

*Teenage romance, betrayal, reconciliation, marriage, tragedy, faith, rebirth and success.*

## **The Wonder of You**

By Lewis Lambert

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*The  
Wonder  
of  
You*

Lewis Lambert

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## **CRYING IN THE CHAPEL**

After breakfast I returned to my room as a single man for the last time. I wondered what Rachael was thinking about. She was probably surrounded by family, friends, a hairdresser, a makeup artist and the photographer. I was happy I didn't have to get dressed in front of the camera; in fact, I cherished my time alone.

When I was about to leave my room, the photographer knocked on my door to take some photos. I asked him how the bride looked.

"She's really beautiful and so cheerful. She's a photographer's dream," he said.

At 2:00 p.m. the wedding party, minus the bride, gathered for the photographer. Everyone looked great, Malcolm made jokes throughout the shoot. The photographer told everyone when they walked down the aisle, he would be filming them so they should just act natural.

It was time for Steve and me to stand under chuppah and wait for the wedding procession. A few minutes later someone began playing soft music as the wedding guests entered the chapel. I turned to wave to the people I knew.

Ten minutes later the pianist played the traditional wedding march. The bridesmaids and groomsmen entered first. The maid of honor walked alone. Then as if on cue everyone turned toward the back of the room as Dr. Stein and his daughter walked down the aisle. Rachael was magnificent in her wedding gown. I could hear people saying how beautiful the bride was.

When they reached where I stood, her father kissed Rachael and placed her hand in my hand. She seemed nervous. I could see her heart beating beneath her dress. I noted she exposed more cleavage than I expected; I was so in awe of my bride.

We faced the rabbi who began in Hebrew and then switched to English. After our obligatory responses the rabbi asked us to recite our personal wedding vows.

"I am the proudest person in the world to become the husband of the most beautiful and caring young woman I will ever know. Our road to this day was not easy but the road after today will be paved with love, respect and happier days. My true vows for Rachael will be delivered later in songs from my heart," I said.

Rachael took a deep breath, looked into my moist eyes.

"It's easy for someone to say they will honor and obey the man they are marrying. Alex and I have a connection beyond words, beyond promises, beyond this world. We are here in front of God because it's God's will. Both Alex and I have felt His presence and blessing long before today. God will never allow us to deviate from his plan," she said in a serious tone.

After I broke the wine glass to the many shouts of mazel tov, I lifted Rachael's veil to gaze onto the most beautiful face I'd ever seen. We stood still for a second, each with tears in our eyes. I pressed my lips against her mouth so as not to smudge her lipstick.

"Hello, Mrs. Orlov, I love you," I said.

As we turned to face our family and friends someone yelled out, please welcome Mr. and Mrs. Alex Orlov. Everyone stood and applauded.

We followed the wedding party to a side room to wait for our guests to leave and proceed into the reception room. Everyone hugged and kissed each other. I lost sight of Rachael for a minute or so. Dr. Stein embraced me and told me to call him, dad. Sylvia and my mom kissed me and said everything was magnificent.

The wedding planner told everyone to leave for the reception room and find their seats and for the bride and groom to remain for additional photos. We were alone together as a married couple.

‘I can’t believe you’re my husband,’ she said.

‘Yes, it’s true, sweetheart and you’re my wife,’ I said.

While we hugged each other the photographer took several candid photos and then asked us to pose for a few more.

‘You look wonderful in that gown,’ I said.

‘I wish I could change but I can’t do that until after dinner,’ she said.

‘If you get uncomfortable later put on something else. I know it’s warm in here and you’re quite excited, you know what happens when your blood pressure goes up,’ I said.

‘Yes, I have an orgasm,’ she whispered.

‘And you get a headache; remember we have a flight tomorrow.’

When we entered the reception room everyone stood and applauded. The photographer continued to take our photos until we took our seats at the head table.

