that started flowing. She couldn't remember being so happy and wasn't sure she deserved this magical moment.

Mike lifted her face off his shoulder and gently wiped her tears with his hand. "Don't cry Alexandra." Picking up her thoughts he said, "You deserve to be happy."

Alexandra let out a long sigh, releasing her stress while visualizing it dissipating into the night air. She felt her body relax as she melted into Mike's strong arms.

Under a star-studded, moonlit sky, Alexandra and Mike danced the sounds of the ocean like music to their ears.

Chapter 9

Alexandra found a note on her nightstand when she woke up. *Had to go run some errands. Freshly squeezed orange juice in the fridge. I'll be back soon. Hugs, Shirley.*

Throwing on a robe, Alexandra poured herself a glass of juice and walked to the back porch to enjoy the sun that was filtering through the jalousie windows. As she started to sit down on a rattan rocker, she noticed a faded photograph on a shelf tucked away in the corner of the room. She picked up the frame and studied the face. It was a picture of a young woman in a graduation cap and gown. She had strawberry blonde hair, blue eyes and Shirley's smile.

Alexandra looked up and saw Shirley standing at the door. "That's my daughter, Emily," she said. "That was her high school graduation picture. It's hard to believe that she's in her late 50's."

"She's lovely," Alexandra said, placing the photograph back on the shelf. "Does she live nearby?"

"She lives in New York. She's a very well-known Criminal Attorney. She goes by her maiden name, Emily Levington."

"Is your daughter the Emily Levington who defended the world renowned Surgeon accused of murdering his wife?" Alexandra asked. "That case was all over the news for weeks."

Shirley sat down next to Alexandra. "That's my daughter" she replied. "That was the biggest case of her career. She used it as an excuse to go months without calling me...Said she was too busy."

Alexandra looked at Shirley, wanting to say something, but finding herself at a loss for words. She thought about her Mother and how much she

missed her.

"If you have some time, I'll fill you in on the details," Shirley said. "I don't want to come across as a hateful old woman." Shirley started talking and an hour later, Alexandra understood her new friend much better. Shirley shared how she eloped at eighteen with her high school sweetheart, bore a beautiful baby girl, only to have the wealthy parents of her young husband force him to leave her. She talked about her overwhelming sadness when the parents went after full custody of her child, hiring the most powerful attorney in the county to prove that she was an unfit Mother. "I had nothing to fight back with," Shirley said, "My father was battling an addiction to pain killers and my Mother had died when I was a little girl. I had no-one to help me." Her voice trailed off... "No-one."

Alexandra sat quietly as Shirley continued. "I was allowed to see my daughter one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer. The visits were always awkward and uncomfortable. Emily lived a very luxurious life with her father and grandparents. When she came to stay with me in this house, she hated it. When I remarried and moved briefly to California, I was miserable not seeing her. That and the earthquake I told you about were enough to bring me back."

Shirley excused herself for a minute and came back with an album. "This is my grandson, Charles," she said, leaning over the table and opening the album. "Emily waited until she was almost 40 to have a child. He was shipped off to boarding school most of his life and now he's in college." Shirley paused and Alexandra watched as her eyes grew misty. "I've seen him three times in his entire life. He barely knows who I am and I doubt he cares."

Alexandra interrupted Shirley. "You are his grandmother and he should know you. You have so much to share with him."

She stood up next to Shirley and wrapped her arms around the older

woman's neck. "You're a wonderful person Shirley...Don't give up on your grandson. He may need you in his life one day. Please don't give up on him!"

Chapter 10

Alexandra was strolling on the beach when Mike called. "I could use your help," he said. "My nephew Nick has been misbehaving in school and my sister has asked if I can handle it. You've got more experience with children than I do. Are you up for a kid-related challenge?"

"Always," Alexandra replied. "I'm just a few blocks from your office. Let me wash the sand off my feet and I'll be there in five minutes."

When Alexandra arrived, Mike was standing outside looking very happy to see her.

"Thanks for giving up some of your vacation time to help me," Mike said. "Nick's school is half a mile down the road. Let me run across the street and get us both a juice, so we don't dehydrate in this heat."

While they walked, Mike shared his sister's story. Though never married to Nick's father, his sister had an amicable relationship with him, both parents very involved in their son's life. Last year, her son's father met a divorced Mother of three at work. He slowly lost interest in spending time with his son. After the wedding, the new family relocated to Colorado. Mike's sister knew he was never coming back.

"My nephew is angry," Mike said. "He's a nine year old who wants his Dad in his life. I think he's finally come to the realization that it's not going to happen." Alexandra listened as Mike continued, knowing that he needed someone to talk to. "I love spending time with Nick but I'm not his Dad and I don't pretend to be. I'm just Uncle Mike."

