

# Worth Every Penny



*by*  
**Sarah Soon**



*Inspired by prompts from Sherry Craig*

## ***December 12th, 2016***

I'm running late as usual. My bridal session went longer than I expected. At the first red light off the highway, I grab a bite of calzone. Whoa, hotter than I expected!

As I take a quick swig of water, my phone buzzes. I glance at the text, Moriah informing me that my 2:00 appointment has arrived. When I touch the microphone button to respond, pepperoni laden with sauce drips off the calzone and lands on my white shirt sleeve. Figures. Just as I'm about to interview someone. I text *almost there*.

I have a strategy but need a small search and rescue team. Within a week, Moriah found three potentials—three more than I expected. Since it's Christmas season, I assumed no one would have time.

She screened them, and Sherry Craig matched our qualifications perfectly. Almost too perfect, so I need to interview her myself. I'm hoping she's sincere.

I walk into my house by 2:10. Moriah greets me in the narrow entry. "Eating on the run again?" She points to my shirt stain.

"That bad, huh? I don't have time to change."

"Alright," she whispers, tilting her head toward the dining room. "I got Sherry up to speed on the job requirements. Her résumé and application, the spreadsheet, and the map are on the table."

"Thanks." I give her a fist bump. My administrator and marketing guru keeps more than my wedding photography business afloat.

We enter the open space between the living and dining rooms. A blonde woman in a cream cable-knit sweater sits at the dining table.

She waves. "Hi."

*Have I seen her before?* She reminds me of someone who'd be in Mom's Bible study or book club.

"I'll get you a fresh cup of coffee." Moriah enters the kitchen.

"Much appreciated," I say. "Hi, Sherry. I'm Garrett Bettencourt." I extend my hand. "Do you need anything? Tea, water, juice?"

Good, her handshake is steady. My gramps called a weak grip "milk-toast hands." He'd say you can't trust anyone who doesn't put grease into a greetin'.

"I'm happy to meet you, Garrett. Moriah gave me some herbal tea, so I'm all set." She curves her hands around the sides of a mug. Hmmm, her accent is Southern, but she talks at a slightly faster clip than us Okies. Maybe Tennessean? She has that drawl where they stretch vowels into two syllables.

I sit across from her. “If you’ll give me a moment, I need to review my notes.”

“Take your time.” She sips her tea.

I open the leather binder and review her résumé and Moriah’s notes. As I read, Moriah approaches with a mug like Sherry’s, hand-painted with a pine branch and holly. They’re from a Christmas set I got from Granny and Gramps.

“Do you need anything else?” Moriah sets a coaster on the table and rests the mug on top.

“Great for now,” I say. She sits next to Sherry.

Needing energy, I take a long sip of coffee. Perfect. Moriah heightened it with peppermint mocha creamer and plenty of sweetener.

“You have a stain on your white shirt.” Sherry points to my sleeve.

“Tomato sauce,” I say.

“If it’s recent, you’ll want to remove it before it dries. I can wait. Run cold water on the back of it. Apply liquid detergent in a circular motion, working from the outside in. Spot treat with bleach.”

“I don’t have bleach.”

“Dab on hydrogen peroxide, then repeat. Before washing, apply a gel remover if the stain is still visible.”

Moriah stands. “I’ll treat it. Why don’t you change and bring the peroxide from the bathroom?”

Within a few minutes, I return to the dining room with the shirt in my hand and peroxide from my medicine cabinet. The Scottish plaid flannel I’m wearing is a more comfortable option.

I hand Moriah the stained shirt. She walks to the mudroom off the kitchen and slides the door closed. That way, I won’t get distracted.

“Let’s see here—” I glance at Sherry’s résumé. “You’re an author and bibliophile?” I look at her. “I need someone analytical and intuitive on my team.”

“I’ve been told I’m good as a hound at tracking anything lost. And I value heirlooms. They help keep our family legacies alive.” She touches her cross necklace.

“Lost is one way to put it. Best if I dive into why I need a search team. Hold on.” I pause as my pulse races. I hoped organizing a team might ease my guilt, but I didn’t realize how reporting this story over and over would recycle the pain.

“No hurry.”

I take a short sip of coffee. “The story starts with me lending my fiancée the heirloom to wear at our wedding. The gory details are painful. The bottom line? It got stolen out of her bag at the airport.”

Sherry grips her chest. Empathy, another great trait.

I tap the table with my pen. *Tat, tat, tat.* “That’s where you come in.”

Grabbing the map of metro Tulsa and the spreadsheet listing contact info for all the local pawn shops and vintage jewelers, I push the documents toward her. “You’ll visit these shops circled in red and ask if they’ve seen the heirloom. Then follow up in a few days. Moriah will give you access to the spreadsheet on Dropbox, so you can update it there.”

“Great.” She jots something in her notepad. “Do you mind describing the heirloom and its history?”

“It belonged to my Granny. She was classy, compassionate, and courteous. And beautiful.”

“You two were close?”

I nod. “Especially when my parents separated. Granny was a lifeline. I could go on about her—” Sherry’s eyes gleamed. “But you need the heirloom’s story.”

Crossing my arms behind my head, I lean back in my chair, eyes closed, and tell the story the way Gramps and Granny always did.

