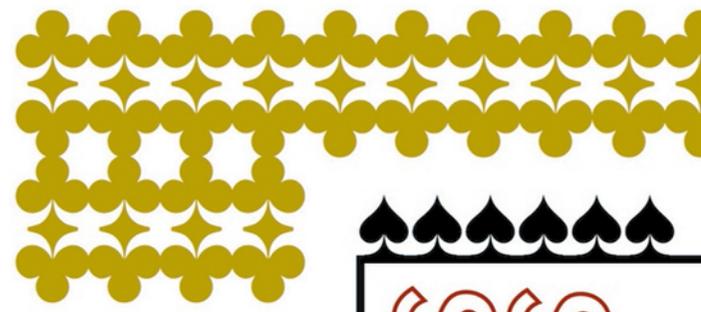


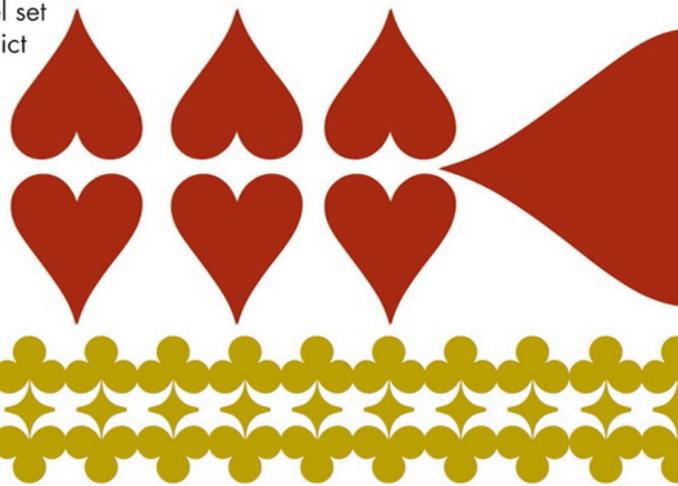
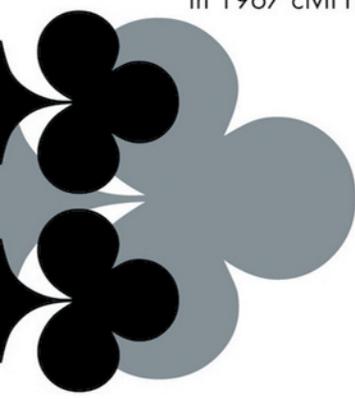
SARAH
SEWELL
WOLTERS



BRAVO ATLANTA

SASSY
SONJA

An exciting romance novel set
in 1967 civil rights conflict



Sassy Sonja
Bravo Atlanta



Sassy Sonja Bravo Atlanta



By
Sarah Sewell Wolters



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ISBN: 978-1-68181-007-2

Book Design by Julius Kiskis

22 21 22 20 19 18 17 16 15 1 2 3 4 5



Dedication

Dedicated to Conductor Robert Shaw and
Members of The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra
Who Put Atlanta on the World Stage



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Foreword

The world around Sonja Kent Avon is the turbulent 1960s. Segregation is ending in the South, a new day of racial equality is dawning. Her husband gets involved with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. A new generation of Atlanta leadership is determined to shape the change affecting their city and activate the goodwill present in the community at-large. Separate restrooms and water fountains must go, and racially segregated schools and restaurants also have to go, to comply with new and unpopular laws. Atlanta trains an effective police force and rioting, burning and looting are held to a minimum. “Bravo Atlanta,” so says the Avon family and so say I, who lived through this time in Atlanta. My book reflects my hometown pride.

Today, in a new millennium, our newspaper headlines reflect racial conflicts which still persist despite fifty years of change. Relationships have surely improved and economic opportunities for all have been increased. Readers will come away with a new awareness of the efforts of the past generations, giving them hope in a weary world and enthusiasm to meet the post millenium challenges that exist with courage like that of “Sassy Sonja.”



Acknowledgments

SASSY SONJA: BRAVO ATLANTA

Thanks to fellow writers

Widsoe T. Bastian

Meghan Fitzmartin

For their encouragement

For their expert help in bringing the

Atlanta Avon Family to life.

My book shines with their polish.

Snow in Atlanta

In my foggy state I think a giant pillow in the sky has burst open, with pieces of pure white goose feathers softly, silently floating down in the aftermath of destruction. I have never seen anything so beautiful in my entire life.

Now I know I'm not living in Florida. This just doesn't happen in Jacksonville. In 1966 when Sandy and I moved to Atlanta, we enjoyed a beautiful spring season. We expected snow at Christmas but never mind that, it's January 1967 – the glorious snow is here.

