

Doctor Robert Pritchard finally arrived and raced over to his patient. He looked at the wound, felt for a pulse, listened to his heart and chest and then looked at Delilah. The expression on his face told the whole story.

“This does not look good. Jameson is very weak; he has lost a lot of blood. I may be able to stitch him up but he will need a blood transfusion immediately. I will need someone that hopefully matches his blood type, preferably a close relative.”

The family was all deceased except for Jebediah, his nephew, who quickly volunteered.

“What do I have to do, Doc?”

Doctor Pritchard reached into his bag for a needle and some twine and went to work to close up the gaping wound on an ever weakening Jameson. Nanny wiped the blood away to give the surgeon a clearer view of the severed vessel.

As he tediously labored away, sweat poured down his brow and had to be constantly wiped away.

He began to bark out orders as he continued his labor: “Jebediah, take off your shirt. You two bring that other couch over here. Nanny, boil some water to sterilize these items.”

He produced two more needles from his bag, a tube and a small bellows which would transport the blood from one man to another.

He mumbled under his breath, “I hope this works.”

The wound was successfully closed and Jebediah lie prostate on the adjoining couch as the surgeon stuck one needle into his arm attached the tube to the two needles, and then stuck the other needle into an unconscious Jameson. He began to pump the small bellows until the blood began to flow from the donor to the patient. Minutes passed which seemed like hours and then Doctor Pritchard removed the needle from Jebediah and then Jameson.

“I can give him more,” stated Jebediah.

“No, taking too much will weaken you and I can’t do that. Now you just lie there and rest. Nanny get him something to eat and drink so he can regain his strength.”

“How is James?” quizzed Delilah.

“Only time will tell. He needs to rest for the next few days, I’ve done all I can do, it’s up to God now.”

Jameson still looked very pale and weak as Delilah took his hand and told him to get better; she would remain next to him for as long as necessary.

Everyone wanted to know what happened to Michelle. Delilah said she had stabbed him with his own blade and as he stumbled off an alligator finished the job. No one shed a tear.

The children were brought in to see that their papa was ok. They both kissed his head and told him to get better quickly and then were ushered off to bed. Delilah stayed close to her husband all night, never sleeping, just keeping a close watch for any sign at all.

Doctor Pritchard came by every day to check on his patient. The blood transfusion was obviously successful as Jameson seemed to be improving. The recovery was slow but over the next couple of days, Jameson was getting his strength back. Nanny made fresh chicken soup every day and he eagerly devoured it.

In the next few days, Jebediah and Marcus returned to the swamp with an idea. They wanted to find and recover Delilah's pearls, restring them and surprise her with a new strand. They knew this small gesture would make her happy and perhaps they could bring a smile to her face once again, a smile that no one had seen for a while. It would be difficult, they imagined, as the mud and soft earth would cover and disguise the jewels, preventing the light from revealing their whereabouts. They also had to watch out for the reptiles, quicksand and poison plants that thrived in this inhospitable habitat.

They searched carefully marking their steps so as not to get lost in the forbidden area. There was one and look there, another. They still glistened even in the minimal amount of sunlight that was allowed to pierce through the dense overgrowth. They walked all the way back to the clearing and the old shack, amassing quite a few gems. When they were satisfied that they had found as many as was possible, they returned home. They even managed to find the original string that Delilah had torn off her neck.

They returned them to Madeline and Ambrosia who carefully cleaned each one, and painstakingly began to restring them. Marcus was even able to repair the broken clasp. When it was completed, the necklace almost looked as good as new, no one would be able to tell the difference.

That afternoon they surprised Delilah with a box. They had to coax her to open it but upon opening the case and seeing the pearls glowing in the light, she was touched by their generosity and kindness and wept with joy. She hugged and kissed each one in turn and then she placed it around her neck and clasped it tight; where it was never to be removed again. She eagerly showed them to Jameson who also thanked them for the kind gesture.

Jameson was too weak to make the journey northward and Delilah's time for giving birth was rapidly approaching so they remained in South Carolina, at least for the time being.

Six months later, Delilah delivered a healthy baby boy which she promptly named, Jameson Lee Hartford Jr. He was the spitting image of his father. Both boys were proud and beaming.

Abigail too delivered a child, a girl which she named, Jamie Gail, a tribute to her former husband. She had a difficult pregnancy and a very hard delivery due to the wound she suffered at the hands of the Frenchman.

Delilah and she became unlikely friends but complications continued to plague Abigail, the wound would not permanently heal and she never fully recuperated. One day Jameson's and Delilah's presence was requested at Tall Oaks. When they entered Abigail's room, they were aghast at how pale and weak the lady had become. Doctor Pritchard told her Abigail was near death how and there was nothing more he could do. Her spirit seemed unwilling or unable to go on.

