

New York Times Bestselling Author of *Sparkly Green Earrings*

The Antelope in the Living Room



The Real Story of Two People Sharing One Life
- a memoir -

Melanie Shankle

author of the Big Mama blog

I loved *The Cantaloupe in the Living Womb*.

SIRI

Melanie Shankle has definitely done something jolly with this book.

SIR ANTHONY STRALLAN, *Downton Abbey*

I feel that I have been misrepresented as the villain of this book. You'll be hearing from my attorneys.

THE ANTELOPE

I haven't worn that rust-colored velour jogging suit in at least ten years.

CHARLES MARINO, father of Melanie Shankle

Why did you send me this book, and how did you get my address?

JEN HATMAKER, author of *7*

I don't read many books, but when I do . . . I read Melanie Shankle.

THE MOST INTERESTING MAN IN THE WORLD

This book is the big one, Elizabeth.

FRED SANFORD, owner of *Sanford and Son*

Clear eyes, full hearts; with this book you can't lose.

COACH TAYLOR, former coach of the Dillon Panthers

This book is good, but I still don't understand the problem with having an antelope hanging in your living room.

PERRY SHANKLE, husband of Melanie Shankle

Melanie wrote a book?

EVERYONE WHO WENT TO HIGH SCHOOL WITH
MELANIE SHANKLE

I wish I had Melanie's imagination and storytelling abilities!

C. S. LEWIS

Melanie Shankle's delightful book exceeded my great expectations.

CHARLES DICKENS

I only wish Melanie had been around to write some of the New Testament.

THE APOSTLE PAUL

This book is the funniest book you will ever read. It will absolutely change your life for the better. Why are you waiting? Buy it right now.

GULLEY, best friend of Melanie Shankle

Quit bugging me about helping you come up with fake funny endorsements.

SOPHIE HUDSON, author of *A Little Salty to Cut the Sweet*



THE ANTELOPE IN THE LIVING ROOM

The Antelope in the Living Room

The Real Story of Two People Sharing One Life
- a memoir -

Melanie Shankle



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The Importance of Being Antelope: A Prologue



WHEN I WAS WRITING MY FIRST BOOK, *Sparkly Green Earrings*, I realized there were so many more stories about our family that I wanted to tell. However, most of those seemed to involve my relationship with my husband, Perry. So I began to think up an outline for a second book with an eloquent title along the lines of *Dadgum, Y'all, Marriage Can Be Hard*.

(I also considered *Big Louis Vuitton Purse with Matching Wallet* based on the number of pairs of sparkly green earrings I received after my first book was published.)

Ultimately, according to vast market research in the form of two people I asked, neither of those seemed to be the catchiest title, so *The Antelope in the Living Room* was born. I've done my best to tell real stories of two people sharing one life, including the things we sometimes try to ignore. The veritable antelopes in the living room of life.

A few months after I turned in the final manuscript for this book, my publisher began to send me various cover options. I'd sent them a drawing I really liked to give them an idea of what I had in mind, and when I saw the first few cover options, I was

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really excited to see they had incorporated exactly what I had envisioned.

Until I showed them to Perry.

He looked them over and said, “Well, it looks good, but that’s not an antelope.”

“What do you mean it’s not an antelope? Look at those antlers!”

He sighed deeply. “Yes, that’s the problem. Antelopes don’t have antlers. They have horns.”

“Oh. Okay. But I like the antlers! I think they make it look so pretty!”

“Pretty enough to make your entire book a fraud?”

Seriously. This is my life. Who’s going to read this book? Jim Fowler?

I replied, “No, of course I don’t want the entire book to be discredited by a fraudulent depiction of an antelope for the two readers who will know the difference. I certainly don’t want anyone to feel bamboozled.”

(I didn’t really say bamboozled, but I wish I had. It’s a great word.)

He suggested, “Why don’t you just send them a picture of the actual nilgai antelope hanging in our living room and let them use that?”

“For the same reason I’m sad it’s hanging in our living room. It’s ugly. I need my book cover to be pretty.”

That’s how we ended up spending the next several hours on Google looking at pictures of various antelopes. Ultimately I decided I could forsake my beloved deer image for a kudu, because in my opinion they have the prettiest horns of all the antelopes.

I e-mailed Tyndale and said, “Um. Apparently I requested a deer for the cover of my book instead of an antelope. According

to Perry, this bit of carelessness will create a scandal the likes of which the publishing industry has never seen. Can we please exchange these duplicitous antlers for a kudu? You will find a picture attached.”

