

Liberty University

Divine Threads: Unraveling Testimony, Character Development,
and Christianity in Fantasy Narratives

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To all those who supported me along the way,

Thank you, it did not go unnoticed.

Acknowledgements

Flash Through Time has been a journey that first began back in 2021. Born out of the demands to stay home and not travel to Italy for my creative writing class I instead had to travel through the written word. This story has seen many versions and while I'm sure there are more versions to come, I truly love what I have created thus far. I first have to thank The Lord for giving me the words to write the story He wanted written. There's been surprises along the way and I know they came from Him. I want to thank all my creative writing professors at Liberty University, especially Dr. Latta for his role in guiding me through the thesis process. I also must thank my classmate, Jaclyn Weist, for her guidance throughout the thesis process as well. You're a lifesaver! Finally, none of this would be possible without the support of my family. Thank you to the ones who truly care, support me, and encouraged me to keep going when I didn't know what to write. I appreciate it more than you know.

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Artist Statement

Inspiration and Background for *Flash Through Time*

It was not until the fifth grade that I found joy and magic in reading. Before I entered this pivotal grade, I loathed reading. I was not good at the activity and detested practicing although I was supposed to every night. During my time in fifth and sixth grade I had the same teacher, Mrs. Bibby, who required her students to select a book to read each month and then either write a report about the book or create a book report diorama, my personal favorite. I mention this brief bit of my history as it was during these two years that I learned reading was not an activity to loathe but to love. As I grew up my love for reading flourished and eventually the seedling for literature Mrs. Bibby planted blossomed into not only a love for reading but also writing. I do not remember exactly how old I was, somewhere between twelve and fifteen when I realized I wanted to be a published author. This realization terrified me and sometimes still does.

Fast forward to my junior year of undergraduate education at Pacific University when I hesitantly enrolled in a creative writing course that was hopefully going to travel to Italy at the end of the school year. I used the word *hopefully* because, during my sophomore year at Pacific, I completed a travel writing in Spain course except we did not get to travel to Spain as the course was being held spring of 2020. Needless to say, the Spain travel writing course was a unique experience. Although I was disappointed and a little gun-shy about my lack of travel to Spain, I was still hopeful about the opportunity and likelihood of traveling to Italy. I was hearing from my professors and fellow students, those who were a part of the Student Senate, that study abroad courses were going to start up again this spring semester. Everyone was saying to sign up for the course, that they were certain I would get to travel to Italy that May. Through a great deal of prayer, a pro and con list, and getting more information from the professor who would be

teaching the course I enrolled. It has always been a dream of mine to visit Italy and during this time of my life, I had never visited another country outside North America.

Before I knew it, it was January 28, 2021, and I was looking for a seat in the classroom. Returning to in-person classes at the beginning of the school year was another reason I remained hopeful that the promise of travel would come true. Professor Kathlene Postma greeted the class, there were eleven students, and I instantly liked her as a professor as she reminded me of a family friend. Postma radiated joy and excitement not only about writing but about Italy and the anticipation of all of us venturing across the pond. She had visited Italy several times prior and was exuberant about sharing that part of the world with us. However, Kathlene, who preferred we call her by her first name, was very transparent about the ever-changing travel situation. When the course first began, Kathlene told us that the university was leaning towards allowing us to travel, but it was all contingent on what our federal government and the Italian government allowed. As I am sure you have realized by now based on the timeline I did not get to travel to Italy with this course. This decision was not finalized until about a month before we were supposed to depart when another variant of the virus emerged. Thankfully, the university informed the students in my course of their decision before we had made any travel plans such as airline tickets, something they did not do with other travel and study abroad courses much to their annoyance. My professor made it extremely well known to the university that she was not going to put her students through the excitement of making plans and spending money only for it to be stripped away. Kathlene is the type of professor who is a champion for her students. Not only does she champion her students to her higher-ups, but to each of us as she encouraged all of us throughout this interesting time. With her lively spirit, Postma was intent on making the rest of our course as fun as possible by creating as close to an Italian experience as she could.

Through Kathlene's previous travels to Italy, she had made numerous friends and connections who were more than willing to video chat with our class. For example, one of the Italy experiences we had was when her friend, Claudia, an Italian tour guide, took us on a sunset tour of Venice via video chat. Kathlene did all she could to provide us with a worthwhile experience. We made fresh pasta, had an Italian feast, went to her home and ate Italian pastries while we learned more about Italy, and video-chatted with an eclectic married couple who own an artist resort in Tuscany.

Throughout all of the educational fun and Italian experiences created, we wrote. Since I was a junior at the time and the Italy Travel Writing course is only offered every other year this was my last chance to go on this particular adventure to Italy. The way the university divided the credits was four credits for the "prep" portion of the course which takes place during the spring semester. This is the part of the course I have been discussing. Then the student would receive an additional four credits for the "travel" portion of the course as we would have continued our writing while in Italy. However, due to the pandemic and the closing of travel to Italy, junior and senior students in this course were given the option to either opt out of the travel portion we were already enrolled in, or to continue with the "travel" portion so we could receive the necessary credits. Kathlene made all of this clear to the students when she told us the news that we would not be physically traveling to Italy. As a group, we brainstormed how we would complete the travel portion of the course which would have to take place over video chat as it would be summer vacation. Ultimately, Kathlene and the seven upperclassmen students, including myself, came up with the plan that over three weeks we would video chat as a class over Zoom every Tuesday and Thursday for two hours. During those meetings, we had more video chats with

Kathlene's friends in Italy and continued to write as the objective for this travel section of the course was to "travel" to Italy through our creative writing stories.

It was during these three weeks that the concept for my novel, *Flash Through Time* was born. If the pandemic had never happened, I never would have thought of the concept for this work. During a time when travel was not an option, my mind redirected the disappointment and "traveled" to Italy through the use of my imagination. Originally, during this course, *Flash Through Time* was a short story I never finished. I always hoped it would one day become a novel if I ever received the opportunity to visit Italy. Three years later I have yet to visit Italy, but after graduating from Pacific University in 2022 I did visit Ireland during autumn of the same year. This experience opened my eyes to the joy of traveling abroad as it was my first time leaving North America.

Once the Italy Travel Writing course finished in May of 2021, I did not touch my novel, *Flash Through Time* until I enrolled in Liberty University's, WRIT 610: Writing Fiction course where I quickly learned the Italian setting that worked for my Italy Travel Writing course would not work for a publishable novel as I have never been to Italy. I did not want to write about a place I had never visited, though I know it is possible. It was too disappointing considering my just out-of-reach history with Italy. Not to mention it made me feel like a fraud. However, I also did not want to start over from scratch, so I compromised with myself and created a hybrid version which is the current version of my novel I am working on. In a later course, I worked on *Flash Through Time* during WRIT 650: Fiction Workshop where I revised my past work and added twenty pages. Since the workshop ended, I have been letting the story ruminate in my mind. Every so often I will jot down an idea or make a mental note, but I have not written more at the time of writing this. Instead, I have been mentally preparing for the massive undertaking of

research and the further shaping of my work. In a Letter of Recommendation, Professor Kathlene Postma of Pacific University Oregon discusses my time in her Italy Travel Writing course and my novel stating,

For the Italy Travel Writing course I teach, she wrote several sophisticated pieces set in Italy. The chapters she crafted for a novel were clever, suspenseful, and showed a fine grasp of how mystery narratives work to explore identity and longing. She made successive drafts of this piece and enthralled her classmates. Because of the pandemic, we were not allowed to travel physically to Italy as we'd planned, so Miranda and her classmates "took" us there through fiction. We were ready to read Miranda's entire novel, which she launched into with zeal. Her sophisticated work with character and plot was exciting (Postma).

My vision for this novel is that it will be my first completed novel length literary work. More than that I hope that one day this literary work will become my first published novel. I truly hope that it will inspire others to love reading and to turn towards Christ. If I can help one person come to Christ through my words then that would be such a blessing, even if I am never aware of it, I have faith that Christ is using me for a purpose.

Introduction to the Manuscript

The last time Adelia French saw her father was the night of her eighth birthday. Adelia peered out the window as she watched him walk out on her and her mother. Now almost twenty years later Adelia has found herself in a tricky situation: executor of her now-deceased father's Irish estate. Despite her better judgment, Adelia agrees to undertake the task of finalizing his wishes praying this will finally give her closure. One last goodbye to the father she never truly knew. Before Adelia knew it, she was on a plane from Seattle to a small Irish village that her

father called home. As soon as she arrives, Adelia gets to work packing up her father's cottage. Working room by room she finally makes it to her father's locked office. Once in the office, Adelia finds an old film camera and several drawers full of undeveloped film. Curious to learn more about her father and what he did all those years away from her, Adelia converts the bathroom into a darkroom and begins developing the film. While in the middle of the development process, something magical happens as Adelia is transported through time and into the roll of film she was developing. Shocked by what has just occurred Adelia realizes she is no longer in Ireland, but Italy and the man standing in front of her photographing the picture she was just developing is her father as a young man.

Through this discovery of magical time-traveling film, Adelia realizes she can venture into each roll and learn more about her father. Maybe this is how she will finally get her answers. There are only two problems: she must discover which roll was the last one her father shot since that is the version of her father who can answer all her questions, and she does not know how to get out of the film and back to reality.

The dynamic between Adelia and her father, William is crucial as they build their relationship throughout each roll of film. It is through this relationship Adelia might finally get some answers, closures, and the shock of a lifetime.

Literary Context

Before the story's beginning, Adelia French lived in Los Angeles, California. Adelia was born in Seattle, Washington where she was raised by both her parents until her father left her at eight years of age. She is an only child. After her father's abandonment, Adelia and her mother continued living in Washington as that is where her mom's family is located. Adelia's full name is Adelia Grace French, and she is named after her father's sister who died tragically when she

was a little girl. Adelia graduated top of her class from the Law School of Stanford University when she was 24. However, Adelia soon realized she only became a lawyer to make her mother proud. Now three years later, Adelia is following her dream of becoming a professional chef. After her father left, Adelia found comfort in her grandmother's kitchen. Where she spent nearly all her free time either watching her grandmother and uncle cook or learning how to herself. Through the bond built between Adelia, her grandmother, and Uncle Thomas a love of cooking blossomed. During her time in the kitchen, Adelia learned that food not only nourishes the body but the soul through the bringing of people together. Adelia was in the middle of the interview process to be the sous chef for a popular Los Angeles restaurant run by a Michelin-star chef when she received the news of her father's passing and her part in dealing with his estate.

Ever since her father left, Adelia always wondered what happened. For many years she blamed herself. She did not believe that she did any particular thing wrong, but that she was not enough of a reason for him to stay. Adelia's faith in Christ allowed her to heal as best she could, but there was always something nagging at the corner of her heart. She needed to get answers from her father since her mother acted as if he never existed. Adelia's bond with her Uncle Thomas felt as if he was a substitute for her father so she never truly felt like she missed out. Uncle Thomas was the one at all her soccer games and piano recitals. He was the man who took her to her father-daughter dance, and along with her mother the one who scared her first boyfriend by sharpening his kitchen knives when the poor guy showed up to take Adelia on a date. Adelia's Uncle Thomas has always been there. He has been a father to Adelia more than William ever was.

Adelia has a background in photography as she took a few photography courses in college which is why she was able to create a darkroom out of her father's bathroom. During

Adelia's eighth birthday party, her father William gave her a hot pink, sparkly film camera before he left that night. Adelia loved that camera and was devastated when she forgot it at a park a few months after her birthday and it was ruined by the rain. While at her father's estate, Adelia finds that William had the same hot pink camera. This is the camera with the magical film.

Significance of the Novel as a Christian Author

While I consider myself a Christian, I have never thought of myself as a Christian author. When I first started this novel, I did not intend for it to be faith based but I am not against it if that is where the Lord leads me. At the moment I am being drawn toward writing *Flash Through Time* with Christian principles and beliefs in a broad stroke or "plant the seed" style of writing. Honestly, I do not know exactly where this novel will take me or what it will say. However, I have faith that God will provide me with the words and stories that need to be shared.

This novel speaks to the heart of the reader through the topic of relationships. While there is the magic element of time traveling involved, that is only the shiny part of the novel which I hope with intrigue the reader enough to give it a chance. The true soul of the novel is found in the relationships developed. Adelia may not have had her earthly father around yet; she did have her Uncle Thomas and Heavenly Father. This novel explores the unique dynamic of what it is like to grow up with your father for some time until one day he is gone, yet quickly replaced in a way by another male family member. It explores the relationship Adelia forms between each version of her father she encounters through her time traveling. Building on the relationship Adelia reconstructs with her father, she also turns to Christ after each encounter to help her navigate what should be an impossible situation. Through this the reader will see that the true backbone of the story is not just the relationships formed, but Adelia's faith. While Adelia goes on a magical journey through film, she will also embark on her personal faith journey.

Divine Threads: Unraveling Testimony, Character Development, and Christianity in Fantasy Narratives

Characters are the backbone of fantasy fiction novels. In fact, characters are one of the core components of any novel no matter the genre. In every successful novel, you will find at least one protagonist and one antagonist. Some novelists choose to tell their stories through the use of multiple characters, all of whom have complicated stories of their own. The reason so many fantasy fiction novels are successful is not just because of the magic and worldbuilding, but the characters using the magic. Character development is intertwined with the character's testimony which can be seen through the characters found in fantasy fiction novels based on Christian principles.

Strong character development is an essential element in the creation of a well-done novel. If the main character of a novel never showed any growth throughout the arc of their story this would leave the reader dissatisfied, unlikely to read works from this author again. Character development is crucial as it allows the protagonist to become relatable to the reader. A strongly written character portrays depth and growth throughout the arc of the story. Readers can discern when an author has taken the time to fully develop a character and appreciate the work the author goes through to do so. Jaclyn Weist said it best in her thesis paper, "Shaping Character: The Role of Mythology in Society" stating:

Character development isn't just about learning through a character arc, but also by those outside influences that act upon them...Each piece plays a vital role in making a story great—into making the *character* great. A story arc can't happen if the characters don't have something acting upon them. They'd stay stagnant and never grow. Learning these

backstories behind the strong characters can help us understand other people and what they've been through (Weist 8-9).

Although most people do not think of their lives in terms of literary elements, character development is a part of all our lives. Throughout the trials and tribulations of life, a person is developing their character. An individual's morals, beliefs, life experiences, and personality all account for who you are as a person. For some, it may take their entire life for them to learn who they are while others just seem to know. Christianity teaches that our identity is found through Christ, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20 *NIV*).

Once an individual recognizes their identity is found in Christ it is much easier for them to go through life knowing who they are, what they stand for, and their God-given purpose. Typically, in creative writing, the protagonist starts at the beginning of the novel not fully understanding who they are. The protagonist might lack purpose, an identity, or their 'why' in life or the story. A strong writer will give their characters purpose and identity throughout their story arc. The writer will write the character in a way that checks all the boxes; physical, emotional, and spiritual characteristics, allowing the reader to understand and connect to the character. A novel with well-written character arcs breathes life into the story.

While not a book of fiction, The Holy Bible, is a divinely inspired, complicated work filled with not just characters, but real people. The men and women of the Bible provide words of wisdom and examples of character development through their testimonies for their readers. For example, the Apostle Paul was originally a pharisee intent on stopping the spread of Christianity. Paul was present at the stoning of Stephen, a martyr for Christ. After witnessing the

end of Stephen's life, Paul was the first to lead the charge in the persecution against the early church.

During this time Paul's character is being developed. In any other story, Paul would be considered the antagonist or villain. That is until he was on the road to Damascus, and everything changed. While traveling to Damascus, Paul, formerly Saul, is blinded by a flash of light and then the Lord spoke to him asking why Saul persecuted Him. For the next three days, Saul was blind until the disciple, Ananias, came and placed his hands on him restoring Saul's sight (Acts 9:1-19). Through this event, Saul converted to Christianity and became known as Paul. The Lord speaking to Saul on the road to Damascus is the catalyst for Paul's testimony. Throughout the rest of Paul's life, he drew on his experiences, testimony, and growing understanding of God to convey wisdom through his letter writing. Through the development of his character, God used Paul to show joy in suffering.

Paul is an excellent example not only because of his testimony but through his character development from a zealous pharisee to one of the greatest warriors for Christ. In the following Scripture, Paul is writing to the Romans explaining how he finds joy in his suffering as he knows it is developing his character as a witness for Christ:

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:3-5 *ESV*).

It takes the development of one's character to get to their testimony. However, character development will continue after the testimony throughout the rest of the believer's life. A testimony is another form or element of a person's character development.

In the Christian faith, a testimony is an individual's story of how their life changed through accepting Christ. Every believer has a unique testimony. Many individuals who grew up in the church, whether they are the child of a pastor, or have always been raised with Christ in their household may not think they have a testimony. This is not true. Every single person who decides to believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for their sins has a testimony.

According to Oxford Learner's Dictionary, the term, testimony, is defined as, "a formal written or spoken statement saying what you know to be true, usually in court." The section within the definition stating, "[a] statement saying what you know to be true" cannot be emphasized enough! How appropriate that the definition for *testimony* is "what you know to be true" and is the term used in the Christian faith to explain the believer's experience of accepting Christ.

According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary* the term "testimony" is defined as "proof or demonstration of some fact, evidence, piece of evidence" (*OED*). It is not a coincidence that the term defined as "proof" is also the term Christians use when sharing their personal stories about how Christ transformed their lives. According to *OED*, the origin of the term, testimony, can be traced back to the Ten Commandments:

The earliest attested sense in English's "The Ten Commandments" (late 14c.), from Vulgate use of Late Latin *testimonium*, which, along with Greek *to martyrion* (Septuagint), translates of Hebrew 'eduth "attestation, *testimony*" (of the Decalogue), from 'ed "witness." The evangelical sense of "open attestation or confession" (of faith) is by 1540s (*OED*).

Character development and the believer's testimony are each a form of personal growth, respectively. A testimony is the believer's personal experience that can be intertwined with the

character development of the individual's life. As the individual believer goes about their life part of their testimony will act as a fixed point in their lives, what occurred in their life before and up to the point of accepting Christ. However, after the believer accepts Christ there is a distinct separation between their life before and with Christ, both of these are a part of the believer's testimony. As the believer grows spiritually, they will be able to discern their life before and with Christ simply through reflection and a compare/contrast analysis. This analysis of one's testimony can be eye-opening, providing hindsight of all the ways God was with the individual. Many authors utilize this type of compare/contrast analysis and self-reflection enabling them to draw upon what they know to be true to further their literary works.

Authors such as C.S. Lewis and J.R.R Tolkien leaned on their real-life experiences, beliefs, and testimonies to craft fantastical works of fiction. It is well known that C.S. Lewis was a Christian. This is evident in his literary works, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *Mere Christianity* to name a few. Lewis viewed all of life as a way to evangelize for Christ. Lewis understood the power of the written word and conveyed truth through the use of the pen and his reader's imaginations. Instead of writing out a logical argument displaying his beliefs, Lewis wrote characters that underwent significant character development. He created characters who forged through adversity and emerged on the other side victorious and with testimony.

For example, in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the character of Edmund Pevensie is first introduced as a self-centered young boy who betrays his siblings to the White Witch. However, he eventually realizes he is wrong as Edmund comes to see the White Witch's true character. Edmund shows remorse for his betrayal and is nearly killed by the White Witch until Aslan sacrifices himself to save Edmund. A pivotal moment in both the plot of the story and Edmund's character arc. Throughout the series and through Aslan's sacrifice, the character of

Edmund transforms turning from a petty, selfish boy into a man of justice and integrity. Eventually, Edmund becomes “Edmund the Just” during his fifteen-year reign as the King of Narnia, which he serves alongside his siblings.

While most authors tend to write their characters to have positive, growth-fulfilling character development some authors use the method of negative character development. This form of character development is utilized to explain the creation and backstory of the story’s antagonist, or what happens to a character when they go down the wrong path. A prime example of negative character development for both the making of an antagonist and what happens when the character ventures down a dark path is none other than Anakin Skywalker from the graphic novel and cult classic film series, *Star Wars*.

Skywalker was first introduced to readers as the legendary Jedi Knight, who was prophesied to be the Chosen One of the Jedi Order, fated to bring balance to the Force. Throughout the complex comic book series, Skywalker ultimately falls prey to the Dark Side thus creating his alter ego, Darth Vader. Once known as Darth Vader, Skywalker’s character arc takes him from destined Chosen One to the main antagonist of the Jedi Order. While his character development is more nuanced than that, this is a George Lucas character after all, those are the broad strokes of Skywalker/Vader’s character arc. Although *Star Wars* is not considered a “Christian” creative work there are elements of Christianity present through the struggle of good and evil, redemption, and the Savior or “Chosen One” character among other themes.

Throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia*, many elements of Christianity can be discerned. The character of Aslan is an allegory for Jesus Christ. The moment in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* where Aslan sacrifices himself for Edmund is pivotal to many readers solidifying the character as being an allegory for Christ. The White Witch is the evil force or antagonist

while Edmund, Peter, and Lucy Pevensie are thought to be reminiscent of Christ's disciples. Susan Pevensie, the sibling who could not see Narnia for what it truly was, eventually reasoning herself into believing it was a childish imagining, is like that of doubting Thomas who did not believe Christ had risen from the dead without physical evidence and personal experience.

