

*Will You Love Me  
Again?*

By Emily Craig

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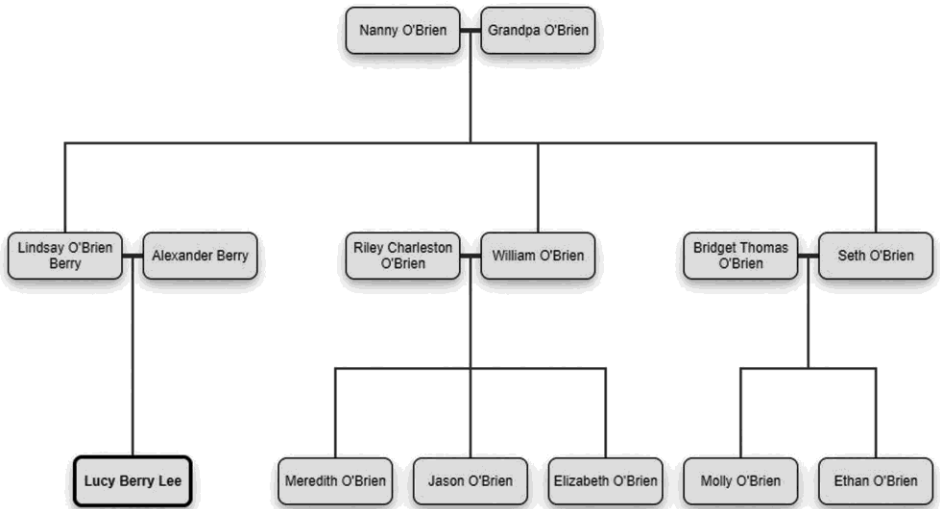
*To the aspiring authors: Never give up on your writing dreams. Everyone starts somewhere.*

*To my support system: Thanks for encouraging me to follow my dreams, no matter how difficult the journey becomes.*

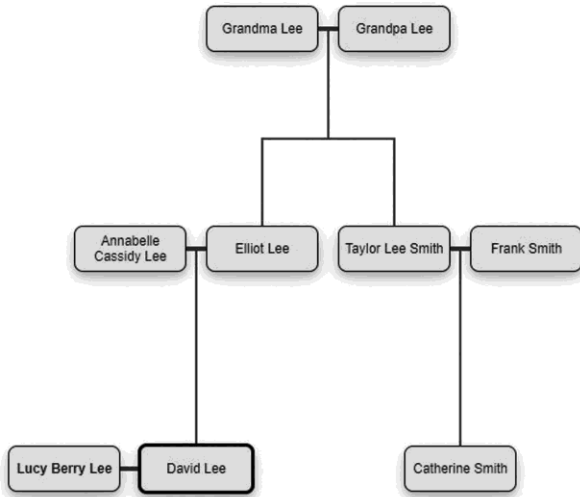
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## Lucy's Family



## David's Family



# PROLOGUE

*June 2, 2020*

I throw our prom pictures across the room one by one and briefly see the glass shatter against the wall into a million pieces. Our hardwood takes a hit as I see the frames crash with a thump.

“All these pictures. All happy and in love! Was it ever real?”

My husband doesn't meet my eyes as he spins his wedding band. He stops mid-spin and I catch his cautious eyes blankly staring back at me. He doesn't speak. I pick up our wedding picture, our 'I do' moment, and hurl the scarred memory at him. The corner of the frame barely misses his head and bounces off the wall to the side of him.

“Baby, sweetie. You know I love you.”

“No, you don't. You lied.”

“Lucy, darling. Please believe me.”

“I can't even stand the sight of you. You make me sick. David, I love you. I wish I didn't.”

“We can get through this. We've had issues before. I believe in us.” He inches towards me.

“This is bigger than moving away for college. This is too real, too hard. You knew what damage it would cause; you should have known.” I glance at the multiple college pictures. The ones where we'd always come back to the town where we met for date nights. I only let one tear escape my eye as I try to look back at the man standing in front of me. High school sweet- hearts, college sweethearts, and finally husband and wife. The love these years hold and some great struggles, but nothing compares to the past few months of marriage.

“Lucy? We can work through this. She meant nothing to me. You're my sweetheart.” He reaches for my hand, but I pull away.



# CHAPTER 1

## *Two Years Earlier*

### *June 5, 2018*

I walk over to the mirror and stare at my wedding dress. I take in the elegant view of a girl about to marry her one true love. I run my fingers down my sides as I admire the sweetheart neckline and jewels covering the bodice. I can't help but smile as the nerves bubble in my stomach.

I take deep breaths while slipping on my favorite Yellow Box white wedges and exit my dressing room. I glide down the hall towards the sanctuary and turn the last corner while taking in one more calming breath. My dad immediately turns to me; I can see tears brimming at the edges of his eyes as we stand hugging in front of the double doors.

