

Salem State University
The School of Graduate Studies
Department of English

The Color We Could Live With

A Thesis in English
by
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Chapter 1: The Letters

I found the letters because the drawer was stuck. It was the bottom drawer of an old dresser in the attic, the one drawer that resisted opening, as if it was never meant to be open. I kneeled before the drawer and I traced my fingers against the rusty handle; small flakes broke away in thin scales. Slowly I curled each of my fingers around the ridged handle and pulled. But the drawer didn't budge. I pulled harder, and the rust began to fall in larger scales onto my hand. I pulled until my fingers ached; the resistance of the drawer replaced my curiosity with frustration. I will come back to that later.

I slowly rose and dusted off the dirt on my jeans and walked further into the attic. Large paintings with gold frames leaned against the bare walls, there were several mannequins with outdated outfits that were placed scarcely throughout the room. There were nine large trunks stuffed into the left corner. Stacked neatly on top of one another. The floor creaked with each step I carried. I turned to my right and a tall, wooden bookcase sat against the chimney. Several dusty books filled the first shelf, titles and names I have never heard before. I looked down at the second shelf and dozens of photo albums were stacked on one another.

"Bingo." I smiled, and I pulled one out and blew the thick layer of the dust off the album.

I fanned the dust away with my hand. Still coughing, I brushed off the layer of dust from the small photo that was placed in the center. A woman and man from what looked to be the 1950's, smiled brightly, dressed in wedding attire. The woman raised her bouquet of flowers in the air; her other arm wrapped tightly around the man.

I looked closer at the photo. It was black and white, but it had a yellow tint to it. The more I looked at the woman, the more I recognized her soft facial features as Nan. "Oh gosh, look at you Nan." I whispered and smiled. But the man I couldn't quite recognize. He was quite tall, his dark hair combed back, he had glistening eyes that smiled. His facial features were sharper. I wondered if this was grandpa. He passed away when I was ten, so I don't remember much of what he looked like or seen many photos of him when he was younger.

I rubbed my thumb softly over the photo. My phone buzzing in my back pocket surprised me. I quickly grabbed my phone and the screen lit up brightly in the darkened room. A text message sat at the bottom of my screen.

Mom: How is the cleanout???

I had been so fascinated by all of Nan's junk that I had forgotten my purpose for why I was here. I was asked by Nan to clean out her attic while she stayed at a rehabilitation center a few towns over. She specifically wanted everything cleaned out in preparation to sell the house. It pained me when she told me she was putting the house up for sale. It had been in the family for quite

a few generations, built by my family members who were inspired by the Queen Anne architecture here in Southport, North Carolina.

The house was elaborate in so many ways, it had round towers on each side of the house, a large wrapped around porch with unique spindle work. Along with steeply pitched intersecting gable roofs, and my favorite the multi-paned windows. There were about 10 of them throughout the house, each one had a different style. The house was originally a deep red with a yellow trim, but once Nan inherited it, she painted it a dusty blue with a tan trim. Everyone in the family hated the color she painted. But her. She said it was a close friend of her favorite color. And every time she looked at it, she was reminded of them.

Nan no longer wanted to be in the house after her bad fall. There was a small loose section of carpet on the stairs that she stumbled on and slipped. She tumbled down the whole flight of stairs. She broke a couple of ribs and was badly bruised. Her mood deteriorated after the fall, she became more agitated, fatigued and at times she wouldn't even talk. It was hard to watch her fall into this version. She wasn't always like this. She was bubbly, loved to sing and dance, and at her age of ninety-two years old, she still loves to gossip.

I placed the old photo album down on the shelf and wandered around the attic. What could I start with first? The attic was like a large oval. I had walked in almost a full circle when I stumbled upon that old dresser that I tried to open earlier. I stopped in front of it, I had this strange initiative feeling. There was something in that drawer that was silently calling my name.

I stared at the mahogany dresser, it had four drawers, and eight rusty handles. It was in the corner, almost hidden but I had noticed it right away when I first entered the attic. I walked back over the dresser and began to shuffle it slowly to the middle of the attic, where the sunlight shined in from the stained-glass window. It was quite light, and I was able to move it easily. I kneeled before it, the sunlight shining brightly onto the mahogany wood. You could tell the reddish-brown hardwood had aged and probably hadn't seen light in almost a couple of decades.

I wrapped my hands around the handle yet again. The rust had chipped off in large scales from my earlier attempts. And I began to pull. Nothing, not even a budge. So, I sat on the ground, and placed one foot on the side of the drawer and began to pull like I haven't before. And suddenly the drawer opened, sending me flying backwards along with the rusty old handle that was still in my hand.

I sat there stunned, and I watched the sunlight beaming from the stained-glass window reveal small particles of dust that danced their way out of the drawer. It was as if it had always been there, moving quietly, waiting to be noticed. The drawer sat open ajar, as if calling me to finally see its contents inside. I slowly inched my way closer and peered inside. There were several bundled letters tied together in a ribbon gone dull of its original color, the color of something that once looked lavender but had lived too long in the dark.

I slowly and carefully took one bundle of envelopes out of the drawer; they were soft to the touch, their edges dulled with age, their color an uneven yellow as if time had touched it in certain stages of life. They looked handled but not opened; the seals were still intact. The ink on the front of the envelopes was faded, settling into the paper rather than sitting on it. I slowly tried to slide the ribbon free, but it softly resisted. The ribbon felt like silk, although now aged and fragile. It was as if to remind me that its contents were to be kept quiet. After a few minutes of carefully untying the stubborn ribbon, it finally set free, and the envelopes escaped from my fingers and sprawled across my lap.

I slowly picked up the first envelope that caught my eye. There was no address, or return address, only the name: *Earl Williams*.

Earl Williams? Who is this man? Nan has never spoken of a man named Earl Williams.

I had the itching desire to open the envelope, but before doing so, I picked up the other envelopes. There were about ten envelopes in this bundle. And each one was the same, no address or return address, just the name, *Earl Williams*.

Cautiously, I picked up the first envelope I dropped and slid my finger on the back of the lip of the envelope. It slowly ripped open, and I tried my best to carefully not rip open what was inside of it. Alas, the envelope was open, and I slid the paper out. It was neatly folded in three.

Before I opened the letter, I walked over to the stained-glass window where the light beamed brightly.

Slowly, I unfolded the paper.

May 5th, 1959

My Dearest Earl,

I will forever be grateful that I met you in Henry's on that chilly afternoon in October. You have changed what the meaning of love is to me. You have taught me to be myself authentically in ways that I thought were never possible.

You have given me the confidence to finally go up to Sylvia, and for that I never know how to thank you, as I was never able to. Maybe in a way through these letters. So thank you. I hope you are somewhere warm with Harold.

Love Always,

Dot

I traced my thumb over the pale inked letter. My mind raced with questions. Who is Sylvia? Who is Earl? What does this letter mean? I slowly folded the letter and stared at it for quite a while. This is something I need to speak to Nan about before I end up indulging myself in

reading more of these letters without her permission. A wave of guilt washed over me, as I had opened something that was not meant to be opened or read by someone else.

I turned back to the dresser and the letters that scattered the wooden floor, I began collecting each one and piling them back together. I tied the ribbon carefully. I began to put the piled letters back into the dusty, dark drawer, but I had stopped myself. I stared at the yellow, aged letters. What if she could read these letters one more time? What if she explained to me what these meant, where she was in her life, who mattered in her life?

I carefully closed the drawer. I took the opened letter and the bundle of letters I took out with me. It felt wrong throwing away such personal letters that seemed to have such a profound effect on her life without her permission. I was going to see Nan and present these letters to her. And yes, of course I was curious as to who these people were. But why keep them a secret? Why pile them into a drawer in the attic? What was she hiding? All these questions yet again filled my head as I made my way out of her house. I locked the main door and made my way to my car.

I placed the letters on the passenger seat and stared at them. The sunlight danced off the worn-out yellow pages, casting small shadows onto the seat.

I gaped at the letters. What is your story?

Chapter 2: Olivia

The rehabilitation center smelled of hot lemon, and fresh flowers. I stood in the doorway longer than I needed to, the letters tucked under my arm, and suddenly I was aware of how heavy the paper could feel under my arm. I could see Nan through the conservatory that was connected to the rehabilitation center. She sat in the middle of other tables, the sun shining brightly onto her. She turned her face towards the sun, looking upwards and closing her eyes smiling softly.

I made my way over to the conservatory; it was quite large and there were windows everywhere. From the walls to the ceilings, large windows created the space. The sunlight danced into the room, shining onto other patients, and the plants that were scattered everywhere. It was beautiful and bright.

I opened the double glass doors with a soft push. The sound of Elvis Presley's voice filled my ears immediately. I smiled; I knew this song "Suspicious Minds." Nan constantly played this song, and it's no shock that it is on the record player.

I made my way over to where she was sitting. I noticed her eyes still closed, that soft smile was still displayed on her face. Her gray hair was pulled back into a bun, only a few pieces managed to escape. I slowly placed my hand on her shoulder; her pink cardigan was soft against my fingers.

“Nan?” I spoke softly, trying not to startle her.

“Mm?” She turned her head towards me, her eyes now open and glistened when she registered who stood before her.

“Oh Olivia, come here.” She reached for my face and kissed my cheek. Her touch was warm and comforting. Something that I missed dearly.

I sat down next to her; the letters still tucked under my arm. I reached out and touched her hand that was placed on the white tablecloth. She placed her other hand on top of mine. She lightly shook my hand in excitement.

“I am so happy you are here, how is the house?” She smiled. Her spark was starting to come back.

The letters felt even heavier under my arm. I was so eager to ask but I didn’t want to spring this onto her immediately. I wanted to converse with her before bringing this up to her, it could be very touchy, or it could not and I had to think smartly about how I was going to go about this. She was already agitated from the fall, and I didn’t want to add more stress onto her.

“You have so much junk.” I shook my head and began to laugh, to which she started to laugh.

“But so much beautiful junk, I found a few of your old photo albums. Your wedding was beautiful. What year again did you get married?” I watched her body language and not much seemed to change. She reached forward for her cup of water and began to sip on it. I slowly took the letters from under my arm and hid them behind the flower arrangement that sat in the middle of the table.

“Mm, it was September 5th, 1958. I was twenty-five.” She raised her eyebrows and laughed. She placed the glass back down on the table.

“Oh wow, you were so young. What about papa? How old was he?” She smiled softly. She paused for a short while as if a memory popped into her head and she was watching it.

“He was twenty-four at the time. I had met him after his time in the Vietnam War. My best friend Sadie at the time wanted to go on a double date with him and we just kicked it off ever since.” She began to laugh, I hadn’t seen her this nostalgic in so long.

“He fought in the Vietnam War?” I was a bit taken aback when she told me this. I hadn’t known that he was in the army at all let alone fight in a war.

“Oh yes, he was a Lieutenant. He led troops into combat; he was on the front lines with hundreds of other men.” She spoke much softer this time. Her head bowed, as she spoke.

She turned to look at me; her eyes drew wary. “He carried a lot of weight on his back during and after the war. He was a great man but had a quick temper.” She shifted her attention back to the plate that sat before her, she began to fiddle with the croissant, pulling it apart slowly.

I wasn’t quite sure what to say back. “I-I’m sorry Nan.” I whispered back. She had just opened just a small crack of the door of her past to me. I didn’t know my grandfather like I thought I had. Nan kept secrets and she kept them well.

“What are those?” Nan lifted her hand toward the letters that were peeking out behind the flowers.

“Oh! Um, well they are something I found in your attic. And I wanted to ask you about them.” I wasn’t sure how I was going to go about this, and I didn’t think she would be the one to point them out to me.

“Well, alright what are they?” I grabbed the first letter that I had opened, unfolding the piece of paper. And placed it in front of her.

The music that was coming from the record player was suddenly louder in my ears. I cleared my throat before speaking.

“They were kept in a drawer that wouldn’t budge funny enough. And I didn't want to trash something that may be of sentimental value to you, so I opened this letter and I did read and I am so sorry if I invaded any kind of privacy. But I wanted to know who Earl Williams was. And why did you write so many letters to him?” I finally let out a breath. My heart was racing so loudly in my ears.

I watched as Nan slowly picked up the worn-out letter. Her hands were shaking just a little. She smiled lightly; her eyes began to water. It was although I wasn’t even here and she was transported somewhere else.

“Oh.” She whispered and let out a gasp.

“I- Nan? Are you alright?” I leaned in closely and brushed my knuckles lightly across her arm. I wanted to comfort her, but I didn’t want to overstep.