(Moments like these I feel certain that their job is so much easier when they're helping Tony Dungy with a book. I bet he has never once brought up the difference between a deer and an antelope and required their cover artists to deal with this type of wildlife minutiae.)

But the whole thing is a beautiful illustration of our marriage. Perry pays attention to detail. He likes things to be correct. He will measure something down to one-eighth of one-eighth of an inch. Meanwhile, my life philosophy is basically “Eh, close enough” as I nail holes in the wall, all devil-may-care. He believes in rolling the tube of toothpaste from the bottom up to get every last drop of Colgate, like he's some kind of fluoride addict, while I like to squeeze right from the middle of the tube.

And while I believe it is civilized to leave the toilet seat down as a courtesy to other family members, Perry seems to take some sort of sadistic pleasure in leaving it up, thereby creating a potential middle-of-the-night obstacle course that causes me to go scrambling in search of a towel.

Antelope? Deer? Tomato? To-mah-to?

Yet God led us to each other, with all our differing opinions and systems for hanging clothes in our closet and our feelings about salting the tortilla chips and his love of the outdoors and my love of air-conditioning and sheets with a high thread count. We made a promise before God, our families, and our dearest friends to work through all these differences, right before eating pork

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tenderloin medallions on small rolls and some sort of thing called *Brie en croute*, otherwise known as fancy cheese with crackers.

And somehow we make a good team in spite of it all. Maybe we're actually a great team because of all our differences. We each balance out the other's extremes even though we don't always agree.

Particularly on what constitutes a pretty book cover.



Introduction: Erring on the Side of Love



DR. SEUSS ONCE SAID, “You know you’re in love when you can’t fall asleep because reality is finally better than your dreams.” And that’s nice and all. But then you get married and reality isn’t always that great because maybe somebody snores or is kind of weird about “staying within our household budget,” and your dreams start to look pretty good by comparison. Because marriage can be the biggest blessing and the most significant challenge two people ever take on. It’s the joy of knowing there is someone to share in your sorrows and triumphs and the challenge of living with someone who thinks it’s a good idea to hang a giant antelope on your living room wall.

The days are filled with laughter and compromise. And then there are days filled with silence and anger. But at the end of it all, you’re two people God has joined to journey through life together. For better or for worse. In hunting season and in health.

A few weeks ago, I spent most of the day at my best friend Gulley’s house. It was one of those rare, gorgeous Saturdays in Texas when the weather is absolutely perfect. We’d spent our time catching up on life while the kids ran around the yard and did

their best to see if there was a way one of them could end up in the ER before nightfall. It's like their hobby to see which of them can make us yell first, "WHY DID YOU DO THAT? YOU'RE GOING TO KILL YOURSELF!"

As day turned to evening, Gulley invited us to stay for dinner. So I called Perry to let him know that was the plan, and he said he'd meet us at Gulley's in the next hour or so to help with the grilling of the meat. Because nothing really brings men together like building a fire and cooking on it. I'm pretty sure that's in the book of Proverbs.

And since it was after five o'clock by that point, and since nothing wears you out quite like watching your children try to push each other off a trampoline, Gulley and I sat out on the swing in her backyard and began to reflect on life in that way you do with your best friend.

The past week had been full of various political rants in the news, and seeing as we'd already covered our latest thoughts on *The Bachelor* and how we felt about colored skinny jeans, our conversation turned to these controversial topics. I was feeling pretty good about life and began a whole discourse on how all we need is love. Just like the Beatles told us in 1967.

I said I felt like maybe I'd been too harsh in the past. Too black and white. Too quick to judge someone before thinking about how they might feel or what they've been through. I'm sure by this time I was waving my hands wildly in that way I do when I feel strongly about something, and I concluded this whole diatribe by saying, "I want my next forty years to be about love. If I err, then let me err on the side of love. May it be said of me that I always erred on the side of love."

Gulley nodded and we toasted to erring on the side of love,

feeling pretty good about ourselves and our new magnanimous take on life. Then I looked up and saw that Perry had arrived. So we made our way back into the house to figure out what we needed to do to get dinner started.

I kissed him on the cheek as I walked into the living room, and he asked, “What were y’all talking about out there on the swing?” Feeling good about my new resolution, I replied, “I was telling Gully that I’ve decided maybe I’ve been too hard on people in the past. From now on, I’m going to err on the side of love.”