With heels on, I am the perfect height to rest my head on my dad's shoulder. He is a short, stocky man with black shaggy hair (nicely combed today), and square-framed glasses that sit on the bridge of his nose. I feel the slightly scratchy fabric of his worn black jacket against my cheek. I glance down and notice he remembered to wear his shiny dancing shoes. As he pulls me out of our embrace, his blue tie catches my eye. I remember him wanting to match my "something blue" and he is. I smile as I touch my "something blue," my flower barrette.

"Are you ready?" he says.

"The question is, are you ready, Dad?" I joke.

"Your whole future awaits you at the end of the aisle. It won't always be glamorous but worth it."

"Dad, you're going to make me cry. I love you."

"I love you, too, sweetheart." *Here comes the bride* starts to play. Two people open the doors. I see David's face light up and his hands cover his mouth.



My eyes stay on David as my dad walks me down the aisle. My mind drifts back to the first time I met David at age 15 with his button-up shirt and khaki shorts. I always admired his dashing good looks with his shaggy brown hair swept away from his baby blue eyes. I snap back as my dad squeezes my hand and I take in the sight of my sweet David. He is still that dashing handsome boy I fell in love with so many years ago. His brown hair is a bit untidy and I can tell he has been running his fingers through it all morning. He slightly rocks back and forth on the heels of his black dress shoes with one hand in his pocket and the other still covering his mouth.

“Do you give this woman away to this man,” the pastor says to my dad as he stands in-between me and David.

“Yes, I do.” He gives us each a hug. Placing our hands in each other’s, he goes and sits with my mother.

David and I face each other with tears shining on our faces.

“I was told that these two have prepared vows,” the pastor says. I nod my head. My Maid of Honor, Jenny Thompson, hands a slip of folded paper to me. David’s Best Man, Aaron Morgan, hands him a slip of folded paper.

After unfolding our papers, David whispers, “You go first, Luce.”

Nodding my head in agreement, I say, “David, my love. You have been my whole world. I remember seeing you freshman year in high school on our first day. I told Jenny, that guy is cute.” I smile. “We had English together and I got to know you. I fell hard. Who knew you were falling for me, too. I can’t wait for many more years of love with you.” Folding the paper in half, I look up at David.

“Lucy, my everything. These years with you have been a blast. Never a dull moment because you keep the days fun. You have been there for me since my first day in a new town and I am grateful to have found you.”

We each hand our papers back, “If anyone wishes these two not to be together, say something or forever hold your peace,” the pastor says. “David, do you take Lucy to be your wife? Do you promise to love, honor, and cherish her in sickness and health, in adversity and prosperity, and to be true and loyal to her so as long as you both shall live?”

“I do.” He places the ring on my finger.

“Lucy, do you take David to be your husband? Do you promise to love, honor, and cherish him in sickness and health, in adversity and prosperity, and to be true and loyal to him so as long as you both shall live?”

“I do.” I place the ring on his finger as my hands shake.

“I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may now kiss the bride.” David lovingly dips me, like we are on a date, brings me back up, and kisses me.

“I now, for the first time, present to you, Mr. and Mrs. David Lee.”

We hold hands and walk down the aisle – finally married!

The reception feels like a dream, one that I had only made up in my head. It is all coming to life in front of me.

Jenny taps a spoon against her wine glass while everyone sits down. She moves her wavy brunette hair out of her face and clears her throat, “I have something to share. A speech to my best friends, David and Lucy.” She picks up a piece of paper from the table and begins to speak, “First, I’ll start with Lucy. She is one of my life-long best friends and I am so thankful for her. Years before we first met David, we were thick as thieves.” Her green eyes shine with tears, “None of that changed when the two became four. The guys, David and Aaron, added to our craziness and laughter. Today, two of the four commit to each other and become one. I am in awe. I am filled with so much joy and happiness because of the love that radiates from both of you. I wish you both love and happiness. I hope David remains his funny self and plays car games with Lucy like they are a couple of graduates. I hope you remain lovebirds forever. I love you both.”

She raises her glass, “To David and Lucy, may you have a long and loving marriage.”

“Ok. Ok. It is my turn to talk to my number one buddy, David,” Aaron says as he unwinds and rewinds his hands as his blue eyes light up as he talks, “I’ve known Lucy since kindergarten. It was always Lucy, Jenny, and me – three best friends. In ninth grade, I happened to be the one to show David around on his first day. Of course, not the same time as Lucy and Jenny first saw him but earlier that day. David was pretty cool and super smart.”

David gives Aaron a look. He runs his fingers through his shaggy dark brown hair and laughs, "Dude, you were. Yet, he immediately got Lucy's attention. I heard all about David that day after school, our usual hangout time. Lucy told me I should invite you to hang out with us and that is when we all became friends. David, buddy, thanks for moving to our small town. It'd be a little less exciting without you! To a happy and long marriage!"

Everyone claps and the guys fist bump.

As the music begins to play, David and I walk to the center of the dance floor, our first dance as husband and wife. My heart is pounding out of my chest. The perfect dress and the best date, just like prom. How'd I get so lucky? I hold David close as we slow dance to our favorite song, "Fireflies."

"I love you," he whispers in my ear. I feel his cool breath on my skin. "Here's to the next chapter of our lives."

"I love you, too," I whisper back. "With you, I know it will be the best chapter yet."

