

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

MADE IN AMERICA:
A HISTORICAL NOVEL ON THE U.S. INTERVENTIONS IN GUATEMALA DURING THE
20TH CENTURY
PART ONE

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SPRING 2018

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in ENGLISH
with honors in ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

In this Part One of my historical novel, *Made In America*, I will examine the lives and careers of two Americans who learn of and grapple with the atrocities committed by the U.S. CIA and State Department in Guatemala the 1954 coup of President Jacobo Árbenz and the beginning of a subsequent thirty-six-year civil war. The lives of these two characters will illustrate the complexities of realizing the extent of economic imperialism and totalitarianism abroad. With scenes across the world and across time periods, I will draw parallels between different totalitarian regimes, covert U.S. interventions and policies, and Americans abroad.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you first and foremost to Dr. William Cobb, for your considerable edits and advice over the past two years. Thank you to Dr. Matthew Restall, and Mary Rohrer-Dann from the Pennsylvania State University for their continued help and advising on this project. Thank you to Dr. Jennifer Casolo, Dr. Alejandro Flores, and Dr. Ricardo Lima-Soto from the University of Arizona with whom I studied abroad in Guatemala.

Thank you to my wonderful friends in the English Department's Creative Writing B.A./M.A. program for all the feedback, love, and friendship I never could have predicted. Thank you to my parents, Carrie and Bill, and my siblings, Maggie and Dyson, for never once questioning whether this project was too far-fetched.

Prologue

Nebaj, Guatemala 1981

Blood dripped from the ceiba tree like sap. It pooled around the tree's roots, spilling onto the ground, turning the dirt into ruby colored rust. Grey sky. The taste of smoke without a fire coated our mouths. Gunpowder and charred wood from the wreckage of what used to be a town, what used to be life, filled our nostrils. Emptiness filled the town square. But it was not quiet. We were petrified wax figures ready to melt, afraid to move and afraid of not reaching for each other one more time. A boy soldier with a gun. Scowling at us. Wiping his machete on his fatigues. Screaming to remind everyone including himself that he was to be feared.

Chapter 1

Washington D.C. 2012

The photograph didn't mean a damn thing until it did. Few people ever even saw it. Sometimes I wonder if it's fair to pin the start of this story back to that picture. Is it fair, deciding to dip your hand in the middle of time and declare that something began there? As if it hadn't always been and would be? Still. The picture shows tangible, irrefutable proof of me before I realized what the world was. You can't argue with photographs.

Shortly after the reporter took it, I tucked the picture into my briefcase after the meeting with the provost in September of 1974. I hadn't meant to save it. Had I been a more organized professor, God, even person, and cleaned out the cloth pockets and slots of my briefcase once a week (hell, even once a month), I would have tossed the photograph before anything had ever started between James and me. As it happened, I didn't find it until June '75. By that time, sentiment had already seeped in and stained me. The photograph of James and me on the Washington Mall fluttered to the floor of my apartment one day when my briefcase fell off the kitchen counter. Somehow, unlike the clutter of to-do lists, notes from students, and outdated coffee receipts, it was in perfect condition. Unwrinkled and unscratched by forgotten pens. Sometimes life is obnoxious in its symbolism.

If I had any sort of artistic talent, I could paint that photograph from memory: Students encircled us. Sunglass-wearing policemen with riot gear and a German Shepherd lunged at the picture's edge. On the right, I threw my weight into shouting at James, my pinched face mid-yell as my chocolate hair frizzed like chewed wires. I was wearing a knee length skirt, short black

heels, and a white blouse buttoned up to the neck. Ever the prude. James leaned away from me, his back resting on some invisible recliner. Ever relaxed, ever detached. In his white t-shirt, yellow button down unbuttoned and sleeves rolled up, and frayed jeans, he hardly looked like a respected journalism professor. He had chocolate curls that scruffed around his ears and an innocuous half-smile of surprise. His shoulders shrugged and an *Impeach Nixon* sign tilted out of his left hand. The epitome of dowdy conservatism blares at the ever-progressive emblem of peace.

That's how *The Hoya* editor planned to paint it anyhow. He had raced right up to us after taking the photograph asking for a comment, oozing over the symbolism of two politically polarized professors arguing in front of the Capitol. It wasn't the first time we'd met, James and I, but it would be the start of us as far as I'm concerned. Though it didn't feel like it then because it never does, it seems clear that from that picture on, we could never have avoided entangling ourselves in each other's lives.

I suppose you think this is a romance. My kids call this story that. My friends, my colleagues, all the living ones, call it a political commentary. My friends who aren't would call it a horror. Before he began to fade, James would tease me about my indecision, my hesitance to classify what happened. Just to push me, he'd say it's either a political thriller or a romance. Pick one, Evie. Either or. When has the real word ever worked in either ors? Lives are never so uncomplicated that they can be properly shelved by genre. Or just say it's all of the above, he'd say in a sobered voice while he rubbed my back, kissed my shoulder. All of the above. It's not except that it is.

Those who know James and me, and who know what happened, must wonder why he didn't write this instead of me. I wonder that too, if we're being honest and I'm assuming we are.

In fact, in the late Fifties he tried to write the truth of what he knew the U.S. had done in Guatemala. We'll get to that. And then in the late eighties he did publish a plain, impersonal historical account through a university press. He left out our story and stuck to the leaders and wars. Turns out no one read it. Like I said, life's too tangled to sever the personal from the historical. And now's as good a time as any, with all the squawking on television about immigration and Central America, to tell what happened—as far as we know. James is also starting to forget. I needed to write this so that maybe we'll all remember.

And I get it. None of this is really about me. None of the terror, the blood, the disappeared ones, the wrecked lives, none of that has a thing to do with me. I just happened upon someone who happened upon one of the worst atrocities in modern history, one that our country caused. If I could tell this without me, I would. As it is, all I can tell you is how intolerable it felt in my throat. I'm handing that to you now. I hope you'll do something better with it all.

Chapter 2

Washington D.C. 1974

September of 1974 was just about the worst time to be a conservative in Washington D.C. I'd been at Georgetown for a few months as an associate professor in the history department, and I'd locked into a five year lease on my apartment. Nixon resigned just weeks before the semester started, but the country hadn't cooled. Daily protests on almost every open lawn in the city. Newspapers with the same front pages for weeks. Metro lines and buses crowded with a collective sense of discontent. Everything only worsened when President Ford announced the pardon of "all offenses against the United States which he, Richard Nixon, has committed or may have committed or taken part in" from 1969 until 1974. Meaning he said Nixon was free. Meaning he tossed oil onto a fire and called it water.

Well, shit, I thought when I watched that Sunday night broadcast from my couch and swallowed my drink as I ate alone. Even I had to concede that Ford had stoked the coals with that one. I began clicking off the television only a few minutes into the news reports at night. Then I quit watching. I had lessons to plan. That's why, I told myself, burrowing deeper into my couch.

My students couldn't help couldn't help but edge the discussion away from Jacksonian politics to the pardon in Monday's class. It took one stretched analogy to steer discussion away from the Trail of Tears to Watergate (*Ignoring the Supreme Court's ruling in 1832 was an abuse and overreach of power, not unlike Nixon's...*). I raised my eyebrows at the undergrad who'd spat that one out. Before class I'd seen him smirk when a girl said she liked his glasses.

“Thanks,” he’d said. “They’re fake. See,” he had taken them off and showed her the thick, wide brown frames. “No prescription.”

“Why do you wear them then?” she’d asked, her expression twisted in confusion.

“The irony,” he had leaned back in his seat, spreading his arms across the empty chairs on either side of him.

“What irony?” she’d asked.

He had scoffed and looked up at the metal ducts on the ceiling, as if the answer were obvious and up there somewhere.

Now, after his derailing comment, his nodding classmates joined the harmonious chorus of attack on President Ford.

“It’s a double standard of democracy. Like, he can just override the law, and suddenly Nixon is out of jail free?” one student threw her hands up in the air.

“Well—” I started, about to remind them of the constitutionality of presidential pardons. The class dived on top of my lack of validation of their indignation.

“He’s a criminal just as much as Nixon!” Fake Glasses blurted.

I suppressed an exasperated “please” at the single flavor of outrage they all seemed hooked on.

As their professor, I didn’t raise my own opinions. Maybe I thought Gerald Ford was a decent, rational man trying to salvage America’s singed dignity. Maybe I agreed with them that Watergate had been a huge abuse of power (all the more reason to reduce the scope of federal power, my argument went). But we had to put it behind us.

Good lord, I thought at the time. Don’t these kids realize what we’re up against? This is not the time to jail a president. We cannot risk losing even more credibility in front of the

U.S.S.R. Still, I reasoned, it'd be an abuse of *my* power to lecture in opinions about current events. Getting through the curriculum seemed impossible in all my classes that day. I sped home most days. Didn't watch the news. I graded. I reread biographies on James Madison. I tried to finish the scarf I was knitting. I had trouble sleeping. Like most adults, I was tired of Watergate.

The larger problem came on Wednesday's class, or rather didn't come. Half of the students were missing in my 19th Century American Politics class.

"Where is everyone?" I asked with pleading eyes to Gordon, the half-asleep junior in the second row. He shook awake, wiped his mouth, and looked around.

"What?" he yawned. I turned to his neighbor with an open notebook and cocked pen, Chelsea.

"Sam organized a *Georgetown Says Jail Him* protest on the Mall for this afternoon. They pinned flyers up in most academic buildings. I think a lot of people went to that," Chelsea explained. I vaguely remembered hand-drawn fight the power kind of fists on orange 8x11 paper on my walk through campus that morning.

"Remind me. Who's Sam?" I press.

"He's the one who..." Chelsea starts, but I realized where she was going with this. Fake Glasses. Got it.

"Oh," I paused to refocus. "Well, we'll continue without them." My pulse quickened, though. This was my first honors course, and already before midterms students were skipping.

Attendance only worsened on Friday. Fewer students came than the last class. Chelsea's face seemed to offer a tepid apology for her peers' apathy or activism, depending on the way you looked at the situation. I plowed forward with the lecture, ending with the economic recession

during the Panic of 1837. At the end of the lecture, I made a point to stress the importance of showing up.

“If you see your classmates who didn’t make it this week,” I said to Chelsea and the handful of others left, “tell them there will be a quiz on Monday. Those who miss it will struggle to pass the course.” It was a bluff, and a bad one at that. At least Chelsea seemed to buy it.

The whole weekend, which mostly consisted of me eating cereal in my studio and catching up on grading, I wondered if the warning would work. I could only hope. I tried to convince myself that this had nothing to do with politics. Whenever I looked in my bathroom mirror, I pictured imaginary students standing right behind me against the yellow tiles of my shower, questioning my motives. By all means, I said to them, go ahead and protest. But does it have to be during my class? You pay for these lectures.

After I finished the Madison biography, I opted for a monograph on Isabella I’s monopolization and standardization of the Spanish royal mints. I hadn’t read the book in about ten years, and I felt myself slipping back into my twenties when I had done all my research in Madrid. The tariffs, trade deals, silver mines, and medieval banks—they all felt so far away, so already decided and clear-cut. Unable to fall asleep, I read late into the night, until two-thirty when I passed out.

Saturday night, the university hosted a dinner at the Sheraton-Carlton downtown for all new tenure-line faculty members. Event’s at seven, the History department secretary had said and smiled as she set the invitation on my desk earlier in the week. Joyce Fields, another new hire and an early American colonialism professor stopped by later that afternoon.

“You in for this?” she tucked her head into my office, holding her invitation in between

her index and middle fingers for me to see.

The afternoon light slitting through my blinds painted horizontal shadows on her face. She squinted and then sat down in the chair in front of my desk before I could reply.

Joyce and I had sat next to each other at the first department meeting. Ed Kilgore, the department head, had turned his head to his papers and launched into details about the semester schedule for classes, special events, and other administrative points without glancing up once. He was a man partial to ship metaphors and averse to eye contact. Even as others spoke to him, Ed had kept his gaze focused on his papers, only nodding and mumbling to show that he knew other people were still in the room. Joyce and I had both taken furtive notes the entire meeting. At the end Ed had raised his head as if surfacing from the ocean for the first time in a half hour, and extended a limp hand in our direction. “Oh, and uh, please note we have some new members aboard our crew here, Joyce Fields and Eva Belmonte, he had said. “They’re some smart...looking,” he’d paused with an awkward grin to let his joke settle, “young girls, so make them feel at home on our ship here.” The rest of the faculty, all men, had chuckled and smiled at Joyce and me. Resisting the urge to say anything, I’d written on the margins of my notepad ‘aye aye captain.’ Joyce must have seen it, and a piping laugh had escaped from her before she covered her mouth. After the meeting, she had told me I was all right, and after that we were friends.

“I don’t know,” I set down the papers I was grading. Joyce leaned forward.

“Don’t fuck me over on this,” she said, twisting her head to check the door was closed and no students were walking by. Joyce was from Flatbush in Brooklyn. She still had the accent and flippant cursing, although I had noticed once or twice her harnessing it into a polished East Coast academia accent when she spoke to Ed Kilgore. It’s called code switching, she told me

once. What's that, I had asked. It's a linguistic term, she'd said, I'm surprised you haven't heard it—been around for a few years. What does it mean, I'd asked. Means I can go back and forth between dialects and accents and stuff when I need to, she'd explained.

“I can't go to this alone,” Joyce said, moving some of the files and cardboard boxes of books on my floor so she could stretch her legs out. “Besides, we both know otherwise we'll be working or reading biographies all night, which is the same thing, if we don't go.” Accurate, I thought.

“Maybe,” I let my voice leak.

Joyce hoisted herself out of the chair with a hop, making her wire glasses slip down her nose and her long necklace slap the front of her maroon sweater dress.

“Pick me up at six thirty,” Joyce said.

Saturday night, I stayed in my turtleneck and sun-faded Levi's until almost six-fifteen. All afternoon I filled time with whatever I had put off since the start of the fall semester. I clipped my finger nails and filed them down. I vacuumed. I watched re-runs of The Carol Burnett Show on TV and sorted my mismatched socks. Even as I forced myself, plunged myself, into mindlessness with these tasks, a tightness, a tenseness, seized me. Just thinking about the gathering reminded me of similar ones at Sarah Lawrence.

I knew what these gatherings contained: white tablecloths and warming trays with tepid food. Stiff, starched bodies standing around in the unflattering light of a hotel ballroom. Clapping. Place cards. Small talk. All which would be fine if it weren't for the political mood of it all. These events were nothing if not a collective nodding of heads and murmuring of affirmations at the singular, already agreed upon perspective and credo. Conversations seemed built on disparaging whichever Republican congressman or foreign involvement had come up

and standard remarks like “Oh, I *know*,” “You’re so right,” “Well, and did you hear about,” and “I couldn’t agree more.”

This always left me motionless, wordless. What could I say? I was a Republican who had to keep her cards close to her chest. As I left Sarah Lawrence to accept the position at Georgetown, my mother said, “This is for the best, Evie. You’re going somewhere nice where they appreciate you.” She meant somewhere Catholic and perhaps even conservative.

With all of the protesting on and off campus though, I worried the climate at Georgetown wouldn’t be so different from Sarah Lawrence. Thinking about the dinner infused me with anxious dread. I had a mounting worry that politics would be practically unavoidable at the dinner. Thus I had to avoid the dinner.

I looked across my apartment from the couch to the phone mounted on my kitchen wall next to the wooden crucifix my mother had given me. I padded over and reached for the phone, already drafting the excuse I’d call Joyce with, when I heard someone rap my door knock. I checked the peephole. Joyce held a bottle of wine in a purple cocktail dress and peered back at me.

“Let me in, Eva,” she half-hollered. I opened the door and she walked in past me, setting the bottle down on my kitchen counter.

“I was just about to call you,” I said, stuffing my hands into my jean pockets.

“I know,” she said, pulling at one of my drawers. “Where do you keep your bottle openers?” I pointed at the drawer on her left. “You were going to call and cancel, right?”

“It’s just that I’m not feeling well, and—”

Joyce stopped pouring two glasses, came over, and put the back of her hand on my forehead. Then she walked back to the counter and finished pouring.

“Frankly, dear, that’s bull,” she said with a closed but wide smile, handing me a generous glass of red wine. I saw the futility in resisting her. We each finished a glass as I picked out a dress. As we left, I stopped in the doorway.

“Your bottle,” I pointed back inside.

“Keep it. Consider it a reward for later for sticking this thing out.”

At the hotel, we got out of the cab and walked inside, following the paper signs saying GEORGETOWN NEW FACULTY EVENT. Inside the banquet hall, scores of circle tables took up the center, with long, buffet serving tables and open space on either side. Mahogany wood panels lined the walls with a warm, insulated, if suffocating feel. At the front was a tiny, temporary stage constructed specially for the event. On it stood a wood podium with ferns placed to the left and right. Joyce and I set our purses and coats down and then ambled towards the buffet tables where the hotel staff had placed salad and cheese and cracker appetizers. A little while later, after the servers brought out hot trays of food and everyone settled at the tables, the university provost and a handful of others spoke, welcoming the new hires.

After dinner, no one sat at the tables, so we joined the mingling. The event was for new faculty, but I noticed plenty of established professors who had been at Georgetown for decades too. At one point, a friend Joyce’s from her graduate school years tugged her away to meet someone. I talked about the Virginian historical parks with a poetry professor who had just come from William and Mary until a shout ripped through the air and startled him.

“Harold!” shouted a tall, stout man in a tan colored suit and thick green tie. He slapped the man I was talking to hard on the back, causing him to cough as he chewed his food.

“Neil,” the poetry professor said, clearing his throat. “Good to see you.”

“It’s been a hell of a long time, you sonofabitch,” Neil growled in a churlish,

overly-friendly voice. Harold shifted his weight and coughed again.

“Neil, this Eva Belmonte,” Harold stammered. “She’s a new hire in the History department. Eva, this is Neil Gawn. He’s an old friend from Deerfield.”

I pictured them thirty years younger in prep school ties and jackets at Deerfield Academy. Harold would have been the one trailing Neil, not joining in his pranks but never walking away either. I knew plenty like them from my own prep school, Westtown School, in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

“Are you a poet too?” I asked Neil. His face was red as he hit his fist against his sternum, and snorted.

“God no. I don’t write it. Just study it. Renaissance poetry for the most part. Basically I feed off the work of other poor bastards.” No one said anything. Neil nudged Harold with his elbow and then bellowed, “I’m just bullshitting you, I’m over in Journalism.” He laughed at his own joke until Harold chuckled too.

“Oh,” I smiled and forced a laugh.

“Don’t look so glum,” Neil said, palming my shoulder. He snapped at a waiter and exchanged his empty wine glass for a full one. “It’s a great time to be teaching Journalism. Practically a gold mine! Shmucks like Ford make my job easier than my morning dump.”

“Excuse me?” I said, startled. Harold looked back and forth between us anxiously, crinkling the edge of the paper plate in his grip.

“Neil,” Harold started to mediate.

“What?” Neil said, his hands up in surrender and his chin doubling into his neck. “Oh, sorry there, sweetheart, my mother always told me I had the mouth of an outhouse. But if nothing else, I speak the God’s honest truth.”

“I doubt God would have said any of that,” I said dryly.

“Well, maybe not in so many words,” Neil’s voice drawled, “but I’m sure He’s not bestowing His blessings down on our fuck-up-in-chief any time soon.”

Harold looked away and scratched at his eyebrows. Panic started soaking in, filling my limbs and torso up to my neck.

“How about we talk about something else,” I suggested.

“All I’m saying is, the man’s been in office for little over a month and already he’s managed to twist the Constitution more than a pair of panties in a washer machine,” Neil guffawed.

“Nothing he’s done,” I said in a soft, measured voice, “including the pardon, has been out of his purview according to the Constitution, so I don’t know what you’re talking about. And I don’t appreciate your tone either. For goodness sake, have some respect. He’s the President of the United States. He’s not the manager of your lousy baseball team.”

Neither man said anything just long enough for me to fold the napkin in my hand into a square. Harold shuffled and looked around the banquet hall. Neil readjusted his belt.

“Well, forgive me there,” Neil mumbled. “Sorry to have bothered you.”

“It’s alright,” I said. “Please excuse me. I need to find my friend. It was nice to meet both of you. Harold, let me know if you or your wife would ever like to talk about history again.”

I shook their hands, walked at a brisk pace in no particular direction just far enough away to escape the two, and I scanned the room for Joyce. A voice came from behind me.

“His baseball team isn’t lousy, you know,” the deep voice said. I turned around.

“I’m sorry?” I said. A man in a navy suit, red paisley tie, stood a pace away.

Slivers of grey and light brown dusted his dark hair. His face, brown with only a hint of wrinkle, had a wry smile. He had the appearance of a middle-aged foreign actor, looks still intact but youth fading. A young woman with thick chesnut hair, too young to be even a lecturer, much less a professor, had her arm around his waist, but she was looking to the side, as if not aware of me.

“You insulted the man’s baseball team,” the stranger said. “He’s a Red Sox fan. They’re probably not going to make post-season and you had to rub it in. That’s below the belt, don’t you think?”

“I think his comments about the president were far worse,” I replied. The stranger exhaled a short laugh into his drink. At this, the woman seemed to reanimate and notice me, but she didn’t introduce herself. Instead she smiled at the man and then looked away as if waiting for him to finish.

“Next time you’re planning on getting into a political fight, why don’t you pick on someone your own size?” the stranger said with a grin.

He started to walk away with the woman, but I said, “I’m practically a foot shorter than him.”

“Wasn’t talking about height,” he replied. This time, the two of did leave. I watched him guide her to the coat check.

Joyce tapped my shoulder. “Who’s that?” she asked, following my gaze.

I shook my head. “I don’t know. You want to head out?”

“Yeah,” she said. “That’s what I was coming over about. No one else is scheduled to speak, and I think they’re pretty much out of food. Let’s blow this popsicle stand.”

We went back to my apartment and finished the wine Joyce had brought over.

After she left, I lay flat on my back in bed, letting the wine pulse through my head, thinking about the stranger. There had been a compliment buried in his joking, a kind of respect. Or maybe there hadn't. Maybe I only wanted there to be. I pictured his wavy hair again. Probably because of the alcohol, his hair reminded me of rolling hills. I had the urge to turn back time, extract him from that woman, and run my hands through it. Instead given the immutability of time, I felt the wine sink me into sleep, and I slept without interruption.

Monday's attendance squeaked to a meager eight students. Eight out of thirty students. I didn't even try to begin with a lecture.

"What's going on? How are these protests organized by—"

"Sam," Chelsea piped.

"Thanks, by Sam still getting traction?" I asked.

"Doesn't he have that professor helping him?" someone else turned and tried to confirm with Chelsea.

"I think so," Chelsea started a slow nod, eyes squinted in concentration. I took a minute to say a prayer for this girl. Lord have mercy on her little Type A heart. Speak for yourself, said the voice inside me. I shook my thoughts back in order.

"What professor? What department?" I pushed further.

"His name's James Calderón. I think he's in political science? Right?" Chelsea swerved and looked at the other student who'd spoken up.

"Yeah. But I'm pretty sure he's in journalism. I took a survey class with him last year," the other student said. Journalism. I thought of the blowhard from the dinner. But his name had been Neil, I reminded myself. Still, I could only imagine what his colleagues were like. What

had this Calderón guy fed these students? He's probably a failed reporter who wouldn't admit his age as he hit on the very coeds he was trying to organize, I thought. Against the prudent part of me that warned chasing after these students would be petty, I closed my notes on the lectern.

Somehow I said the following with a straight face:

“Come on, guys. Field trip.”

