

The Notebook Café
Inspired Words for the Journey

The Christmas Fragrance

By Shelly Thompson



Special Christmas Edition

The Notebook Café-Inspired Words for the Journey
 Brewing up fresh words of faith and encouragement at
thenotebookcafe.com



The Notebook Café and The Notebook Café Publishing.

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Nestled in between Des Moines and Omaha is the sweet little town of Walnut, Iowa. The Notebook Café has an amazing and unique place we call 'The Café' for your women's group, Bible Study, or circle. Consider reserving the historic restored circa 1875 bank building in Walnut, Iowa, restored by Publisher and author, Shelly Thompson and her husband. We'll prepare our **signature Café brunch**, provide a tour of the historic bank building, and present a devotional prepared by The Notebook Café. Then you can leisurely stroll along the quaint brick lined streets of Walnut and enjoy over twelve awesome shops featuring vintage, shabby, recycled, upscaled, and repurposed finds...and we think the best bakery in the Midwest!

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We make women's BIRTHDAY parties extra special!



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A Closer Glimpse in the Manger

By Shelly Thompson, Publisher

Christmas has been different for me since my mom went home before Christmas last year. As 'decking the halls' starts all around me, I feel joyful and yet, sometimes, as I watch the preparations starting...I know my celebration at Christmas will again be...without my mom.

I really miss my mom as we try to continue the many traditions she gave our family throughout the years; BUT GOD continues to give us His joy through moments of laughter, and covers us with His presence and peace as we begin to make new memories and traditions.

Commercials and store ads tell us that Christmas is a 'magical time of year'. Christmas has become what we creatures of earth have made it. A time to make a magical 'Christmas wish', as if God only performed miracles on command at Christmas. The commercials that fill are right about how we celebrate Christmas...we want a 'magical' moment on Christmas morning. And yet, the Bible does not tell us to celebrate, or even honor, the day of Christ's birth...it doesn't even mention the exact date...

The Bible states it so beautifully simple...**on this day...a savior is born...**

There was no fanfare at his birth. No royal announcement was trumpeted. No 'Sale' signs were posted throughout merchants in Bethlehem offering a bargain gift to celebrate the birth. There were no social media posts with the announcement. It was a quiet gratefulness of the heart that surrounded his manger, in a tiny stable... unnoticed by many...unnoticed by the masses...

I suspect...God knew...that like Adam and Eve, left to our own interpretation of His son's birth...we would turn it into exactly what it has become...so, He never instructed us to celebrate the occasion, or even mark the date on our calendars.

Christmas has indeed become a 'magical' time of year. A guilt free time to try and buy happiness in something new and shiny, even if we can't afford it...to make ourselves, or someone else, feel a little better.

The media would tell us...

In December we can max out credit cards, shop 'til we drop, busy ourselves with all kinds of festivities making ourselves crazy, watch movies with beautiful scenery and wonderful endings, surprise our spouse on Christmas morning with a shiny new car in the driveway topped with a red bow...

In search of the 'magical' feeling of Christmas.

The problem is...

January 1.

The fake 'magical' feeling we've created briefly in a present is gone.

We're broke and exhausted...even the 24 hour always-happy-ending Christmas movie countdown on Hallmark can't be found...



Many are left wondering...what happened...where did the 'magic' go?

We find we're not so different than those that were outside of the stable all those years ago...in the city of David when Christ was born...

His birth...

...went unnoticed...by the masses...nothing changed for them that day...

Our society has chosen to have the message of His birth compete with something completely fake...a fictional character in a sleigh with eight tiny reindeer...

...who by the way...drives out of sight...only to be reincarnated for next years 'magical' frenzy.

Although perhaps not intentionally, we have watered down the truth...we have walked away from the manger in search of something better...

Trying to improve upon the divine birth, to give it a 'magical' feeling, we've even given it a price...

That comes in wrapped packages and bows...

He wanted the birth of His son to be about His great love for us...

He sent His only son...to show us the truth...as he lived out a Godly life...demonstrating for us a selfless example to follow...feeding the poor...blessing the widows and orphans...living righteously and obediently before God, fulfilling God's word...giving His life...

...in exchange for ours...

The ultimate gift exchange...His life...for our sins.

This was His gift to the whole world...so that those who would believe...

...would never experience an eternity in hell.

Now that...is SOMETHING to celebrate!

Every single day...

I believe that God wanted us to celebrate the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus everyday...the whole package...not just one part and not just one day. The message can't be found in just one part, it is all inclusive to be fully understood, accepted, and cherished.

He wanted us to honor Him by sharing His love everyday...not just at Christmas, or any designated time.

I know where my mom is celebrating Christmas this year...

I can celebrate in my heart too because I know she has the greatest gift she could ever receive...

...Jesus.

He never comes wrapped under a tree. Nobody ever needs to make monthly payments

A Glimpse in the Manger (cont'd)

for Him. There will never be sales tax charged to receive Him. He won't even arrive with a bow...there is simply a gratefulness in the heart... a moment at the stable, **a glimpse in the manger**, a life and heart forever changed.

