



Prologue

Once Upon a Time... In The Beginning...

It's been a long exhausting day. Have you ever had a day that was emotionally so good, so uplifting that you almost couldn't breathe? Well that's what happened for me today. My name is Oliver and today I was the best man, the groom, and groomsman at the most important wedding I've ever attended. You just won't believe the number of roles I played today – all of them important, both to me, my family and in particular, the principal bride and groom.

It's a wedding that almost didn't happen but the Good Lord and His Divine providence orchestrated the whole thing. And the thing of it is that they both almost missed it by a lifetime. What they'll share from this day forward cost me twenty years of my life – it's a twenty years I'd gladly give again, and again, and then I'd start it all over and give it again.

You're most likely wondering what I'm talking about. I guess I would too if I were you. But you're gonna have to bear with me a-bit cause even though it's happened, I'm not so sure that even I, one of the principal players, was ready for the sheer magnificence of how God worked things out. For a long time, most of my life in fact, I've wondered why bad things happened to good people. I wondered on more than one occasion for example, how God could have allowed my grandmother and grandfather to be separated by the word of his premature death. And why had God teased me by showing me the love of my life but never allowing me to know her. I thought for a long time that God had a cruel sense of humor and my family and I were his victims. I couldn't understand why my parents and my surviving grandmother held on to God so much.

Don't get me wrong; I love the Lord more than you can imagine – I'm just saying that it wasn't always so or to be more exact, I don't remember a time when I didn't love God but was angry with His discretion in matters of my life. But as you'll soon read, I discovered that what I thought was God's cruel sense of humor, was in actuality, my and a few of my family member's total

misunderstanding of God. We didn't understand the nature of His love for us and worse of all, we had absolutely no comprehension whatsoever, into the true nature of His sublimely perfect sense of justice. Now this next point is extremely important so take heed; if you're reading this book and you even think you're mad at God for something you believe He allowed to happen to you, just slap yourself right-here and right-now. Why? Because I promise you, it's you, not God.

And while much of what we experience is painful, even the pain we experience is irrelevant compared to the love we share with God. Think of it this way; the pain of childbearing and childbirth is shocking, stunning, and almost unbearable and sometimes cost the mother her life to bring the child into the world. But after the birth of the new life, no woman alive would trade the experience away or even care because the joy of the new life surpasses any and everything. I say no woman alive because the women who died during childbirth can't relate their feelings but judging by the instinct that mothers have to protect their children, it would seem so. But back to the point; I'm telling you that whatever we suffer, you've got to know in your heart that it is nothing like the joy you'll experience in God's love and care. Trust me on this one; I know what I'm talking about.

Then again, why should you trust me. I keep rambling on and on and still, you have no idea what I'm trying to convey. I'll catch you up, I promise. But back to the wedding, it was beautiful and I guarantee you, you've never witnessed a ceremony like this in the movies, television, books, theater, anywhere! What am I talking about you ask? I'm about to tell you a story where God Himself performed the ceremony. I'm talking about a whole new definition for what is Biblically based but has now become the ceremonial cliché, "*...what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.*" By the time you and I finish this story, I'm sure that you'll agree with me.

So there I go again talking about the end of the story. Well as with all things, the only way to tell the story is from the beginning – in this case, my beginnings. So let's start there.

This is my story – the story of my life.

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It seems as though it was so long ago, but it wasn't. I was either eleven or thirteen - I don't remember. Anyway, it was the year of the great earthquake

in the upper Northwest. There weren't many buildings that shook, but then again, we didn't have many buildings - just trees, trees, and lots of trees.

I remember us watching the Balesterio Bridge between Chauncey and Lighttower pitch and yaw like clean linen on a high-wind clothesline. We were in the canyon below the bridge at the Oberton General Store, when we heard the air-raid sirens. Dad loved a concoction that he was only able to get from Mr. Peters, owner of the General Store. Dad loved coffee but wouldn't drink it during the summer. Dad said it was too hot but missed his coffee.

I was watching Mr. Peters as I had always done, with his blenders, crushed ice and strainer as he would mix and stir until he got it just right for my Dad's taste. Once, he even let me help but I could barely reach the counter so after that, I just watched.

The noise was deafening. The air raid horns from the Oberton High School were howling in the background. I remember that just as we all ran outside to see what was happening, a cream colored DeSota came careening off the blacktop hitting the canyon below. It exploded like it was a helpless box of matchsticks. The uprights of the old bridge shuttered under the roaring pitch and I both saw and understood the terror of the moment in my parent's eyes.

I, my brother Charlie, and my sister Patricia thought it was big fun, after all, the ground was shaking and it felt just like it did when we all jumped up and down on the bed screaming in uncontrollable glee. Shucks, I even thought the Russians had attacked and we were finally gonna get to camp out in the new bomb shelter I helped my Dad build. But those feelings were quickly doused as I saw people in the throws of an involuntary death grip. I knew it was serious when I heard my mother scream, "Dear God in heaven - help those poor people on that bridge!" I remember thinking as I heard her words, *'hmmm, that's a great idea'*.

I heard my normally stoic father wince in tearful trepidation as he uttered, "there, but by the grace of God..., we were just on that bridge. Dear God, help those people", as he dropped his cup of iced coffee to the ground in horror.

I looked up at both of them wondering what all the hubbub was about. And then I saw it. Yes, it! I saw as the cars hit the rocks below, I saw splashes of body parts explode in bloody grenades that littered the rocky countryside below.

As a kid, I was too dumb to know I couldn't do it and I tried to do it and it worked. Only problem is I didn't know it at the time and for that matter, quite