

FOUR

HER PARENTS PARKED the car in the visitor lot at the college. Already in New England, the leaves hinted at autumn, and though it had stopped raining, the air was chilly. Joanna's dorm room was on the third floor of a large, half-timbered Tudor-style building, luckily not in the newer, slipshod housing thrown up last year in anticipation of a larger student body. Luckier still was the fact she'd been assigned one of the two singles on the corridor.

"Nice room; what could be better?" her father commented as he sank onto the unmade bed after helping carry up her trunk. He cradled his unlit pipe in his hand and Joanna knew he was itching to get outside for a smoke.

"Yeah, looks like I got lucky with a single."

"Well, take advantage and study hard," her mother said, standing at the window and looking out at the activity of arriving students in the courtyard below. "If I could turn back the clock, I'd wish this on myself."

"My advice, keep focused, take this Lucien fellow with a grain of salt, and stay away from the anti-war weirdos," her father said with a broad smile. "Then nothing can stop you."

"I'll keep that in mind," Joanna replied, standing by the door. She wanted, and didn't want, them to leave and softened her tone. "I'll get a letter off to you this week so it's there when you get home. Sorry I was in a bad mood in the car. I guess I was just on edge about getting here and everything."

"Of course you were, dear. And I know you'll put this young man out of your thoughts and enjoy yourself here. I can't help but envy you." Her mother hugged her tightly, and her father followed suit.

"I'll miss my Joey. Can't wait to read your letters." With that, he clamped his pipe between his teeth and escorted her mother out the door.

Alone, Joanna watched from her window as they crossed the courtyard to the parking lot — hand in hand, she noted with surprise; they'd rarely shown much affection for one another in front of her or Louise. She followed the black Mercury with her eyes as it inched out to the main drive and disappeared. She gazed out the window for a long time, watching other students with their parents, then slowly began to unpack and put away her belongings.

Her room was small and narrow with a single bed, dresser, bookcase, and desk, all made of heavy, dark wood. She set up her two lamps and record player, arranged books she'd brought from home and taped a couple of posters on the wall. Fishing around in her purse, she found the small pewter picture frame with Lucien's picture and placed it on the desk.

She'd left her door open, and the corridor buzzed with girls and their families searching for their rooms and meeting their roommates. She saw two girls across the hall laughing as they unpacked and thought with apprehension of all the new people she'd meet in the next few days. As unobtrusively as possible, she closed the door and lay down on her bed to think.

For better or worse, she had to admit her parents were right — she was foolish to have fallen for an itinerant musician, foreign at that, when she had been so excited about college. All summer she'd counted the days, and now the day had arrived, and she felt limp and depleted of joy. All she could think about was Lucien. Long gone, he'd probably reached the California coast by now. She'd given him the school's address to write to, but she knew nothing would have arrived yet.

The last few days at home after Lucien's departure had been trying. Her father surmised that Lucien had been the mystery guest in the car at the beach, and her parents needled her about it. Joanna, on edge and lovesick, eventually admitted she had a crush on him. Her mother wanted details and had been especially insistent, first interrogating then cajoling. One morning as Joanna sat at the kitchen table finishing her cereal, her mother sat down beside her and took her hand in both of hers, massaging it tenderly.

"Joey, I understand how you feel about this boy, don't think I don't. When I was your age, I fell head over heels too, for someone who came to our farm for work. I'd watch him from my bedroom

window while he worked in the field next to the other hired hands. When it was time to bring them water, I made sure I was out by the spigot filling the bucket before anyone else could. When work was done for the day, he and I sat on haystacks in the barn and talked.” Her mother gazed out the window toward the garden as if searching for her girlhood home in her mind’s eye. “My mother’s eyes were sharp as a hawk’s, though, and she suspected those little meetings might lead to something more. ‘He’s not good enough for you, Bea. I’m going to send him on,’ she said. I was devastated, but I knew my mother was right. It’s just the way it was.” She patted Joanna’s hand. “First passions don’t last long, dear; you’ll get over this boy soon enough.” She rose from the chair and started to clear away the breakfast dishes.

“Why don’t you understand better how I feel, then?” Joanna asked.

“Because it was a long time ago and people change.”

Joanna puzzled over her mother’s enigmatic reactions to her longings, first derisive then empathetic. She had always been that way, with both her and Louise. It was the one true source of Joanna’s distrust of her. Her father, for his part, had laughed off her infatuation.

“Boo hoo, he’ll be out of your thoughts before the second day of school.”

There was a knock on her door. Joanna leaped up and smoothed her hair. She forced her face into a pleasant expression and opened the door. One of the girls from across the hall stood outside.

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