

Windswept

ONE MORE MOMENT

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Seven Years After the Close of Epilogue I

Houston, Texas

The Beginning of October

“You want us to do what? At the plantation?” Davis Jamison stared at his wife as she entered his home office after putting the boys to bed.

“I’m suggesting the whole family celebrate the hundredth birthday of your grandfather, Edgar Preston Jamison, at Windswept Plantation, the third weekend in May. We can have a big party and combine it with a fundraiser for hurricane relief.” Barrett Browning Jamison’s smug smile showed through her “innocent” expression.

“A party *and* a fundraiser.” Davis thought hard, put together some observations and facts, and concluded, “About which you’ve talked to several people already. Let me guess. My brother Bill and his wife, Teresa, the fundraisers extraordinaire. My sister Martha and her husband, Tom. Anyone else?”

She grinned at him, her hair a riot of curls, her dark blue eyes twinkling mischievously. It was hard sometimes for him to realize they'd been married ten years. She'd only gotten prettier.

"Only cousins Taylor and Corinne in St. Gregoryville," she answered. "Oh, and my brother Mark, who thought he could bring some of his football player friends."

Outmaneuvered, as usual. Although Barrett claimed not to be a military historian, she could work strategy and tactics like Stonewall Jackson. "Please tell me I won't have to deal with Lloyd or dress up in a costume."

"You don't have to deal with cousin Lloyd or dress up in a costume. Cross my heart." She made an X over her chest. "Corinne's going to work with Grace to keep Lloyd out of trouble."

Davis sighed. "I'll believe that when I see it. How much is this going to cost me?"

"I don't know that yet. Bill and Teresa think they can get most things donated, especially with Taylor's help." Barrett came around the desk and gave him a kiss. "It will be fun, you'll see."

Davis watched his wife leave the room. He had to admit, the party probably would be fun. The plantation belonged to the state now and was a stellar tourist destination, not his grandparents' home. He anticipated no problem in putting on such a party on its

extensive grounds. And the cause was certainly worthy, what with the way hurricanes kept coming right up the Mississippi River. Thank God the property was high above the river.

Come to think of it, he and his family hadn't visited Windswept itself in a while. Preston was seven now, and Clift was five. Maybe it was time to start teaching his sons about their heritage.



St. Gregoryville, Louisiana
Friday of the third weekend in May
A bright spring morning

As she climbed out of the car at the cemetery by the church, Barrett put aside all her thoughts about the party the next day. Now was her chance for the stop she and Davis made every time she came to St. Gregoryville. She took one of the flower arrangements from the back-seat while Davis picked up the second.

They always visited two sets of graves: First, of Davis's grandfather's and grandmother, Edgar P. and Elizabeth Jamison. "Granddaddy" had brought her and Davis together by agreeing to give her access to the plantation's papers.

After paying their respects to the grandparents and leaving one bouquet in the newer part of the

cemetery, they walked over to the older sections close to the redbrick church. Here wrought-iron fences with elaborate gates separated each family, and the Jamison plot held many descendants.

In the middle, side by side, lay the first Jamisons at Windswept, Edgar John and Mary Maude Jamison. Barrett thought it only fitting to pay homage to Mary Maude Davis Jamison, whose secret she had exposed and whose journal had made her career as a historian.

Barrett and Davis entered through the gate, which depicted a weeping willow, and placed the flowers on Mary Maude's tomb. As usual, they stood for a couple of minutes, holding on to each other, as Davis read the inscription Mary Maude had ordered. "Mary Maude Davis Jamison, 1811-1886, In Her Life, She Persevered. May God Have Mercy."

"Amen," Barrett murmured.

"I wonder," Davis said as he gazed at Edgar's stone before turning his hazel gaze to her, "what would have happened to the family if Edgar had lived."

"Mary Maude would have done what countless women have—held the family together, no matter what," Barrett replied. "She persevered."

When they returned to the plantation, they took a private tour of the house to see how it was holding up as a historical venue. It wasn't a huge mansion but a comfortable "cottage," as the style was known in the area. A gallery, or porch, extended across the front and

around the side of the wooden two-story structure.

As they entered the front parlor, Barrett recalled Mary Maude's description of the house as being welcoming and decorated in warm colors. She particularly mentioned being able to feel the love and comradeship of the builders, Edgar's uncle and aunt.

The house had been lived in since it was built, and many of the family's antiques had remained when it became state property. None of the upholstered furniture or the draperies, however, still had their original coverings or hangings, and no attempt had yet been made to replace them with more period-accurate ones. The result was, Barrett thought, that visitors had the feeling of coming into a home, not a museum. Fresh flowers and scented candles further enhanced the ambiance.

"You know," Davis said, as they stood in the dining room, "I still expect Granddaddy or Grandmama to come around the corner any minute."