(Please picture me saying that like I’m Gandhi. I felt like I’d never been more profound.)

Perry looked right at me and without missing a beat said, “That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard.”

Well, I bet no one ever talked like that to Gandhi.

But that’s marriage. You are two very different people who aren’t going to agree on everything. There are times you might feel like the person you married is dead inside because they want to quote the apostle Paul after you’ve just declared that you want to err on the side of love. And sometimes those moments will lead to a fight in the middle of your best friend’s living room that causes her and her husband to find an excuse to leave the room.

Hypothetically speaking.

Marriage is a constant push and pull of thoughts and ideas and values and arguing over whether \$100 is too much to pay for a pair of jeans. (It’s not.) But it’s also the most literal example of how iron sharpens iron.

When I look back on the sixteen years Perry and I have been married, I can see the places where we’ve made each other better. There are parts of us etched into each other like the rings in the trunk of a tree. We’ve grown, we’ve changed, we’ve been forever

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marked. And ultimately, we are so much better together than either of us would be on our own.

Sometimes we err on the side of love, and sometimes we think that's a dumb idea. But we are in this thing together for the rest of our lives—not just for better or for worse, but for better AND worse. No one else drives me crazier, makes me laugh louder, or causes me to fall in love all over again when I least expect it.

And that's what this book is about. The times that brought us together and the times we were falling apart. The days that we wouldn't trade for anything in the world, and the days that he hung an antelope on my wall.

Welcome to the story of a real marriage. Dead animals and all.



CHAPTER 1

Warm Heart, Cold Salad Bowl

EVERY YEAR ON our wedding anniversary, smack-dab in the middle of the hottest month of the year, I know with all certainty that I was out-of-my-mind in love with Perry to marry him at noon in August. In Texas. And not just anywhere in Texas, but in South Texas, where the devil has been known to remark, “Man, it is really hot. Can someone find me a double-wide with a window unit and an extension cord so I can plug in my oscillating fan?”

I’d always envisioned a December wedding complete with twinkle lights, poinsettias, and Christmas trees decorating the church sanctuary. My bridesmaids would be dressed in dark-green taffeta dresses with huge bows on the backs, because this was a late ’80s/early ’90s daydream, which meant they’d also have enormous hair and bushy eyebrows. In a perfect world, they’d have

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delicate wreaths of baby's breath encircling some type of elaborate updo and green satin shoes dyed to match their dresses. For years I'd kept a picture torn from an issue of *Bride* magazine that featured a December bride with her hands tucked in a white fur muff with red roses cascading from it like a waterfall. Never mind the fact that in Texas it rarely gets cold enough for a pair of mittens; I wanted to look like Anna Karenina on my wedding day.

However, when Perry finally proposed on April 24, 1997, after two (long) years of dating, I said, "YES!" before he could even get the words out of his mouth. A woman with a stash of contraband bridal magazines hidden underneath her couch is a woman quick to abandon the dream of a wedding with a winter-wonderland theme.



Prior to our relationship, Perry hadn't had many serious girlfriends because he believed his time was better spent hunting deer and making homemade ammunition. Contrary to popular belief, a deer blind with no indoor plumbing isn't really the best place to meet a nice single girl—or even a trashy single girl, for that matter—and thus he went through his late teens and early twenties with a Ford truck and a .257 Roberts as his primary companions.

This may explain why he felt a hunting blind was a perfectly acceptable gift to give me for my twenty-fourth birthday. Fortunately for him, we'd been dating for only about three months, so I accepted the gift with great enthusiasm instead of making him leave on the spot. Looking back, I should have set the gift bar a little higher from the beginning, because he had no way of knowing the small tin of popcorn he got me the following Valentine's Day was going to send me into tears and hysteria. It

wasn't so much that I didn't enjoy the festive, cinnamon-flavored popcorn as that I reached the bottom of the tin only to discover there was no velvet ring box.

It's not his fault. All those John Hughes movies I watched throughout my formative teen years would have set up any guy for failure. Who can compete with Jake Ryan, the Porsche, and the final birthday cake scene? It's not possible.

(That movie may or may not also have been responsible for my slight obsession with hair adorned with baby's breath. So classy.)