A few minutes later the best man, Steve Weiss began the toasts. He mentioned his childhood friendship with me and all the years we played basketball together through high school culminating in winning the city championship. He said I was shy around girls, even in high school. He said only someone like Rachael could have rescued me from my introverted life.

“She went hard and fast for him and in less than four years she won her lifetime partner. We thank her for making this day possible. Mazel tov, my friends,” Steve said.

Beth Goldsmith, the maid of honor, Rachael’s lifelong friend said when Rachael sets her mind to do something, she does it.

“I think Alex’s goose was cooked the day Rachael told me she was going to marry Alex even before she ever met him. My advice to you, Alex is to let my friend do what she wants to do because one way or another she’ll convince you to agree.”

Dr. Stein stood and said his toast was being made on behalf of his wife and himself.

“To our beautiful and loving daughter. Your parents share this special day with you for the same reason as you do, we love Alex and welcome him into our family. From the moment you brought him home from school nearly four years ago, all our lives changed for the better. You told your mother how you felt about him months before you even met him. Relationships don’t

usually begin that way. For you and Alex this isn't just a relationship, it's a deep abiding love that could only come from one source, God. How you knew as a 15-year-old girl that Alex was the one, remains a mystery, happily one I don't have to solve. Our hearts are bursting with joy because of your happiness and bursting with pride that you have grown into a strong, brilliant woman and we're grateful to God you are able to dance today with a most wonderful human being. God bless you Rachael and Alex."

Ruth got up next. She was soft-spoken.

"I witnessed my sister and Alex grow up together for nearly four years. Their relationship was unlike any other teenage love story ever written. Like my father said this isn't an earthly love, it's a spiritual love. I love you Alex, my big brother and I love you, Rachael."

"I'm saving my toast to my wife for a little later, wow wife, I'll get used to it. Listening to the father of the bride tell you how he met me sounded like Rachael brought home a stray dog. I want to thank my mother for giving me a wonderful life because being a single mother wasn't easy."

I continued in Russian which caused my mother to cry.

"For those of you who didn't understand my praise for my mother, I told her in Russian that she was responsible for teaching me how to be a man, for knowing how to respect and love a woman and for encouraging me to follow my dreams. I grew up without knowing my father but my mother made up for his absence. I love you mom."

Everyone applauded.

“To the father of the bride, what can I say? For more than three years I’ve called you Dr. Stein. You were my biggest cheerleader when I needed encouragement in sports and on decisions about college and of course with your bundle of joy, the lady in white. You and I lived through some tough moments and we came through them with flying colors. Several months ago, you asked me to call you Harald, which I’ve gladly done. Today for the first time I have the privilege of saying I love you, dad. I’m sure there were times you didn’t think you’d hear that but I know you and mom, Sylvia, prayed it would. I also know you are grateful I captured the heart of this lovely spitfire and took her off your hands. That didn’t sound right, did it? I’m adlibbing this so please forgive me. I promise to share her with you and bring her back home once in a while,” I said as people laughed and applauded.

I paused to take breath and collect my thoughts.

“Before I serenade my wife and before I give her the microphone because I know she’s dying to tell everyone how she feels at this moment, I have to say to anyone who ever knew me before I met Rachael, this wasn’t on my radar. I mean what 15-year-old boy ever dreamed he’d meet his soulmate in the back seat of a gas fumed school bus? In fact, I didn’t even know what a soulmate meant four years ago. Rachael, you are my reason for getting up in the morning with a smile and I thank God for your love every minute of every day and going to sleep at night with a...uh, no I’m not going there but I’m sure you know what I’m thinking of. Rachael entertains me with her wit, she challenges me with her intelligence and she has a damn good lefthand punch when she wants to get my attention. She is unpredictable which makes my life fun and exciting and she is the reason why I will achieve my

dreams. I'll take her with me wherever I go. I'm anxious to hear from her now," I said as I handed the microphone to her, I kissed her.

Rachael stood as people applauded.