She looked up at me, smiling lightly. Tears rolling down her pale freckled face. “I haven’t seen these in ages; they were up in the attic?” She whispered. She looked back down at the letter.

“Yes, they were in this mahogany dresser, the bottom drawer wouldn’t budge at first. But there were at least seven bundles of letters. I don’t know how many letters in each, but they were there. I’m sorry that I have invaded your privacy.” I had hung my head low, not looking at Nan

as I felt immense guilt. I felt bad that I had opened something that may have not been meant to be opened.

There was silence for a small amount of time. Nan let out a small chuckle. I looked up and saw how Nan's face was so bright and radiant. She clutched the letter to her chest, closing her eyes and taking a deep breath.

"I locked those letters up a long, long time ago. I hadn't forgotten about them, but I couldn't remember where I placed them. And you found them. I am grateful, Olivia, that you found them. I thought I would never see them again." She was still smiling, and clutching the letter so tightly it was wrinkling under her fingers.

"Nan, I must ask, who is Earl Williams? And why were you writing to him?" She placed the letter back down onto the table and began folding it back into its original state.

"Earl Williams was a man that I married in 1954. He was a dear friend of mine and due to the way that society was then we thought marriage would be the safer option while still exploring other interests." She laughed at herself and lightly shook her head.

"From that letter it almost seemed like you- were with another person?"

“Mm, we were. We were in other relationships while married.” She turned to look at me, grabbing my hand and placing it in her lap, tapping my hand lightly.

“We were in a lavender marriage. It was the most fun I have ever had in my life. Earl and I were best friends but were not romantically involved with one another. We married for financial, emotional and social reasons. It was the safer option at the time.” She continued to tap my hand; I could tell she was nervous to tell me this.

I paused before speaking. “I think that is beautiful. Will you tell me more about the marriage, Earl? And maybe even the relationships you had during the marriage?”

Nan’s smile grew larger, “How many other letters do you have with you?”

Chapter 3: Dorothy

I patiently waited outside my house for my good friend Francesa to come pick me up in her brand-new Nash Metropolitan in pink. I know this already as she bashed my ear on the phone this morning after it was purchased. It's a convertible which is convenient as it is early July, the perfect weather to drive around. Francesa is the only one of the friend groups to have her own car, the other three of us have our license but use our family cars to drive around town. So, I would be lying if I said I wasn't excited that my best friend had a car of her own, that was pink.

I pushed down the fabric of my favorite swing dress, as I anxiously awaited Francesa arrival. It was a floral design, and I wore a tan belt around my waist that matched my shoes. I wanted to look my best as we were going to the Star-lite drive in the movies tonight. Francesa has been going on about a greaser boy that she had been keen on the last week or so and she wanted to introduce us to him and his friends. I was quite excited as I have just gotten out of a relationship recently and I was ready to start going out again.

My last relationship lasted about a year, we dated in high school and once we graduated, George wanted to go his separate ways for college. He got into law school and didn't want any distractions that would put his future on the line, or whatever that meant. It didn't hurt as bad as I thought when we broke up back in May. I did cry for a couple of days but realized that it was for the best as I was going to be staying home and working at the hospital in the meantime.

I really enjoyed nursing when I volunteered in high school, and I wanted to continue once I graduated.

The loud sound of beeping caught my attention; I looked up to see Francesa in her bright pink Nash Metropolitan roll up to the side of my house. I laughed and covered my mouth with both of my hands out of excitement.

“Dottie!!” Francesa shouted and beeped twice. She waved excitedly from her seat.

I opened the screen door to my house, and called out to my parents, “Francesa is here! I’ll be home around 10pm.” I quickly ran down the driveway and to the fancy new Metro.

“Do you like it?” Francesa had both her hands on the wheel and looked up at me from her sunglasses that sat on her face and gave me the biggest smile. She looked so ginchy with her dirty blonde that looked so shiny and bouncy. She wore a blue button-down dress that complimented her eyes.

“Francie, you look so ginchy!” I squealed and opened the brand-new door of the Metro.

I sat down in the passenger seat and straightened out my dress. I looked around the interior of the car, and the seats were a nice white leather, the dash and wheel were covered in the same pink as the exterior. There were seats in the back for our other girlfriends, it was the perfect car.

“Isn’t it amazing?! I will have the cover off for the rest of the summer so we can drive around just like this.” Her smile was so bright and big.

“You truly are the queen of the town right now. Everyone will be looking in your direction.” And it was true. Francie was very popular in high school, and she still was after high school. She was the head cheerleader when we were in high school and just about every teacher adored her. She currently works in one of the elementary schools as a teacher, she loves children and wants to start a family quite soon.

“Let’s go get Sadie and Cheryl. I want to get to Starlite a little earlier than Bobby.” Bobby was the boy she was talking to me about non-stop for the last week. He’s a greaser which is different for Francie as she usually has dated jocks in the past, so I am very intrigued to meet Bobby and his friends.

We had pulled up to Starlite around seven pm, and we bought tickets for Garden of Evil. A movie I was quite excited to watch but I knew I wouldn’t be watching most of it as we tended on hanging out.

Francie slowly drove over to the screen that was playing Garden of Evil, she headed more towards the back of the rows of cars as Bobby mentioned to her that is where he would be with his friends. We parked next to a car, but we hadn't seen Bobby or any of his friends, so we decided to sit and wait until he arrived. The rest of the drive-in was quite busy; a lot of people were hanging out next to each other's cars. Although movies were playing no one was really paying attention to it as most people were playing music from their cars and talking.

"So, tell us more about him, where did you meet him?" Cheryl asked from the backseat.

"I want to know more about the kiss you two shared." Sadie laughed and Francie gasped. I turned to Francie and I watched as her face got bright red. She covered her face with her hands, and giggled.

She pushed Sadie's shoulder jokingly and smiled, "it was so romantic, so I am not ashamed of it." Her face got red all over again. The girls started giggling and talking more about Bobby, but I began to scan the cars around us.

I watched as a group of motorcycles entered the drive-in. Just about everyone stopped what they were doing and watched as they approached where we were parked. My heart began to race a little bit faster. I hadn't really hung around many greasers so I did not know what I was getting into but I knew they could be trouble.

There were about five of them that rode over to the cars around us. I elbowed Francie gently, "is that Bobby?" She bit her lip and nodded her head.

"You forgot to mention that they ride motorcycles." Sadie squealed, she was just as excited as Francie was.

We watched as the boys got off their motorcycles and looked in our direction. All of them wore leather jackets, some had boots on, and others wore converse. They all looked about the same, slicked back hair, dark clothing. I didn't really see what was so special about them.

I watched as one of the boys fixed his jacket and began to walk over to Francie's car. He was quite tall; his hair was dark and slicked back but a shorter piece of hair hung down. He had a bit of stubble, not completely clean shaven. His eyes were beautiful; they were a light blue that glistened. He stopped in front of my door and smiled at all of us.

He put both hands on the passenger door and leaned over; I could smell his cologne. He smelled fresh and a little musky. I leaned back a little and looked up at him, he looked down at me and looked back up towards Francie.

"Hey Francie, Bobby wants you and your friends to come join us by the bikes." He smiled widely, I smiled and before I knew it, I was answering for Francie.

“Sure thing, we’ll come join. What’s your name?” He looked back down at me, quite surprised I had answered. He leaned backwards a little and then forward closer to me.

“You can call me Slim.” He winked and leaned off the door and began walking backwards not breaking eye contact with me until he turned around and jogged back to the bikes.

“Dottie what was that about?!” Cherly laughed.

“He’s handsome.” Sadie pipped in.

“I honestly do not know what took over me, I got quite lost in his eyes and my mouth sort of just opened and words came out.” I laughed and looked at the girls.

Francie smiled, “let’s go get to know him more then.” She opened her car door and began to get out. I opened my door and left it open for Sadie to get out.

I patted my dress down and waited for Francie to come over to me to walk over to the boys.

We locked arms and began to walk towards their direction. I noticed Slim was leaning on his bike with his arms crossed watching me and Francie walk over. There were four other boys

besides Slim, one of them walked up to him and put his arm around his shoulder. This boy was

about the same height as Slim, but he had dirty blonde hair. He was a bit leaner than Slim, but still handsome. I was assuming this was Bobby.

We stopped in front of them, "Hi Bobby." Francie smiled, I could feel her body tense up a bit.

The boy took his arm off Slim and smiled, "Hey France." She removed her arm from me and walked over to Bobby who put his arm around her shoulders and pulled her closer.

I directed my eyes towards Slim who was already staring at me, he smirked at me and leaned off the bike. He walked closer to me, circling me. I laughed when he stopped in front of me.

"What's so funny?" He crossed his arms, he wasn't wearing a leather jacket like the rest of them, instead he had a black short sleeve on.

"What's with circling me?" I crossed my arms, mimicking his body language.

He laughed and put his hands in his pockets, "you're different."

"How so?" I uncrossed my arms; he smiled and shook his head.

"You just are, I can tell." I had to look away from the eye contact. He made me quite nervous, and I haven't felt like this since I dated George.

I didn't know how to answer back to this so I just smiled and crossed my arms again. He nodded his head towards the group, "come on, let me introduce you to the other guys."

I was still smiling when I walked over to the group, everyone was talking. I noticed Cheryl was talking to one of the other guys, he was shorter and had a baby face. Francie was with Bobby who was talking to one of the guys. And Sadie was talking to a boy who looked like Bobby.

"That is Bobby's brother, Johnny. The one talking to your other friend is Kid. And the one talking to Bobby is Jet." He pointed to each one of them.

"What is with the nicknames?" I looked up at Slim, he was at least six foot two, but he wasn't slim he was rather muscular.

"Kid is based on his looks, he is short and has a baby face, but his actual name is Earl. Jet is quite fast and sharp, but his name is James. Bobby and Johnny are just nicknames for their actual names, Robert and John. And as for me, I was slim when I was younger and it always just stuck, my actual name is Richard." It was quite fascinating at the nicknames compared to their actual names. I do have a nickname but it seems like the boys like to name each other after appearances or things they do.

"Do you have a nickname?" I smiled.

“I do actually, the girls call me Dottie, but my actual name is Dorothy.” Slim smiled, he repeated my nickname a couple of times.

“Dottie, Dottie, Dottie, I like that.” He didn’t smirk this time but rather he smiled quite big.

I smiled in return, staring up at his dark brown eyes. He put this arm around my shoulder and ushered me to the group.

Everyone was standing around the parked motorcycles, just about all the boys were smoking cigarettes. I watched as Sadie asked Jet for a light, to which he lit her cigarette that hung low from her mouth.

We walked up to Jet and Sadie; Jet was only a little shorter than Slim but had a similar build. Although Jet had darker hair and lighter eyes, his jawline was very sharp along with his cheekbones. He spoke with a slight accent and moved quite a lot when he spoke, mostly with his hands.

Sadie passed me her cigarette to which I took a drag of. It was a Lucky Strike. I hated this brand; I did not enjoy the toasted tobacco.

I took my drag and scrunched up my nose and handed back the cigarette to Saide while coughing.

Jet laughed from beside me, he took another drag of his cigarette, "Oh you've never had a cigarette before, huh?"

I was still coughing at this point, I answered in between coughs. "Oh no, I smoke Marlboro's, I just do not like the toasted tobacco that Lucky's has."

"Oh Dot, let's go get a milkshake to help with the coughing. We'll be right back boys." I was relieved that Sadie saved me from this humiliation.

We walked arm and arm towards the snack bar. I had stopped coughing at this point, but the lingering taste of toasted tobacco sat in the back of my hot throat. I turned around to see Slim and Jet watching us walk away. I shot him a smile before turning back around.

The snack bar was quite busy, several carhops in and out of the concession. All on roller blades with bright, pretty uniforms. We walked up in line to the outside bar. The menu was overhead displayed on a bright board.

"Next in line!" Sadie and I walked up.

“One chocolate shake please.” Sadie ordered for me.

She turned to me, she was still holding my arm, but tighter this time. She leaned in close and whispered to me, “What do you think of Jet?” She smiled and giggled while leaning back.

I smiled, and leaned forward, “So cute!” We both squealed in excitement.

“I’ve noticed Slim has an eye for you.” She pulled my arm a little out of excitement.

“He is quite cute.” I blushed. I felt the warmth underneath my skin radiating from my neck to my cheeks. Sadie poked my cheek with her finger and giggled.

The snack bar worker called for my name and handed me my shake. I took a straw and sipped the cool, frothy chocolate and groaned in relief. I handed the shake to Sadie who also took a sip.