## CHAPTER 2

### *First Year of Marriage*

A few weeks after our June wedding, David and I are settling into our new home - a small two-story structure with white panels and a green door. Our freshly cut lawn, cut just a week before our move-in date, looks beautiful. A small sidewalk leads to the brick steps onto the front porch.

David hands me the last couple of boxes. Yesterday, we had Jenny and Aaron helping us move the furniture in the house, and today, we add the final touches. July is here, and for once it isn't terribly hot. After putting up the final touches to make this home ours, we sit outside on the porch in the rocking chairs my mom and dad gave to us as a wedding gift.

I scroll through my Spotify music library on my Android to find my Everything playlist. Finally, my finger lands on it; I click play and immediately our wedding song, "Fireflies," starts streaming out my speaker.

"If only we could see millions of fireflies at night. I love this song," I muse.

"You will never forget the lyrics to that song, will you?" David says while he smiles at me.

"Forever. It will always be our song. I love throwback songs that still mean something." I lay my head back and hum.

A few months later, things are going okay, but I feel something in the pit of my stomach. I brush the bad vibes away and go to see what David is grilling for supper.

"Hamburgers or hot dogs, babe?"

"Hamburgers! They're almost done, and my stomach is growling."

"Okay, I'll go get the fixings."

David is busy finishing up the burgers and transferring them onto a plate. His phone rings.

"Lucy, can you get my phone? It is by the door."

“Yeah, of course.” I walk to the back door and grab David’s phone. The screen is lit up with two text messages, Cindy (Work).

“Babe, it is Cindy from work. She needs you to call her when you get a chance.”

“Tell her I will after I finish eating supper,” he says as he puts the last patty on the plate, turning off the grill, and closing the lid.

I click the message and reply with, after supper I’ll call.

Even with the bad feeling in my stomach, I put his phone on the table without a second thought.

By the time December rolls around, I notice more and more “work” texts coming from Cindy. I tell myself that it is legit work talk, but I read so many things about failed marriages that I feel paranoid. I love David so much. He is a total catch. I find myself thinking, any woman would be lucky to have him. What if there is another woman. No, no. I am just looking for all the negative. Focus on the positive.

The click of the front door closing causes me to stop worrying. David walks around the corner and sits down beside me. I kiss him as if it has been more than three days since I have seen him.

Coming up for air, “Babe, it was only a three-day work trip. We talked every day.” He kisses me hard.

“It was so lonely here. I missed your touch, kisses, and presence. Every sound was amplified while you were away.”

“I missed you, too, babe. No monsters bothered you while I was gone. Just noises?” he asked as he kisses my neck.

“No. Just a loud noise every now and then. I could have fought the monsters, you would have been impressed,” I say giggling.

“You are so funny when you are writing out scenarios in your head.”

“It is fun to dream.”

“You’re my dream,” he says as he picks me up and carries me to our bedroom. Stepping over the threshold like we are newlyweds again, we make our big entrance.

He lays me on our king-size bed and slowly kisses me. Starting at the base of my neck and stopping at the top of my head. I start to let loose and brush all the bad feelings away as I enjoy every kiss. I slowly reach my hands up and unbutton his blue dress shirt, it is soft in my hands. He pulls me up as I am unbuttoning the last small white button and gracefully slips my t- shirt over my head. Before I can comprehend what he is doing, he eases up and takes my yoga pants off. Goosebumps spread across my body as he slowly balances his ab tight body over me. My hands find his six-pack as he plants kisses on my shoulder blades.

He pulls me back up and I wrap my hands around his neck. Running my hands through his hair, I kiss him hard on the lips as he lifts me off the bed. David turns around and pushes me up against the wall as our kisses intensify. Releasing one hand from his hair, I undo his jeans and push them down. He steps out of them and we are back on the bed, on top of the covers.

The next morning, I wake up in my underwear and look over to David's side, which is empty except for a handwritten note.

*Lucy,*

*I love you. I am so happy to be home. Rest up, I am taking you out to dinner tonight for our six-month anniversary.*

*XOXO, David*



# CHAPTER 3

## *Six Month Anniversary*

### *December 5, 2018*

Five o'clock rolls around and David comes home to pick me up for our anniversary date night.

"We're going to UMI, your favorite restaurant. Are you ready for some sushi?" he says as he backs the SUV out of the driveway.

"You know the way to my heart, David! Let's jam out to music while we drive. Next stop, Florence for some sushi." I turn up the radio. Athens to Florence is a 45-minute drive, and I still have worries about our marriage. Music helps everything.

The car ride feels like our drive to the beach for our senior trip four years ago. We were so in love. I hope it never fades. He was my first real love. And after last night, I know I am his everything, forever, I assure myself. He was so gentle and loving. I just need to enjoy our marriage and stop worrying so much.

Halfway to UMI, David and I belt out the lyrics to "Hurricane" by Luke Combs. By the time we notice the song has stopped, we are at the last stoplight before Florence's city limits.

"I guess we got really into the music. It swept us up like a hurricane." David and his puns.