Humidity still hung in the air on the Washington Mall, unconcerned that it was now September. After a very anticlimactic series of metro rides to the center of the city, we'd strode over to the Mall, my students' pace slower than mine. I saw a small cluster of familiar faces with signs on the edge of the lawn across from the Capital Building. Now that I saw Sam (still wearing his pointless glasses) and the other no-shows, I realized I had no idea what I'd say to them. The whole ride I'd tried to think of a strategy and failed. What was I going to do now that I'd hauled half my class to confront the other? Call them out and threaten to lower their grade? Was that the plan? That, apparently, was the plan.

As we approached, we heard their weak chant of “Jail to the Chief” that was out of sync with the rest of the older, real protesters, the ones who had no college dorms to go back to. A girl with a dandelion headband saw me first. She tapped Sam's shoulder, and he swiveled to look my way. Seeing me, he pumped his poster stapled to a stick even harder.

“Thanks for joining us,” he smiled. I couldn't tell if he was high or sarcastic. I looked at the others.

“To all of you who have recently missed three or more classes,” I started in a voice too high pitched for me to keep up. I cleared my throat and modulated down. “You have now used up all of your excused absences. You are at severe risk of lowering your grade.”

Even I wanted to flip me off. I did my best not to flinch while the student protesters turned their outrage and sneers to me. A man stepped languidly to the forefront. He was the stranger. The man from the dinner. Although dressed like the students, he stood out with his peppered stubble just enough that I knew he had to be the journalism professor, James Calderón.

“Gentlemen,” he started, “and ladies.” He grinned as he added the second part like he’d just been nudged in the ribs by someone reminding him to be all-inclusive and he had decided to indulge them. I noticed a different woman from the one at the banquet, equally young, hovering near him. This one blond. I hated him.

“You heard the woman,” James said. “So it’s up to you. Preserve democracy and the system of checks and balances or go to class.” They snorted, undoubtedly enamored with him, and a wave of jealousy flooded up from my ankles to my temple in a matter of seconds.

“You must be the Woodward and Bernstein wannabe,” I dug into him. You are stooping to his level, I told myself. I don’t care, I said back. “Couldn’t write the news anymore so you’d thought you’d try making it? Well done. You lured most of the girls from my class and Sam to your wilting excuse of a protest.”

At least Chelsea laughed on my side. James, though, only spread his smile wider like he was using a butter knife.

“You must be Eva Belmonte. I hear you give a rousing lecture on Martin Van Buren,” he said with too straight of a face. I closed my teeth into a tacit grin to hold back a “get lost.”

“Look, one colleague to another: put a stop to this,” I lowered my voice as I stepped closer. “We both know it won’t make a difference. Do them a favor, though, and tell them the truth. Nixon’s not going to jail no matter how many bongos you bang.”

“Not with naysayers like you!” Sam interjected. Both James and I took a moment to collectively look at Sam in surprise as if to say *Naysayers? Really?* Sam shifted his weight uncomfortably, and then started another chant, this time of “Fight the power.” The others joined in, washing away any ground I might have gained. James, and his smile suggested that he knew the futility of this protest but he’d decided to sip a beer and watch anyhow.

“Are you serious?” I begin to raise my voice. “As a Georgetown professor, you’re going to intentionally encourage students to skip class? Are you sure that’s what you want the record to reflect?”

“Tenured professor,” he raised his index finger in correction, speaking so close to my face in a voice so soft that only I could hear. “Let this record you’re talking about reflect that. I worked hard for that fire-proof position.”

That, folks, was where I lost it. I can’t remember what I screamed at that point, nor do I remember the snap of a camera. I do remember Chelsea gasping.

Then the photographer and some other student in corduroys and Chuck Taylors running up to me with a pad and pen.

“As this protest rages on,” the corduroys started.

“Rage is a strong word,” I interrupted.

“Do you have a comment on your recent outburst here on the Washington Mall? Do you support President Ford’s decision to pardon Nixon?”

I shook my head, startled. “Who are you?” I asked.

“Reporter and Editor of the Political Section of *The Hoya*,” he replied, barely pausing to look up from his pad and pen. “Who did you vote for in the last election, Ms. Belmonte?”

“It’s Professor Belmonte,” James stepped in, shooting me a *you’re welcome* smile. “B-e-l-m-o-n-”

“Alright!” I shouted. I immediately regretted my volume. “This has nothing to do with politics. I only came here today to get my students to come back to my class.”

“I quote you saying, ‘Nixon’s not going to jail no matter how many bongos you bang,’ is that accurate?” corduroys pressed.

“Christ,” I muttered.

“He’s got nothing to do with it,” James raised his eyebrows and grinned.

Walking to the provost’s office the next morning. I stared at dried leaves cluttering the sidewalks, dragging my feet through them. The leaves made me think of my parents’ house in Virginia and Frank Sinatra. My dad used to listen to Sinatra’s LP *Sinatra At The Sands* on loops in the fall. Frank’s monologue before “One for My Baby and Another For the Road” came to mind:

“This is the part in the program when we sing a drunk song,” Frank said, piano winding down behind him. “Drunk songs are usually done in small bars and bistros in wee hours of the morning. Usually talked or sung by a fella who’s got problems.”

I felt certain I was screwed. So, I thought, I might as well enjoy the fall. Turning the corner onto campus through the main gothic gates, I began to hum without noticing. Only a few bars slipped out before someone rushed from behind me and I stopped mid-line. It wasn’t even eight in the morning, and I needed a drink.

The night before I had gotten home and seen three new three new messages blinking on my answering machine. The phone had rung again before I had time to listen to them. It was the provost's secretary, calling to schedule a last minute meeting for first thing the next morning "in light of recent events." Sitting in the waiting room that morning, staring down at the rich navy blue carpeting, I tapped my toes inside my heels in a way I hoped wasn't noticeable to the provost's secretary sitting across the way. The sound of her IBM typewriter's clicks filled the room. I tried to remind myself that I probably wouldn't be fired.

The *Hoya* reporter from the other day, still in corduroys, opened the oak door from the hallway and sat down next to me. He tapped a manila folder in his lap a couple of times. I looked at the clock. Two minutes until the scheduled meeting time. Corduroys took a sharp inhale through his nostrils, cocked his head towards me, stared for a few seconds, and then went back to tapping his folder. One minute.

"I'm Mack," he blurted. His arm nearly left its socket as he rushed his hand out towards me to shake.

"Eva Belmonte," I shook his hand.

"I know you from yesterday, obviously," he stuffed his hand in between his legs. "I figured you might want to know who I am."

"Nice to meet you, Mack," I said, trying to be the adult.

The door to the provost's office opened. The provost, still facing in to his office and chuckling, stuck his arm out to us to usher us in. Mack jumped up and rushed to be in first. I followed, not feeling even like an undergrad, much less a professor.

The provost had photographs of himself on several hunting trips, holding rabbits, ducks, foxes, and even a few deer. Trophies from collegiate fencing clubs filled a bookshelf that

otherwise only had recent Georgetown yearbooks, a Catholic hymnal, and a collection of Rudyard Kipling novels, spines not creased. A 1933 Yale diploma hung behind his gold-riveted, cherry wine colored chair. I imagined him, a young man already with a double chin and wing-tipped shoes, secluded and buffered from the Depression inside warm dormitory halls. He looked frozen in time since 1928, unaffected by the denim, mud colors, shag rug, and fringe leather vests of the seventies. On the provost's desk facing outward rested two pictures of him shaking hands with two presidents, Franklin Roosevelt, and Jack Kennedy.

James already sat at one of the two chairs across from the mahogany desk that the provost had settled himself behind. How long has he been in here, I wondered as I clutched my faded tan briefcase, sinking my nails into its leather.

Mack darted in towards the only other chair, and I sidestepped a collision with him as I entered. Probably thinking better of taking the chair from a professor, Mack opted to stand at attention behind both chairs with his hands folded in front of him and his manila folder. I sat down. The provost and James each shrugged in a half-laugh, both bemused. In cahoots. How boys' club. I bit the inside of my lip. I could very well be fired today, I reminded myself. James, on the other hand, could not. The provost shifted his gaze, now sobered up, to me.

"So," the provost began. "Miss Belmonte—"

"Professor Belmonte," James corrected again.

"Right you are, James," the provost shot an affirming index finger and a nod his way and then continued. "Professor Belmonte—"

"Thank you," I said. His stern look, which doubled his wrinkles, suggested he did not appreciate my interruption as much. No finger guns. He restarted.

"Well," he restarted, "I gather that you've come to us from Sarah Lawrence, is *that*

correct?” The provost raised his eyebrows, as though waiting for someone else to correct him again.

“Yes, sir. A year ago,” I add, trying not to sound so fresh off the boat.

“And it says you taught briefly at the Complutense Universidad de Madrid?” he garbled the Spanish on the papers in front of him.

“Yes, sir, back in the sixties for a while,” I replied. James, who had leaned back with his hands folded on his stomach, sat up and looked my way in surprise.

“¿En serio? ¿Habla español?” James said in a smooth, Central American accent, sitting up.

“Claro, en serio,” I turn my head to address him before looking back at the provost, who appeared miffed at being left out. “I taught English and studied Isabella and Ferdinand’s removed involvement in the Inquisition.” At this, James turned his whole torso to squint at me.

“With Franco in power?” he asked.

“Wouldn’t that have been dangerous?” Mack asked, leaning in breathlessly.

“I was fine,” I replied. “I finished my first master’s dissertation there, and then left right after. This was before I changed interests and did my PhD dissertation as an Americanist on Jefferson at the University of Virginia.”

“You were so cool until you said Jefferson,” James shook his head, turning back to the provost.

“What?” I glanced at him.

“He’s cliché. Bet you liked Ike too,” he said.

“Why don’t we bring this back to why we’re here today, shall we?” the provost readjusted his bowtie. He pushed his wire rim glasses up his nose. “As it is, I don’t know you.

But I do know James. I've known him for, what was it? When did your father first bring you to my office? You couldn't have been more than ten, right, James?

"That's about right," James said in a quiet voice for the first time.

"Anyhow," the provost continued, not aware of the obvious nepotism or James' embarrassment of it, "what I've heard of yesterday surprises me for any set of professors, and we must address it. Mack, would you mind sharing the photograph with the rest of us?"

"Yes sir!" Mack lunged forward, placing the manila folder on the provost's desk. The provost, flicking his eyes in obvious annoyance that Mack hadn't pulled the photo out of the folder for him, now did so. He faced it towards James and me. Looking at it for the first time, I stifled a cringe. The police officer's German Shepherd had jumped mid-air just at the right moment, pulling at his leash. My body stance didn't look that different from the dog. James however, backed by all the students, looked calm. Innocuous. Reasonable.

"Now," the provost began, folding his hands on his stomach, "you can see how this would be quite the problematic picture of Georgetown if this were to get out."

At the word "if," Mack stiffened, clearly surprised that his story might not reach the papers.

"Considering your quote, Miss Belmonte—"

"Professor Belmonte," I spoke up for myself. James nodded in solidarity at me.

"You put us here at the university in a difficult position, and I cannot understand for the life of me why you chose to do so. You explicitly critique and deride student protesters and another faculty member."

"Sir, they were skipping my class for the fourth day in a row at Professor Calderón's urging," I defended.

“Mack, let me know if I have this right.” the provost said. “Professor Belmonte was heard shouting: ‘You might as well be protesting breathing for all the difference you’ll make, so cut it out with this bullshit protest. Everyone else in America is sick of Watergate and righteous, assholes like you who think they’ve got some sort of moral superiority to the rest of us.’ Is that an accurate quote, Mack?” he looked up.

I realized this must have been what I’d said in that period of blacking out.

“I have nothing but the sincerest apology for Professor Calderón and for the university,” I said in a hoarse voice.

“I should say so,” the provost retorted. He leaned farther back in his chair. “You were completely out of line on all fronts. I cannot even understand why you went down there in the first place.”

“Are you saying the administration stands alongside these students and condemns President Ford?” I questioned. Mack gripped his notepad so much it bent. James smiled into his lap.

“What I’m saying is,” the provost eyed Mack sternly, “the administration should never had been put in the position where that question was ever posed in the first place. It was irresponsible, reckless, and uncouth. Do you understand?”

I nodded, knowing my grace was about to run out. The room stayed quiet for an ungodly amount of time, and I considered whether my old department head at Sarah Lawrence would let me come back after this.

“Moving forward,” he said, “at the advice of Professor Calderón, who is clearly a friend of yours, this is as far as this debacle or photograph will ever go.” Mack’s shoulders slumped.

“You mean, our positions here are secure,” I pointed to James and myself. The provost chuckled once to himself, his double chin shaking as he laughed.

“Yes, of course, Professor Belmonte, you’re not fired,” the provost answered.

“Sir,” Mack spoke up.

“Yes, and you, young man. I expect I won’t be reading about yesterday or this meeting any time soon in *The Hoya*, correct?” the provost’s voice steeled. There was no discussion. He would have made an excellent primary school principal in another life.

“Yes, sir,” Mack withered.

“This is the only copy of this photograph, correct, son?” The kid nodded.

“Excellent. Well,” the provost took a deep breath. He shuffled his papers, placed his palms on the desk, and stood. We followed suit and stood as well. “Glad this could be resolved with such efficiency. Dorothy will see you out,” he opened the door and motioned out to his secretary. On our way to exit, the provost handed the photo to James. His grin flattened into a doughy line as he said, “Keep an eye on this one.” I genuinely felt uncertain whether he meant the picture or me.

For a minute, while we waited for Dorothy to stand and smooth her lavender shirtwaist dress so she could unnecessarily show us out, the three of us, James, Mack, and me, stood there. The kid had picked the carpet as his focal point, while I stared at the crown molding and top of the white drapes over the window looking out on the Dahlgren Quad. James stared at me. Out of the corner of my eye I could see him shaking his head, arms crossed, and holding onto the corner of the photograph. He had an incredulous smile that said he was ecstatic to have discovered me. Something like anger rose in me. *Discovered* my ass, I thought. I’ve been here the whole time.

As I walked out and down the red velvet staircase, I traced my hand on the wooden banister and remembered I still had to make mimeographs of my outline for my students.

“Chutabas algunos rabános allá?” James shouted after me, jogging down the steps to catch up. *So did you shoot any Commies over there?* His voice echoed in the antechamber up multiple floors, but he showed no sign of embarrassment. Franco. Spain. He’s talking about Spain, I gathered. My expression must have conveyed enough embarrassment, if not alarm, for the both of us, so he added, switching to English, “What? Anyone listening in this neo-medieval manor probably hopes you did.”

“I was there in the *sixties*,” I emphasized. “The worst was over by that point.” I stopped a gust of honesty in the back of my throat from telling him about the government spies at all the universities who lurked around hoping to catch you in a communist rapture. At the time, I had no reason to believe James had ever known anything other than Mexican beaches and sleepy college town bars. In other words, I had no reason to trust him. So I kept those memories to myself.

“Doesn’t really answer my question,” James said, “but on the off chance you’re a spy, I’ll let it die.” I stopped walking briefly to just examine him. Today he had a wrinkled baby blue button down with a thick, green and navy plaid tie hung loosely under his collar. He wore matching green sports jacket and pants, but the jacket had come off since the meeting and hung on the strap of his briefcase. His chocolate hair still curled in a way that made me hate how much I liked it. Plenty of women, including the two I’d seen with him, would tolerate anything for a smile and hair like that. Thinking of this, I shook my head and kept walking. He ran ahead and turned around in front of me, taking up the whole sidewalk. I kept walking, so he thought better of it and kept up alongside me.

“I’m James,” he said, sticking out his hand as he kept up with me. “Don’t think we ever properly introduced ourselves.”

“Eva,” I said, shaking his hand. “You seem to know the provost well.”

“Old friend of my father’s,” he shrugged, swinging his cross-body briefcase strap over his head.

He just saved your job, I reminded myself and kept walking. Looking at the chapel’s stained glass, remembering how incredibly minute and personal all of this must be in the scheme of the world and hating myself for how wrapped up I had been in this one conflict with this one man, I softened.

“Thanks for everything in there, James,” I said. I looked at him. He nodded to show he understood. We had the whole conversation in that look and left it at that. My head felt a blend of heavy and dizzy, so I begged off and said goodbye.

“How bout you keep this?” James called after I’d taken a few steps. “Give you something to remember me by?” He placed the photograph in my hand. I looked down at myself screaming in a 4x6. Taking a deep breath, I let the shame rush over me like an ocean wave I had decided to duck instead of fight.

“You don’t want it for your scrapbook?” I smiled.

“I’ll keep the next one, how bout that?” He readjusted his cross-body briefcase and sports jacket, then tucked his hands in his pockets, and walked away.

Chapter 3

Madrid 1966

Almost ten years earlier, I was twenty-five and wanted to run away from 1966. So I went to Spain. A sense of hungry dread had built up after I left undergrad, and for months I had known I needed to escape the States. Go somewhere else. Somewhere Kennedy wasn't dead and people with darker skin could eat at restaurants without strange looks, and boys from high school didn't come back as ghosts from Vietnam. Somewhere with castles and ruby dresses and a history already carved into the world with complete certainty. My Fulbright scholarship didn't start officially until August, but I booked a flight to Madrid for five days after graduation from the University of Pennsylvania. I was impatient. I was impulsive. But hey, I argued to my parents, there were worse things a twenty-five year old could do.

Back then Fulbright students in my program, and there weren't many, lived all together about a dozen blocks from the university. The apartments were really just a cluster of bedrooms stacked together in an old, narrow house. The tan stucco house, spackled together with its neighbors, seemed to extend a quarter mile back from its street entrance. The woman who owned the home ran a laundry and dry cleaner's service on the first floor. To get upstairs, you had to enter the shop, go behind the rotating clothing rack the woman turned with a crank, past the large metal basins she did the various washes in, and then up the stairs, or go around the entire block to the alley and climb stone steps up to the second floor.

After the first week, I stopped going through the storefront and went to alley instead. That way, I could avoid the sticky wheel sound of the clothes rack rotating and the exasperated customers with bags on their hips. Up the alley, I could look at nothing but the steps. The rough granite steps could have existed in any time. I could pretend I didn't hear the cars or see the

bellbottoms hanging from the clothesline across from me. The wooden shutters of my top floor room opened overlooking the stonewall edge of a neighbor's garden. Spanish bluebells, orange tipped gazanias, and red carnations spilled over each other. To the left, I saw a park with a balding, brown lawn. Five blocks away, I could see the sunrise coat the steeple of the neighborhood church. The other housemates, mostly linguists or architecture students, hardly spent time at the house, so I tried not to as well.

That summer before the academic year began I can't say I got to know Madrid. I didn't go to much in the way of concerts or movies or the trending, modern restaurants of a generation of Spaniards starting to relax after the civil war and then decades of a silent, hidden war. Instead dove into what Madrid used to be. I walked to the historical district. The Plaza Mayor. The Don Quixote statues. The Royal Palace of Madrid. It was cliché and I loved it. Soaked it up. Alba encouraged my passion.

"The older buildings are just beautiful," she agreed. "They are the foundation of this city. I still cannot believe they put two 'skyscrapers' in the Plaza de España a few years ago."

The Royal Palace of Madrid was my favorite. Running my hands along the corridors as light shone in and washed the white pillars of the palace, I pictured queens from centuries ago doing the same. Reality did its best to break the illusion. I knew any queen or princess there would have been hounded by the urgency to marry, to bear children, to otherwise stay still. And Isabella never bothered with Madrid, which had been a sleepy town while she reigned. Whenever I went on the guided tours though, I set that aside and sunk into the moment. When I told a version of this to my landlady, Señora Alba Gustavo Medina, once while she pressed and ironed orders for the next morning's pickup, she said without looking up that's nice, dear. Her cordiality sobered me a little. Normal people still had work in the morning. This was still 1966.

Once the fall semester started I spread out my classes on the Holy Roman Empire, the Age of the Aragon and Castilles, the Spanish Inquisition, and Spanish Imperialism over the course of the whole year. My advisor, Dr. Jorge Zapatero Herrera, supervised my research, but spent little time with me. He shook his head when I suggested regular weekly meetings and then biweekly meetings. Once a month would be fine, he assured me. He trusted me, he said.

Most of the time, I worked alone in the archives or sometimes with my typewriter at my desk in the graduate student cubicles. Dr. Zapatero and I met three times the fall. Each time, he read through my papers in silence, marking a few notes in pencil, before he would nod at me and tell me to continue, with a few suggestions about correspondence between Isabella and some relative or explorer he thought I should look into.

I spent more time with Dr. Abasolo in the English department than I did with Dr. Zapatero. As part of my exchange, I assisted in an introductory English lecture. The professor, Dr. Geraldo Abasolo Ochoa, also seemed to teach the class out of obligation. His real passion, he explained the first day we met in his office, was British poetry and chain smoking.

“Have you ever been there?” he leaned across his desk in sudden interest.

“To England?” I clarified. His head bobbed in a vigorous nod, his cigarette bouncing in sync.

“I wish,” I said. He rapped his knuckles on the desk in approval.

“Let me know if you ever want to borrow something,” he motioned around the room.

Columns of thin chapbooks and thick anthologies stacked themselves in every free space of carpet, forming a tiny city of skyscrapers. His bookshelves along the walls weren't bare, but were largely uninhabited. I only keep the stuff I don't read there, he explained.

“Please,” he handed me books by Cecil Day-Lewis, John Donne, and H. G. Wells. I thanked him, but explained I’d have little time with my own research to read them. He set them down, disappointed.

“Haga lo que quiera,” he shrugged. Suit yourself.

Most of our students in the English class were business majors desperate to speak “fluently,” which they interpreted to mean without an accent. Emphatic students in suits thrust papers into my hands after class, hoping I could fix their grammar before the deadlines for their International Commerce courses. Afternoons I did my own research. I could step into a different era. Slipping on white document gloves, I read Isabella and Ferdinand’s correspondence, their decrees, their church records. I pictured them doing the most normal things—eating lunch, getting dressed, walking hallways—in the most elegant ways.

Alba left croissants or other small pastries with coffee out for breakfast for the other exchange students and me. She never seemed to eat them herself, but she explained that she knew how Americans especially loved their breakfast. I ate at the house, but I rarely made it back for the merienda, the small mid-meal between the big late lunch and later dinner. Usually I picked up a sandwich on my walk back to campus after resting to hold me over until dinner at nine or ten at night. On specially days I bought hornazo, a small bread with chorizo sausage, some pork loin, and egg. On my daily walk to campus, I passed by three bakeries. One afternoon Alba raised her eyes in alarm when I came home with hornazo from the first bakery. That evening she pressed my hands into hers and, in the smoothest appeal, urged me never to go there again.

“Mi reina,” she rubbed my forearm like I were her niece she’d watched grow up for decades, “Please, don’t go there again. Take the extra two minutes and go a block over to El Horno de Gallego.”

“¿Qué fue el problema? Pensé que lo fue delicioso,” I defended the bread. She combed my hair with her fingers and cocked her head. The dim light of her kerosene lamp on the center table bathed her white tiled kitchen laced in blue window drapes in gold. The shadows on her face pitied me.

“Sweet girl, that bread is like eating paper,” she said dragging on her third cigarette of the evening before returning to stir the pot of cocido, a chickpea stew with mutton, beef, chicken, and a variety of vegetables. I leaned against the wooden doorframe. “Besides,” she said in between scrubs over the sound of sloshing stew. “Communists run that store you went to today.” She turned around to face me. “It is best to simply go to Gallego.” I swallowed this and nodded. Noted. “Anyway, dear, rent is due next week, and I am making paella this weekend for one of the boys birthdays.” She called all of the exchange students boys and girls, though most of us were well into our twenties or thirties.

Finishing the drying of a dish and shaking her head, Alba said, “I still must get used to the boys. It used to be I housed only girls and Graciella Herán, you remember her from my Bible study group on Tuesdays, she hosted the boys. But now they put boys and girls together in the same house,” she shrugged and trailed off. “Still separate floors, though. I keep the boys on the one and you girls on the other, for your sake,” she said smiling. She came over and touched my head.