We walked back over to the group, and Cheryl waved us over. We walked over to where she was. She was talking to Kid, who was only a little bit taller than us girls. He was leaner and had short blonde hair that was combed back like the rest of the boys. His eyes were a bright blue that complimented his pale complexion.

“Would you like a sip Cheryl? It’s chocolate.” I offered the shake to Cheryl; she smiled and took a sip of the shake.

“You are Sadie and Dottie?” Kid asked, turning to us, he was wearing a white tee with a black leather jacket. His jeans were slightly distressed and cuffed at the bottom that showed off his black high-top converse.

“I’m Dottie, this is Sadie.” Kid made an “oh” with his mouth and nodded his head.

A squeal of excitement came from behind us and we turned to see a few of our other girlfriends we haven’t seen in quite run up to me, Cherly and Sadie. I had turned to greet them but was surprised when my arm was pulled back.

I spun around to see Kid had his hand around my elbow. I looked down at this hand and then back up to his eyes. His eyes were uneasy. “Be careful of Slim.” He warned me.

“Excuse me?” I pulled my arm away from him. I searched his eyes for more answers, but he wouldn’t give me any.

“Just be careful.” He warned me this time, but he spoke softly. His eyes and the tone of his voice carried a sense of genuine worry.

I nodded my head as I didn’t know how to answer back to his warning. Was Slim someone I should worry about? Why?

Chapter 4: Dorothy

Kid's words sat in my chest like a swallowed stone as I walked back toward Slim. Was he someone I should keep a careful eye on? Or was Kid just jealous? I crossed my arms tightly across my chest and hefted a heavy sigh. Francie ran up beside me as I entered the group.

"Geez Dot, what's with the glim look?" Francie held both of my crossed arms. She was searching for answers in my eyes, but I looked away from her.

I grabbed Francie's arm and walked away from the group. "Kid just warned me about Slim." I whispered, I looked over to Slim to which Francie followed my gaze. Slim had a lit cigarette hanging low from his mouth as he spoke to Jet. They were both laughing and joking around.

"Oh, don't listen to Kid. He's only trying to get your attention. Slim is a stud, and I heard he likes you." I turned my attention back to Francie, her face beaming with excitement.

"Really?" My lips curled into a smile; I swung my arms back and forth in a nervous excitement. I could feel the fabric of my dress softly brush my skin. I kept my arms behind my back to stop myself.

Francie nodded, biting her lip. She leaned in and whispered, "I also heard he wants to take you out on a ride on his bike."

My jaw dropped slightly, and I could feel the blood rushing to my cheeks. I felt a warmth rise into my chest, a feeling I had not felt since my last relationship. I turned to look over at Slim, but he was already staring at me. He had broken eye contact staring down and then back up at me, smiling slightly and shaking his head. He threw his cigarette on the ground, squishing it with his shoe. He pushed off the bike he was leaning on, combing back his hair that fell forward while walking in Francie and I's direction.

"Oh my gosh, he's walking over here." Francie whispered excitedly.

I stood up straight, keeping my hands behind my back, interlocking my pointer fingers together. I turned from Francie to Slim as he was close to us.

"Hey Fran, can I talk to Dottie?" I raised an eyebrow at the mention of my nickname. Only the girls call me that.

Francie nodded her head and shot me a look before walking back to the group.

I tilted my head as I looked up at him. He smiled as he looked down at me. "Want to go for a ride?"

I nodded my head, "sure thing." He extended his hand out, his palm open. Without hesitation I placed my hand in his. His hand was rough with calluses, but I didn't mind.

He pulled my hand lightly, and I began to walk faster with him. When we reached the group, Francie was in Bobby's arms, Cheryl and Sadie were finishing a cigarette with Jet and Kid.

I stood before Slim's bike, and he took a helmet out from a compartment on the bike. Cheryl gasped, and Sadie laughed from beside her. I looked at Francie whose smile only grew larger.

Slim handed me the helmet, and I placed it on my head, I quickly adjusted the straps. Slim swung his leg over his bike; he started the engine which roared awake. I swung my leg over his bike, adjusting my dress to sit still. I placed my hands on Slim's shoulders. The group watched us in awe; I caught Kid's eye. There was an unsettling look he gave me, I looked away and patted Slim's shoulder as a signal that I was ready. My stomach knotted as we slowly rode off. I couldn't tell if it was the look Kid gave me or the fact I have never ridden on a motorcycle before.

We had been driving for only a few minutes, but I didn't want it to stop. The wind against my skin felt incredible. At this moment I felt free, I wanted to spread my arms out and let the warm air swallow me whole. But I knew that would not end well, so I clung onto Slim tighter, wrapping my arms around his waist and placing my head on his back. In response he revved the engine of the bike and accelerated the speed. I squealed and he laughed.

I realized that Slim was bringing me up to trail to a lookout that was popular. My stomach knotted. Kid's warning was in the back of my mind this whole ride and the look he gave me before we rode off. But I also have been listening to my gut, and I haven't felt anything off with Slim if anything he has been kind and seeks an interest in me. Maybe Francie is right, Kid might just be jealous.

We slowly came to a stop, and Slim turned the bike off. Where we parked there was an overlook of the town. It was dark as the sun set on our drive over. I could see the lights of the town brightly illuminate the landscape. I used his shoulders as support to lift myself off the bike. I patted my dress down, and took the helmet off, fixing my hair as the wind had knotted it. I walked over to the overlook and stared down at the small town I called home. It was beautiful from this view; I hadn't seen it like this before.

"First time here?" Slim's voice came from behind me. He stood next to me, the smell of his aftershave was strong. There was a hint of rosemary and citrus.

"I have never seen it like this before." We stood there and admired the view.

Slim's rough hand slightly touched mine as he took the helmet that was still in my hand. I hadn't noticed. I turned to him and let go of the helmet.

He walked over to his bike and placed it onto the handle letting it hang. He turned back to me and slowly walked over.

"Will you have this dance with me?" He lightly bowed and placed his hand out for mine.

I smiled and took his hand. I placed my other hand on his shoulder, and he placed his other hand on my waist. Our chests barely touched, I could feel my heart beating faster. I looked to the side; I was too nervous to look up at him. I noticed there were only a few cars around the area, I could only lightly hear music coming from a car not too far away from us.

"What about the music?" I finally looked up at him. He looked down, his eyes glistening under the bright moonlight. He had these brown hazel eyes that had a little green in them.

"I'll sing for us." I laughed softly.

"Okay, what will you sing?"

Slim cleared his throat, “If I go a million miles away, I’d write a letter each and every day.” His voice was slightly deeper, dragging out a few of the words to try to create rhythm while singing slightly off key.

I giggled, “not bad, I must say.”

“I do practice in my free time.” He chuckled, he hummed the rest of the song as we slowly continued to dance, our bodies moved in sync together, it felt so natural. I rested my head on his shoulder, and we danced for a while like that. It had felt like time had paused for a moment, I didn’t want to let go of him.

My worries and suspicions of Slim had diminished. He had shown me a side that I don’t think many guys would show to me, especially this early on. I felt this pull to know him more. But I first want to get to the bottom of why Kid warned me of Slim. There must be a reason as to why.

I removed my hand off of Slim’s shoulder and checked the time on my watch. We had been here for almost an hour. “Slim? I think we should be getting back.” We pulled apart from one another although I didn’t want to let go.

“We’ve been here for almost an hour.” I said raising my arm up to check my watch again.

“Oh wow, we’ve been dancing for that long?” He chuckled, pushing his hair back out of his face.

“I suppose so.” I smiled.

“Let’s get back to the drive-in then.” His smile was a little bit larger this time, and I could tell the feelings were mutual. I wanted to jump up and down, but I composed myself of my excitement and walked over to Slim’s bike.

We pulled back into the drive in, and Slim slowly made his way over to the group. I watched from over Slim’s shoulder as the group was much larger than when we left them. There seemed to be a commotion going on as there were several boys that I had not recognized in Bobby, Johnny and Jet’s faces.

Slim parked the bike as close as he could to the group. I immediately jumped off as I did not want to be involved or near what was going on.

I backed up from the group and watched as two tall boys yell in Bobby and Jets faces, although Bobby wasn't taking the situation seriously. He was smiling and stood his ground while the boy yelled in his face.

Francie ran over to me and grabbed my arm.

"What's happening?" I asked Francie as I removed the helmet from my head.

"I -I don't know, some of the boys were yelling and accusing Bobby and Jet of something. I don't know, it was just awful." She stammered and began to cry.

I placed the helmet down so I could hug her and comfort her.

I noticed Cheryl and Sadie made their way over with Kid to Francie and I. They stood with us as we watched Slim walk up to the boy that was giving Bobby a hard time and push him. This caused a chain reaction as Jet jumped onto the other boy and Bobby pushed another boy of their group. Johnny threw a punch and suddenly there was a brawl.

Several people from their cars turned their attention to the fight, even some of the employees stood there unsure on how to approach the situation.

The sound of police sirens boomed through the drive-in. I turned around and watched several police cars with their bright lights make their way into the parking lot.

“Shoot. We need to go.” Francie was still a mess under my arms, and I grabbed Cheryl’s arm. She grabbed Sadie’s and we began making our way quickly to Francie’s car.

Francie was too hysterical to drive, so I told her to get in the passenger seat, and I would drive us all back home. Everyone quickly got into Francie’s car, and I put the car in drive. I slowly drove the car to the exit of the drive-in as there were still people walking around. A lot of people began to get in their cars and start to leave due to the police cars filling in. The bright blue lights were a bit blinding as they drove past us to where the boys were.

“Oh Bobby.” Francie sobbed, Cheryl was leaning over in her chair and rubbing Francie’s shoulder, calming her down.

I managed to get us out of Starlite and began driving towards Cheryl and Sadie’s house. I gripped the steering wheel so hard that my knuckles turned white. But I kept my focus on the road and let the radio play as we were all silent on the drive home.

Francie kept crying, and at one point it began to bother me. “Francie, he will be fine. They are men, they can handle themselves. But please stop crying, you are ruining the makeup that took you forever to put on today.”

Francie chuckled, and I quickly looked over to her, wiping her tears. “You’re right, they can handle themselves. It's just that we all got along so well. I was so happy to see you talking to Slim, Cheryl talking to Jet and Sadie talking to Kid.”

I watched in the rearview mirror Sadie sits up in her chair, leaning in so we could hear her. “I wouldn’t count on Kid and I. He’s sweet but not exactly my type. A bit too short for my liking.” We all laughed at her comment.

“Tell us about where Slim brought you.” Cheryl spoke.

They all piped in asking me questions. Too many questions that I told them to stop, and I would start from the beginning. It was a night that I will never forget.

Chapter 5: Olivia

I placed the letter down onto the lace tablecloth. I had just finished reading the third letter from the bundle. After I read the first letter, Nan wanted me to continue to read the rest. We had four more letters to go, but visiting hours were coming to an end and I had so many questions to ask her.

I noticed the gleam in Nan's eye when we had finished. That night must have been so magical for her, the moment she had with Slim seemed so free and romantic. Something that would come straight out of a movie. I was seeing Nan in two different aspects of her life, one in the present and one in the past. Something that struck me as grateful to get to experience.

"You really liked him, didn't you?" I couldn't help but smile so big.

Nan's smile grew too, "I sure did."

At this moment it felt like two girls talking about their crush. Although it was two different generations sitting across from one another. It had felt special, and sacred. I was understanding more about my grandmother through these letters than I have before.

But there was one thing that I wanted to know more about, and that was Kid and his warning. I understood now that Kid was Earl, but why was he so concerned about Slim? What was it about him that made Earl want to warn Nan?

“Out of curiosity, did you consider Kid’s warning about Slim?” I asked.

Nan lifted the cup of water and took a long sip before placing it back down. She paused for some time, “I did, although at the time I thought it was a form of jealousy that he had towards Slim.”

“What do you think about it now? Why do you think he warned you then?” I leaned in closer to her.

Her smile started to fade a little, “Kid always saw things other people didn’t. That was his greatest gift, and I should’ve listened to him back then.”

My eyebrows narrowed, I was a little confused. “What do you mean Nan?”

She wouldn’t look at me; she stared straight ahead. “Sometimes the most dangerous people are the ones you want to know the most.”

She turned her head to look at me. We stared at one another for what felt like forever. I broke eye contact before speaking. "So Slim was a dangerous guy. He was a greaser, weren't they known for being reckless and dangerous?" I tried to come up with some plausible explanation for what she meant that he was dangerous, but it seemed like it was catered more towards me than her.

"He was dangerous in many ways." Her brown eyes looked sad.