Between laughs, I say, "I guess it did. Couple more stoplights, then it is sushi time."

Drifting back into the radio, Keith Urban's "Raining on Sunday" streams through the speakers. By the last line, *Let it rain*, we are turning into the small parking lot of UMI Japanese Steakhouse.

The entrance is decorated with Polaroid photos from the main doors to the hostess' stand. "Table for two?"

"Yes," I reply within seconds. My excitement is getting the best of me.



“Is a booth okay?” We both nod our heads in agreement.

I sit on the right side as David slides in across from me, “Your waitress will be right with you.”

“Thank you,” David says as she walks away. As we are waiting, we flip through our menus, even though we both know we each want a Rainbow Roll. David knew I wouldn’t share eight pieces of sushi. He learned that the hard way when he left hungry after one of our first dates. But he loves that I wasn’t afraid to be myself with him, and I ate as much as I pleased.

“You know what you want?” I say, looking over the top of my menu at him. I am in my black dress, glasses pushed up to the brim of my nose, and my brunette locks rest on my shoulders in beautiful curls. This is the longest my curls have stayed intact, the trick is tons and tons of hairspray.

“Yeah, of course. You look beautiful, darling.” That makes me blush and I take in David’s casual work look. He has his glasses on, and his hair is a tad messy but handsome. I love his hair messy.

The waitress, Joyce, comes up to the table with pad and pencil in hand, “Are you ready to order?”

“Yes. Lucy?”

“Okay. I want the Rainbow Roll, and can I get that with the soup and salad?”

“Yes, but the salad will be bigger than the normal side.”

“That is perfect. And I would like water with lemon, too. Okay, David.”

He clears his throat, “Make that two, except with a sweet tea with lemon.” Joyce takes our menus and she is off.

David scoots out of the booth, “I’m gonna go to the restroom. I’ll be right back.”

I poke my head out of the booth when I hear David’s name as I see him walking towards me.

“David!” a woman’s voice says from his left. I see him spin his head to the hostess desk area, and I can’t see who he is talking to, then I hear him speak.

“Evening, Cindy. Is this your husband?”

My ears perk up as I listen closely to their conversation.

“Yes. David, this is Tom.”

“It is nice to meet you. I work with Cindy over in Athens.”

“Nice to meet you, David,” the deeper voice says; I assume it belongs to Tom.

“Where is your wife?” Cindy asks David.

“She is over this way at our booth. Would y’all like to meet her while you wait to be seated?” I see them heading my way and I quickly slip my head back into the booth. Our booth is by the window. “Lucy, darling, this is Cindy and her husband, Tom. You know, Cindy from work,” he tells me after seeing the confused expression on my face.

“Ah, yes. Good evening. Are y’all having a date night, too?”

Cindy and Tom look at each other, Cindy replies, “Yes, our one-year anniversary was this week.”

“It’s our sixth month anniversary today,” I tell them. “The work trip ended just in time to celebrate.”

“Jennings, party of two.” We turn to look towards the hostess stand.

“That’s us. See you at work, David. Hope to see you again, Lucy,” Cindy says.

“Same to y’all,” David and I say in unison.

Once Cindy and Tom are out of earshot, I build up the nerve to bring up my worries to David. “So, that’s Cindy. She is pretty. Do y’all work well together?”

“Yeah, everyone in the office says we do. So, I guess we do. I’ve never really noticed.”

“Oh, okay, that’s great, babe.”

“Is something wrong?”

“No. No. Just wondered if y’all were close work friends. She seems nice.”  
“I guess we are. We’ve always been paired up with work assignments. From business trips, to editing assignments, it’s just how it’s been since I started at The Athens Editing Company.”

“Well, that’s good. Nothing to worry about, right?”

“Never. You’re my sweetheart. Besides, she has eyes for her husband.”

“I love you. I am glad I got to meet her.”

“I love you, too. I am glad, too. It was long overdue.”

I still feel that pull in my stomach, that something is going on. But now I am not sure it is with Cindy. What is it, with these bad feelings? David and I are happy. He has always had eyes for me, I assure myself as we wait for our food.

“I see our food,” I say with a smile.

“Finally, I’m starving!”

Joyce sits down the plates of food in front of us, “Do you need more water and sweet tea?”

“Yes,” David says to both of us as I nod in agreement.

“I’ll be right back with those.”

“Thank you!” We immediately start eating.

I pick up the sushi. “Yummy, that hits the spot!” I say between bites and I catch David smiling at me.

The night was perfect. Eating at our favorite restaurant to singing in the car like we were a couple of teenagers. No more reading articles titled, *50 Ways You Know He Is Cheating* or *Three Reasons Why He Doesn’t Love You Like He Use To*, and the worst of all, *Just Accept Your Marriage Could End Terribly*. I promise to stop thinking so negatively and believing everything I read on the internet and just trust my husband, the one man that I love.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Christmas Work Party*

### *December 20, 2018*

Only three weeks after meeting Cindy, I feel that David is more affectionate to me. He seems to have no desire for other women. He comes home earlier than before, is romantic, and always keeps his eyes on me when we go out to eat or spend a casual Saturday in the park.