Lewis believed that writing this way, a style typically thought of today as “pre-evangelism” prepared the reader for the gospels. Another way to define this style of writing is “planting the seed” for Christ writing. Whether consciously or subconsciously to the reader, this style of writing is witnessing for Christ as it explains the basics of good and evil through the use of strong character development and plot. While some authors write openly about their Christian beliefs in their fiction and fantasy novels others write in broader terms layering the basic principles and beliefs of Christianity into their writing. The latter style is my intended writing style for my impending novel, *Flash Through Time*. Both forms of writing are important as they allow for a wider audience of readers to consume such literary works.

Fiction and fantasy literature that implores the use of evangelizing through the characters is critical as it is another form of witnessing for Christ. Renowned author, Karen Kingsbury was recently interviewed by CBN (Christian Bible Network) where they asked a series of important questions regarding Christian fiction's growing popularity stating:

Why do you think interest in Christian fiction has grown so much over the last few years?

Secular writers can tell a story about the physical, the emotional, and the intellectual parts of a character. But no matter how well they tell the story, they miss a facet that is innately part of all of us – the spiritual. As a Christian fiction writer, I can tell a story about the

complete person, the whole character. I think this resonates with readers and touches them in the deepest parts of their hearts and souls.

What responses have you gotten from your fans?

Fans say that they are closer to God and each other after reading the stories the Lord has given me to write.

Have your novels been well received in the secular market?

Yes. Most of my sales are in the secular market – though most of my titles are Christian titles. It’s a sign of the hunger for books that talk about the spiritual side of life, a side we all have – regardless of our understanding of Christ’s truth (CBN).

Kingsbury’s response to why she believes Christian fiction has grown in popularity over the years is full of truth most readers may not think about, myself included.

The character written by a secular writer can only relate to the reader to an extent. The same goes for the character written by a Christian writer when writing secular work. Similar to Kingsbury’s statement the physical and emotional elements of a character can be written by the secular writer, but it is the spiritual aspect of a character that turns that character on a page into a person. The spiritual element of a character is essential to the character development and relatability of the character. It is through the spirituality of the characters and their respective spiritual journey, that connect to the reader, pulling them into the story and forcing them to turn the page eager to know what will happen next. The spiritual element within a character transforms them from a substandard character into a complete, believable character.

Whether fantasy, fiction, sci-fi or potentially even horror, genres that write with the foundations and principles of a Christian worldview are necessary. Not only are these faith-based forms of creative writing important they also serve a purpose. Presenting these genres with a

Christian worldview not only serves as entertainment but also are a way to force the reader to think. This goes back to the form of writing C.S. Lewis preferred, “pre-evangelism” or as many Christians refer to it “planting the seed.” While the novel, or movie, several popular Christian fiction novels are being adapted into films, may be entertaining at the time the elements of truth within them will stick with the viewer. The Bible teaches us that if an unbeliever is open to learning about Christ, also known as positive volition, then God will make it happen. Pastor R. B. Thieme Jr. speaks on this in his book, *Heathenism*:

Wherever and whenever positive volition exists God always responds by sending the Gospel. The character of God reassures us that His message has been taken “to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8*b*). The Gospel spreads as populations expand and peoples mix. It is disseminated through preaching, personal witnessing, and through the translation of the Scriptures into various languages (Thieme 21).

Pastor Thieme provides Biblical evidence for his claims by citing specific verses found in Scripture:

If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching (John 7:17*a*).

“His will” connotes purpose and design—the plan of God for salvation (1 John 3:23).

“The teaching” refers to Gospel information—the principles of Christ’s person and saving work. Pursuit of a relationship with God after reaching God-consciousness is also expressed in the Old Testament:

And you will seek Me and find *Me*, when you search for Me with all your heart [mind] (Jer. 29:13).

(Thieme 21).

Pastor Thieme also teaches about “common grace” a term he coined. The ministry of common grace can be defined as “common grace makes the message of salvation understandable to an unbeliever willing to listen (1 Cor. 2:13-14)” (Thieme 125). According to Pastor Thieme’s teaching on common grace which can be found in *Thieme’s Bible Doctrine Dictionary*,

The omnipotent Spirit illuminates the Gospel so that the listener, spiritually dead and incapable of understanding spiritual truth, can make a decision for or against Christ. This is also called the Spirit’s *convicting ministry* because His function in common grace is to convict, or convince, the unbeliever (John 16:8-11) (Thieme 125).

All of this is to say that perhaps God is using the Christian fiction novel, fantasy narratives, or film to prepare the unbeliever, allowing them to open their mind and soul to one day receive God’s Word. Karen Kingsbury references this in her interview with CBN. During the interview, CBN asked Kingsbury how her novel, *A Thousand Tomorrows* was different from her other novels and why she felt compelled to write this story. Kingsbury answered with the following statement:

A Thousand Tomorrows is a parable of 1 Cor. 13 love. As such, it is not full of Scripture references or people holding intimate conversations with God – the way my Christian novels are. Instead, it is a place of entry for readers who might not otherwise have picked up a book by a Christian author. Many hundreds of readers have read *A Thousand Tomorrows*, loved it, and contacted me looking to find out what else I’ve written. Now they will have an open heart toward the message of the bulk of my novels. My goal in writing this book was to hit an audience I hadn’t already hit (CBN).

Kingsbury's novel, *A Thousand Tomorrows*, is the "plant the seed" or "pre-evangelism" type of narrative. Whatever you prefer to call *A Thousand Tomorrows* it is most definitely being used for common grace, Kingsbury said it herself!

There are a few notable core themes found within the fantasy genre which at their earliest beginnings were built upon Christian principles. Themes of redemption, resurrection, forgiveness, and the struggle between good and evil, are ever present in most fantasy novels through the use of at least one of these categories. All of these themes originate from God's Word whether individuals recognize that or not is up to them, depending upon their beliefs. According to Megan Luebberman of Vanguard University, "Literature can be viewed with a Christian lens so to speak, which dictates how one interprets a book. Contrastingly, if one is not a Christian—they can interpret Christian books in a secular matter—all according to their personal perspective of life."

J.R.R. Tolkien wrote in a letter to his son where he discusses his essay *On Fairy-Stories* and the connection between Christian principles found within the fantasy or "fairy story" genre stating:

If the story has literary 'truth' on the second plane—that this is indeed how things really do work in the Great World for which our nature is made.

And I concluded by saying that the Resurrection was the greatest 'eucatastrophe' possible in the greatest Fairy Story—and produces that essential emotion: Christian joy which produces tears because it is qualitatively so like sorrow, because it comes from those

places where Joy and Sorrow are at one, reconciled, as selfishness and altruism are lost in Love.

Of course, I do not mean that the Gospels tell what is only a fairy-story; but I do mean very strongly that they do tell a fairy-story: the greatest. Man, the storyteller would have to be redeemed in a manner consonant with his nature: by a moving story. But since the author of it is the supreme Artist and the Author of Reality, this one was also made to Be, to be true on the Primary Plane..." (J.R.R Tolkien, Letter 89)

Scottish author, George MacDonald is credited with penning the first fantasy novel for adults in 1858, with his novel *Phantastes* (English). While the fantasy genre has roots in mythology as well, it is evident that elements of the Christian faith would seep into MacDonald's writing as he wrote this novel during a time when both Scotland and England were predominantly Christian. Moreover, after graduating from ministry training in 1850, MacDonald was a pastor at Trinity Congregational Church. MacDonald resigned from the Church in 1853 where he went on to become a professor at the University of London and begin writing his novel, *Phantastes* (Stonestreet and Sunshine).

Circling back to the notion of common grace discussed earlier comes an example of how God used MacDonald's *Phantastes* to lead C.S. Lewis not only to Christ but the fantasy genre. In his spiritual autobiography, Lewis recalls when he first picked up MacDonald's *Phantastes* novel one night in a bookstall at a train station stating, "That night my imagination was, in a certain sense, baptized; the rest of me, not unnaturally, took longer. I had not the faintest notion what I had let myself in for by buying *Phantastes*." Lewis continues, "All the confusions that had hitherto perplexed my search for Joy were disarmed" (Lewis 180-181). Within Lewis'

autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, he explains that the purpose of this spiritual autobiography was to share his testimony along with the events leading up to it. Lewis credits MacDonald's *Phantastes* for beginning the journey to his conversion and career (Lewis 180). Every author has a pivotal moment in their life that led them to become an author, remarkably for Lewis, not only does he credit MacDonald's *Phantastes* with opening his mind to fantasy, but it planted the seed that eventually led Lewis to Christ. This beginning of Lewis' conversion and journey to his testimony exemplifies common grace and all the events and choices in our lives that we can only see through hindsight.

The fantasy genre relies on themes such as the struggle between good and evil. "Readers come to these works looking for adventure on a sweeping scale, elegant language, and the struggle between good and evil" (Burcher 227). Typically, this struggle is fought between the novel's protagonist and antagonist, however, there is another popular angle to convey this struggle; through one character and their respective internal struggle. This approach to writing a character's internal struggle of good versus evil usually marks the making of the antagonist. Anakin Skywalker is the quintessential example of a character whose internal struggle transforms him into the antagonist. For Skywalker it truly was a battle raging inside him as he could feel the Force pulling him to the Dark side.

The struggle between good and evil is present in nearly all fantasy narratives. The theme of good versus evil originates from the principles taught in the Bible. Cath Filmer-Davies of *Christianity and Literature*, comments on the correlation between God and fantasy with the following statement:

The language of fantasy, like the language of much Scripture, is highly metaphorical: it speaks in parables. Like the language of religion, the language of fantasy

literature points beyond itself, but to what? Authors of fantasy often include a god or goddess, or several of each; some exclude the possibility of either. Yet, even when God is apparently absent from fantastic texts, His presence seems, paradoxically, to inhabit the absence” (Filmer-Davies 59).

The foundations of writing teach us that there needs to be some form of protagonist or hero to follow throughout the story. Accompanying the need for a protagonist, is the necessity of a force working against them be that another character, antagonist, or external forces out to get them, creating difficulty for the protagonist to reach their goal. This struggle over light and dark can be set between characters one on one such as protagonists against antagonists, groups set against one another i.e. war, or even an internal fight. The internal struggle is of particular interest since every character has some form of inner conflict even the protagonist. It is in the moments of this inner quarrel between the character’s conscience that further builds the character’s development either driving them to their testimony of triumph or downfall. The author who writes the character with the inner conflict utilizes that character to convey a message to the reader.

Oftentimes in life, as well as in fiction, there are two choices, right versus wrong. The inner struggle of a character allows them to become relatable to the reader. The character knows what the right thing is to do but is drawn toward making the wrong decision either due to personal gain or because it is the easier option. This point in the story, or life, is where it comes down to the testament of the character’s will and disposition. This is where the character development occurs. When things are happening to the character forcing them to make a choice, sometimes that choice does not seem very important or is hardly noticeable throughout the thousands of choices an individual makes in a day. Other times, the choices the writer coaxes,

and perhaps forces their characters into completely define them. Ultimately, the choices a character makes throughout the plot are laying the foundation brick by brick for who the character will become. Choices make character development, while character development moves the story further down the plotline creating the character's testimony. Character development along with the character's testimony are intertwined, in the end, one cannot occur without the other.

It is evident that one's testimony is tied to their character development be it a fictional character or in reality. The themes of redemption, good versus evil, character development, and testimony are all present within the fantasy genre whether from a Christian or secular worldview. For the majority of society, when dealing with the struggle between good and evil, society internally knows the right thing to do. The human conscience, our morals, and the way we were raised point us toward knowing that doing the right thing, even when it is difficult is the best option. This understanding of knowing and doing the right thing is not present when we are born, but something we as humans must learn. Humans are not inherently good or evil, hence the struggle. This is because humans were given a sin nature, meaning we are subject to evil and sin which is what separated us from God until Christ died on the cross. Fantasy and fiction writing can be used to point the reader toward Christ, similar to how Lewis was subsequently led to Christ through common grace via MacDonald's *Phantastes*.

Character development is ingrained in one's testimony both in reality and fantasy fiction writing, just as basic biblical principles have been woven into the fabric of the fantasy genre. Jesus taught in parables utilizing storytelling as a means to get His point across to as many people as possible. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are His testimony and testament to His faith in His Father and love for mankind. The characters in Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, all

underwent character development through the occurrence of fantastical events while also developing their spirituality. Anakin Skywalker underwent a negative character arc ultimately choosing to join the Dark side. The choices made by the authors for the characters, albeit some authors may say it is the other way around, are fundamentally what create their character's testimony while simultaneously developing their character arc and disposition.

Flash Through Time

Chapter 1

The rhythmic sound of knives chopping around me produces a culinary chorus I thrive in. The hectic nature of the kitchen working hard to get each patron's meals out at a timely manner elicits a sort of adrenaline rush. Glancing up from my station in front of the stove, chef and restaurateur extraordinaire, Finley Hudson, eyes me with a sharp look on her face. Sweat trickles down my back as my nerves tense under her observation. This trial run to be her sous chef has to go well. The interview with her this morning was promising, although I find it a little odd that she is only observing tonight instead of cooking. Ordinarily, when a chef is looking for a new sous-chef, they want to cook with them to see if the two work well together. Perhaps the rumors about Chef Hudson being a bit unorthodox were true. Finally, the onions in the pan before me are perfectly caramelized and ready for plating.

"Luciano! That branzino needed to go out to table seven 20 minutes ago. You know I love a good TikTok as much as the next person but stop filming and get the food out," I call to my saucier for the evening.

"We can make the videos later. Right now, we have hungry, paying customers." Glancing over my shoulder I see Luciano sliding his phone into his pocket before plating the fish.

"Yes, Chef!" Luciano slides the plate of fish under the hanging heat lamp then rings the bell signaling the food is ready for serving. One of the waitresses rushes in through the kitchen doors to claim the fish for her section of tables.

The night races on like a speeding train, plates of food going out at a steady pace. The clock on the wall reads 10 in the evening.

“Thirty minutes til closing everyone. Let’s get those final meals out so we can start cleaning up and go home.” The kitchen staff cheers at my mentioning of home. Chef Hudson is out front mingling with the handful of customers we have left.

“Oh, Erica, make sure to give table three an extra dessert on the house. It’s Mr. Eisner’s 80th birthday today.”

“Impressive that you know that Chef French,” Chef Finley Hudson says as she strolls through the kitchen doors pausing by the countertop next to me.

Focusing on chopping the carrots evenly I manage to explain to Chef Hudson, “Mr. Eisner and his family were regulars at my last place of employment. When they heard I was having a chance to cook here they wanted to come and support.”

“That’s sweet of them. Points for you bringing in new customers,” Hudson says as she plucks a piece of carrot off my cutting board popping it into her mouth with an audible crunch.

“They are the sweetest, but I don’t think a chef like yourself needs any help attracting customers. I bet your television work on the food channel alone fills this place up.”

“It definitely helps, but I like the community of it. The people who keep coming back night after night. They make this place special. The TV shows help pay the bills and I get to be a part of some incredible experiences, but I didn’t become a chef to be famous. You know what I mean?” Chef Hudson trails off.

“I think so, being a chef is about community. The feeling of feeding others and seeing their faces light up with satisfaction at something you made is unlike anything I’ve ever experienced,” I shrug as I take the chopped carrots and dump them into the prep container.

“I meant to ask you this morning during our interview, but how did you get into cooking?”

The carrots tumble into the container making a soft thump sound before I seal the lid on tight.

“Through my uncle and grandma actually. I grew up watching them in the kitchen. Once I was old enough, I was allowed to assist and be the official taste tester.” I give a slight smirk.

“The best part,” Finley smiles back.

“Definitely the best part. Eventually, I stopped wanting to just eat the food but actually learn how to make it. That was the difficult part since neither of them work with any written recipes.”

“I had a grandma who was the same way. Never made it easy on those of us who were trying to learn but I got it eventually. That dish you’re prepping for there is one of my grandma’s recipes,” Chef Finley says as she gestures to the prepped carrot container.

“What do your parents think of you being a chef?” Hudson asks as she leans against the stainless-steel counter.

“My mom couldn’t be prouder though she wishes I was still in Washington,” I explain setting the knife down.

“What about your dad?”

Picking the knife back up I begin chopping the bunch of celery waiting to be prepped. Tension knots in my stomach at the mention of my father. How do I tell her that my father abandoned me when I was eight years old. You don’t, at least not during a job interview.

“Unfortunately, my father hasn’t been in the picture since I was eight.”

Hudson shifts on her feet at the mention of my father’s lowlife actions.

“I’m so sorry.”

Before the situation gets any more awkward, I do my best to change the subject.

“Yeah, it’s unfortunate that he left, but ultimately, it’s a part of God’s plan. I never really felt like I was without a father because of my relationship with Christ, as well as my Uncle Thomas. He really stepped up after my dad left.”

Looking around I realize the rest of the employees have all left. Quickly, I finish dicing the celery and seal it into its container before wiping down the counters. Chef Hudson has gone silent contemplating my words. Normally, when this happens it’s because people are trying to formulate a politically correct response. Those don’t go over well with me.

“I hope my mentioning of Christ didn’t offend you, but at the end of the day you asked me a question and I’m a firm believer in honesty and authenticity. I won’t change who I am or not mention my faith just to avoid making someone else uncomfortable. I don’t plan on bring up my faith but if I’m asked to deny Christ to work here then I won’t be working here.”

“You’re hired.” Chef Hudson looks up locking eyes with me.

“Come again?” I ask leaning forward brow furrowed. Did she just say I’m hired? A smile spreads across her face, “I said, you’re hired. I like it when a person not only knows who they are and what they stand for, but actually stands up for it. I was watching you tonight and you’re exactly what I’m looking for in a head chef.”

“Head chef?! I thought I was interviewing to be your sous chef?” I ask bewildered brow furrowing deeper.

“You were. This afternoon my agent called and said the network needs me for a new television show shooting in Cyprus. I need someone with enough experience, professionalism, and attention to detail to run this place while I’m gone, and I pick you.”

“How long will you be gone?” I stammer in utter shock.

“Twelve weeks, but I leave for Cyprus in two weeks. Before I go, we need to work together to finalize some things. How does all that sound?”

“Like a dream come true.” A smile spread across my face, “Thank you.”

“Thank you. You really impressed me today, Adelia. No, excuse me, Executive Chef Adelia French.”

Chapter 2

“You’re never going to guess what happened!” I scream into the speakerphone while driving home.

“No one’s dead right?” Mom questions voice thick from sleep.

“No, sorry I’m calling so late, but Mom guess what!”

“Addie, I’m half asleep I don’t have the mind for guessing.”

“Not only did I get the job at *Hudson & North*, but I was given the job of Executive Chef!” I scream even louder than before. Mom does her best to scream back but she sounds more like a choking zombie than excited.

“But I thought you were interviewing for sous chef?” She grumbles trying to wake.

“Chef Hudson was just offered a hosting gig for a TV show filming in Cyprus. She picked me to cover for her for three months,” I explain while pulling into my driveway and shutting off the ignition.

“That’s incredible sweetie. I’m so proud of you. Grandma and Uncle Thomas will be so happy for you too.”

“Thanks! Can you do me a favor and tell them the news. I’m going to be busy nonstop working with Chef Hudson before she leaves.”

“Of course I can.”

“Hey, I got a package. Did you send me something? Could it be the contract already?” I bend down to pick up the large manilla envelope then make my way inside.

“I didn’t send you anything. What it is?” Mom questions through the speakerphone.

“It’s a large manilla envelope. Hold on Mom let me put the phone down and open it.”

“Okay, okay, hurry. You woke me up now I want to know what it is.” Mom says in a terrible New Yorker accent.

“You must be really tired if you’re bringing out Gloria,” I chuckle. Suddenly all the laughter extinguishes from me as if someone just pinched out the flame of a candle. I scan the top letter again making sure I read it correctly.

“Addie, what is it?” Mom asks noting my abrupt silence.

Shock rolls through me along with other emotions I can’t quite identify.

“Mom,” I whisper. “Dad’s dead.”

Mom’s end of the phone goes silent. She’s probably thinking he’s been dead to her for 20 years.

“How do you know this?” she whispers back breaking the silence.

“This envelope is full of legal documents. On top is a letter from his attorney stating,

We regret to inform you of the passing of Mr. William Walker French. He passed on April 14, 2030, due to a cardiac event while at his cottage in Dingle, Ireland. Ms. Adelia French was listed as his next of kin and executor of his estate. Inside you will find a roundtrip ticket to Shannon, Ireland. A car service will be waiting at the airport to take you to his estate. We look forward to meeting you soon to go over the details of your father’s will though regret it will be under such grievous conditions.

With Regards,

The Lawyers of Murphy and Mulligan Legal LLP

“Talk to me Addie. How do you feel about this?” Mom questions concern and curiosity in her tone now fully awake.

“Honestly—I don’t know what I feel Mom.” I take a seat on my soft white couch as I try to wrap my mind around the news.