When we receive His gift of pure love...we receive all the gifts that come with it...mercy, strength, shelter under His wings, protection, endurance, grace, hope, peace, and forgiveness...

I hope this season of 'magic' becomes a season of truth and gratefulness among the masses...those who are walking around staring through store windows, and searching Amazon...looking for the perfect gift realize it can't be bought. The best gift ever to be received has already been provided by God through His son. A timeless gift from a loving Father to His children that He cherishes in His heart. He calls us **His beloved**. We are His most precious children.

I pray that He restores your hope, regardless of your circumstances and gives you peace that passes all understanding, and fills your heart with His joy...no matter what struggle you may be facing, or wonderful season full of life's blessings you're in...it's all part of His perfect gift...

And, in January...and every other month that follows...every single day...His sacrifice and love are a treasured gift that grows more valuable each day as you unwrap His love in His love letter to you, the Bible, and seek Him through prayer.

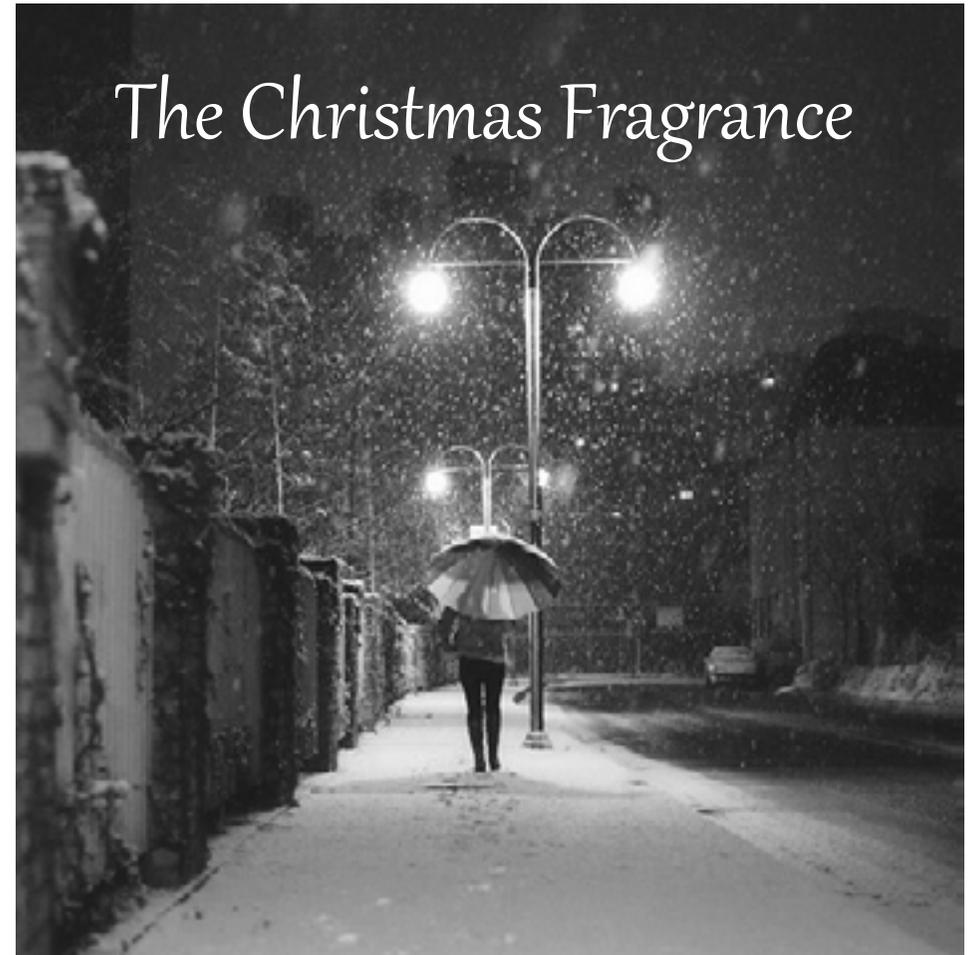
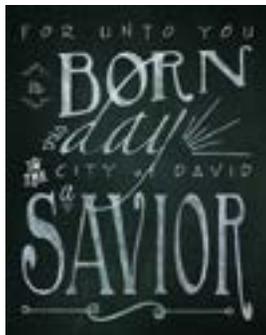
God is good. God is faithful. God will carry you. God's plans are perfect. God's abundant love never ends. If you've never accepted His free gift...His son, Jesus...today, my sweet friend, is the perfect day...to receive the perfect gift. You are His beloved.

We hope you'll enjoy reading 'The Christmas Fragrance'. Our prayer is that the words on these pages remind your heart of Jesus...the gift to the world, born to carry each of our sins to the cross...in the city of David...many years ago. Yet His gift is still available to each of us...it is a timeless gift. Won't you join Caroline and Maude in 'The Christmas Fragrance' as they share their stories and exchange the fragrance of Christ's love...