Abigail summoned Jameson and Delilah close to her bed and managed to acquire the strength to speak, "I'm not going to make it."

“Don’t talk like that; of course you will Abbey, you’re going to get better.”

“No, no I know I won’t, but I need to ask you a big favor.”

“Of course, Abigail, you can ask me anything, but there is no need as you will get better, just as before.”

“I need both of you to take care of Jamie Gail for me. I know that is a lot to ask, but you’re the only ones I trust to raise her.”

“What about Annabelle?”

“Belle, she’s still such a scatterbrain can’t possibly raise a baby. She is still not well since the, er...incident. Please do this for me...please.”

Delilah looked at Jameson and the two did not have to think twice about the request, after all, the baby was a part of Jameson and who else should raise the child.

“Of course we will, Abigail, we will raise her as if she was our own child, don’t you worry about that; but you rest and try to get better so you can...”

Suddenly Abigail went silent and quietly passed. It seemed as if she held onto life just long enough to secure her daughters future. Doc Pritchard felt her pulse, listened to her heart and sadly covered her with a sheet.

Delilah, Jameson and Annabelle cried together, all hate and jealousy had been forgotten. They took the child home with them that day and lived up to their promise.

Annabelle was ridden with guilt because of what she had started with the Frenchman. She blamed herself for her sister’s death, Jameson’s wound and for her own disfigurement. She was severely depressed. Once her sister passed, she had no reason to continue and it only took a few short months before she died of remorse and loneliness.

Delilah and Jameson together with Nanny would raise the children. They would tell them bedtime stories about their adventures, all the while instilling in them the principles of fairness, equality and love. The children adored the stories and always asked for another, hoping to put off bedtime for another couple of minutes.

Jebediah and Madeline had two children of their own and stayed on to run the plantation and continue to teach in the school.

Dawnalee, Jameson Jr., Ruby Rose and Jamie Gail all went to university after high school, their parents insisted on a good education. They graduated with honors and decided on their life’s work. Ruby Rose grew up to be a teacher ensuring all her pupils would have a good education and racism would be a thing of the past. Jameson Jr. grew up to be a lawyer specializing in cases for the poor and downtrodden. He had a lot of his father in him. Jamie Gail grew up to be an activist, crusading for equality and minority rights. Dawnalee had a penchant for numbers and eventually returned to Boston, settled there and ran the bank her father had started. They all married and had children of their own, thus insuring the lineage of the Hartford name and its crusade for righteousness and equality.

Nanny survived for 5 more years and then one night passed peacefully in her sleep. She was buried next to her dear friend and secret love, Uncky. All mourned the loss of this great lady, friend and adopted mother. They were all blessed to have known such a wonderful human being and would forever feel her loss. She was the voice of reason so many

times and helped them through all their trials and blessings. No one could ever replace her and she would never be forgotten.

Delilah and Jameson never left Serenity. He was unable to regain his former strength and was content to stay at his first home and live out his days there. She worked part time, but mostly spent her days taking care of the children. She learned a valuable lesson, that money meant nothing without love. She blamed herself for not spending more time with Jameson while he was healthy instead of pursuing her business interests which seemed so unimportant now. She was so grateful for every day, hour and minute she was able to spend with her one true love.

One afternoon, Jameson went to sit on the porch, Delilah was making him a cool sweet tea. When she brought it to him, he looked at her and said, "I see my family coming down the road."

She turned to look and then heard the tea cup and saucer crash to the ground. When she spun around again, Jameson was slumped over in his chair as a warm breeze blew past her. She knew what it meant and cried out for the only man she had ever loved. He had lived to the age of 85 and had touched so many lives that his funeral was the largest anybody had seen in those parts.

Delilah kept her hair short for Jameson and would spend every evening, after dinner, sitting on the front porch, smoking a cigar and talking to him. No one knew for sure if his soul was indeed there or not; but a warm wind seemed to well out of nowhere and softly caress her, assuring Delilah her James was near.

Delilah lived only a few more years to the age of 89 and when she died, she was surrounded by her children and grandchildren and all her friends and family. One night, as she laid in her bed a warm breeze wafted through the room and then slowly out the window leaving Delilah with a huge smile on her face. It was as if Jameson had come to touch her and take her with him to their eternal reward.

She was buried next to her beloved Jameson. The large stone marker is still there today and the engraving is still visible. It reads:

*Jameson and Delilah Hartford*

*Together again... forever*

And so they still are and will always be.