“In a way it’s like he’s been dead for 20 years. The day he walked out on us is the day I lost the father I knew and loved, whoever he’s been since then is a stranger. Now he wants me to take care of his crap,” I pause my angry rising. “No, hell no, let the Irish take care of it. Let it all rot and become abandoned just like he did to us!” Anger courses through my veins the longer I speak.

Mom releases an audible sigh.

“What, Mom? What are you not saying?” I throw the papers down and begin pacing around the small living room.

“He picked you to do this for him because he obviously has no one else. He knew I wouldn’t do it—”

“Well, why would he ever expect me to do this for him?” I interrupt. The temperature of the room starts to rise as I hurry my pacing along the length of the room.

“Honey, listen to me. First, stop your pacing and take a breath,” Mom tries to console me through the phone.

“How did you know I’m pacing?” The heat no longer bearable I remove my jacket and shoes placing them on their appropriate racks by the front door.

“Really Addie, I’m your mother. Plus, I can hear you moving.”

The papers slide out of the envelope like a waterfall creating a scattered mess. Bending down to pick them up a groan escapes me. Wait, what’s that? “Mom—” I start to tell her of the letter mixed within the legal documents but stop short. It’s from Dad.

“Adelia darling, I know you may not want to hear this, and you might be shocked that it’s coming from me of all people, but I think you need to do this.”

My head snaps up, dropping the letter onto the couch.

“What? Who are you and what have you done with my mother? You’ve hated this man for most of my life,” I say taking the phone off speaker and pressing it to my ear.

“Just because I didn’t talk about your father doesn’t mean I hate him. It’s just…” Mom pauses taking another audible breath. “What happened between your father and I is extremely complicated. I was confused and hurt, maybe I still am, but one thing I know for sure is I never hated him. Addie, I don’t want you to live with the same regrets and questions about your father. This might be your only chance to finally get closure. I think you should take it.” Silence fills the room as I contemplate Mom’s words.

“Not to mention you’d get to go to Ireland. You’ve always wanted to visit,” Mom says trying to lighten the mood.

“Yeah, but not this way. I wouldn’t be getting to travel around the country. I’d be there to clean up the cottage and leave. Besides I can’t go even if I wanted to.”

“Why not?”

“Because of *Hudson & North*, I’m supposed to take over full time in two weeks and I have to be prepping with Chef Hudson before she leaves.” I can hear the faucet turn on in the background on Mom’s end.

“You either need to text her now and tell her what’s going on or you’ll have to call her in the morning to explain. Hopefully, she’ll understand.” The faucet turns off and Mom takes a sip of her water gulping loudly. Rummaging through the mess of documents on the floor I find the plane ticket.

“My flight leaves at midnight tomorrow. I have a layover in Boston and then head to Shannon arriving in the afternoon.” I inform my mother as I read the itinerary.

“When do you return to LA?”

“On Monday the 28th. I’m only gone from the 24th, it’s only for the weekend.”

“The lawyers are only giving you a weekend to get all your father’s belongings packed up and taken care of? He must not have very much if they think you can do it by yourself in three days. Do you want me to come with you?” I can hear the hesitation in her voice at the offer.

“No, I’ll be all right. Thanks for the offer though I know how big of a deal that is for you to even ask.”

“I hope you know I mean it too. Whatever you need honey I can set aside my issues with your father if it will help you.”

“Thank you, but I’ll be fine. I should go. I need to start packing and finish reading through all these legal documents.”

“All right well I love you sweetie. Goodnight, and Adelia I’m sorry about your loss and proud of you on the job offer.”

“Thanks Mom. Not sure I can call it a loss though when he never really chose me.”

“It’s still a loss. He loved you, Addie he really did. Maybe I didn’t tell you that enough because I was being selfish and couldn’t talk about him, but he did love you. I’m sorry for any unintentional hurt I’ve caused by making you think you couldn’t ask about your father. It was a complicated situation.”

“What happened?” I ask desperately hoping she won’t brush me off like so many times before.

“Go to Ireland. I have a feeling you are going to learn far more about your father than I could ever tell you. Goodnight, travel safe and call me when you land.” Mom says hanging up before I can reply. Brushed off again. What does she mean I’ll get more answers from my dad’s things than I would from her? She knew him. Why won’t she just answer me?

Combing through the documents I find the letter from dad. It’s short more of a note really.

Dear Adelia,

Let me start by saying I’m sorry. I hope you know how much I love you and I always will. I’m not sure if your mother told you what happened between us. All I can say is its complicated. I’m making you the executor of my estate because it’s all yours. Everything I own is now yours. The cottage, car, cameras, all my assets are yours. I know it won’t make up for the last twenty years, but I hope it’s a start and will help you out in some way. I want to express once again how truly sorry I am and how much I love and miss you. When you make it to my home, now your home in Ireland, since I must be gone for you to be reading this, understand that all your answers will be found here. My office will tell you everything you need to know. I love you my sweet girl. I pray you get the answers you crave. Love, Dad

Chapter 3

Hot tears stream down my face landing on the letter in my hands. I'm unsure what to make of my father's words. Setting down the damp letter I walk across the room for the tissue box on the far side of the couch. After cleaning my face, I get to work packing while occasionally pausing to read through more of the mound of legal documents. Hours pass the sun slowly rising. My phone rings waking me from my slumber on the living room floor.

"Uh hello?" I say as I rub the crick in my neck.

"Addie, are you okay? You never came over last night like we planned," Josh says on the other end of the phone, "I was texting you all last night."

"Sorry, I completely forgot. You'll never bel—"

"What happened that would cause you to leave your best friend hanging like that?" Josh interrupts clearly still agitated.

"Well, if you wouldn't interrupt me, I could tell you Joshua." I say his full first name sharply.

"Sorry, go ahead."

"For starters, Chef Hudson didn't hire me for the sous chef position," I pause waiting for his reaction, but it doesn't come.

"She hired me for the Executive Chef position!"

"Of course she did she's a brilliant chef! I knew you were trying to mess with me," Josh exclaims. "Okay we need to have lunch together today to celebrate," he states.

"While I won't say no to a meal there's something else..." I trail off.

"Ok go on," Josh implores. Inhaling deeply, I answer him.

“My dad died, and he made me the executor of his estate. Now I’ve inherited everything he owned and apparently, he moved to Ireland and has a cottage which is now mine. I leave for Ireland tonight,” The words rush out of me like air from a balloon.

“Your dad, like the one who abandoned you when you were a child, and you never talk about. Wait, let me internet search him. I need to see what kind of everything we are talking about.”

“Yes, that dad and the lawyers bought me a roundtrip ticket. I’m only gone for three days so there can’t be that much stuff.” I hear the clicking of his keyboard.

“Adelia Grace French, you must inherited a goldmine,” Josh whispers.

“Huh? Are you sure you looked up the correct William French?” I ask as I switch him over to speakerphone to search my father on the internet.

“Oh wow,” I whisper. “How did I never know he was wealthy?” I question Josh as I stare at his estimated net worth.

“That’s a lot of zeros,” Josh says.

“Uh huh,” I say dumbfounded, eyes wide.

“Now they are your zeros. I mean, Addie, even after taxes you’ll still have millions. You’re set for life. You can finally open your own restaurant. Forget *Hudson & North*.”

Still in shock I manage to say, “I think I need to keep the *Hudson & North* job for a while. There’s so much I can learn there before I open my own place.”

“You’re right. I just got excited for you. Do you need me to come with you to Ireland? I can probably get a few days off work, and I have plenty of air miles,” Josh offers though I know it’s partly out of his own curiosity.

“I’m okay, thanks though. My mom already offered. This is something I have to do on my own. Let’s meet for lunch at 11:30 the usual spot.”

“You got it. See you then,” Josh agrees before ending the call.

Slowly I peel myself off the floor various parts of my body popping. Swiftly, I clean up all the documents making sure to place them in my now full suitcase on the bed. After making sure everything I need is packed away, including my passport, I hop into the shower. The searing hot water embraces me like a warm hug. All the news from the past twenty-four hours hits me with every passing second. I don’t know how to feel. Closing my eyes I begin to pray,

Dear Heavenly Father, please give me wisdom to navigate the journey ahead both professionally and personally. Please guide me to the answers I’ve been craving and give me discernment to recognize them when they are found. I pray he is no longer in pain but walking in Heaven with you. Please keep me safe during my travels that I may make it home in one piece. Thank you for all my blessings. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

The shower handle squeaks as I shut it off and grab a towel. Once dry I put on my favorite pair of black leggings, sandals, and the maroon oversized sweater Josh gave me last Christmas. Twisting my caramel brown hair up into a large hair claw I then add a few swipes of makeup across my eyes. Hauling my suitcase to the front door I place my purse on top before heading into the kitchen to make my morning “coffee” that’s actually a chocolate protein shake mixed with espresso flavored superfoods and probiotic powder. The morning ritual beverage hits the spot every time. Pulling my phone out of my leggings pocket I open the contact for Chef Hudson and fire off a quick message letting her know I need to speak with her as soon as possible, preferably in person. A moment later my phone buzzes with her response.

Sure, see you at the restaurant in 20. Hope everything is okay.

Opting not to respond to her, I finish my drink before grabbing my purse and head out to my car.

The drive to the restaurant, *Hudson & North*, is surprisingly traffic free, a rarity for midday in Los Angeles. Once parked in the back staff parking lot, I make my way to the service entrance on the backside of the brick building. A few other employees are inside getting the restaurant ready for the 4 p.m. opening. Chef Hudson is in her office with the door cracked open soft tunes floating out from it. Knocking on the door before entering Chef Hudson pauses her music, “Come in.”

“Good morning, Chef Hudson. Thank you for meeting with me,” I say as I sit down on the leather chair opposite from her behind the desk.

“Morning Chef, and please while we’re not in the kitchen, call me Finley,” Finley requests as she swoops her golden hair into a ponytail.

“All right, well Finley I wanted to see you this morning because something’s come up,” I begin to explain while nervously shifting in my seat.

“Do tell,” Finley waves a hand for me to continue as works on her computer.

“Last night I learned that my father passed away a week ago. I received a stack of documents informing me that I was named the executor of his estate,” I briefly pause. “He moved to Ireland after he left my mom and me. Within the mountain of paperwork was a roundtrip ticket for Ireland. The issue is the flight is for tonight,” I finish explaining, my hands wringing together in my lap. Finley is quiet for a moment contemplating. I’m beginning to learn she does that a lot.

“First, let me express to you how sorry I am about your father’s passing. I know you weren’t close, but it’s never fun to lose a parent. I’m glad you are bringing this up now however, I must ask how long you will be gone?”

“Only until Monday, so I would be back to work on Tuesday the 30th. I really hope this isn’t a problem and we can work something out,” I say as reassuring as possible.

“Recently, I was the executor for my grandmother’s will. It can be a long and difficult process; one I completely understand. Please don’t worry about work right now. Your job will still be here when you get back.” Relief rushes through me at Finley’s words before she continues, “Of course, this means we will have less time to prepare which isn’t ideal, but from what I’ve heard about you and what I witnessed last night I’m confident we can make it work,” Finley smiles. My heart swells with pride and a bit of surprise that *the* Chef Finley Hudson has heard such positive things about me.

“All right,” Finley says slapping her hands together before clasping them together on her desk. “I have some calls to make so you enjoy the rest of your day and good luck in Ireland.”

“You don’t want me to work the rest of the day? I can help you with phone calls or getting the staff ready for when I step in.” I question confused yet grateful for the day off.

“No need. I’ll bring the staff up to speed and start working on a plan. We can go over everything together and officially start once you are back on Tuesday. I know it’s a complicated situation but try to enjoy Ireland. If you get a chance, you must drive out to see the Kerry Cliffs way more impressive than the Cliffs of Moher.”

“Thanks for the tip, and thank you so much for understanding,” I say rising from my chair. Finley stands and stretches out her hand. We shake hands then she walks me out to the kitchen beyond her office.

Back in my car, I hit the favorites button in my contacts dialing Josh. The ringing of the call echoes through the car speakers as I pull out of the parking lot and on to the now busy street.

Chapter 4

“Are you almost here? Did you get all packed?” Josh asks by way of greeting.

“Yeah, I’m all ready to go. I actually just came from a meeting with Finley,” I say while turning on my turn signal.

“Oh, how’d that go?” The cringe in his voice is evident.

“Surprisingly well. Really well actually. I’ll tell you more about it at lunch. I’ll see you soon.”

“Okay cool. I’m already at our usual table so head on back.”

“Whoa you’re actually early. Good thing I’m sitting down,” I say with a chuckle.

“Yeah, yeah, very funny. I can be early when I want to be.”

“Oh, I see how it is. Most of the time you just want me to wait for you. How chivalrous. You can’t see this but I’m rolling my eyes,” I scoff.

“I could have guessed you would be. How much longer until you’re here? The waitress has been by three times. I bet she thinks I’ve been stood up,” Josh whispers the last part into the phone.

“Two minutes. I’m just finding a parking spot.”

“Park over by Buchanan’s Bakery, which we should stop at after we eat if they are still open. I could go for a chocolate pistachio croissant,” Josh lets out a small groan thinking about the delectable pastry.

“You and your stomach. I’ll see you in sixty. Bye,” I say clicking the end call button on my steering wheel as I pull into the parking spot in front of the bakery. The afternoon heat has picked up. I notice sweat already trailing down my back as I exit my car and walk around the corner to the restaurant, *Eagle’s Nest*. Passing the hostess with a nod, she knows Josh is waiting

for me, I round the corner of the restaurant to see the waitress at our table once again. Josh makes a motion towards me causing the waitress to head directly towards me wearing an unpleasant look.

“I wouldn’t keep my man waiting, especially one that looks like him,” The waitress says as she slows down to pass me. Caught off guard I do my best not to laugh before ignoring her and taking my seat which Josh has pulled out for me.

“What’s going on. Normally, you don’t—”

“Act cool. She was totally just hitting on me,” Josh explains while guiding me into my seat pushing me towards the table. A laugh rolls out of me.

“I said act cool,” Josh leans down and whispers into my ear slight panic in his voice. He makes his way over to his side of the table taking a seat. A breeze blows by rustling his sandy brown hair.

“What happened?” I ask giggling at his obvious panic and discomfort.

“Right after I hung up with you the waitress, whose name is Jane by the way, came over and gave me a complimentary cup of coffee, which I, of course, gladly accepted because I’m addicted, but when I picked up the mug her number was written on the napkin beneath!” Josh explains eyes wide.

“Let me get this straight. A cute, yet admittedly rude woman, has been dotting on you for the last twenty minutes giving you free coffee and her number, yet you’re freaked out by this? Clue me in here, what am I missing?” I ask confused by his reaction to being hit on. Josh takes a sip of his coffee savoring it.

“I’m just weirded out because we’ve been coming here for years, and she’s never done anything like this before.”

“Maybe she was just working up her nerve or was in a relationship before but now she’s not,” I suggest. “Woman flirt with you all the time why is this any different?”

“I’ve just been feeling different lately like I’m ready to settle down.”

“So why not with her?”

“Not with her,” Josh shakes his head. “She has party girl written all over her. Plus, I already know what, or who I’m looking for. She’s just not ready,” Josh states matter of fact.

“Cryptic,” I say narrowing my gaze at him. “Anyway, lets change the subject. Do you want to hear how it went with Finley?” I ask avoiding the awkward feeling I know who he’s talking about. Mercifully, Josh follows my lead, “Yeah, what’d the boss say?”

“Honestly, she was amazing. I was totally shocked by the amount of grace she gave me especially with all I’ve heard about her reputation for being harsh. So far, she isn’t like that at all.”

“I take it you get to keep your job?” Josh questions stretching out his tan muscular arms.

“Careful there or Jane might start drooling,” I quip gesturing to his stretched-out arm.

“Oh, shut up,” Josh playfully snaps back returning his arms to his side.

“Yes, I get to keep my job. She even gave me some advice to visit the Kerry Cliffs, instead of the Cliffs of Moher which kind of surprised me.”

“She’s right. Kerry Cliffs are way better than Moher plus less crowded. You’re taking your camera, right?” Josh asks before taking another sip of his black coffee.

“It’s packed, but I don’t think I’ll use it much. It’s not like I’m going on vacation. I need to get there, pack everything up, ship or donated it, and get out. I only have three full days to clean it all up.”

“But aren’t you the owner now? Does this mean you want to sell it?”

“Yeah, at least that’s the plan. I want to have a meeting with a real estate agent while I’m there,” I say now looking around for the waitress. Spotting her over by the hostess stand I gesture her over.

“Are we all ready to order?” Jane asks only looking at Josh. Instead of avoiding eye contact like I suspected he would Josh holds her gaze firmly as he orders his sandwich then looks to me.

“I’ll have the lemon kale Caesar salad with grilled chicken please. Oh, and a chocolate milkshake, two straws.” I order smiling at Jane whose eyes flare ever so slightly at the mention of two straws before walking away.

“Now you’re just messing with her,” Josh chuckles.

“Hey, I figured if I said two straws, she won’t spit in it if she thinks you’ll be drinking it too,” I shrug.

“Now you just have to watch out for hair or something in your salad,” Josh remarks making a cringe face.

“We may have to find a new spot if she actually defiles my salad.”

Our food arrives soon after. I wait for her to leave before checking my food for any unpleasant bodily material or fluids.

“Okay, I think I’m good.” I announce after my inspection. “What about you?” Josh looks up from his plate of food nearly half eaten. “What? I was really hungry,” he says innocently his greenish hazel eyes stretching wide like a puppy. I let out a little laugh before trying my milkshake. “Mhmm. They changed ice cream providers. It’s really creamy now try it.” I say enthusiastically holding out the cold glass.

“I love that you can tell the ice cream is different,” Josh chuckles.

“Try it,” I urge. “I bet you’ll taste a difference too.”

Josh takes the glass from me and sips from his straw. Then takes another sip studying the improved flavor profile and creaminess of the shake.

“I really can’t tell,” Josh confesses after a moment.

“What? No way!” I ask surprised.

“Seriously. I want to say it’s a bit richer, but wouldn’t that be from the chocolate and not the ice cream?”

“Not necessarily, the two work together. They could have changed the type of chocolate they use which from what I can tell is a syrup and not a powder, but this type of richness is coming from the ice cream not the chocolate,” I explain holding out my hand for the shake.

“Fascinating,” Josh smirks. “I think we need to stop and get a croissant when we are done.”

“I parked right in front of the bakery. They close at two.”

Josh glances at his watch ensuring we have enough time.

“Don’t worry, I’m almost done,” I reassure him.

After splitting the check, we leave the restaurant and make our way around the corner to Buchanan’s Bakery. Josh’s excitement at the prospect of chocolate pistachio croissants radiates off of him. He shakes my arm in anticipation of the sweet treat.

“What can I get for you?” asks Katherine the owner and baker, a sweet smile on her face.

“Four chocolate pistachio croissants, two chocolate chip lobster tails, and one lemon bar please,” Josh orders nearly bouncing on his heels.

“You having a party or something?” I ask leaning close to him.

“No, some of these are for you to take with you. You know in case the Irish don’t know how to make proper pastries,” Josh answers turning towards me with a grin.

“I’m pretty sure they do, but thanks, that’s kind of you,” I say giving him a side hug. Katherine boxes up the pastries then returns to the register.

“That’ll be thirty-two dollars. Do you have a punch card with us?” Katherine asks.

“Of course I do!” Josh exclaims as he rummages through his wallet before handing her the card.

“Looks like you have two free pastries. Would you like to add to your order or take two off the total price?” Katherine questions looking between us.

“Add!” Josh and I speak in unison. Katherine lets out a small laugh at our synchronicity. “What would you like to add?”

“Two Le Crookies,” we say in unison once again.

“Our bestseller, excellent choice,” smiles Katherine as she boxes them up.

“Here on me,” I say to Josh while handing my debt card to Katherine.

“Absolutely not!” Josh protests. “I wouldn’t have ordered so much if I thought you were paying, please let me do this.” We hold a stare before I relent, “Okay, fine. Thank you.”

“What are friends for,” Josh smiles taking the box of pastries from Katherine before opening the door for me. Outside the spring sun beats down more intense than usual.

“By the way, I should have said this sooner, but I’m really sorry about your dad. I know it’s a complicated situation given how everything ended, but from what I remember he was a really great guy. Honestly, I’m still shocked by him ever leaving in the first place,” Josh says putting a hand on my shoulder.

“You and me both. Thanks, I know you were close to him too. It wasn’t just my loss,” I say. Suddenly, a thought pops into my head I’d never thought of before.

“Wait, you were close to him, weren’t you? Did he ever reach out to you after he left?” I ask head snapping up from searching in my purse for my keys. Josh looks away trying to avoid eye contact.

“He did, didn’t he! Why the hell didn’t you ever tell me?” I accuse smacking his arm.

“William only reached out once. It was about a year after he left. He wanted to let me know that he found a place in Ireland and was doing well. He sent me his address and a phone number and asked that I pass it along to you. I was going to give it to you, but when I came over your mom could tell something had happened and she pried it out of me. Told me not to tell you or I couldn’t be friends with you anymore. I’m so sorry Addie,” Josh confesses looking down at his shoes.

“He didn’t forget about me. I could have had a relationship with him all this time,” I whisper now becoming furious. Hot tears threaten to spill.