Another time, I came home reading a newspaper and sat in the kitchen, waiting for Alba to come up from the store. When she did, she halted in the doorway, looking like a stopped up bottle. She crossed the kitchen to where I sat at the table, smile reapplied.

“Evita, this newspaper is no good,” she said. Picking up the pages from my hands with her forefingers and thumbs, she set it on the kitchen counter. “They report nothing reliable.” Heading into the parlor, she brought out another newspaper and set it out in front of me. *ABC: Tu Diario en Español*. A picture of Franco in full military dress waving from a motorcade took up the front fold.

Alba set about cooking dinner, frying fish in a pan, while I kept reading. I knew from the first week when she stiffened with tears better than to ask if I could help. While the faucet poured into the pot, she lifted the other newspaper that I’d brought home.

“I can throw that out, Alba,” I offered.

“No, no, angel,” she smiled, tucking loose, dark hair from her bun behind her ear. “It’s no problem.” She took the pages into the parlor. I could hear the iron bars of the fireplace cover clank as she opened it. I tilted out of my chair just enough to see her stack logs, strike a match and toss it on top of the newspaper. The grey print blackened and disappeared like something was eating it from within, and when the newspaper disintegrated, the flames turned blue. It was if it had not existed.

Saying nothing, Alba walked back in, wiping her hands on her apron, and then turned back to the fish.

Every once and a while I saw men who looked too old to be students sit in the back of the English lecture. They wore nondescript suits and never pestered me about adverbs or

inflection rules. Usually a day or two after these men would sit in, a student or two would stop coming to class. One time midway through the semester after these men had visited earlier in the week, I set graded papers down on the wooden table next to the lectern. As I wiped the chalkboards down, a herd of students thumped down the forum style hall to collect their essays. When I turned around, three papers still rested on the table. Unusual. I checked the names. Rogelio, Martin, and Silvio. They were friends—I knew that. Usually the three of them were first to cut me off on at the door and ask me questions after class. I held them up to Dr. Abasolo, who was fastening the clip on his briefcase.

“Sabe donde están? I asked. *Do you know where they are?*

“I don’t think they will be returning,” he didn’t look up.

“Why?”

“We don’t ask that question in Spain,” he said with abrupt seriousness. He made eye contact and walked closer. “Not right now anyway.”

His gaiety and distracted sense of humor returned, and we walked back to his office where we usually spent our afternoons talking about history and poetry and his favorite anecdotes about Spanish royals long gone.

I knew about Franco. Or at least, I knew about him in the abstract. I knew about the Spanish Civil War that had pitted nationalists against communists. Practically everywhere across the world, communists had clamored to Spain to play at war. Boys with guns who needed to calm down, my mother had waived her hand once when she talked about it when my father wasn’t in the room. If they’d just waited, they’d have gotten their war, she said, thinking of her brother who had died in Normandy at the end of the Second World War. My father rarely spoke of the war. He never spoke of Franco. Of course no victors showed mercy to the losers. I knew of

the tight grip Franco and the nationalists had put on Spain. But the U.S. had renewed relations with Spain in 1953. Things were supposed to be better now. That's why we had Fulbright programs like mine.

Otherwise, that fall slipped by calmly. Like pouring water into a glass. At the holidays, my parents flew over to Europe. My father, a first-generation Castilian American from Toledo, my mother an Scottish-English American with four ancestors on record fighting in the Revolutionary War, we spent Christmas in Paris. My sister Joanne spent it with her fiancé Arthur's family in Connecticut.

"You don't mind spending Christmas here?" I asked my parents while we ate brunch in the glass hotel dining room.

"Oh Evie, of course not," my mother placed her hand on top of mine and rubbed my knuckles.

"We could've spent it in Spain, if you'd wanted," I looked at my father, who ate his third roll.

"Why?" he replied through chewing. "You wanted to see Paris! Besides," he smiled, "there's nothing left for *me* there." He ate another roll, unconcerned. My mother readjusted the cloth napkin on her lap. My father did not speak about his family. He did not speak about the Civil War.

"What is there to say?" my father had said once when my sister and I had asked about his family. "My parents, my brothers, my uncles and aunts, my cousins—they died. Everyone's family died. Everyone lost everyone, or at least someone. Is there a point to talking about which side they were on or who killed them? They were on both sides. I had cousins fighting uncles.

Brothers fighting fathers. They did not kill each other. No one killed them. The war killed them.

That is all that I know and that is why I left.”

We walked the Champs-Élysée. We passed theaters and shops, and through the Place de la Concorde, past its obelisk and fountains. The three of us visited Musée d’Orsay, Versailles, and every other tourist must-see my father could think of. Still, it did not feel like the Paris of the movies or of any novel. Even outside these monuments to a different time of European luxury and influence, people was the Paris of normal people going about their weekly grocery shopping, business meetings, and dinners with friends. As my father narrated the different visits, I imagined him there as a little boy in between wars, probably some time in the twenties, with his family. This phantom family hung in the air.

Returning from the holidays, I went to Dr. Abasolo’s office the week before the semester started. The arrangement had been that I would assist in his class again in the spring to offset any costs not covered by my scholarship. A younger man with fox eyes yanked the door open, cigarette in hand, when I knocked.

“Yes?” he asked without really asking anything. I knew the path to Dr. Abasolo’s office by habit now, but I craned my neck back to check the number outside the door. Right office.

“Perdóname señor, estoy buscando por Doctor Abasolo. ¿Sabe donde se puede encontrarlo?” *I’m looking for Doctor Abasolo. Do you know where one can find him?*

Fox eyes twitched and set his hand on the doorframe, blocking the entrance.

“You must be Eva. It is a pleasure to meet you. I am Felipe Doloroso Porras,” he extended his free hand to shake mine. He spoke in polished English. “Dr. Abasolo had to leave rather unexpectedly. He left just yesterday, in fact. Unfortunately, he will not be here at

Complutense this semester. I will be taking over his classes, including the one with which you assist.”

I shook my head instinctively. He seemed not to notice my shock and took another drag of his cigarette.

“What? What happened? Is he alright?” I asked.

“Certainly,” Felipe pressed his palms together like a prayer. Then he motioned me inside. The spiraling columns of British poetry had disappeared. “It is a personal matter that takes him away. We will respect his privacy, you understand,” he closed the subject. I reopened it.

“Where are his books?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“His books. He was a fanatic for 19th and 20th century British poetry. Couldn’t get enough of it. He always had stacks of chapbooks and anthologies littering the floor,” I motioned to the empty carpet. “If he left yesterday unexpectedly, where are his things?”

“Yes, a fanatic. He was certainly that,” Felipe grinned down at his stomach. “He packed up his books.” He smudged the embers of his cigarette into a small ash tray, Dr. Abasolo’s ash tray, with one solid motion. I was not sure the cigarette pack on the desk wasn’t Dr. Abasolo’s as well. Shadows from the cloudy afternoon outside cast ghoulish shadows across his face and neck. The white walls of the blank office never looked darker.

He had closed the subject again.

“Now,” he looked back up at me, “We can get started planning the first weeks of lessons. I have an outline of the department’s objectives for the course to guide us,” he pulled a wooden drawer open. It clanked with its emptiness as he took out the outline, the one thing in it. “I think

you and I will get along, Eva,” he smoothed the papers in front of us. “We will teach well together. It will be as though Geraldo were never here.”

On my walks home, I started to take new routes. My beeline between the university, Alba’s, and the palaces had grown stale. I had begun to recognize certain cracks and ruts in the sidewalks from taking the same paths everyday. So I walked elsewhere.

I started to see a different Spain, a newer Spain of the sixties, with record stores and signs advertising cigarettes in the windows of narrow tienditas. The skinny sidewalks housed extra tables for two from crowded cafes and restaurants, forcing pedestrians to venture out into the street. A few people even wore jeans and leather jackets, but they were mostly foreigners. Slim cars rode down the streets, but boxy city buses and motorcycles dominated them. Spanish women still walked together or with a man. The older ones wore house dresses with wide pockets and their hair in tight knots. The younger ones wore shorter skirts, but still ones that tended to brush the tops of their knees. Shop owners and several maitre d at restaurants would stare at me while I walked past by myself, as if trying to tell if I were waiting to meet some chaperone. Men mostly wore full suits with slim ties in Windsor knots. Older buildings now sported bright signs and housed magazine stands and electronics stores selling all sizes and styles of radios, sometimes even a television or two. Photography studios and movie theaters stood next to classic bakeries and ancient monuments. But there was more beyond the signs of modernity.

One night I saw dried blood on cobblestones outside a café. It was gone the next day.

Another night, I saw a poster advertising an alternative magazine’s release party shredded. I’d seen a man in a jean jacket put it up outside just that morning. Tatters of the poster

stuck to the brick wall of the Liberal Arts building. In the shadow light of the street lamp, the thin, remaining pieces looked like shriveled bodies at the gallows.

One night in the blue hum of twilight, a teenager sprinted past me on the checkered grey tiled street, his unzipped windbreaker flapping and hitting his elbows as they pumped in the air. He looked back briefly, scanning for someone, and made eye contact with me for a moment. I saw the softness of his face. He probably had not begun shaving yet. His hair had been gelled into the mold of a wave, a look he'd probably gotten from a magazine picture of Elvis. The moment ended, and the boy kept running.

The bright colored buildings, darkened by the lack of sun, had no spaces and no alleys. An urban tunnel. The boy might as well have been running down a cattle shoot. Two cops pounded after him with shouts. They slammed him into a shoulder pin against the closed wooden shutters of a men's clothing shop. The shutters tolled like dull bells as his head hit them. The toll did not stop until the cops shoved the boy down so his whole body pressed against the cold, grey street slabs. Two more cops ran past me to join the tackle. The boy shouted for help, his adolescent voice cracking. *¡Ayudáme! Call my mother!*

A gentleman in a cream turtleneck and tight-fitting navy suit and manicured hair swept to one side clutched the arm of a woman in a black dress and shawl. The gentleman tapped the fourth officer on his shoulder.

"Disculpa, señor," he said in a bad Spanish accent, betraying his foreignness. He cocked his chin in the direction of the screaming boy, squirming under the knees and elbows of the other cops. "What is happening?"

The sun had sunk into a purple haze and then an indigo night in a matter of minutes. Darkness provided cover. One of the cops whacked the boy on his skull and cover his mouth as

they dragged his body around the corner. The foreigner repeated his question. “What is the matter?”

“Drogas,” the officer snapped. His tone softened when he saw their pale blond faces. He switched to a thick and deliberate English. “It is nothing to be concerned about. He will not be back on this street. Are you visiting Madrid?”

The black-clad woman nodded as she looped her arms through her husband’s. A desperate, flayed scream escaped from around the corner. The officer smoothed.

“Have you tried the restaurants on the strip outside the palace?” the officer asked, ushering them away from the dying screams.

Aside from a grocer sweeping the daily debris from his storefront with a push broom, I was alone on the street. Walking at a steady pace, I made sure not to quicken or slow down. I stared at the spot where the boy had been. Blood from his forehead had scraped against the stone street. Already it had started to dry. It looked like start of a cave painting. The grocer came over, bent his knees, and pulled a damp cloth out. His back hunched as he scrubbed away. A motorcycle rumbled down the road, masking the remaining moans, as if the boy had never screamed at all.

Once, I stepped out of my office cubicle with the other foreign graduate students. We stopped short mid-way down the steps of the History and Geography building. Heavy shouts punctured the grey skies like thunderclaps. Three dozen students filled the small lawn, holding signs. I caught sight of one that said in Basque, “Gure hizkuntza eta gure ahotsak gabe, estatua gara.” I looked it up later. *Without free voices, we are only statues.*

Police in military green uniforms and flat caps swarmed the students. The scene looked like an upturned beehive, people running without direction or pattern. Officers threw students to

the ground, locking their arms behind their backs. The officers slapped the signs face down on the grass, hiding their messages, before slamming the students down too. Two vans barreled into the quad. The police shoved the students in to them. A few stragglers who hadn't been caught yet kept running in circles as the cops chased them. It looked inevitable. Desperate.

“Come on,” one of the Irish international students said, tugging at the elbow of my jacket. “Walk at a normal pace.”

We stepped quickly, turning our backs on the lawn. Someone, probably the last straggler, screamed. The Swedish grad student pulled her coat tighter around her torso. We walked without saying anything. The next morning in our cubicles, we talked only of the burnt coffee and whether the coffee maker was broken.

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I ate with the other international students in the History department at lunchtime. We met up for drinks on the occasional weekend. And every few weeks Felipe, Dr. Abasolo's replacement, always asked me to dinner. Still, I couldn't let go of the feeling that I couldn't trust these people. That they would shake me off in an instant, toss me to oblivion if whoever was behind all these disappearances and beatings said so.

In February the History department helped sponsor an exhibition of 15th century Royal jewels and possessions at El Alcázar, the castle of dreams, in Segovia where many of the monarchs at the time lived. A private donor associated with a number of art museums across the region in Madrid, Lisbon, and Tangier had brought forward a collection of hand fans, jeweled ivory combs, silk purses, and various necklaces that had belonged to Isabella and her daughters, Isabella, Juana, Catherine, and Maria. Even Isabella's crown and scepter were being brought in from the Royal Chapel in Granada. Since so much of the royal memorabilia burned in the Great

Fire of Madrid of Christmas Eve 1734, the government jumped when the donor, Valeria Tordesillas Solos, offered them. Although the exhibition would be in Segovia, the donor apparently lived in Madrid, and had requested the Complutense History department to work in tandem with a team from El Alcázar to curate the exhibition. Dr. Zapatero stopped by my cubicle one day and asked me if I would like to assist him on the project. Startled, I nodded.

“Absolutely,” I said.

Along with another professors and his graduate students, we worked for two weeks researching and labeling the different items. As thanks for our work, the exhibition’s director invited the university team to the opening night gala. We drove early in the afternoon to Segovia and stayed at a hotel not far from the castle. An orchestral octet played in the corner, and waiters circulated the catered food.

We placed Isabella’s crown and scepter in the throne room in front of the two wooden thrones at the top of the red-carpeted steps. Most of the other artifacts went on velvet covered tables along the perimeter of the larger, adjacent, white hall. As we arrived to the castle, which sat alone on a hill just outside town, looking at the snow capped mountains and orange fields nearby, I felt a chill. As usual Dr. Zapatero left me to my own devices, and headed towards a businessman across the ballroom rumored to have a medieval sword collection. A few other academics scattered the room, but mostly wealthy aristocrats, businessmen, and their wives circulated the event.

I stayed by the necklaces. A jewelry fiend, Isabella would sport luxurious pendants and rings for her whole life. Once when a priest had chastised her for her vanity, Isabella rebuked him back, telling him she wore her jewels to assert her God-given power and display Castilian wealth to anyone who might challenge the state. Most of these necklaces belonged to Juana,

Isabella's second daughter, known as Juana La Loca for her mental demise later in life. A handful of the more conservative ones were Catherine's and Maria's, and two opal necklaces belonged to Isabella, Princess of Asturias. Only the emerald pendant purportedly belonged to Isabella. I ran my fingers along the velvet tablecloth until a man behind me cleared his throat.

"I work on the university team that curated these," I explained, keeping my hand on the table to assert myself as legitimate.

"Then it's an honor to meet you," the man extended his hand. His eyes were the first aspect I noticed about him. Undeniably handsome, the man had sharp eyes that looked as hard as marbled granite. He was impressive. Startling. He looked young, and I thought he must have been in his mid-twenties like me, but he also wore a well-tailored tuxedo and a large, gold watch hanging on his wrist just below his shirt cuffs.

"Carlos Tordesillas, un gusto," he introduced himself.

"Eva Belmonte," I replied, opting for the Spanish pronunciation of my name. "Espera, are you—?"

"I'm her son," he said. "The collection was my mother's. I'm just here for the party and the beautiful curators." He smiled and waived a server over. "Disculpa señor, could you bring us two champagne glasses?" The waiter nodded and headed for the kitchen. Carlos turned his gaze back to me. "You have done marvelous work."

"Thank you," I blushed. "De verdad, we hardly had much to do given the detailed notes your mother included with the artifacts."

"Do not undersell yourself," he cupped my shoulder. "Excellence should be acknowledged."

I laughed, a little uncomfortable but for the most part flattered, and looked down at the necklaces.

“It was an *era* of excellence, no?” Carlos said. “A time of such grace, a Spanish golden age. I find myself drawn to it, wishing to go back to it.”

“I know what you mean,” I regained my smile, flooding with excitement at the mention of history. “It certainly was, though it came with so much terror and violence.” Carlos’ face retracted into a polite grin.

“Yes,” he said as he turned to take the glasses from the waiter and hand one to me. “To excellence,” he toasted. We clinked glasses and drank.

“Now as I understand,” he started, “you are not from here?”

“I’m from the United States. How did you know?” I asked.

“It is my business to know who people are,” he replied.

“What business is that?”

“International commerce. Oil. But back to you,” he steered the conversation. “Your Spanish is immaculate. If I hadn’t asked your supervisor about you, I would not have known you from a Spaniard. How does an American learn to speak as you do?”

“My father is from Toledo. He met my mother in Paris when she was traveling Europe with her aunt. When they married, he went back with her to Virginia, which is where I grew up. He taught me Spanish.”

“My compliments to your father, then,” Carlos said. I blushed as he touched my back.

Over by the throne, a woman in a deep green gown stood next to a man who cleared his throat loudly and tapped his glass with force.

“Excuse me, my apologies. I promise I’ll return,” Carlos said. He left and walked towards them.

“Could I have your attention, esteemed guests?” the man asked in a raised voice. The hum of the room settled to his satisfaction, and he continued. “I have the honor of introducing the benefactors who made tonight and this new exhibit possible. Valeria Tordesillas’s generosity cannot be overstated. She has brought tremendous regalia that brings tremendous pride to Spain. Without any more words, I present to you all, Valeria Tordesillas.”

The hall and the throne room echo with claps. Valeria kisses the man’s cheek and then turns to the crowd. Carlo, the dutiful son, stood at her side.

“As most of you know from the lovely displays prepared by the castle curators and the history department at La Universidad Complutense de Madrid, this collection was passed down in my family from the sister of a nun who worked at the nunnery where Juana La Loca spent the final years of her life. She had hoarded a number of trinkets from her mother and sisters and taken them with her to the nunnery. When she died, they fell into my family, and I think it time to return them to the people of Spain.” Everyone clapped.

“Yes, *she* thought it was time,” a low voice behind me chuckled. I did not turn. Another man’s voice joined in laughing quietly.

“Certainly the timing wasn’t sped up by Carmen Polo,,” the other voice said.

My eyes darted to a woman in a rich navy saffron gown a few steps from Valeria and Carlos. I recognized her then from the pictures in the newspaper: Carmen Polo, Francisco Franco’s wife. The relaxed confidence in her posture said she knew she didn’t have to exert much energy to get people to do what she wanted. Carlos looked sideways at the dictator’s wife every few seconds, as if checking to see if she had moved. Valeria finished her speech. After

about fifteen minutes of chatting with Carmen Polo and his mother, Carlos returned to me. The event had trickled to an end. The guests kissed one another goodbye, slipped on their overcoats, and disappeared into the winter night.

“Where are you staying?” He asked as he touched my elbow.

“A few blocks away at the hotel with the others from the university,” I answered.

“Could I walk you? It’s on my way.” One look over at Dr. Zapatero told me I would not be missed. Besides, I felt a draw, a tug, to Carlos.

We walked along the tan, stone wall of the city limits on Ronda de Don Juan II and then Calle de Socorro. The curves of the hills beyond the city on our right, covered in a dusting of snow, looked like white waves of an ocean frozen mid-flow. Short Spanish trees, dusted in snow and shadows, scattered the plains like low clouds settling on the sea. The icy mountains in the distance made me think *you are not yet out of the thick of it*, but I couldn’t place my finger on the it. My short heels struck the street like slow snare drums. The sidewalk contained real cobblestones, random cuts of stray rocks petrified in ancient, pre-concrete mortar.

“I grew up here, you know,” Carlos broke the silent air. “In Segovia.” He put a thin cigarette, thinner than the ones in the States between his teeth and lit it with a bronze lighter. He stuck out the box, offering me one, but I shook my head.

“No, I didn’t,” I replied. He seemed momentarily surprised by this response, as if he expected me to have asked about him.

“My mother moved us to Madrid right before I went to secondary school. Before that, we’d lived on the other side Segovia just past the aqueducts. I could see them as a young boy from my window and watch the mountains poke through the open spaces of the aqueduct arches.”

I sniffed and brought him out of this private meditation. He looked at me.

“What did you see as a child from your window?” Carlos asked.

I thought to my parent’s house in Seaford, Virginia with white gables on the top floor. It must have been a farmhouse at one point. But my father, a small firm accountant, and my mother, his secretary, remodeled it into our home. I slept in the back bedroom that overlooked our backyard and the York River with my older sister, Gloria, in bunk beds until she died at fifteen. I was twelve. Gloria was gone in a matter of weeks. First, the fever. Then she moved from the top bunk to the lower one when her limbs went numb. By the time the doctors diagnosed her with polio, she had slipped into organ failure. She died within a week in the hospital in Richmond. It took me years to forget the feeling I got on that top bunk, not moving, not sleeping, just listening to her breath struggling to catch itself in her sleep. The polio vaccine came out two years after she passed.

After that, I moved into the front guest room. The gable had a thick windowsill and I could fit my whole frame on it. The window looked out on our neighbor’s grove of birch and Japanese cherry blossom trees. While I waited for the school bus, I’d climb the Japanese cherry blossoms in warm weather. Gloria had done it too. Joanna, the youngest, would wait at the tree’s base, unwilling to scrape her white school stockings to climb up with us. Gloria used to say that in the spring bloom, the pink flowers that enveloped you in the higher branches looked like heaven. *Squint*, Gloria had told me. And I did until my vision blurred. *You’ll see heaven*.

“Japanese cherry blossoms,” I answered Carlos.

“Like in Washington,” he lit up in recognition.

“Yes,” I said. I didn’t explain that we didn’t live near D.C., but along the York River. Carlos nodded in the way that people do when they aren’t familiar with your world. He put his arm around me.

“You look cold,” he said. I wasn’t, but I let his arm be. With few street lights, Segovia’s sky hung in darkness, its clay, orange-red roofs now shaded in a deep crimson. I watched the shadows fill the empty store windows and shuttered homes. I’m sure we talked about meaningless, get-to-know-one-another details. I was young. I thought these kinds of facts could tell you who a person was. I don’t know what Carlos thought. I had stopped watching the Spanish scenery and focused entirely on his animated, handsome face as he told me of his plans. As we walked, I let him move closer to me, and the wool of our long coats brushed together. A block before we reached my hotel, he stopped me placed his hand on the middle of my back.

“So that this is just ours,” he whispered. He pulled me against his waist and kissed me. Before I could sink into it, he stepped back and smiled at me. We walked the rest of the way to hotel door manned by a bellhop, and he kissed my hand goodnight.

After we returned to Madrid, Carlos visited me regularly. He stopped by the university at his lunch hour. He teased Linnea, the Swedish grad student who had her cubicle next to mine, swapped football scores with Jaimieson, the Irish grad student sweet on Linnea, and waited for me so we could eat out at the sandwich shop one block off campus. On weekends he came over for Saturday lunch and took me out afterwards. This was our routine. Alba adored him.

“I read about him, you know,” she cooed one night as the two of us drank coffee after dinner. She always meant Carlos when she said *him*.

“Where?” I asked.

“The society pages. His father, Lorenzo, works in the Ministry of the Interior, you know. Very close to President Franco. I think he does something with intelligence, or law enforcement, perhaps. And his mother, she hosts scores of parties every season. Her side of the family has money in oil, you know.”