“Are you ready to go? The Christmas party starts in 40 minutes,” David yells from the front door as I am walking down the hallway to him.

“That just means we’ll be ten minutes early, babe. Relax,” I say and place my hand on his forearm.

“I can’t relax. It’s a work party.”

“A party full of your co-workers and their spouses or dates.”

“People judge. They think if we have fun at a party, then that is how we are at work.”

“Okay, then just be yourself. David, you are so confident. You’ve got this. Let’s just have fun.”

“You always know what to say.” He takes my hand and squeezes it tight. Grabbing his keys with his free hand and opening the door, we are off to the office Christmas party.

I barely notice as David parks the car and lets out a big breath. I see him glance over at me, “Lucy, we are here.”

“Oh!” I giggle. “I was deep in thought.”

“What about? Another monster story?”

“Oh, no, this time it is about two lovers that go way back, but something may be preventing that.”

“Sounds scandalous.”

“Yes, it is indeed. The something in-between them could be several things, such as an addiction, a person, or bad blood started boiling out of nowhere. The story lines are endless,” I say smiling.

“So, I take it you’ll be writing tonight when we get home.”

“Of course. That’s my dream job. Yours is being an editor and I am an aspiring writer. The perfect pair. Now, what are you scared of? It’s not like every person in there is a writer, so you may never do business with them. Just have fun. Clear all the stress. Just because it is an office Christmas party does not mean that stress has to be involved!”

We unbuckle our seat belts and step out of the car. He opens the door for me and follows me inside.

The office is fairly large; the cubicles have been moved to make the main space an open floor plan. They are replaced with many spaced-out fold-up tables with red table clothes and ornament center pieces with glitter.

“David! Lucy! Over here!” says a familiar woman’s voice. David and I turn our heads in the direction of the voice and spot Cindy waving us over to a table next to the Christmas tree.

“Breathe, David. You’ve got this.” I grab his hand and give it a small squeeze.

“Thanks, babe.”

We sit in the two empty chairs beside Cindy. She is sitting beside her husband, Tom, and co-worker, Sam Shelby, and his wife Jessica

“Good evening, everyone! Merry Early Christmas!” I say to the group.

“Merry Early Christmas to both of you,” the group says in unison without meaning to.

Christmas music plays over the speakers as we chat about work and life in general. I catch a few of the lyrics to “Run, Rudolph, Run” by Chuck Berry and hum along as I rest my chin on my hand.

As the night goes on, I can see David become less tense and ease up. He starts carrying on a conversation with the guys. Of course, I listen in on their conversation while also talking to Jessica and Cindy.

“Did you guys see all the Stephen King novels that got put on the shelves for the horror genre theme?” Sam says to David and Tom.

“Yeah, *The Shining* is one of his best. Well, now that I say that, *It* still ranks as my top favorite,” David says while raising his eyebrows. “I finally got Lucy to watch both movie adaptations since she liked the novel so much.” I see him give me a big grin and then turn back to face the guys.

“Horror movie, perfect date night?” Sam and Tom ask David with puzzled expressions.

“Of course, she squeezed my hand tight and buried her face in my shoulder. Yet, she swore she wasn’t scared of a clown.” I hear him let out a laugh.

My ears perk up even more at this comment and I chime in, “Excuse me, Pennywise is very scary.” I roll my eyes at David.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever you say, dear.”

“All right let’s hear the other guy’s revelations. Ladies, I think you’ll want to hear this.” They turn towards the rest of us.

“Okay, challenge accepted,” Sam says. “Jessica likes some of the horror genre and owns a few Stephen King novels. So, I don’t think she’s scared since she watched the first movie adaptation in her late teens. Maybe we could watch the 2017 film for a date night. It would be a nice break from both of us looking over others’ writing.”

“How have y’all not seen the movie? The DVD came out a couple months ago. Doesn’t Jessica have time to take a break from grading high school English papers to enjoy a horror movie?” David questions him.

“One word, work! There’s just too much work and so little time!” Sam jokes.

“Second that. Cindy and I hardly have time to relax at the same time,” Tom says.

“Aren’t you a college professor, Tom? I think Cindy mentioned that at one point,” David raises the question to Tom.

“Yes, I am a Mathematics Professor at the University of North Alabama. Most of the time, I am grading tests while Cindy is getting home from the office to relax. Which doesn’t leave us much time to enjoy a movie together,” Tom answers.

“So, basically we are nerds that have no time to relax because we work all the time?” Sam laughs.

“Yes!” David and Tom accidentally say together.

“To answer your question, Lucy, Cindy is only slightly scared of clowns.”

“Sure, okay,” Cindy says and rolls her eyes.

“Well, you are!” Tom shrugs and smiles at his wife.

“Well, I think we should make it up to these ladies of ours! You know, not joke about what they are and aren’t scared of.” I see Sam look directly at Jessica and then at the rest of us, “Ladies, why don’t we all get up and dance to the music? After all, this is a Christmas party.” He stands up, grabs Jessica’s hand, and leads her to the middle of the dance floor. “DJ, turn up the volume, my wife loves this song.” “I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus” fills the entire office, and I see Jessica smile as Sam spins her around the dance floor.