Before I could answer back, one of the caregivers entered the room and gave a reminder that visiting hours were coming to a close and those who were visiting were to say their goodbyes and sign out.

I began folding the letters gently back into their original state when Nan's hand rested on mine.

"I want you to come back tomorrow, with more of those letters. But you can only read them when you are here with me."

I placed my other hand on Nan's hand, "deal." I smiled.

She smiled softly, and removed her warm, wrinkled hand. I placed the letters back into their envelopes and placed them onto the unopened ones and tied the faded ribbon.

I kissed Nan's warm cheek goodbye, "I'll meet you here again tomorrow."

Nan nodded her head, "tomorrow dear."

I walked out of the bright conservatory and headed my way to the desk that had the sign out sheet. My thoughts were all jumbled. Nan was in a lavender marriage? With a gay man? So then who was she with then? Was this man Slim truly dangerous? Or just behaved that way?

There are so many unanswered questions that I must ask Nan, but I knew that the stories that were kept in these letters would also answer my questions. So, in the meantime, I need to be patient. This is Nan's story.

I arrived home just short of three o'clock. I parked outside my parents' small blue bungalow home. My childhood home. I haven't lived here in quite a few years. I have been living in Boston for the past four years with my fiancé Will. We've been engaged for a couple of months now, and ever since learning about Nan's accident Will has been nothing but supportive and reassuring in times where I have been upset. He asked to come with me, but I wanted to do this

on my own. Nan and I had a strong relationship when I was growing up, as it was just me and two other cousins on my dad's side. I'm the only girl.

I walked up the small hill of our driveway; I could smell the pavement as it was slightly damp from the quick rain shower. I made my way to the front door; the door was unlocked which meant my mom was home. She was notorious for leaving the doors unlocked, she claims it's from her short-term memory loss, but I think she just cares to not lock the door.

I entered the foyer and kicked off my sneakers. Pushing them under the bench that sat against the dark blue wall. There was a circle mirror that hung above the bench, I stared at my reflection and saw versions of Nan in there that I haven't seen before. Like the color of my eyes, we both have the same deep brown.

"Hello?!" My mom called.

I stepped into the living room to my left; she wasn't in here. I tried the kitchen next; she was standing over the oven stirring a pot. The smell of warm garlic hit my nostrils.

"You know you should lock the front door." I teased. I always said this to her.

“Yeah, yeah. Where were you? I thought you would be home by lunch after cleaning some of the attic at your grandmother’s house.” She turned slightly from the oven so she could look at me.

I leaned against the wall. I placed my keys and phone on the counter of the serving window. I left the letters in my car; I didn’t want the temptation of reading the rest of the sealed letters. And I didn’t want my parents’ asking questions about them. For now, this was between Nan and I.

“I was still there; she has a lot of junk to go through. I wanted to organize and sort through certain things so it would make it easier. It would be great if I had some help, so I wouldn’t come home so late.” I lied. This wasn’t the time to bring up the letters.

“Well at least you organized some things, I already told you why I couldn’t come with you today. Maybe dad can help you tomorrow. If not, see if a friend can come with you.” I watched as she placed chicken into the pan and hissed against the heat.

“Why won’t you come?” I was taken aback by this myself as it just came out of my mouth with no urge to stop it.

She stirred the chicken around for a minute, I thought she didn’t hear me, so I began to collect my things and go upstairs to my room when she responded.

“I’m not ready. And I will go with you eventually but right now I don’t want to go there. I don’t want to be in that house.” She was still stirring the chicken, only the side of her head was turned so I could hear her.

I understood why she didn’t want to go to the house. She was the one who found Nan at the bottom of the stairs. She told me she thought Nan was dead.

“You know if you want to talk about it mom, I’m here.” I was left with silence which I wasn’t surprised about. I still wanted to offer. We have a close relationship, my mom and I. But ever since Nan’s accident, she’s become more shut off and won’t show much emotion when talking about the incident.

“Alright, well I will be in my room.” I pushed off the wall and collected my belongings and made the turn to go back into the living room when I heard her call out.

“I appreciate it honey; I really do. It’s just, I need time to register what happened.” Her whole body was facing me now. The first thing I noticed was the dark circles under her eyes. She hasn't been sleeping well lately.

“She’s not dead, you know.” My voice was low, I wanted to remind her that Nan is still present, and she needs her daughter more than ever.

She nodded her head. I gave her a small smile in return and began to turn back to the living room.

“Monday. I-I’ll come with you Monday. To the house.” Her voice was shaky, and I could tell it took some courage to say out loud.

“Ok, Monday it is.” I smiled and left the kitchen to go to my bedroom.

Once I entered my bedroom, I shut my door and leaned against it. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. This was not exactly how I thought my day would go. In less than twenty-four hours I found out my grandmother was in a lavender marriage, had relationships while in this marriage, and kept it a secret for sixty-seven years.

Chapter 6: Olivia

I gripped the steering wheel so hard that the leather began to rub off onto the palms of my hands. I stared out the windshield; a fog had settled over the rain-soaked road. The rain lightly pattered on the car and a clap of thunder finally snapped me out of the zone I was in. I turned over to the letters that sat in the passenger seat, staring back at me in all its uncertainty.

It was 9:05 a.m. and I had planned to go back to Nan's house, back to where it all started and clean as well as look for anything else that suggested the relationship of Earl. There needs to be more than just these letters, did she keep photos? Clothing? Items of their times together? I wanted to find out, and I wanted to get an early start to it before I visited Nan back at the rehabilitation center.

I put the car in drive and slowly drove down the road. The whole ride to Nan's house I just kept asking myself those questions. I was eager to get there and began searching. There had to be something there, she had to have something that belonged to Earl, there was no way she didn't have some sort of trace of this man.

I pulled into the long driveway and parked my car. I got out of my car and stared up at the large, beautiful house that stood in all its glory. My favorite part of the house was the wrapped porch with the unique spindle work, something about it creates the charm of the house. I left the

letters behind and began walking up towards the porch. The wood is so old that with every step it creaked.

Upon opening the door, I let it creak open slowly. The house was so quiet and empty with no one occupying it currently. It made me feel sad in a way that Nan lived here alone for such a long time. My family visited her weekly, but a wave of guilt rushed over me as I realized in this large empty home, I had not visited her as much as I should have.

I made my way towards the large staircase that Nan fell not even a month ago. The staircase is quite large and stands at the focal point of the entrance. I noticed the rug runner that used to lay along the stairs was ripped up, most likely after Nan's accident, Mom definitely got someone to take it off. It looked bare, and almost out of place. These stairs are the focal point when you walk into the house, the beautiful red Persian runner was what made the stairs. Nan's family had that rug shipped from Persia when they first built the home.

I trekked up the bare grand staircase and entered the second floor. I made my way to the second staircase passing by large old photos of family members that hung on the walls and felt their stares watch me as I passed by. There were three floors in this house, the third floor is where the last set of staircases allows you to enter the attic. I had made my way finally to the last staircase and opened the attic door. I walked up a few stairs and entered the attic. For some reason I felt more comfortable up here than I did anywhere else in the house. I think after

finding the letters and some of Nan's memorabilia it felt like I was closest to her and the people in her past life.

I walked past the dusty drawer that held the letters, "I'll get back to you." I whispered. I wanted to find any kind of photos or maybe even a shadow box that was dedicated to Earl. I made my way over to the large bookshelf that held all different kinds of photo albums, most of them were dated on the spines which was convenient on my end so I could find it quicker. There were dozens of photo albums, and I knew I didn't have much time to go through every single one before I went to visit Nan. I scanned the shelves, and saw the year 1954 printed on the spine, this was the year she met my grandfather and Earl.

I slid it out of its place and turned it over to its front. I opened to the first page and saw photos of Nan and her girlfriends in a very nice car. The photos were all black and white, and only a couple photos were on each page.

I smiled as Nan looked so happy and carefree in these photos. She was laughing in the passenger seat of a convertible car while her friends made funny faces in the back seat. I flipped through the album and didn't see any boys her age that could potentially be my grandfather or Earl. So, I closed it and placed it back in its spot.

I scanned the shelf again and then I saw the year 1956 printed on the spine. I slid it out of its place; I turned it over to its front and recognized the photo. It was a photo of Nan and a man I

hadn't recognized before getting married. Maybe this is Earl. I opened the album and several photos of Nan in her wedding dress were placed on the first page. She looked so elegant and beautiful. I flipped through some of the pages and stumbled upon a solo photo of the man. The description of Earl that Nan gave me fits this man in the photo. So, this must be Earl.

He was staring back at the camera. He looked like he had lighter features, but I couldn't tell too well due to it being black and white. He smiled lightly at the camera, he wasn't showing many teeth. His eyes were beautiful; you could tell he had lighter eyes. He was quite small, he was short and had a smaller build, he seemed very skinny. I stared at his photo for quite a while, without thinking I removed the photo. I placed it in my back pocket; I wanted the photo of him more so I could look back at as we read the letters together. Maybe I'll show Nan this picture when I see her later today.

I placed the album back into its place. Now that I have a photo of him, I would like to see if there is any other kind of memorabilia of him hiding around somewhere. I walked around the large attic, passing by old trunks, old suitcases. Mannequins dressed in clothes from the 1950s, there were large paintings scattered everywhere. All this stuff seemed to be collected by past family members as a lot of the furniture and clothes were extremely outdated.

I stumbled upon a clothing trunk that I hadn't noticed before and I was curious to see what was hiding in there. I removed old paintings that were placed on top and placed them aside. I kneeled so I could be more eye level when opening it. The trunk was extremely dusty, it was

mostly made from wood, and it had these beautiful, intricate paintings all over. It looked like it came from another country that one of my family members brought back with them. I unlocked the locks on either side and slowly raised the lid. At first glance there were clothes scattered messily inside of the trunk. I slowly began to remove each article of clothing from the trunk and place it beside me gently. There were a lot of dresses that looked like they were from the 1950's. A beautiful blue dress with a white collar stood out to me. But that's not what I was here to look for. At the very bottom, I noticed a notebook was placed on its side up against the wall of the trunk. I took it out from its place and a very old, pressed flower slipped from its placement inside the notebook and landed on my lap.

I slowly picked it up and held it out before me, it looked like a rose. The red color had faded so much that it had become this tan color. I placed it back in my lap as I didn't want to ruin or destroy it. I picked up the notebook again and with my sleeve I lightly removed the layer of dust that sat on top of it. There once was ink written on the front, but it had faded. I could barely make out the words. I opened the first page, and it read "Dorothy Miller's Diary, 1956-1957." I immediately shut the notebook. Another private thing of Nans. I want to bring this with me as the dates are fitting from the letters we are currently reading. Maybe there is more in here than there is in the letters.

I took the pressed rose and placed it back into the diary. I wonder if this was Earl's or grandpas. I noticed the vibration of my phone beside me and saw it was the number from the rehabilitation center Nan is staying at. My heart immediately dropped as they typically do not

call me. I immediately answered, my heart was bounding so hard that it was the only thing I could hear at first.

“Ms. Olivia Moore?” A woman’s soft voice spoke.

“Yes? Is Everything alright?” My voice was shaky.

“Oh yes, your grandmother Dorothy Moore wants to see you now. She has requested us to call you and to come now.” My heart rate immediately slowed down. I closed my eyes and sighed softly. I placed my hand over my heart and could feel it begin to beat slower.

“Oh, thank goodness, alright tell her I will be there in fifteen minutes. Thank you.” I hung up the phone and placed it beside me. I still had my hand over my heart; I placed my other hand in my head and laughed. I took a deep breath and began to put the clothes away back into the trunk. I left the diary out as I wanted to bring that to Nan for her to see. I closed the lid of the trunk and put the paintings back on top of it.

I gathered the rest of my belongings and began my way out of the attic. Mom will be coming with me in the next couple of days to go through things and begin to throw away or donate which is needed badly up there. I trekked my way down the two floors back to the main stairs and out to the foyer. I turned around and looked around the house one more time. It truly is so beautiful and a shame that we are selling it. There is such character to this home, and stories

hidden within its walls. But some chapters need to come to a close, and this one is Nan's chapter.

I walked out to the porch and locked the large wooden door. The wooden porch creaked as I made my way across it. I made my way back to my car and took the photo of what I assume to be Earl and placed it inside the diary along with the pressed rose. I closed the notebook and opened the passenger door, placing it beside the bundle of letters and closed the door. I made my way over to the front seat and got in. I turned the engine on and felt the A/C blast over my skin and hair. I stared at the letters and diary, "this will be interesting for sure."