That sounded familiar to me. Carlos said he worked with his uncles in their oil company that did business abroad, which accounted for his crisp Moroccan, French, and English. This news seemed to energize Alba. She nodded and hummed, arranging pieces in her head. All of her children had grown up and moved south to Valencia, so Alba had plenty of time to ruminate over Carlos’ societal standing. She invited Carlos to dinner regularly and never lost hope after his polite declines that he would come eventually. On the nights Carlos took me out, Alba waited in the dry cleaner’s doing bookkeeping at the counter by the front window so she could look up through the painted letters that said *Gustavo Limpieza en Seco* to see if I would let him kiss me. She didn’t offer me coffee on the nights that I didn’t. I think she had hoped to condition me into loving him by rewarding me with coffee on the nights I did kiss him.

Carlos discovered that I liked musicals, so he took me to the opera, assuming that an interest in one implied an interest in the other. When he realized the error and grew angry with himself, I laughed and rubbed my nose against his cheek. “Close enough,” I said. That night in the Teatro Real, I sat on the velvet seat in Carlos’ box, chilled in the cold of the darkened opera house. I tried my best to follow the Italian storyline by facial expressions and mood. Carlos squeezed my hand. I wore a satin dress he had bought for me. He had left the dress in the dry cleaners with a bow on the box earlier in the morning. Alba told me she had spent the afternoon smacking the hands of children who had tried to touch it while their mothers pulled out their

pocketbooks at the register. He left a note on the dress. *Parecerás bellísima en esto. You will look beautiful in this.* At the time, this hadn't sounded like a command.

Carlos held doors open for me. Held my hand. Remembered all the rules for how things like this were supposed to go. He introduced me to the sparkling restaurant scene of Madrid. He laughed loudly when I joked. He begged me to sing his favorite songs to him. He would stare at me with expanding satisfaction when I did. He kissed my entire face. I felt near full with him.

I fell in love with Carlos' love for history. His home in the Salamanca neighborhood overlooked the expansive Parque del Buen Retiro in Madrid, an oasis in the middle of modern mid-century condominiums, shops, and apartment towers. We traced the paths in it, walking for hours sometimes. He told me stories of when the royal family had owned the park until a century before. Most of the stories were about drunk viscounts and dukes pissing in the fountains or smashing glass panes in the Crystal Palace. I felt certain he made half of them up, but I always laughed. On those days, when we'd both talk about centuries we'd never known for hours, I sunk into feelings for him. Breathed him in. Convinced myself that maybe this was, in fact, love.

Carlos loved my work on Isabella, which felt close enough to loving me. I had shifted the topic of my Fulbright thesis to focus almost entirely on Isabella and less on Ferdinand. Carlos supported this. On more than one occasion, he sat with me for hours in the evenings in the archives while I worked. Carlos would slip on the document gloves, and read through the land grants Isabella authorized, draft of her proclamations, and her correspondence with hopeful conquistadors who wanted her patronage on a trip to Central America or the Andes in search of gold and a pretense mission work, of course. Together we marveled at her. Her intelligence. Her political maneuverability in a masculine world. In everything, she dazzled.

Sometime in March one night in the archives, I asked him why he wasn't studying Spanish history with me.

"I am, mi amor," he said with a blithe smile on his face. "Right now."

"You know what I mean," I countered. "You love this as much as me. Why work for your uncles? You hate oil."

"With my uncles," he corrected. He always got irritated when someone made that slip, but that night he just leaned back in the wooden swivel chair and crossed his hands on his stomach. "And I don't hate oil. It is okay," he ruminated at the stacks behind me, rubbing his fingers along his sweater. He snapped his focus back on me, his eyes boring into my skull for signs of my disapproval. If I had any, I hid it. Content, he smiled and leaned forward to squeeze my knees.

"Besides," he exhaled, "it is better than being poor." He laughed. It was the sort of laugh that suggests a mutually agreed upon joke about a mutually agreed upon fact. Suddenly I pictured him making this joke countless times before, a drink in hand, to faceless aristocrats he must called friends. *Poverty*, they would chortle. A detestable hilarity. Something we can all agree on.

In March Carlos and I went to Toledo for a day.

"I've got business there and I know you don't teach on Fridays," he coerced. We drove out through the brown hills. Snow still clung to the slate grey mountain ranges of the skyline, but the snowbanks had left the lowlands curling around the roads enough that hues of green brushed the brown landscape. I asked Carlos if we could put the top down of his Glas 1700 red convertible. The air was cool. Soft. It wrapped itself around my head and shoulders as we drove

through thicket of brown hills and mountains. Strips of my hair escaped the bun I'd set low on the nape of my neck and stuck to my lips. Carlos looked over and laughed. It did not sound kind.

"You are a mess, amor," he said. He pulled over and clicked the top back in place. He tilted the rear view mirror my way. I felt like a child, haplessly undone. He waited while I fixed my air before he started the engine and got back on the road. The stale air hung inside the car with artificial heat.

Outside the windows, we steered through stone towns and stray houses in between them. Everywhere, little boys in pea coats and caps tried to race along the car. Sometimes one of them had a bike, and sometimes there was a mother shooing them away from the speeding machine.

We arrived mid morning and ate lunch near one of the more famous goldsmith shops. Afterwards, Carlos spoke to the owner of the goldsmith shop.

"Como le va, Hector?" Carlos said even before the door of the entrance had fully closed behind us. *How's it going.*

Hector set down his pocket calculator at the register and motioned for a younger woman to take over ringing up the Belgian tourists with two small children at the register. He swerved around the display counter, filled with gold jewelry and small trinkets resting on black velvet, to meet us at the door.

"Bien, Señor Tordesillas, a pleasure to see you again," Hector pumped Carlos' hand.

"This lovely lady is Evangeline," Carlos introduced me, his hand cupping Hector's shoulder. Hector kissed my cheeks and I smelled peppermint on his collar.

"Un gusto," I said. *A pleasure to meet you.*

"Igualmente, señora," Hector said. *Likewise, ma'am.*

"How goes business, Hector?"

“Sabe negocios. Ni fu ni fa,” Hector replied, his leathery wrinkles bunching near his ears as he smiled wide. *You know business. Neither good nor bad.* “How is your father?”

“Oh he’s fine,” Carlos replied, his shoulders broadening as he stuck his hands in his pockets.

“Still in the Ministry of the Interior?” Hector asked, a note of fear underneath his plastered grin.

“Someone has to keep the country in line,” Carlos joked. Hector nodded. A forced chuckle came out of him in puffs. “But Hector, I heard you had a rough last year? Almost had to close the store?”

“Oh, we would never close,” Hector denied, his palms raising up in surrender to motion to the rest of the dim, yet glimmering store. Black velvet and gold covered the otherwise wooden room. Gold items ranging from decorative plates to vases to play swords coated every wall from ceiling to floor. The young girl at the counter, probably a daughter or a niece, had finished with the Belgian family. She knew it wasn’t her place to come over, but she nodded in accord with Hector from a distance. From the way Carlos smiled, I knew Hector’s denial was a lie, but it seemed like a necessary one. It was as much a lie as saying “good” to “how are you,” a vital cover to keep up some pretense.

“Well, what can you do for my Eva today?” Carlos moved on.

“Well, we have some beautiful new necklaces that my son and I finished just last week,” Hector said, walking back behind the display case to unlock one of the glass cases.

“Carlos,” I began to voice that I didn’t need or want anything. It felt odd, eerie, to have normal people like Hector and his young female assistant flit around me at the speed of

hummingbirds in the shadow of Carlos' wealth and influence. I felt as much an accessory as Hector to Carlos, but clearly I had more favor.

"You cannot leave Toledo without some gold," Carlos shook his head and placed his hand on the small of my back, rubbing the belt of my blue coat.

Carlos picked a thin chain with an emerald wrapped in gold for me and I said yes, I liked it. Just like Isabella's, he said, referencing the necklace that I'd been staring at in Segovia when we'd met. At the register, Carlos leaned in and said to Hector, "I'm glad to have such an old friend like you. More like family, no?"

Hector crossed out the price in his ledger and replaced it with a lower one. While he went to the back work room to find extra velvet scraps to package the necklace with, I asked Carlos why he'd pushed for a discount. Surely he could pay full price. Carlos kissed my cheek.

"That's the free market, mi amor."

While Carlos met with businessmen from Venezuelan oil companies in the center of town, I went to the outskirts of Toledo along its wall. I found the Santa María la Blanca cathedral. Now a memorial tourist church site, the structure had been a synagogue until the early 15th century. Before that, it had been a Moorish Islamic temple, and rumor had it that the Phoenicians before them had even used the land as a worship center as well.

"Algo sobre este lugar," the nun who guided me through the white pillars of the empty, main sanctuary. *Something about this place.* "It is holy. Everyone seems to have known this, without doubt. Civilizations have fought over it, hoping to get closer to God."

Undoubtedly romanticized, the story struck me as pretty, but glazed beyond recognition of the truth. Still, the nun stuck by it, hugged it. She believed it and spoke it into existence as true. The dome, the tiles, and white arches and pillars of the sanctuary had undeniable Moroccan

design. Almohad origins, the nun nodded when I pointed. “It was an unusual design for a synagogue. Almost like the Jews had tried fitting a mosque into synagogue clothing,” she explained. Even more unusual design for a Catholic monastery, I thought. “Still, they did build a Rabbi’s quarters into the courtyard,” she conceded. Except for a few exhibit placards with inscriptions in Spanish and English and some artwork sold by the nuns who ran the national memorial site, the white interior stood empty.

“Why Santa María la Blanca?” I asked about the name.

“Whiteness,” she replied. “To drive out the darkness of its non-Christian past.”

The evening air of Toledo frosted. Carlos put his coat around my shoulders as we walked to his car. When we returned late at night to Madrid and he kissed me goodnight in front of Alba’s storefront, his hand rested on my collarbone. He touched the emerald necklace he had just bought, as if to make sure it were still there.

Inside, coffee scents glided around Alba’s kitchen. Paraffin from the kerosene lamp coated the chamomile smell. The blue curtains on the windows behind the sink had darkened in the night shadows to a deep indigo. The other students, as usual, had plodded up to their rooms after the meal that must have been hours ago. Alba stood up from her usual wooden chair to greet me.

“Gracias a Díos, ya has vuelto,” she exclaimed, clutching her wrists in a tight hug around me. *Thank God you’re back.* She ushered me to the other wooden chair where I normally sat for our after dinner coffee. She broke tradition and did not ask her perfunctory question about whether Carlos would come up for a visit and cup of coffee.

“Alba, ¿qué pasó?” I asked what was the matter. Alba kept brushing her side curls behind her ear so much it looked as though she were brushing them.

“Evita,” she used my nickname. She petted my arm with the same rapidity as she pushed back her curls. Looking over her shoulder at the miniature table where she kept fresh flowers and the latest newspaper, she picked up the afternoon edition of *ABC*'s newspaper, and set it in front of me. In the center of paper inside a rectangular photograph were handcuffed students lying on their stomachs on the lawn of my university. A pile of rifles and handguns stacked up in the background while armed officers next to grey vans filled the foreground. The title read, “Police Narrowly Stop University Insurrection.”

I look up at Alba for answers. She turns over the paper on its fold and shows me the bottom half of the article, which contains two smaller photos side by side. One was the bloody face of an older, familiar-looking man, his eyes puff and discolored, his head turned so his bruised jaw lay on the road in profile. The other picture showed Dr. Abasolo. His hair looked almost as disheveled as in his death shot. He was sitting in his old office, his spirals of books still in tact, throwing his hands up in glee as he held two books in each hand. I didn't know exactly when the picture was dated, but I recognized the scene well. He showed identical excitement whenever his friends from England sent him new poetry chapbooks or novels on the working man's condition. The newspaper editors had darkened the picture, making him look deranged.

“¿Qué es esto?” I stumbled on my words to get the question out. *What is this?*

She explained, sparing me the mercy of reading. There was a shootout at the university. Early in the morning. Before the first of the day's classes. Apparently, the police had apprehended the students, led by Dr. Abasolo, before they had the chance to shoot up the entire campus. Police rounded up the students, but Dr. Abasolo had refused to surrender. According to

all official reports, he fired the first shot. They “neutralized” him as quickly as they could, shooting him right in the middle of the street. According to the paper, they were all dissatisfied with the university for a long time. Communists. Terrorists. The article stated that all of them had been going to secret meetings with a known anti-Franco faction in Madrid for months.

For a long time, I sat in silence with Alba. She worried over me, but for the wrong reasons. Alba was terrified of communists. Alba was terrified I had been in unknown peril working at a campus with communists. She couldn't have known that I knew Dr. Abasolo. I'd never mentioned him to her. I knew better than to cry. Gripping the fringe of the tablecloth out of her sight, I spoke.

“No puedo creerlo.” *I cannot believe it.*

“I am just glad that you were with Carlos today and that they were stopped,” she comforted me. She scooped her chair closer to mine and hugged me.

“Yes,” I said back. Alba pulled away and inhaled with a sharp determination to take care of me.

“I'll pour you some coffee,” she offered.

While she got up and walked to the counter to the metal coffee press and cupboard of mugs, I unfolded the newspaper so both halves were visible. Both the students and Dr. Abasolo wore heavy winter clothing, too warm for even chilly March weather, as if they had stepped right out of months ago. After a closer look, the picture sparked a memory. The students. They were the same ones I'd seen protesting on the lawn outside the History and Geography before the police had swept them into grey vans that looked very similar to the ones now in this photograph. It felt as though they had been delivered, tumbled back on the same ground the police had

snatched them on for the express purpose of these photographs. To prove they were no good.

That they needed to be gone.

Alba had switched conversation to distract me. She offered to take me to visit her hometown in Valencia when the oranges were in bloom in April, only two months before I would return to the States.

“I think it would be good for you to get away,” she stroked my hair. A buzz from the downstairs bell of the store rang.

“Who is that?” I asked. Alba went to the window and pulled back one of the blue curtains.

“It’s Carlos,” she piped, surprised.

“Carlos?”

“Gracias a Dios,” she thanked God. “Maybe he can cheer you. Go ahead, invite him up!”

At the front door of the store, I let Carlos in.

“Hola, amor,” he kissed my cheek.

“Buenas, I’m surprised to see you,” I said, feeling like the words could echo in the empty, shadow-filled dry cleaner’s. “Alba begs that you come up for coffee.” I didn’t feel the words leave my mouth, didn’t feel my jaw form them, but I heard them.

“¿Su propia mezcla?” he asked. Her own blend? He smiles at what he considers her predictability and mine for that matter.

“Yes,” I said faintly.

“I would love to, but I just came for my coat. I forgot I gave it to you, and it has my wallet.”

“Oh,” I turned. I walked behind the counter and in the back room where Alba’s personal coat rack sits next to the staircase to her apartments. Finding his coat, I brought it back to him where he stood, waiting with expectation. I stared at him and saw in his eyes how guaranteed he thought my affection was. And I knew. What we had wasn’t love. If anything, underneath the shiny surface tension that felt something close to happiness, Carlos made me feel a hollowness. A reminder of something that wasn’t there. My body grew cold.

“Gracias, amor,” he put the coat over his forearm and hugged around my unresponsive body. “What’s wrong,” he finally asked.

“Something happened at the university today while we were gone,” I manage. “Apparently some students were armed and the police stopped them from shooting up the campus. A professor I worked with in the fall was supposed to have led them. Dr. Geraldo Abasolo. I had been his teaching assistant in that English class to make some extra money while I’m here. They shot him, the police.”

“I’m sorry, amor,” Carlos nodded with what could pass as sympathy, but he did not look surprised. I stepped away. He said nothing more.

“Did you know about this?” I asked.

“Amor, we just got back,” he did not answer.

“Yes, we just got back. How could you have known about this?” I asked. It was not a question of whether he had; it was a question of mode. The answer struck me without mercy.

“Your father. Did you even need to go to Toledo today?”

Carlos said nothing, but reached again for my arm to pull me back towards him. I stood still, staring at the linoleum floors of the store.

“Amor, I just wanted to get you out of here for the day,” he started.

“He was my friend, you know. Dr. Abasolo,” I said. “Well, not exactly my friend,” I thought back on the fall, “but he was a good man.” The words felt stale, as though countless others had already spoken about other people who’d been murdered and I was just borrowing them, and I suppose all of that was true. He was a good man. An eccentric man. A kind man. A poor man caught on the wrong side of ideology.

“He disappeared without warning in January, you know,” I stated facts that I realized Carlos probably already knew given his father’s clout in the Ministry of the Interior, but I said them out loud anyway. “I didn’t know why. When I asked, no one gave any explanation. Were they just holding him until the right moment when they could release him on the street as a ‘communist terrorist’ and shoot him before anyone could ask any questions?”

“Eva,” Carlos cut me off. His voice had hardened like hot metal liquid tempered to a sharp edge. “You are upset. I understand that. But what you are saying is crazy.”

“I’m crazy?” I shouted. “This is crazy! This is absolutel—”

Carlos cuffed his hand over my mouth. He did it with rough speed, and I felt the pressure of his grip through my skin on my teeth and jaws. His other hand, on my back, held me steady so I couldn’t pull away. No one would have heard us arguing anyhow given the thickness of the old walls, but he must have had enough. As quickly as he had covered my mouth, he drew away, his hand falling and retreating to his pocket, embarrassed by his rashness.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know why I did that,” he said. His eyes, still thick with frustration, told me that he did. I cut him off.

“No, that’s it. Está fin. Goodbye, Carlos.”

“He was a dangerous man, Eva,” Carlos defended.

“Do you really believe that?”

“Yes,” he said, the last word I would ever hear from him. Even now, decades later, I can’t tell if he meant it or not.

Chapter 4

Washington D.C. 1974

Every seat in the wood-paneled lecture hall had a body in it, sitting straight as though a grandmother had just tugged at the sitter's shirt collar in church. Open notebooks sat on every desk. No sleepers. No slouchers. No whispers or glossed over, constricted eyes tracing the paths of the floating dust in the rafters.

"I'd like to take a jump forward today and talk about the Mexican-American War," I baited. A untenable war if there ever was one. The students staring at me with unmarred expectation were all history majors. Undoubtedly, they knew this about the Mexican-American War, or must have at least recoiled from war of any variety growing up in the sixties. Only a collective click of pens echoed in the forum. Without turning my head and betraying my insecurity, I glanced to the right at Sam. Still in his corduroy bell bottoms and a suede hat, his posture, now hunched and smaller, talking up less space, gave off a look that can only be described as earnest contrition. No fake glasses. Look who's growing up, I thought. His neighbor, the same girl he normally goaded into conversation before and running into the first few minutes of class, this time tapped his desk with her fingertips.

"Where are your glasses?" she asked.

"They were straining my eyes and making my head hurt," Sam mumbled, gaze focused on me.

"What?" the girl asked. "That doesn't make—"

“Can we talk later?” he whispered, pointing his pen at me and my lectern. His voice had the desperate whine of a nervous dog. Startled by the role reversal, the girl let out a restrained “uh” sound that stopped her throat. I began the lecture.

“It was as if I stepped into a new semester,” I told Joyce in her office as we ate our packed sandwiches that afternoon. “I glided through that class.” Joyce huffed and pieces of lettuce dropped onto the lap of her long denim skirt.

“Glided?” she wiped her mouth and picked up the stray lettuce.

“Yes!” my voice raised. “No, it—I just *glided*. That’s the only way I can put it.”

“Go on,” she leaned back in her chair, bemused and settling in for my explanation.

“Joyce, I swear,” I insisted, “today felt like a fresh piece of paper. You know? These past few weeks, I’ve been making typo after typo and today felt like I was finally allowed to take the page out and put in a new one. We talked about *history*.”

“I’d hope so. That’s what you teach anyhow,” Joyce interjected.

“But really,” I leapt up and kept talking, “they listened and dug into the class. Everyone. There might have been one or two students who didn’t participate. When we talked about Polk, we actually talked about Polk.”

“You don’t say,” Joyce said, still looking at her sandwich. She picked at a piece of loose lettuce. Resting against her bookshelf, I looked outside her window at the browning leaves. Even though Joyce had just settled in like me, her windowsill had stacks of books even taller than the ones on mine. Where my office had sprawling chaos, Joyce’s had organized. Her

book shelves served more as a file cabinet, dresser, and kitchen counter of sorts with spare sweaters, umbrellas, and a cluster of mugs and thermoses.

“Want some coffee,” Joyce offered, walking over to her brand new orange and brown Cuisinart coffee maker sitting on one of the bookshelves. I shook my head still in disbelief at my successful lecture.

“Before class I swore that we were going to derail when we talked about the Mexican-American War. I mean President Polk practically conjured a war out of thin air. It’s just about one of the most unjustifiable wars we’ve had, I was convinced the class would fall apart, but we didn’t! Not one single mention of Vietnam. We went into the nineteenth century and stayed there.”

Joyce finished her sandwich. Wiping her mouth with a napkin, she threw out her sandwich’s wax paper and brown paper bag in her waste bin. She sipped her coffee from her plaid-patterned metal thermos and set it down on her desk, still not looking at me. An edge formed in my jaw at her lack of enthusiasm.

“Today was a big deal,” I emphasize, stepping away from the bookshelf.

“Undoubtedly,” Joyce picked her thermos again and drank.

“What?” I said, dropping my shoulders.

“You sure it was a good idea to go into Russia, Napoleon?” Joyce asked. I fall back against the bookshelf in surprise.

“What?”

“This can’t be the first time someone’s called you short. You’re about, what, five three, five four?”

“Joyce—”

“Evie, look,” Joyce got up and sat on the edge of her desk so she was facing the bookshelf and me. “I think it’s great that you got your students’ respect. Really, I do. I know it’s been a hell of a ride for you so far this semester. To be honest, I’m not surprised you got it. One of my juniors who had been at the Mall that day said you had screamed something about if the students were going to follow a professor blindly based on pure sex appeal, then they should see you in your suede mini-skirt—”

“God, no I didn’t, I didn’t say that, did I?” I dragged my hands down my face.

“No you didn’t,” Joyce calmed me. “But she did say you kicked ass and made good points about how protesting can’t be the full extent of their activism. Eva, my point is, it’s great that your students are willing to follow you now, but look where you’re leading them.”

“What do you mean?” I crossed my arms.

“You really think it’s a good idea to decontextualize history in class? Sever it from today? I mean, Evie, if ever there was a time to draw a parallel to Vietnam War, a lecture about the Mexican-American War would’ve been it. And hell, if you’re okay with calling a president a war hawk, why stop with Polk in the 19th century? Whaddja call an Eisenhower if not that?”

“Hey—”

“I know, I know. Your dad served with Eisenhower and you’ve got Ike’s picture in your office in a secret drawer to admire when no one else is around.”

“It’s on my desk in plain view for anyone to admire.”

“That’s brave, Evie,” Joyce’s mouth broke into a grin. “Look, I’m not going to engage your Eisenhower-loving ass in an argument. That’s for the birds. Actually, that’s for our students. They *need* to have these debates. That’s what shapes them.”

“I don’t think you understand what I was dealing with, Joyce,” I said.

“You think you’re the only professor with political students? We’re all fumbling to keep control of our classes, thanks to Nixon. But they need to talk about these questions because you’re right.

“Wars like Vietnam? Or the Mexican-American War for that matter? They’re seedy. They’re complex. I can’t believe I’m saying this right now, but even if most of Polk or most of Eisenhower knew their conflicts were unwarranted, I’d bet the pension I don’t have yet that somehow they convinced themselves that those wars were protecting us somehow.”

Joyce paused. I said nothing. Neither of us moved from our spots. Our bodies formed a deep valley ending in the burgundy carpet, both of us facing one another and leaning against the landscape of her office. I looked at her diplomas hung on the opposite walls next to smaller frames of photographs of her at her graduation with friends, at the Grand Canyon with her parents, and at Niagara Falls with a woman I didn’t recognize.