Blessings,

Shelly Thompson

Publisher, The Notebook Café
The Notebook Cafe - Inspired Words for the Journey



The Christmas Fragrance

Written by Shelly Thompson

Devotional Thoughts Written by Deb Martin

Abandoned as a young girl by her mother, Caroline is now a young woman transplanted from the hills of Tennessee to the bustling streets of Chicago. Caroline has been looking for love and acceptance since she was ten-years-old and read her mother's note saying she was 'onto better things'. In Chicago Carolyn lands a job at a perfume counter where she meets Maude, a wise widow with a true heart for God who takes Caroline under her wing. Maude too has had a prayer in her heart, that God is about to answer in a way that only He can.

*This story weaves together the journeys of two women, years in the making, that demonstrates beautifully God is always working things out. Even when we can't see it, He never stops actively bringing His perfect plans together for a magnificent ending. We receive a fragrance of life as only God can give when we trust in His plans. **Every day can give us a breath of...The Christmas Fragrance.***

The Christmas Fragrance

THE NOTEBOOK CAFÉ & CO. PUBLICATION

It was a quiet night as Christmas Eve began to settle on the streets of the Windy City. Caroline's heart raced as she wandered through the streets. The snow was beginning to fall like droplets from heaven as she walked. The fresh snow bringing joy to her heart with each step along the city street. She never knew this was where life would find her. She had never seen that behind all the hurt she experienced, God would bring such fullness to her life. That sadness would give way to great joy and knowledge of a much deeper meaning of life. There were times Caroline wanted to give up, believing that she was worthless and her life didn't matter, but God...had arrived on the scene, at the perfect time, lifting her out of the darkness to a place that she felt completely surrounded by love...just as the falling snow surrounded her tonight. A sign from heaven. While there was a chill in the Chicago air, the place she had called home for ten years...there was a warmth that enveloped her and a sense of peace she had come to know giving her courage to face her future. Despite the cold temperatures of Chicago, this warmth arose from the inside. The warmth of being richly and unconditionally loved.

As she briskly turned the corner, Caroline noticed that sounds of the busy Chicago streets were beginning to quiet as families were heading to celebrate Christmas Eve. She herself was walking to the place she had visited for the last 10 years on Christmas Eve. A place that during many years of her life she never thought she would find herself. Yet, this evening as the city was beginning to quietly slow down, her own pace quickened as she stepped towards her destination. Caroline took her hands out of her pockets reaching up to tighten the wool scarf around her neck. The snow was beginning to catch onto her coat and long dark hair as she continued to hurry her pace. Anxious to arrive at the place where she would see the face that she longed to see. Where Caroline could lay her eyes on the family that she had grown to deeply love over the years. She knew the sacrifice made for her to become part of the family. She felt tears well up in her eyes as she stopped at the cross walk. Everything was becoming hazy from the tears forming in her eyes. There were others in the cross walk and Caroline didn't want the tears to be noticeable to anyone. Luckily, on this night people were so caught up in the places they were headed to celebrate they didn't seem to notice the unfallen tears. It wouldn't have been what they thought for they were tears of joy brimming in her eyes.

As the falling snow began to turn the trees that lined the city streets into shimmering white silhouettes, she fought the memories, but they tumbled into her mind, of a time when her tears were not of joy, but of deep sorrow. She remembered the smell of her mother's perfume. The scent so real to her even now surrounded by the newly falling snow and fresh air whirling around her. As a young girl, that scent had been the one thing she had clung too. The embossed fragile bottle of perfume her mother had left behind in her hurry to start a new life. She remembered the note her mother left. A note, even after all these years, she still found too painful to read. Words written on paper that for years had left her feeling unloved...unwanted...unneded...unaccepted. As a 10-year-old she hadn't been able to process the beautifully scripted handwriting her mother hurriedly wrote on the note, and as a teenager the words had carved a deep anger within her that came out in ways that caused her teachers to often see no redeeming qualities in such an angry young girl. They didn't see the nights she would go home...and open the perfume bottle allowing the fragrance to pull her into a dream of what her life could have been like. The scent provoking thoughts of a life she wanted...a life she saw her friends living. A young girl with a family. A loving mother. A place that she would feel loved and cherished. A place the words on the note couldn't wound her anymore.

Her mother's note had said that she could no longer handle the financial worries that were burdening her and Caroline's father, Nathan. Her words expressed a written apology and sadness that her husband had went from job to job, but she herself was entitled to a life and she felt 'tied' to a man who couldn't keep a job, even though she acknowledged that economic times were tough. The hastily penned words went onto say that the two children always seemed to need more than she could give. Her mother's handwriting concluded, she was sorry, she just knew there was more to life than living behind those walls, drowning in debt and children. The note...hadn't even used the names of Caroline and her brother Matt, or her father for that matter. What should have been cherished family to her had become nameless faces. Faces that entrapped her, stopping Caroline's mother from achieving what she felt her life should be like.