One night, early in our relationship, we were at my apartment after attending a wedding shower for some of Perry's friends. There is nothing that makes a single girl start to dream about new linens and china patterns like a wedding shower. Because everyone knows that's what marriage is all about—the new household items. It didn't matter that I had no idea how to prepare an actual meal; a new set of Calphalon cookware would change all of that. Perry stood at the door, wrapped his arms around me, and whispered words he would live to regret for the next two years: “For what it's worth, I know you're the girl I'm going to marry.”

With that statement I began to mentally plan a wedding. A wedding that wouldn't take place for another two years because Perry left a crucial word off the end of his statement. What he should have said to the crazy lady with starry-eyed visions of ivory silk shantung in her head was, “For what it's worth, I know you're the girl I'm going to marry SOMEDAY,” but he didn't know that because it's not a lesson you learn when you spend a large majority of your young adult years with a bunch of guys competing to see who can get their truck stuck in the mud.

When the day finally arrived that an actual proposal of marriage came and the follow-up question from Perry was “How

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soon can we get married?” I whipped out the wedding planner I’d secretly purchased months before (okay, years before) and said, “Let me call the church.” The answer, according to church availability, was August 16, and the rest is history. Instead of looking like a Russian ice princess on my wedding day, I spent my reception with the glow of a woman wearing fifteen layers of petticoats in 120-degree weather.

Love is not only blind but also indifferent to extreme temperatures.

Organizing a wedding in three and a half months isn’t the easiest task, so it totally paid off that I’d been planning it in my head for twenty-five years prior to the actual day. All I had to do was substitute a bouquet of lilies for the white fur muff covered in roses, which I was willing to do, because did you read the part about getting new cookware?

At some point in the midst of the wedding-planning festivities, I dragged Perry to several department stores and local boutiques to register for gorgeous place settings of fine china and sterling-silver utensils that, to this day, we’ve used all of three times—one of which was when I made dinner and discovered that all our regular forks were dirty and we were out of plastic ones. So I pulled out the sterling, and honestly, it did give the Cheesy Cheeseburger Hamburger Helper a certain sophistication that had previously been missing.

These days, whenever we attend a wedding, we sit back with our three plates of cake and four glasses of house wine and watch the bride and groom take to the dance floor for their first dance. We get all sentimental, look deeply into each other’s eyes, and say, “Those two fools have no idea what they’re getting into. They don’t deserve those new dishes. You know who deserves some new

towels? We do. We've survived over a DECADE of marriage, and we've earned those towels."

When you're a young, bright-eyed fiancée, you have no idea what color towels you want for your bathroom because chances are you're moving into his apartment, and anything will be a step up from the thirty-year-old towels he stole from his parents' house before he moved out, the concrete blocks that serve as an entertainment center, and the neon Bud Light sign that he and his fraternity brothers swiped during what has become a legendary night in college.

The exception is if you marry a man whose mother served as his interior decorator and helped him purchase all new dishes and linens when he initially moved into his bachelor pad. If this is the case, you may want to reevaluate whether or not you want to spend the rest of your life with a man who let his mother pick out his sheets. It's like the old saying goes: "The hand that picks the sheets rules the world."

Of course, maybe I'm just a little bitter because we're down to a mere three dinner forks in our Country French flatware pattern. It's the price you pay when you eat on paper plates most nights and throw them in the trash, forgetting not everything is disposable.

But all those years ago, I was one of those fools who agonized over choosing all the right items to celebrate our new life together, especially the bedding. I walked around the department store exclaiming, "It needs to be pretty, but not too feminine! It should have a masculine influence because, Honey, I want our bedroom to reflect both our personalities!" How could I have known our bedroom would have plenty of his personality, thanks to all the boxer shorts and socks left lying around on the floor as part of his decorating style—Early American Frat House?

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There was no need to choose that over-the-top-masculine navy-plaid Ralph Lauren comforter to convey that a man lived on the premises because the stack of *Texas Trophy Hunters* magazines next to the toilet broadcast that message to any visitor who had the misfortune of using our downstairs half bath, which was the size of a phone booth but without the charm and intimacy.

(If you were born after 1992, I want to explain that a phone booth is something from ye olden days. It was a small glass enclosure with a phone inside that you could use to call someone if you had a quarter or a friend willing to accept a collect call.)

(The phone booth was necessary because there was no other way to make a call if you weren't at home. At the time, iPhones were just a glimmer in Steve Jobs's eye. We couldn't have imagined a world where we would have a device we could carry in our pockets that would give us access to unlimited information and lots of funny videos about cats.)

