

A Wright Thanksgiving

Now that the funeral was over, Hope Street's Annual Fall Festival had ended, and Thanksgiving was around the corner, The Wright Family needed a dose of happiness. Reverend Matthew Wright, Sr., the pastor of Hope Street Baptist Church had just recently married his second wife, Alyse, and desired to acclimate his new wife to the Wright Family customs. Alyse had witnessed some of the Wright's customs as Matthew's fiancé; however, things have changed, and expectations have expanded now that she was his wife. Alyse was no longer a visiting guest bringing a bottle of wine or a desired dessert to the table, but now *the host* of the family's events.

Although this was a trying time for the Wright Family as they had just buried their patriarch, the late Reverend Percival Wright, Matthew wanted to ensure Alyse's first Thanksgiving as a Wright would be as loving and memorable as the ones she had previously shared and longed for again with her family, the Daniels. With that, he enlisted the help of his three main ladies: his mother Hattie, his godmother Barbara, and his sister Maureen, to help the new Mrs. Wright uphold the highly anticipated Wright Family Thanksgiving tradition. Although Alyse hailed from a large family with great family traditions, nothing could have prepared her for the insurmountable task awaiting her. The idea of hosting both families, the Wrights and the Daniels, and Hope Street in one house was daunting for the ladies, yet exciting for Alyse, or so she thought. While it had been years since the *whole* family gathered, on both sides, it was now time to see if the traditions of old would be renewed, or if new traditions would materialize.

On Saturday, November 1, 2014, the ladies gathered for lunch at Chateau Angelou to develop their plans for the forthcoming holiday. Alyse enjoyed a glass of *Moscato*, and Maureen sipped a glass of *Riesling* while they awaited Hattie's and Barbara's arrival. Once there, they greeted each other and marveled in the restaurant's ambiance and new menu. Hours passed and their laughter filled the air like a bright array of sunshine. Barbara leaned back in her chair and said, "Alright ladies, let's get down to the task at hand. Thanksgiving is three weeks away and we need to plan a special one for the family. This is the first Thanksgiving for Alyse, Matthew, and the children as a blended family, and the first Thanksgiving without Percy. Matthew hadn't

had a good Thanksgiving in a while, and it is time to change that.” Alyse offered Hattie a handkerchief. Hattie smiled. “Sweet girl, that’s one of the many things I love about you. You are one of a kind, Alyse Marie. I’m alright.” Maureen respected the idea, but stated, “Barbara, I agree, but shouldn’t we get Alyse’s opinion on Thanksgiving since she’s hosting it?” Alyse choked on her wine as the ladies spoke. Barbara chuckled. “No more wine for you, my dear. Good wine like that is not meant for choking ... drinking, yes; but definitely not choking.” She continued, “Now Maureen, perhaps we should explain to my lovely goddaughter-in-love what the expectation is for Thanksgiving and all other Wright holiday functions, as she is new to our family and the pastor’s wife.” Alyse was the wife to the pastor, yet also the daughter and granddaughter to Baptist pastors, and had excellent rearing from both. However, the life Alyse once knew while growing and watching her grandmother and mother serve their minister husbands and their church was beautiful compared to the life presented before her today.

Wright family traditions were enamored and not to be tainted with drama. Although drama exists in every family, holidays were not the platform for drama in the Wright home. As the host house for Thanksgiving and probably Christmas too, the expectation was that the Wright home is immaculate. For Thanksgiving, the home is decorated in exquisite shades of ginger, butterscotch, pecan, cherry, and basil. Nevertheless, for Christmas, the home is decorated in exquisite shades of crimson, emerald, pearl, ash, and a hint of azure. The expectations were mandatory and always had to meet Hattie’s approval before presentation not just for the family, but because the pastor and his wife host annual Thanksgiving and Christmas parties in the home for the varied church auxiliaries the week before the prospective holidays.

Bewildered, Alyse sat there and listened to all the information presented. “Question: are you telling me I am expected to *host* these events in *my* home? For *all* the church auxiliaries? Wait one minute! *All* the auxiliaries the week before the holiday, and then the families for the actual holiday? Isn’t that a bit extreme? I have hosted the family, and I have even hosted the church; but I have never hosted them in my home together, and never for a whole week before the holiday. Who has time for all of that? WHY am I hosting **ALL** the auxiliaries in *my* home the week before the holiday?” The answer to Alyse’s many questions was simple: ***It’s tradition.***

Percy and Hattie hosted these events for many years until Percy retired and Matthew inherited the church. Once Matthew inherited the church and his parents' traditions, their traditions became his and Sarah's, which are now his and Alyse's. Laughter turned into confusion and angst. Smiling faces bore serious, strained lines. "Ms. Hattie, pardon my tone. Please explain this to me?" Hattie held Alyse's hand and smiled, "Sweet girl, it's obvious you don't realize what family you married into, but these are things we told you were forthcoming. You won't do everything on your own, as we will assist where needed. The children will handle their portion, Matthew will handle his portion, and we will do ours. Together, we'll make a beautiful event." Even more puzzled, Alyse inquired, "Hattie, how many auxiliaries are we looking at for these gatherings in *my* home? Are these catered events?" Hattie chuckled. "Catered events; no sweet girl. We cook around here."