As Caroline had grown older, she had often thought her mother was young at the time of her departure, maybe even too young herself to understand the three grieving hearts her unexpected absence would cause. The pain of not even being worthy of her mother writing her name one last time before leaving the prison she called home drove a stake deep in Caroline's heart. It pierced her to the very core of her being to know that she was truly unwanted and even unnamed in the final note by the woman who had given birth to her. Carolyn had eventually grown past the anger, but she still held onto the perfume bottle dreaming of the mother she had created to match the scent that remained. The perfume still held some qualities of the original fragrance, but the smell was faint. Much like the scent of the perfume, the hurt in Caroline's heart had grown faint over the years, but still lingered.

The tears were starting to slowly stream down her face now. She stopped walking for a moment and reached in her purse taking out a tissue to wipe her moist checks. She looked around at the sights that drew her in. This beautiful city with all its light was especially illuminated as the bright night sky continued to let droplets of snow slowly escape from the store houses of heaven. She stared toward the sky and remembered gratefully the night...she met Nick. A round man with a beard and a hearty laugh, not Santa Claus, although his name was Nick. He offered her an opportunity that came from far beyond the North Pole. An open door of hope that would give way to the fragrance of life for Caroline.

Caroline's thoughts drew close in her heart remembering the day God filled the empty void she had grown used to.

She had moved from the small town in Tennessee where she had grown up to Chicago ten years ago. Wanting to start over in a new city in a place that didn't hold painful memories. A destination where people she passed in the streets didn't keenly stare at her as the young woman whose mother had given up on her. Their faces clearly showed their feelings...Caroline would never amount to anything. Although it was unspoken, she often felt that their thoughts were perhaps true her mother was right to walk away from her. Her father had finally remarried shortly before Caroline moved to the 'windy city' and his new wife was a very kind and compassionate woman. Perhaps Caroline had stayed in the hills of Tennessee because she didn't want to desert her father like her mother had years before. Her brother had left for the military when he turned eighteen. Nathan was so proud of his son and daughter. Her father had tried over the years to be a mother and a father, but he simply couldn't fill the void her mother's departure had left in Caroline's heart. Once Nathan was happy and remarried she felt she was free to escape the small town that tried to predict her future.

She had deliberately selected Chicago knowing she would be unknown in such a large city. Her father was worried for many reasons when she told him and her stepmother of her plans. She could still see the concern on their faces as they discussed her impending move. The concerns they voiced...she had never been out of Tennessee...the distance...

finances...a job...her safety in such a large city. However, Caroline was fortunate that upon arriving in Chicago, the rounded man, with the beard, 'Nick' hired her, seeing something in her heart that nobody else noticed. Throughout the years growing up several of her teachers, in not so many words, indicated that she would never amount to much and her grades and sharp attitude certainly proved their point. Her principal had even once implied that, 'she couldn't stick with anything and was just like her mother.' She thought perhaps that sad statement was true. She too felt imprisoned, not by the desire to leave, but inside. Deep inside her heart she was a prisoner...of feeling unwanted. She wondered if it was possible he was right and she too would walk away from everything one day and not look back.

Those nights as she wondered who she was...she would go home and open the perfume bottle she still kept in her nightstand. In those moments of questioning her identity, she held the ornate shaped bottle in her hands...she could still recall that familiar scent of her mother. She could still see her mother's face. Hear her laughter. Those memories were quickly interrupted and overtaken by the moments of arguments between her mother and father. The doors slamming. The shouting. The crying...but, she tried to remember the good things about her mother when she smelled the perfume bottle. Her dad had tried to make up for the emptiness that settled in their house, but he too was heartbroken. While eventually her dad found a job that was stable and provided a good income for the three of them...her mother still had no desire to return to the prison she had broken free from.

Caroline didn't realize that the sales job at the perfume counter Nick offered her in one of Chicago's well known retail stores would change her life. Caroline's pace fastened as she was coming closer to arriving at the destination of her family visit. Suddenly, the sound of 'God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman' interrupted her walk. Carolers dressed in 1920's period style Victorian era fashion complete with empire skirts, matching velvet jackets, and bonnets rounded the corner. With the usually busy streets almost empty, the sound of their voices seemed to reach the stars. Caroline sat down on a nearby bench to listen as the caroler's sang under the antique lamppost on the street corner. As the perfectly harmonized voices blended to create a magical captivating sound, Caroline was taken back to the first Christmas she spent in Chicago enjoying her new job in the Waterford Mall. The Christmas Nick introduced her to Maude Beck.