Perry knew the registering process wasn't about him, because otherwise we'd be at Home Depot or Academy instead of Scrivener's picking out delicate crystal welcome bowls and eating lunch in a tearoom that served chicken salad on a leaf of lettuce with a side of consommé. He just went along for the ride because he instinctively knew his role in this whole affair was to smile and nod at everything I selected, even when everything in him wanted to scream, "We don't even eat shrimp, so why do we need sterling shrimp forks at \$75 apiece?"

The great irony of selecting expensive merchandise for your parents' friends to purchase for you in exchange for some free champagne and carved beef tenderloin is you're selecting things for the life you think you are going to live, when in reality there is no way to know what that life will really entail. Based on my

registry selections, I had big dreams of a future filled with formal dinner parties requiring twelve full place settings of china and linen napkins. The reality is the last time we had people over for dinner, I served salad from a bag on paper plates and handed them some Viva paper towels to wipe their mouths. Formal dining for us means we put the dogs outside.

Perry and I were two different people coming from two totally different backgrounds. I'd spent the majority of my formative years believing there was no finer meal than a Big Mac spread out on the paper wrapper it came in. He grew up with grandparents with a staff they referred to as "the help" long after it was politically incorrect, and a mother known to make him eat Arby's roast beef sandwiches on fine china at her dining room table because "only stray dogs eat out of bags."

It's no wonder we were a little confused about what our life together would be. He wanted to break free from the formality of his childhood, while I envisioned a life reminiscent of the Ewing family, where we would walk in at the end of a long day, pour ourselves a drink from a crystal decanter, and toast to another day of swindling Cliff Barnes out of his share of the business.

The only problem with this scenario was we didn't own an oil company. Or a ranch. And neither of us really enjoys the taste of whiskey or bourbon or whatever it was Sue Ellen used to inhale straight from those crystal decanters.

(At the time of this writing it had only been a few months since the death of Larry Hagman [aka J. R. Ewing]. I'm not kidding when I say it felt like a piece of my childhood had died. A piece with very large eyebrows.)

During our engagement, I lived in a delightful little apartment complex for the bargain price of \$395 a month, all utilities

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included. I was essentially paying a dollar per square foot. It was a tiny apartment, but did I mention the part about all utilities included? For a single girl living barely above the poverty line, it was a little piece of heaven. I could set the air-conditioning at sixty-five degrees and leave it there all day. I wrapped myself in a down comforter all year long, drank hot chocolate, and pretended it was winter while I watched with the rest of the world to see if Ross and Rachel were ever going to get together.

I quickly noticed within a few days of moving into my little apartment that I was the only resident under the age of eighty-two. I'd inadvertently stumbled onto some sort of semi-assisted-living arrangement reminiscent of *Melrose Place* for the elderly. All the apartments were situated around a common courtyard area with a pool and a landlord who constantly tended to the plants while wearing a surgical mask and toting around her oxygen tank. From time to time she'd pull the mask away from her face long enough to take a hit of her cigarette or yell at one of the residents for parking their Cadillac too close to her hedge of red-tip photinias.

Needless to say, I stood out in this land of Geritol, and they were fascinated with me. There were nights I would go out and arrive home long after the ungodly hour of ten thirty. Perry would walk me to my door, past all the clotheslines hung with large girdles, and we would see thirty-two sets of miniblinds throughout the courtyard pop open as they watched the only entertainment they considered better than *Walker, Texas Ranger*.

Lee Vernon was the neighbor I knew the best. Mainly because I had to walk past her apartment every time I went to my car, and she spent most of the day sitting in a lawn chair right outside the door with her oxygen tank and her Chihuahua named Penny. Within two days of my move into the complex, she knew

everything about me and, most important, everything about Perry. I suspect she had some sort of CIA connections, based on the amount of information she was able to gather about us in such a short amount of time.

I soon learned she was the eyes and ears of Village Oaks. She knew everything about everyone and would tell you about it whether you wanted to know or not. It became part of my after-work ritual to stop by Lee's apartment and catch up on the latest gossip, which usually included juicy information about whose Social Security check had yet to arrive in the mail or who the Bradford widow was trying to seduce. I determined the main reason she always sat outside in her lawn chair was to ensure she didn't miss anything. It was reminiscent of how the paparazzi camp out whenever there's a chance they might spot Britney walking barefoot out of a 7-Eleven or Kim Kardashian buying diapers for baby North (make it stop), except she was waiting to see if Dorothy Nowacek and Evelyn Moore were going to get into a fight over eminent clothesline domain.