Tom puts his hand out and Cindy takes it. He leads her to the dance floor and follows Sam’s lead on spinning Cindy. Last, David acts like he is just meeting me and puts his hand out to me. I place my small hand into his and he leads me straight into a dance. All six of us spin around the office, even around the Christmas tree, until the song ends. Once we stop spinning, the ladies and I can’t stop giggling. Our husbands are grinning from ear to ear, especially Sam.

The party is over. We all are saying goodbye and making promises to go out sometime as a group date night. The conversation continues as each of the husbands open the car doors for their wives. Waving goodbye, we pull out of the parking lot, one after the other.

“Sweetheart, did you have fun tonight? I know I did,” David says as he turns into the driveway. “I loved talking about the Stephen King novels and movie adaptations.”

“I guess it is good I love his novels so much,” I giggle.

“I guess it is!” he says to me as we walk in the house. “We wouldn’t have had such an interesting conversation without it,” he laughs.

“I’ll have you know you made up for your little comment about my fear of clowns with that smooth dancing,” I smile.

“Oh, you mean this dancing?” He grabs my hand and twirls me around and we burst out laughing.

I lay my head on his shoulder, then break away. “Well, I’m sleepy. I think I will write that story idea in the morning before I start wrapping presents,” I say as I yawn and head to bed.

“I’ll be there in a minute. Goodnight, sweetheart!”

“Goodnight, babe!”





## CHAPTER 5

### *First Christmas Married* *December 25, 2018*

I hear the clock in the living room chime midnight. I want to shake my snoring love awake just to say, "Merry Christmas," but I know he is a little grumpy in the mornings. Instead of risking yelling to start my favorite holiday, I slip out of bed and go to the living room to sit in the stillness of the morning. Curling my legs and fuzzy slippers under me, I look at the beautifully decorated Christmas tree. Our very first Christmas as a married couple. As I look at the front of the tree, I see my favorite ornament, which is the one with our wedding picture and the date inscribed on the back.

Before I can even blink, the clock chimes to signal that an hour has passed. Stifling a yawn and uncurling my stiff legs, I head back to bed to sleep a bit before the Christmas festivities start up. Quietly tiptoeing down the hallway, I slip back into bed where David is still heavily snoring.

I barely hear the clock chiming as I slowly wake up. Rolling over to grab my phone off my nightstand, I scream with joy!

"David! David!" I shake my husband because now it is really time to get up. "It's Christmas! It's eight in the morning, get up!"

Instead of the usual groans, he opens one eye and looks at me. He is questioning why on earth I am yelling on his off day. I can see that the little lights and other decorations around our room comes into focus, along with my bright smile. I can also see the realization hit him like a snowball.

"Merry Christmas, darling!"

"We have breakfast at my grandmother's in an hour, we've got to get moving!" I yell from the bathroom doorway.

"We live only 20 minutes from her, babe. I could still be in my dream world right now," David says through a yawn.

"I didn't want to be rushing around. And anyway, Christmas is like the perfect little dream." I smile at my reflection in our bathroom mirror while combing my hair.

"I guess you're right," he says as he gets out of bed.

Thirty minutes later, David and I are on our way out the door. I am wearing my lovely flowing red dress with tiny ornaments lining the bottom hem, black leggings, and red high-heeled booties. With each step, my jingle bell bracelet jingles. My hair flows in beautiful curls around my shoulders. David looks sharp in his casual festive green polo, khaki pants, and black Chukka boots. His hair is a tad messy, just how I love it.

Turning onto Highway 72, we make our way to my family's Christmas morning gathering at my grandmother's house. As long as I can remember, I have always come here for breakfast with my family; we open presents while spending time talking for hours before heading back home. The delicious smell of eggs, bacon, and biscuits can put anybody in a good mood, especially since some of my relatives aren't morning people. I am a morning person, I love waking up early to watch the sunrise, but Christmas is by far my favorite time to get an early start to my day. Although my family isn't huge, just my parents, grandparents, two uncles, two aunts, and five cousins, but spending time with them is always the best part of the holiday season.

Driving down Market Street, my grandparents' mailbox comes into view. I hear my stomach make a low growl, I hope David didn't hear that. I am so hungry. Turning into the driveway, we park beside my parent's charcoal black Nissan Versa and step out of the car.

"Open the trunk!" David says to me. Walking around to the back of our SUV, I pull on the handle to reveal presents. "I'll be back there in a minute; my phone fell between the seats," he says laughing.

"I thought you didn't bring it with you since you are off?" I say while carefully placing presents in my arms.

"I brought it for pictures. After all, it's our first Christmas as a married couple."

That comment makes me smile, "Sounds good to me, babe." I am finally steady with four presents stacked in my arms. I begin walking toward the front door, barely able to see over the gift boxes. I catch a glimpse of my cousin, Meredith.