Maude was a keenly aware woman of wisdom, who immediately began to welcome Caroline to the perfume counter at the store. Maude was bustling about proudly showing Caroline all the products the store carried. There were all types of perfumes, ornate decanters, spray bottles, essence oils, and even lotions extracted from exotic plants around the world. Caroline didn't know many of these products existed, and was intrigued by the delicateness of the bottles and the contrast between the different fragrances. Nick gave Maude a wink as he disappeared a few moments after introducing Caroline to this petite woman. While Maude was much older than Caroline, her delicate facial features and kind eyes, gave her a beauty that was radiant. Her small frame wearing modest, but stylish clothing, along with fashionable jewelry, illuminated that inner radiance. Caroline quickly learned that Maude had worked at the perfume counter for over 30 years. Maude knew all the ins and outs of almost every perfume and recalled many that had lived their glory days and no longer appealed to consumers. She said that the frequent change of fragrances was fortunate because it kept the perfume counter busy and Maude knew she would always have a job. Her eyes beamed as she told Caroline about her husband who had died 30 years ago shortly before she started working at the perfume counter. They had no children and it was obvious that perfume had become her passion and the customers, many who knew her by name, were her extended family. Caroline knew immediately she liked Maude and the feeling was mutual. An instant bond between the two women was formed over the perfume counter. Sojourners on a journey, each dealing with pain in a very different way.

After a few weeks, Caroline was even given clearance to go to the store room to get

items to restock and even do a few small displays at the counter. "You, my dear girl, have a nose for fragrance," Maude began to jokingly say to Caroline. Maude had also noticed Caroline's kind hearted words to customers and the way she could pick up on scents that perfectly blended with people's physical chemistry to create an individualized appealing scent. As Christmas approached that first year Caroline and Maude worked together, Maude decided to have Caroline create the Christmas displays. She had done it for years and it was good to see someone who truly seemed to care about the beauty of fragrance and the delight it brought others. "Caroline, how would you like to create our perfume countertop displays this Christmas?" she asked with obvious excitement one night as they were locking up the perfume cases. "Maude, I've only been here for a few months, do you think I can create the look the store wants?" she quietly inquired of the older woman. Maude confidently responded with a warm smile, "You will, because you care. I see it on your face as you help people. The beauty of fragrance isn't found in each heart, but in your heart you know the delight and joy that reaches the senses when the fragrance is a perfect fit!" Caroline was thrilled. It was ten years ago and she smiled reflecting that she had just completed her 10th display at the perfume counter several weeks ago. She remembered thinking how good the fragrance display had looked this season. Caroline had even received several compliments from the corporate office. It brought a smile to her lips as she sat on the bench listening as the carolers voices echoed thankfulness into the air...to the throne of grace that had never given up on Caroline, even when she herself had. A presence that watched over her, even when her mom escaped her. A fragrance in her life giving her hope and eventually...a perfect fragrance match.

As the carolers moved farther down the street, their voices now sounding muffled, but still beautiful, it made Caroline smile as she thought of the perfume bottle her mother left behind, and the day, she realized the significance of the perfume bottle. A day she would always be grateful for...as she was completing her first Christmas display all those years ago...

Caroline had been nervous about doing her first display, especially at Christmas, but the wise Maude encouraged the young woman to approach the new task with boldness. She encouraged Caroline to seek out perfumes and bottles in groupings that enhanced the glow of the scented liquid that filled the various sized and shaped crystal bottles. Caroline had went back and forth all day to the store room collecting new product to create the displays with. During one of her many trips to the storeroom she noticed there was a dust covered box of vintage perfume bottles. Reaching it down from the shelf, Caroline wondered if perhaps mixing some of the perfumes that were no longer worn with the new fragrances released for Christmas could provide a nostalgic display. Giving customers perhaps a favorite fragrance they remembered from their past while creating conversation as they looked at the newly released Christmas perfumes. She sorted through the old box adding in several vintage bottles with the new product she was taking to the counter.

She worked all afternoon on her displays as Maude helped customers. Maude was watching with her keen eye as Caroline carefully selected each perfume placement in the different displays she created. She noticed the care she took to carefully group contrasting fragrances together. Caroline had learned quickly as Maude had taught her about the different fragrances. Maude had discussed in depth the chemistry behind perfume scents. While there were three notes used in the perfume industry to describe notes of fragrances top, middle, and bottom, Maude had only explained the top and middle note to her young protégé. Maude noticed Caroline had seemed to be intensely aware of the middle note, known in the perfume industry as the 'heart' of the fragrance. Maude wondered what drew Caroline to the 'heart' of each perfume, she knew eventually she would uncover why this young woman appeared to be even more drawn to fragrances each day.

As Caroline completed the displays, Maude approached her. "My girl, you have done a

fabulous job! These displays will absolutely bring customers to this counter. What a great idea to add in vintage perfume bottles from the storeroom. That was absolutely brilliant! Customers can relive fond memories right here at the perfume counter," Maude exclaimed with joy, her delicate earrings reflecting the light from the crystal perfume display case. Caroline felt her cheeks turn red as she blushed, but deep inside she basked in the compliments of the older woman. She had loved spending the day smelling the scents and trying to sort out the different 'bouquets' and determine the top and middle notes of each fragrance.

