

## Featured Reviews

DEAREST BY MICHELANGELO ALTIERE. LONDON HOUSE PUBLISHING (MONTGOMERY COUNTY OH), 2007. UNP GIFT BOX EDITION \$99.99.

DEAREST BY MICHELANGELO ALTIERE. LONDON HOUSE PUBLISHING (MONTGOMERY COUNTY OH), 2007. UNP BOOK BOX EDITION \$119.99.

*Reviewed by Leslie Birdwell and Sarah Greenawalt*



THE LETTERS OF DEAREST

A package of carefully preserved love letters tied in ribbons plus a few mementoes (a ticket, a cigar band, a dried flower, and a stone) have been stored in a box, a box that is passed from one generation to the next, a box that holds a love story.

*Dearest* is the first in a series of Experience Novels by London House Publishing, designed to engage the senses. The hope is that the reader will find him or her self, “if only momentarily, in the place and time of the characters.” The book is a sensory experience, from the light perfume of a dried rose to the tactile experience of reading letters on different papers, written in different hands. The letters are written on hotel letterhead, on the backs of blueprints and on company stationary. They have ink blots, and one envelope appears wrinkled and worn. A lot of care has been put into this creation to simulate age and verisimilitude for the reader’s enjoyment. The story-in-a-box also provides the

reader with the transgressive thrill available only to those who eavesdrop or read mail meant for another.

The first letter is an airmail letter sent from Uncle Willie to his niece for graduation in 1953. Since his niece is interested in family history, he gives her a box of letters that are part of their ancestry. The letters are to be kept secret and only bestowed upon one chosen family member each generation. Uncle Willie suggests starting with the gray ribbon letters and then moving on to the yellow ones. They are numbered in the order which they are to be read. The first correspondence is dated 1872 and to Miss Anne Levitt from Mr. James Cavell. Another interesting wrinkle in this take on the epistolary novel is that the letters crisscross very much like letters sent in real time. Cavell can't keep from expressing his almost immediate devotion to Anne, and his enthusiasm finds release in letters sent one after the other compared to Anne's careful responses.

In the end, a fate that was set in motion long before the two lovers met has the last word. *Dearest*, in either edition, would make a good gift for someone who already has everything, or needs something a little different. It is also a great winter-read experience, perhaps most suitable for a long, cold night.