Windswept Plantation, St. Gregoryville, Louisiana
Saturday of the third weekend in May
A fine spring morning

When Davis, Barrett, and their two boys arrived at Windswept Saturday morning, the party was beginning. Accordion and fiddle music came from the

direction of the small stage behind the dower house, where Mary Maude had moved after Edgar Jr. married. Next to the tents and tables set up yesterday, the food suppliers had started cooking, and those taking part in the gumbo cook-off were preparing their entries. A few local arts and crafts vendors had set up shop in their designated area. In front of the house, docents organized their tours.

The four walked around the grounds, the parents answering Preston and Clift's questions and checking out the layout. Everything looked ready. They met Bill and Teresa by the ticket booth.

"How are ticket sales going?" Davis asked as he watched the visitors walk down the long avenue of huge oak trees toward the house.

"Just fine," his brother answered. "I expect we'll exceed our projected numbers for both days."

"Who's the bunch in the field? They look like they're in uniforms."

"A group of Civil War reenactors. They're part of our plan—" Bill began but didn't get to finish because a fellow in an immaculate Confederate uniform marched up.

"Ah, here you are," Lloyd Walker boomed.

Davis groaned inwardly. Cousin Lloyd, the last man he wanted to see. They'd never gotten along, even as children. Especially as children. Now, although he and the family had stepped in ten years ago to save

Lloyd's butt from his own mismanagement, the man still acted as though he was leader of the pack.

"Lloyd," Davis said to acknowledge his presence.

"When I'm in character, you should refer to me as *General Walker*." Lloyd preened and readjusted his sword and belt.

"Are you a pirate?" Preston piped up. "You have a cool sword. Do you have a treasure?"

"No, I'm not a pirate," Lloyd answered with a slight huff. "I'm an army general."

"No treasure then?" Preston made a sad face.

"Not today," Davis told his son, then turned to his cousin. "Exactly what are you going to do in your encampment? We're not set up for shooting firearms of any kind." Davis didn't know what kind of permits the event had, but he wasn't going to have bullets flying around the kids.

"I know that," Lloyd grumbled, while Davis breathed a sigh of relief. Then the general perked up to say, "We're going to march and demonstrate how armies camped in the war. We also have permission to build a revetment—dig a trench and use the dirt for the wall—to repel an attack. We'll remain totally in character when we talk to our visitors."

Looking slightly harassed, Lloyd's wife, Grace, came hurrying up. "Oh, here you are, dear. The reenactors need you. Something about fortifying the camp."

"Duty calls," Lloyd said pompously, and after a

semi-salute, he strutted off with Grace. Davis heard him mutter, "You must call me General when I'm in uniform, honey."

Davis shook his head. "How did we wind up with a cousin like that?"

"Walker blood," Bill answered. "We weren't going to let the 'regiment' take part until we all realized it would keep Lloyd busy."

"Let us hope," Davis said fervently.

At noon, after presentation of the colors by the honor guard of local veterans, and welcomes by the head of the State Parks Office and the mayor, Davis took the microphone.

"Thank you all for coming today. We're here to raise money for hurricane relief, and I'm happy to report that all of the ticket and raffle proceeds, your donations, and half of what you spend with the vendors will go to that worthy cause. Our purpose is fitting because this plantation, Windswept, received that name after it was almost blown away in a storm in the early 1800s.

"My grandfather, Edgar Preston Jamison, whose one hundredth birthday we celebrate today, was determined to leave the house and surrounding land to the state on his death. Granddaddy had a great love of

history, and his stories and tales brought it alive to me and my cousins.

“Please take advantage of the opportunity to learn about everything from plantation cooking and gardening to how soldiers lived in the field. We have people who can help you with hurricane preparedness. For those of you suffering from the lack of football, some pro players will be running plays; all ages can participate. For those of you still able to move, tonight we’ll have a dance. Local merchants and organizations have also contributed goods and services which will be raffled off both days. Please, folks, be generous. All proceeds will go to help those in need. All the Jamisons thank you for coming.”



That night, the smaller cousins had been taken back to Taylor and Corinne’s for a slumber party when the adults and teenagers gathered for the dance. A band capable of playing all sorts of music, from zydeco to swing to fox-trot to square dance and more, quickly drew people onto the large floor that had been constructed in one of the parking lots. Candles in hurricane glasses, electric lanterns, and strings of colored lights helped create an ambiance of festivity, and soon everyone was having a good time.

Barrett found herself an object of attention, not so much as a dancing partner, but as someone to be pumped about a variety of subjects—Davis’s investment firm, her own history books, plantation life over the last two centuries, and her brother Mark’s plans after retiring from professional football.

Phooey! Where was Davis when she wanted to dance? The words had no sooner formed in her mind than she heard a familiar tune, and Davis stood in front of her, as tall, dark, and handsome as on the day they had met, and now with a sly smile on his lips.

“I believe they’re playing our song,” he murmured and drew her into his arms and into the seductive rhythms and steps of a tango.