"Wow, there's not much left for me to say. It's true I had a big crush on Alex months before I introduced myself to him in the back of that school bus. As I said last night, shaking his hand that day and taking his hand today are the two most important things I've ever done. How can I describe the most perfect man I ever shared a be...a bagel with. I'm not going there either Alex. In my wildest imagination I never thought someone would come into my life and literally save my life. Alex isn't a doctor but most of you know he saved my life, my physical life, my emotional life and my spiritual life but between you and me, I think he was just being selfish because who wouldn't want to save me for himself."

People laughed.

"It's hard to make light of something as serious as a near death experience. It seems a few people have mentioned Alex and God in the same sentence. I hope it doesn't go to his head. My husband, wow, husband, sorry but I kvel when I say he is the most unassuming hero in the world. He could become a professional baseball player, he's that good, he might become a famous musician, he's that good but you know what my husband told me? He'd give it all up to make sure I lived my dream. Well, my love, you don't have to give anything up because I'm living my dream right now."

We embraced as everyone stood and applauded.

Hank Simmons, the Durham University athletic director stood up and took the microphone.

“There are only a few people here today, besides my lovely wife, that know who I am. I am Hank Simmons, the Durham University athletic director. Two years ago, we offered Alex an athletic scholarship to play baseball. Y’all know Durham is in the center of America’s college basketball country, so go figure; baseball. Nevertheless, my staff believed Alex could turn around our less than successful baseball program. Unfortunately, he turned us down but we didn’t lose a baseball player, we gained a great basketball player in Malcolm Jarvis, Alex’s high school teammate to whom we gave a scholarship. I’m going to make this short. Last year Alex called to ask if the scholarship offer was still available. Thank God it was and Alex joined us last fall. We wanted him to try out for the basketball team. He didn’t want to play basketball, nevertheless he promised to give it a try. This year he starred on the basketball court for the Durham Blue Devils. Now that’s really not what I wanted to tell y’all. Alex’s love for Rachael and what he did for her after her accident was an inspiration to my wife, to me and to the entire Durham Blue Devil family. His devotion to and love for Rachael is something all of us should have in our lives. I love these two young people and I hope they stay around North Carolina for a long time. My wife and I are religious people so, when I say Alex and Rachael are truly God’s chosen people, y’all know where I’m coming from.”

He embraced us as everyone stood and applauded.

“Before I began to sing to my wife, Hank, if you loved me so much, how come I didn’t start every game?” I asked.

People laughed.

“I suppose no one thought they’d be entertained by our family and friends tonight. I promise, we didn’t rehearse our toasts. They were from the heart and now from my heart to my dream girl’s heart, my musical toast to you. Ira, when you’re ready.”

I sang ‘I Can’t Help Falling in Love with You.’ Rachael cried like a baby and so did many in the audience. I followed up with ‘You Were Always on My Mind’, and then sang ‘The Wonder of You’.

I walked over to Rachael and held her in my arms. We both cried.

Ira told everyone the next song was special and had a significant meaning for Rachael so he wanted to accompany my beautiful rendition.

Rachael never heard me sing the song before but as soon as I began ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone’, there wasn’t a dry eye in the room. I struggled to get through it and fought back tears near the end. Everyone stood and applauded. There weren’t enough tissues to wipe away all the tears. Rachael couldn’t speak she was so emotional. She told me I just pushed a button that opened her soul to God. I thanked Ira for helping me make it the most memorable time of my life.

“Alex, Wendy and I want to do everything possible to make your new band a reality. Let’s talk later,” Ira said.

When the regular band returned, the leader said he didn’t think they could top what they just heard but it was time to dance. Rachael and I took the floor alone then Rachael’s father took over and my mother danced with

me. My mother-in-law, Sylvia, took me for a turn and said she was emotionally drained by my performance.

“They should make a movie about you two,” she said.