“But seriously, Eva, how do you expect to help your students make real differences in the world if you keep posing history as a prefabricated, neat set of inevitable events?”

The question stung. I looked outside her window at the torrent of wet fall leaves raining down, wanting to be angry. I could feel the dizziness of the different arguments rising in my rib cage.

“It’s just you and me here, Evie,” Joyce said. Her tone was soft. We made eye contact. “Don’t listen to me, listen to what I’m saying.” I looked back outside. From her window, a sliver of the stained glass arch con the top of the Dahlgren chapel peaked through the trees. The colors brightened, looking deeper, fuller, in the afternoon sunlight. I cooled.

“You’re right,” I said, and she was. History can’t be separated from the present. Why had I been trying to do so for my whole career? God, I thought. How did I get all the way here without realizing this? Something like shame expanded in me, pushing out all other sensations.

Joyce looked surprised by my admission, but didn’t say anything. She let me pause in silence. I stared at the darker specks in the carpet. The rigidity of the bookcase had started to make my back ache. Because I could think of nothing else to do, I slid down cross-legged onto the floor. Joyce joined me. For a moment, we pretended we weren’t in our mid-thirties and supposed to have already figured these things out. She folded her hands in the lap of her long jean skirt and pushed up her glasses that had started to slide down her nose again, waiting for me to speak. I gripped the shins of my leather boots and rested my elbows on my brown slacks.

“I’m sorry,” I finally said.

“Oh, hey,” Joyce pretending to brush the apology away. She grinned at me. “For what it’s worth, I’m floored you admitted you were wrong. That never happens after my monologues,” she nudged my knees.

“Thanks,” I laughed. I hoisted myself up and offered her a hand.

Taking it, she said, “That’s what happens when it’s two female coworkers. No patriarchal machismo to maneuver through.”

I took a long inhale and ignored this. Joyce had just corrected me without any admonishment. I could let her comment pass. Joyce still noticed my grimace. “I know, I know, it’s all women’s lib propaganda,” she said, making us both snicker, though for different reasons.

“Thanks for today, Joyce. I needed it,” I said, heading for her door.

“Hey,” she grinned. “What am I here for but to be your progressive conscience?”

A week later, I was running late to class. The night before I had stayed up late talking to my sister on the phone about her newborn, my niece Charlotte.

“I can’t get her to fall asleep,” Joanne cried. Through the phone, without her in front of me, she sounded ten years old again. I heard baby Charlotte howling too. Though I wasn’t there, I could picture my little sister, only twenty-six, in Charlotte’s nursery or down in her flower wallpapered living room, bobbing her second baby without cease.

“Where’s Arthur?” I asked her.

“He’s upstairs,” she blubbered. She was beyond trying to comfort the infant in her arms. “He’s got an early conference tomorrow with the Belgian branch, so I said I would handle it, but Evie I just can’t. I *can’t* do it. She won’t stop crying and I don’t know why!”

“He’s a stock broker,” I said. “Doesn’t he always have an early conference?”

“Well, yes,” Joanne dodged the question that I haven’t asked: *Why isn’t he helping you?* “But this is my *job*, Evie.”

“Okay. Well, is she hungry?” I shifted.

“Don’t you think I’ve tried that?” Joanne sobbed. I heard her dissolve again into tears.

“Why don’t you call mother?”

“She’s probably already taken her quaalude by now,” Joanne sighed. “She wouldn’t pick up and Daddy’ still in the hospital. Not that he would know what to do anyhow.” I nodded even though Joanne couldn’t see me. She was probably right.

“Okay, well, I’ll stay on the line with you until Charlotte settles down,” I said, stretching the cord out and carrying the phone set over to my couch.

And I did. By the time Charlotte and Joanne had both fallen asleep, it was past two-thirty in the morning. I hadn't even heard my alarm until Stan from the next apartment over banged on my door because it had been blaring for ten minutes. Driving to campus, I hit traffic. My gait reached a near jog as I left the faculty parking lot. About halfway across the quad, I heard a "Hey Professor Belmonte!" from behind me. Sam from class rushed to meet my pace.

"You're late too?" he huffed as we hurried. His breath curled around him in front of us. The temperatures had sunk almost overnight, and we were on the brink of legitimate cold. Sam seemed relieved, as though he were genuinely worried about showing up tardy to my class now.

"I had a late night last night," I replied. Sam swerved his head up from concentrating on the sidewalk to look at me, startled and intrigued. "My sister called," I clarified. "She's got another newborn and she couldn't get her to go to sleep."

"Oh," Sam sobered his face. "Well congratulations to her, I guess." We keep a quick stride, still two minutes away from the lecture hall and already one minute late.

"Thanks," I said on Joanne's behalf.

"Do you have any kids?" Sam asked.

"No," I said. I pushed my hands deeper into the pockets of my long walker coat. I had gloves, but my fingers still felt numb.

"Oh, sorry, stupid question," Sam hurried to say. "You're not married," Sam said.

I looked at him to see if he was joking. This was Sam. My resident hippie. How did he know with such certainty that I wasn't married? And not that I would have had a child out of wedlock, but I was surprised Sam had assumed I wouldn't. But his face was steady and he hadn't slowed his walk. He didn't see the irony of his comment.

We reached the lecture hall and I headed for the lectern while Sam steered over towards the seats. I set my coat, briefcase, and the slide carousel case for the projector down on the wooden table next to the lectern and then raised my glance up to the students. In the back row, James Calderón sat with one leg crossed loosely over the other and his head resting against the wood panels of the hall. I darted my eyes to Sam and then back up at James. This was a set up. All the good behavior was a rouse. They were going to protest in my class. James was here to organize them. To watch.

But James made eye contact with me and shook his head as though he knew my fear. Even through the haze of my anxiety, his dark hair and eyes looked smooth, handsome, and I couldn't stop myself from blushing. He reached down to his briefcase on the floor and pulled out a notebook and a pen. Then he looked back up at me, waved a hand, and mouthed, *Go On*. I hated him. But I did.

Chelsea had already plugged in the projector and pulled down the screen over the chalkboard for me. Setting the slide carousel down, I gave her a grateful nod. Pen in hand, she gave me a short wave of her hand against her desk and smiled. Bless her.

I clicked to the first slide to a picture of young Abraham Lincoln without his facial hair. A deep, unguarded burst of laughter echoed down from the top of the lecture hall. James covered his face with one hand, waving me on with the other.

“Let's talk Spot Resolutions.”

“Belmonte!” James Calderón's voice echoed down the lecture hall as I packed up the Kodak carousel back in its case.

“Calderón,” I called back, not looking up. I knew the students had all filed out, and I could hear James’ shoes strike the wooden steps as he came down to the front lectern area.

“Excellent lecture,” he said. “Rough start, but you can’t win them all. After that, though, you gave a real ringer of a talk on why Lincoln’s still a moral pillar of America.”

I finished packing the slide case, and looked at him. He slipped his arms through his walker coat and pulled the wool of collars onto his chest, walking closer to me. He stood at my side, and glancing up I could see the fresh, bareness of his neck where he must have shaved that morning. Something in me wanted to brush my fingers along that spot. I stepped away.

“What brings you to my class, James?” I asked, snapping shut my briefcase and sliding it onto my shoulder. I took a few more steps backwards, creating more space between us.

“I told you that I’d heard you give a rousing lecture on Martin Van Buren. I came to learn,” he said, holding up his notebook. “This one was good too, though.” He followed me out into the hallway, pushing past students to keep up with me.

“You know, at this point,” I turned my head to him while we walked, “you’re bothering me without cause.”

“Not true,” he said, shaking his head. “I have a cause.”

“To learn about Martin Van Buren.”

“To learn about how to *talk* about Martin Van Buren. Lecturing, really.”

“How long have you been teaching here at Georgetown?” I asked him, pushing to the exterior of the building and out into the fall air.

Twelve chimes rang out, marking the new hour, the sext prayers, and start of the next round of classes. Stray students clutching books to their chests ran in criss-cross patterns through the courtyard in front of the Dahlgren chapel, their coats and bags flapping against their sides in

the wind as they hurried last minute into buildings. In comparison, he and I were barely moving. Then campus lay empty. It had rained in the early morning. Everything looked saturated and the colors seemed to deepen, vibrate. The chapel's red bricks had a slick shine. Healy Hall, made of limestone, darkened to a slate grey. The rain blackened the tree bark but gave the moss a pale green color of a corroded penny. Even the browning leaves on the ground grew richer in the rain.

“How long have I been here?” James repeated my question. “Since after Kennedy, after *Sputnik* but before *Luna* missed the moon,” he scratched the incoming beard on his jaw. “So what would that have made it? Fifty-nine? Somewhere around there, anyhow.”

“You always measure your life by Presidents and space exploration milestones?”

“They're as good a measure as anything else,” he shrugged. We walked along the iron wrought gate marking the edge of campus. I sidestepped a puddle. He looked far ahead of us, as if undoing an equation in his head. We kept walking for a bit, James seeming to follow whichever bend my path took.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“Let's have dinner sometime. Tomorrow night?” James said, not answering my question. I stopped, halting in the middle of a puddle. Water started soaking into the toes of my boots and then my stockings. Noticing where I was standing, James put his hand on my forearm and guided me to step to the side.

“Why?” was all I could think to say. James let out a short laugh and looked at the ground, scratching the back of his head.

“I want to know about Franco,” he said, his forehead contracting in thought as he looked still ahead at something I could not see. Turning to face me, he said, “And I want to know what you thought of him.”

He spoke as if he thought the Spanish caudillo had been a personal friend of mine and I were some untapped authority on the man. I did not confess I had only seen him in parades, in newspapers, and never in person. I could have. But James' confidence in me flushed me with a small happiness I didn't feel ready to quell. I also felt anchored thoughts from my time in Spain surface, thoughts that tugged at my sleeve, told me maybe I had seen something.

"Alright," I said as we reached the parking lot. His face rippled with a smile.

"Alright," he said back. He turned and walked away. Holding the top of the driver side door, my body half in and half out of my car, I watched him. His form fit into the campus landscape, but it did not seem to belong there. He walked with speed, but it was a directionless velocity.

I expected another drop by visit from James in my afternoon class or else a note from James on my desk that afternoon after I'd returned from visiting my father at a hospital outside Arlington. I got neither. My survey course on the War of 1812 had no interruptions. I checked my box in the mailroom, but it only held some late papers from students, a flyer about a department-held talk of some visiting lecturer, and a Christening announcement from my sister Joanne, who had thought to mail two invitations, one to my work and one to my apartment to make sure I came.

"Of course I'll come," I said on the phone to her when I gave her a call back in my office. "Did you think I wouldn't?" An adolescent bite, a sharp edge saved only for siblings comes back into my voice. This is normal for the two of us.

“Well, I don’t know,” she said with the same passive ring of argument in her voice. “Heaven knows you are so *busy*.” A familiar poke. I worked too much and didn’t have time for a social life.

“Actually, I have a date tomorrow,” I told her. To anyone else, such a leap in conversation would be illogical and erratic. To Joanne and I, the train of thoughts connecting her baby’s Christening to my work life and then my personal life was seamless and communal.

“With whom?” she asked with interest. Her voice sounded louder, as if she has pressed the receiver closer to her mouth. “What’s his name?”

I could hear her hoping for a recognizable surname, something she could trace back to her store of knowledge on important East Coast families from her days at Wellesley.

“He’s a Journalism professor, I don’t know if you’d know him,” I replied. This disappointed her. Professors are not businessmen. They are not financially secure, at least not like Arthur, her husband. I heard her side sink against her kitchen wall, her bracelets clinking against the wood paneling next to the phone jack.

“Well give me a shot.”

“James Calderón.”

“Calderón?” Joyce’s voice upticked in pitch. “Are you sure? Where’s he from?”

“I don’t know,” I admitted. I confronted myself internally, realizing I know very little about James. Joanne sighed.

“Well, there was a Daniel Calderón who married a girl from my class at Wellesley. Karen Doherty. His father was from Mexico, I think. The other girls on the hall always tittered because he was so much older and he would throw some Spanish into his letters to Karen, calling her ‘amor’ when he visited and took her out.”

I heard the slight flick of annoyance in her tone. Despite how much she could blend in with her Anglo-Saxon neighbors, a man sprinkling Spanish onto his love letters wouldn't impress Joanne. Though she rarely spoke it after she married Arthur, who knew nothing but English, Joanne had grown up speaking Spanish with our father just as I had, back before she had changed her name from Joanna.

"I'm pretty sure his father was a foreign minister in Mexico or Columbia back in the forties and then a State Department consultant of some kind. No," she corrected herself. This was her domain, sorting out mysteries and stories of important people and making matches.

"Definitely Mexico," Joanne went on, "because I remember junior year right before the '68 Summer Olympics in Mexico, Daniel canceled a date with Karen. He was going with his father back to Mexico to sort out some massacre or another."

"Tlateloclo," I said in a soft hush. I remembered reading about the slaughter in the paper when it happened. October 2nd, 1968. I had just returned from Spain and started as a PhD student at Sarah Lawrence. Somewhere between 30 and 300 students and civilians were killed in the Tlateloclo sector of Mexico City. I remembered gaping at that wide range of a death toll: between 30 and 300. A U.S. official quoted in the newspaper reported the death toll at 44. Hundreds of bodies looks very different than dozens, I had thought at the time. How could people disagree so much about the dead, I had wondered while I read the article.

Back in '68 as I read about Mexico, only images of Spain came to mind. I remembered the Madrid police wrestling students to the ground outside my university, and blood splattered over my memory. Why did I think of Spain, I wondered as I read the article. I never answered myself. On the phone with Joanne, the memory of all of this expanded inside me.

“...and if this James Calderón is who I think he is,” Joanne rattled on, “he’s got an older brother too, who works in the State Department as well. They’re well off, no doubt. Their father made his money in the private sector before becoming an ambassador.”

I stopped myself from asking her how she knew all this. It was her job to know, her job as a Virginian socialite. Asking her how she knew these strangers’ lives so well would have been insulting somehow. I knew that even if I did not fully understand why.

“Huh,” I offered.

“When are you seeing him?” Joanne pressed.

“Tomorrow, I think. I’m not sure,” I said.

“Where is he taking you?”

“Ah, I’m not, I don’t know yet. It’s sort of up in the air,” This slowed our phone call. I could hear Joanne stifling her own exasperation at the indefiniteness of my plans. She was also trying not to step on the invisible lines we’d drawn years ago outlining the boundaries of our relationship.

“How’s Dad,” she asked after a pause. We were retracing familiar conversational routes.

“He’s okay,” I said. “Not great, but his color looked better than last time I saw him.” We left it at this. Our father had Stage 3 Chronic Kidney Disease, which relegated him to the hospital every few months when his renal system dipped into dangerous failure. For him, there was no “good.” There was no real chance of “getting better.” There was okay and there was not okay. This was how Joanne and I talked about our father.

“And Mom?” she asked.

“Fine enough,” I replied. “Still spending all her time at the hospital with Dad. She worries. You know. But I think some of the women from her bridge club and from church handle

things for her, cooking meals, cleaning up around the house, collecting the mail, that sort of thing.”

Joanne murmurs an mmhm. This is all expected. When Dad worsened to Stage 3 six months ago, it had been Joanne and I doing this. But Joanne had been pregnant and I had been in the final steps of the Georgetown hiring process. Our mother had the care of our father under wraps, but neither of us could sustain consistent care for my mother.

I asked about my nieces Heather and Charlotte.

“Charlotte’s sleeping in her crib, but Heather’s been such a handful. I’m having an absolute fit with her about potty training, which all the parenting books say is normal, but Lord if the other girls in her play group aren’t using the toilet already.”

“I’m sure she’ll be fine,” I defended my sweet, if scattered and energetic niece. I loved that little girl. Whenever I visited lately, Heather had started running to me in the unstable way that kids do. Hurling herself with every tiny, trepidatious step, she tumbled to meet me whenever my car pulled in their driveway. Whenever she fell, she never cried. She never even lost her confidence. Falling, to her, was just a factored-in reality of running.

“Well,” Joanne sighed in a high pitch, signaling the end. “I really must get going. I’ve got to change over the laundry.”

“Te amo,” I said, venturing into Spanish, into our past. Joanne didn’t speak Spanish anymore, but I tried, seeing if she would.

“Love you too,” she said sweetly.

The following day, it didn’t rain, but the mud at the edges of the sidewalks was still wet and malleable. The fall air had finally adopted a consistent coldness. No more bursts of

summer every few days. The chill had certain brightness to it, as though the lower temperatures punctuated and emphasized the sunlight. Perhaps it just wakes you up more, makes you pay attention to the landscape, I thought at the time. I don't think of the cold this way anymore. I've gotten older. Now in my seventies, my daughter's children call me Gran, and go few places without a sweater or a coat. I remember back at in 1974, I thought I was old. Now when I think on this, my first instinct is to dismiss my younger self. But then I remember what it was like.

Thirty-three did feel old at the time. I had been an adult, out of school, out of my parents' house, out on my own, ready to fail or survive on my own, for quite some time. At thirty-three, I walked around campus or D.C. with effortless vigor, giving a slight jump on and off the curbs of sidewalks for no other reason than that I could. A certain kind of vitality surged in me, an energy I didn't know I had until I lost it decades later. I remember doing normal things like grocery shopping, taking my trash out to the dumpster behind my apartment complex, or depositing my salary checks at the bank, and being hyper-aware of my autonomy, my solitariness. My younger sister had been married for almost five years. Though I had dated some after I returned from Spain in 1967, nothing had been very serious. A few dates here and there with one man or another. Then one of us would move, reconnect with an ex, get a promotion at work that steeped us in responsibilities, or just plain get bored. It was a calmer kind of dating. Not the kind that you do when you're really young as a high schooler or college co-ed. There was less drama. Less overt, careless heartbreak. Not that I didn't feel hurt every once and a while. But for the most part, I moved through my twenties and into my early thirties without much in the way of pain. At thirty-three, I assumed I had a consistent pulse on the world.

By the time I walked out of my late afternoon class that day, I had all but forgotten about James. It was not so much that I didn't care, but rather that my obligations as a professor, researcher, and daughter had swallowed my attention. I had to go back to my dad's hospital in Arlington in the middle of the day to sort out an insurance issue heckling my mother, and I didn't even get to see him. I also had only a few months left before I needed to show progress on my current research projects and only a few days until my students grew mutinous waiting for their most recent papers.

When I looked up on my walk from rustling in my briefcase to see James a hundred yards away, I stopped in surprise. He spoke to a beautiful woman in an orange pea coat who had her hand on his upper arm. She was not the same woman from the banquet. Or the protest on the Mall. When she kissed his cheek, I cringed. She walked away, and James looked in my direction and smiled. As he walked toward me, he tucked his hands into his long, wool coat, letting his crossover briefcase hang loose on one shoulder and tap his side to the beat of his gait. He did not seem surprised to see me.

"I was just about to come and find you," he said as he reached me.

"You still want to go to dinner?" I asked.

"Of course," he said. I've got a great place in mind for us. We can go in my car."

James parked in a small lot off the side an exposed brick building. We walked the rest of the way to Old Ebbitt Grille on F street. Three years later, the FBI would bust a Soviet spy ring operating in there and catch Vladimir Alekseyev, a USSR reporter in the States, contacting a United States Information Agency man. This was back when there were a dozen and a half different acronym agencies vying for Congress' funding and the country's respect and you

couldn't remember half of them. After the arrest hit the papers, people avoided the bar for weeks for fear of being labeled a Communist. Or at least I did. But that night, the bar was at a little over half capacity.

"Welcome to the oldest bar in D.C.," James smiled as we entered, swerving through the narrow entrance in the narrow cavern between the stools along the long wooden bar on one side and tightly packed tables on the other.

"I get it," I said, flicking my wrist to point at myself. "Because I'm a history professor?"

"No," he answered with a wry grin and no hesitation. "Because they've got the best taxidermy." I laughed loudly, pulling several eyes away for a second from the boxy, Panasonic mini television set at the bar that broadcasted a baseball game.

"It's the playoffs," one of them grumbled. The telephone at the bar rang, and the bartender grabbed it off the wall and tucked it between his chin and shoulder while he poured the watchers another round of beers. This mollified them.

James was right. Almost every wall and shelf of the bar had some sort of stuffed animal on it, or otherwise a picture of one. Heads of multi-point bucks dressed the wooden beams between the tan walls. A herring hung over the back wall of the bar. Bobcats, rabbits, and a miniature statue of a brown bear rested on the shelves. The bar even had a few mounted turtles. We headed to the back to a round table in the back. A guy with coarse facial hair and a loose white half apron tied around on his waist who looked young enough to be one of our students or at least one of our graduate students approached.

"What can I get for you two?" he asked, pen already hovering over the paper pad in his hand. James looked at me and motioned that I could order first if I wanted.

“What do you have on tap?” I asked. He rattled off a few brands and I asked for a porter in the middle. James optioned for something even darker. When the waiter brought them a few minutes later, I thanked him and then turned my head back to James.

“So tell me about yourself,” I said. James took a sip of his draft and closed his eyes in a satisfied smile, then set it down.

“This is great,” he pointed at it. “Do you want to try it?” he asked, sliding it towards me. I did the same with my drink, feeling unsure about whether I had asked my question too soon. “This is good too,” he said, handing my glass back. “Do you like it?” he pointed again at his glass.

“Yeah, it’s great,” I said. We stalled in this bland back and forth.

“So tell me about Spain,” he smiled. I laughed, this time with a sharpness, and rubbed my index finger around on my glass. I was thirty-three and did not think I had time for this, time for another elusive, monotonous maybe-date. It was rare enough that I ever went on one, and I wasn’t going to let him think his evasion had passed my notice.

“That’s a deep question for someone unwilling to answer one about himself,” I pointed out.

“What?” James laughed.

“Please. You show up all of the sudden—”

“Well, if we’re being technical, if there was any suddenness, that’s on you. You showed up at my university,” he said, taking another sip.

“—in my class. You show up all of the sudden in my class,” I clarified.

“That’s fair.”

“And you ask me on a thinly veiled excuse for a date,” I continued.

“I didn’t think I veiled it at all,” he remarked.

“And you don’t give me a straight answer about anything, including the vaguest request, tell me about yourself, but you want to pretend to pick my brain about the one time I went to Spain for a year?”

“I’m not pretending,” he said.

“This is what I’m saying—”

“My family’s from Philadelphia,” he switched. His voice this time sounded honest, unadorned. “Actually, my father was from Mexico, but my mother’s side has lived in Philadelphia since the Revolutionary War. My father was a diplomat, so we did live in Mexico City for a while when I was a teenager. I eat toast almost every morning for breakfast. I like to play checkers, but I’m pretty mediocre at it, and I’m convinced Mike Schmidt is going to be the best third baseman of all time.”

Neither of us said anything for a moment, and we stared at one another.

“Do you want to watch the game?” I hiked my thumb in the direction of the television set at the bar and the baseball fans watching.

“Nah,” he said. “It’s Baltimore and Oakland, and I don’t care about the Baltimore Orioles. The Phillies already lost their chance at the playoffs.” I nodded. “You like baseball?” he asked.

“A little. My mom and her brothers are from New York, so they always had the Yankees on the radio, but my dad was a soccer fan.”

“Was? Did he pass?” James asked.

“No, sorry,” I corrected myself, ashamed. I had already started talking about my father in the past tense. “He’s still alive and following the European leagues.”

“Yeah? Which ones?”

“Well, La Liga mostly. He’s from Spain. He reads the scores in the paper when he can’t find a station carrying the games, which is most of the time.”

“Real Madrid or Barcelona?”

“Real,” I answered, impressed.

“Family from Mexico,” he reminded me. “I grew up playing some fútbol, but was never that good at it.”

“That why you switched to teaching journalism?” I asked. He chuckled and took another sip.

“You know I reported for *The Washington Times*,” he said.