Hope Street had the following auxiliaries (*boards, departments, and ministries*): deaconess, deacons, trustees, ushers, music department, youth department, the singles' and couple's ministries, the pastor's aide, and the ministers. Ten auxiliaries in seven days. Who does that? Alyse ordered another glass of wine and asked for the bottle to remain. Too much drama in one sitting. Lunch was not supposed to end like this. Hattie handed Alyse a bag and replied, "Don't open it now, as I can see your temperament flaring. Do peruse these documents no later than Wednesday, as we have things to do."

Retired men and women who have nothing more to do than relax from day to day can make plans and arrangements and expectations, more so requirements such as these and tasks are performed. Alyse was in her early thirties rearing the two teenagers of her husband, working her full-time job, maintaining her auxiliaries and duties at the church, and let's not forget the biggest charge of all, maintaining her husband.

Alyse sat reticent at the kitchen table that Sunday evening while the teens bickered, and Matthew gaped at her. He wondered where she was because it had become clear she was not at the table. Matthew cleared his throat. Matthew even complimented the meal. Matthew then became livid as he watched emotionless Alyse stare across the kitchen and he didn't quite know where to begin with her. With that, he shifted his attention to the children. "Excuse me you two,

the dinner table is for many things and bickering is not one of those things!” Michelle and Stephen disregarded Matthew and continued bickering. He then slammed his hand on the table and shouted, “Alright! That’s enough! Alyse? Alyse?! Alyse Marie Wright!” Alyse’s gaze shifted to Matthew. “Yes dear?” There were so many ways this conversation could go because Matthew had plenty of thoughts ready to erupt from his lips. Although she was there with them, Alyse couldn’t stop thinking about *ten auxiliaries in seven days and two families dining for the first time*.

Matthew began with the song the choir sang in service earlier that day. He loved the song, but it wasn’t the song he had previously approved. Alyse looked at him and then at the children. “Michelle and Stephen, I believe you were asked to stop.” Silence filled the room. “Please clear the table and excuse yourselves.” Humbled and quiet, they complied. To prevent a fight with her husband, Alyse attempted to change the conversation to Thanksgiving dinner. Matthew wasn’t ready to address Thanksgiving yet, as he continued to goad his wife. “Speaking of dinners Mrs. Wright, you haven’t touched yours.” He paused, then continued. “You’ve outdone yourself again with a lovely meal. But I have a problem.” Undisturbed, she replied “You have many of them tonight dear. Which one are we dealing with now?” Matthew shook his head, “You made changes this morning and I did not approve them! But I guess you couldn’t fulfill your duties in service this morning for that bottle of wine at lunch with mother and the girls yesterday! You sat there and allowed the children to disrespect me at this table! And then you sat here and issued the same disrespect at the table! What’s your say in all of this?”

Alyse rose to exit in a further attempt to prevent a fight with her husband. For she knew her mouth and temperament would have created an even bigger problem there. She knew he was upset about the changes this morning, and as the new directress of the choir, Alyse was trying to instill some positive changes. Her only problem in propagating change, in any way, at Hope Street rested with her husband. If Matthew didn’t like it, the choir didn’t do it. That’s the way things had always happened at Hope Street. Everything had to meet the pastor’s approval, and the pastor didn’t like change. Matthew emphasized the issue because Alyse didn’t sing the song. Every song which required a lead singer had to come from the first lady. If she didn’t sing it, he

didn't like it! In Alyse's eyes, it should have been Hope Street Baptist Church's choir. Instead, it was beginning to appear as Alyse and the HSBC choir, and she didn't like that.

Alyse thought of the few ways Matthew might have known about the wine. Surely Hattie, Barbara, nor Maureen had told him. However, in Matthew's eyes, it was unbecoming of his wife, the second-first lady, to drink in public. One or two glasses at the table was acceptable, but Alyse requested and partook of the whole bottle. Matthew had many quips and qualms and policies about him, but they were becoming excessive. Matthew leaned forward in his chair and shouted, "Sit down, Alyse! We're not done here. I'm waiting for answers, and you will eat before you leave this table!" Alyse remained calm as she spoke to him in spite his tempers and nostrils flaring. "Reverend, take the belt off the table. I'm not in the mood for this tonight. It is clear you are angered by the uneventful happenings of today and even yesterday. I won't touch the choir thing tonight. That's something you will save for another day. Please don't get angry with me for the children's bickering because you sat here and allowed it to linger. If you had a problem with the wine, you should have said something last night instead of pouting and grunting and coming to bed drunk and irate, or even saving it to build into more anger tonight. And as for my behavior tonight, you know, that juvenile behavior you spoke of? If you wouldn't force us to sit here like some bogus happy family on a Sunday evening after an entire berating session today, then maybe you'll have a pleasant dinner. And another thing while it's fresh on my mind; I love tradition as much as the next person. I believe traditions are meant to be kept and passed on to further generations, but I am not a machine. Something needs to be adjusted with ten auxiliaries in seven nights in our home. The expectation is too vast for any one person to achieve."