The groomsmen danced with Rachael while the bridesmaids waited to dance with me. We were out of sight of each other for 20 minutes. When Ruth had a chance to dance with me, she looked into my eyes and said I was a beautiful person and she hoped Rachael would realize someday what a shithead she had been to me. I understood there was a message in there somewhere. I kissed her on the cheek but didn't say anything.

I was surprised when Sheldon came over to me later and said he would like to join my band after he graduated college. I said he was my only choice as my drummer. We shook hands. I was very encouraged. My dreams of playing baseball for a New York team just took one giant step backward.

When I was able to catch up with Rachael, I took her by the hand and returned to the dance floor. I noticed she was a bit flushed and warm to the touch. I was concerned about her blood pressure.

“How are you feeling, sweetheart? Do you want to change into something more comfortable?” I asked.

“I would very much like to do that. Let's ask the wedding planner if the photographer is finished with me in my gown. I'd really like to lay down, I'm tired.”

After we got the okay from the wedding planner, I took Rachael to her room so she could change her clothes.

"I have to tell you something, Rachael. I've never been more in love with you than I am now, I've never been prouder of you than I am now and I am so very happy to call you my best friend, my soulmate, my lover and my wife. You know so many people told me how much they liked our toasts to each other. I think people believed we prepared them but I didn't because when I speak about you, I always find the right words. People thought we were funny. I thought you were so cute. You and I made people very envious as to how much we were in tune with each other. Why am I blabbing so much when what I really want to do is to make love to you?" I asked.

"I am so excited; it was beyond my wildest dreams. I married the man I fell in love with four years ago but today my love for you has exploded beyond that. I feel as though I've been picked up by a tornado and I'm spinning out of control. All I've been doing today is crying with happiness. I've never been so emotional about anything, not even when we first made love or when you asked me to marry you. I want to jump into that bed with you but we can't. I hope you can wait another four or five hours," Rachael said as she sat on my lap and kissed me.

I knew I made the right decision not to give up on Rachael. We were destined to be with each other. I finally felt complete and knew no matter what path we chose to follow after graduation, we would be together. I also realized she depended on me for my strength, my sage advice, my support and of course my love. After she changed, we returned to greet our guests, some of whom were leaving. While Rachael was saying good-bye to her friends, Ira sat down with me.

“Alex, when I complete my master’s degree this summer, I will seek a teaching job at a university. My school has a nation-wide reputation for graduating quality music teachers. I am the top graduate in my class and have received dozens of unsolicited offers from universities. If you are serious about starting a new band, I will try to find something in North Carolina and we can make great music together,” Ira said.

“I’m humbled by what you’ve just said, not only because I want to work with you again but that you’d make that commitment to me. Also, Sheldon told me he wants to join our band as soon as he graduates next year. I can’t believe all the pieces are falling into place. You know, Malcolm’s girlfriend, Destiny has a great voice and Rachael is very good as well. Destiny’s family has contacts with several Atlanta based recording companies and Malcolm wants to manage the band. All I can say is come to North Carolina and let’s do it,” I said excitedly.

“Well, I’m excited and Wendy loves your voice. I’ll take a look at all the offers and if none are from North Carolina, I’ll apply to schools in your area,” Ira said.

“Okay you two, no talking business on my wedding day. Come with me Alex and say good-bye to our guests. Ira, it was wonderful meeting your wife. You two are always welcome to stay with us if you come our way,” she said.

I thanked Ira and said good-bye. Rachael and I thanked the guests as they left.

Around 8:30 p.m., the last guests left. The only ones remaining were in the wedding party and they would all stay over for breakfast and see us off. The first thing I did when I got to my room was to get out of my clothes and run into the shower. Rachael was only minutes behind me. We stood about a foot apart and stared at each other, then we broke out laughing.

"I love looking at you, sweetheart. Funny, you don't look much different since we got married," I said laughing.

"I must look fat after eating all that food and the wedding cake. You look even better to me now that we're married. Come here and scrub my back and whatever else I ask you to do, my husband," she said.