It was then Maude paused for a long moment. She stood silently once again observing the newly created displays Caroline had placed together. Caroline could sense that Maude was in deep thought and feared perhaps she was reconsidering her recent compliments bestowed upon Caroline. Without saying a word Maude slowly walked behind the counter. Then suddenly, Maude asked Caroline what her plans were for the evening. Knowing as a young woman in a large city she probably should have evening plans, she sheepishly admitted to Maude her calendar was free. "Come with me," exclaimed Maude with a smile, "I want to introduce you to my family!" Caroline hadn't heard Maude speak of any family. She was very intrigued by the last minute invitation as she accepted it. That first family meeting...now ten years ago. How quickly time had passed.

As Caroline continued to sit on the park bench watching the carolers get farther and farther into the distance. She remembered that special night, when she and Maude walked along these streets to meet Maude's family. It was a night much like tonight, but there was no snow cascading down. It was a beautiful full moon that led them that night to meet Maude's family. They walked arm in arm as Maude chatted happily about things that happened that day at the store, but never mentioned where they were headed only 'that it wasn't far' also omitting...who these family members were.

Maude abruptly came to a stop in front of the church. Caroline noticed the beautiful nativity the moon casted its glow on in the large front yard. The snowfall from the day before causing the small lights that were focused on the faces in the nativity to almost look real. There was a peacefulness surrounding the nativity as they approached it. Caroline was confused as Maude set down at a nearby bench. Caroline slowly went over and joined her. She thought perhaps the older woman needed a break before continuing their walk to meet her family. Maude slowly unclasped her small black purse, reaching in and pulling out a small tin box. Maude began to slowly speak. "I've been carrying this little tin box with me for 30 years. It contains the last bottle of perfume my husband gave me for Christmas. I have treasured it. He was such a kind and loving man. I wasn't an ordinary young woman when he met me. I was described as a 'wild card' when he married me, but he loved me. He took a chance on me and I never let him down. I grew to love him more each day. He had a tradition each year of giving me a new fragrance on Christmas. He said it was because our lives gave off a 'scent' to others of happiness and joy, and we should always be aware to share our life fragrance with others. The perfume each Christmas was a reminder to share joy with others. He taught me about the three notes of fragrance the top, middle...and bottom. On our last Christmas together, he gave me this perfume," she said holding up the small tin containing the perfume bottle inside. Without opening the tin she continued, "I've explained the top and middle fragrance notes to you, but there is a bottom note, my dear. This bottle will demonstrate the bottom note perfectly."

Caroline was deeply engaged with Maude's every word, "The bottom note...is the residual scent of the fragrance. This note lasts the longest because it is composed of ingredients with low volatility. Once the volatile top and middle notes have faded...the bottom note is all that remains. The bottom note is responsible for the longevity of the fragrance," she said as she slowly sat the tin case down for a moment. "I want to demonstrate the final fragrance note...the bottom note...to you, and this is the perfect scent to do that. But, there's another part of this story. This perfume contains Myrrh.

I am sure you remember the story of the wise men and the first Christmas and the gifts they brought the baby Jesus." Caroline nodded in silent agreement, although she never really understood much about Christmas, except after her mother left, it was a brief time when her home would be filled with a little lightheartedness for a few weeks.

Yet, here was this woman holding onto a tin box, in front of a manger, who seemed about ready to offer her some great wisdom. Caroline wondered where this conversation was going and she was desperate to see the last bottle of perfume Maude's husband had given her. Maude's voice started again, "You see, we never had the children we hoped for, but my husband, always said, 'God had a plan'. Being a 'wild card', I wasn't sure that was quite true. I was a defiant young woman," she smiled warmly at Caroline. Caroline's heart could see the wisdom in older woman's eyes, wisdom gained from moving beyond the pain of no children and losing her husband. She wondered how she had lost so much, yet had such a kind and gentle heart filled with a fragrance for life. She hoped Maude could in some way help her to move past the emptiness and ache she felt in her heart. The realization suddenly came to Caroline that she and Maude had both been holding onto memories contained in a perfume bottle. That thought was quickly interrupted as Maude began speaking again.

"My husband had his hands full," she winked at Caroline. "The first Christmas before we were married, he brought me here on Christmas Eve. He said, 'My darling Maude, let me introduce you to my family', I remember my bewilderment as I looked at these same faces in the nativity that chilly December night. We huddled under a blanket on this same bench. I wasn't a 'churched' young woman," she smiled at Caroline from the depths of her soul. "I didn't understand what he meant. That dear man, walked over on this frozen ground, and kneeled beside that manger, and told me how this mother, Mary, so beautiful beside him had been a virgin in her hometown when she became pregnant. He said he often thought of the mocking a young woman in those times might have withstood, perhaps even facing being stoned for her perceived promiscuity....but she and her baby were kept safe...by God. He then told me about Joseph, and how God had told him in a dream not to doubt that Mary was truthful and indeed a virgin. My sweet husband was moved to tears that night as he explained detailing their journey to Bethlehem and the young Mary traveling all that way on a camel. The hardships they faced and the obstacles they would have endured on that long journey, especially being late in the pregnancy. Then the time drawing near for the delivery of this special baby, they found no room anywhere for them to stay and receive this wonderful child. So, they stayed in an animal stall as Joseph cared for his young wife, wiping her hair away from her forehead and gently kissing her temples encouraging her through the delivery and birth process of the little Christ child. My husband was weeping by the time he told me this part," Maude stopped suddenly to wipe away her own tears. Caroline hadn't even realized she too had tears running down her face. They both smiled as Maude provided tissues from her pocket for each of them.