“My Gramps worked as a bellhop at the Mayo Hotel. Tulsa’s premiere place to be attracted celebrities and local luminaries back then too. The first time he laid eyes on Granny, he wanted to marry her. Since she was local, she frequented the hotel. With his charm and confidence, he found ways to talk to her. Although she had a boyfriend, Gramps didn’t relent. They became friends, and when he got drafted, he went for broke and asked her out.”

“How romantic,” Sherry says, “like a Frank Capra movie.”

“That’s a good way of putting it.” I open my eyes and smile, sensing Sherry and I will become friends. “She said yes, and they hit it off. On their date, he discovered that her boyfriend gifted the bracelet she wore, pearls with a sapphire clasp. Gramps promised he’d give her something fancier when he returned from the war. She told him she didn’t require expensive gestures, but he didn’t back down.”

“Sounds like a determined man.”

“Yep.” I lean over the table. “When Gramps returned from the war, he had a custom bracelet made. It drained all his savings, but he said it was worth every penny.”

I resume tapping my pen to the rhythm of self-accusations. *Tat, tat, tat. Only you would’ve been so reckless to lend it.*

Sherry stops jotting and looks at me. “We’ve all made costly mistakes, Garrett. Don’t blame yourself for losing the bracelet.” Her tone is soft as a lullaby.

“I’m working on forgiving myself, but it’s hard.”

“You’ve endured a journey to get where you are, haven’t you?” Sherry’s eyes have an effervescent glow, as if illuminated from within. Like Granny’s.

“I have.”

“Would it help to describe this heirloom?”

“Of course.” I set my pen down. “Gramps wanted each gem to represent Granny. The four strands of Atoka pearls represent the four years he was separated from her in the war. The gems on the gold lobster clasp are citrines, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and diamonds. Each type of gem represents an aspect of her, citrines for her angelic glow, especially the first time he saw her. There’s a picture in the next room.”

I stand, and Sherry follows as I walk into the living room. An 11" × 18" photo in a cherry wood frame hangs near the entry hall. “This is Granny. Do you see the bracelet over her white glove?”

In the photo, Granny stood in front of their marble fireplace, regal in a floor-length, emerald taffeta gown.

“The bracelet is unique. And only a master could arrange those gems so tastefully.” Sherry points toward the heirloom.

I smile. Yes, Granny was unique.

“Do you mind telling me the bracelet’s appraised value?” Sherry asks.

“About \$25 grand. And I’d shell out all my savings to buy it back.”

Sherry’s eyes grow large. “Wow.” I give her a pause to sort her thoughts. “Why not hire a private detective?”

“My dad taught me that relational equity trumps transactional dealings any day. I’d rather pay you than a PI.”

“That’s a good reason.” She tilts her head as she looks at the photo. “I believe God redeems that which has been lost.”

“You’re hired, Sherry.” I hug her. “When can you start?”

“Monday? I’m babysitting my grandpups over the weekend.”

“Perfect. Feel free to call me or Moriah if you have questions.”

“Will do.” Sherry grabs her purse, notepad, and pen from the dining table.

I hear the washer whirling. Moriah opens the sliding door and walks toward us. “Thanks for the tip, Sherry. Looks like the stain came out. We’ll know for sure once it’s washed.”

“Glad to help.” Sherry smiles.

“She’s joined our team,” I tell Moriah.

“Thank you.” Moriah hugs Sherry too.

“Besides getting paid,” I say, “you’ll also get a discount on wedding photography services. Do you have a loved one getting married?”

Sherry shakes her head.

“How about a professional headshot?”

“I’ll take you up on that. I need one for my debut novel.”

“I’ll provide a free session and five edited photos. Moriah will email you a scheduler, so you can set up an appointment.”

Sherry touches my arm. “That’s awfully generous. Maybe you could just give me a discount.”

I shake my head. “I’m not negotiating this. The photography session and photos are included in your paycheck.”

She lifts her hands. “I’ll receive.”

“You’re taking a heavy load off my shoulders. Worth every penny.”

After Sherry leaves, I sit on the couch and lay my head on its upholstered back. The sun shines through the window. Wherever the bracelet is, I at least have hope.

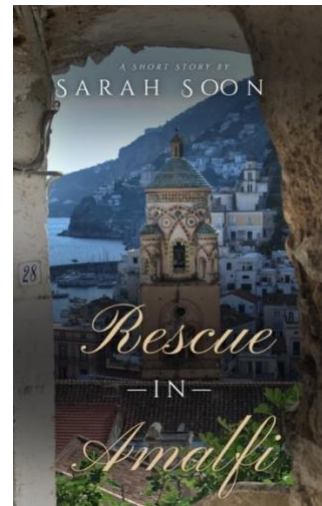
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## About Sarah’s storytelling

Sarah Soon has published several nonfiction works, including *Option Ocean*, a devotional anthology for young adults. She’s ghostwritten two memoirs and served as a contributing writer for the coffee-table book *The History of Medicine in Tulsa County* and for *Tulsa City Lifestyle* magazine.

However, she’s most excited about sharing her novels! Look for the upcoming *Christmas at Sonshine Barn*, an installment of her Mayo Love series, in fall 2023. Subscribe to Sarah’s monthly newsletter at [sarahsoon.com](http://sarahsoon.com) and receive her short story “Rescue in Amalfi,” a whimsical adventure inaugurating the series.

When not working on her latest novel, Sarah enjoys going on hikes with her husband, traveling, and spending time with family, friends, and her church community.



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