

Harold was faithful, and a godsend to her father. He understood and embraced her father's vision for the ministry as if he'd been there when God gave it to him.

He was discreet and walked perfectly in rhythm with her father's stride. He told her father the needful things and kept the trivial ones to himself. He screened the plethora of preachers and speakers who phoned or wrote in trying to make their own name at Everlasting, and he weeded through the dozens of business proposals before they hit her father's desk.

Everybody had the perfect idea, the next best thing, and the greatest thing since that last great thing. They sought endorsements – because her father's name was a brand in religious circles – and financial backing, advice, and counsel. Harold discerned between necessary business and useless ideas.

But he was also faithful to her. She hadn't meant to drag out their engagement – if dragging it out was the right term – but it had just happened. Seven years he'd waited. People called Harold a fool, and her a cold fish and a daddy's girl who thought she was too good for any man. But she and Harold had never let it bother them. He loved her, and she loved him. Shouldn't that be enough?

Yet life and situations kept getting in the way. First, it was her father's bout with cancer some years ago, and he needed her to help with church business. Then, it was law school, and she'd been determined to finish. For the most part, Harold understood, but at times he got uncomfortable. She figured it was coming more from the folks around them, than it was from him.

But now her father kept saying it was time she married. "It doesn't look right for you to date for so long without taking this man's hand in marriage," he'd said. "He's a good man," he'd added. Harold was the only man her father had ever approved of her marrying, and her father had taken on the son who had eluded him in blood.

There were no butterflies or a fluttering heart like her sister Jacqui had described with so many of her failed relationships. No. There was no *falling* in love.

It was a deliberate choice to love a man who was good for her, and she had decided that Harold was as fine as any brother half his age.

She couldn't do better than Harold Whitman. And come October fifteenth, she'd be wearing a hand-beaded, pure white gown down the aisle of Everlasting Joy, and nothing could change that.