

THE REMARKABLE TRUE STORY OF JACK DANIEL  
HIS MASTER DISTILLER NEAREST GREEN  
AND THE IMPROBABLE RISE OF UNCLE NEAREST

# LOVE & WHISKEY



*New York Times* Bestselling Author  
**FAWN WEAVER**

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# THE BEGINNING

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**I**N THE REALM of imagery, where a single frame can speak volumes, there exists a picture from circa 1904 that captures more than mere moments; it ensnares entire narratives. This particular image, steeped in history and shrouded in mystery, was my gateway into an extraordinary account. Central to this enigma was a Black man, seated with striking prominence to the right of the legendary whiskey maker Jack Daniel. When I first encountered this photo, his identity was a mystery to the world and me. But as I delved deeper and secured the original image, it became clear that this man was more than just a figure; he was a symbol of something profound and unspoken.

In this photograph, taken in Lynchburg, Tennessee, a place and time barely a generation removed from the shadows of slavery, this Black man's presence beside Jack Daniel was a statement in itself. If you peer closely, two remarkable details emerge. Firstly, while it appears that all the men are seated, Jack Daniel, standing at a mere five foot two, is actually upright. By the time of this photo, his right leg had been amputated, adding to his already diminutive stature. Secondly, and more significantly, this Black man is not merely positioned beside Jack Daniel; he has been granted the central spot, a place of honor, by the whiskey icon himself.

This man, George Green, son of Nearest Green, was more than a companion or an aide to Jack Daniel. He was a chosen confidant, tasked with a role that went beyond companionship; he was there to obscure Jack's physical limitations, a sort of guardian against the vulnerabilities of a man revered in history. This repositioning, this deliberate choice to cede the center stage to George Green, intrigued me deeply. In him, I saw not just a figure by Jack's side, but a man entrusted to shield another's frailty, a silent yet powerful testament to an unspoken bond and a hidden chapter in the annals of a famed whiskey legacy.



*GEORGE GREEN, center, with arms crossed*

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**CHAPTER**

**1**

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**T**HIS STORY starts in Singapore, but to understand how I got there, you really have to start in LA. By the time I was born, my parents had become leaders in the evangelical Southern Baptist church, studying under the cofounder of the Southern Baptist Leadership Conference. My dad's past as a bigtime Motown writer and producer was behind him. Parties with the Temptations and the Supremes morphed into hundred-person Bible studies in the living room. Famous artists still came by, but now it was because my father was their minister. My mother was the bestselling author of relationship books for women with titles like *Liberated Through Submission* and *Your Knight in Shining Armor*. They were drawn into their church's strict interpretation of scripture. Their pastor was a proud male chauvinist who preached that women should only wear dresses and skirts, never pants. From a young age, that didn't sit right with me—I couldn't figure out why on earth God wanted me to wear a skirt in the middle of winter. I've been wired from day one to challenge everything.



When I was fifteen, my parents had another baby. My mother felt she'd made mistakes with me and my sisters. She wanted a fresh start with her youngest, but I was constantly pushing back on everything. And so my parents gave me an ultimatum: conform to the rules of the house or leave. I left. I was saying no—no to the rules I didn't understand, no to women being subservient to men, no to being someone else. Just no. My mother watched me walk down the driveway. I think we both understood that living in that environment would no longer work for me, but it was still heartbreaking.

This was in 1992, less than a year after Rodney King was brutally attacked by the police. I moved to Jordan Downs, one of the housing projects in Watts, dropped out of high school, and spent several years in homeless shelters.

The last shelter I stayed in was Covenant House. They helped you get a job, save your money, and get on your feet. My first morning there, the staff helped me put together a résumé and sent me out into LA to pound the pavement. I went to a bunch of different places, handed out my résumé, and did some interviews. One was for a job as a server at BB King's Blues Club. I walked in, interviewed, and was offered a job. You were supposed to be twenty-one to work there. I had just turned eighteen, but I only got a few questions about my age before management soon forgot about it. They saw someone who carried herself with the confidence of an adult, not a homeless teenager. I got three more job offers by the end of the day.

From then on, my confidence only grew. I knew I would be all right. I took a second job at Camacho's Cantina as a hostess, and I started saving up.

In addition to my restaurant jobs, I got an unpaid internship in PR. Back then, you'd send out a press release, see who picked it up, and watch someone run with the story. But I thought PR could be more experiential. It just seemed to make sense that if you took the products

someplace where the press was already going to be—for example, filling the greenroom where a celebrity would be interviewed with an artist’s paintings and sculptures—then a natural conversation with the press could follow. I reached out to celebrities I’d grown up calling “aunt” and “uncle” to introduce me to entertainers who might allow me to do this.

Today we call that *brand integration*, but at the time, it didn’t really exist.

I pitched it to my boss, who didn’t fully get it. “But if you can execute it, go for it,” she said. So I took it to two clients. They were hesitant, but they knew what the PR firm had been trying wasn’t working, so they were open to giving this idea a try. After successfully placing their products a few times, both clients came to me and said, “Listen, we’re not going to stay with this PR firm. We’re going to go somewhere else. But if you ever decide to start your own firm, we’ll go with you.”

I was still a teenager, but suddenly I had two clients. After an initial trial, each offered me \$5,000 dollars a month to take on their accounts—the same amount they’d been paying the other firm. By age nineteen, I’d established FEW Entertainment and had ten employees. My dad even helped—he had a mostly unused office for his nonprofit, Black American Response to the African Crisis (BARAC), that he let me use to set up my headquarters.

FEW Entertainment’s clients were happy, but within a year the business started to falter. I knew how to do PR, but I didn’t yet know how to run a company. I made the hard decision to let go of every employee, although I didn’t completely shutter the company just yet.