“How would I know?” I feigned ignorance. I did know. I had asked around, which meant I’d asked Joyce. Joyce grew up and did her undergrad in D.C. before going to Columbia for her grad and postgrad work. She said she remembered he’d been a reporter at the Times.

“Well I told you, for one,” he replied.

“When?”

“Just now,” he said. I smiled and nodded into my drink. “I worked at the Latin American desk in Mexico City for the paper.”

“Did your father help you with that one?” I regretted asking as the words left my mouth. I’d breached the borderline of rudeness, the understood, agreed-upon level of sarcasm between us. But James didn’t seem to notice.

“A little,” he nodded. “I was young and straight out of the war. I forgive myself for the lapse in nepotism.” He didn’t need to clarify which war. For people of my generation and his,

there was still only one. The Second World War. His gaze wasn't at me so much as it was at his past that he was unpacking. "I'd enlisted right at the end in '44 when I turned eighteen.

"Afterwards, I went back to school to finish up my degree in Political Science and English that I'd started before I left to sign up. From there, I just wanted to get as far from Europe as I could."

"Were you stationed there in Europe during the war?" I asked. He nodded again. This time he didn't elaborate.

"The change must have been refreshing," I said. I regretted saying this too. How trite. How insensitive. But what can a person who hasn't been through war say to someone who has?

He said yes, it was, but his expression looked far from refreshed. Like a few times before, his face betrayed a tiredness that seemed to have spanned decades and never really ended. Relax, I told myself. He's probably just exhausted after a long day and after you dragged him into a conversation about the war.

"Tell me about Spain," he said, with a renewed smile.

"Well, I was there on a Fulbright studying Isabella the First."

"Excellent," he grinned wider.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," he said. "I mean, come on. I studied Political Science and English. That's circling the drain around History."

"It was amazing," I said, pulling out the phrases I hadn't used in a while, the standard stock I used to say all the time when I first came back from Spain. It was amazing. Gorgeous. So exciting. Really life-changing. Life-changing. My voice always hitched whenever I said that.

Life-changing how? How could I explain that accurately and also be honest when friends and family asked?

“I would have thought it’d be terrifying,” he said, breaking through my pretense of not talking about the darker parts of Spain.

“No,” I qualified. “It wasn’t like that. It wasn’t terrifying. Just... I don’t know.” I didn’t know how to express the subtle fear that coated Spain. By the time I arrived in the mid sixties, it wasn’t an urgent fear, just an existing one. It breathed. It hummed. It was like an invisible electrical current running underneath the whole country. “It was tense.”

James nodded.

“Only a handful of things that actually scared me.” I did not mention Dr. Abasolo.

“Did you ever see Franco?”

“Only in newspapers,” I said, cupping my glass and looking around at the stuffed animals. As he asked, though, I realized that it felt like I had seen Franco. Or if not Franco, then a shadow of him, one that had followed me and everyone else in the country, lingering above us like the scent of sulfur. “I did see his wife once. At a gala I worked at in Segovia.”

“Did you talk to her?” James asked. He was fingering the edge of the table, but he didn’t break eye contact with me.

“No,” I shook my head. “But my boyfriend of the time did.” For some reason, I added the obvious, “We’re not together anymore.” James nodded.

“Did he know her, then, this ex-boyfriend—”

“Carlos. I think so. His mother did. I think his father did too. His father was,” my voice trailed off as I tried to pick my words. “He was high up in government.”

“No wonder you weren’t scared then,” James murmured. “You had friends in high places.” His face had fallen, as though disappointed in me.

“I guess you’re right,” I said, folding my hands in my lap and looking around the bar before looking back at him. “I hadn’t thought of it like that. I always thought it was because I was a foreigner.”

“Didn’t you say your father was from Spain?” James asked. “I felt pretty at home in Mexico. Didn’t you have family there?”

“None left,” I explained. He nodded, this time with a sort of grave respect and deference toward me. He knew then, I thought. The Spanish Civil War. His nod was a pass, an indication that I didn’t have to say any further why I felt like a foreigner in my father’s country. But his deference made me feel comfortable, so I explained anyway.

“To be honest, I don’t really know what happened to them. All my dad has ever said of them is that they’re gone and they’re gone because of the civil war. He’s usually a pretty talkative man, but he seems to shrink whenever anything to do with them or the war comes up. I don’t even know which side they were on.”

“Wouldn’t it just kill you if they were communists?” he said. Coming from anyone else, that irreverence would have infuriated me. But James had a look, a sadness in his eyes. It betrayed his own vulnerability. I could see the ghosts from tragedies I couldn’t identify yet. This gave him a sort of conspiratorial, commiserating expression. Irreverence was allowed between partners in grief. There was no malice in his voice, only understanding.

“If I had to guess,” I said, “they were probably split politically. Most families are during a civil war, especially a big family, and especially during a big civil war.”

“That’s true,” he said.

“It’s strange,” I said. My spine relaxed against the wooden spindles of the chair. I rubbed the sides of my glass, letting my eyes unfocus as I stared at it. There was such an easiness with James. An unwarranted, inexplicable, yet familiar comfort. Talking to him did not feel like talking with another person so much as it felt like talking with a part of myself. Thoughts I hadn’t yet opened even on my own unraveled with him.

“Yeah,” he said into his drink.

We both let the bar flood the silence. Gnarled curses came over from the men watching the Oriels game. “Fuck,” one of them said in a deep, half-hushed gravel. Someone next to him slapped the bar. Conversations meshed together like knots. It was a tangle of tourists, men getting off work, friends catching up, and couples on dates.

“Well we missed the Capitol Building today and I don’t know if they’ve got tours tomorrow...”

“Wait, didja see M.A.S.H. last week...”

“Nah, Darrel had me workin’ so late double checkin’ the books that I slept on the couch in the lobby...”

“It’s so good to see you, Elenor...”

“This time last year I was waiting in that line of cars for *hours* to fill up my tank...”

“Do you wanna get out of here...”

James said nothing, waiting for me to continue talking about my father.

I took another sip, finishing my beer, and then took a deep breath. “I wish my father wouldn’t keep everything to himself. I hate secrets. But enough about that,” I said with a smile.

“So you *must* have a problem with Nixon!” James clapped his hands together and set them down in his lap.

“What?” I jostled my head in confusion.

“You *have* to!” he said, setting his palms flat on the table as if ready to push up. “The man was nothing but secrets at his core.”

“You’re still on this?”

“You’re not?” he shot back, grinning. “What? Did it stop being alarming once the story was a few months old and growing stale?”

“No. Look, can we just forget this?”

“You forgotten about the missing eighteen minutes of the tapes that would have nailed him into jail ‘til his shoe-polish hair turns grey, the minutes he lost?” James kept pressing.

“He didn’t lose shit,” I said, folding my napkin neatly in my lap. I had broken.

“No?” he sounded surprised. Amused.

“The man taped all of his conversations for his ‘legacy,’” I bent my fingers in air quotes. “He was meticulous. He was a narcissist. He was still the President, but he didn’t lose those tapes.”

James chuckled. “Why don’t you talk like this to your students?”

“Because their my students. Because I have a job to do, and that doesn’t include ranting about my viewpoints.”

“Fair enough,” James said. Seeing my drink empty, he caught our waiter’s attention for another one. When the waiter brought new beers for us both, James reached across the table and raised his towards mine.

“Cheers.”

“What are we toasting?” I asked.

“You’re officially a recovering Republican,” he said.

“Oh come on.”

“What? It’s a wonderful thing, you’re finally seeing how destructive your habits have been for your friends and family—”

“I’ve had just about enough self-righteous smugness from liberals—”

“I’m just yanking your chain—”

“No,” I interrupted, “ you know what, it’s amazing how you manage to blame Republicans for just about every evil in the world. I didn’t see you folks blaming Roosevelt for those Japanese internment camps. Didn’t hear the Democrats disavowing the racist Southern Democrats that were in your party back before the sixties. And remind me, who got us into Vietnam?”

“You’re right,” he grinned.

“Close, but it was Johnson.”

“You’re right.”

“A Democrat.”

“Corruption knows no bounds. You’re right.”

“Darn right.”

We were both smiling. James’ voice was animated, but his body relaxed and rested against the chair and table.

“Why are you a Republican, anyhow?” he asked. I scoffed, but he said, “No, seriously. I want to know.” I searched him, trying to see if I could find any derision in his face, a joke waiting for the right timing, but I found nothing.

“Because I’ve seen what happens when federal governments grab too much control,” I said, thinking of Spain. “Because I think that people who actually live in any given community

know what that community needs better than officials hundreds of miles away do. Because no government can fix all of our problems.” James laughed.

“No, I get it. Why try to do the impossible? We’re doomed anyway,” he sipped his beer.

“That’s not what I mean. I just mean that individuals, real people in real towns and counties and states, should try to take on their own problems. Anyway that’s better than the alternative,” I said.

“What’s that?”

“Giving up,” I said.

He grinned, and set his glass down. “Maybe. Maybe we should all tackle the hurdles instead of waiting for someone else to take them down.” I nodded.

“Tell me more about you,” I said. I held my cup in my hand loosely, tilting it and watching it catch the glimmer of the tea lights. We had both finished our drinks again.

“Something beyond what baseball team’s cards you collected as a boy.”

“As a boy? Still do,” he said, but without much indignation or enthusiasm. He might as well have just told me what day it was or what the weather was like outside. Banter was as effortless as exhaling for him.

“See,” I pointed at him, smiling. “Another diversion.”

“Why do I get the feeling we’re in a downtown station and you’re interrogating me?” James asked. His tone stayed even, calm as ever, but still I blushed.

“What do you mean?” I grasped for solid ground.

“What is it exactly that you want to know about me?”

I didn’t know. “Well what is it exactly that we’re doing here?”

Something like an exasperated laugh escaped from James as he exhaled. He glanced to the side for a moment, as if searching for help, but then back at me with a smile.

“This how you treat most of your dates?” he asked.

“Is that what this is?” I asked.

“It was what I had aimed for,” he replied.

“Well.” I cleared my throat. “Then okay.”

“Wanna take a walk?” he asked, taking my hand.

He laid bills down on a check I hadn’t even remembered the waiter bringing over, stood up, and we left. As we walked out of the restaurant, the sky had turned lavender and a wispy chill had settled. Traffic sounds of everyone going home for the day filled the air. Stray sirens from distant ambulances played over the normal sounds of cars picking up speed, rolling along the pavement, and stalling at traffic lights. Joggers ran by, some with dogs. Skinny trees planted in breaks on the sidewalks marked the sides of the roads. We came to a crosswalk and waited.

“Where do you want to go?” James asked.

“We didn’t actually eat dinner,” I pointed out. “Come on.”

We stopped at a food truck near the Washington Monument. I bought two hot dogs and soft pretzels.

“Here,” I said. James smiled. “What,” I asked.

“Nothing, it’s just so American,” he motioned to the food and then to the Monument.

“What’s wrong with that?”

There was a pause. The sun lowered into the tree line. We walked the sidewalk of the ellipse surrounding the obelisk. Eventually, he said with a soft, if reserved, smile, “Nothing.”

Others passed us. A mother wrangling two kids to sit still on a bench while she retied their shoes. A business man with a briefcase. A family of tourists who hadn't dressed for the cold weather, all with their arms tucked in around their bodies as they craned their necks up at the memorials. An older woman with a small utility cart holding a brown bag of groceries and her purse. The woman smiled at us. I turned my head to look at James. His arms nearly brushed against mine.

James began to whistle. The tune was the melody of "I'll Be Seeing You" from *Right This Way*. Without noticing, I hummed along. We headed towards the water.

"You sing?" I asked.

"Poorly. But I'm an excellent whistler," he said. "You?"

"Sing?" I asked. He nodded. "Yes." His elbow nudged mine.

"You have to sing for me," he said.

"No," I smiled. "Not here. My voice might make those kids cry even harder." I nodded over at the mother with the two kids who had started to wail. James laughed.

"Next time then," he said.

"Yeah," I said, looking at him to see if he knew what he was saying. "Next time."

Fuchsia and violet streaked clouds darker, smudging with the red maple trees of the skyline. We walked through the park for an hour, talking about our classes and research, laughing each other's most bizarre students. By the time we wandered back to the parking lot, it was late. Light rain came down, and while neither of us had an umbrella, we walked slow. As we searched for his car, James started to whistle the first verse of "One For My Baby." I heard the words in my head. *It's a quarter to three, there's no one in the place. Except you and me.*

Unconsciously, I started to sing in a low voice. He took my hand, his fingers wrapping around mine lightly. In the middle of the chorus, he kissed me.

It wasn't tremendous, but looking back I'd say this is where we started, the two of us. Right then. In a rainy parking lot. Before this point, we could have bounced off of one another, rocketed away in our separated directions. Afterwards, we were together. It went like this: James wrapped his arm around my shoulder. We kept walking, kept on whistling, kept humming.

Chapter 5

Philadelphia 1975

James took me to Philadelphia for a weekend in February. He wanted to visit his mother and check in on her, and offered to bring me along and show me the city.

“You’re going to love it there. Philly’s got the best historical district. You’ll go nuts. They’re gearing up for the bicentennial next year, so everything’s getting redone.”

“Sounds great,” I said. “When do you want to see your mom?”

“Oh, I don’t know. We can have dinner with her Saturday night, and I know she’ll insist on having you stay for Sunday lunch after her mass. But I don’t want her to think I’m monitoring her too much. She’s fine, and I know that, I do, but I’ve worried about her since my father passed,” he said. I nodded.

“I get it. I’m the same way with my mom. The doctors and nurses take excellent care of my father, so I worry more about my mom. She’s just...”

“Fragile,” he said.

“Yeah,” I said, relieved he understood. “I worry sometimes that if one more bad thing happens, she’ll fall apart, like she’s some sort of overfilled glass of water that could spill over at any moment.” He nodded and squeezed my hand, but then flashed a smile.

I held his hand the entire train ride up to Suburban Station. He said we should tour around before going to his mother’s.

“Are you sure?” I asked. He nodded, and kissed my cheek.

We saw Benjamin Franklin’s house, and then his grave, and made our way to the Betsy

Ross home. At the end of the afternoon, we went to Independence Hall, saw the signer's room and the Liberty Bell.

"Ben Franklin used to trip other delegates in here from his aisle seat," James said, pointing at one of the green tables with an intricately carved wooden chair behind it.

"You're kidding," I whispered.

"He's not," Max, our young guide, grinned. "He used his cane. Sometimes his foot if they got close enough to him." James seemed to know every guide we passed on a first name basis.

"Max was the one who told me about Franklin's pranks in the first place. He's studying history here at Penn," James said.

"Here," Max motioned out of the signer's room. "You two are my last tour today, and I've got something special for you." He led us up the blue staircases, past the *No Visitors Beyond This Point* sign, and then up a plain ladder behind the clock face to get up to the top. I felt my skin buzz with excitement as we went through passages that had stayed mostly hidden for two hundred years.

"Other than some maintenance teams and a handful of special folks like James, no one's been up here in probably a hundred and fifty years," Max said. James and I just looked around in silence. "Anyway, I've got to lock up by seven, but you guys take your time up here." We thanked him, grateful.

Leaning against the wooden frame, we watched the sun set through the white columns on Washington Square and Center City. I erased the sandwich shops and corporate buildings and paved roads as the view grew dimmer, and pictured a time that vibrated with uncertainty, one in which no one knew how their cause might be remembered. James told me more anecdotes about the building and former delegates that he'd learned from years of visiting and making friends

with countless guides, some lifers and some college kids finishing their degrees. The Independence Hall basement once served as a city dog pound. Multiple delegates hid whisky flasks in loose bricks. John Hancock sanctioned two delegates for bringing their mistresses into the hall. Oliver Walcott, a delegate from Connecticut, had wanted to challenge Edward Rutledge from South Carolina to a duel over Rutledge's insistence that the Declaration writers delete the passage about slavery, but Roger Sherman got the governor of Connecticut to appoint him as a brigadier general to avoid scandal.

"Really?" I asked about the last one.

"Maybe," James grinned. "Or maybe I just like to imagine a version of history where someone protested that passage's cut."

"He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere," I quoted Jefferson's deleted passage that indicted King George and the British government for starting the American slave trade. I had memorized most of Jefferson's writing back during my dissertation at UVA. Both of us must have heard in that moment the silent defense that people had used to justify Jefferson for centuries: *at least he tried*.

"He should have tried harder." James said.

"I never told you what my dissertation actually said about Jefferson," I said. James turned, leaning against one of the columns so that an orange light from the sunset came through the slits, illuminating strips of his face. "That day in the provost's office? I mentioned my dissertation and you assumed I praised Jefferson."

“You didn’t?” James asked. His demeanor shifted. He looked more vulnerable, more timid, than I had ever seen him.

“James Callender was the first to bring up Sally Hemings. He had a grudge against Jefferson and used his position as a journalist to publish a scathing expose in a Richmond paper during Jefferson’s first year as president. He thought it would destroy Jefferson, like other reports had destroyed plenty of Jefferson’s political contemporaries. But it didn’t. It should have, but it didn’t. Jefferson still thrived, still got elected for a second term, still founded the very university where I did my dissertation, and still acted as a consultant for future presidents until he died. I wanted to know how he pulled that off. How did he escape damnation and stay remembered as a Founding Father?”

“What did you find out?” James asked.

“That people are more likely to forgive rape than embezzlement, and more likely to forgive the rape of a Black woman than a white one,” I said. “Did you know he freed her children but he didn’t free her? His daughter let Sally leave after his death so she could go live with her children, but he never planned to let her go, even in death.”

James let out a huff of air and looked at the dusty wooden floor of the bell tower.

“But I still find myself turning back to that deleted passage that he wrote about slavery,” I went on. “It’s beautiful. It’s just so indignant and ideologically pure. How can a person split themselves like that, and write one thing while doing another?”

“That paragraph doesn’t save him,” James said. “A half-ass effort like that doesn’t make up for what he did to all those people he owned, especially to her.”

“No it doesn’t.”

We walked in the dark to his mother's place in Rittenhouse Square. We cut through the park and into a small, understated building of apartments, and knocked on one on the first floor. His mother met us at the door and embraced me before him.

“Oh sweetheart!” she exclaimed. “Oh, it's just so good to meet you! Javi's talked so much about you, and look at you!”

“It's such a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Calderón,” I said.

“Oh!” she burst into a bubbling laugh, “She's got manners, this one. Oh my dear, you're so sweet. Please call me Claudia. Oh, will you just look at you. You're gorgeous! Javi, she's so gorgeous!”

James smiled and kissed his mom on the cheek. “She is, mama.” Looking at me, he explained, “Xavier is my first name, but I go by James except with my mom.”

“I still don't know why you do that, amor,” she tapped his shoulder as we walked into her apartment. His mother wore a cardigan over a long-sleeved navy dress down to her ankles and her silver hair in a 1940s twist I recognized from my own mother. Her bright pink lipstick stood out on her thin, honey-colored face. Every wall in her apartment was painted light pink, and the carpet was a plush tan. All of the photographs and paintings sat in fading gold frames. She directed us to her floral couch in her living room. “Eva, would like something to drink?”

“I'll get it, mama,” James said.

“Thank you, dear,” she said, “but I'm not an invalid.” She sat him down and patted his arm before walking to her kitchen before I could answer. “Ice tea?” she called out.

“Yes, thank you,” I said. She came back with three glasses out on a tray and gave us each napkins and coasters to set on her coffee table. She sat down, breathing heavy, and

fanned herself. Across the room sat a glass cabinet with dozens of small figurines on each shelf, some porcelain, some wooden, some clay, and some with gems. I couldn't tell where all of them were from, but I recognized some as Central American and others from Europe and even Africa. "Claudia, I love your collection."

"Oh, thank you," she beamed. "I got most of them whenever Ramón would take me on one of his ambassador trips, and a few he brought back for me when I couldn't travel with the boys. The ones on the top shelf are mostly from Mexico, some from the northern Baja region and some from the Yucatán. Those there we got when we took our honeymoon to Spain."

"Eva's been to Spain. Her father's actually from Madrid," James smiled at me, holding my hand. His mother's eyebrows raised higher than I thought eyebrows could go, and she gasped.

"Really?" she asked. I nodded. "Did you grow up there, dear?"

"No, I grew up in Virginia. My mother is American, and my parents moved back to the States after they married. But I did research after college in Madrid for a year, and I've gone back a few times since to visit."

"What did you study?"

"I researched Queen Isabella the First and her remote involvement in the Inquisition in the colonies."

Again, Claudia's eyebrows arched and she smiled at me. "A history buff! Just like Javi," she said, eyeing James.

"Really?" I asked.

"Oh my, yes. When they were boys, Daniel would play for hours outside, but I had to beg Javi to put the books down. He begged us for a new one everywhere we went, always

about some war or president or something ancient.” I laughed, which encouraged her. “As a little boy before we moved to Mexico City, he would want to wander to the historical district here in the city and just sit down with the guides, ask them all his questions, sometimes even debate them.”

“I believe it,” I smile at James. He rubs the back of my hand with his thumb.

“So you found yourself a smart girl for a change then,” Claudia addressed her son.

“Mama, I don’t think—”

“Oh I know, that what’s her name went to junior college and the blonde taught home economics. But you know what I mean. It’s nice for you to not bring home a hussy for a change. You’re not a hussy, are you?”

“I’m a Catholic,” I said.

“One can be both, my dear,” she said, ruminating while she drank her ice tea.

“Come to think of it, I suppose a hussy could still be smart. Well,” she smiled at me, “I like you anyhow.”

“Okay,” James said with a smile as he stood up. “Why don’t we go to dinner?”

“Go where?” Claudia asked. “Can’t you smell the roast? Why go out when I’ve got a perfectly good oven here? In fact, why don’t you check on the beans sitting on the stove for me, Javi? Give them a stir,” she said.

“He’s a good boy,” she said when he walked out of the room. “Goodness. I forget how old we all are now. He’s, what, forty-eight now? But I still picture him as fifteen, bouncing around and talking all the time about fairness and justice and all these idealistic dreams of his.”

“Really? He did?” I asked. James had never struck me as someone to do any of that.

“Oh, of course. He started a campaign in his school to save the janitors’ jobs when they wanted to cut the budget and keep just a few on part time. He moved mountains, even then. I guess that’s why he picked a woman like you. He told me how you fight for your students. He really admires you, you know.”

“He does?” I asked, unsure and startled to hear of this side of James.

“Of course,” she chuckled and patted my leg. “Darling, you’re a smart woman. Don’t be dumb. Don’t you see the way he looks at you? He adores you. He brought you to meet me, after all.”

“He doesn’t bring all his dates to you for a litmus test?” I joked.

“Only the pretty ones,” she smiled sweetly. “No, but seriously, there was only one decades ago, Patricia, back when he was on the Latin American desk in Mexico and Guatemala, but not since then. Not in a long time.”

James walked back in, his hands in his pockets, and leaned against the wall. “You telling her ghost stories about me, mama?” She waved him off and put the empty ice tea glasses back on the tray.

“How are the beans? Almost ready?” she asked. He said yes, and she ushered us into her small dining room where she had already set cotton place mats and silverware. “Sit,” she instructed, and she brought in the food, breathing heavily again.

“I can serve,” I offered. I knew James wanted to, but he was afraid to ask to do to much for her. I knew that fear well.

“Thank you, dear.”

We ate and talked late into the evening. After James and I did the dishes, we joined her for pinochle. At nine, her expression and movements seemed even more tired.

“I’m afraid I must go to bed,” she said. “Eva, I set up the guest room for you, and Javi there are pillows and sheets for you by the couch. If you plan to sneak into her room, please wait until my sleep medication really kicks in and I’m sleeping like the dead. I’ll see you both in the morning for mass,” she ended, kissing each of our cheeks and excusing herself.

When her door shut, we both dissolved. We sunk into our chairs around the table, laughing until tears came.