“Why would she do that?” I ask now furious with my mother. “I understand you not telling me right away, but you could have once I moved out. Hell Josh, that was ten years ago that you could have told me. I should have been allowed to make that decision!” I nearly shout at him anger rising.

“You’re right. I should have told you when you turned 18. I know it’s no excuse, but we had lost touch for a while there with me going off to college. I kind of just forgot. I never reached out to him after he called that one time.”

The pained look on Josh’s face tears a piece of my heart. He was just a kid too even if he is seven years older than me.

“I’m sorry. This isn’t fair to either of us. My parents never should have put us in the middle. Put you in the middle of an impossible situation. That wasn’t fair of them,” I apologies. Josh wraps his arms around me in an embrace squeezing tight. Breathing deeply his coffee and pine scent surrounds me settling my emotions.

“Be careful while you’re gone. I pray you find all the answers you are looking for,” Josh says against my ear. The hug lasts a moment longer before we pull a part.

“Me too. Can you do me a favor?”

“Anything.”

“I know it’ll be late, but can you give me a ride to the airport?”

Josh chuckles before slinging an arm around my shoulder, “I was already planning on it. I’ll pick you up at nine tonight. That way you’ll have plenty of time. Lord knows you need it.”

“I sure do. See you tonight,” I say then unlock my car.

“Oh! Here take some of these,” Josh hands me a few of the pastries in their small paper bags from inside the box.

Chapter 5

A storm rages in my head the entire drive home. I need to call Mom but decided it'd be best to wait until I was no longer driving. Throwing my purse on the counter I whip out my phone.

"Call Mom speakerphone," I grind out still upset.

"Calling Mom on speaker," my smart phone says back to me.

"Hi Sweetie, did you talk with your boss?" Mom asks by way of greeting.

"Yeah, I did, but we can talk about that later. Right now, I want you to explain to me why you felt it necessary to threaten Josh so that he wouldn't tell me about dad reaching out to him."

"He finally told you," Mom says quietly.

"Yes, only because I point blank asked him. For some reason I had never thought to ask before only to find out he's had dad's address and phone number this entire time!" my voice begins to rise. "Wait," I pause. "I'm so stupid. If you knew about this than that means you've had dad's information this entire time as well, haven't you?" I'm so upset anger begins knotting up inside of me.

"I was trying to keep you safe," Mom confesses.

"From my own father!" I scream into the phone. "I'd understand if he made bad decisions or was a danger to me, but he wasn't. Mom, he was my best friend! I'm sorry if that hurts you, but he was an amazing father until suddenly he just vanished!" Tears stream down my face as I crumble to the floor missing the couch entirely.

"Why did you do this? What happened between the two of you that would make you act as if he never existed," I ask through angry sobs. Mom sniffs now crying too.

"It's complicated Addie—"

“No! You don’t get to say it’s complicated anymore. Stop with that excuse and tell me the truth!” I shout into the phone cutting her off.

“I’m sorry I can’t explain it. You’ll find out when you get to Ireland.”

“What does that even mean? All I know is that by acting like he never existed you weren’t just punishing him you were punishing me.” I want to hang up, but something stops me. Mom’s tears have turned to full on sobbing.

“Please just have a safe trip and call me when you get back. Adelia, honey I’m sorry. You’ll understand I was just trying to protect you, please give it time.” Mom says between gasps before ending the call. Tears continue making their way down my face. What is going on? My heart begins to break all over again at the thought of all the years I could have spent with dad. Was I wrong to be angry with him this entire time? Clearly, there’s more going on than I know. Why was she trying to protect me from him? He never would have hurt me. A fresh wave of grief and longing for the father I loved so dearly when I was a young girl race through me.

“I miss you so much dad,” I whisper through soft sobs clutching the heart necklace he gave me when I was a kid. He told me it used to belong to someone very special in the family and that she was very precious to him just like me. It’s the only thing I have left of him. Pushing myself up off the floor I scrunch into a ball on the couch. My gaze wanders to the suitcase by the door. I guess the necklace isn’t the only thing I have left of him. Whatever he left behind in Ireland is mine now too.

“Nothing will ever be able to replace him. I just wish I could see him one more time,” I mumble to my empty living room before nodding off.

An overwhelming sense of peace and safety surrounds me the smell of pine and coffee dancing around me.

“Addie, get up,” a male says shaking me. “Honey it’s time to wake up.” For a moment I hear my dad’s voice, feel his hand on my shoulder. Shooting straight up off the couch I nearly collide with the man in my apartment.

“What are you doing here?” I shriek while fumbling for the light switch.

“I’m here to take you to the airport like you asked,” Josh replies.

“Oh, it’s you,” I say realizing its only Josh.

“Yeah, it’s me. Who else would it be?” He asks face knitted together with confusion.

“Never mind, no one. Did you call me ‘honey’ a minute ago?” I ask recalling the moment.

“Um no. I said “Hurry, it’s time to wake up.” Why would I call you honey?”

“I don’t know. That’s why I asked. Guess I just heard you wrong.”

With the room now lit, Josh stares at me face shifting from confused to concerned.

“You called your mom. I take it didn’t go well,” he says gesturing to my face. A glance at the mirror on the wall by the dining room table shows what a mess I am. Thick black lines of mascara streak my face still red and splotchy, though most of the redness is now from how I was asleep on the couch.

“She refuses to tell me what happened between them. You know my mom and I don’t fight, at least not like this. It was pretty harsh.” I pause taking a deep breath. “The worst part of it all is that she could have avoided it if she’d just been honest. That’s never been hard for her before so why now?”

“I don’t know. I wish I could help you Addie, but when it comes to what happened with your parents I’m just as clueless as you,” Josh shrugs.

“At least I’m not alone in my cluelessness,” I chuckle, “I’m going to clean myself up then we can leave,” I say feeling defeated before walking to the bathroom to wash my face.

After scrubbing away the runny mascara something my mom said hits me.

“My mom mentioned something intriguing during our fight,” I say loudly enough for Josh to hear in the other room.

“Oh yeah? What?” He questions now leaning against the doorframe of the bathroom. Turning towards him, now finished reapplying my makeup, “She said I’d understand once I got to Ireland. This isn’t the first time she’s said something like that either.”

“Cryptic,” Josh says furrowing his brow.

“It really is. She also said she was only trying to protect me. Does she mean from dad? If so that doesn’t make sense. He never would have hurt me.”

Josh looks at me not saying what we are both thinking. Dad did hurt me. His leaving broke my heart.

“One thing I’ve learned as I’ve aged is despite thinking we know someone completely we never really do. I learned that the hard way. People will always surprise you,” Josh says thoughtfully.

“Most of the time it’s not a good surprise,” I agree.

“Come on, let’s go. You’re going on an adventure,” Josh smiles changing the subject. Josh takes my suitcase to the car while I lock up.

“Lord, please helping me find answers,” I say leaning against the now locked front door. Pushing off the door I head over to Josh’s car and hop in.

“Ireland here I come!” I say trying to muster up some excitement for my first time to the Emerald Isle. Josh lets out a holler and whoop while backing out of the driveway.

“I hope you get some stellar photos while you’re there. Promise me you’ll go out exploring at least once,” Josh requests.

“I’ll try, but it depends on how much work is waiting for me.”

“Oh! And make sure to look for your dad’s camera collection. He had the coolest Canon film camera. Sleek all black with silver writing. Man, that camera was a beauty!” Josh says shaking his head at the memory.

“Is that the one he used to photograph my eighth birthday party?”

“Yeah, I wonder what happened to those photos. He told me he used ‘special film for a special day,’ but I never found out if he developed them since you know…” Josh trails off.

The two of us go silent for a while. Reflecting on our memories with my dad.

“How’s Macy doing? Did she get the grant she was after?” I ask.

“Last I heard she was still in the running for it. I actually haven’t spoken to her in a couple of months. She doesn’t have a lot of cell service in the region where she’s working in Africa. Our mom talked to her about two weeks ago, she said everything was going as well as could be expected,” Josh explains.

“Weren’t you supposed to go and visit her? Why didn’t you?”

“I was, but she called a week before and told me to reschedule. It wasn’t a good time apparently,” Josh shrugs.

“I’m not sure if there will ever be a ‘good time’ when you have a sister who’s saving the world,” I counter.

“True. I’ll see if I can get an email through to her and set something up.”

“You should. She probably really misses you. I can tell you miss her.”

Josh doesn't respond but the look on his face tells me enough. Macy's been working in Africa for three years and during that time she's called him only a handful of times.

"Have you talked to her?" Josh questions though I know he already knows the answer.

"You know I haven't. She stopped talking to me the second she left for college."

"I'm still mad at her for that," Josh says as he turns onto the airport road.

"Don't be. Macy's found her passion in medicine. I'm proud of her for saving lives."

"Just because she went to med school doesn't mean she had to stop being friends with you."

"True, but its more than that. She was never the same after what happened to me. Macy didn't know how to act around me because of my dad leaving. She tried to stay friends with me as long as she could, but I felt her pulling away. I also think on some level she knew I would be all right without her because she saw how close we became."

"We did bond over losing your dad. I guess I can see how in her mind she thought it was okay even though I still think it wasn't," Josh says pulling up alongside the curb.

A strange sense of emotion I can't quite define courses through me thinking of how Josh and I became best friends after dad left.

"You never seemed to care how much younger I am than you are back then. Most teenage boys wouldn't have stepped up like you did. Thank you...for being there."

Josh reaches across the middle console hugging me, "I'll always be here for you Adelia." We share a smile now back in our separate seats.

"Okay, well I'd better go. Can't afford to miss my flight," I say opening the door.

"I'll see you right back here on Monday."

The airport is oddly empty making security a dream. I'm at my gate before I know it. Waiting to board I send Josh a text, "Already at my gate. Guess that's the beauty of a redeye."

"That only took you an hour. Score!"

"It would have been faster but there was a family of six in front of me. For some reason all of them had to receive a pat down," I add with the cringe face emoji.

"Not the dreaded pat down!" Josh says with a crying face emoji.

The overhead speaker announces my plane will be boarding early.

"Gotta go time to board," I send back before pulling my ticket out of my purse. After gathering my bags, I head over to the lady scanning tickets. My phone buzzes with Josh's reply.

"Text me when you land. Good luck!" I give the text a quick thumbs up before sliding my phone back in my pocket.

"Looks like it's your lucky day. You've been selected for an upgrade to first class. Would you like to accept or stay in your original seat?" chirps the airline employee.

"Definitely accept! I've never flown first class," I beam.

"I'll let them know to make your flight experience extra special Ms. French."

"Thank you."

"Thank you and have a great flight," she says while handing me an updated boarding pass.

Chapter 6

It wasn't a dream. The song of the Goldfinch floats in through the open window gently nudging me awake.

The chilly Irish breeze rustles the white linen curtains which elegantly adorn the windows like the veil of a bride. I can feel the jet lag lingering within me as I lift my still heavy head from the most comfortable pillow I have ever slept on. A surreal rush of realization washes over me as I squint out the window into the overcast Irish countryside. My mind spins as it slowly begins to compute that my dream wasn't a dream at all. Dad is dead and I'm in his cottage in Ireland.

Suddenly, my stomach growls. I have yet to eat since arriving in Ireland who knows how many hours ago. Though my stomach sounds its alarm of hunger, I feel as if I cannot eat a thing. Food itself seems unappealing. The thought of packing up my deceased father's cottage is taking its toll on me, and I've not even begun. I can't believe Dad was only 51 years old before stress and a massive heart attack took him away.

I remember the last time I saw William, my father, was nearly 20 years ago at my eighth birthday party just before Mom divorced him. Little did I know after the night of my eighth birthday as he tucked me into bed and placed a kiss on my forehead, I would never see him again. I wonder if he knew. If he was planning it. Why didn't he take me with him? Why didn't he fight for me?

"Ugh, don't go there," I mumble to the empty room. He bought me my first camera, the disposable kind but mine was special because it was pink and sparkly. I had that camera for years until I accidentally left it at the playground one day after school. When we went back to get the camera, the rain had destroyed it. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest I should have known that would happen.

Working up the strength to get out of this heavenly cloud-like bed I pad my way along the cold tile down to the kitchen. Tea and a table full of pastries are on the counter waiting for me. Looking around to see where they came from, I see a small red figure of a convertible flying down the long, muddy driveway back to the main road.

“Wait, who are you?” I shout out the open window after the fleeing vehicle.

Returning to the kitchen I spy a note on the refrigerator.

Hello, Miss Adelia French, I was your father's assistant, Niall. I came by to drop off some tea and pastries from a wonderful bakery a few towns over. I figured you may not have any food and wanted to make sure you were properly nourished before you started packing up the cottage. I again, would like to offer my assistance for anything you may need while you are here. I understand this is a difficult time and realize how personal packing up your father's home will be. I don't want to be in the way or stop you from getting the closure you may need. I didn't want to wake you this beautiful Irish morning which is why I have left this note. Please feel free to contact me if you need anything. I left my information on the refrigerator. Good luck with everything here. I hope you find what you are looking for.

Truly,

Niall M.

That was sweet of him. I'll need to meet him before I head back home. The flaky blueberry pastry melts in my mouth as a groan escapes me. A quick internet search on my smartphone informs me of the bakeries in the surrounding area. Just because I'm here for personal reasons doesn't mean I can't work a little. I need to make time to find the baker of this mouthwatering treat. A wave of emotion pummels me as I think back to the day before Dad left. We had spent the day together just the two of us. He took me to the park where we played tag for

hours until we worked up an appetite. Instead of going for a normal lunch Dad suggested we go to our favorite bakery. We each had a blueberry fritter, reminiscent to the pastry I'm currently eating. Memories like this one hurt. I thought he'd always be there for me. It's a strange feeling, grieving for someone you barely knew. I'm still having a hard time understanding why I am grieving for a man who abandoned me so many years ago. Why do I care about someone who didn't care enough to stay?

Eating the last bite of my blueberry pastry I set about to go assess the situation of packing up the cottage. Thankfully, the cottage is only two levels and from what I can tell so far it doesn't look very lived in.

The glimmer of the Irish sun beginning to peak through patchy clouds reflects off a crystal figurine on the table in the living room. Picking up the figurine I discover it is of an elephant herd composed of three elephants: two big and one small. A family. Maybe Dad bought this on one of his business trips? Growing up elephants always were a special animal in our household. Perhaps he didn't completely forget me after all. My thumb rubs over something sharp down the middle of the figurine. Upon closer inspection I find that the two larger elephants have a crack running straight down the middle of them. I nearly drop it. How appropriate for there to be a crack. I set the figurine back in its spot on the side table and continue my search for packing material.

Despite the cottage being relatively empty there's still a few items that will need to be donated. Searching around the ironically charmless house I'm unable to find any sort of packing boxes. Returning to the kitchen a pair of shiny keys hangs on the wall by the back door. A car? Snatching the keys, I head out the door taking care to lock up the cottage before making my way over to the garage. Hauling open the wide wooden door reveals a small SUV with a hideous

burnt orange paint job. I do my best to push aside the impending migraine this color is giving me as I make my way to the opposite side of the car than I'm used to and turn on the ignition.

"You've got this Adelia, you're an excellent driver. Just remember everything is opposite over here," My pep talk seems to help a bit as I make my way down the long driveway.

The drive to town wasn't nearly as harrowing as I braced myself for having gotten the hang of driving on the opposite side of the road rather swiftly. The worst part was how narrow the roads are. What should be considered a one lane road somehow passes for two lanes here. Grabbing a buggy, I make my way through the value store searching for packing material and a few provisions.

Back at the checkout now with a full buggy the clerk begins ringing up my items.

"Somebody moving?" the clerk questions. He's a handsome guy around my age with brown hair and blue eyes.

"Something like that," I say. The sooner I can get out of here the better.

"American aye. Moving back to the states, are we?"

"Yes, American. I'm here helping out family," The look of interest on his face skyrockets at my mention of family. I grimace noting my mistake. One thing I've learned in my short time of being in Ireland is how friendly and chatty the Irish are.

"Oh, you've got family here. Mind I ask ya what's your surname?"

"French."

"French huh? Sounds like you belong in France instead of Ireland," chuckles the clerk. I glance at his name tag. James. He finishes ringing me up noticing my lack of response to his supposed joke. I quickly pay and head back to the pumpkin orange car.

Not being able to shake the broken elephant family from my mind, I keep getting the sense that I am snooping as I go through each room and pack up what little things there are. I guess now that I'm the beneficiary I'm not snooping but it sure feels like it. When did he buy this place? The cottage is surprisingly empty aside from the few pieces of artwork every now and again. This place feels as if Dad bought it but never lived in it sort of like he just left it the way the realtor staged it. He has to have a place in the city with how sparse this one is. Maybe it's under a different name and that's why the lawyers couldn't find it? The only bright side to the cottage being so minimally decorated is I can stick to my schedule of only being here only a few days. I need to get this cottage all cleared out and sold so I can get back to my normal life.

Finally, having packed up the small things and artwork that I could find downstairs I make my way up the wooden staircase. With only two rooms and two bathrooms up here I should be all packed up in no time. Maybe I will get to explore Ireland a bit after all. A bolt of excitement rushes through me at the thought.

The door at the end of the hall looks like a good place to start. Twisting the doorknob, I try to push open the door, but it won't budge. It's locked. Suddenly, I remember the random key at the bottom of the manilla envelope full of legal documents. I rush back to the room where my purse is and fish out the key.

Now back at the door I slip the key in, the lock releases with ease. As soon as the door swings open, I realize this room not only doubled as Dad's office but also as a sort of hobby room. Memories of all his hobbies rush to greet me. I push them aside as I enter the room bracing myself for what I might find.

"Well here's all your stuff," I chuckle scanning the full room.

Chapter 7

Miniature ships in glass bottles cover the windowsill while photos of Dad sailing with what appears to be other colleagues are hung along the wall next to the window. A sleek navy-blue bicycle sits in the corner just beginning to collect dust. On the desk below the window is a large stack of papers that appear to be business transactions. Across from the stack of papers, on the left-hand side is a single framed photo. Picking up the smooth black picture frame I'm instantly taken back to my eighth birthday party. The picture shows the three of us. Mom with her long, sleek brown hair and fair skin smiling sweetly at the camera while I blow out my candles. I remember how cautious I was as I blew them out. The anxiety in trying to avoid getting my long, caramel blonde braids with the special sapphire velvet ribbon braided through them caught on fire. Dad stands tall behind me grinning wide as he makes bunny ears over my head with his tan fingers. His jet-black hair slicked to the side from the heat of the day. That was the last time we were all together before the divorce and Dad moved to Europe permanently.

I slowly open a drawer from the dresser facing opposite the window to find it filled to the brim of old undeveloped but used film. Eight-year-old me rushes to the surface as I spy a sparkly pink disposable camera just like the one Dad gave me. Rummaging through the drawer I find that this is the only camera in here. I didn't know he had one too. Is this the only camera he used? No, he should have the black Canon around here somewhere.

Reaching farther back into the drawer my fingers fumble over a canister of film I must have missed. The pink and glittery roll of film with the words "Sparkle's Magic Film" scrolled across it in sparkling pink letters send me back to my childhood. This looks like the type of film that should have gone with the camera Dad gave me. Why didn't I get any? I remember having to go buy the cheap film from the grocery store, the kind that always hung by the checkout stand.

Shaking the film leads me to believe it's used but not developed. The only way to know for sure is to develop it.

Putting my college darkroom film classes to good use I set about converting one of the downstairs bathrooms into a darkroom. I need to find out if Dad took these pictures and if so of what? Or who? Thankfully, photography seems to have been Dad's favorite hobby because I find a box full of all the darkroom equipment, I need in the drawer below where I found the film. No wonder I loved it in college.

Before I know it, I've set up the bathroom near the living room into a darkroom and have over half the roll finished. Needing to take a quick break I head over to the kitchen for a snack and a glass of water. Wait, what time is it? Looking out the kitchen window into the back garden the moon full and bright hangs in the sky. The clock on the stove says one in the morning.

Getting back to work on the pink roll of film I find there's only two exposures left before it's all developed. Most of the pictures appear to be of Italy, mostly landscapes and artsy types of photographs, but no people. The dipping and dunking of the last two negatives create a rhythm that calms the anxiety coursing through me. Slowly the final images reveal themselves. The first looks to be the view of the city of Florence from a hillside. Green rolling hills make up the background while the foreground explodes with a bustling and vibrant city. Centuries old buildings stand proud with their terracotta roofs and stone walls. A magnificent duomo with a turquoise dome is the main focus of the image just left of center. A warm summer breeze brushes across my face tossing an olive from the branch above me to the grassy ground next to my feet.

Wait what?

How did I get outside?

Looking around in front of me I notice the turquoise roofed duomo from the image I just developed. How did I get to Florence? Am I in the film? No. That can't be. It must be the jet lag talking.

The sound of a camera shutter goes off to the right of me. Turning my head, I nearly faint at what I see next.

My father.

Alive.

Not just alive but young too. His perfectly quaffed black hair blows in the breeze as he lines up the viewfinder for another image. I stumble backwards into the trunk of the olive tree behind me. Slowly, I let myself slide down the rough tree before I find the grass and dirt below me. All I can do is stare. It's like looking at a ghost, except here Dad looks to be in his early twenties.

