

2021

## The Chair of White Roses

Aaron Maxey

*Michigan Connections Academy*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/lajm>

---

### Recommended Citation

Maxey, Aaron (2021) "The Chair of White Roses," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 37: Iss. 1, Article 10.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.2324>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Language Arts Journal of Michigan by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gvsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gvsu.edu).

## The Circle of White Roses

AARON MAXEY, MICHIGAN CONNECTIONS ACADEMY (TEACHER: DEBORAH BREWBAKER)

Memories, O' these memories. Clarissa, my beautiful wife, whatever happened? Someday I know I shall return to meet you, but what about this present moment? Each day, I stare at the rocking chair we crafted. The exquisite flower stems that run through its fragile frames bring me great sorrow, as I recall our moments. The magnificent white rose petals that were so thoughtfully painted up and down its spine.

Clarissa, Clarissa O' my love. It is in your memory that I recall our times. If I shall do anything, let it be this, to bring one of fellow circumstances to our same outcome. Clarissa, let you be described as so. Your hair seemed as if it were shaped by the angels themselves. The glowing locks of gold that came down past your shoulders could make even the rocks reach out to feel the softness of the strands.

Clarissa, your marvelous blue eyes would remind any of the deep ocean. They contained so much grace and peace, but reminisced of power. Your smooth pale skin with one touch would bring about a great flutter in any man. The lips on your never forsaken face, reminds all of a joyous moment in their lives. Clarissa, every part of you was more attractive than all the riches in the world.

It brings me deep sorrow and happiness to recall us. You and I were as close as any two mortal humans could possibly be. Still to this day, I wear your ring on my finger and tell all those who ask, that I am married to you. You will always be in my heart and mind Clarissa. Until I come to meet you once again, you will have my full attention on this earth.

As for now Clarissa, I shall fulfill your wish. I will tell all those who listen of your beauty and grace. They will be told of our story, Clarissa. I will make sure that no other couple should go through the trying times that we did. Please, to all who listen, hear our story. Be filled with emotion at the tale of true love. I am but an old humble man. All I offer is a simple story. Listen and hear, my dear friend.

\*\*\*

It was at the young age of twelve that I lost both of my parents. My life was always very tough. Even when my parents still roamed this earth, they hated each other. I was reminded every single day of my worthlessness. My parents had blamed me for all of their problems. It was the summer of 1923, when they died in the plane crash. Even though they caused so much damage to me, I still mourned deeply upon hearing their loss.

I was taken in by my childhood friend's family. They cared greatly for me, although I did not belong

---

*MCTE partners with Michigan Youth Arts Festival (MYAF) annually to highlight outstanding creative writing in high schools across the state. MCTE member teachers may submit student writing for adjudication in late winter. MCTE Executive Committee members read the submitted student writing in the genres of poetry, short story, play or script writing, creative nonfiction, and graphic novels and score the submissions to choose the strongest examples of creative writing at the 9-12 grade level across Michigan. The selected writers are chosen to participate in the Michigan Youth Arts Festival, which is held annually in May (usually on the campus of Western Michigan University, but the 2021 festival was virtual). At the festival, students attend two days of a creative writing workshop with an accomplished Michigan writer. In addition, students are selected to perform their writing pieces at the creative writing showcase. MCTE also published the Creative Writing Book available online and in print for teachers and students. More information about the festival and how to submit student writing can be found at: <https://mymcte.org/myaf-creative-writing/>*

---

to them. To this day I do not know if it was love or pity that made them care for me. Either way, I was treated as though I were their flesh and blood child. Rodger, my friend, would talk to me as you would to your brother. His family played a great deal in part of how I turned out today.

For the next eight years, I lived with my newfound family. During this entire time although, I was as welcomed as one could be, I still searched for a close comfort and love I never felt from my own parents. Rodgers's family always felt emotionally distant though they tried their best to accompany me. I needed a caring mother I could talk to, and a strong father who I could learn from. Rodger's parents met both of these qualities, however, I simply could not fully adjust to them.

School was difficult for me as well. My mind would run off to distant places, as my teachers tried their best to help me learn. Nothing ever felt suited to me. The emotional damage my own parents had caused, left a lasting impact on my brain. That is, until winter, 1931.

It was a cold frozen day, as we have had many a days before. I had only a month left of school before I would graduate. While on my way to school, my gaze was caught by a young girl. She had been walking opposite the street of mine. Everything about her enticed me to my core. The golden hair and blue eyes. The smooth pale skin. She wore a thick coat and gloves to give her warmth and the girl looked to be the same age as I.