Their song, indeed. She’d fallen under his spell the first time they’d danced a tango. After ten years of marriage, still entranced by her husband, she surrendered to the music, the dance, and him.

When he lifted her from the low dip at the end, Davis held her close for a few seconds and whispered, “If we could only leave . . .”

“I know,” Barrett sighed, “but that’s the problem when you’re the host.”

“Remind me: The next time we throw a party, it will be in our own house.”

“Like the first one I attended there?” She grinned at him, and he returned the smile.

“Oh, yes, I remember it vividly,” he murmured and

gave her a little kiss.

“Oh, for Pete’s sake, get a room,” Bill teased as he and Teresa came up with preliminary numbers.

Barrett laughed while Davis glared at his brother, and they became hosts again.



By noon on Sunday, Davis was beginning to relax. The crowd was a little larger than yesterday’s, sales and raffles were going well, and all were enjoying themselves.

He let himself be talked into running a few football plays with Mark and his football buddies *and* all of the kids around. What fun that was! Especially when he showed his boys how to stuff the football under their T-shirts while he faked a pass. They both scored a touchdown, thanks to the adults looking the other way, of course.

Davis was heading for the cold drinks and maybe a bowl of gumbo when one of the reenactors came running up. The man was covered with dirt and grass stains.

“Mr. Jamison, come quick!” he panted. “We found a coffin!”

“What? Where?” Davis asked as, at a jog, he followed the man back the way he had come.

“We were digging to build our revetment, and

there it was. Lloyd . . . uh, I mean, General Walker sent me to find you.”

“Holy . . .” Davis scanned the crowd. “Taylor!”

When his cousin caught up with him, Davis said, “This fellow says Lloyd and his men found a coffin. Find a couple of our police security and bring them to the reenactors’ camp.”

Taylor went off on the errand, and Davis and his guide continued to the field, where Lloyd’s cohorts were digging a trench close to the fence and tree line.

Lloyd, still immaculate in his uniform, stood at the head of the trench. Inside it, about three feet down, three men shoveled dirt out of the hole. They stopped when they saw Davis.

“What do you have, Lloyd?” Davis asked as he approached.

“See for yourself.” Lloyd pointed down.

In the bottom of the trench, the men had uncovered a rectangular metal box that appeared to be about two feet wide and six feet long. It might have been a coffin, but it looked more like a crate for moving or storage.

“Can you get it out of there?” Davis asked.

“Long as it’s not too heavy,” one of the diggers said. “We can see the bottom edge.”

The law arrived in the person of the St. Gregoryville chief of police. George Wheeler took in the situation and told the men to see if they could raise the box. Then he ordered the deputy he’d brought with

him to get the crowd back to a manageable distance.

“Some of you help the deputy,” Lloyd commanded his men before turning eagerly to Davis. “What do you think it is? A body? Pieces of the family silver? Treasure from a raid on the Yankees?”

“You’re letting your imagination get the better of you,” Davis replied. Trust it to Lloyd to come up with fanciful tales. After all, he had been the one who’d kept yelling about a “terrible secret” hiding in the plantation papers. Davis doubted they had the same situation here.

Barrett and Grace came running up, and he quickly filled them in. Barrett frowned thoughtfully. “I don’t remember any comment in the papers or journals about something buried in the fields.”

The troops brought ropes to slide under each end, and those in the hole heaved on their shovels to free the crate. After some adjustment and with a certain amount of cursing, they lifted the crate out.

An old-fashioned lock held the metal hasp closed.

“Can you break that lock, Melvin?” Lloyd asked as a trooper came forward with a crowbar.

“Yeah, the metal’s rusted and pretty thin. I think it’s only a metal skin with wood underneath. Don’t stink, so I don’t think there’s a body here.”

“Get on with it, man,” Lloyd growled.

A couple of men held the box in place, and Melvin slid the crowbar under the hasp and pulled. With a

creeeeeeeeeeeeeeak and a *snap!* the lock flew off.

“Stand back, men!” Lloyd pushed himself to the front.

Davis stood by the police chief and watched Lloyd get his gloves dirty as he tugged on the top—and nothing budged.

Melvin took pity on his commanding officer and used the crowbar again to work on the lid. The top gave way grudgingly but finally flopped open.

The first thing everyone saw was gray-green oilcloth tied together through metal grommets. Exactly as Edgar’s and Mary Maude’s journals had been. Davis stared as Barrett gasped and grabbed his arm.

Lloyd pulled a knife and cut the twine, then flipped back the oilcloth.

A sigh, then a laugh rippled around the audience.

Inside were a very rusted musket, a badly dinged and dull cavalry sword, some wooden guns, a Confederate hat and a Yankee one, a variety of toys, and, last but not least, a good pile of Confederate money.

“Looks like some of the younger Jamison boys played here at one time,” Chief Wheeler remarked.

“Let’s hope this is the last secret of Windswept Plantation,” Barrett said.

“And,” Davis added, “we can tell Preston we did find a treasure.”