Needless to say, neither of us slept very much. We were late for breakfast. Rachael fell asleep in the limo to the airport. I dozed off on the flight to Hilton Head. By the time we checked into our hotel suite we could barely get undressed before we got into bed and fell asleep.

I woke up refreshed. I opened the balcony door to let in the cool ocean breeze. I stretched my well-toned frame and turned to stare at my sleeping beauty. I laid down beside her, propped my head on my hand and contemplated all sorts of delicious things to do to her. She just had the biggest day of her life, an event any young woman would have prayed for followed by blissful lovemaking, no wonder she looked so peaceful.

Would this be my reward every morning for loving a young woman who still had so much to live for? It was hard to believe we were still teenagers living an adult life. How fortunate and blessed we were. Where could we go from here, I thought. Our priorities should be to earn our college degrees.

Starting a new band was a great idea for the next few years but was it something to do after graduation? We could always make money as entertainers, being a very good cover band could get us lots of jobs. However, we had to write and record our own music to make it big enough to support everyone in the band. With Ira on board that wouldn't be difficult but finding the right musicians that would establish us as popular entertainers in our own right might be difficult.

As I continued to look at my love's chest rise and fall with each breath, I realized my obligation to take care of Rachael and perhaps our children had to be job number one. By the time I graduated in two years, I'd know if the band would be successful. On the other hand, ever since I was a small boy I always wanted to play baseball for the New York Yankees. I was closer to that dream now than ever before but at what cost to Rachael? Could I be a loving husband, a musician and a baseball player at the same time? I thought not. Giving up my dream of playing professional baseball would only disappoint me but giving up the band would hurt lots of people that depended on me and supported me. Rachael would always be the center of my universe even without having a band. In a matter of a few minutes, I had planned my future.

I didn't want to wake my bride so I laid my head down and closed my eyes. I'd never been happier in my life. What more could I ever hope for? I couldn't fall asleep so I showered and ordered breakfast for both of us. We had five days to rest, relax, talk about the future and love each other.

By the time breakfast arrived, Rachael began to stir. She made her way to the bathroom and yelled out, thank you.

"Thank you for what, my bride?" I asked.

"For putting the seat down."

"Are you hungry? I've ordered breakfast."

She said she'd be right out. She wanted to know long I had been up. I said for about an hour.

"What have you been doing for an hour and why didn't you wake me?"

"You looked so peaceful and beautiful so I just watched you sleep. I was so happy just to look at you. Yesterday you used the word kvel, well I do that whenever I see you," I replied.

"I think you should know that my period is due in a few days so do less watching and more action this week," she said laughing.

Rachael asked what I wanted to do after breakfast.

"I'd like to take a walk and see what there is to do here. Maybe we could play tennis, would you like that, sweetheart?"

"I'm not very good at that, what else is there to do?"

"We could take golf lessons; how does that sound?"

"That sounds like fun, I've never done that."

While Rachael was in the shower, I read a brochure to find other things to do. There were several that interested me. When she came out of the bathroom, she was completely nude. I looked up at her and smiled.

"My lover man, I think I have a bite on my back, could you please find what is itching me?" She asked sweetly.

"On your back?" I laughed.

"Yes, just above where my hand is. Do you see it?"

I sat her down on my lap and started kissing her all over. She said if I didn't stop in five minutes, she would rape me.

"I didn't know you had a violent side, sweetheart," I said.

It wasn't necessary for any violence when we engaged in intense lovemaking willingly and with great passion. After we were sated, Rachael asked me why I was still using condoms since we were married.

"I don't think we should take a chance the pill is 100 percent, do you? I don't want you to get pregnant before you graduate which should be our primary goal, don't you agree, my beautiful bride?"

"I suppose so but I could still graduate if I got pregnant. I want to be the mother of your babies."

"Yes, I want that too but we should wait. Let's share our lives together for a few more years before we dedicate ourselves to our children. We are young, too young to have a family. We need to establish our careers whether as musicians or as psychologists so we could provide for a family."