How is this possible?

"Someone pinch me," I breathe as my eyes stay trained on him.

Next thing I know Dad is walking right towards me. Unsure of what to do I continue staring completely still. He leans down and pinches the side of my arm.

"Ow!" I shriek, "What was that for?"

"You asked for someone to pinch you? Did you not?" Dad inquires.

"I hadn't realized I said it out loud."

"The names William French," Dad says as he sticks his tan hand out in front of me. All I can do is stare.

"You're supposed to shake it," he says with an odd look on his face.

"Oh, yeah of course. Hi!" I take his hand and give it a good shake just like he taught me.

“Hey nice handshake. You know most people get the grip wrong. They are either too firm or too soft, but you have it right in between. I always say, ‘The best way to get a good first impression of someone is through their handshake.’ Don’t you think?” Dad prattles on.

Am I not supposed to tell him the truth of who I am? Will I mess up the timeline if I do? I don’t think so though since he’s dead. His future has already been written so I don’t think it can adjust his past.

“I’m sorry I didn’t catch your name?” Dad questions.

“My name? Yeah, about that. What I’m going to say next might sound a bit odd but just bear with me.”

Dad looks even more amused. I remember the last time he gave me this look was when I dressed up as Dr. Frankenstein for Halloween and dyed a dog green to be the monster. He was freaked out then because we never owned a dog.

“My name is Adelia French and I’m your daughter,” I blurt out the truth hoping it’ll be like ripping off a bandage. The world doesn’t split in half by my telling of the truth so my theory of his death not alternating the timeline must be correct.

Dad bursts into laughter.

“No seriously. I am. What year is it?”

“1999,” Dad says bending over through fits of laughter.

“You haven’t met Mom yet. I don’t want to tell you too much but please just listen.”

Dad calms down enough for me to explain to him what happened. After I finish explaining everything, he picks up his sparkly pink camera and reads the back of it. His face goes white as cream.

“Wait, why do you have that pink camera now? I thought you bought it with mine.” I ask.

“You’re telling me that this pink sparkly camera is magical?” Dad questions.

“All I know is one second I’m in your cottage in Ireland developing the picture you literally just took and the next I’m *in* the picture! I don’t know how it’s possible I just know it happened.” I exclaim as I motion my arms to the view of the city in front of us.

Holding the back of the camera up close for inspection Dad reads what I read only a few hours ago, “Sparkle’s Magic Film,” he drops the camera like a hot potato.

“Ok let’s just pause for a second and say I believe you. Why are you telling me the truth? Won’t that mess up the timeline or flashpoint or something like it did for *The Flash*?”

Raising one eyebrow I give Dad a look of confusion.

“What I read the comics,” Dad says nonchalantly.

“I have no idea who *The Flash* is or what you are talking about but that’s beside the point. I don’t think telling you will mess up any timelines or flashpoints.” I begin to say.

“Wait you don’t know who *The Flash* is?! Are you sure you’re my daughter? I would have thought I’d raised you better.”

“You would’ve had to been there to do that,” I try and say under my breath.

Dad stills. All laughter vanishes as he processes what I mumbled. A wave of sadness washes over his face as he realizes he wasn’t in my life.

“What do you mean I wasn’t there? I can’t wait to be a father. It’s one of the things I want most in life,” Dad explains with the utmost sincerity.

Confusion ripples through me. This doesn’t sound like the Dad I know or at least the one Mom told me about after they divorced. Then again, she hated him after he left and rarely mentioned him. Did Mom lie? Why would she do that to me? I fall back to the ground not remembering when I stood up. This old olive tree is proving to be the only stable thing in my life

right now. It's coarse bark poking into my skin an ever-present reminder that all of this is somehow real.

“What do you mean you can't wait to be a father?”

“I've always wanted kids. Growing up in a big family probably contributed to that. You want to know why I use this pink girly camera?” Dad asks as he takes a seat next to me against the olive tree. I manage a nod.

“When I was a little boy, I had a younger sister. Her name was Adelia, which I guess I'll name you after. We were best friends, and this used to be her camera. One day we were playing in the meadow by our home back in Washington. It was so hot out that day and we found a freshwater spring hiding in the tall grass. I had just begun to tell Adelia not to drink from it, but it was too late. She had already gulped down the water by the time I reached her,” He falls silent as he relives the memory. “Not long after she fell ill. The doctors tried all they could, but they couldn't save her. Some kind of bacteria they don't have a cure for must have been in that water. In the days leading up to her death she told me she wanted me to have her camera and the rest of the film that went with it. She asked that I use it only for the moments I wanted to revisit, so it would last longer, and that I travel the world with it. Adelia said that as long as I had this camera it would be like she was there with me,” Dad trails off again lost in emotion. His eyes land on the heart necklace he gave me. I never take it off.

“Did I give you that?” He asks picking up the necklace around my neck.

“Yes, just before you left.”

“It was my sister's. I gave it to her a long time ago,” Dad goes silent.

I never knew I was named after someone or that Dad had a sister that passed away. If he cared about his sister so much to name his own child after her then why would he let me go? A

mixture of nausea and anger twists through me as I realize I can't ask this version of my father the real questions I've been longing to know the truth. The version of my father with those answers is dead.

Suddenly, an idea begins to bloom. A memory of the drawer full of film in Dad's office flashes in my mind. If I could figure out how I got here, then I could find a way to get back to reality. Once I'm back in Dad's cottage all I need to do is find the last roll of film that Dad shot but never developed. Then I can go into those photographs he took and find him. If this works, I just may get the answers I've longed for.

Chapter 8

The Italian sun warms my skin as I stand to chase after the young version of my father walking away from me. I'm still underneath the olive tree and hadn't realized he left. He's good at that sort of thing.

"Hey, wait!" I shout.

"Yeah, what now? Are you going to tell me I have a son in the future too? How about a pet parrot named Philip?" William turns back as I call after him.

"No, nothing like that. You didn't stick around long enough for that to happen," I mutter as I match his stride.

"What was that?" William raises an eyebrow.

"Never mind, you wouldn't be able to answer my questions anyways, you're the version of my father before he met Mom which is why I need your help getting me out of here."

"And how do you propose we make that happen?" He asks placing a hand on his hip.

"I have no idea. You're the photographer. I thought you would know about film and this stuff. That's why I need your help." My heart races in anxious anticipation. I need to get back to that drawer of film in the cottage.

"Film, I understand. Magical film, on the other hand, I know nothing about. Is magic a well-known topic in the future? Explain how this happened again, maybe something will stand out that can be useful."

"No, magic isn't a well-known topic. I didn't even know magic existed until this happened. I was going through your office in your cottage in Ireland when I found a drawer full of film that hadn't been developed. There were a few rolls of normal film, but some of them

were the sparkly, pink rolls. I decided to develop one of them because they reminded me of the camera you gave me just before you left us.”

“Hold it. I leave you and your mother?” shock fills Dad’s face.

“Yeah, but that’s a story for a different time,” I say brushing him off. “Anyway, I decided to develop one of the rolls of film and as I was dunking the last photo in the solution, I felt lightheaded, so I sat down. I must have passed out or something because the next thing I know I’m waking up in Italy and it’s 1999!” The vein in my forehead is bulging now as I begin to tap my face the way my therapist taught me as a calming mechanism. Silently praying The Lord will lead me out of this mess and provide me with answers.

“Well,” William grows silent for a moment then continues, “That’s a lot to unpack. First, I’ll start with: Why are you tapping your face?”

“It’s a type of calming mechanism my therapist taught me. Ever since you left, I’ve struggled with anxiety and abandonment issues. The tapping is a way for my body and mind to focus on one thing at a time, allowing me to calm down. Think of it like self-soothing for a baby but for adults.”

“I’ll try and keep that in mind when you’re a baby in my future.”

A laugh gurgles out of me then another and another until I can’t control it. I’m laughing hysterically when William asks, “Why are you laughing?” confusion painted all over his face.

“Because you say things like that. “You’ll try to keep it in mind when you have me. It’s ridiculous! The father I know didn’t care enough to stay. I thought he did, but his actions proved he didn’t. He left, so why would you care? You already know your future, so why try, and remember something as trivial as facial tapping?” I’m gasping for air between fits of laughter

mixed with waves of anxiety. This is the weirdest panic attack I've ever experienced. If I can call it that, I normally don't laugh when anxious.

Dad stops walking and turns to me. I still don't know what to call him. He's not my dad yet in this time period so William seems more appropriate.

"I'm sorry," he says eyes brimming with tears.

"What?" the laughter leaves my body as if he had just performed an exorcism. Cold races down my spine.

"I'm sorry for leaving—for everything. I may not understand the reason or circumstances around it yet, but if what you're saying is true and I chose to leave then I'm sorry. I can see how much it has affected you. How old were you when I left?"

If what you're saying is true.

How can he not believe me? My mind feels as if it's about to explode, his words left ringing in my ear. Instead of losing my cool, something inside of me forces me to see things from this version of my father's point of view.

"I was eight," I say as I brush past him without looking back.

"You left the night of my eighth birthday. After you tucked me into bed, I could hear you and Mom arguing, so I crawled out of bed and hid at the top of the stairs listening. Both of you were screaming then crying. For a minute there I thought everything would be all right when you leaned in and hugged and kissed Mom, but then something happened that I couldn't see." A tear trails down my face as I recall the memory.

"Next thing I knew you were slamming the front door. I raced over to the round window in my bedroom and saw you loading your luggage into a taxi and driving away. That was the last time I saw you." A section of my caramel blonde hair falls in front of my face as I finish telling

him the memory. William moves closer brushing the hair off my face before pulling me into an embrace. I hadn't realized how cathartic it would be to share this with him even if he's not the version of the father I knew. Sharing this memory with him feels different than when I shared it with my therapist. I feel lighter, like a different sort of weight has been lifted.

Out of nowhere, an overwhelming sense of exhaustion hits me as if I've taken a sleeping pill. Taking a seat on the grassy hillside, William follows suit as he stretches out his long tan limbs and rakes his hands through his black hair before taking a photo of himself against the grassy hillside.

My mind begins to race as I recall the photo William just captured is near the end of the roll of film I first exposed. What happens to me after this roll ends?

A torrent of questions pummels through my mind too fast for me to answer all at once. Mentally, I reach out and grab one to focus on. Does getting to the end of a roll of film take me back to my reality? Something inside of me *clicks*, call it intuition, I don't know, but this theory feels right. There's only one way to find out.

"Come on!" I say to William as I launch myself onto my feet and stretch out my hand to help him up. A sudden burst of energy courses through me like a shot of pre-workout. I may only be 5'6" but sometimes I surprise myself with how strong I am as I haul his over six-foot frame up off the grass. He towers over me making me feel like a kid again. A strange wave of déjà vu smacks me like an oncoming train. Jumping up and down for a brief moment I do a little shimmy to shake the feeling off.

"What are you doing?" William asks as he arches his thick black eyebrow.

"Nothing. I just got excited," I immediately stop moving, as color begins to bloom on my cheeks.

“I think I figured out a way to get back to my present day, but I’m going to need your help,” Grabbing his hand, I race towards the bustling city of Florence sprawling at the base of the hillside.

Chapter 9

“What are we doing at the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore?” William questions as he admires the architecture. A smirk spreads across my face as I wait for him to snap a photo of the cathedral.

“Isn’t it gorgeous? Did you know it’s one of the biggest domes in the world and it was built in the 13th century?” William exclaims as he backs up a few steps, angling for the perfect shot before finally taking a photo.

A bolt of anticipation shoots through me, one photo left in the reel. A loud rumble sounds around me as I whip my head back and forth scanning the surrounding area to find the source of the noise. Suddenly, a sense of emptiness hits my stomach as cramps spread throughout my torso. Looking down I place my hands on my belly as another round of grumbling rips through me. William notices my strange behavior and begins laughing as we both realize I’ve been plagued with hunger.

“This way, I know a market with some of the best street food, it’ll change your life. After the market, we can get gelato if that’s something you’d like,” William’s demeanor shifts halfway through as if he realizes how much he doesn’t know about me.

I loop my arm through his as we begin to walk through a crowd of people toward the market, “Gelato sounds amazing.”

An hour later the first taste of rich dark chocolate gelato with hints of espresso melts in my mouth as a groan escapes me.

“Mhmm. This is the best gelato I have ever had! How did you find out about this place?” The cool treat is divine on this hot and sticky Italian afternoon. Licking the edge of my gelato

cup I make sure to catch a drop of the dark liquid slowly surrendering to the heat. William reaches across the café table and offers me a napkin. I gratefully accept as an influx of melted gelato trickles down my fingers.

“One of my friends here at university is a local. He took a group of us here the other night,” William explains with a gesture of his hand to the gelateria’s beige stucco entrance. Dipping the napkin in my water glass ever so slightly adds just enough liquid to help release the stickiness of the gelato from my hands.

“Pays to know people,” I remark with a slight nod of my head.

“It sure does. Have you ever been to Italy before?”

“Only once,” I pause taking a minute to collect myself.

“I visited about a decade ago. I had just graduated high school. It wasn’t the best trip, unfortunately,” I pause gathering my next words. “I came here looking for you. This gelateria is still open in my time, but I never stopped.” My words slowly fade off until I’m left looking anywhere but at William. There is a pit in my stomach gnawing away. Sneaking a glance, I see he has let his gelato melt down his hand and drip onto his khaki slacks. Instead of handing him a napkin or helping clean up the mess his direct stare causes me to freeze. The sorrow in his eyes makes the pit in my stomach twist even more.

“Why are you staring? Do I have gelato on my face?” I ask using the napkin to wipe my mouth. It comes away clean.

“I just cannot believe that I would abandon my child. I have always wanted to be a father, so it just baffles me that I would leave any child let alone someone as wonderful as you to grow up without a father. I know I’ve already told you this, but I truly am sorry for leaving you.” A single tear falls down William’s face.

He's always wanted to be a father. The pit in my stomach grows deeper.

I must have a look of shock on my face as William continues, "Believe me I'm just as surprised as you must be. Remember how I told you about my sister Adelia? You remind me a great deal of her. I imagine if she was given the chance, she would have looked just like you."

"Yes, I remember you telling me about her. It's too bad I never was able to meet her." I say somberly as I place a napkin on the pool of pink cherry gelato now soaking into his slacks.

"Geez! I'm a mess. Thanks," William gasps as he takes the napkin from me and begins padding up the pink liquid.

"No problem."

"So, where do you want to go next? There is an amazing fountain you just have to see! It is massive! You've heard of Neptune, right? What about art? You a fan? If so, we have to visit the Uffizi. Hands down the best museum in the world!" William nervously spews questions desperate to redirect the conversation.

"Uffizi the best museum in the world huh? That is a bold statement," I say with a slight smirk and arch of my brow.

William's face widens with pride, "I know. Did you ever visit when you were here after high school? Then again if you had you'd know it's true."

"No, I never did make it to see the Uffizi. It wasn't my priority at the time. However, if I had known I could have found you in a museum I definitely would have checked it out."

William stands and begins to walk away from our table. Turning back towards where I sit William holds out his hand, "Seguimi, figlia mia."

My rusty Italian gears begin moving as I work to decipher what he said. If I remember correctly the first word, he said means "follow." I get up and begin after him as I comb off the

cobwebs from my high school Italian language arts course. I continue walking while pondering what he said when it hits me.

Follow me, my daughter.

This time the pit in my stomach doesn't twist or grow deeper, but somehow lessens. I can feel the knots begin to loosen, poising themselves to unravel. As strange as this situation is he believes me. More than that he likes me as a person, even thinks I'm wonderful. Why would someone like this version of my father abandon me? A million questions whirl through my head all at once. Surely, there must be more pieces to this puzzle.

Chapter 10

The walk to our next destination is quiet. William calling me his daughter is stuck on repeat in my head. Along with that, I'm trying to recall the last time the William I knew called me his daughter. If memory serves me right it was during my eighth birthday party. All the guests had just finished singing "Happy Birthday" as Mom brought out the cake. Dad stood behind my chair while Mom placed the cake in front of me. I could see his reflection through the mirrored sunglasses someone had left on the table. He leaned down and placed a kiss atop my head whispering, "Happy birthday my sweet daughter."

Chills run up my spine as I am pulled out of the memory and back to the William of my father's youth. We have stopped walking and are standing in front of the Uffizi Galleries. Tourists mill about all around. A line of people at the entrance spans down the length of the building wrapping around the corner.

"Are we about to wait in that?" I point towards the long line.

"We can if you want, but I have another way in," William smirks.

This time it's my turn to place my hand on my hip, "And what would that be?"

"Act like you belong and follow me."

"What? Act like I belong. I'm not really an artsy person so that might be difficult." I try to explain, but William has already charged ten feet ahead of me acting as if he owns the place. Standing a bit taller, I do my best to follow his lead and exude confidence. William struts by the long line of people and around the corner to the side of the gallery. He waits a beat for me to catch up before opening a side door that leads us to a dark stairwell. Once inside with the door shut, it takes a minute for my eyes to adjust. There is a small ray of light shining in from the top

of the spiral staircase. Leaning over the railing, I tilt my head up to see the light source several flights of stairs overhead.

“Are we going all the way up there? I tend to avoid the Stairmaster at the gym, and this looks a lot worse.”

“Yep, I hope you’re wearing comfortable shoes. Andiamo!” William chuckles as he begins walking up the stairs.

Taking two at a time I work to catch up and fall in step with his pace.

“How did you know about that side entrance? Why wasn’t it locked?”

“All I can say is a friend from university has connections and may or may not have shared them with me against the rules,” William’s eyes twinkle mischievously.

“I’m beginning to learn you’re a man with many connections. Thank your friend for me, we would have been standing in that line for hours.”

The stairs continue winding around and around until I’m dizzy.

Noticing my struggle William stops.

“We can stop and rest for a moment if that would help. We have about three more flights of stairs to go.”

There’s a little round window on the landing where we stand. Resting my elbows on the ledge, I use a leftover napkin from the gelato to wipe off the thick layer of dust from the glass. Immediately, more light beams in as I peer through the window. The cobblestone far below is littered with people rushing from one tourist attraction to the next.

After a few minutes William gently places his hand on my shoulder, “Are you ready to keep going?”

Turning my attention back to him I give a slight nod as we start climbing. The pit in my stomach unknots a little more from his careful touch.

The last three flights of stairs go by quickly and quietly as I ponder how I feel about that shoulder touch. It was a very fatherly thing for him to do.

Now at the top landing, we are standing before another door. Instead of opening the door himself, William taps three times, pauses, and taps another four. Someone on the other side of the door responds with two taps, a pause, and then three taps. A secret code? Maybe his university friend is the person on the other side of the door? Suddenly, the door swings open wide. I shield my eyes from the bright light once again waiting for them to adjust. Beyond the door is a black and white marble tiled hallway lined with alabaster statues on the left side, and a wall of windows looking over the city on the right. There is no one in the hallway.

Bewildered I ask, "Who opened the door?"

"I've always wondered the same thing, but found it is best not to ask."

William and I meander around the gallery for a while before he stops in front of a full-figured white marble statue of a woman. My mind flashes back to the room in William's Irish cottage where I exposed the roll I'm trapped within. I've seen this statue before. She's the main focus of the last exposure.

The whole time I've been trying to remember where I've seen this statue, William has been prattling on about the detail and difficulty of the piece. Sneaking a closer look at the plaque beside the statue titled, "Victory" the snap and click of a camera shutter sound off behind me.

All of a sudden, the statue begins to melt before my eyes. Confusion races through me as I lean down to touch the now milky white puddle at my feet that was once the statue. How can

this be? Out of nowhere, a marble arm shoots up from within the puddle and snatches my arm pulling me in headfirst muffling my scream.

Chapter 11

Sharp pain pierces through my brain as I begin to rise from the table my head is resting on. Placing a careful hand on my head, it feels as if someone is trying to hammer it open like a coconut. Bringing my hand back into view no blood stains my fingers. This migraine is killer, but why do I have it? What just happened? Where am I?

Moments later memories flood my mind. William! Where is William? Swiveling around in dad's office chair quickly elicits a wave of nausea and regret from the sudden movement. Scanning the room around me, realization hits I am no longer in Florence with William. Instead, I sit at my father's desk in his Irish cottage. Dim light seeps in through the blackout shades placed over the window. Gently, I lean over the desk in front of the window and remove the curtains, illuminating the room. Flipping on the light switch for extra light, the clock on the wall must be broken as it reads, I have only been gone for an hour.

Confusion washes over me, "This can't be right. I've been in Italy for days."

"At least it felt like days," I murmur furrowing my brow.

My mind is still trying to wrap around the idea that I may have just transported into the film. How could that be? Magic? An unknown length of time passes as I sit in contemplative thought attempting to process everything that has happened. Speaking out loud to better help me think, I go over my options.

"Adelia, you're not crazy. Just take a breath."

I inhale deeply, hold for a second, then slowly exhale. Just like my therapist taught me.

"Okay, while I cannot convince myself there is a *reasonable* explanation for all this.

There has to be an explanation so let's find it."

Staring at the photo of my parents and me during my eighth birthday party I begin to speak to the eight-year-old girl with the gap-toothed grin.