Mike shared more about his sister and his nephew and the role he played in their lives. She could tell by the way he spoke, how much he loved the two of them. She thought of the children she taught through the years, many of them in similar situations as Nick. Alexandra was going to try to

help this little boy any way she could. There was no way she would walk away from a child in need.

Suddenly the realization came to Alexandra that she was supposed to be here, not only to figure out her life but to make a difference in others. It was no coincidence that she chose this town to visit... on this particular week.

Alexandra walked into the school with Mike, finally feeling like it all made sense.

Chapter 11

Alexandra was excited about the invitation to spend an afternoon on Billy's boat. Of course, Shirley was coming along, though she tried to make Billy think she had to check her social calendar first. Shirley was the one who made the suggestion that Alexandra invite Mike.

When Alexandra called him, he said, "Your timing is perfect! I just finished up a project and could use a break."

"Wonderful," replied Alexandra. "We'll meet at Shirley's house at noon. That way we can all drive to the dock together."

"Alexandra thanks again for helping me out with Nick yesterday. You made quite an impression on the principal. I got the feeling she'd love to hire you."

"I liked her, too. I think she understands what your nephew is going through. I know he's going to be just fine."

"It's thanks to some very caring people," Mike said. "Well, I'm going to make a few phone calls and get out of here. See you soon."

Alexandra couldn't believe how gorgeous the afternoon was. Each day of her trip had been absolutely perfect, as if the weather had been custom ordered for her.

Shirley brought a cooler packed with sandwiches, drinks and sliced melon. "Just in case we get stranded on a deserted island," she said, giving Billy a wink. "I also packed a change of clothes."

"Woman, when have I ever stranded you anywhere? I've had this boat longer than these two kids have been born," Billy said, pointing at

Alexandra and Mike.

Alexandra laughed. "Thanks for the compliment. I'm a lot older than you think." She looked at Mike and wondered if he had guessed her age based on details she had shared with him about her life.

"Well young lady, you look pretty darn good to me," Billy said, knowing that his comment would make Shirley roll her eyes at him.

"I can't believe that I'm forty-three," Mike said. "It seems like yesterday I was eighteen." He looked at Alexandra and grinned. "I feel like a kid in a man's body."

"It's all attitudes," Shirley said. "If you sit around and let life pass you by, you'll age faster than an old dog. You have to get out there and LIVE life to the fullest!"

"Let's make a toast to that," Billy said as he passed around bottles of root beer from Shirley's cooler. "To life, friendship and a day to remember!"

"Forever and always," Alexandra said, her words drowned out by the sound of the motor as the boat made its way out into the ocean.

Chapter 12

When Shirley pulled up to the house, she noticed a young man and woman sitting on her front steps with a couple of oversized duffel bags. "Looks like I've got a few visitors," she said to Alexandra and Mike.

"Alexandra and I will bring in your cooler and the other stuff from the boat," Mike said. "You go see who they are."

Shirley got out of her car and walked up to the front steps. She looked at the young man and couldn't believe her eyes. "Charles," she said, "is that you underneath that beard?"

"Grandma, it's me and this is Cara. I hope you don't mind that we're here."

Shirley just stared at the couple for a few seconds and then regained her composure and gave both of them a hug. "Of course it's alright... You are a sight for sore eyes. Let's get the two of you and your belongings into the house."

Minutes later, everyone including Alexandra and Mike was gathered around the kitchen table drinking iced tea and enjoying some of Shirley's delicious glazed lemon cookies.

"Are you two kids on a break from college?" Shirley asked.

Charles looked at Cara and then reached for her hand.

"It's a little more complicated than that." Charles answered. "I've got some news to share with you and I hope you take it better than Mom did. She isn't talking to me right now, since according to her, I've disgraced the family."

Alexandra stood up and said, "Mike and I are going to go sit on the back porch so you can have some privacy."

Shirley nodded at Alexandra and then turned to her grandson. "What's going on Charles? she asked. "As happy as I am to see you, please tell me what is going on."

Charles moved his chair closer to Cara and wrapped his arm protectively around her shoulder. Then he started sharing his story with the grandmother he barely knew.

Chapter 13

Shirley was very upset at the story that her grandson was sharing with her.

Charles and Cara had been dating since the beginning of their freshman year and were very much in love. Cara's father, who emigrated from Vietnam to the United States many years ago, was the head custodian at the college they attended. One of the benefits was his two daughters were given scholarships including free tuition and housing on campus. Last spring, Cara's mother was killed by a drunk driver. Her father was devastated and soon his own health began to decline. He was leaving his position a few years before his scheduled retirement and moving in with his eldest daughter and her family. Cara was notified by the college that her scholarship was being revoked at the end of the semester.

Charles went to see his mother to ask if there was anything she could do to help. He hoped his mother would use her expertise as an attorney to help Cara regain her scholarship.