"You always have the right answers, my love. Our lives will be complicated enough without having children too soon. I don't want to share you with anyone else for a long time," she said.

I discussed some of the fun things to do during our honeymoon. Rachael wanted to parasail and learn how to sail a boat. After we got dressed, we

went for a walk. We were decisively on the same page as we began our married life.

We found a nice cozy place to have lunch. I asked Rachael about a comment she made before our wedding that she wanted to go to synagogue again. I told her I'd been thinking about it as well.

"We have to thank God for what we have. He has blessed us more than I could ever imagine. My life with you is His gift and I want to thank God every week. Can we do that?" She asked.

"Of course, that's the least we can do to show our gratitude for bringing us together. I think how fortunate I am to have you in my life every day. I couldn't find anyone else even if I spent the next 10 years searching for someone exactly like you. You know why? Because there is only one you and fortunately you found me," I said as I leaned over to kiss her.

Rachael teared up. She felt the same way but couldn't express herself as well as I did.

After lunch we went for our first sailboat lesson. The instructor was a young woman in her mid-twenties. She was a graduate student at Clemson University. When she saw me, she asked if we ever met before. Rachael squeezed my hand when she heard the question.

"I don't believe so, we attend Durham University," I replied.

"Well, I never forget a face, it'll come to me later. I gather you are here on your honeymoon, congratulations," she said.

Halfway through her explanation of the different parts of a sailboat, she suddenly recalled where she saw me.

"You're on the Durham basketball team, aren't you? I saw you play last year. You're pretty good, Alex."

"I assume you aren't much of a baseball fan," I responded.

"No, but my husband is. He's the assistant athletic director at Clemson."

"Tell him you met the pitcher that shut you out last April," I said.

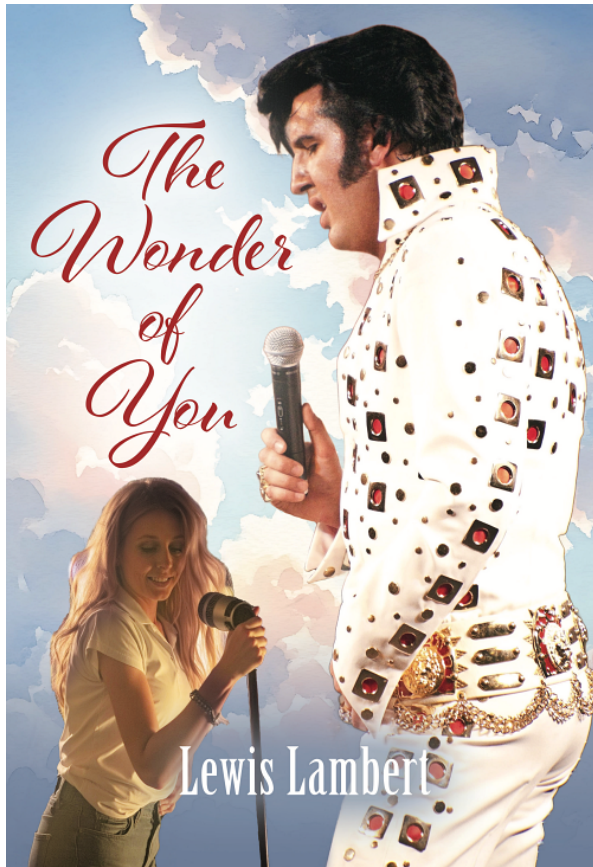
After the lesson ended Rachael said she was surprised I boasted about the game against Clemson.

"You're not that kind of person, Alex. Why did you have to say that?"

"Did I embarrass you, sweetheart? It just came out, I'm sorry."

"I'm actually proud of you. I don't hear enough good things said about you, my love."

"As long as I hear good things from you, I don't care what others think. You are the only one I want to please, though once the band becomes a reality we'll need to please a lot of people."



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