“Based on my deductive reasoning skills, I’ve concluded we have three options to explain the unexplainable. First, my subconscious mind has created this fantasy as a way to finally get answers about Dad abandoning me. Option two, magic is real, and I’ve just experienced it by actually transporting myself into the film through the developing process. Or there’s option three which quite frankly seems the most logical though physically painful, which could explain my migraine. I must have been in an accident and am now stuck in a coma. This must be the fantasy my mind cooked up as I lay in some unknown hospital bed recuperating.” The little girl in the photo continues to smile back at me.

“I agree. None of those options are any good,” I say frowning back at the photo of my younger self.

Leaning back in the chair I begin to survey the room and notice everything appears exactly as I left it. The drawer to Dad’s messy undeveloped film collection is pulled open where a rainbow of colored film rolls awaits to be organized. I whirl the swivel chair around to the film draw and begin placing the canisters of film on the table to the side. Some of the rolls of film have dates on them, so I try my best to channel my inner Monica Geller and create an efficient system. First, I separate the rolls with dates on them from the rest of the pile and chronologically arrange them. Next, I organize all the other rolls of film without dates not only by color but also by film brands. About an hour later, I place the final roll of film in line with its other Kodak, Ilford, and pink labeled siblings and lean back to admire my work.

Pride swells inside me as I whisper to no one in particular, “Monica would be so proud.”

A slight chuckle escapes me in my now state of delusion.

Peering over the rainbow assortment of film two film rolls catch my attention. The first is from the row of films organized chronologically. Picking up the film canister I examine the most recent date.

April 7, 2030

Rubbing my thumb over the date, “He finished this roll of film last week. April 7th was a week before he died.”

Suddenly an idea begins to bloom. If he took this only a few weeks ago that means I can go into this film, assuming it will work again, and talk with him. This version of my father must have answers for me. I might finally get the answers I’ve been searching for. A torrent of nausea rips through me.

Squeezing my eyes shut, I flatten my palms on the table in an attempt to ground myself to reality. Opening my eyes, the second roll of film once again catches my attention as it appears to be sparkling. It’s the same pink roll of film my father gave me for my eighth birthday. Examining it closer I notice a small engraving on the side.

August 13, 2011

The wind is knocked out of me as I drop the film to the table as if it were on fire. My jaw tightens and the knot in my stomach feels as if it has given birth to a thousand more knots. This is the roll of film from my eighth birthday.

Wait, that can’t be right.

Shifting my eyes to the corner of his desk where the picture frame sits, “If this is the roll of film from my birthday then how did he get this photo of the three of us from my party developed?”

Picking up the picture frame in one hand and the roll of film in the other.

“Where did you come from,” I question the family photo.

Directing my attention to the pink-clad film canister, “And what answers might you contain?”

Chapter 12

The process of developing film is typically very soothing through its rhythmic dipping and dunking, but today with this particular roll of film, I'm on edge. An invisible weight presses down on my chest with my unanswered questions. Anxiety rolls ripples through me with the hopes that I will somehow be transported into this roll of film. It's worked before unintentionally, now it needs to work. If I'm right this is the film roll my father used to take photos at my eighth birthday party—it's also the day he left us. A sharp pain shoots through my head as I continue to nurse my headache from earlier. Taking a seat in the swivel chair, the room begins to spin. This time the spinning of the room is more than just in my head; it's swirling as if I am caught in a tornado. The pressure in my head continues to intensify until it all goes black.

"Where am I?" I groan.

The carpeted floor beneath me smells remarkably familiar to the cinnamon and dog hair scent of my childhood home. Rising from the floor, I realize the familiar scent and carpet remind me of home because that is exactly where I am. The digital alarm clock by my bed reads August 13, 2011. My eighth birthday. I was transported back to the day he left us. The knots begin to tighten again at the thought of having to relive this day. Focus. Look for what you didn't see as a child. Suddenly, the door handle begins to jiggle.

"For Heaven's sake, William the door handle to Adelia's room is still sticking! I asked you to fix this weeks ago!" shouts my mother from the other side of the door.

Scanning the pink-painted room with dolls strewn about I do a quick survey to make sure my younger self is not in here. Walking over to the round window that overlooks the playset in the backyard I see my younger self having a picnic in the grass with my two friends, Macy and

Abby, and our dolls. Nostalgia begins to settle in at the sight of little Adelia, although back then my friends called me Addie, unaware of the life changing events that will happen tonight. All of a sudden, the door rattles again shaking me out of it.

Whipping around from the window I search for a hiding spot. Dropping to the floor I roll under the bed taking care to pull my legs in, so they don't stick out. Finally, Mom shoves her shoulder into my door with a thump as she enters the room. While I can't see her face, her feet doddle about as she appears to be searching for something. Watching her like a hawk, she moves over toward the window to check on my friends and me. Next, she moves to the closet where she bends down, and her face comes into view. Hastily, I grabbed a stuffed blue rabbit lying nearby and placed it in front of my face.

"Aha ha!" Mom exclaims triumphantly as she stands with the item she was searching for and exits the room closing the door behind her. What was she looking for?

Squirming out from under the bed, I carefully follow her to the edge of the stairs taking care not to be seen. The moment I exit my old room the smell of bacon and freshly brewed coffee hits me. A rush of emotion swirls through me at the familiar scent. Mom always used to make bacon and coffee in the morning because it was Dad's favorite. She stopped making both once he left.

Abruptly, the back door creaks open and I can just barely make out my dad's old white tennis shoes he always wore around the house, "Honey, where did you move my present for Adelia?"

"The one with the sparkly pink wrapping paper? It is on the kitchen counter next to her cake."

“Okay, thanks. Not sure why you had to move it in the first place,” Dad lets out a grumble.

“I heard that, William!” Mom shouts back.

“You were supposed to!”

Shock hits me as I witness this exchange from my perch on the stairs. I never knew they were so catty to one another. I had never seen any indication of there being trouble between them then again, I was only eight. That’s why it was such a shock when Dad left that night. Tonight. The memory of them fighting that night rushes forward from the catacombs of my mind. The anger on their faces seems so out of place for the two loving parents I’ve always known. Why were they fighting? The memory continues to play like a movie, as I watch Dad grab his luggage walking out into the dark night. He gets into a waiting ride share before driving away. That was the last time I saw him.

The rest of the day carries on as I remember it. Mom and Dad helping each other host my birthday party, passing out cake, and handing me presents. No sign of the anger I know is to come. The moment came when the family photo that is sitting on Dad’s desk back in Ireland was taken. Standing inside the house my view from the window in my old room at the party in the backyard is perfect. When Dad handed the camera off to my Uncle Thomas and went to stand by Mom, I noticed an odd exchange between the two of them in their facial expressions. Almost as if my father was asking Mom if it was all right for him to stand next to her with his arm around her waist. What was going on between them? Realization hits me like a tsunami. Suddenly, I can’t breathe. Was one of them, possibly Dad, unfaithful?

Shaking the thought out of my head, “No. I refuse to believe that. It must have been a financial issue or something else that drove them apart,” I whisper. My heart begins to ache at the thought of their potentially having been someone else. Is that why our family shattered? Now more than ever I need answers.

Then I notice it. The reason Dad has this photo on his desk is because it did not come from his camera that Uncle Thomas used, but from Aunt Jenny who also was snapping photos. How did I never notice her before?

“Who are you and why are you in Addie’s room?”

Panic races through me as I whip around to see a teenage Josh standing at the door.

“I’m Addie’s aunt,” I lie.

“Why aren’t you down at the party?” Josh questions. He looks to be about fifteen if my memory serves correctly.

“I just came up to get a gift Addie’s mom asked me to get, but I can’t seem to find it. Why are you here in my niece’s room?” I question placing a hand on my hip. Looking around the room, Josh’s expression starts to look panicked. I recognize the moment the lie pops into his head before he speaks, “I was just looking for the bathroom.” He shifts his weight from foot to foot.

“Nice try, there’s a bathroom downstairs and you know it. Want to come up with something else, perhaps the truth?”

Josh’s eyes wander throughout the room before settling back on me.

“Which one of Addie’s parents are you a sibling to? You look an awful lot like an older version of Addie.”

“Oh no, don’t think you can evade the question, Joshua,” I do my best to mask the panic inside me at his observation.

“Okay fine,” Josh lets out an exaggerated breath. “Mr. French asked me to come upstairs to his room and find an envelope in his bedside drawer. He asked me to put it underneath Addie’s pillow. Here you do it. I want cake.” Josh walks across the space of the room arm outstretched and places the envelope in my hands.

“Thanks,” he shouts as his feet thunder down the stairs. Without looking I know this is the birthday card with the heart necklace inside. I place it under my pillow for little Adelia to find later.

Going back over to the window, Josh is soon back out in the yard making his way over to Dad who hands him a slice of cake. The two are speaking as Josh gestures toward the window I’m looking out, both of them looking up to me. I fall back throwing myself on to the bed out of view. I need to get out of here. That’s when I remember this house has a basement. Racing from my old room I make it down the stairs and to the dark, musky basement just in time to hear William come inside.

“Daddy where are you going?” my younger self shouts.

“I’ll just be a minute, Addie. I need to check on a special birthday surprise,” William calls back from inside the house.

Carefully, I make my way down the basement stairs through the darkness. Hands braced against both walls feeling my way down down down until I hit the bottom. Taking a step off the landing something thin hits my face. Reaching up I feel through the air until a dangling string enters my grasp. Yanking down on the string the dark room becomes dimly lit. Camera equipment is all around me. In the far-right corner, darkroom equipment and chemicals are neatly

organized on a table. Along all the walls and draped across the room are film photos drying. William took these. Upon closer inspection some of the photos are of the three of us, others are portraits of Mom or me. Walking through the rows of photos toward the back the images start to change from our family to landscapes of Italy. Images of his time spent there as a young man. There's one image of William, the one I met, looking back at the camera in the same outfit he wore when I met him. The skyline of Florence is behind him in the photo as if it was taken by someone else just before I arrived.

There wasn't anyone else around except for William when I was transported there. How could this be? Someone must have left shortly before I showed up, or maybe he used to wear that outfit frequently?

Glancing at my watch it's nearly time for Mom and Dad to start arguing. Carefully, I make my way to the top of the basement stairs hopeful I can remain hidden here during the impending storm. My stomach begins to knot at the thought of having to listen to my family crumble once again. Taking a deep breath, I steady myself.

"Remember you're an adult now. Look for clues, you already know what happened. The key is finding out how," I remind myself.

"Is Addie in bed? We need to talk," Mom asks now standing in the kitchen by the stairs.

"She's fast asleep. Our little girl had a big day," Dad remarks. I can hear the smile in his voice.

"I'm happy she had such a fun day. Do you want some wine before we talk?" Mom asks. While I can't see her the sound of a cabinet door opening floats over to my perch on the stairs. Glasses clink down on the granite countertop.

“No thanks. I’m going to go develop some film. What do you want to talk about?” Dad questions.

“That actually,” Mom’s voice has turned hard.

“What about it?”

“William, you have a problem. That film is killing you. Please just stop.” The floor squeaks from Dad shifting his feet.

“What are you talking about? I don’t have a problem. So what if I get headaches from it. I like that I get to see her when I develop film. You know how much I miss my sister and by getting to visit her even just for a little while it makes me feel better. What’s so bad about that?” Dad’s voice begins to rise. This is about the time I remember crawling out of bed and lying at the top of the stairs listening all those years ago. I look up towards the direction of the stairs where I know my eight-year-old self is listening.

“You know it’s a problem William. Your sister will understand. I love that you’ve found a way to feel close to her again, but if she knew that every time you visit her it is slowly killing you, I guarantee she would tell you to stop.” Mom walks to the living room. Dad follows after her voice fading slightly.

“The doctor said it could be cancerous in the future not that it is now.”

“It will be if you don’t stop! If you won’t do it for me then what about for Addie huh? What am I going to tell our little girl when I find her father dead in that damn basement! All because he couldn’t stop developing some stupid magical photos,” Mom screams her voice thick with emotion. Though I can’t see her, I know by her tone she’s crying.

“You know it’s not that simple. I already lost Adelia once I’m not going to do it again.”

“Oh, so you’ll stay loyal to your sister Adelia, but not your daughter Adelia! You are not the man I married anymore,” Mom scoffs.

Here it comes. She’ll be going to the closet soon to get his suitcase.

“For the love of all that is holy don’t be so dramatic! Why can’t I have both huh?” Dad retorts.

“Because one of them will literally *kill* you if you don’t quit.”

How did I never remember this part of their fight before? Dad’s been going into the film to see his dead sister. That’s why he left. Mom gave him an ultimatum and he chose the film over us. But how is the time traveling film dangerous? Nausea rolls through me my head beginning to ache.

“I’ve had enough Will. You either stop with the film or get out.”

“What do you mean? You want a divorce?” sorrow creeps into Dad’s voice.

“Yes. If you love us enough, the ones who are still *living*, then this won’t be a difficult decision.”

“Of course it’s a difficult decision!” Dad shouts.

“You are stuck in this loop where you literally cannot stop visiting the dead. I am done. You need to grieve your sister and more on. William this isn’t healthy for you physically or emotionally.”

“This isn’t about me. It’s about my sister.”

“You’re right it’s not just about you. It’s about me, and our daughter. Your choices are negatively affecting all of us and it’s time you stop, or I promise you will never see that little girl upstairs again.”

The room goes silent. The nausea within me intensifies.

“You wouldn’t dare,” Dad whispers. “Adelia is my everything.”

“I one hundred percent will. Someone has to protect her.”

“Protect her from what?”

“From you! Did you not hear me? What if she comes home one day and finds you dead down there,” Mom says most likely gesturing to the basement.

“It won’t matter her age, finding her father passed away will traumatize her. And when she learns it all could have been prevented, but you were so addicted you couldn’t stop, then how do you think she’ll feel,” venom coats Mom’s every word.

“I promise you I will fight you. I will fight you tooth and nail every step of the way if you try and take her from me,” Dad vows.

“Will, you have nothing to stand on. As soon as the courts hear my side, they will side with me. When they learn that you could have stopped, but visiting your dead sister was more important to you, not only will I get full custody you’ll probably be court ordered to get your head checked,” Mom jibes. She’s probably right. If I hadn’t of experienced the magic film myself, I would have thought he was insane. This is why Mom never would explain what happened between her and dad. I needed to live it.

“Fine,” Dad huffs. “I’ll go, but can I at least visit her?”

“No, Will. The same thing could happen, and she’d still get hurt.”

“And you think she won’t get hurt by me just vanishing. Abandoning her out of the blue! Now you’re the one that’s delusional. Couldn’t the visits be supervised? I’ll take anything please don’t kick me out of her life!” Dad cries.

“Adelia will still get hurt, but isn’t it better that the last time she sees her father is alive and happy instead of the alternative? I can take care of her. I’ll find a way to explain it, so she understands.”

I nearly scoff out loud knowing she never did. Instead, she did the exact opposite, acting like he never existed. One of them moves the suitcase overhead.

“You already packed it,” Dad says surprised.

“I had a pretty good feeling you wouldn’t choose us,” Mom says through angry tears.

“What about my darkroom equipment?”

Mom laughs but its joyless devoid of humor.

“I’ll ship it to you once you get settled somewhere.”

“How do I know you’re not just saying that, and I won’t get a box of broken equipment?”

“I’ve tried my best to stop you from killing yourself, but I’m done getting in the way. I promise I will send you all your equipment intact.” Every one of Mom’s words is coated in ice and venom but there’s truth in her tone.

The two go silent once again for several moments. My thundering heart the only thing I can hear.

“My cab is here. I’ll let you know where I end up,” Dad says feet moving overhead of my place in the basement.

“William, I want you to know I’m truly sorry it had to end like this. I wish you would have chosen differently,” Mom confesses. Her heart is breaking I just know it. Mine is breaking all over again though this time not just for me, but for all three of us. Mom had to make an impossible decision. If only Dad had loved both of us more than his strange addiction.

The front door closes. Quickly, I make my way out from the basement stairs sneaking out the back door adjacent from the living room. Running around the side of the house I see Dad’s

cab beginning to pull away. Doubling over the contents of my stomach are soon on the grass in front of me. Some of the knots in my stomach loosen.

One of the teenage neighbor boys has left his bike on our front lawn. Without thinking I pick it up and begin racing after Dad.

Chapter 13

I ride behind him for a few miles before the cab stops at the diner we used to visit every Sunday after church for chocolate chip pancakes. Dad gets out of the cab suitcase in tow. Through the slightly fogged windows I see him take a seat at our usual booth. Nostalgia washes over me. I haven't been to this diner in so long. Mom never took me here after he left. Uncle Thomas did once but Mom told him not to after I came home one day asking to see Dad.

The bell of the diner jingles announcing my arrival as I take a seat at the U-shaped bar. Situated on the far side I can still see Dad's face. Other people sit at the bar providing a shield for me. I can see him, but from his angle I know it's harder for him to see me. His face is red and puffy from crying. The waitress walks over to him. I can just barely make out his order. Coffee and chocolate chip pancakes with a side of bacon. Exactly what he would get every time he brought me.

"What can I get for you miss?" questions the waitress who just took Dad's order. How did she get over here so fast?

"Black coffee, chocolate chip pancakes and a side of bacon please," I order trying not to stare at my father. The waitress frowns.

"Funny, that man over there just ordered the exact same thing," she says gesturing towards dad.

"The man must have good taste then I guess," I jest. The waitress nods her head in reply before leaving to place my order in the kitchen.

Out of nowhere a memory from my first journey into the film resurfaces. William and I are lying on the grass in the Italian countryside. He was talking about his sister, Adelia. How he imagined I'm what she would have looked like had she ever gotten the chance to grow up. An idea pops in

my head. What if I go over there and talk to him as his sister. Will I be able to convince him to stay. To stop developing film and just be present with his family? Rising from my seat to go over a darker thought emerges stopping me. Do I want him to stay? If he stays that will change everything? I finally have a chance at my dream job. My life is good. Do I really want to change the person I've become just so I can have my father back? Something inside says to sit down rooting me to my seat. My heart is urging me to go over and speak with him, but my gut is saying otherwise. My instincts have never failed me before. Dad was the one who taught me to always listen to my intuition.

“Here you are darlin’,” says the waitress plopping down the food in front of me. She gets out a mug from behind the counter and pours the coffee. The strong smell reminds me of Josh bringing my mind back to reality. If I go over there, I'll lose my friendship with Joshua. A twinge stabs at my heart with the thought of losing him.

“Thank you. It smells amazing,” I smile back and dig in no intention of moving.

After finishing my food, Dad has yet to even take a bit of his pancakes though he's slowly been sipping his coffee. What is it that I need to accomplish in order to get back to reality and out of this film? The longer I've had to process all that I learned from my parents' argument the more I want, no, need to get out of here and never come back.

The bell on the door rings signaling another patron who walks over to dad's booth and sits down. Who is that? The man is wearing a dark jacket with a hood. Dad looks surprised to see the individual but doesn't say anything. The man must be talking. The man raises his hands to remove his hood which falls back revealing the back of the man's head and the side of his face. Though he's younger, I recognize Uncle Thomas immediately. Something twists inside me

seeing the man who raised me at the same table as my father. If I go over there, he'll recognize me immediately.

Curiosity itches at me desperately wanting to hear their conversation. Grabbing a menu, I place it in front of my face and walk to the booth just before theirs. I slide in sitting with my back to them.

"You're a coward," Uncle Thomas says surprisingly calm. I grip my menu tight at his tense words.

"I'm only doing what your sister thinks is best for Adelia," Dad responds somewhat sheepish.

"What about what *you* think is best for her? Don't you think it would be best for Addie to have her father in her life. A father, I might add, that she *adores*."

Looking up from my menu I can see Dad's reflection in the diner window. He's looking down at his uneaten food.

"Of course, I think it would be best for Addie if I stay, but Nicole seems to think otherwise."

"Prove her wrong. Give up your obsession with developing film or whatever it is that she was saying is the problem. Go back to your family."

"I can't."

"Why not?" Uncle Thomas shouts. A few people turn to stare for a moment before going back to their meals.

"You wouldn't understand."

"Try me. Nicole said it was something to do with your sister. I have a sister too, you know this, she's your wife."

“Soon to be ex-wife apparently.”

“Unless you do something about it. Fight for your family. Don’t let your addiction get the better of you and destroy your life.”

“It’s not just an addiction, Thomas. You’re telling me to fight for my family and I am just not the family you’re referring to.”

“Then explain it to me. Let me help you figure this out please. They need you.” His reflection in the window shows Thomas with his hands flat on the table palms up in pleading.

“I don’t know how it happened. How it’s even possible, but when I develop film in my darkroom, I’ve somehow been time traveling into the photos I was developing,” Dad whispers leaning across the table towards Thomas.

“Adelia, my sister, has been in the photos I was developing. Next thing I know I’m waking up in a field in Washington and she’s there. Alive. I keep going back because she needs me. I have to stop her from drinking the creek water, so she won’t get sick. So, I won’t lose her. I’m almost to the point in the film where she drinks from the creek. If I can just stop her than everything will be all right. Then I can stop developing film and come back to all my family.”