“She’s a fervent Catholic,” James said, sending us back into laughs.

“She’s incredible,” I said. And I meant it. In between card games, she showed me pictures of her time traveling around the world. She took incredible photographs, ones that captured emotions and made them sit still so she could have them forever in a picture. My favorite, a picture of a black jaguar in the tangle of green weeds in the Yucatán, his dark coat catching the glint of the afternoon sun, she told me she took without a zoom lens.

“Didn’t have one of those. I just walked slow and stood still for a while, letting his breath and mine synch before I took this,” she said of the jaguar.

She told me how as a teenager James had tried to submit her photographs to National Geographic under a male pseudonym since they wouldn’t accept her work as a female. Her high-pitched chuckle piped as she explained that it hadn’t fooled the photo editor. “But my poor boy tried,” she laughed.

Once she went to bed, the two of us sat on her couch talking about her respiratory system with the news on in the background.

“She insists it’s just aging, but I want her to see a doctor to make sure it’s not something more serious.”

“I noticed she was struggle several times to catch her breath even just after walking across the room,” I said. “I don’t know if it’s that serious, but I understand. If it were my mother, I’d feel the same way.”

He nodded. “Thanks for talking this out with me. I feel like you understand what it’s like to parent your parents more than others.”

“Of course,” I said. “Why wouldn’t I talk it out with you? I’m not going anywhere.”

He shook his head, smiling at me, and grabbed my hands. “I love you, Eva.”

“I, I love you too,” I stammered. I felt my face flood with all the blood in my body, and my limbs felt numb.

“Yeah?” he asked, grinning harder.

“Yeah,” I laughed. “Yeah. And not just because we can bond over our parents.”

“No,” he said. “Definitely not.” He kissed my mouth lightly, and then again. I leaned back, and accidentally pressed on the remote. The volume turned up, and we both looked over at the CBS news report.

“...so the market closed down five points. Eli Black, corporate mogul most notably in charge of the acquisitions company AMK and United Brands, formerly known as United Fruit Company, committed suicide early this morning.”

James sat up and watched closely.

“Bystanders say Black jumped out his forty-fifth floor window of the Pan Am Building with his briefcase in hand, landing on the northbound ramp of Park Avenue. The president and CEO of AMK and United Brands, fifty-three, leaves behind two children and his wife, Shirley Lubell. Though unclear why Black jumped, unnamed sources within United Brands told CBS

reporters that it could be related to a growing SEC case against the company for an alleged deal with the Honduran President Oswaldo López Arellano.”

“Wow,” I said. “That’s awful.” James said nothing. The news switched to a report about a new baby animal in the zoo, and I turned the TV off. “We’ve only got so much time for this weekend vacation,” I said. James smiled, distracted, but kissed me again.

“You’re right,” he said. “We shouldn’t spend it worrying about the news.”

“How do you want to spend it?” I smiled in between kisses, leaning back.

Later that night in bed, with James’ arm around me, I breathed deeply, taking in the smell of his forearm. Half awake, I felt him kiss my shoulder and then my neck before he shifted and pulled me tighter into sleep. *I forgot*, I thought. *I forgot about the kisses, the ones in the middle of the night that just remind you that he’s there.* I felt a drowsy happiness fill me and begged a God I only half believed in to never let that feeling empty.

Chapter 6

Washington D.C. June 1975

The phrase “fell in love” sticks in my throat whenever I try to use it. It sounds so reckless. So happenstance. At least for me, James’ and my relationship was anything but that in those first few months. I grew to love James with careful caution. We worked in each other’s offices and ate together most afternoons and nights, but I tried not to assumed we would.

“I like not needing you,” I teased him. “Let’s me focus on wanting you.”

“You’re afraid,” Joyce told me once. “Just in case he lets you down somehow, you want to make sure it won’t break you. Do what you have to, but for what it’s worth, that’s a fucked up way to live.”

But James in his kindness let me go at my own pace. And in the mean time, if I couldn’t admit to loving him, I could admit to loving the things he did. He whispered jokes in my ear during movies, talking all over the dialogue. Sometimes when it rained, he would tip my umbrella so a little rain would hit my forehead. Whenever we waited in a line anywhere, he’d twirl me around and start dancing with me in the meantime. I never saw him angry, but I watched him start several animated arguments about baseball with strangers at the bar and always end them by laughing and buying everyone a beer. He held my hand unconsciously when we took afternoon naps on one of our couches on the weekends. He called Evie in a way that sounded different from everyone else.

“Someday I’d like to ask you to marry me,” he said in a sweet quiet one night when we walked along the trail that hugged the edge of the Potomac River. “At some point. You let me

know when it's alright to ask. Take your time." I mean, can you even imagine that? Have you ever met someone who talks that way, says the kinds of things that knock all of the oxygen out of you and then instantly flood you with so much air you can't imagine not breathing next to them? I wanted to grab him instantly and say let's do this thing, but I caught myself. It was like a defense reflex, like putting up your arms in front of your head when you trip. So instead I smiled, and said alright.

James never mentioned marriage again until May when we took another trip to Philadelphia. We walked out of a Phillies game at Veteran's Stadium, and I felt every part of me filled to the brim.

"You can ask me now," I said in the dark parking lot. And as if the question had stayed on his mind, paused and ready, he nodded, knowing what I meant without any explanation. Two weeks later as we sat on the floor of my office surrounded by piles of final papers we had to grade, he leaned across one stack, rested his arms and chin on it, and said, "So you wanna get married?"

After my first year at Georgetown, I stayed in the city to work over the summer. At the time I was researching the beginnings of a book about John Jay, one of the Founding Fathers and the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. I split my time between the university library and the National Archives. Most nights I met up with James for dinner after his squash games with his buddy Charlie.

"You play squash?" I asked the first time James told me about them.

"Yeah," he said. "Picked it up a couple of years ago, I can't remember when. I play every once and a while when I get the chance. It's good for relieving stress."

"Not baseball or soccer?"

“Squash is easier to organize,” he said. “You only need one other person, and you can play in any weather since it’s indoors. Plus, it’s more contained. You get all your frustration out in that room and not in the open air, and then you leave it there when you’re done.”

“What are you frustrated about?” I thought to ask.

“Unmotivated students, bad essays, you know,” he shrugged the question off.

One night in the middle of June, I went to the gym where James played to surprise him and take him to a new Chilean restaurant. James had told me weeks before that he wanted to try it, but the reservation list had practically no openings. I had called Joanne to see if she had any friends with husbands in the D.C. restaurant scene who could help me get a reservation, and one of her girlfriends from the D.A.R. booked it within hours. I walked into the gym lobby and up to the front information desk. A teen attendant reading comic books, probably working a summer job until school started again, told me the squash courts were to the left on the second floor.

I looked through the small windows on the doors of the rooms to find him and Charlie. Two men in their sixties took up the first one, and a young girl and her instructor were in the second. At the end of the hall as I looked into the last room, I was about to give up at the sight of a slim woman in a tennis skirt and white sneakers when I noticed James. Once I felt certain it was him, I stepped back from the window and sat across from it on a worn wooden bench. So Charlie was a woman, I thought. James had never identified Charlie as a man. He also never identified Charlie as a woman or corrected me when I referred to her as a him.

You’ve got three choices, I said to myself. Walk away. Stay and get mad. Stay and don’t. I chose the last one. I couldn’t tell you exactly why I did. I had noticed women hovering around James since I met him, but he never spoke of any except colleagues since we

started dating exclusively back in October. After we visited his mother in February and she mentioned Patricia, the woman she said he had once been serious about, I had asked him about his past personal life. He didn't mention her by name and didn't say much. Only that he'd been engaged once, that she had passed away, and that he hadn't dated seriously since.

"If it's okay with you, I don't want to talk about it," he had said at the time. "Not now anyway." I nodded, held his hand, and told him I understood. So a line was drawn around his past, and I never asked him about other women again. Doing so would have felt like picking at someone else's scab.

James and Charlie stepped out of the room, and I smiled without flinching. Charlie looked older, probably around James' age, but even more athletic and beautiful than I had noticed through the window. She had blond hair.

"...so who's to say what Hunt did or didn't do," James said in a dark tone, his head still not turned around, as they stepped out to the hallway. "I can't even tell any— Eva!" James exclaimed mid-sentence. Still smiling, I searched his face. He looked surprised, but not guilty. He wiped his face with a small towel. "I don't want to get you sweaty," he said as he approached.

"I don't care," I said, making my smile widen even more as I hugged him and he kissed my cheek. "This has to be Charlie!"

"Yes!" James broke away and turned to motion at the woman holding a racket in front of her body. "Charlie, this is Eva." I hated how much I wanted him to identify me as his fiance.

"A pleasure to meet you," she said with a subtle South Carolina accent, her vowels gliding and her r's disappearing. "James talks my ear off about you, so I've been pickin'

at him to finally meet you,” she tapped his shoulder. “He talks so fondly of you, Eva. Never heard the man crow about a woman so much.”

“Oh, well thank you,” I smiled. “I didn’t mean to interrupt you two, just wanted to surprise James for dinner.”

“Oh don’t worry one bit,” Charlie said. “We were just talkin’ shop. James and I used to work together at the *Times*, and I was tellin’ him about the blow up goin’ on over there with the Rockefeller Commission just breaking.”

I had read about the Rockefeller Commission in the newspaper the day before, and I strained to remember its details. Something about an investigation into corruption in the CIA. I nodded. “Right, I think I heard a little about that,” I said. I noticed James had started rummaging in his gym bag, not grabbing anything in particular.

“It’s the last bit of it that’s really got people up in arms, what with it claiming that Howard Hunt and Frank Sturgis might’ve even been involved in the Kennedy Assassination!” Charlie said.

“Charlie,” James started to speak.

“What? I’m not giving away any scoops,” Charlie spoke over him. “It’s all public record and been reported on anyhow. But if any of that theory holds weight, then everything gets called into question. The two of them are already in jail for Watergate, but the JFK assassination? I don’t know if I buy it, I mean we already went through all that hullabaloo about the multiple shooters and all the prior reports said that Lee Harvey Oswald shot Kennedy on his own, but still. It gives you something to think about.”

I looked at James to see what he thought, but Charlie spoke again before either of us could.

“This one thinks Hunt did it,” she pointed her thumb at James.

“No, that’s not what I said,” James jumped in. “I said Hunt’s done a lot more than Watergate, and we don’t know what he’s capable of.”

“What’s he done?” I asked, out of my depth and trying to catch up.

“Nothing anybody can pin him for,” Charlie joked.

“We should head out,” James said abruptly. He stuffed his racket into his gym bag and zipped it sharply.

“Well anyhow,” Charlie said, “I’ll let you two get on to your dinner. Nice to meet you, Eva.”

“You too,” I said.

When James and I got to the Chilean restaurant and we sat down, I asked him why he had seemed so bothered.

“Charlie’s an old friend. She joined the *Times* back when I did when we were both having a rough go of it. We both changed our names, hers from Charlene and mine from Xavier, to try to avoid some shit from the...older writers and less progressive readers. She’s great, but we’re just friends. Sometimes she goes off about things.”

“Like Howard Hunt?” I asked. His expression twitched.

“Yeah,” he said, recovering. “Anything really. She’ll just talk you to death if you let her, so I wanted to save you from that.”

“Okay,” I nodded. I sipped my water and smoothed my napkin.

“Really, though, I guess I never mentioned Charlie was a girl, it never crossed my mind, but I promise we’re just friends,” James stressed.

“James, I know. It’s okay. Don’t worry, of course I believe you,” I said and reached for his hand across the table.

And I couldn’t tell you if I really did believe him or not. A Hemingway quote comes to mind: “Isn’t it pretty to think so?” It’s the part in *The Sun Also Rises* when Jake tells Brett that he and her could have had “such a damned good time together,” and they both know what’s inevitable. And then Brett says it: isn’t it pretty to think so?

I think in the restaurant, at that moment, it felt good to say I believed him. Saying I did felt I had some control, some magnanimous composure, despite everything else inside me that indicated otherwise. If I had dug past those deep-seeded defenses, I felt a piercing, unbearable fear and anything other than okay.

But isn’t it pretty to think so?

Shortly after the run-in with Charlie, something shifted. Not immediately, and not all at once. But James seemed different. The shift was imperceptible to others, but it was there. I knew it was. It was a dripping faucet, each oddity building like slow water pressure, swelling with time, dropping only when it had been a while since the last one hit.

At a cocktail party at James’ colleague’s house celebrating the end of a summer conference, one woman almost choked on her drink when she heard I was James’ fiancé.

“You’re marrying James Calderón?” she struggled to say. I couldn’t tell if she was stifling coughs or laughs.

“Yes,” I nodded. “Are you okay?”

“Oh,” she cleared her throat, her face reddening with pressure. “No, thanks, I’m fine. I’m just—” she coughed. “I’m just surprised. Didn’t think James was the type for

marriage.” Before I could ask why, she raised her empty glass and said, “Excuse me, I need another one of these.”

James saddled up next to me and wrapped his arm around my waist with a broad, languid motion. He kissed my cheek hard. I stared at the carvings on the mahogany mantle, but caught our reflection in the mirror just above it.

Grinning at the banquet hall around us, James said, “Derek McMullins from Sarah Lawrence just told me you had passed on my paper on wartime journalistic ethics to him last month. He said he plans to use it in all of his classes next semester as required reading and asked if I would give a guest lecture.” Elated and buzzed, he kissed me again. “Evie, you’re the best.”

I told James I wasn’t feeling well and asked if he might take me home to my place. Did I think I could hold out for another half hour, he asked. He wanted to talk to his department head about McMullins’ offer. I nodded. At that moment, James’ face drained of his earlier elation. I turned to follow his gaze and saw a beautiful woman with an older man walking near us. They passed the grand piano where a paid music student played muted jazz. The couple seemed to share James’ discomfort, but only a yard away, they couldn’t avoid acknowledging us. The man gave a thin, terse grin. The woman looked to the side, as if feigning disinterest.

“James,” the man said. He stuck a hand out to James, as if remembering the social norm.

“Bertram,” James reciprocated the hand. He stole a glance over in the direction of the coat check and then gave a small, submissive nod. “Elise,” he said to the woman.

“It’s been too long,” she said as though she didn’t mean it.

“This is my fiancée, Eva Belmonte,” James introduced me.

“Bertram Keating,” the man said. “James and I used to work together at the *Times*.”

“No,” James shook his head. “I worked for him. That was never in dispute. Mr. Keating was the managing editor.”

“What are you up to these days?” Bertram asked. Elise’s eyes fixed on James.

“I’m teaching at Georgetown now,” James said. “And I’d love to talk to you more about it, but Eva’s not feeling well, and I promised I’d take her home right away.”

We said our goodbyes and stepped into the cold streets slushed with freezing rain. James did not stop tapping his leg.

“What was that about?” I asked as we got into a cab. A flush smile like the one he had worn earlier in the night came to his face again. His one hand tried to immobilize the other from tapping.

“Old boss,” he said. “I didn’t feel like talking to them and spoiling the night.” I said nothing. When the cab approached my place and James kissed me goodnight, I pictured Elise’s fixed gaze on him again. I let his kiss press against my lips, and let my arms hang in the night air, motionless as tree limbs.

Women smiled at him wider than they smiled at other people. They found reasons to stop by his office, to touch his arm, to laugh at his jokes. As for James, more often he said he had work. We had always worked together, but more frequently told me he was taking his papers to his apartment and would call me in the morning. Sometimes he forgot to. Sometimes he wore the same clothes as the previous day. Sometimes he missed my mouth when he kissed and left in a hurry. I was paralyzed. What could I do, ask him if he still loved me only a month after he asked to marry me? So I said nothing. Please don’t judge me for that.

Chapter 7

Seaford, Virginia July 1975

James and I went to my parent's home in Virginia for the Fourth of July. The fourth fell on a Friday that year, so everyone planned to spend the whole weekend there. We arrived Thursday night, driving along the York River until we reached my parents's waterfront home. Joanne and Arthur sat on the back porch with baby Charlotte while Heather played at the edge of the sand, trying to catch hermit crabs.

My mother met us at the edge of the driveway, and briefed us on my father's latest health updates as we walked into the house and planned to pretend as though he were fine. She called Joanne and Arthur in, and Heather ran giggling into the house in her bathing suit, tracking in wet sand as she came to meet us. James spun her around in the air until Joanne complained that Heather's feet were flicking wet sand all over the walls. While Joanne took the girls up to change them into their pjs, Arthur made uncomfortable small talk about sports with James.

"You gonna play me in tennis soon?" Arthur asked James.

"I could," James replied. "I'm more of a squash player, but I could try—"

"Ah, that's right. Sorry, I always forget which fake sport it is you play," he teased, slapping the doorframe of the hallway. "Heard your Phillies gave the Cardinals a smacking today."

"Yeah, they're forty-four and thirty-five so far. They've got a real shot at the league title," James replied.

“I mean, the Mets wupped you good a few times. Wouldn’t count them out yet,” Arthur took a sip of his beer. “Tomorrow’s game will be a real showdown. The Mets’ll put you back in your place.”

“Well, we’ll have to see,” James tried to laugh the tension down.

“You picking sides on this one, Eva?” Arthur asked. “Gonna side with your man or your family on this? You haven’t married him yet.”

“Still going to, though,” I said, putting my arm around James. James squeezed my shoulder. We walked into the den to where my father waited in his armchair reading his newspapers. He read three a day, usually saving the local paper for the evening.

“Hi papa,” I leaned down to kiss him, careful not to bump his oxygen tank or tangle in the tubes.

“Hola amor,” he hugged me tight. “¿Como es mi hijita? Y el novio?”

“Buenas señor,” James said, shaking his hand. “Como le va?”

“Come on, now,” Arthur huffed, trying to sound funny. “What country are we in again? Keep talking in Spanish, and I’m going to start thinking your talking about me.”

“How was my porch?” my father asked Arthur. As a sick man, he had given up all pretense of liking my brother-in-law.

“Your granddaughters loved it,” Arthur said, sticking his hands in his pockets. My mother brought out coffee, and Joanne brought the girls down for a little while. My father asked Arther to play the wooden piano in the corner, and he sang along in a deep, blunt rasp. Joanne, James, and I sat on the carpet playing cards with Heather, while my mother held baby Charlotte on her lap in a long hug, whisper-reading picture books in her ear. When he started coughing too

hard and my mother brought him a glass of water, my father bickered with Arthur about the stock market and why Arthur couldn't "turn things around up there in New York."

Joanne and my mother took the girls up to wash their faces and go to sleep in Joanne's and my old bedroom. Charlotte fell asleep in her crib within minutes, but Heather bounced in muted excitement in the top bunk for a good half hour before they fell asleep. When my mother and Joanne returned, they brought out fresh coffee. James and I sat together on the small couch angled by the windows that took up the whole western wall. Grey clouds stood out against the indigo sky behind us. Lightning bugs bumped against the glass, trying to get in. Joanne and Arthur sat across us on opposite sides of the long couch with three throw pillows between us. The wood beams of the old farmhouse cast shadows on them. My father sat in back in his armchair near the piano and fireplace, and my mother had pulled up a folding chair to sit next to him.

"So when are you two getting married?" Joanne asked.

"We haven't picked a date yet," I said. Joanne shook her head.

"We set our date within a week," she said.

"Well, she set it anyhow," Arthur looked around the room for a laugh.

"You'll want to start booking as soon as you can," Joanne pressed. "Lots of people get engaged over the holidays. You'll be fighting off hoards of couples to find a church."

"We want to make sure my family can come," said James. Everyone nodded.

"Now where are they again," my mother asked. I gave her a look of surprise. "What, Eva? You never bring James by, so how am I supposed to remember all the details you've never told us?" My father wheezed in a chuckle.

“My brother lives here in D.C. with his wife, Stephany, and my parents live in Mexico City.”

“Mexico City?” Arthur asked. He raised his eyebrows. “That’s an interesting place. Got a lot of crazy going on there.”

“Arthur,” Joanne hissed. Arthur ignored her.

“It’s got its problems,” James said. “Every city does, but it’s beautiful. I grew up there for a while, and got to spend some time there after World War II with one of my first correspondent jobs with the *Washington Times*.”

“Where were you stationed during the war?” my father asked. He had enlisted as soon as his citizenship papers processed, serving in Northern Africa and then Sicily.

“Italy. I speak Spanish, and back then I knew some Italian. That was enough to make me a translator with my platoon.”

For a while again my father spoke excitedly in Spanish with James about their respective deployments until Joanne coughed and nodded at Arthur and we switched back to English for his sake.

“So you wrote from Mexico City after the war?” my mother recapped the questions asked in Spanish for Arthur.

“Mostly. Until the late fifties, I was one of the reporters on the Central American desk for the *Times*, so I covered a range of different countries. Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Belize, Guatemala.”

“Guatemala? Belize? Christ, I feel like I haven’t even heard of these places,” Arthur interjected. I thought I saw something like a flicker in James’ eyes, but it passed, and James smiled along with Arthur, resuming his laid back demeanor.

“Yeah, I guess it’d be hard to keep track if you’re not familiar with the region,” James said.

“Did you like reporting from there?” my mother asked him. James’ lower lip jutted out like he meant to say otherwise, but his grin never left and he nodded. My mother waited for him to elaborate.

Eventually, he said, “It was an interesting gig.” He fidgeted with his napkin left from dinner. I tried to catch his eye, ask him without words what was wrong, but he didn’t look my way. My father went into a coughing fit and my mother went to the kitchen to get his pills and a more water.

“I’m fine,” he said as he swallowed the medicine. She kissed the top of his head and sat down.

“Ten points to anyone who can name the date the Declaration of Independence was signed,” my father with avid eyes, resuming his earlier game of trivia. Joanne tsked in annoyed fatigue. My mother glowed. Put simply, she loved every part of him.

“Fourth of July,” Arthur took the bait, replying as if he thought it were a trick question.

“Nope!” my father piped. “Next guess?”

“And Eva can’t answer,” my mother chimed in. My father nodded.

“Yes,” he agreed. “Eva is out. It’s practically cheating when it’s your job. Arthur is out. Joyce, James, and Deirdre, you can still guess.”

Joanne put up a palm to indicate she wouldn’t participate. My father turned to James, eyeing my on the side to see if I was ready to answer in case my fiancé failed.

“July 2nd 1776,” James said. I nodded and squeezed his arm. My father beamed at him.

“Excellent,” my father said. “That is correct!”

“A keeper if he wasn’t one already,” my mother said. James and I laughed, unused to the attention on us.

“Thanks,” James said, smiling at me.

“Such a momentous document,” my father returned to the history trivia. “Freeing a people from tyranny.”

“Well, sort of, papa,” I said. “Technically land-owning white men.” I scrutinized my father’s face to try and see whether this was new information or information he had known once and forgotten with his age. I couldn’t tell.

“Still,” he said. He shook his head, his face souring, and shifted his weight in the wheelchair. Despite having only immigrated to the States, my father had an unwavering faith in the United States, and defended his new country with fierce fervor. “It’s... como se dice, no hay que buscarle cinco patas al gato, verdad?”

“Don’t split hairs,” my mother translated for him.

“Okay, yes,” my father gestured with one hand towards my mother. “Don’t split hairs. Where would this country be without those founding fathers? They took the steps they could take at the time and that still deserves gratitude, no? They laid the *foundation*. ‘All men are created equal.’”

I sucked in my breath and looked at James. I thought back to our conversation in February in the bell tower, and knew what was coming.

“The Founding Fathers didn’t make them equal,” James said, looking down at his coffee sitting on the dining room table. “People were always equal humans. It’s just that some weren’t always called that. Or treated like that.”

“That’s what I meant,” my father waved him off. “You’re picking at my words.”

“Words matter,” James said. But somehow his tone didn’t sound like an argument.

“Yes, they do,” my father agreed.