I was stopped where I was, staring at her. I'm sure I looked foolish but I couldn't help it. She was everything I could ever imagine about the prettiest girl on the planet. Some form of courage, or stupidity, welled up inside me. I had the urge to approach her. With no thought as to what I would say, I crossed the street and ran up to the girl.

In hindsight, I recognize there was no way on earth I could've charmed her. She was just too pretty, I couldn't help it. All I know is I said something similar to, "You're so beautiful."

The girl spun around, and the rest is history. By some miraculous way, the girl chuckled. She told me her name was Clarissa, and we talked the hour away. From that day forward I joined Clarissa everyday as she walked to work. Day by day, we grew closer. Within weeks, I'd ask her out on our first date. Things seemed to be moving at an incredible speed. Two years later,

Clarissa and I were deeply in love. Clarissa gave me the comfort and love I never received from my parents. She received every space of love in my heart. All I wanted to do was spend every second with her.

Then, the day came. I had saved my money and bought an engagement ring. That very night, I decided I would propose to Clarissa. Each and every moment my heart beat faster, as I grew anxious of the proposal. My entire world came crashing down however, when I opened the mail. The first letter in the mailbox was from the military. I had been drafted to Vietnam.

As soon as I read the letter, I fell to my knees. This couldn't be true. Everything was going so well. I had started to repair all the emotional damage from my childhood. Now, it would all come to an end. Hiding the ring inside my house, I took the letter straight to Clarissa. She was even more distressed than I was. Clarissa's eyes were filled with tears, as we thought over what to do.

No matter what, I would have to serve. It was only a question on where our relationship would go. Without mentioning the engagement ring, Clarissa and I decided we could make it through this. She promised she would wait for me until I returned home. It made me feel a little bit better after the conversation, but, it was still a lot to handle.

Within a couple of weeks, I went out to war. The experience was life changing, and not in a good way. For two years I fought in Vietnam. War is hard on any man. To see so much death and pain around you, changes the mind. Constantly having to defend your own life, as well as your fellow troops, took its toll.

As the war went on, I became quicker to anger. It was purely exhausting. Then, on September 10th, 1936, my life changed drastically. While out on a scouting mission our platoon hit a mine. The explosion and the shrapnel killed five men, and wounded many more. Among the wounded, was me. I was standing around 10 yards from the blast, and got hit by shrapnel. It struck me in my right leg.

After a couple minutes of checking wounds and seeing the condition of all the men, quickly, the wounded were set on makeshift stretchers and brought back to camp. More than the physical pain, was the emotional pain. I had just witnessed five people, who I considered friends, die right in front of me. We were all distraught. After hours of my leg being operated on, I was told it would need to be amputated.

My only response was, "As long as I have Clarissa, I can get through anything."

The medical team did their work. When all was finished, I no longer had my right leg. I could no longer serve, and was sent back home. Needing a wheelchair now, I rolled off the plane that took the wounded home. A small crowd of people was there waiting. Instead of a warm welcoming however, insults were hurled at us, as protest was made. Only the families of the wounded rushed over to support the soldiers. Even though the insults cut deep, my spirits were lifted as soon as I spotted Clarissa in the crowd. She ran to me, and we embraced. Clarissa had waited all this time, she kept her promise.

"Thank you, thank you so much for waiting," I said to her.

She replied, "How could I ever leave someone like you?"

A great smile erupted on my face. In the coming week, I decided I would propose to her. It rolled around into the next week before I knew it. After having a romantic dinner, I got down on one knee and proposed to Clarissa. She said yes. In the summer of 1937, we got married. Even while having to use a wheelchair to get around, my life was incredible. I couldn't have wished for anything better, O' my Clarissa, I really couldn't have.

It wasn't until five months later, when I lost it all. No matter how good my life was, it still didn't erase my memory of war. I had nightmares frequently. It didn't take much for me to go unhinged. Starting as a simple argument with Clarissa, over I don't know what, it slowly escalated. Clarissa blamed me for something and I blamed her right back. It gradually intensified. Any deeper flaws we saw in one other began to come out. Anything that was not talked over and dealt with earlier, started to destroy everything we had built.

We yelled and yelled for several minutes. Finally, I snapped. Reaching over, I hit Clarissa across her cheek. She jumped back and winced in pain. Immediately, grief and regret hit me like a bullet. Everything went quiet, as Clarissa held her face. Then, she turned and looked at me. Tears were flowing down her cheeks. I had only seen her this grief stricken once before, and that was when I was drafted.