Chapter 7: Olivia and Dorothy

The rehabilitation center had that same lemon smell, and it hit my nostrils so hard that my eyes began to water as I entered through the main doors. I signed in at the front desk and walked over to the conservatory. The glass French doors were open this time and I could hear the soft conversations along with the scratchy record that was playing. Nan was at the same table we sat at yesterday. Although she had a friend with her this time. I pushed the letters and the diary further into my armpit to hide them from her friend as I stepped down the few steps and walked towards Nan. This diary was a new thing I found, and she had no idea I had this. I'm sure her friend does not know about the letters, and although it would seem like a great story to tell, it was not mine to do so.

The woman who sat beside Nan looked a tad younger than her. She had long white hair that looked very well taken care of. She had several crystals that laid around her neck, and a long flowy dress that had a beautiful pattern with all sorts of colors inside and out of the pattern. I approached closer and I noticed she was sitting in a wheelchair, and her chair was covered in all sorts of decorations. Fake flowers that were wrapped around the handles on the back of the chair, and some colorful scarves that were placed on the side of the chair. The woman smiled and nodded at what Nan had said, but before she could talk, she noticed my presence approaching.

“Oh hello, are you here for my friend?” The woman’s voice was soothing to the ear. Nan slowly turned around and looked up at me. Her smile grew bigger.

“Olivia, sit my dear. This is my friend Janis. She lives across the hall from me.” I sat down next to the right of Nan and placed the letters and diary on the chair beside me. I reached over and shook Janis’s hand.

“It’s very nice to meet you, thank you for keeping my nana company while she’s been here.” Janis’s hand was soft; I slowly let go of the shake and she smiled in return.

“Oh of course, your grandmother was just telling me about you actually and your most recent visit. She mentioned you were recently engaged. Congratulations! That is very exciting.” Janis was naturally beautiful; she looked like she aged gracefully. I was captivated by her beauty.

“Thank you, yes, just about four months now. We are very excited.” I smiled in return; Nan placed her hand on top of mine that laid on the table. I looked over to her and she smiled softly, squeezing my hand.

“She’s been helping clean out the house for the past week.” Nan turned to Janis; her eyes went wide.

“Oh wow, that’s quite a large house you got to clean out. I remember as a kid, everyone in the area knew of your grandmother's house, just because of how large and beautiful it was.” I knew everyone in the neighborhood loved my grandmother's house. She used to decorate it during the holidays and made it scary during Halloween. I used to host my birthday parties there as the yard was large and my friends and I could run around the large house as there was so much space to do as a kid.

“It can be a lot at times; Mom is coming to help me tomorrow. I have been put in charge of the attic, but we are starting on some of the rooms.” I notice Nan’s body language shift; her and mom have not seen each other since her accident. I knew this was a touchy subject as Nan wanted mom to be here, and so did I. I rubbed nan’s arm, to which she smiled lightly back in response.

“I see, well I will leave you two be, I have an appointment I must be at soon. Dorothy, it is always a pleasure, I will see you at dinner.” Janis gave me a smile, before excusing herself from our table.

“Janis seems like a great friend, I’m happy you have her here.” It made me feel better that she wasn’t alone and had someone who talked to her here as it had just been me for some time now.

My mom is her only child, and to have her not visit Nan has been hard for me to see and has been hard for Nan. I knew that she had a hard time after seeing her mother at the bottom of the stairs, but she is here now recovering very well. I know there is something more to it, and my mom won't speak about it, but I want to talk to her tomorrow while we are at the house.

"Did you bring the letters?" Nan asked.

I reached over to the chair next to me and carefully picked up the bundle. I left the diary where it was as I wanted to come back to it.

"They are right here." I placed them on the table and untied the faded ribbon. I knew which ones we read from the opened envelopes. I had organized the letters by date, so the one on top was the next letter I was going to read to Nan. I lifted the letter from the bundle and carefully opened the envelope. I unfolded the letter that was folded in threes.

"You ready?" I looked up at Nan who had a large smile on her face. She nodded her head and I began reading.

Francie had dropped me off about an hour ago, but I stayed on the front porch and sat on our old wooden bench. It was extremely uncomfortable, but I needed a cigarette and time to collect my thoughts that I didn't even mind.

I had gone through two cigarettes so far and wanted one more before I went to bed. Every time I thought of Slim, I couldn't help but smile. He was exhilarating, I had never felt so free and when I was with him on his motorcycle I had felt like a new person. He captivated me and I wanted to be around him so much more now. But I couldn't help but wonder why Kid needed to warn me right away. I didn't want to just push away his comment just because of what I was feeling. I would like to give Slim a chance, but I needed more information from Kid before doing so. I took one last long drag before dropping the lit cigarette and squishing it with my shoe. I watched as the tobacco crumbled outside of the filter and smoke emerged from the ember that was still lightly burning. I walked inside my house, closing the front door behind me. The living room lamp was the only light in the room; no one was in the living room so everyone must have gone to bed. I kicked off my shoes and placed them neatly next to the rest of the shoes at the front door.

"Have a fun time out tonight?" My mom's low voice made me jump; I placed my hand on my heart and could feel my heartbeat thump widely against my chest. I turned around to see her leaning against the wall, her hair all crazy in rollers. She was wearing her pink bathrobe; her arms were crossed so I knew she was about to lecture me on something.

“Jesus, you scared me.” I laughed and began walking over to the kitchen. I wanted a cup of water before I headed off to bed.

“I heard the cops made their way to Starlite.” My mother’s voice was a lot sterner this time. I turned around and began drinking my water, rolling my eyes as I knew where this was going. She’s still been strict with me even after I entered my twenties. I was the only one left in the house, my sister had gotten married a couple years prior. She’s a few years older than me, and ever since she left, my mother has been asking me almost every week about putting myself out there more often to find a husband soon.

“Yes, they did. The girls and I left shortly after they showed up.” I finished drinking my water, placing the glass into the sink. I avoided eye contact with her at all costs.

“Those greaser boys didn’t have anything to do with it, did they?” And there it was, my mother managed to always find a way to know what I was up to. It’s honestly extremely impressive, and I can’t get too mad at her for that. I don’t blame her as I am very vague when I tell her where I’m going, who I am seeing and what I am doing. I just like my space as an adult, and she tends to not respect that. I think it’s due to the fact I am the only one left living at home.

“There may have been a fight... or two.” I turned around and faced her. I began playing with my grandmother’s engagement ring that sat around my neck. She gave it to me before she passed away, we had a very close relationship growing up so her death was devastating to me.

“Wait, how do you know...?” I looked up to her staring intently back at me.

“About the greaser boys? Nancy Brown called me earlier and told me her daughter Sandra was at Starlite with her girlfriends and saw you drive off on a motorcycle with a greaser. Are you insane? If your father found out he would’ve... I don’t even want to know what he’d do but you need to be more careful with who you associate with...”

I rolled my eyes and faced back to the sink, placing both of my arms on either side. I looked up at the window and tried to look out but was met with both our reflections. My mother rambled on for quite a while, I could hear what she was saying to me, but I chose to not listen completely. Instead, I thought of Slim and the moment we had together on his motorcycle. It was so freeing and exciting, and I do not regret doing that whatsoever regardless of what others thought of me. Sandra Brown can go kick rocks for all I care, same to her mother.

I felt a strong pinch of my skin and looked down to see my mother grabbing my arm very intensely.

“Do you hear me?” Her voice was loud and it boomed throughout the kitchen. She was so close to me that her spit landed above my eyebrow and on my nose. She was a bit shorter than me, but I could see the anger in her eyes. I pulled my arm away from her firm grip.

“I do hear you, but I’m a grown woman and I make my own decisions now.” I backed up and began walking to my bedroom. I left my mother standing there in the kitchen. Although I understand her concern, I did not feel any sort of danger tonight. If anything, I felt more alive than I have in the twenty years of my life and I intend to keep catching that feeling.

Chapter 8: Dorothy

I laid in my bed, staring at the ceiling. Watching the light from the moon shine into my bedroom from the small slits of the window blinds. I had stopped thinking for a while as it began to give me a headache and just stared at the popcorn ceiling. Analyzing the intricate patterns above me. I rolled over to my side and read the small clock on my nightstand that said, 11:45 P.M.

Clink.

I whipped my head to the strange sound in my room, unsure of its exact whereabouts. It came from the window side of my bedroom, where I had bookcases on either side, and a bench that sat below my window. My room was dark besides the moonlight, I suddenly became paranoid as I was not sure if I truly heard something or if it was a fragmentation of my imagination creeping up on me in the late night.

Clink. Clink.

This time I rose out of bed as I was not going insane but rather someone might be messing with me, and I had a suspicion it was Francie. She may or may not have done this a couple of times.

Throwing rocks at my window so we could sneak off and walk around the neighborhood late at night, mostly to just talk but I really enjoyed her presence at that time of night.

Clink. Clink. Clink

I walked over faster to my window, and kneeled on the bench, prying open the window so fast that the next rock hit my shoulder, quite hard too.

“Ow!” I whispered. “Who the hell...” I looked down to see slim standing in my mother’s prized rose bush, which took her over a year to grow. I giggled as the sight before me was too funny not to. He had the biggest grin on his face and waved to me.

My bedroom was on the second floor, facing the street. But I have climbed out of my bedroom several times, thanks to the climbing roses that were held up by these thin white trellises that look like a ladder. I’ve managed to find my footing in the right spots so that way I wouldn’t fall as often.

“Get out of the rose bush!” I whispered loudly so he could hear me.

He backed out of the rose bush and waved his hand at me to come down. “Come on! I have something I want to show you.”

I could feel the excitement in me begin to form as I looked down at him. He had this huge grin across his face. I have never felt so infatuated by someone before.

“One second!” I climbed off the bench and looked around my room to find something to put on quickly as I was wearing a nightgown. I knew I had a button-down cardigan I could throw on. My mother had just gotten me a new dress that was hung up in my closet staring at me. I didn’t have much time to think so I grabbed the new pastel pink dress, quickly changed into it and threw the cardigan on over as it was a bit chilly out. I slipped on some flats and walked over the window and pushed it all the way up so I could climb and throw it.

I leaned down, Slim was still there playing with a rose he must've picked off the bush. I shook my head and laughed to myself.

“I’m coming down! Turn around!” I whispered loudly and spun my finger in a circle to signal him to turn around. Slim smiled and turned around. Before I began to climb out the window, I chucked my flats out the window and onto the grass in front of Slim. That way I could have a better grip climbing down.

I slowly placed my right leg over the windowsill and found the top of the trellis with my toes. I secured my placement and swung my left side over and placed my left foot on the next thin step. I slowly climbed my way down; my dad did a great job of securing this trellis as it did not budge as I made my way down.

I looked over my shoulder as I could tell I was close to the ground and jumped the rest as it was only a couple feet. My feet met with the warm mulch, and the corner of my dress got caught on one side of the rose bush. I patted my dress down and fixed my hair a little before I made my way over to Slim who was still turned around.

My feet were met with the grass now as I walked up beside Slim, "hi there." I whispered.

He turned around and smiled brightly at me. He reached out and gave me the rose he had plucked out of my mother's rose bush. I smiled and took it from his hand, our fingers lightly brushing. I could feel my ears begin to get hot from just our small interaction of touch.

"You look beautiful." He stood before me, staring into my eyes. He still had his clothes on from earlier in the night, the same dark leather jacket that looked worn down, but it gave him character. It made him look rough around the edges, but I could tell he had a soft heart.

"Thank you. What is it that you wanted to show me so badly that you threw rocks at my bedroom window? How did you know my address?" We began walking over to my shoes that were a few feet from one another.

He picked up one of the flats, "That is for you to shortly find out, and Francie gave it to me. I called her and asked her where you lived." I nodded my head, of course she gave him my address.

He grabbed my other flat, and we reached the sidewalk to which Slim got on one knee and patted his leg for me to put my foot on. I placed my white pedicured foot on his dark denim jeans, and he placed my flat onto my foot. He did the same to the other foot, and I placed my other foot on his leg, and he slipped my flat onto my foot gently.

I giggled, "Thank you." We began walking down the sidewalk.

"Where is your..."

"I parked it a street over, I didn't want to wake up your parents, plus I wanted to surprise you."

He was walking on my left and looked down at me as he spoke.

I made an "oh" with my mouth and nervously began playing with the soft rose petals that I was still holding.

It was quiet for a bit as we walked in the dark on the sidewalk. "Can you give me a hint?" I was very curious as to where he was bringing me, especially if he made the effort to call up Francie to ask for my address. And then to show up at my house, and then to park a couple streets over to not wake up my parents, or I.

