

The Music Box  
*by Marilyn Reeves*

Catherine looked wistfully out her third floor window at the assisted living facility. The apple blossoms were in bloom, and the coming of spring always reminded her of her first love, Joseph.

Her gaze then fell on the beautiful music box he had given her so many years ago, and she thought briefly of opening it and listening once again to the lovely melody that he had created especially for her, just a few months before he departed from her life forever.

They met during the summer session at the University. She was an art student, he was perfecting his skills as a concert pianist and going for his Masters Degree in Music Theory. They fell in love and talked about getting married some day. About having children and growing old together.

Joseph was long and lean, his eyes as dark and wild as his coal black hair. The sonatas he created were deep, dark, mysterious, building to a thundering crescendo, and then ending softly, quietly, as if the storm in his mind had finally passed, leaving him at peace.

One day, as she was listening to him play, he was composing a melody so sweet, so lyrical, it was like nothing he had ever played before. Tears welled in her eyes as she listened. When he was done, she asked him the name of the piece. He looked at her and said, "I think I'll call it 'Wild Flower'."

"For me?" she said.

"Yes, for you."

A few weeks earlier they had taken a picnic out on the meadow and he had picked a pretty wildflower and placed it in her long, flowing hair. He kissed her tenderly and said, "You are my lovely wildflower. I think I shall call you that."

The following spring he presented her with the beautiful music box for her birthday. The outside was decorated with a ring of flowers in mother-of-pearl, surrounding a little brass plaque engraved with the words, "To My Wildflower". And when opened, the tinkling music played a sweet rendition of her special song. It was the loveliest gift she had ever received and she had cherished it to this day.

But, like so many love stories, theirs ended much too soon. He went on to become a concert pianist of some renown, touring the world, enchanting audiences with his talent – his Wildflower seemingly forgotten. And she had stayed on at the University to become an art instructor.

But now, today, more than a half century later, as Catherine sat musing, she heard the sound of music coming from the lounge – the notes played simply – the way a child would play with only a single finger. And as she listened, she knew.

Placing her music box carefully on her lap, she wheeled herself down to the open doorway of the lounge. A tall, lean man with a shock of silver hair was sitting at the bench, hands tortured with arthritis, picking out the notes of "Wildflower". When he finished, Catherine opened her music box and it began to echo the melody he had just played.

Joseph spun around on the bench and stared at her in astonishment. "Catherine!" he said.

"Yes, Joseph," she replied. "It is your Wildflower. It seems we may grow old together after all."