"Hey, cousin of mine. Morning!" Meredith says in a very cheery voice as she opens the front door. She is a bit younger than me, in her senior year of college, but we have always been close. When we were in high school, junior and senior year, we would shop almost every weekend together. I called it, "cousin bonding" time since I would be busy with college the following year; we needed to get some time in before it all got crazy! "Nanny said to set those anywhere under the tree."

"Okay, thanks! David should be here in a minute, he had to dig for his phone."

"I'll meet you by the Christmas tree in a few," she says as David walks up the sidewalk and greets her good morning while carrying the rest of the gifts in each arm. "Morning, David," she says while walking in the door behind him.

A few minutes later, we finally meet at the Christmas tree in the corner of the living room. The rest of the family is scattered around the room on sofas, chairs, and stools, except for my mom and nanny, who are still in the kitchen finishing breakfast. My uncles, William and Seth, are on one end of the sofa talking about the latest Alabama Football season. On the other side are my aunts, Riley and Bridget, who are talking about the last Hallmark Christmas movie they watched.

After David puts the presents beside the Christmas tree, he, Meredith and I join the rest of the cousins next to the other sofa, and we take a seat in chairs scattered around. When we sit down, Molly, Jason, Elizabeth, and Ethan are talking about the Harry Potter series. This topic immediately gets my attention because, like David and I, my cousins love reading and writing, too.

"Which one do y'all like better, *Sorcerer's Stone* or *Goblet of Fire*? Consider that this includes what you like about those two movie adaptations and the novels." Molly poses the questions to me, David, and Meredith as we join into the conversation while the others have a head start on mulling over their answers.

This is definitely a way to get us thinking before we eat breakfast, I can't decide which one I like better though. I love the movie, *Goblet of Fire*, because Robert Pattinson portrays Cedric Diggory. He is so good in the movie, his and Daniel Radcliffe's acting is superb. Then, there's the opening to *Sorcerer's Stone* – a description of the magical world Harry is entering. I love them both, maybe I will just say that instead of picking one or the other.

"Okay, anyone want to chime in?" Molly says after a long pause.

"Yeah, I do. My favorite is *Sorcerer's Stone* because you are meeting Harry and the Hogwarts gang for the first time, getting to picture what every detail looks like in your head," Meredith says. "I remember reading the whole series and just loving it when I was in elementary school, but I think the movie also captured every detail well."

"I think I can top that!" Jason says.

"Let's hear it!" everyone says in unison.

"The cast, of course, for all the movies is marvelous, but in the first one, the main cast are just kids. In my opinion, I say that makes it extra good. Most of them probably got their big break on this movie, and they nailed it."

"You make a good point, but *Goblet of Fire* is also a movie where the acting is marvelous!" Elizabeth chimes in.

"What about the novel, *Goblet of Fire*? It keeps you guessing. Especially about Professor Moody finding Harry," Molly states.

"Wait, have you considered that both novels and movies are good?" I question the others.

"Well, yes and no. Sometimes I like all four, but other times I pick and choose favorite parts. I still like all of them but specific parts," Ethan answers.

"I agree with Lucy; they are all good, but also with Ethan on that, I really likesome parts over others between the novels and movies," David says. "Molly, what is your answer after all that?"

"I still feel that the Professor Moody and Harry scene in the novel is my favorite, so I pick *Goblet of Fire*," Molly quickly answers.

Before anyone else has time to question her, we hear Nanny yell from the kitchen area, "Time for breakfast!"

Everyone runs to the kitchen. "Jeff, will you say the blessing for us?" Jeff nods his head yes.

"Dear Lord, thank you for allowing all of us to gather here this morning. Bless the food to the nourishment of our bodies and the hands that prepared it. Amen." Everyone raises their heads and opens their eyes, "Let's eat."

Jason and Ethan are first in line with the rest of the cousins following. Platters of scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, biscuits with a bowl of chocolate gravy, and hash brown casserole cover the counters. I breathe in delicious smells that make my stomach growl even louder, making the urge to hurry the guys along even stronger.

Everyone is settled into a chair or on the floor. All is silent, and only sounds of chewing and gulping echo throughout the living room.

"The faster everyone finishes, the faster we open presents," Grandpa says as he sets his sweet tea on the table.

Ten minutes pass. "Done! I guess I can hand out the presents, right?" Ethan says. He stands up and puts his plate in the kitchen sink as fast as a cheetah. Returning to the living room, he walks straight to the Christmas tree. He looks for name tags and groups some gifts together to deliver to the anxious recipients. "Jason, can you come help me?"

"Yeah, of course, dude!" He gets up and crouches down beside Ethan, "Let's just pick up as many as we can and hand them out that way."

"Okay, that is easier than sitting here until we group them up by name," he laughs. The guys gather the gifts up in a stack with the name tags facing up. Each of them walks around the room, setting presents in front of someone until only their presents remain.

After everyone settles into their seats with all their gifts, the unwrapping begins.

My grandparents gave each of us grandkids 50 dollars, each along with gifts that fit each of our personalities from novels and journals to movies and CDs. Our nanny always went all out for us grandkids with a little help from her kids, our parents.