Those years were ones of turmoil, marked by a lack of hope. I tried to take my own life twice by the time I was twenty. I remember tubes down my nose and charcoal being pumped into me to pull out everything I’d taken. The second time I thought, *All right, God, so I tried to*



*take myself out twice and you're not allowing it, so how about I figure out why I'm here?*

In one of my mom's books, she challenges women to make a six-month commitment to put an "Under Construction" sign on themselves and figure out who they are without being in a relationship. That idea resonated with me. *I'm going to be under construction*, I thought. For six months, I did nothing but go to work and read. I cut out all TV and radio. I read the Bible every day and read some sixty other books, anything that seemed like it could be helpful.

In that six months, and for years after, God worked his own charcoal in my spirit. I found this truth in the Gospel: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In other words, wherever your focus is, whatever you give attention to, that's what grows. I've lived by that and focused on my strengths ever since.

I stayed in California and worked earnestly to build a career and life that sustained and nurtured me. By twenty-five, I had become the co-owner of one of the top restaurants in Los Angeles. Chef Gerry Garvin (now G. Garvin) wanted to open his own restaurant and needed help on the business side. One of my former employees suggested me to him. Although my fledgling company was barely surviving, I had enough work that by the time Gerry contacted me, I had built strong credibility in the industry, and very few knew of my company's challenges. I advised him to focus on his catering business, which had attracted a lot of celebrity clients, while I put together a business plan for him. I became a minor shareholder and the business manager, and I oversaw the successful, celebrity-filled launch of G. Garvin's Restaurant. It quickly became *the* place to go in LA.

In 2003, I was getting my hair done once a week at a great salon. I tried to keep my head down and avoid taking in the celebrity and local gossip. I'd bring a book or spend the time on calls with staff or payroll in order to avoid chitchat. The only thing my hairdresser ever

talked about was her only son, who sat just a little lower than the angels in her estimation. She never got involved with celebrity gossip. Hair and her son were her only topics. One day she had my head in the wash bowl and leaned over and said, “I’ve been watching you all these weeks.” She liked that I ran a business at such a young age. “You have to meet my son.”

It took her over a month, and four attempts, to finally convince me to give her my number. Then, she had to convince her son to call me, which took another month of relentless appeals. “I met your wife,” she told him point-blank.

“This must be the Second Coming,” I said, when I realized who was calling.

Keith burst out laughing. “You’ve been talking to my mother,” he said.

Our first conversation lasted for hours. Before meeting up for a date, I asked God to let me know if Keith was the right person for me and to close the door if he was the wrong one. I knew, from our first conversation, that Keith was it for me. He was absolutely the right door.

We didn’t even have that much in common. His parents were divorced. Mine were marriage counselors. He likes to think things over for a long time. I’m eager to make a choice and follow my gut. I often think and act in the same motion. But we respect each other, we work well together, and most importantly, we love each other.

I believe who you partner with in life is one of the determining factors between success and mediocrity. I wouldn’t be where I am without Keith. I was a whole person by the time I met Keith—perfectly content with going to the movies alone, sitting by myself in restaurants, and loving my life. Keith was a whole person as well. Our relationship is not one of two halves making a whole. Our marriage is one multiplied by one to equal one. Folks often describe me as a strong, independent woman, but that’s not exactly right. I am a strong *interdependent* woman.

I also started to see my parents in a more nuanced light through Keith's eyes. People had always talked about how important my dad was, but as a kid, I never got excited by his music; I couldn't relate to it. Growing up in his house was a little like growing up in Orlando and being utterly unimpressed with Disney World. When Keith and I got serious, though, I brought him home to meet my family.

He walked in the door and looked around at the gold and platinum records that bordered the walls of the entire living room.

"Did you forget to tell me something?" he asked.

I'd never mentioned it. I never thought to! He asked me what songs my dad had produced, and I couldn't remember any beyond "You've Made Me So Very Happy," "Love Child," and "Still Water (Love)."

When I got home, I got a text message from Keith with a link to my father's Wikipedia page. *You should know more*, he wrote.

We got married nine months after we met and considered moving to San Antonio, Texas. I always knew I was Southern at heart and wouldn't live in California forever. But Keith was an executive at Sony Pictures Entertainment. LA was home. So we compromised and found a community in Old Agoura, about thirty miles outside town. It's like time froze there. Our neighbors had cattle and dozens of horses, and chickens crossed the roads. We had a dream home with enough room and stables for four horses, a lifelong dream of mine. We called it Serenity Ranch.

For years, our life was wonderful. I built an investment company, and Keith and I became real estate investors. I wrote two bestselling books and traveled the world.

But nothing great ever comes with ease. My father passed away in 2012. Following a decade of fertility treatments, in vitro, and unsuccessful adoption and surrogacy attempts, Keith and I came to terms with the idea that the family we'd long dreamed of might not be our purpose in this life. I named my investment company Grant Sidney,

Inc., after Grant Edward and Sidney Elisabeth, the kids' names we'd chosen early into our marriage. The push I felt to mother and nurture found fulfillment in my niece, Brittany. We were her respite from a very tough world for a teenager. Whatever tools she needed in life to succeed, she knew she could come to us and we'd supply it without ever asking a question. We loved Brittany—an audio engineer and animal lover—as a daughter, but my work with Grant Sidney was often so all-encompassing that I didn't have the time to spend with her that I wanted.

One of the companies Grant Sidney invested in was struggling. I tried to help its founders turn it around, but it was a stressful experiment. In June 2016, after a year of nonstop frustrating moments, Keith invited me to join him last minute on a business trip to Singapore. I jumped at the chance for a break. For better and for worse, the trip turned out to be much more than I bargained for.



**This chapter is excerpted from  
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