As I slowly rouse, my brain begins to function again. When I roll out from under the warmth of my sheets, I nearly fall flat onto the cold ground in my rush to the window. Overnight the world outside has been transformed from its familiar greenery into something wonderful. Something magical. Something completely white.

Snow.

Saturday morning is the perfect time to enjoy the new winter landscape. I have always wondered what all the fuss was about. Jacksonville's winters have never produced snow; the temperate ocean breeze and humidity is a buffer against any ice forming in the atmosphere. Last night I went to bed intent on exploring the area around my new home. Now I am both determined and excited to venture outside.

But first a cup of coffee to warm me up.

Even the sound of coffee brewing is magical today. I

can't help but just stare in awe and wonder. The seconds turn into minutes. Everything is crisp and pure. I feel as though if I think the wrong thoughts or say the wrong words, I will wake up and the picture before me will vanish like the images of a dream.

I am pulled away from my quiet contemplation by Ralphie, the golden Lab who adopted my roommate and me. He comes and sits by my side, vigorously wagging his tale at the prospect of exploring this strange new natural phenomenon. His enthusiasm is contagious, but I restrain myself. It is cold outside, colder than anything I've ever experienced in Florida. I need to be properly dressed before I begin my romp with the dog in the snow.

Haphazardly I throw on my newly bought thick coat, a wool cap, and a pair of my roommate's old boots. Then I open the front door. When I do, a blast of winter air hits my face at twenty miles per hour! I'm glad that I listened when Sandy convinced me to go shopping for winter clothes last week. Ralphie runs outside like he has been shot from a rifle, nearly knocking me over as he bolts through my legs and dashes out into our snowy front yard.

The first thing I do is stick my uncovered fingers into the icy fluff. The sensation is so surprising that I jerk back with a squeal. But I don't let go of the snow in my hands. Instead I pack it together, forming my very first snowball.

"Watch out, Ralphie!" I shout before I throw the snowball, aiming just in front of the dog, who is leaping and bounding through the small drifts.

When Ralphie calms down long enough to stop barking and sniff a particular patch of snow, the quiet from the early morning returns. Only now it is even more still than the hush of dawn. I don't think I've ever heard quiet quite

like this before. Even the trees listen to the silence, holding their breath as if the winter wind that is blowing through them has a secret to share.

Ralphie isn't calm for very long. After he starts to bark again, I am aware of a peace that has settled over the neighborhood. It seems that nothing can go wrong while the snow is falling. I grin and flex my fingers, warming them up so I can pack another snowball.

The morning would be perfect if Sandy, my friend and roommate, could be here with me to share the wonders of this new white playground. But Sandy is a surgical nurse at DeKalb Medical Center. She has the early shift and won't be home until just after noon.

Sandy and I have been talking for months about the excitement of seeing our first snowfall. Although she loves her job, I'm sure she'd rather be home right now. This is an experience we definitely wanted to share. To soften her disappointment of missing the thrill of waking up to the white stuff, I decide to make her lunch—biscuits and chicken casserole.

Playtime for Ralphie and me lasts another half hour before I figure it's time to trade my coat for an apron. The truth is, by this point my hands feel as though they are frozen solid. The wonder of the texture of snow wears off quickly as I realize that I cannot feel my fingers. Despite the discomfort, though, it has been worth it. I will never forget the feeling of holding a snow ball in my palm and crushing the flakes between my fingers for the first time.

Ralphie follows me inside, panting heavily from the exercise. Because Sandy and I are busy working women, poor Ralphie doesn't get enough chances to just run. He looks at me with laughter in his eyes. A thin layer of snow is

covering his eyelids. A much thicker snow cocoon blankets my dog, and when he begins to shake I know that there is a cleanup job to be done before cooking.

My experience with new weather both invigorates me and terrifies me at the same time. It reinforces the truth that I am no longer home. It is time for me to branch out on my own, to leave behind the memories and life I led in the past, but every once in a while I am reminded that I have such limited experience with so much of the world. For someone so young I have been through a great deal, but there is still so much that I don't know.

"But we are going to make it, aren't we, Ralphie?" I ask my soggy dog. Dutifully, he answers me with a bark and a tail wag. I kiss his nose and grab an old towel, rubbing the cold out of his wet coat.