Clarissa, in a pain filled and saddened voice, said, "Goodbye, Charlie."

What had I done? What, had, I done? My eyes

welled with tears as I watched Clarissa get up and go for the door. She stopped, took one last look at me, and then went out into the night. I collapsed to the floor when she was gone. In a fit of rage at myself, I beat the ground and walls. Throwing around chairs and breaking everything in sight, I regretted every single word I said to her.

Days passed, and Clarissa never returned. O' my Clarissa, how I regret my actions to this day. Finally, I could not destroy myself any longer. One Sunday morning, I went to the local church. It took a great deal of effort to get up and down the church steps, but I needed to do it. I prayed with everything inside me for Clarissa to come back, and for everything to go back how it was.

As I left the church, I noticed a small flower shop across the street. I went over to it. Going inside, I purchased a single white rose. Looking at it, I sighed and mustered up my courage. I traveled several blocks to get to Clarissa's parents' house, knowing for sure, she would be there. I went up to the door, and knocked. Clarissa answered the door. She opened it and as soon as she saw me, tears welled up in her eyes.

Clarissa slowly shook her head and said, "No." through tears.

Then, she slowly shut her door. I sat there for a couple seconds, tears in my own eyes. After a minute, I set down the rose on her porch and solemnly made my way back home. When I got back, I punched the walls over and over, taking out my anger. I felt even more pain now, than I had ever experienced.

The next day, I once again went to the church, carefully and painstakingly making my way up the stairs. After leaving the church, I went to the flower shop, and bought another white rose. Going down several blocks, I went to Clarissa's parents' house. I knocked on the door and Clarissa answered. The same as last time, she shook her head while crying, and slowly shut the door. I set down the rose on the porch. The rose from the previous day however, was gone.

Once again, I set home, with tears along the way. Day after day, I would repeat this process. I could never say sorry enough. After visiting the church I would get a single white rose and knock on Clarissa's door. Each time, she would cry as she shook her head and closed the door. Every day, the rose from the previous day, would be gone.

Day after day, week after week passed. Even if it

all was for nothing, I would show Clarissa how much I regretted my actions. Slowly, any pain inside me grew. I thought there was no way she could ever forgive me. O' Clarissa, how dearly I was hurt.

Finally, after an entire year of setting a single white rose down, I could take it no longer. To that day, I had always worn our wedding ring. If anyone had asked, I always told them Clarissa and I were still married. Now, I truly knew, it was over. Taking off my ring, I set it down beside the rose. I never bothered to knock that day.

That night, I heard a knock at my own door. Opening it, I was astonished to see Clarissa standing there, once again, her eyes filled with tears. In her hands was a large box. Inside the box, was every single rose I had left on her porch, every single one of them. Most were dead and withered, but nevertheless, she had kept them. Clarissa sat down the box and said these few words I will never forget,

“Charlie, I forgive you.”

She rushed over to me and we embraced.

I responded while holding her, “Don't ever let me yell at you again.”

Forty-three years later, she never did let me treat her bad. It was forty-three years of pure, true, love. In the summer of 1982, Clarissa was diagnosed with cancer. Before she passed, she and I did one final act of love. We carved a magnificent rocking chair, covered in white roses. Each rose as Clarissa explained to me, represented one of the many times we had together.

On October 5th, 1982, Clarissa passed away.

The last thing she said to me was, “I forgive you for everything, Charlie.”

Now, every day, I wake up and observe the marvelous rocking chair, recounting each memory. Each and every day where we truly loved each other. Oh how sweet the moments were. Truly love, those who listen, truly love. O' my Clarissa, we truly loved, we truly loved...

**Aaron Maxey** is in 12th grade at Michigan Connections Academy. His short story “The Chair of White Roses” was meant to capture the effects of war and PTSD in a poetic and authentic way. Currently, he's planning on writing more short stories that combine poetry and story to create emotional tales that convey wisdoms of life in an engaging and unique way. His stories are sort of like fictional memoirs. By March 2022, he plans to have written ten more short stories, each one telling a different tale of grief, loss, wisdom, and experience. He plans on publishing the stories when I turn eighteen in March. For publishing, he will most likely pursue a form of self-publishing, but publishing plans are still very flexible for me. As a future career, he will pursue some form of authorship in writing, possibly do part-time photography, and work in some form of farming or outdoor labor as an extra.