He grinned, "let's just say we didn't spend enough time at the Starlite, and I want to make it up to you. I am not the type to get into fights anymore; it's something that I am trying to get out of and change. So, I was quite embarrassed that you had to witness that and we did not get to say goodbye to one another." I smiled at him and clutched the rose closer to my chest.

"You know that I am not afraid of you right? If anything, I feel very comfortable around you for some reason. You make me feel free and I have never experienced that before with someone." He looked down at me, smiling. He lightly placed his hand on my back and ushered me to cross the street.

We began to cross the street and enter the street over from mine. But I could not see a motorcycle in sight. Instead, we approached a black, convertible Gold Eagle. I only know this because my father has been eyeing one for the longest time, and won't stop talking about it to my mother and I.

Slim jogged over to the passenger side and opened the door for me, I smiled at him and got into the car. I noticed the seats were very nice leather and smelled very nice.

Slim walked around the car and got into his side. Adjusting the mirrors and eventually turning the car on.

"I didn't know you drove one of these." I spoke.

Slim pushed the piece of hair that dropped down from the front and slicked it back with a comb he had in his pocket. He looked over at me and placed his comb back into his pocket.

“I don’t want to lie to you, but let’s just say my good buddy let me borrow his very nice car. So, we need to be very gentle and return it back in top shape. But I wanted a car to drive in for tonight’s occasion instead of my bike. That thing can get uncomfortable sometimes.” He said as he put the car in drive.

He turned to look over at me, probably to see my reaction. But I just smiled, I was appreciative that he told me the truth and I didn’t care that he borrowed this very nice car. “I wouldn’t have minded the bike; in fact, I like the bike. It’s a thrilling feeling; I’ve never experienced that before.”

“Really? I would’ve thought you were on a bike before, only because you seem to know what you were doing when we went for a ride earlier.” He began driving down the street and took a left to leave the neighborhood.

“I might've just played it cool in front of you.” He turned his head to look at me and smiled, then quickly returned his eyes back on the road.

He turned the radio on, and “My Girl” by The Temptations was playing, although it was halfway through the song already. But Slim began singing along to the lyrics.

“I don’t need no money (ohh), fortune or fame. I’ve got all the riches, baby (ohh) one man can claim.” He was off key a bit, but he wasn’t too bad of a singer. I giggled and joined him.

“Well, I guess you’d say. What can make me feel this way? My girl, my girl, my girl.” I was a little off key myself, but he laughed and turned the radio down a little.

“Not bad, you can sing girl.” I laughed at that; I wasn’t the greatest singer but occasionally I would put a record on and sing a bit in my room.

“You’re not too bad yourself.” I poked his bicep. He looked down at my finger and looked back up at me, smiling so big.

We drove in silence for the rest of the ride. A couple more songs played through the radio, and Slim would hum occasionally to them. I began to recognize the area as Francie drove me here earlier today. I recognized the funky motel with the bright lights that was next to Starlite the drive-in movie theater. When he pulled into the Starlite drive in, I looked over to him confused.

He didn’t say anything and drove further into the property, stopping at the ticket stand. A worker stuck their head out from the ticket booth and asked what we would be watching.

“Two tickets for Sabriana, please.” He reached for his wallet in his pocket. And took out two dollars, handing it to the worker.

My mouth was left slightly open. “But Sabriana doesn’t come out for another couple of days.” I have wanted to see Sabrina with Audrey Hephron ever since I saw that it was coming out. How he knew that I had no idea.

I watched as he thanked the worker and drove over the light up screen. There were no cars in sight. Only us. Slim slowly drove the car to the middle of the lot and parked the car.

“Do you think we have the best spot?” He turned to me. I scoffed.

“You’re funny, how did you do all of this?!” I used my hands to exaggerate the word “this.”

“My good pal, his dad owns the drive in, and I asked if I could have it for the night. To make up for what happened earlier. I do have to work a few shifts here as I was the one who was in one of the fights, to pay them back. And a hefty tip but it’s worth it to me. Would you like any popcorn?” I scoffed again as I was taken aback completely by this.

“Sure.” The words had escaped me. I watched as he got out of the car and made his way to the outdoor concession stand and ordered popcorn. There was only one worker there. Besides us

there was only two other people here that I noticed, the ticket booth worker and the concession stand worker. We truly had this place to ourselves.

He paid the worker and began walking back with the popcorn in hand, popping a couple in his mouth. I turned back around in my seat and faced the screen and noticed the movie began to play. He passed me my cup of popcorn before getting back into the car. We were silent for the first few minutes of the movie; I was thoroughly enjoying my popcorn. I turned to Slim and noticed he was also very invested in the movie, eating his popcorn.

I placed my cup in my lap. "Slim?"

He turned to me, mouth full of popcorn, "Yes?" he mumbled.

I laughed, but let him finish eating before telling him, "Thank you, for this. All of this. You did not have to do this at all."

He placed his cup down too, "I wanted to, I did not want you to see that side of me tonight and I wanted to show you the true side of me. Especially when I like someone." His voice grew softer.

I began to start to talk, but he began talking again. "I really do like you Dorothy, will you go steady with me?" I was completely caught off guard. I was not expected to be asked out so

quickly, especially after meeting someone after one day. But this felt different, he made me feel free, and it was a feeling I hadn't felt before in a relationship. So, my answer did not catch me by surprise.

"Yes Slim, I will go steady with you." I smiled.

Slim then whooped in excitement, taking his cup of popcorn and throwing the rest of it in the air, going everywhere in the car. I laughed so hard, I began to cry.

He turned to the side, placing his right arm over my chair. His expression grew serious, and I slowly stopped laughing. "Dorothy?" Slim asked.

"Yes?" I answered.

"Can I kiss you?" I nodded my head, to which Slim leaned in, and took his left hand holding the side of my cheek and kissed me. I could taste the butter from the popcorn on his lips, but they were soft and gentle.

"I'm just really happy you're my sweetheart now." His smile was so big, filled with excitement and gentleness that I had completely disregarded what Kid said to me today. I like Slim, and he likes me and there's nothing that will come in between that.

Chapter 9: Olivia

I placed the letter down gently on the table. We had finished the first bundle of letters, and Nan was silent when I looked up at her. She had her eyes closed, and her head slightly leaned back. She took a deep sigh and opened her eyes.

“Is everything alright Nan?” I asked as I placed the letter back into the envelope.

“I remember that night with Richard like it was yesterday. He was so kind, and free spirited then.” Her voice was almost a whisper. She didn’t seem excited about this memory but rather sad.

“I constantly snuck out of my house late at night to go see him. It’s what made me so invested in our relationship. I had never felt that way before, especially not in a relationship. It changed my life in ways that I am grateful for, but things changed when he came back from the war.”

Nan said. She played with her marriage band on her finger.

“He seemed to bring out a side of you that has always been there but just needed an extra push. But what do you mean that things changed when he came back from the war?” I tied the ribbon carefully back into place and held the bundle of letters in my lap.

It was almost like Nan had a memory come back to her, as she sat in silence staring out in front of her. I tried to look where she was looking but there was nothing interesting going on, just other patients playing cards at one table, and a group of other patients sitting in rocking chairs or wheelchairs staring at the television that had Jeopardy on.

“Nan? Is there something-”

She cut me off and turned her head to me. “Don’t ask silly questions like that.” Her voice was sharp and I could tell I had hit a spot where I was not supposed to hit.

I nodded my head, “Of course, I’m sorry that was not my place to ask.” Nan continued eye contact with me as she turned her head back to the group watching Jeopardy. That indicated to me that she was done for the day. We didn’t have any more letters to read, and I figured this would be a good time for her to have a break from them.

“These were all the letters in this bundle. I’ll let you have some time with your friends here. I have to go home and do some things, but I will be back tomorrow. Does that work?” I placed the letters under my armpit and took the diary from where it was sitting.

Nan was still staring at the group, and I didn’t say anything else as I didn’t want to continue to upset her. I slowly got up and gathered everything, taking my keys out of my pocket.

“Leave the notebook.” Her voice was softer. There was a shift and she no longer seemed upset. I looked at her and noticed she was staring at the diary that I was holding. I nodded my head and placed it on the table in front of her. She smiled and traced her fingers along the leather binding.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Nan.” I touched her shoulder and turned to walk away. She didn’t say anything else and I watched as she opened the diary and began flipping through the pages. She wanted her moment with the diary, and I was going to give it to her.

I had driven back to Nan’s house and decided to use my time wisely and start looking at the things in her home to sell. I had pulled into the driveway and was very surprised to see my mom’s Nissan parked in front of the house. I was delighted to see that she was here and stuck to her word.

I left the letters in my car and made my way inside the house. When I entered the foyer, the stairs immediately caught my attention again. They were still bare, no rug runner, just sanded down wooden stairs stared back at me. The sounds of footsteps caught my attention, and my mom turned the corner from the larger living room that was on the left side of the house. She was holding an iPad, and had her phone pressed to her cheek as she was talking to someone.

She raised her pointer finger to me to signal she'd be done soon and I began walking around the house.

I noticed there were unfolded moving boxes and large amounts of bubble wrap that laid in the main living room. This room was my favorite as there was so much interesting artwork and artifacts that our family members collected throughout generations. There were multiple taxidermy animals that were hung on the walls, from a large Moose that hung above the doorway to the kitchen, to multiple deer, and even a bear covered one entire wall. There was this large bookcase that sat up against the same wall as the taxidermy animals that held beautiful artifacts from different countries. Someone in our family was smart enough to label each artifact, where it was from, and its purpose. There were multiple different kinds of pottery that were from ancient Egypt. Most pieces were broken for most of the pottery, but there was one vase that had these incredible carvings of multiple horses around the vase.

“Olivia?” My mom walked into the room I was in and turned from the glass bookcase and faced her.

“You’re here.” I smiled at her. I knew this was difficult for her to do, but I knew this was one of the first steps for her to come to terms with us selling the house and then eventually seeing Nan in the rehabilitation center.

She smiled back at me and looked around the room. "God, I hate this room." She started laughing, and I joined in with her.

"Come on, I've organized each room to pack." We began walking to the family parlor room.

"The movers will be here soon; we are going to start with the family parlor room as it is just mostly furniture. I have someone coming to look at the art, and artifacts from the auction house to see what we can sell. The larger pieces will be sold to the local museum." I watched as she typed on her iPad. I haven't seen her in her element in a long time. She did a lot of event planning for schools, and sometimes weddings. She hadn't worked in a bit since Nan's accident, but I could tell this was helping her get back into her element.

"Can I take one of the paintings? The smaller ones?" I always admired one of the paintings that hung on the wall on the second floor. It was a beautiful painting of flowers and landscape. I always went to admire it whenever we came over to visit Nan.

My mom looked up from her iPad, "We'll see what the auctioneer says." I didn't fight with her on that as I knew it would end up being a losing battle, but once the auctioneer comes, I'll work my magic with them.

I asked her what she'd like me to pack in the meantime, and she told me to start in the kitchen first with the plates, and other utensils as she changed her mind on starting in the family parlor room.

It had been a good hour of bubble wrapping so many plates, bowls, and teacup sets that all looked the same that it was starting to drive me insane. I sat in the small breakfast nook of the kitchen, and had four large boxes full of bubble wrapped plates, bowls and teacup sets. I managed my way out of the bubble wrap infested table and went outside to sit on the porch to get some fresh air and scroll on my phone for a while.

I hadn't really been on my phone that much this week, and I wanted to check up on Will as he hasn't heard much of me this week. There were movers in the house at this point, they had removed a good majority of the furniture and were still placing it into their large truck.

I walked around the boxes, and the furniture sprawled everywhere in the foyer and walked over one box to get outside to the porch. It was a beautiful day out, and it was very sunny which was nice as it had been raining the last couple of days.

I walked over to the porch swing and plopped down on it. The cushions were quite old and smelled of mildew, but I didn't mind. I needed to be outside. I opened my phone and began

checking all my notifications. I had taken time off work to be here for my family so I didn't bother checking much of my work emails as I could do that when I got back.

There was one notification that caught my eye, it was from Instagram. It was a direct message from a name I was not familiar with. I clicked on the notification and a selfie of a girl's profile picture popped up; I hadn't recognized her. The direct message she sent was quite long. I began reading the message.

Hello, you don't know me, but I wanted to message you on here as this was the only form of communication I have with you. It hurts me to send you this message, but I would want someone to send one to me. This past weekend, I had met your finance William at a bar, and we talked for quite a while. He gave no indication that he had a finance or was in any form of relationship. He came over to my house that night and we-

I stopped reading the message as I knew where this would lead to. I couldn't finish reading it, I knew what she was about to tell me. My chest got so tight that I couldn't breathe, I tried to inhale air, but my lungs wouldn't me. Tears began to cover my vision, and I tried to gasp for air. I threw my phone out of my hand as I no longer wanted to look at it, and I started yelling for my mom.