"My mother refused to help Cara and demanded that I stop dating her immediately. She let me know how embarrassed she was that I would bring home a girl like her."

"Please tell me that my daughter did not say that to you," Shirley said.

Charles looked at Shirley sadly. I told my mother, "Cara is a beautiful, intelligent woman who I plan to marry as soon as we both graduate from college."

"Marry her and I'll disown you!" Emily had screamed at her son. "How dare you even bring a girl like that into my home!"

"Cara was standing right there next to me and my mother didn't even care!" Charles told Shirley. "I could not believe that she would be so rude."

We left immediately and went back to college to finish our second semester. My mother refuses to speak to me and has continually threatened to cut off all funding for college and other expenses."

Shirley listened to the story and felt like she was being transported back almost sixty years earlier. The heartache of what Emily's grandparents had done to her came flooding back.

How could her daughter repeat history like this?

"Where was your father during all this Charles?" Shirley asked.

Charles looked at Cara. She said, "Please tell your grandmother everything. She needs to know."

"My father left my mother three months ago. He said that their marriage has been over for years. He doesn't want to get involved in this situation and offered me money just to leave him alone."

"Did you take it?" Shirley asked, already knowing the answer.

"I don't want my parents money...I just want their love," Charles said.

Shirley stood up. She had heard enough.

"You and Cara can stay here with me as long as you want. My home is always open to you." Shirley looked at Cara and said, "Please call your father and let him know that you arrived here safely. I am sure he is worried."

"Thank-you for allowing us to stay," Cara said as she stood up and extended her hand to Shirley. "You are a kind woman."

Shirley looked at the young woman and recognized the look in her eyes. Suddenly she had the urge to call Billy and tell him how much he meant to her.

Life was too short not to give love another chance.

Chapter 14

Alexandra invited Cara for a walk on the beach. Charles and Shirley had stayed up most of the night talking and were both still sleeping. The two women slipped out quietly, leaving a note on the refrigerator.

"I can't believe that this is my last day in Florida," Alexandra said as they walked along the shore. "It's been such a terrific week and I made so many new friends. My only complaint is the week went by much too quickly!"

"I thought you and your friend Mike had known each other forever," Cara remarked. "You look so comfortable together."

Alexandra didn't know what to say. How could she explain what she felt for this man when she was married to someone else? Why was her heart beating faster just at the thought of Mike's arms around her?

"Mike is a wonderful man," Alexandra said. "I am so happy that I had the chance to meet him."

Alexandra was grateful that Cara could not see the tears behind her sunglasses. Just the thought of leaving and never seeing Mike again made her sad.

"Shirley is very happy that you and Charles are here," Alexandra said, quickly changing the subject. "I know that she only wants the best for the two of you. She is upset that her daughter is being so unreasonable."

"I miss my mother," Cara said, stopping to put her feet in the ocean. "She would have loved Charles and would never discourage me from being with him." She turned to Alexandra, a look of anguish in her eyes. "Why is life so unfair Alexandra? Why did my mother have to die? I need my mother!"

Alexandra wrapped her arms around the sobbing woman. As the waves lapped against the shore, she felt calmness come over her. "Sometimes

there is no explanation for why tragic things happen," she told Cara. "The hardest part is accepting them and moving on." She looked at Cara. "Your mother is still with you, in your heart. No-one will ever take that from you."

Cara closed her eyes. "I do feel her," she said. She opened her eyes and looked at Alexandra. "You remind me so much of my mother. I think she sent you as my guardian angel."

As the two women continued walking, Alexandra took Cara's hand, wishing the day would never end.

Chapter 15

When Alexandra and Cara walked back to the house, Shirley was in the kitchen baking cookies and Charles was busy washing pots and pans. "I'm teaching my grandson how to help in the kitchen," Shirley told the two women. "We've got a party to get ready for!"

"What's the occasion?" Alexandra asked.

"It's your going away party," Shirley replied. "I've already invited Billy and Mike and they accepted the invitation." Shirley started laughing. "Those two guys would never turn down one of my home cooked meals."

"A party...for me?" Alexandra asked. "What a sweet thing to do!"

"What can I do to help?" Cara asked.

"How are you at peeling potatoes? I'm making my famous potato salad. If you and my grandson would like, I just might share the recipe with you!"

After Shirley handed Cara a peeler and a bowl of potatoes, she asked Alexandra if she could talk to her for a moment in the living room.

Shirley took an envelope out of the pocket of her apron. "Alexandra," she said, "I want you to have this."

Alexandra opened the envelope and inside was the check she had given Shirley to rent the room for the week. "Shirley, why are you giving this check back to me? Your accommodations were so nice and you couldn't have been a more gracious host."

