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## sandy lee carlson

Holding Dear Your Love

"Welcome friend  
Glad you came.  
Hope so much  
You feel the same."

E.H. 1935  
Colonial Sampler No. 1047  
Pure linen. Vogue, Co., NC.

I almost lost this  
Cross-stitched sampler  
In a tag sale  
Or, I should say,  
I tried to  
But there were no takers.

So, who wouldn't want it?

In a mitered oak frame,  
This friendly sentiment  
Is roughly done.  
E.H. did not separate the silk floss strands,  
So the letters are thick,  
As are the flowers  
And the black silhouette  
Of a bonnet girl in a hoop skirt  
Stepping urgently forward  
With a bouquet for someone.

E.H. is my paternal great-grandmother.  
She would have been 37  
In 1935, and four years away  
From becoming my father's grandmother.

(continued)

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This home-maker's handiwork  
Created in dim, after-dinner,  
After-everything-else-is-done light  
And mounted in a mass-produced frame  
Survived a marriage in Hoboken  
During the Depression,  
Child-rearing in Staten Island afterward,  
And a retirement trip to Miami that would last  
A quarter century.  
The dust on the back of the frame  
Says this message of welcome  
Was honored  
On a wall, not left in a box.

I almost gave it away.

Today, though,  
I take it from its frame  
And peel off the cellophane tape  
That has held it in its place  
For 87 years.

I use lemon oil mixed with beeswax  
To clean and brighten the frame.  
I wash the glass with vinegar.

Elsa Howardson from Hoboken,  
I remember you and your kindness  
Papering over the deep veins  
Of cruelty pulsing through generations  
Of Dad's family  
That to this day leave me wordless.  
This needlework is  
The home you would have me keep  
By putting the currency of love in my hand  
If I would let go of the pain.

I have made the trade.  
I will hang your artwork in my home,  
Holding dear your love  
In Woodbury.