“Ignoring the fact that you’ve supposedly been time traveling what will you do if it doesn’t work? What if you stop her from drinking the water that time, but she drinks from it later when you aren’t around. Will, there’s no guarantee she’ll come back. You aren’t God, you can’t prevent the inevitable.”

“It has to work. It’s the only way I get to keep Adelia. Both of them.”

“But what if it doesn’t? You’ll turn yourself into a madman.”

“I’ll do whatever it takes.”

“What if what it takes is you going to God? Ask Him for peace and discernment,”

Thomas presses his hands together.

“He can’t help me. I’ve already asked, and He didn’t respond.”

“So, you don’t get an answer one time and you stop believing? When did you ask?”

“Just after Addie was born.”

Thomas begins to chuckle looking down at the table.

“Don’t you see? God did respond!” Thomas waves his hands. “He answered your prayer by giving you your daughter, *Adelia*. You asked for Adelia back, didn’t you? He gave you Adelia.”

Dad is quiet for a moment.

“She’s not the Adelia I was praying about. As much as I love her, God giving me a different Adelia than the one I was asking for is too much of a fortune cookie trickster answer.”

“Addie may not be the person you were thinking about, but God knows she is the Adelia you need. Why else would you and Nicole have named her that?”

“It was Nicole’s idea. As a way to honor my sister’s memory and keep her close.” A rogue tear falls from Dad’s face. He quickly wipes it away with the back of his hand.

“When was the last time you prayed, William?”

“I don’t know. When I was asking for Adelia back.”

Thomas slowly nods his head up and down in understanding.

“You’ve spent eight years away from God running around doing life the way you think is best. Eight years trying your hardest to bring back your sister from the dead, yet nothing has worked. Funny enough I know someone who’s in the business of raising the dead. You do too, but you have to have faith that He can do it.”

“He abandoned me. Why would I believe He would help me now.”

“William, Christ didn’t abandon you. He *died* for you. You’re the one who abandoned him. Did Nicole say you could still call Addie?”

Dad scrunches his face in confusion at the change of subject.

“No, she said I can’t even send her letters. Zero contact.” Dad’s face looks heartbroken at the thought of losing his relationship with his daughter.

“Interesting. So, from Addie’s perspective when she wakes up in the morning she’ll have gone from a rich and loving relationship with her father to zero contact, yet she did nothing wrong.”

“Yes, and it’s killing me. Nicole is taking her anger with me out on Addie, and it isn’t fair. She thinks she’s punishing me, but she’s really hurting both Addie and me,” Dad rips the paper napkin in half.

Uncle Thomas laughs a little before leaning back into the booth silently staring at Dad. His head nearly touches mine before I lean forward grateful to have avoided contact.

“You can’t have a relationship with someone you don’t speak to. The same goes for your relationship with Christ. He didn’t cut you off, you cut Him off. All you have to do is pray and then listen for His response.”

“What if it’s not the response I want.”

“That could happen, but that’s when your faith kicks in. Trust that God has your best interest at heart. Pick up your Bible and learn more about Him. Grow your relationship with Christ and your faith and trust in Him will increase as well.”

My heartrate increases at the prospect of Dad surrendering to Christ. If he lays his burdens at Christ's feet, I know they will be lifted. Maybe then Dad will come back to us? Anticipation wells inside me. Please, Dad trust in Christ. He's waiting for you to run to Him.

"I don't think I can do it. Thomas, it's been so long since I've prayed, I wouldn't even know how, let alone, where to begin."

"If you'd like I can pray with you. All you need to do is ask for forgiveness and then give your requests to God. Lay all your burdens at His feet."

Dad remains silent for a moment shifting in his seat.

"I can't. Tell Adelia I'm sorry. Be the father to her that I couldn't. The father she deserves," Dad says before sliding out of the booth and bolting out the door.

The bell ringing in his absence. The reflection in the window shows Uncle Thomas with his eyes closed burying his head in his hands. The ringing from the bell grows louder in my ears.

Slipping out of my booth, I run out into the night after Dad. Spinning all around, Dad is nowhere to be found. How did he vanish so quickly? Ironically, that's a question I've been asking nearly my entire life. My vision blurs as the ringing in my ears worsens pain now shooting through my head. Pressing my hands to my ears I let out a scream of agony, eyes shut tight trying to block out my surroundings. The ringing grows louder, louder, louder, until—silence.

Chapter 14

Opening my eyes, relief floods my senses at the sight of being back in Dad's office in Ireland. Warm tears fall from my face as I place a hand over my mouth. Off in the distance, a ringing begins though I soon recognize it as my phone. Running down the hall toward the direction of the noise I find my phone on the guest bed right where I left it.

"Josh! It's so good to hear your voice," I cry into the phone.

"Addie, what's wrong? You never text me that you made it safe. I've been going out of my mind," Josh says frantically into the phone.

"I'm so sorry. I must have forgot and then the jet lag kicked in and turns out that can really knock you out. When I finally woke up my phone was dead. I guess I forgot my charger at home which totally isn't like me, I know, but I got a new one earlier at the market. Josh you'll never believe what happened," I ramble trying to get the words out as fast as possible.

"What happened? Are you safe?"

"Yes, physically I'm fine. I'm at my dad's cottage packing up his things. Everything was going smoothly until I found his office with all his camera gear in it."

"Did you find the Canon?"

"I did. I'm bringing it home for us to share. That's not the crazy part though, are you sitting down?"

"Yeah, I'm at home at my desk."

Taking a deep breath, I try not to overthink what I'm about to say.

"I finally found my answers. I know why my family broke," I breath. Saying the words releases a weight in my chest I'd long become accustomed to.

"What happened?"

I tell Josh everything. From my first encounter with William, to his fight with mom, and conversation with Uncle Thomas. At first, he's flabbergasted I'm sure from his silence, but soon comes around.

"You're sure you didn't hit your head?"

"Yes. It really happened. Dad became addicted to the chance of bringing his sister back that's why he left. Well technically, Mom kicked him out, but either way."

"He never brought her back either. He wasted his whole life searching and addicted to the impossible. Yet, Uncle Thomas held up his end and was the father you deserved. Why wouldn't your dad pray with him?" Josh questions.

"I'm not sure. There's one more roll of film left that would give me the answers to my final questions."

"Are you sure it's safe for you to go back? I thought you said you didn't want to, that it hurt your head too much."

"It does hurt, but not having these answers hurts more. It's only one more time and then I'm finished."

"If I asked for you to wait for me to get there, would you?" Josh's voice is full of concern.

"By the time you get here I could be out of the film and back with answers."

"But what if you get hurt in there? Isn't it possible for you to not come back at all? I need to be there to help you."

"How would you help me?"

"Can't I wake you up or something?"

“Maybe, but what if you wake me up and I’m right in the middle of speaking with Dad? I won’t be able to go back in to get the rest of my questions answered.”

“Because you can only develop film once, I know. I could end up ruining everything,” Josh says quietly. I can tell he’s processing this realization.

“I’m sorry, but I need to do this now. I’ll call you when I get back, I promise.”

“I need you to mean that promise and not forget, otherwise I’m flying over there.”

“I mean it. I’ll call you as soon as I’m back.”

“Be careful, Addie. I love you,” Josh’s words warm me in a way they’ve never before. Does he mean more than a friend?

“I love you too,” I say before ending the call. I can’t think about him right now.

Chapter 15

Grabbing the roll of film from the table with the date *April 7, 2030*, scrolled on it I make my way back to the darkroom. I wonder why every time I come out of the film it takes me back to Dad's office and not the darkroom. I guess it doesn't matter.

Switching the regular light off for a red light I begin the task of developing the film. My stomach knots once again at the prospect of learning the answers to my final questions. Before I know it, I feel the usual pull of the film taking me under only this time I'm back in Dad's office. Wait, did it not work?

"Hello, Adelia," Dad says from somewhere behind me. Swiveling around in the office chair I find that he is sitting in the corner of the room. I never noticed the shelves of books making up the wall behind him or the plush chair where he sits.

"Dad," I whisper while rushing out of my chair to hug him. Instantly, I know there's something different about him than the version of my father who abandoned me as a child. This is the man I never had the chance to meet. The father I prayed every night would return and love me enough to stay.

"I've missed you so much my sweet girl. Look how grown you are," Dad chokes out as tears descend from both our eyes.

"I'm 28 now. I work as a professional chef in LA, actually I just got this amazing promotion." I beam while wiping my tears unsure as to why these were my first words to him in two decades. Dad beams back at me.

"I'm so proud of you. I knew you would grow up to do amazing things. It doesn't surprise me that you're a chef. You always loved to bake and be in the kitchen with your grandma."

“Yeah, she was a major influence on my culinary journey.”

“Since you’re here I assume that means I’m gone,” Dad says looking to the ground.

“You had a heart attack last week.”

“Heart attack, hmm. I would have thought the tumor who have taken me first.”

“Tumor? From the film?” I ask looking around us at the film and equipment spread throughout the office.

Dad nods in confirmation.

“You never brought her back. Did you still visit her? See her grow up?”

“I did. You look exactly like her,” Dad says marveling at my appearance.

“Was it worth it? Choosing her over us?” I question swallowing a lump in my throat.

Dad’s smiling face turns serious. He places his hands on my shoulders.

“Are you happy? Do you have a good life?” Dad asks intently.

“Yes. I love my life.”

“Then yes, it was worth it,” Dad’s face softens.

“You don’t think I could have had an amazing life if you had stayed? Because I do, I did for my first eight years with you,” I say adamantly.

“I wasn’t fully present, Addie. As much as I wanted to be I wasn’t. Part of me died that day with my sister Adelia. When I learned I could travel through the film to see her again I found that piece of me. Every time I left and came back to reality, I felt that piece die inside me. It was agony going back and forth.”

“So why did you keep going back? Why not just stay in the film?”

Dad looks down at our now intertwined hands.

“The film doesn’t let you stay. Once you reach the last exposure it kicks you out. Didn’t you know that’s how you’ve been able to get out every time.”

I look up at him in shock.

“How did you know I’ve traveled through other film?”

“I can see it in your eyes. There’s pain in your head right now isn’t there? Also, you weren’t surprised to see me at all a moment ago. Where have you been?”

All this time I thought I needed to figure out how to escape the film yet, it was always going to let me out. The film was never something I needed to work against. I should have been working with it.

“The Italian countryside right outside Florence was my first visit. You were a young man in your 20s then. We went all around the city. You took me to get gelato and then to the Uffizi,” I trail off looking around the room.

“Where else?”

I remain silent continuing to look anywhere else but at him. Finally, I muster up the words.

“The next journey was to revisit my eighth birthday.”

Dad’s eager expression changes to one of understanding and sorrow.

“Only this time I heard your entire argument with Mom. I even followed you to the diner we always used to visit. Uncle Thomas found you,” I stop unable to continue as my next question catches in my throat.

“I hadn’t realized you heard that,” Dad looks down at our hands still intertwined. “I’m sorry.”

“Why...why didn’t you pray with Uncle Thomas?” The words squeak out of me. Dad inhales deeply before slowly exhaling as if he’s waited a lifetime to answer this question.

“Simply put, I wasn’t ready back then.”

“Back then. Does that mean you became ready? Did you find Christ later in life? Hope swells in my chest.

“I did,” Dad grins, his eyes twinkling. Relief floods my body at the news. He can see the question in my eyes the urge to know more.

“It took me about a decade after I left until I finally accepted that I couldn’t bring Adelia back. Shortly after that realization a friend of mine witnessed to me. Once I accepted Christ, everything was different. Of course, I still had my struggles, but my burden was finally lifted. I was finally free.” A tear slides down his face.

“I would have been 18 by then. Why didn’t you ever reach out?”

Dad crinkles his face in a mix of hurt and confusion.

“Addie, I did reach out. I sent you letters, but they were all returned. I thought you didn’t want anything to do with me, so I respected that and stopped sending them.”

“That wasn’t me. I never received any letters,” I say while trying to rack my brain as to where I was living at the time.

“What time of year did you send them?”

“Autumn, I believe.”

Realization hits me then anger.

“I was already away at college. Did you send them to our old address?”

“Yes, it was the only one I had.”

“Mom. We had just moved a few months prior. She had all our mail rerouted to our new house. She must have received the letters and sent them back to you,” I say shaking my head angry with her. “I’m sorry. She had no right. I was an adult by then I could have handled it.”

“I’m sure she thought she was just trying to protect you.”

“Even still that doesn’t make what she did right. I have a feeling it was more about protecting herself than me.”

“What do you mean?” Dad asks.

“Before I came here to Ireland, I was trying to find out what happened between you and Mom. After you left when I was eight, she acted as if you didn’t exist. She never told me anything. We got in a fight over how she handled everything with you. Even then she refused to tell me what happened. Claiming I would learn everything I need to once I arrived.”

“She was correct on that one. Wasn’t she?”

“Yes, she was. I accused Mom of hating you so much she had to pretend like you never existed. Turns out it was the opposite.”

“What?” Dad whispers his now wrinkled brow creasing.

“During our fight Mom admitted that she loved you so much she had to pretend like you didn’t exist in order to not fall apart. She had just become a single parent and couldn’t risk not being able to piece herself back together, at least that’s what she told me,” I explain.

“She never remarried?”

“Never even dated,” I admit shaking my head.

“I could have sworn she hated me. Instead, you’re saying she never stopped loving me?”

“When she heard you had passed I could hear the heartbreak in her voice.”

Dad takes a seat in the plush chair behind him releasing my hands. Burying his head in his hands he mumbles, “I should have gone to her. To both of you once I was freed from my addiction. Maybe if she had seen how I’d changed she would have let me come home. We could have been a family again.”

“One thing I’ve learned from your leaving is not to dwell on what could have been. We’ll never know so we might as well just move on. After you ran away from Uncle Thomas that night at the diner our family’s fate was sealed. Though I do have to ask, why didn’t you try and find us? We didn’t go far.”

“I did. Your grandmother found me at our old house. I guess the new owners are friends of the family. They called her and she came right over,” Dad confesses.

“You just said you didn’t come back to find us? Now you’re saying grandma found you at our old house. What’d she say?”

“She told me to leave and never come back. That the two of you were doing great and didn’t need me coming back into your lives messing everything up.”

I swallow trying to keep the anger within. Why do all the women in my family think it’s all right to make decisions for me? I wasn’t a child anymore!

“How long ago was this?”

“About five years ago, you must have been living in California by then. During our conversation she mentioned your mom and Thomas were out of town helping you move.”

I nod.

“Speaking of Thomas did you ever see much of him?”

“I heard you tell him in the diner to be the father I deserved. Once you left, he really stepped up. Never missed an event. It wasn’t just grandma who fueled my passion for cooking. He taught me a great deal as well like how to spatchcock a chicken,” I chuckle at the memory.

“Good, I’m glad you had someone you could count on other than your mother.”

“Josh really showed up for me too. Do you remember him? Macy’s older brother.”

Dad laughs as he readjusts his position in the chair.

“Absolutely I remember Joshua! He was the closest thing I had to a son. I kept tabs on both of you. Does he still work for that aerospace company out of Texas?”

“No, he never enjoyed working for them. Texas was too flat for his taste,” I laugh recalling our phone calls during the brief time he lived there. He never failed to not complain about the lack of mountains, though he did like the people.

“Josh recently told me you reached out to him. My mom found out before he could tell me, and she convinced him not to say anything. He’s really sorry.”

“Tell him not to worry. I figured something like that happened. You two still keep in touch, are you?” Dad makes a motion with his hands indicating if Josh and I are more than friends.

“No, we’re just friends. Best friends for 20 years now,” I say with a grin.

“What about Macy?”

“Our friendship is complicated. She was never the same after you left. Josh says it’s because she didn’t know how to handle it. Macy watched as her brother and best friend mourned over the loss of a man who was still alive. We were so young she didn’t understand. Now she’s working to become a doctor. She’s been living in Africa for the last three years helping as many people as she can.”

“I’m sorry. My actions really messed up your life in more ways than I could have imagined. Geez, it messed with more lives than I would have thought,” Dad apologizes reaching for my hand again.

I let his apology wash over me. Healing pieces of myself I long forgot were broken.

“Thank you. Thank you for owning your mistakes and understanding the pain they caused,” I say through tears my voice thick with emotion.

“More than that I’m sorry you had to see my conversation with Thomas at the diner. I’m sorry I didn’t pray with him. That I didn’t surrender to Christ right then. I should have fought harder against my addiction. I wasn’t open to Christ and didn’t want to believe, accept really, that my sister wasn’t coming back. There’s truly no excuse good enough to defend my actions.”

“Thank you for saying that” I say rising from my seat to embrace my father.

Dad accepts my hug squeezing tight.

“I forgive you,” I whisper into his ear closing my eyes. The knots in my stomach begin to unravel as more of my broken pieces knit themselves back together. Dad sags slightly with relief.

“Promise me something Adelia,” Dad says still hugging me.

“Anything.”

“Go live your best life. No regrets. Don’t let my past mistakes haunt you anymore.

Please,” Dad says shifting back just enough to look me in the eyes.

“I promise.”

“I love you my sweet girl. I’ll see you again one day,” Dad says slowly starting to fade away.

“I love you too, Daddy,” I say the eight-year-old girl in me finally healed. Dad fades away completely leaving me alone in his office.

Sinking into his plush chair I’m surprised to find it’s cold to the touch. Tears spill out of me uncontrollably a mix of heartbreak, love, and anger. Yet somehow, I know these tears are washing me clean of two decades worth of anger, confusion, and pain. After what feels like an eternity, I lift my head and wipe away my tears.

Chapter 16

Keeping my promise, I send Josh a quick text letting him know I'm all right before dismantling the darkroom and boxing up all the camera and film equipment. Once the bathroom is clean of equipment, I take a hot shower continuing to process the events of the last few days, especially the last several hours. Emerging from the shower I feel like a new woman intent on enjoying the little time I have left in Ireland. Throwing on the appropriate attire I grab my camera and the keys to the car and head out the door.

A horse neighs somewhere out of sight though it sounds nearby. Curiosity pulls me around the corner of the cottage. Not twenty feet away from the cottage stands a large white and brown horse with only a small fence preventing her from striding over to me. Instead, I close the distance between us crossing the shared driveway before the awaiting horse. Petting her on the head she immediately nuzzles my hand for the apple I grabbed on the way out the door.

"Oh, you want this? Here you go," I say holding out my hand flat so she can take the apple. She crunches the fruit happily.

"Aren't you majestic. What kind of horse are you?" I wonder aloud. A quick internet search informs me that she is an Irish Cob.

"I may not know much about horses, but I think you're beautiful. What's should I name you? How about Claire?"

The horse shakes her head yes in agreement.

"Oh, you like that do you? Well, Claire it was lovely to meet you. May I take your photo?" Claire stomps her front leg.

I snap a few photos, Claire switching her pose ever few seconds.

“Seems like you’re no stranger to the camera are you girl? I wonder if Dad every took any photos of you?”

“I can tell you that. What’s your father’s name?” says a man with a thick Irish accent I didn’t notice now standing outside his car. Both Claire and I jump back in surprise though her reaction is due to my surprise.

“Oh sorry, didn’t mean to make ya jump,” says the now familiar looking man.

“Do I know you?” I ask lifting one eyebrow. “You look familiar.”

“Ah you’re the American from the market. I’m James.” He says sticking out his hand.

“Oh, you’re the clerk, right?” I say finally placing him as I shake his hand.

“I don’t actually work there. I was just helping out a friend that day.” James says now sliding his hands into his jacket pockets.

“Then why did you have a name tag? You fill in a lot?”

“Something like that. What are you doing with my horse?” James nods towards Claire.

“Your horse? We were just getting to know each other. She looked like she wanted her photo taken.”

“Ah she did huh?” James raises his brow in amusement.

“Yes, Claire is very photogenic if you didn’t already know that.”

“Claire?”

“I may have named her,” I say peeking down at my now muddy boots. James chuckles at my embarrassment.

“Actually, I did know that. Your father used to photograph Maeve all the time.”

“Maeve? Hmm,” I say scrunching up my nose. “I like Claire more. She doesn’t look like a Maeve to me.”

“Your father said the same thing. He wanted to name her Adelia.”

“Of course he did.”

“Which reminds me, I never caught your name,” James says as he closes his car door before moving closer in my direction.

“Adelia French,” I say shaking his hand once again.

“Pleasure to meet you, Adelia French. James Hawkins, Maeve’s owner, and occasional market clerk.”

“You knew my father? How long were the two of you neighbors before he passed?”

“Ten years, but we didn’t really know each other until about five years ago.”

“How did that start?”

“He came out here one day and start photographing Maeve. I saw them from up at the house. Decided to come down and introduce myself,” James explains while gesturing to his house on the hill above the pasture.

“Similar to how we met. If you don’t count the market.”

“We don’t have to count the market. You headed out?” James points to the open garage door the pumpkin orange car visible.

“I was hoping to go to the Kerry Cliffs and get some photos. How far is that from here?”

“Around 110 kilometers so just under two hours travel.”

“Oh boy.”

“What’s got to you?”

“Nothing. It’s just that’s quite a way to drive and I’m still not used to driving on the opposite side,” I pause looking at him. “It’ll be fine I’ll find something else to do that’s closer,” I say with a wave of my hand.