Shirley smiled at Alexandra. "I believe that all sorts of wonderful things happened to me since you arrived. You brought some good vibes into this house. Please accept the week as my gift."

"Thank-you Shirley," Alexandra said. "I had a week I will never forget and I

am grateful to have met you."

Shirley gently placed her hands on Alexandra's shoulders. "You are a very special woman and I want you to know that you have an open invitation to stay with me any time." Shirley paused and gave Alexandra a motherly look. "Please darling girl, think about your own needs. You are such a loving, giving person."

With that said, Shirley ran back into the kitchen to remove her cookies from the oven, leaving Alexandra deep in thought about what her future would hold.

Chapter 16

The going away party got off to a terrific start. Charles and Cara were in charge of the decorations and did a sensational job turning Shirley's living room, dining room and porch into a tropical paradise. Shirley spent most of the afternoon cooking and baking and making enough food to feed her guests for the next week.

"Go pack your suitcase," Shirley had suggested to Alexandra when she offered to help. "I know you're leaving early tomorrow morning. You're the guest of honor so after you're finished, soak in the tub and get all prettied up for your party!"

Alexandra took Shirley's advice and packed up her things. Then she went to take a bubble bath.

Billy and Mike arrived promptly at six. Billy handed Shirley a colorful bouquet of flowers which she immediately placed in the center of the dining room table. When Billy thought no-one was looking, he tried to steal a kiss. "You silly old man...stop that" Shirley said, her face turning as bright as her hair! Charles and Cara couldn't stop laughing and Billy looked very pleased with himself.

Mike brought a bottle of champagne for the celebration and helped Shirley reach her finest stemware off the top shelf of the kitchen cabinets. "I only bring these out for the special occasions," she said. "Charles and Cara, you two can have sparkling cider since you're underage!"

"Grandmother, what do you think goes on in college?" Charles said. "Trust me; they're not serving sparkling apple juice at parties."

"I'll give you a few sips from my glass," Billy whispered to Charles. "Don't start with that woman. You'll never win!"

"What are you telling him Billy?" Shirley demanded to know.

"How much I adore you," Billy replied during a little jig around the kitchen.

"You're so beautiful to meeeeeee!"

Shirley laughed and announced, "Time to eat! Everyone grab a platter of food."

**

After dinner, Shirley and her guests gathered in the living room sharing stories. Mike was seated next to Alexandra on the love seat, close enough to inhale the scent of her intoxicating perfume. He was having a difficult time staying focused on the conversation.

Alexandra heard her cell phone ringing in the bedroom and excused herself to go answer it. It was Robert. She put it on speaker phone while she sat on the bed folding the last few garments that Shirley had remembered to take off the clothes line.

"Alexandra, I need to talk to you" Robert said.

"Is everything alright? Your voice sounds so strange."

"I'm fine, Alexandra, but I have something to tell you."

"I'm listening....."

"I'm going to Paris and my plane leaves in a few hours. I was offered a very lucrative transfer package with the company I work for."

Alexandra stood up and walked toward the window for better reception.

"How long have you known about this transfer, Robert?"

There was silence on the other end.

"Robert, when did you make this decision?"

"Three months ago, Alexandra. I should have told you earlier. When Gina and I started seeing each other, I knew my marriage was over."

"You've been having an affair with your 23 year old secretary?" Alexandra angrily replied. Concerned that everyone could hear her in the living room, she lowered her voice. "Robert, why didn't you have the decency to tell me months ago when you decided our marriage was over? How dare you put my health at risk!"

"Listen to me," Robert said, ignoring her comments, "I'm going to be fair with you. You can sell the townhouse and keep my share of the profit. I could care less about the furniture. You paid off your car years ago, so I don't have to worry about that. I'll want some of the artwork we've collected through the years to decorate my new place. I've already had our Attorney draw up all the papers. I want this divorce to go quickly." He paused before adding..."Gina is coming with me to Paris."

Alexandra looked outside. It was a clear night and she could see the moon and the stars. While Robert rambled on, she thought of the night that she danced on the pier with Mike. She remembered what a perfect gentleman he had been and how happy she felt when she was with him. Alexandra's eyes welled up with tears. Had she wasted over half her life with a man who couldn't think of anyone but himself?

Suddenly Alexandra felt strong masculine arms around her waist. A deep familiar voice whispered in her ear. "Alexandra, I never thought that I would have a second chance at love. You are an incredibly beautiful, compassionate woman. I need you to know before you get on that bus, how much you mean to me. Any man who would give you up is a fool!"

Alexandra, shut her phone, turned around and looked up into Mike's

captivating green eyes.... seeing only an endless horizon of love.

The End

This story is dedicated to Herman Barnett, the grandfather I adored, who was the inspiration for the character, Billy and to my loved ones and friends who inspired the other characters. Thank-you for being part of my life!