Matthew turned three shades of red as he restrained himself yet listened to Alyse assert herself. When he removed his belt awhile back, he knew his intentions and the family did too. However, this new tone of assertion concerned him. "Marie?" He only called her Marie when he was trying to humble himself and her. "Marie, don't mention tradition to me. What did mother say? Whatever mother said to you yesterday to involve a bottle of wine is what goes. I'm not touching it. As first-lady, it doesn't matter to me how vast the task; make it happen peacefully and leave me out of it. I'm giving you a half hour to compose yourself. Don't keep me waiting."

Matthew awoke the next morning to the aroma of hot breakfast and coffee from the kitchen. However, he didn't realize his wife was having breakfast alone. Alyse had gone to work without waking him as she had often done on a Monday morning, especially after such a Sunday. Nevertheless, she did something unusual that morning. During her morning break, she called. "Good morning dear. No, you are not late for the meeting. The deacons pushed the meeting back a few hours. The children have afternoon activities and I'll be home late this evening. Your lunch is on the stove, and dinner is in the oven. Yes, I am composed. Have a good day." Before he could speak, the dull tone of disconnect met his ear. After nights and fights like last night, Alyse had no desire to deal with him. She called Hattie to apologize for her behavior on Saturday and offered a truce. Alyse didn't have problems adjusting, just concerns. Big things coming too quickly with no time to prepare. Alyse had read everything from Hattie's bag and made notes as she read. Surely some of these things could be adjusted, maybe even tweaked. Alyse didn't want to break their traditions, just adjust them.

Hattie sat at the table with coffee while she awaited her daughter's arrival. She noticed the bruises immediately although Alyse assumed they were well-hidden. Instead of addressing the bruises, Hattie addressed Thanksgiving. They spoke of menus, decorations, invitations, and place settings; the additional conversation that didn't materialize Saturday afternoon. Instructions were provided on certain deacons who were not to be alone in a room with women, on ushers who could not sit beside each other, and on all the possibilities of how quick things could go wrong; hence the reason these auxiliaries didn't feast together. Dates were set and invitations were created. But Hattie didn't know Alyse had a plan brewing. A way for everything to come together while maintaining her sanity along the way. After Alyse finished Hattie's hair, Hattie looked upon Alyse and uttered, "When did this start?" Alyse kissed Hattie's forehead, grabbed her purse, and started home.

Now it was the week before Thanksgiving and these highly-anticipated events were here. To Hattie's thinking, these auxiliaries were going to feast in order the way she had planned. The invitations read otherwise. Alyse fashioned it such that the deaconess, deacons, trustees, pastor's aide, and ushers partied that Monday night, as most of them were either married to each other or some of the same people anyway; the music department canceled rehearsals and partied Tuesday

night; the ministers partied Thursday night; the singles' and couples ministries partied Friday night, the youth partied Saturday afternoon, and Alyse surprised them all with a gathering to surpass all parties that Saturday night, away from the Wright home. This was the first time in Hope Street's history that tradition had been changed in such a way that would bring all the auxiliaries together, peacefully.

Although Hattie and the others were delighted at how the new Mrs. Wright had conducted herself, there were some concerns which required addressing. How did Alyse pull this off? How did she *make* the time she said *no one* had to fashion such events? When and how did she prepare everything? And lastly, where did these people amass from who served the meals? Hattie's questions made Alyse smile. "Hattie, I can't tell all my secrets. The only thing you get from me is that nothing was catered; since *we cook around here.*"

Thanksgiving Day was upon them and families were coming in droves. Alyse's family was large, but numbers had dwindled over the years as members had passed on, and Matthew's family was growing. The house wasn't big enough to hold all of them comfortably at the dining room table, but as Alyse had been previously instructed, *make it happen and leave me out of it.* The dining room table normally seated eight, but now seated sixteen. Other areas around the home were prepared for guests and the kitchen is where the spread had been laid. In blending old traditions with new, all had a place in or around the Wright family home. Sports and other games commenced outdoors, laughter and cheers filled the air as football games played on big screens, Matthew had made amends and basked in his mother-in-love's stories and aunt-in-love's gumbo, they each shared things for which they were grateful, and of course, devoured the vast array of spices and roux and gravies and meats and desserts and more.

Hattie whisked Alyse off in private, marveled in the first of many traditions, and acknowledged a featured ray of sunlight upon her. Alyse cried and Hattie rejoiced. Hattie hugged Alyse and asked, "So, my girl, still mad at me?" Alyse laughed. "Hattie, I was never mad at you, just concerned." Hattie replied, "No, I seem to recall someone kissing my forehead, grabbing her purse, and exiting my home the other week when I posed a question; a question which still remains unanswered. Are things better there?" Alyse sipped her water and replied, "Oh, that?"

Hmmm, I believe I was told awhile back that some things are endured and better left unsaid. Let's not talk about such things." She paused. "Family's waiting, Hattie; we should get back to them. We're good."

Once with the family again, they embellished in watching their families blend even more. The question remains: where do you find a family with no drama other than a Wright Thanksgiving? Blessings to you and yours. What are YOU thankful for?