Continuing, she took Caroline's hand. "It was then the story he told me changed. His words accompanied by his tears, 'This innocent little baby in the manger, the son of God, at only 33 years old became the target of evil, sinful and jealous people. These tiny feet in the manger, were to carry the weight of the world to the cross. These tiny hands were to reach towards the sky, saying 'It is finished', these tiny lips were to give the message of God's love to all creation, these little eyes...would one day see crowds mock him, whip him, and nail these precious hands and feet to a wooden cross. All for you my dear Maude, all for you,' he said as he wept," she paused now for a long moment.

"My dear Caroline, this was all for you too...may I introduce you to my family? The place where this 'wild card' found unconditional love, a void to fill my 'wild card' side

of emptiness and bitterness. A place where I knew acceptance and a place where I was adopted into the family of Christ by the blood of this tiny baby...beyond this manger...is the kingdom of God. Do you realize, my sweet girl, as God's daughter...you, Caroline, are royalty," Maude said her eyes glistening with tears. Maude's heart was so full as she was beginning to realize God had been planning this evening for a very long time. She didn't know Caroline's story, but God did and He was using Maude tonight to introduce her to His family. The family in the nativity. The story of the cross. The fact that Caroline was a royal daughter. She was in fact, a princess, who was deeply loved by a compassionate God.

Caroline felt her heart melt at the sight of the manger and the words began to penetrate her heart. The family in the nativity had struggles, yet God had shown such love to them. The baby who had grown to carry her 'anger and attitude' to the cross. The man he became who hung on the cross because he loved her that much. He adopted her at that moment on the cross into his family. The realization of each of Maude's words gently settled into Caroline's heart as both women sat there, under the stars, clasping hands, surrounded by the chilly Chicago air and a peace that Caroline had never known. The peace that passes all understanding that can only come from God.

After a while, Maude spoke silently, "You know. I never got to travel to Jerusalem where Jesus lived, taught and walked, but I realize every night, I get to gaze upon the same moon that he laid his eyes upon each evening. The same moon he traveled under. The same moon...he prayed under," Maude's voice trailed off. Caroline hugged her tight, the words she longed to say to this woman who had just freed her from her prison caught in her throat. The tears freely flowing....tears of joy...of release...of forgiveness of her mother...of the empty years...Maude had taken her to the family she had always longed for.

The women sat there silently for a long time. Maude finally began speaking again. "Well, it's been quite an evening," she said as she smiled at the young woman beside her. "But, I want to show you my last Christmas gift from my husband," she said. "I want to introduce you to the bottom note, the lingering fragrance after all is gone... I like to call it love," she laughed, "but, the perfume industry calls it the bottom note," she beamed as she began to open the tin, the final gift from her husband. Caroline gasped as she saw the familiar bottle, the etching she recognized all so well...it was the same bottle she had held in her own hands so many times, the bottle of her mother's perfume.

Tears were flowing freely as she explained the story to Maude of the perfume bottle and her mother's departure and how she had felt unloved and unworthy all these years. Maude looked at the moon as Caroline was telling her everything and thanked God for using her to help this wonderful young woman. God whispered to Maude that this was the daughter she had longed for. This was His plan. He had not forgotten that she still held a dream in her heart and He had fulfilled that tonight. Her heart was overflowing with deep joy as she listened to her God given daughter, her long awaited Christmas gift, tell her story and release the pain of the years into the chill of the night air. God heard Maude's prayers and did indeed have a plan to give her a daughter. A royal fragrance of Christmas. A gift of love from the King.

Suddenly, Caroline, who had drifted off in deep thought to the first family meeting with Maude ten years ago, was brought back to reality as the carolers were again approaching her direction. Their voices entwined in beautiful heavenly harmony singing, "Silent Night.... Holy Night..." and although tonight she would now make the trip alone to visit her family, she knew Maude was singing with the carolers in heaven, her arm locked with her husband and in the presence of the King. God had given Caroline the mother she always dreamed of and Maude and Caroline had been gifted nine wonderful years enjoying a special mother and daughter bond God gave them that night. They received the family they each always wanted in a way neither of them ever expected. At a

perfume counter. Joy filled Caroline's heart, and she too began singing, 'holy infant so tender and mild...' making her way along the snow covered and empty streets of Chicago to keep the tradition Maude started ten years ago to visit her family. As Caroline walked the final few steps to visit her family, she reached in her pocket and tightly wrapped her fingers around the two bottles of perfume one belonging to her and the other belonging to Maude...each carrying the fragrance of dreams that God brought together creating the perfect Christmas fragrance ten years ago. Maude often referred to a verse that Caroline thought she heard whispered from heaven mingled with powdery snow, "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere." 2 Corinthians 2:14. Maude had indeed taught her about the bottom note...that faint scent that lingers on carrying the beauty in the fragrance of this life, and a Kingdom that awaits.