"Mom, Mom!" I managed to screech. I put my hand to my chest and leaned back trying to put air back into my lungs.

My mom came running out of the house and ran over to me, “What? What? Olivia, breathe!” She sat beside me, holding me. She took my shoulders and began breathing deep breaths to which I began doing as well. It helped; I finally felt air enter my lungs again.

“What is it?” She searched my eyes and wiped the tears underneath them with her thumb.

“William is cheating on me.” I began sobbing again as it did not feel real to say that out loud. My mom pulled me into a hug and let me sob into her shoulder. She caressed my hair and rubbed my back.

“Let it out, just let it out.” She whispered into my ear. And we sat like that until I was ready to let go.

I slept over at Nan’s house in the room that I had designated as my room when I was younger. I loved the floral wallpaper; it was a dark green with beautiful lilies that covered the entire wall. I felt safe here. I hadn’t moved from this bed since my mom put me in it last night. She told the movers to leave, and to come back tomorrow, and we sat in the family’s parlor room with the one couch left and opened one of Nan’s very expensive and old wines.

Let's just say I drunkenly poured my heart out to my mom, and I don't remember much of it. I might have told her about the letters, but I wasn't entirely sure. My head began to pound as I tried to remember if I told her about the letters or not. I groaned and put pressure in the middle of my forehead using my thumb.

There was a light knock at the door, and it opened. My mom's head poked in, and she carried in a hot cup of tea to my nightstand.

"Hungover?" She chuckled as she saw the state I was in. I groaned and nodded my head.

She sat down on the bed and pushed her long brown hair out of her face, "Me too."

I leaned over to the nightstand and picked up the tea and sipped it slowly. The tea tasted good as the reminiscence of white wine was still bitter on my tongue.

We were silent for a little bit until she spoke, "you mentioned these secret letters that Nan wrote when she was younger and was in another marriage when you were drunk. Is this true?"

I winced as the hot tea spilled onto my chest. I did tell her then. I can't lie to her about it now.

"It is true." I placed the cup of tea back onto the nightstand and faced my mom.

“Where were these letters?” She turned to me.

I pointed upwards, “in the attic. I found them when I was cleaning it out last week.” She nodded her head.

“And does your grandmother know that you found them?” I sink lower into the bed. For some reason I felt bad that I didn’t tell her about these letters as this is her mother, but it also wasn’t my place to go tell anyone else but Nan.

“Yes, she does. I have been visiting her, and I have been reading them to her.” She deserves to know the truth too.

She scrunched her eyebrows, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

I looked away from her. “I felt like it wasn’t my place to let anyone else know but Nan. That was a whole other life she lived, and she wanted to keep it a secret and I was willing to keep it a secret for her.”

“Did she ask you to do this?”

I shook my head, “No, I choose to.”

She looked away and then looked back at me. "May I see where these letters are?"

I reached over and grabbed the cup of tea again, taking a small sip. The steam rose from the cup and the warmth hit my nose along with the smell of honey.

"Yes, under one condition. You don't read them. Nan made me promise to read each individual letter with her and I intend on keeping that promise." I sipped the cup of tea one more time.

"Alright, that is a fair condition." She nodded her head.

"I'm sure you can come with me today to go visit her and hear me read the letter." I took another sip.

"Oh, well do you think she'd let me sit in and listen?"

I nodded my head, "We can ask her when you get there."

She smiled at me and patted my leg that was still under the covers. "Let's get you up and get ready for the day then. We got to go see Nan."

I smiled back at her and slowly made my way out of bed.

I parked the car outside of the rehabilitation center and looked over to my mom. She was already staring at the building, fiddling with the ring on her finger.

She turned to look at me, “What if she doesn’t want me here, what if she-”

I stopped her, “She wants you here I promise. She’s been asking about you.” I placed my hand on her nervous hand. She smiled and nodded her head.

I managed to grab another bundle of letters before we left. My mom was busy showering, and I didn’t exactly want her to see where the letters were until she sat with Nan and heard them for the first time. I made sure the dates lined up correctly, so we knew which ones to read next when I grabbed them from the old dresser.

We got out of the car and made our way into the rehabilitation center, it still smelled like fresh lemons, a comforting smell to me now. I signed both my mom and I in. I ushered her to the conservatory where Nan sat every day. I pushed the glass French doors open, and spotted Nan yet again at the same table as yesterday, except she was alone today. She was reading the diary

I had left her yesterday and did not look up when we walked in which I could tell that she was very invested in what she was reading.

I walked down the stairs and walked over to Nan. I gently put my hand on her shoulder, so she knew that I was there.

“Good morning, Nan, I have a visitor for you.” She looked up from the diary and smiled up at me. I moved out of the way so she could see my mom. I watched as my mom moved towards her, reaching out to her.

Nan smiled at her, “Oh Heather.” Nan opened her arms for my mom.

My mom sobbed and kneeled so she could hug Nan. They embraced for quite a while, my mom pulled away so she could kiss Nan and then went back to hugging her. She whispered some things into Nan’s ear, but I couldn’t hear. I watched as Nan nodded her head and small tears rolled down her wrinkled cheeks. My mom kissed her cheek one more time and got up.

“Sit, sit.” Nan ushered us. We sat on either side of her. I placed the bundle of letters in front of her.

“These are the new bundle of letters we have not read yet. But I wanted to ask if mom could sit in with us and listen, is that okay with you?” I watched as she lifted the bundle of letters and slowly nodded her head.

“It’s time for you to hear this story, Heather.” She turned to my mom and placed her hand on my mom’s. Tears formed in my mom’s eyes again; she nodded her head.

‘I would be honored to sit here and hear your story.’ Her voice cracked, and she took her other hand and placed it on top of Nan’s.

Nan turned to me and pushed the bundle of letters towards my direction. “Please start Olivia.” I nodded my head and slowly removed the ribbon and carefully searched through each letter to find the correct date of where we left off.

I carefully opened the envelope and unfolded the letter. I looked to my mom and then to Nan who were patiently waiting for me. I smiled at both as in this moment it had felt like a healing moment between the three of us. Mom looked like a part of her was whole again from the large smile that was casted on her face. And the peaceful look Nan carried on her face something I have not seen in a very long time from the both of them.

“Are we ready?” I asked, they both looked at one another and then back to me, nodding their heads.

Chapter 10: Dorothy

The curler that was attached to my hair gave me a hard time as I tried to gently roll it out, but it wouldn't budge. The rest of my hair was down, all in perfect bouncy curls. I wanted to look put together today as the girls and I planned on shopping today. It was a Saturday morning, and we hadn't had a shopping day in quite a while, all our schedules have been busy since we all started going steady with Slim's group.

"Ow!" I pulled the last roller a little harder and it began to rip certain parts of my hair out. I finally was able to pull the roller out and twist my hair along my ring finger to create a curl. I took my wooden comb and lightly combed out my hair and sprayed it with hairspray to ensure it wouldn't move the rest of the day.

I got up from my vanity and made my way over the pink dress my mother had gotten me that I wore with Slim a couple of weeks back. I brush my hand along the soft material, and the memories of that night came flooding back. I couldn't help but smile when thinking about that night, we watched the rest of Sabriana, my new favorite movie now. He drove me home and kissed me so many times my lips were numb by the time I climbed back into my room.

I took the dress off the hanger and slipped it on. I checked what the dress looked like in my vanity mirror and was pleased with the color on me. I grabbed my smaller heels and sat on my bed trying to buckle the heels onto my ankle.

I heard the horn from Francie's car signaling she was outside my house. I quickly buckled the last heel and grabbed my purse and sunglasses that laid on my bed. And I walked down the hall and down the stairs. I noticed my dad was sitting in his reading chair, drinking a hot coffee and reading the day's newsletter.

"Hi daddy." I walked over and kissed his cheek. He gave me a half kiss back as he was invested in the newsletter.

"Bye daddy!" I began walking out of the door, and before I could fully open the screen door his voice boomed through the living room stopping me in my tracks.

"Where are you going?" I closed one eye, and turned around, still holding the door slightly ajar. I could feel the heat from the sun that beamed through the screen door kiss my arms and the side of my face.

"The girls and I are going to see the new August line for dresses at Macy's. I should be back before dinner." I replied to half quickly as I didn't want Francie to keep waiting for me any longer.

I watched as he flipped the next page over in his newsletter, taking a moment to respond back to me. "Very nice, tell that girl Francesa to lower her music down please." I rolled my eyes; the

music was not that loud although I could hear it from where I stood. I could tell it was Nancy Sinatra.

“Yes, daddy. See you at dinner!” I shut the door before I could hear a response back from him. I excitedly ran over to Francie’s pink Metro and opened the passenger door. Francie lowered the music as I entered the car. I noticed Cheryl and Sadie weren’t in the car, “Where’s Cheryl and Sadie?” I shut my door and faced Francie.

“They’re going to meet us there, Cheryl said she was running behind and that Sadie would pick her up in her father’s car.” Francie put the car in drive and looked over her left shoulder before driving.

We began driving out of my neighborhood, listening to the radio, I broke the silence. “So how are you and Bobby?” I watched as her dirty blonde hair blew on the side of her face. She lifted her gloved hand and pushed away from her light red lipstick covered lips. She drove with these sheer white gloves that matched her outfit. She always had different colored gloves that would go with each outfit every day. But today she wore a mint green dress, with a white collar and a few small white buttons at the chest.

She put her hand back on the steering wheel, “Oh just wonderful, I want him to meet my parents soon. It just feels right with him, you know?” She turned over to look at me, she wore

these black cat-eye sunglasses, but they were lowered just enough on her freckled nose to where I could see her blue eyes peeking out.

I smiled at her; she looked so beautiful here. “Bobby is a lucky guy, Fran. You seem so happy with him.” I watched as her smile grew bigger, and she nodded her head. She began telling me about the most recent dates they went on, the first kiss they shared and how he asked to go out with her. I hadn’t seen her this happy ever with a guy, and it made me happy to know that she was happy.

“I feel like the luckiest girl, Dottie. Oh! Tell me about Slim! How is that going?” Francie knew about our drive-in movie date as she called me that morning and made me tell her about it. She knew what Slim was up to as he was the one who called her to get my address.

I smiled as I began to reminisce on the time I had spent with Slim in the last couple of weeks. We had gone on a few dates, but mostly he would drive me around late at night as we found that to be one of the most favorite times to spend with one another.

“He’s been great, we’ve gone on a couple more dates and he makes me incredibly happy.” I smiled at Fran. She quickly glanced over from the road to look at me and squealed in excitement.

“Oh Dot, I am so happy for you. We need to have a double date soon! I think the boys would like that, don't you think?” I nodded in agreement with Fran.

“I think that is a great idea.” I smiled and faced the road. The mall was only twenty minutes from my house. We drove through the back roads as it was quicker to get there.

“Isn't this your grandmother's house?” Francie was at a stop sign and began driving through once it was clear to do so.

She pulled up to my grandmother's house. It was quite large and had very old architecture from the outside and the inside. The porch always caught my attention, as it was a wraparound porch, so it was quite large. And had these intricate spindles, and banners, almost like a gingerbread house. But the staircase inside the home was my favorite, there was this Persian rug runner that was so beautiful and stood out from the rest of the artwork and furniture in the house.

“Have you visited her recently? Your grandmother?” I turned to Francie and noticed she was in awe staring up at the home. She parked the car just outside the house so she could look at it. She didn't make eye contact with me, so I turned my head and looked at the beautiful home again.

“No, but when I get home, I am going to call her and ask her if I can come over for some tea.”

My grandmother lives with her sister in that home. My grandfather had passed away a year ago, and her sister moved in just shortly after his passing so she wouldn't live alone. Her sister is only a couple years younger than her, and from the past visits I could tell it was helpful having her around as it gave her company and her sister got her to do things that she stopped doing after the passing. Such as cooking, and painting.

“I think that’s a good idea.” I turned back to Fran and she smiled at me.

“Let’s go.” Fran nodded her head, and put the car in drive, slowly pulling away from the beautiful home.

“Do you think you’ll live there one day?” Fran asked, keeping her eyes on the road.

“I would like to think so, yes. Everyone in my family has eventually lived there. If my sister doesn't, then most likely me.” The house was passed down generation after generation as my mom’s side of the family had built that home and settled here. Ironically all the girls have taken over the house and have taken care of it. My mother wanted to move in after the passing of my grandfather, that way she will have more access to take care of her, but my grandmother refused. She wanted independence still, and so my mother visits her multiple days throughout the week. But I am sure eventually I will be moving into that home.