“No, no. You have to see them they are spectacular. Mind if I drive ya?” James offers.

“Better you than me,” I say after thinking for a moment. Handing him my keys I step out of the way for him to park his car.

“I’ll be right back.”

A moment later James is jogging down the driveway careful not to slip.

“All right let’s go,” James says headed for the pumpkin car.

“See you later, Claire.” I say her name loudly for James to hear.

“Maeve!” James shouts without looking back.

The horse trots back and forth along the fence for a moment before galloping off.

“Your father couldn’t have picked an uglier car. Supreme job, really.”

“Tell me about it.” I say rolling my eyes.

The drive to the cliffs was stunning. Green rolling hills scattered with sheep pinned in their fields by ancient brick fences.

“What part of America are you from?” James asks amused by the elation on my face.

“Los Angeles currently, but I was born and raised in Washington state,” I explain attempting to reel back my wonder.

“I’ve never been to either though I’d imagine that’s a big change.”

“It can be depending on what part of Washington you’re from. I made the switch just fine.”

“You seem quite thrilled about Ireland.”

“It reminds me of home. Washington. All the greenery, if I didn’t know any better, I’d swear I was home,” I clarify still marveling at the surrounding landscape.

“Why do you consider Washington home if you live in California?”

“I live in California for my career, but Washington is where my family lives. It’ll always be home. This is it?” I ask as James parks.

“Just a quick walk up the hill leads to the cliffs but first we have to pay.”

After paying we make our way up the deceptively steep hill. Stopping short of the fence at the cliff’s edge I’m left wonderstruck. If I wasn’t breathless due to the climb I am now.

The wind whips by causing my hair to fly about. Staring down at the rough Atlantic crashing against the jagged rocks below I switch on my camera eager to capture the impressive landscape. Varying shades of green grass climb up from the sea interspersed with brown horizontal layers of serrated rock.

“Impressive ain’t it,” James states.

I nod in confirmation unable to find the words to accurately describe the beauty God has created here.

“See those islands over there?” James asks pointing off in the distance towards a smattering of islands shrouded in fog. Once again, I nod before peering through the viewfinder of my camera zooming in to get a better look at the islands.

“That’s Puffin Island. The one beside it is called Skellig Island. It’s actually one of the many places they filmed *Star Wars*,” James points out.

“Wait, I thought I recognized that. Isn’t the Skellig one Luke Skywalker’s home?” I say snapping a photo of the Jedi’s Island.

“It sure is. I prefer Puffin Island though it’s home to puffins as you can imagine.”

“Do any ever come over to the cliffs?” I ask excitedly searching for the elusive bird.

“Rarely.”

I scan the sharp cliffs through my zoom lens for signs of the bird but come up empty. James is looking at me expectantly.

“Nothing,” I say slightly deflated.

“All the more reason for you to visit again someday,” James says before walking off to another viewpoint.

An hour later and memory card full I find James sitting on a bench overlooking the cliffs.

“Ready to go?”

“Sure am, thank you for bringing me here today,” I say taking a seat beside him.

“It was my pleasure. I love getting to show off Ireland,” James smiles.

“She’s beautiful,” I say marveling at the waves crashing against the impressive cliffs.

“There’s certainly something magical about her,” James says now standing to leave.

“You have no idea,” I mutter following behind him back to the car.

“Thanks for bringing me back,” I say to James holding my hand out for the key to the pumpkin car now parked in the garage again.

“Happy to. How much longer will you be staying?” James asks gesturing to the cottage.

“My flight leaves tonight,” I shrug.

“Tonight. Why would anyone take such a short trip to Ireland?”

“I only came to pack up my father’s belongings and sell the place.”

“You’re selling? That’s a shame. Maeve’ll miss ya.”

“I’m not sure if I’ll sell anymore. I’d miss Claire too much,” I smirk. James rolls his eyes.

“Pleasure meeting you, Adelia. I hope to see you again one day. Travel safe,” James says before walking back up to his house.

After closing the wooden door to the garage, I make my way back into the cottage through the kitchen door. The next few hours before my flight are spent boxing up the last of my father’s belongings. Then deciding which boxes to keep here and which to ship back to Los Angeles.

Making my way into the kitchen for a glass of water I stop short. On the counter real estate agent business cards greet me their professional faces staring back. Individually picking each card up I rip them in half before tossing their shredded remains in the bin by the door. Seeing the beauty of Ireland today made me realize I don’t want to sell. Dad chose to stay in Ireland for a reason and I’m beginning to understand why.

Chapter 17

“Hi!” I say running up to Josh leaning up against his car. Overhead a slightly robotic female voice rings out announcing that no curbside parking is allowed.

“Addie!” Josh smiles as he scoops me up into a hug. “I’m so glad you’re home safe,” he mutters into my ear. “How’s your head?”

“You and me both. For a while there I didn’t know if I’d ever make it back. My head is fine,” I admit now looking him in the eyes.

“Well, I’m happy you did. Come on let’s get you home,” Josh says bumping my arm before placing my suitcase in the back of his car.

Most of the ride is filled with me informing Josh of everything about my time in Ireland.

“Did you sell the house?”

“No, I decided to keep it. Ireland is special. We’ll need to visit together. Maybe in a few months after Chef Hudson gets back from filming,” I say excited by the idea of visiting Ireland with Josh.

“I would love that. You know I’m always down for an adventure. Here we are,” Josh says pulling into my driveway next to a black sedan.

“Whose car is that?” I ask frowning.

“It’s your mom’s rental car.”

“My mom? Why is she here?” I ask grabbing my purse from the back seat.

“She said you two have a lot to talk about. From what you told me I’d say she’s right.”

“You’re not coming in?” I ask after exiting the car.

“This is something you need to do on your own. Fill me in later if you want. I’ll see you soon Addie. Glad your home,” Josh says while putting the car in reverse. We wave goodbye before I turn and head inside.

“Hello?” I say coming through the front door.

“Addie? Oh, hi sweetie!” Mom rushes up from the couch to greet me.

“Hi Mom,” I say hugging her back.

“How was your trip?”

“It was a lot. Why are you here? I thought you would have just called.”

Mom looks at me confused.

“Did you find your dad’s film?” Mom asks probing to see if I learned about the time traveling.

“Yes, I know about the time traveling film Mom.”

“Then you know this is a conversation we need to have in person,” Mom says leading me to the couch. Leaving my bags at the door I follow her over and take a seat.

“Where do you want me to begin?” I ask unsure what to say first.

“Tell me where you visited. What you learned?”

“I only went in three times. First to the Italian countryside in the outskirts of Florence. Dad was in his twenties then. He still hadn’t met you. After that I went to the day of my eighth birthday.”

“Oh, you had to revisit that day?” Mom grimaces folding her legs beneath her on the couch.

“It ended up being very enlightening. Most of my questions were answered during that visit.”

“Who did you speak to? Your father? He was really messed up back then,” Mom states firmly.

“I tried not to speak to anyone. They were mainly answered when I overheard your argument with Dad. The one where you kicked him out. After that I followed him to the diner we used to go to. Uncle Thomas found him and tried convincing him to come home. Give his addiction to God and find peace with his sister Adelia’s passing. They talked for a bit before dad apologized and stormed off.”

“Damn it,” Mom huffs. “Doesn’t surprise me though, your father was never willing to give God a chance,” Mom says turning her body to face toward me.

“Uncle Thomas didn’t tell you about his conversation at the diner?”

Mom shakes her head. “He never mentioned anything. Once I told him what happened he left. I assumed he went after Will, but he never told me, so I didn’t bring it up. All he did tell me was that he promised he would be there whenever either of us needed him.”

“Mom, there’s so much you don’t know.”

“Tell me, please.”

I shift to face her on the couch.

“First, Dad did accept Christ about ten years ago,” I say. Mom’s eyes go wide.

“He said he sent me letters, but they were returned to him. Why didn’t you give me those letters Mom. I was an adult by then I could have handled it,” I ask firmly.

“Just because the law considers you an adult at eighteen doesn’t mean I did. I sent them back to protect you,” she says adamantly.

“Bull! You sent them back to protect you,” I retort allowing just enough venom to coat my words. “You say you loved Dad, but your actions prove you hated him. There’s a thin line

between love and hate which you clearly blurred. You wanted to punish him but ended up hurting your own daughter by not respecting me enough to make my own decisions!”

“What else should I have done. Do you remember when you were asked to the prom by your secret admirer and how upset it made you. I just wanted to prevent that from happening again.”

“That literally makes zero sense. Don’t try and change the subject. Admit you were wrong,” I say now crossing my arms.

“I was wrong. I’m sorry. I should have trusted you enough to make your own decisions,” Mom pleads.

“You’ve always allowed me to make my own decisions for everything else. Why did this have to be any different?”

“Because when it comes to your father, I have a blind spot. I’m not sure if it’s one of hatred or love, but it’s there and I knew that back then. Addie, this is something I’ve been wrestling with for years,” Mom says reaching her arm out to touch me. I shift out of her reach. The look on her face at the rejection pains me but I hold my ground.

“Here’s something else you may not know. Dad came to Washington to find us five years ago,” I start. Mom’s face goes ashen. “He wanted to see if we could be a family again or at least have some contact. He tried to find us at our old house. The Moore’s who live there called grandma because they knew we were out of town. You and Uncle Thomas were in California helping me move into my place,” I say gesturing to the house around us. “Grandma came right over and told Dad to leave and never come back. What is it with you Delano women thinking you know what’s best for your daughters when it comes to Dad?” I ask.

“I swear she never told me any of this,” Mom whispers anger rolling off of her in waves.

“See now you’re angry at grandma. She’ll say she was only trying to protect us,” I pause letting my information sink in. “Now do you understand how that feels when other people make crucial decisions for you that you were perfectly capable of making in the first place!” I spit out anger coating each word.

“Yes, I’m sorry. I never should have made that decision for you. I should have trusted you enough,” Mom begs.

“Not only that, Mom, you should have trusted the way you raised me. Do you believe you taught me to have common sense and to think critically?”

“Of course, I did,” Mom says almost indignant.

“And do you call me out when you think I don’t use common sense?” I ask already knowing the answer.

“Damn, straight I do. Otherwise, we’d have a problem,” Mom says in jest.

“If you trust me in all other areas then do you think maybe the reason you didn’t tell me about the letters is not only because of your mix of emotions towards Dad, but also because you didn’t trust him?”

A lightbulb seems to go off in Mom’s head at my words.

“You’re exactly right. I placed my mistrust of your father on you. Why did I do that?” Mom asks brow creasing in confusion.

“Maybe because your brain was telling you to avoid the situation all together by not telling me. My therapist says that’s a trauma response. We avoid situations that make us uncomfortable or bring up unpleasant emotions like mistrust,” I pause taking a breath. “I’m still upset by your actions, but I’m beginning to understand why you did what you did.” This time I’m the one to reach my arm out for her. She takes it happily.

“Did you get the answers you were looking for?” Mom questions.

“All my questions were answered, but none of the answers were what I imagined they’d be. I never thought time traveling was real, or that my dad was addicted to it,” I confess with a slight laugh.

“Do you understand now why he was?”

“Yes, do you?”

“I do, though it still hurts,” Mom admits looking down at the couch.

“I understand why you made him leave too. Thank you—for protecting me. You were right, I would have been completely traumatized if I’d found dad dead. You made the right call back when I was eight, but not when I was eighteen.”

“I recognize that now. How did it go packing up your father’s belongings?”

“Surprisingly swift. He didn’t have a great deal of things.”

“I didn’t think he would. He was never very materialistic, except for his camera gear. Did you put the cottage up for sale?”

“Actually, no. I was going to, but then I went and explored a bit. Ireland is special. Dad knew that and now I’m beginning to see it too. I packed up a few of his things that I thought we might want here. They should be arriving here in a few days. Keeping the house makes me feel a bit closer to him.”

“I’m glad he gave you that.”

“I don’t suppose you’ll want to visit one day?”

Mom looks up at me through her thick black eyelashes.

“We’ll see.”

Rising from my spot on the couch, I go over to my suitcase and unzip it.

“Dad also left a few things for you,” I say glancing to where Mom sits in the living room. Making my way back to the couch I hand Mom the crystal figurine of the elephant family only now the crack has been repaired.

“I was able to fill in the crack with epoxy, but I wanted to leave a little of it as a reminder of our past while still honoring our present.”

Mom stares at the little elephant family.

“Dad had it in his living room. When I found it there was a crack down the middle between the two adult elephants. I think he liked it because it represented our family—cracks and all.”

Tears fall down Mom’s face and onto the figurine.

“It does represent us. Your father bought this for me when you were born. I’d forgotten all about this,” Mom says through tears turning the figurine over in her hands.

“How did he get it?”

“I think I packed it in his suitcase, but I don’t quite remember. I was throwing things in furiously when I was packing it. I must have grabbed it. I can’t believe he kept it.”

“He loved you until the day he died. When I spoke to him in the last roll of film he was surprised you never remarried. I told him it’s because you never stopped loving him.”

“How did he take that?” Mom asks looking up from the figurine.

“He was visibly upset, that’s when he told me about his visit to Washington. All he wanted was to have his family back in some form.”

Mom’s tears return. I squeeze her hand reassuringly.

“It’s going to take some time for us to fully heal once we process everything,” I say gently.

“You sound like you already are healing.”

“I’m starting to,” I say just as my phone vibrates on the arm of the couch.

“I’ll ignore it,” I say while reaching for my phone to shut it off.

“No, answer it. It could be important,” Mom insists.

The message on the screen is from Chef Finley Hudson, now in my contacts as *Chef*

Finley who writes:

Chef Finley: Hope you had a successful trip to Ireland and made it home safe!

Looking forward to beginning our work together bright and early tomorrow morning. Did you get everything you needed while in Ireland?

Me: Ireland was everything and more.

Annotated Bibliography

“Acts 9:1-19.” *The Holy Bible*, Bible Gateway,

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+9%3A1-19&version=ESV>.

Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.

This Scripture was utilized to reference the story of Paul’s conversion. It describes Paul’s testimony and is the starting point of his journey as an apostle for Christ. I used it to reference Paul’s testimony and as an example of character development.

Burcher, Charlotte, et al. “Core Collections in Genre Studies: Fantasy Fiction 101.” *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2009, pp. 227. *JSTOR*,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20865077>. Accessed 11 Apr. 2024.

This article was used to reference the core foundations of the fantasy genre. Many of the main themes found in the fantasy genre are related to Christian principles. I used this article to explain that and further my point of fantasy having its origin based in Christian principles.

“Definition of Testimony Noun from the Oxford Advanced American

Dictionary.” *OxfordLearner’s Dictionary*, Oxford University Press,

www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/testimony. Accessed 10

Apr. 2024.

This source was used to provide a definition and origin history through the study of etymology for the term, “testimony.” This was the first of two sources used to confirm the history and origin of the term.

English, Will. "A History of Modern Fantasy Literature." *Medium*, Medium, 2 Mar. 2020, medium.com/@willenglish/a-history-of-modern-fantasy-literature-f9a02bdeb16a. Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.

This article was utilized to provide information on George MacDonald and his novel *Phantastes*. This source furthered my understanding of the origin of the fantasy genre including what novel is thought to be the first within the fantasy genre.

Facista, Kaitlyn. "Tolkien's 'On Fairy Stories' and the Gospel as the Greatest Fairy-Story." *Tea with Tolkien*, Tea with Tolkien, 16 Feb. 2022, www.teawithtolkien.com/podcast/26. Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.

This source provided information on Tolkien. It also served use by providing me with the exact copy of Tolkien's 'On Fairy Stories' essay and letter to his son which contributed to my growing understanding of Tolkien and his thoughts on the fantasy genre and fairy stories and how they relate to Christianity.

Filmer-Davies, C. (1997). Presence and Absence: God in Fantasy Literature. *Christianity & Literature*, 47(1), 59-74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014833319704700111> Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.

This source provided me with a quote on the presence of God in fantasy stories even when He appears to be absent from the story. It also spoke on how the struggle of good vs evil is inherently biblical and found in many fantasy novels.

"Galatians 2:20 NIV." *The Holy Bible*, Bible Gateway,

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+2%3A20&version=ESV>

Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.

This Scripture contributed context to the paper. It was used to reference Paul's writing of how as believers we can find our identity in Christ. Through the identity of Christ, we are given a foundation of identity which we can build our character development on.

Harper, Douglas. "Testimony." *Online Etymology Dictionary*, Douglas Harper, 2001,

www.etymonline.com/search?q=testimony. Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.

This source was used to provide an etymological definition and origin for the term, "testimony." When I learned this term had roots to the Ten Commandments it excited me as it furthered my point more than I thought it would. This was the second source used to understand the history and origin of the term.

"Karen Kingsbury: The Queen of Christian Fiction Talks of 'Fame' and Writing." *CBN*, CBN,

10 Dec. 2022, www2.cbn.com/article/not-selected/karen-kingsbury-queen-christian-fiction-talks-fame-and-writing. Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.

This interview furthered my thesis in ways I did not expect but am very grateful. Kingsbury perspective was insightful and provides important moments in the thesis paper. This interview speaks on the importance of Christian Fiction and how it is not just Christians reading these types of novels. This source was used as an example of the "plant the seed" style of writing through Kingsbury's *A Thousand Tomorrows* novel.

Lewis, C.S.. *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*. New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1978. Accessed 10 Apr. 2024.

This book was used to reference the character development of Edmund Pevensie. The story also serves to provide information on the allegory for Christ through the character of Aslan. This source furthered my point of the importance of character development and how it leads to testimony.

Lewis, C. S. *Surprised By Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*. [1st American ed.] New York, Harcourt, Bruce, 1956. pg. 180-181. Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.

This source explains Lewis' perspective on the fantasy genre, "plant the seed" or "pre-evangelism" writing, and how George MacDonald and his novel, *Phantastes*, impacted Lewis' spiritual life and journey toward becoming a writer.

Luebberman, Megan. "Does the Genre of Fantasy Belong with Christianity?" *The Vanguard Voice*, Vanguard University, 16 Nov. 2022, vanguarduniversityvoice.com/2022/11/16/does-the-genre-of-fantasy-belong-with-christianity/. Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.

This article contributed a different perspective of how many fantasy narratives could be read through a Christian or secular lens depending on the reader despite being written in a Christian or secular worldview.

Postma, Kathlene. "Letter of Recommendation: Miranda Wessman." 27 August 2022. Pacific University Oregon. [Letter]. Accessed 01 Apr. 2024.

This letter of recommendation was used in the artist statement portion of the paper to explain my former professor's opinion on my story *Flash Through Time* as well as to corroborate the artist statement and the origin of my novel.

“Romans 5:3-5 ESV.” *The Holy Bible*, Bible Gateway,

www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2B5%3A3-5&version=ESV. Accessed

12 Apr. 2024.

This Scripture was utilized to demonstrated Paul's joy in suffering through his letter to the Romans. The verse cited is an example of how Paul used his joy in suffering to develop his character and further his testimony for Christ.

Stonestreet, John, and Glenn Sunshine. “George MacDonald and the Christian Imagination.” *The*

Christian Post, The Christian Post, 12 Dec. 2022, [www.christianpost.com/voices/george-](http://www.christianpost.com/voices/george-macdonald-and-the-christian-imagination.html)

[macdonald-and-the-christian-imagination.html](http://www.christianpost.com/voices/george-macdonald-and-the-christian-imagination.html). Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.

This article provided facts on the life and career timeline of George MacDonald. It spoke on how MacDonald resigned from the church to become a professor where he began his career as an author.

Thieme, Robert B. “Common Grace.” *Thieme's Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, R.B. Thieme Jr.

Ministries, Houston, Texas, 2022, p. 125, <https://rbthieme.org/index.html>. Accessed 10

Apr. 2024.

This citation provided a definition to the term “common grace.” It also furthered my point on the importance of “plant the seed” style fantasy writing which evangelizes in

a subtle way to the reader. This source also speaks on how if a person is positive to the Word of God and wants to learn about His Word, God will make it possible.

Thieme, Robert B. "Historical Evangelism" *Heathenism*, R.B. Thieme Jr. Ministries, Houston, Texas, 2022, p. 21, <https://rbthieme.org/Publications/for-download/pdfs.html>. Accessed 10 Apr. 2024.

Similar to the previous source, this source speaks in greater detail and with scriptural evidence on how if an unbeliever has positive volition to the Word of God, then God will make a way for that individual to learn about Him and His Word. The two sources go hand in hand with one another and are the beginning elements of an individual's testimony.

Weist, Jaclyn, "Shaping Character: The Role of Mythology in Society" (2024). *Master's Theses*. 1118. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/masters/1118>

This source provided quotes and substance to the importance of character development. This source was used to tie together the idea of testimony and character development being intertwined.

Wookieepedia, Contributors to. "Anakin Skywalker." *Wookieepedia*, Fandom, Inc., starwars.fandom.com/wiki/Anakin_Skywalker. Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.

This source provided insight into the complex origin story of Anakin Skywalker and his ultimate transformation into Darth Vader. Through the use of this source Skywalker's character development could be seen in full. Credit for the character and Star Wars franchise goes to George Lucas and Lucasfilm.