Devotional Thoughts...By Deb Martin

Spend some time with God and ask Him to guide you as you answer. Pray and then write whatever God places in your heart.

What 'bottom' note of fragrance do I leave behind?

Is my 'lingering' scent one that would glorify God? Does it fill the space with His love?

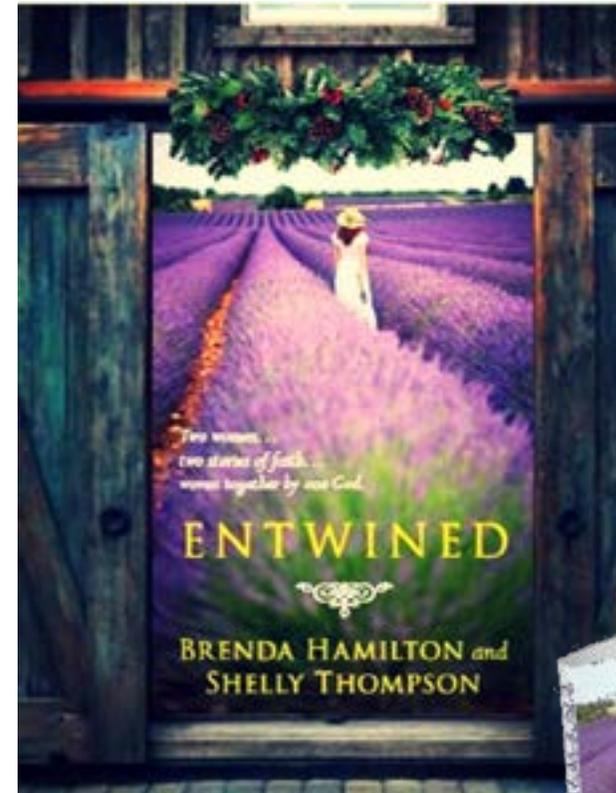
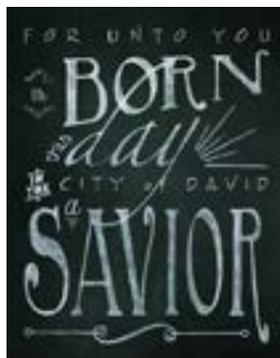
Am I a diffuser of Christ's love? 2 Corinthians 2:14-15

Am I part of the Family of God? That family...the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are waiting with open arms to welcome me in, or if needed...welcome me back if I've been away for a while. 1 John 1:3

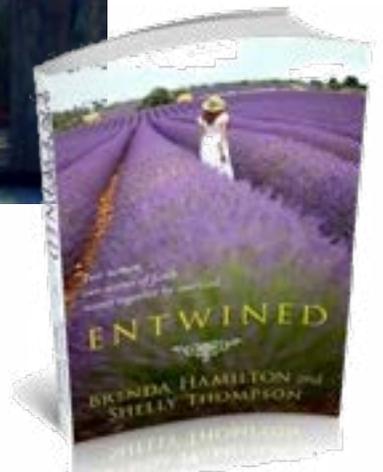
How can I be part of the family? If Maude were on the park bench with me she would share, Romans 3:23, 6:23, John 3:3, John 14:6, and Romans 10:9-11

We would love to hear if you are part of the family! Please let us know below so we can dance with the Angels in celebration. Luke 15:10

Email us at thecafe@thenotebookcafe.com



This season...
Open the
door to faith.



The very word 'Entwined' has such beautiful meaning. To weave together. Despite life's unexpected circumstances, setbacks, disappointments, and seemingly hopeless situations, God's plans are intricately being woven into each day. We often fail to see the beauty of God's perfect plan as He personally writes the chapters of our story until we can reflect on all that He did during those hard seasons.

Do you want to experience each chapter of your life with a trust and faith in God's perfect plan? The pages of Entwined contain the journals of God working in the lives of two very different life stories. Entwined will give you fresh hope to face whatever chapter is currently being written in your own life. To be assured that what is unexpected to you is never a surprise to God. Giving you faith in the perfect plan being written by the Master Author. It will change your heart.

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The Christmas Fragrance—The Notebook Café Christmas Card printed in honor of Esther Stout. A true daughter of God, who faithfully and without complaint, followed the journey that God gave her with a grateful heart until He safely carried her home on September 18, 2017. May your heart cherish the time God gives you here on earth with your loved ones as you look forward to that reunion God promises all believers through His son. *However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" -- the things God has prepared for those who love him-- 1 Corinthians 2:9.* Merry Christmas!