Once Ralphie is good and dry, he gives me a few doggy kisses before bouncing off to rest in his favorite spot by the window. I make quick work of whipping together the time-honored tradition of Southern cooking in my cozy kitchen. It is a morning of reminiscing. If there is a specific time when I almost always think about the past, it is while I am in the kitchen. The familiar sight of dishes, the smell of bread baking, even the color of the ingredients before they are cooked or baked—all these things remind me of my wonderful grandmother, and for that I am eternally grateful.

Even the recipes are like old friends, reminding me of the many happy days I have spent with my grandparents. Times change, but no matter where you are, chicken casserole always tastes the same.

Lunch is ready quickly. I set the table, make more coffee, even fold the napkins like I have seen it done in fancy restaurants. But there is still no sign of Sandy.

She's late, which is unusual for her but not particularly worrisome. So I wait.

Ralphie begins to whine; the smell of fresh food is too much for him. Taking pity on both my dog and my ears, I slip him a biscuit and stand, looking out the window again. The roads were cleared hours earlier, so cars are coming and going with ease. I frown and check my watch. It is thirty minutes past the time when Sandy usually arrives home.

Another fifteen minutes go by as I stare at the casserole, watching it get colder and colder. But I'm not concerned about the supper; I am worried about Sandy. I place the dish back in the oven and turn on the radio, leaning against the counter with an eye on the driveway.

A Frank Sinatra song spills out into the room through the speakers. Though normally I would not turn off the crooner, I hurriedly flip the station. Then I hear "update on the integration of county public schools" before I change the station again.

Then I hear a car door slam shut. Ralphie barks. I switch off the radio.

I let out a sigh of relief as I rush to the door, hurrying to open it as a walking, talking clothes closet enters.

"It is cold as blazes!" Sandy complains, heading straight to the oven.

"Your lunch is in there!" I exclaim. I run to rescue the casserole before Sandy can do any damage. Appraising the woman, I have to laugh. "Are you wearing every piece of clothing you own?"

"Very nearly," Sandy says, her tone clipped. "Freezing is no laughing matter."

"Where on earth have you been?" I ask.

Sandy shrugs and collapses with a padded thud into

one of the kitchen table chairs. “There was a disturbance at the hospital,” she says.

I take the seat across from Sandy. “Is everyone okay? Was there a fight or an automobile accident?”

“No, not inside the hospital. It was outside.” Sandy is still shaking. “Want a cup of coffee?”

“Sure, I’ll have another,” I reply.

Sandy loads a second pot of coffee and switches on the percolator. “The police came to stop a riot,” she tells me with a gleam in her eye.

“You’re lying. What kind of riot?” I ask. Sometimes I don’t know whether or not to take Sandy seriously.

Sandy grins. She has her audience hooked. “A colored man backed into a white nurse’s car.”

I roll my eyes. “Sandy, that’s hardly a riot.”

“I didn’t finish telling the whole story!” she exclaims, raising her eyebrows indignantly. I know that I am going to hear the complete tale. Exhaling, I motion for her to continue.

“Well, after he backed into her car, which he said was an accident, Mr. Mueller, our security guard during the day, came out swingin’ his club as if he were the police or something. Can you imagine, a seventy-five-year-old man on the police force?”

“Sandy . . .”

“Right, sorry. He comes outside swingin’ his club and asks what happened. But he’d already made up his mind. The colored man was in the wrong—they always are, or so it seems. He hit him, Sonja.”

I gasp, and then there is silence between us for a moment as I attempt to process the information. But the pause in our conversation doesn’t last long; silence with Sandy never does.

“The security guard, he drew the colored man’s blood. Everyone in the parking lot was really scared. The blood got all over the place, on the car, the asphalt.” Sandy looks up and stares me right in the eye. “The colored man didn’t even have a gun.”

I would have been more shocked if stories like this weren’t popping up all over the news recently. The civil rights movement has been asserting itself all across the South, not just in Georgia. While I recognize it as a noble cause, the amount of violence surrounding it gives me pause. I am not fond of beatings.

“Is there food?” Sandy asks.

I look up and see her eyeing the dirty dishes in the sink. I laugh at my friend’s blunt nature. “Yes, there’s food. I made biscuits and a casserole. Would you like me to heat it up?”

Sandy’s eyes are answer enough, so I stand, still laughing, and begin to fix her a plate. “Why don’t you go play in the snow while you wait?” I propose.

My suggestion refocuses Sandy’s attention on the winter wonderland outside. Her eyes light up like a Christmas tree. Without a word, she rushes out the door, Ralphie nipping at her heels. As I heat up the oven, I glance out the window. The snow is falling again. I watch Sandy standing in the yard, her mouth wide open, trying to catch the swirling snowflakes.

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