We drove in silence until we got to the mall. We parked outside of Macy's and headed into the store, Cherly and Sadie were running ten minutes late, but we would meet them by the dress section. In the meantime, Francie and I were looking at shoes. Nothing had caught my eye, but Francie was looking at these red heels with a little bow on them. She found her size and began trying them on. She walked up and down the long aisle of shoes.

"What do you think?" She stopped before me with her hands on her hips. She looked just about amazing in anything she put on, and of course I was going to tell her to get the shoes.

"I love them, get them." She excitedly jumped in her heels and went to go get the box.

I walked up further down the aisle, looking at each shoe but still nothing was catching my eye. They were all quite ugly in all honesty, and all looked the same but with different colors. I picked up one that had multiple straps and it seemed like it would be too hard to put on and off every day.

"Is there anything I can help you with?" A voice spoke from behind me; I still had the heel in my hand when I turned around. But I was caught off guard as to who the voice belonged to that I had dropped the heel.

"Kid?" I was not expecting to see Kid, one of Slim's guys, to be working here.

We both bent down to grab the heel, our hands bumped into one another as we both reached for the shoe. He grabbed it before I did and quickly stood up. I slowly stood up and stared at him; I was just about the same height as him in my heels. His hair was slick back. He wore glasses this time, as he didn't the first time I met him. He wore a very nice suit, and shoes. His name tag read *Earl*.

"You work here? In the women's shoe department?" I spoke softly.

He fiddled with the heel, before walking around me to place it back where it was before. He turned to me, "I do, I like... shoes."

I was a little caught off guard by this, both of my brows raised in surprise. I could tell he was avoiding eye contact with me, but I shrugged my shoulders. "So do I, I love shoes." His eyes darted to mine immediately and lightly smiled.

I looked around for Francie and saw her talking to another worker holding another pair of shoes. I turned back to Kid, "is there any pair of shoes that are different from all these ones? I find them quite bland."

His smile grew bigger, "I know just the one, but we have to go to the back." He began walking away from me, when he noticed I wasn't following he turned around to me and motioned his

hand to follow him. I turned around to see Francie still busy with the worker, so I quickly walked to catch up to him.

We walked through the entire shoe department, all the way to the back of the section and to a door that read, *Employees Only*.

Kid opened the door, holding it for me. I raised my brow but didn't question it as it felt thrilling to go somewhere I wasn't supposed to go. I was cautious as I didn't trust him just yet, so I gave us some space. We walked into a room that looked like a warehouse. There were aisles and aisles of large shelves that went up the ceiling with boxes and multiple boxes were stacked on top of one another.

I stopped in my tracks and looked up, "Are these all shoes?"

Kid chuckled, "It's not all shoes, but a good majority of them are, now come on."

He continued walking, and we stopped at one of the aisles and Kid stopped at one of the large boxes that was slightly open. Kid opened the fold of the box and reached inside, pulling out a black shoe box, he took the cover off and took out a heel that was wrapped in plastic. Placing the box down, he unwrapped the plastic and held out a beautiful heel. Something that I had not seen before. It was a black two-inch heel, with rhinestones that covered the back of the heel. A

thin strap with a buckle, it looked like suede leather and had a small bow near the toes covered with the same rhinestones.

“It’s called ‘The Golden Touch’ and comes in sizes four to nine. It won't go on the floor for another month.” He held out for me to hold. I carefully took it from his hands and inspected it closer.

“This is a sexy shoe.” I pointed to the heel, and Kid chuckled.

“Take it.” I looked up at him.

“No, I couldn’t possibly-”

“Please, as a peace offering. I am sorry for the other night at Starlite. That was not my place, and I would like to be friends.” Kid pushed his glasses closer to his eyes; he avoided eye contact with me as much as possible. I could tell he was nervous.

I reached out and squeezed his shoulder, “Friends then, but just know that just because you gave me this shoe, that is probably very expensive, doesn’t mean that I choose to be friends with you over a materialistic object offering. Slim has said very nice things about you, and from our interaction today you have shown me this side that I think I was always supposed to see.”

The corner of Kid's mouth curled into a smile, and he took my hand from his shoulder and squeezed my gloved hand.

"Not to interrupt this moment of new profound friendship, but this isn't my shoe size." Kid burst into laughter, and I joined in with him.

"My deepest apologies, what is your shoe size?" I gave him my shoe size, and he went back into the large box, finishing out my size. He put the other heel I held originally back into its box and placed it into the larger box.

"Would you grab lunch with me?" Kid asked as he folded the lid of the large box. "I have my break now, and we can go to one of the lunch counters and grab something to eat? I will meet you outside of the entrance of Macy's, the one that connects to the mall?"

"That would be great, let me go find Francie since I came to the mall with her and let her know." Kid handed me the correct shoe size and nodded his head.

Kid showed me out, and we walked back onto the shoe floor. I could see Francie at the registers checking out a couple of shoes.

I turned to Kid, "Francie is checking out her shoes, I'll be right back."

I walked over to the register, gently touching the back of Francie to signal I was behind her. She turned around unsure of who touched her and smiled when she realized it was me.

“I have someone who wants to grab lunch with me, is it alright if I meet you and the girls in an hour?” The worker handed Francie her change.

“Oh, not a problem, would you like to meet back here in the dress section?” Francie grabbed the bag that held her new shoes and we began walking away from the register.

I glanced down at my wristwatch and noticed it was 11:07 a.m. “Yes, that works perfectly. I will see you, let's see at 12:07?” I glanced up to Francie and she nodded her head.

“I believe the girls should be here by now but go have lunch and I will see you in an hour.” I smiled at Francie and we went our separate ways. I began walking out of Macy's as it was attached to the new mall that was built just last summer. I haven't explored much of it as there weren't many stores.

Kid was waiting at the entrance like he said he would, and we began walking together to the lunch counter that wasn't too far of a walk.

We entered and sat at two empty barstools all the way at the end. It was just one long counter, with dozens of barstools. It was starting to get busy, so we were lucky to find two empty stools

next to one another. Kid handed me a menu, and I read it over as multiple waitresses began walking up and down the counter. Nothing caught my eye, so I decided to settle on just a vanilla milkshake.

“What made you want to get lunch with me?” I placed the large menu back down onto the counter.

Kid slowly placed his menu down and eventually took his eyes off it. “This is quite strange, but there’s a part of me that can tell you just to understand people well. I like to think that I am quite a strange person myself and quite misunderstood.” Kid’s voice trembled a bit when he spoke and I could tell this was something sensitive for him to say out loud.

“I’m glad you think that I understand people well. I like to think I do, our first interaction I could tell you was more to yourself and didn’t interact with much of the group at Starlite. But what do you mean by being misunderstood? If you don’t mind me asking?” I watched as Kid put up a hand to signal, he was ready to order to the waitress that was next to us. He put in his food order, and I told her I only wanted a vanilla shake.

“That night at Starlite, I knew you liked Slim by the way you two interacted but I couldn’t help notice the way you look at Francesca.” Kid looked at me, keeping eye contact with me which he hadn’t done before so I knew he was being serious.

I was taken aback by his assumption; did I really look at Francie a certain way? What does that mean?

“I- I’m not entirely sure by what you mean, what do you exactly mean by that?” My hands became quite clammy as I was nervous for what he was about to tell me. Is there something that I am missing about myself?

The waitress handed me my milkshake; I placed the straw she handed me into the cup and looked to Kid to explain.

“I mean in the sense that you like her or admire her. That you have a crush on her.” He whispered to me. I stopped sipping my milkshake and began coughing it up.

“What?!” I exclaimed. I held my hand under my chin to keep the liquid from falling onto my new pink dress.

The entire lunch counter went silent. But I just stared at Kid as his assumption was quite crazy. Me liking Francesa? Do I like her? Do I like girls?

Kid’s eyes darted from mine to the line of people behind us. He laughed awkwardly and scratched the side of his head. “We’re all good!” He shouted so people could stop staring at us, but that wasn’t exactly my concern right now.

“It’s fine if you don’t. I don’t mean to assume anything, but the way you look at her, there’s a different gleam in your eye. And I noticed it a lot that night. I don’t find anything wrong with you liking girls.” He held his voice low and quiet as he spoke. I could tell he didn’t want anyone around us to hear.

I paused for a bit so I could collect my thoughts and take a sip of my milkshake. I hadn’t had anyone ask me this kind of question before or notice anything in that nature. I did find Francesca beautiful and there were moments where I would admire her beauty, especially when we drove around town. The wind would push her hair out of her face and that would be the time that I would truly see her full face. So I guess in a way I would admire her beauty, but I wasn’t exactly sure that I liked her as a crush. We have been best friends since third grade, and I saw her as a sister more than anything.

The waitress dropped Kid’s food, it was a Reuben sandwich on rye. He picked up the first slice and began eating it. I took another sip of my milkshake and a thought dawned on me.

“What else made you think that I could potentially like girls?” I kept my voice low just like he did and watched as he placed his sandwich down and wiped his mouth with a napkin.

“Do you promise to not tell anyone this?” He looked so intently into my eyes that I had to look away.

I looked back to him; I could tell this was something serious as he did not break eye contact with me. "I promise." I placed my gloved hand on his hand that was resting on the counter.

He fixed his jacket and cleared his throat. "When I came up to you at the shoe department not too long ago, I wasn't quite sure how exactly to approach you on this subject. But when you didn't make a comment or judge me for liking shoes, more specifically women's shoes, and we had that interaction in the back room. I felt comfortable around you, I felt like you understood me, and you sort of gave me this feeling of praise, something I haven't felt with another female besides my mother." I rubbed the outside of Kids hand with my thumb to reassure him, I wasn't quite sure what he was going to tell me, but I knew no matter what it was he found comfort in telling me and I was going to be there for him.

"I'm rambling, but the reason I asked you about Francesca is because I, myself, like men." His voice was so low that I was surprised I heard him. He stared at me, watching my reaction but I didn't give him much of one as I was not affected by what he told me.

The silence must have been eating him alive as he quickly began talking, "You must think that I'm some mental hazard or some immoral creature that crawled up from hell to-

I cut him off. "I don't think any of those things about you, I think you are a person who just prefers men and I don't think there's anything wrong with that. If that's what you like then that is what you like." Kid raised his head up and smiled.

"Truly? That is what you think?" His voice was filled with excitement that was eager to come out but I could tell he didn't want to disappoint himself if I were to take back what I said.

"Truly I do. I don't have an issue with you being carefree." I squeezed his hand and nodded my head. Kid squeezed my hand in return and smiled. I could tell his eyes became glossy, but he didn't let any tears drop. I was glad that I could be comforting enough for him to confide in me like that, I had no idea that this was a secret of his as he hid it quite well.

For the remaining fifteen minutes we talked about the moment he knew he was different. And how it had changed the perspective for so many things in his life. He told me that he knew when he was young that he enjoyed dressing up in his mother's clothes and heels, eventually trying on her makeup in the late hours of the night and finally feeling like himself. Although his father caught him wearing his mother's lipstick one morning and beat him so bad that he never touched makeup again. He hid all traces of femininity from his father, but his mother was kind to him about it and often encouraged it. She was the one who encouraged him to get the shoe job at Macy's as many men worked as salespersons in the shoe department.

I asked him if he had any relationships with men, but he only had one crush on a boy and quickly fell in love with this boy in grade school that he sat next to everyday but never truly told him his feelings. That boy would move away the next year as his parents found a job across the country and Kid never saw him again, he often thinks of him but never truly moved on.

He went on to explain the reason why he was friends with Slim's group is to fit in and make him seem as normal as possible. He figured joining a group that was known for being highly masculine and delinquents would hide his feminine side and he knew his father would rather have him be a greaser than a man who was gay.

Kid paid for our lunch, and we began walking back to Macy's. I noticed a store that had all sorts of televisions and radios stacked on one another in front of the store's large window. Each television was playing the same channel, News 55. I walked up to the television and Kid stood beside me, we stood there in silence and watched as the very pretty newscaster talked about a treaty regarding North and South Vietnam, showing pictures of the country's current state.

"This is awful." I whispered, I knew that America was allied with South Vietnam and that we would soon involve ourselves in war.

"They already sent out drafts not too long ago; it just depends on your birthday if you get one. I think Slim got one in the mail yesterday. It was greeted by the President."

Kid's voice got quiet as he continued to talk, and the sound from the televisions were no longer there as my heart began to beat so fast that it was all I could hear.