“Lucy, dear, wake up.” David shakes me to try and root me from the dream world. I groan and open my eyes to look at him. “Time to go home.” I roll back over, burying my face in the couch.

“I don’t want to go,” I say into the couch cushion.

“It is almost noon.”

“Fine. I guess I need to be able to sleep tonight.”

“Yes, that is a good reason. Back to the dream world later tonight. Remember, my family is coming over around six to exchange gifts. Just something small,” he smiles at me.

“Hot chocolate will definitely be involved then!”

David sees the sparkle in my eyes as I mention hot chocolate. “Yes, of course there will be hot chocolate.”

# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I couldn't have completed this project alone, and I am grateful for the support I have around me. Through rough patches, writer's block, writing assignments piling up, and struggling with the plot – I managed to come out the other side. As a writer, I learn from my surroundings and the people that walk in or out of my life. I have learned more than I bargained for, but that's why these characters feel so real to me – why this novel means so much to me. Throughout this project, I got to share some of my own life experiences, the people I've loved, and the future I want – but those wouldn't have been possible without what I have gone through since starting this novel. In saying that, I thought I knew where this story would end up when I started two years ago, little did I know that my writing would blossom into what it is now.

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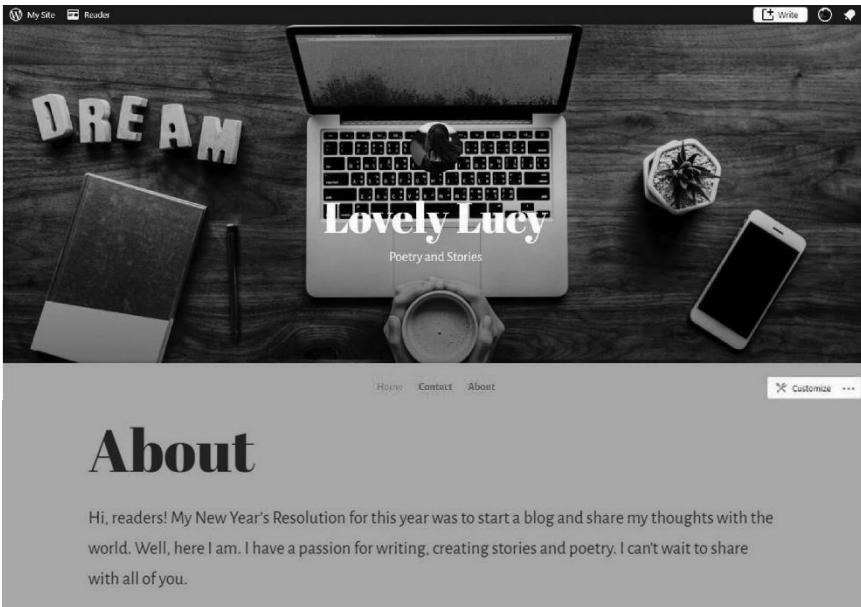
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Craig Hooie is an author, poet, and blogger. With a Bachelor of Science in English from the University of North Alabama, she always knew writing was her future. Her background in writing covers many genres, ranging from Southern Gothic to young and new Adult. With five pieces of published poetry under her belt and after the success of her debut book, *Will You Love Me Again?*, she wanted to fuel her passion for writing with two sequels, thus *Where Will We Go?: A Sequel* and *What's Next, Lucy?* were born. She lives in Athens, Alabama, with the love of her life Dustin and their dogs, Buttercup and Copper.



# EXTRA CONTENT

## *WordPress Blog*



Screenshots: Novel Blog Home/About Pages



Profile Photo: "Perfect World." Blog Lovin', 26 July 2014, [www.bloglovin.com/blogs/perfection-6490005/photo-3182681661](http://www.bloglovin.com/blogs/perfection-6490005/photo-3182681661)

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# LUCY'S SPOTIFY PLAYLIST

**Everything**  
Emily Nicole Craig  
109 SONGS

**RECENTLY PLAYED**  
Stone Cold Classics  
ALBUM  
Everything  
PLAYLIST  
Bohemian Rhapsody (Th...  
ALBUM

Install App  
Emily Nicole Craig

- Fireflies  
Owl City · Ocean Eyes 3:48
- Hurricane  
Luke Combs · This One's for You 3:42
- Raining On Sunday  
Keith Urban · Golden Road 4:45
- The Way I Am  
Charlie Puth · Voicenotes 3:06
- See You Again (feat. Charlie Puth)  
Wiz Khalifa, Charlie Puth · See You Again (feat. Charlie Puth) 3:49
- Empty Cups  
Charlie Puth · Voicenotes 2:50
- No Closure  
Tyler & Ryan · Basement Diaries 3:52
- Kiss Me Kiss Me  
5 Seconds of Summer · 5 Seconds Of Summer 3:24



Screenshots: Spotify  
Novel Playlist

## AUTHOR INFORMATION

### *Will You Love Me Again Series*

*Will You Love Me Again?*

*Where Will We Go?: A Sequel*

*What's Next, Lucy?: WYLMA BOOK 3*

*Connect with Emily Craig:*

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