Lee was the first person to find out Perry and I were engaged. He proposed to me in my apartment, and as we left for dinner, we shared the news. By the time we returned, everyone in the complex had heard about our newly engaged status and celebrated by staying up late to watch *Murder, She Wrote* while intermittently peeking through their miniblinds to see how late he'd stay at my apartment.

Since my parents lived out of town, and since I wanted to see if I could make five hundred square feet seem even more claustrophobic by packing the place with silver gift-wrapped boxes filled with breakable items, I arranged for all our wedding gifts to be delivered to my apartment. Every day when I'd return home, there

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was a porch full of boxes waiting for me. I'd carry them into my apartment while being careful not to trip over the punch bowl set with matching cups that I was using as a doorstop. (Incidentally, that was the last time it was used for anything.)

Lee appointed herself watchdog of all my delivered gifts. She had a clear view of my second-floor apartment from her lawn chair and kept lookout all day to make sure one of her fellow senior residents didn't try to make off with a shiny new toaster oven, because everyone knows those octogenarians love nothing more than some toast.

One day I had to work late and then I met some friends for dinner, so I didn't get home until after midnight. When I walked up the steps to my apartment, I was relieved to see I didn't have any packages to be hauled in. I fell into bed and slept until the shrill ringing of the phone woke me at 6:00 a.m.

Reaching past the boxes of new towels, I grabbed the phone and sleepily said, "Hello?"

The raspy voice on the other end said, "Honey, it's Lee. I got worried when you weren't home at your usual time last night, so I picked up all the packages that got delivered yesterday and brought them down to my place. You know these people around here won't hesitate to steal something."

Yes, I have no doubt I was living in an apartment complex that served merely as a front for an elderly crime ring specializing in pawning stolen wedding gifts to pay for their denture cream and support-hose habit.

Lee continued, "Honey, you can come down here and get these gifts whenever you want. I'll be here all day."

I had no reason to doubt the validity of her statement, so I rolled over and went back to sleep. When I finally woke up around

10:00 a.m., I threw on some clothes and went to retrieve the gifts. I walked down the stairs, marveling that she'd managed to make it up to my apartment, collect the gifts, and get them back to her place—all while toting her oxygen tank. It made me shudder to think about what a precarious journey it must have been.

Lee was stationed outside her front door as usual, but she stood when she saw me coming and led me inside to get the packages. There were about three or four things sitting in her living room. As I picked them up to carry them upstairs, she told me I'd need to come back down because there was one more gift in her refrigerator.

Her refrigerator? Did someone send me a ham? Did Perry register for a selection of Hickory Farms smoked meats when I wasn't looking? I walked back down to her place, and she brought the box out of the refrigerator. Sure enough, it was a big cardboard box with the words "Refrigerate immediately" stamped all over it. I couldn't imagine what was in there.

I thanked Lee for taking care of my gifts and then ran upstairs with the package because the curiosity was killing me. Normally I waited until Perry and I were together to open a present (or at least that's what I told him, but in my defense, he really didn't show the enthusiasm I was looking for whenever we received another crystal vase or a set of steak knives), but I couldn't wait to see what this was, not to mention there was no way the whole thing would fit inside my refrigerator.

As I delicately ripped open the box, I continued to speculate about what might be inside. Maybe some bacon? Imported caviar? The first installment in a membership to a cheese-of-the-month club? (Please God, let it be a membership to a cheese-of-the-month club.) I pulled out the tissue paper to reveal a perfectly refrigerated wooden salad bowl with matching tongs.

THE ANTELOPE IN THE LIVING ROOM

Apparently someone had packed and mailed their gift using whatever box they had on hand. Thanks to Lee, our new wooden bowl had remained perfectly chilled all night long.

Bless it.

I'd finally found someone as enthusiastic about our wedding gifts as I was and vowed that when the time came for Perry and me to pour the first drinks from our new crystal decanter, we would make a special toast to Lee. Unfortunately, we didn't receive a crystal decanter, so the only toast we ended up making was the kind we could make in our shiny new toaster oven.

Which really worked out, because I believe that bread covered in butter and grape jelly is actually more festive than whiskey anyway.