“Listen, it’s been two hundred years, for Christ’s sake.” Arthur interjected, growing more animated.

“Excuse me,” my mother objected to his language.

“Forgive me, Deirdre,” Arthur barely glanced at her. “But what do you want us to do? Pay back every Black person and woman in America?”

“I’d also add Native Americans and Latinos to that list. Japanese Americans too,” James said. Arthur laughed.

“Look, James, that’s ridiculous. I’m just saying that a debt like the one you’re talking about can’t last that long.”

“When does the obligation for ruining millions of lives in the most inhumane way possible end? What’s the statute of limitations on that?” James asked, his voice never once raising.

“Listen, if you’re going to fly off the handle—”

“I don’t think he was, Arthur,” I said. “That’s a fair question. When did we get absolved of the debt? Why shouldn’t it be paid?”

“You don’t see me going to the Spanish government and asking for money for all of my relatives, my friends, my colleagues they killed,” my father wheezed.

All of us held our breath. My father never spoke of the civil war in Spain. He never even spoke of Spain. For as long as Joanne and I could remember, he had erased his entire past and filled himself with every Americanism he could. I wasn’t even sure if my mother knew all that had happened to him. No one wanted to interrupt and risk silencing him.

“It was every day that I would walk home from school or would wake up in the morning to find someone else suddenly gone, some other person I loved more than my own breath called a communist or a traitor or a criminal, and obliterated from all but memory. *Every day.*” He was almost shouting, as best he could. Angry, slow tears accumulated in the wrinkles in the corners of his eyes.

“And that was the easy stuff,” his voice wavered. “You’d never hear or see them again, but at least you didn’t have to watch them bleed. The hard part was when you watched the life leave them. One time the secret police raided our house. My father and oldest brothers had already been missing for months, but the police barged in one night, planted pamphlets, and started prodding my mother with their guns. They were drunk. They could do whatever they wanted. Her mind had frayed long ago, so she was screaming prayers at the ceiling in a hoarse voice. I ran to her and hugged her from behind, and they shot her in the head. I felt the blood and brain matter splatter on my face. She toppled onto me and we both collapsed on the floor.

“So don’t look at me like I don’t understand. I lived through a slaughter. It was horrible and wrong, but you don’t see me complaining about it. Horrors happened every day. Are we suppose to pay everyone for every sin?”

My mother put her hand on him, and my father held onto it tightly. “I’m fine, amor,” he whispered just for her.

Everyone swallowed the silence. We all looked like we might dissolve in tears listening to the unimaginable, except James. James appeared unfazed. As if nothing he had just heard was new. I wondered if he had seen similar things in the Second World War. I broke the quiet.

“Maybe,” I answered my father’s question.

“It’s not just not payable. Be rational,” Arthur chimed in.

“Rational,” James smiled warmly. “Have you met Eva?” he laughed with a convivial, disarming grin, as if inviting us all to join in some good-natured humor. “She’s the sanest of all of us.” James stood. He began to pick up the empty cups and saucer plates. “You’re right, though, Estefan,” he said to my father with a deep nod. “A debt like that isn’t just payable. Paying wouldn’t cover it. Might be a start, though.”

“Okay,” my mother said, ending the conversation with definitive termination. “It’s late. We should all go to bed like the girls. Get some rest.”

The next morning when everyone got up, Joanne told us that Arthur had needed to go back to New York.

“Something came up at work, some fire he had to put out,” she said without any proof she believed herself. “He said to tell you all he was sorry to leave so soon.”

My father never came downstairs.

James took Heather and Charlotte for a walk along the shore after breakfast for an hour. When they came back, I stepped outside, just in short and a t-shirt, to meet them. Heather tramped inside, asking her mama and grandmamma for lemonade. James wrapped his core around mine, and we both let the sun’s heat radiate across our skin. I stared at the Japanese cherry blossom tree in the corner of the front yard, its green leaves long without the pink flowers. I could not begin to predict what was on James’ mind, and that scared me. Who was sitting next to me, I wondered. Who was I marrying? Neither of us said anything, and we stayed like that until my mother called after us. We left the next day.

Chapter 8

Washington D.C. September 1975

When “Squeaky” Fromme, a Charlie Manson follower, tried to shoot President Ford in Sacramento to make a statement about the environment, the pulse of the city changed. She dressed all in red, “for animals and earth colors,” and pulled her Colt .45 pistol from under her red cape and leg holster, pointing it at Ford from two feet away. Even though she hadn’t pulled the gun slide back and put ammunition in the magazine, and a Secret Service agent tackled her within seconds, the country shuddered. No one, not even his worst enemies in Washington, mentioned Nixon or the pardon. My second year at Georgetown had just begun. My students looked at me, scared. All the illusions of stoic maturity that they’d tried to maintain scattered, and I remembered just how young they were. They clung to their notebooks, to their sweaters, to each other, wanting someone to tell them how to understand. But even my friends and I failed to do that. We remembered Kennedy and how simple it had been for someone to steal the air out of all our lungs. Abject fear only grew after the second attempt only seventeen days later.

James and I were eating dinner at his apartment when we found out. The phone rang. My friend Joyce called first.

“A second woman tried to kill Ford,” she said as soon as I picked up. We turned on the television, and all the three major networks covered it. Sara Jane Moore. Waited outside the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco for President Ford to come out from making a speech. Shot and missed his head by only two feet. The bullet ricocheted and hit a cab driver. An ex-marine

tackled her. Every reporter picked apart the same details, her baggy tan pants, her blue raincoat, trying to guess her motive.

“At some point, I feel like the why hardly matters,” Joyce said. I still had the phone pressed against my chin and shoulder as I sat on the couch with James. I didn’t know whether I agreed with her or not.

“I’m not numb enough for this,” I said to James when I hung up. Light from the TV flashed in our periphery. Sirens from an ambulance howled outside his green curtains.

“Let’s get drunk,” he said. He took my arms off his neck and set them gently on the top of the couch while he went into the kitchen. He came back with a bottle of wine and two plastic cups. I laughed, knowing he had wine glasses, even some I had bought him. “Thought we’d do it like the undergrads,” he said, kissing my cheek.

After two glasses each, he put the Beatles’s *Rubber Soul* album on the record player sitting in the corner by his bookshelf that covered the whole wall, and pulled me up to dance. The music clashed with the TV, and after a few minutes we thought of turning the TV off. Silently we both decided not to, still aware of how much we were both clinging to knowing more, and we just turned the sound down. We kept dancing, all the way through the album, only stopping to flip it over and to finish the bottle of merlot. As it came to the second to last song, “If I Needed Someone,” we sat down, both exhausted. Part way through the second chorus when they sang, “had you come some other day/ it might not have been like this,/ But you see now I’m too much in love,” James ran his fingers through my hair over and over and kissed my forehead hard. As we swayed, I bunched his sweater in my hands and pulled him tighter against me. I thought of when the album came out in 1965, and said,

“I wish I’d met you back then,” I said. James knew what I meant, but said nothing at first. He kept combing my hair. “I could’ve saved myself from a lot of bullshit when I went to Spain.”

“But maybe you wouldn’t have went there at all,” he said, looking me in the eyes.

“Besides, I wasn’t exactly in a good place in the sixties.”

Since I was drunk, I asked, “because of Patricia?” He breathed heavily through his nose, and then kissed my cheek.

“Yeah,” he said. He bit his lip, as if working out what he’d say next. “That and some other things.”

“Like what?”

He kissed me again, this time on the mouth, and then said, “We’re too drunk for this.”

“No we’re not,” I insisted, pressing my hand against his chest, rubbing the seams of his yellow collared shirt. He slid his hand down my face and cupped my chin.

“Yes, we are, Evie,” he chuckled.

“I completely disagree,” I said. I struggled to stand up. “It’s about time we talked about whatever’s on your mind, and I’m sober enough. On a completely unrelated note, I have to go to the bathroom.” He laughed harder, and kissed my hand as I stumbled down the hall.

This is the part I don’t fully understand.

I had been to James’ apartment countless times in the past year. I knew it’s layout. I knew James’ bedroom was on the left hand side, the bathroom was on the right, and the closet that had always been locked laid at the end.

“It’s just storage,” James had waved at the closet the first time I asked what was behind the final door. I never asked again, but I had tried a few months later to open in and it was always locked.

So I knew where the bathroom was. On the other hand, and in the defense I gave James minutes later, I had just split a whole bottle of wine. Back on the first hand, though, I knew I wasn't that drunk. My body hummed with the vibration of the wine, but as I padded down the hall from James' kitchen and living room, I stared at that last door and felt I needed to open it. I had no reason I could name, but plenty I couldn't. Something had been gnawing inside my body, slowly clawing up to my throat, wanting to know what James' life had been before me. Even since we had been engaged, he told me next to nothing except inconsequential anecdotes that felt like fleeting images that he held up and then pulled away before I had a good look. Maybe it was the wine, or the assassination attempts, or the insecure feeling growing inside me about the way other women acted around James. Most likely it was all three.

When I reached the end of the hallway, I tried the door knob several times, only semi-conscious of its locked state. I heard James joke from the living room, "need some help," but I didn't say anything back. I hadn't turned the light in the hall on, so shadows darkened on the wooden floor panels as I lowered my head to look closer at the lock. James lived in an old building. Most of the doors had doorknobs from the thirties and forties like the ones I had grown up knowing at my parents' farmhouse. I knew how fragile they were. The door sprung open with three shoves.

To start with, it wasn't a closet. The door swung in, letting dim light from the living room spill in onto a room full of cardboard file boxes. The boxes, some stacked two or three high, left little room to walk. A desk with a typewriter and notebooks sat in the far corner of the room. I maneuvered my way through the cluttering maze of boxes, letting my hands run over some of them. Even drunk, I knew these weren't his things from Georgetown.

I looked up. At the edge of the desk sat a cork board with photographs and note cards propped against the wall. Names I didn't know were written on them: Jacobo Árbenz, John Peurifoy, Carlos Castillo Armas, Guillermo Toreillo, Mohammad Mossadegh, Frank Wisner, Bedell Smith, Al Haney, Henry Cabot Lodge, Anne and Edmund Whitman, Edward Bernays, Dave Atlee Phillips. Dozens more. Dates and places webbed together under the title "Operation PBSuccess." I did recognize some names: President Dwight Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, CIA Director Allen Dulles, and Howard Hunt.

Some of the pictures had x's through them in dark marker. A rusted machete with dark stains and a mangled wooden handle lay on one of the boxes. By the desk I saw a Colt M1911A1 pistol and an M1 Garand rifle. My head buzzed, overwhelmed by what I saw in front of me and the alcohol still coursing through my blood, and I didn't hear James come down the hall.

"Eva, what are you doing," I heard from the hall. It wasn't a question. His voice sounded more strained than angry. I turned around and saw him standing in the doorway.

"Isn't that what I'm supposed to be saying right now?" I asked. "What are you doing? What the hell is all this, James?"

I thought back on every time he had ducked a personal question, left early without a real explanation, or wanted to avoid talking to someone we passed on the street. I felt my pulse inside my skull. The I waited for him to say the expected lines. Please listen. Calm down. It's not what you think. I can explain. But he didn't.

"Explain everything," I begged, my voice breaking and tears welling under my eyes.

"I can't," he said.

"Nope," I shook my head. "Nope, no, you—you're not allowed to can't."

"Eva, I—"

“Nope,” I screamed. “Don’t tell me you can’t. Tell me what the hell is all of this.”

James looked in pain. He let out a sigh, and walked towards me, not even looking at the boxes on the floor as if navigating them was routine. When he reached me, I didn’t pull away. Maybe I should have. I didn’t know at that moment what he was up to and had no reason to trust him. But I didn’t need one. I loved him.

He held my forearms and pulled me into a hug. “Eva, I’m so sorry. I know this must look confusing, probably scary, but I promise you, I’m not lying. I can’t explain everything. That’s part of the problem.”

“What do you mean?” I asked. Tears dropped down my chin and followed my neck down to my collarbone. “Who are you, James? Who am I marrying?” I let him pull me tighter against his frame, and rested my head against his chest. There is a particular kind of anxiety that comes from being comforted by the person who’s made you cry. I couldn’t push him away. I couldn’t hug him back either. I let my arms hang in free fall, not sure if I would ever move. I could picture no future at that moment. The wedding we had just planned for December, the house we had made a bid on, even my life as a professor at Georgetown—it all erased itself without hesitation.

“James,” I half-whispered. “James, just—just can you promise me the truth?” He nodded. “Are you, are you some sort of spy?”

“No,” he said, squeezing me tighter.

“Are you trying to overthrow the government or something?”

A stunted laugh escaped from him, and he kissed my forehead. “No,” he said. I pulled away.

“Don’t you fucking laugh at me,” I said in a low growl. “You don’t get to do that. Not with the J. Edgar Hoover set up you’ve got going on here.” I took another look around the room. The wall had maps and pictures taped up next to old yellowing flyers in Spanish warning about some sort of communist plot. I didn’t read anything closely. My eyes couldn’t focus. The pictures showed profiles of men in suits, fighter planes, stacks of ammunition, and crumpled buildings in dusty rubble. In the center sat a picture of President Eisenhower.

“I’m not a spy, Eva,” he said. “I promise.”

“Then what is this?” I shouted, losing my grip on trusting him.

“This is my research,” he said.

“What? No,” I shook my head. I heard my own voice rise, become hysterical, but I couldn’t drag it back down to normal. “No, you’re researching public confidence in the American press. I’ve seen your research. I’ve seen it! What is this? Why are there pictures of fighter planes? Why—”

“In 1954 the U.S. overthrew the democratically-elected Guatemalan government,” he rushed, “and tried to make it look like an organic, Guatemalan revolution all because the U.S. wanted to preserve the land rights of the United Fruit Company—”

“Wh—what?”

“Eva, I know, I know,” he said, trying to reach out for me again. I took a step back, almost tripping on a box. It shuddered, and I looked down to see pictures of dead bodies. “I know this sounds crazy, but you have to believe me. I’m telling you the truth. The CIA and the State Department engineered a secret coup to protect American economic interests.”

“In bananas?” I said.

“Yes, in bananas,” he confirmed. “I know this be difficult to process, but—”

“No, it’s just insane, James,” I shouted. “I mean, we would have heard about this. Our government just doesn’t *do* that. It’s impossible.”

“Why is it not possible? You think our government is too pure for this? Too righteous?”

“You say this happened in 1954? No, that’s when Eisenhower—”

“Oh, Eisenhower!” James sneered. I felt my pulse shudder. I had never seen him show this kind of anger, this derision. “Eva, I know you and your father got a special place reserved for that man in heaven, but he—”

“Oh spare me,” I snapped. “You don’t know a damn thing about him. Eisenhower saw everything in that war. Every horror imaginable a hundred thousand times over, just like you did. He wouldn’t have done something that could start another war.”

“Exactly,” James interjected. “That’s why he had the CIA start a secret coup. Fewer casualties, or at least American ones.”

I didn’t know how to respond. I felt the wine pounding in my head and ringing in my ears. “If something so monumental like this actually happened, then why haven’t we heard about it. How could this possibly be kept a secret?”

“Because the government wanted it to be kept a secret. Eva, come on,” he said. “You’re the smartest person I know. You know better than to believe that everything happens out in the open. But I’ve got proof. I’ve got evidence that we overthrew another country’s government for profit.”

“We?”

“Yes, we,” he said. “We’re responsible for the actions of our government. This is our fault too.”

“How is this possibly our fault?” I exclaimed.

“Because Americans like us elected these people. Because they didn’t follow up and check what those people were doing. Because the people today never asked either. And now everyone acts as though it never happened, and it’s like—” he faltered. “It’s like it didn’t. It’s this sort of alternative, dystopian world where history doesn’t exist, or it does but everything’s redacted.”

I watched him stand there in silence. Every shadow I had ever seen cross his face seemed to emerge now, every worry and burden he’d hidden coming into plain view. Seeing him like this halted my anger, made me pause.

“I just,” I started. “I just don’t understand. If you really have proof, then why didn’t you tell anyone? Why didn’t you write some sort of exposé and tell everyone what happened? It’s 1975. You’ve had two decades. Why did you keep this from everyone? Why did you keep this from me?”

“I’m sorry,” he said. He reached for my hand, and I let it hang limp in his. “I couldn’t publish it. I tried, but I couldn’t. And I wanted to tell you, but by the time I trusted you, I didn’t know how. I—I didn’t know when. I mean, when is the right time to tell someone about this, especially someone you love?”

“I don’t know,” I said back. “But you should have.” I threw my hands in the air and let them clap against my legs as they fell. “I, I just don’t understand. Anything. I don’t understand whatever this is,” I said, motioning around the room, “and I don’t understand how you could have not told me.” I felt my body sink down until it hit one of the boxes, and I curled onto the floor. I realized I was crying.

“Please,” he begged. I looked at his face to see him crying too. “Please let me tell you what I know. Then you can decide what you want to do. Please, Eva, please give me this chance, okay?”

“Okay.”

Chapter 9

Washington D.C. 1975

Guatemala 1952-1954

James made coffee while I went to the bathroom. He poured us both some of the coffee and also two tall glasses of water. I came out and walked to where he stood in the kitchen, on the other side of the counter that divided the kitchen from the living room. Looking at him made my body want to run. I never cared about exercise, but at that moment I wanted my lungs to burn. I wanted to not stand still.

“Can we go for a walk,” I asked. Even with the water, I felt encumbered by the stuffiness of the apartment, the limiting walls. “I need to get outside for a minute.”

“We can’t talk about this outside,” he said. I laughed in an unkind way.

“What are you saying? You think the CIA is going to track us and listen in?” I said.

“I’m saying we can’t talk about this outside.”

“You’re paranoid,” I said. But I couldn’t tell yet whether or not he had a right to be. James nodded. “I need to go out for a while, though. Just for a little while.”

He nodded again. “Might be good to get some air before we start this. Do you want me to come?”

I didn’t know what I wanted. James said okay, and got my jacket. He handed me the keys, and gave my hand a quick squeeze. I pretended not to realize as he leaned in that he was trying to kiss my cheek. I could not decide for more than a minute at a time if I could

tolerate his closeness. I checked my watch. One in the morning. How did it get that late, I wondered. We must have been fighting for longer than I had thought. When we got downstairs and went outside, the street was damp. It must have rained, and the thin trees that broke up the sidewalk were heavy with wet leaves. A few blocks away I could hear a single car slick through the road. The air shocked my skin, and even through my jacket and sweater I felt the chill wrap itself around me. I passed the dark houses and empty storefronts of my Bethesda neighborhood. Dew clung to the metal playground and the darkened mulch around it. Everything looked asleep, safe. A place like this would never have to worry about attacks or invasions like the one James had just described. Guarded by the monolithic and impenetrable power of a country that dictated the world order, this town and all places like it in America could relax in secure, self-assured comfort. Somehow this realization only unnerved me.

Once my legs vibrated with fatigue, I stood still and took a deep breath, as if trying to fill myself with enough air to last the night. A few stray drops of rain fell from telephone wires and overhanging branches onto my face and shoulders. I felt worn out enough to be calm, so I headed back.

“Where do you want to sit?” James asked when I set the keys down on the counter.

“Not in there,” I sighed looking over at the door at the end of the hall. “On the couch, maybe.” He nodded.

“Okay,” he said. “Let me go get a few things.”

He came back with a journal and a few folders, and set them down on the coffee table. The TV still blared a muted flash of news updates about President Ford and the cab driver who got shot. I turned it off. James sat down next to where my body curled up.

“Right at the end of the war 1945, I turned eighteen. I signed up on my birthday, trained for six weeks, and then shipped out to Italy by February. Just in time for the spring offensive to Northern Italy where Mussolini’s forces and the Nazis holed themselves.” He paused.

“I have no room to complain. It was two and a half months. Older men in my platoon, and there weren’t many by the end of the war, had seen years. Years. That kind of endurance... it’s just unimaginable to me. Every day when I woke up, I felt like my body would explode from the inside out from pressure when another battle started or ended. In the middle of the battles, I felt nothing. Like TV static. How those guys managed for so long...well, the point is, I didn’t deserve to have been so shaken. But I was.

“After the armistice in May, they sent men home based on a points system. I’d barely been in the war long enough to get half the points you needed to go home, so I stayed for the post-war reconstruction and patrol. We saw whole towns, whole counties decimated. Nothing but soot and mud and rubble. Even in the ones where anything was still alive, there was no food. People chased us, begging for food. And the women—the young ones hid. Especially if they were pretty, they hid from the soldiers on both sides, trusted no one, and I couldn’t blame them.

“When I came back, I couldn’t fit back into life. It had shrunk. I went to Stanford just to get away from the East Coast. When I graduated, I took a job with the *Washington Times* down on the Central American desk. For the most part that meant staying in Mexico City, but every once and a while my editor sent me to other places in the region. Nicaragua when Somoza was reelected in 1950, Honduras for a worker strike, Panama for a flood, stuff like that.

“Then my editor wanted me to go to Guatemala. It was 1952. I knew a few reporters who had gone there before, but they rarely sent the same one twice. I went on my first organized press

junket in Guatemala for two weeks. It was supposed to be a tour of the country, but it was all organized by United Fruit Company.”

“What?” I asked.

“You’d know it as United Brands,” James explained. I remembered vaguely back to the news report we saw on our February trip to Philadelphia when we heard the United Brands CEO and president had committed suicide. What neither of us knew at the time was that because of Eli Black’s death and the ensuing scandal about the \$2.5 million bribe he offered to the Honduran president, the company would rebrand again in 1984, calling itself Chiquita Banana.

“The banana company?” I asked. James nodded.

“Why? Why them?”

“Back then United Fruit controlled everything in places like Guatemala. Railroads, telephone lines, sea ports, airports, schools, practically all of it. It wasn’t a company so much as a government. United Fruit produced eighty-four percent of all the bananas in Guatemala by 1954.”

“Wait, how is that all even *possible*?” I asked. My head pounded from the mix of the coffee and the hangover.

“It just was,” James replied. I felt as I looked at him that I was watching him undress, take off layers of easy-going disguise, and show me his naked worry and fatigue.

“Okay,” I said even though it wasn’t.

“In general in Guatemala,” James went on, “two point two percent of the population owned seventy-two percent of the arable land. Indigenous peasants worked for five to twenty cents a day, and seventy-five percent were illiterate. They were tied to the plantations, arrested

for vagrancy if they left, and paid in plantain currency they could only redeem at plantation-owned stores, spiraling them into a lifetime of debt for them and their families.”

It reminded me of the post-reconstruction Jim Crow sharecropping era and former slaves and their children and grandchildren working at the same cotton and tobacco plantations of former slave owners and their children and grandchildren.

“How could they have gotten such control?” I asked.

“The company came in during the mid-1800s and latched on like a tick, growing more and more the more that it could suck out of the country. You have to understand that even after the Spanish left Guatemala in 1821, the country never really had freedom. Different dictators, caudillos, came in and ran the country into the ground until the next one came along. Most let foreign companies like United Fruit call the shots in exchange for political support and lucrative bribes in one form or another. It wasn’t even until 1944 that the country even had its first real democratic election ever since the Spanish first arrived in 1524.” He paused and let me process that.

“What changed in 1944?” I asked. For the first time, his face softened.

“They had a revolution.” He rubbed my hand. This time I let him. “Teachers, lawyers, small business owners, middle-class workers, and farm workers overthrew the dictator, Jorge Ubicó. Afterward they wrote their own constitution and based a lot of it on ours and on Roosevelt’s New Deal.”

“Really?” The question escaped from my mouth. That would happen a lot that night, but every time James stayed patient with me. He nodded.

“For ten years, the two presidents they elected reformed everything: healthcare, education, transportation, and plenty else. But it wasn’t until the second president, Jacobo

Árbenz, approached agricultural reform when United Fruit and the U.S. government put their foot down.” He showed me a photograph marked “Árbenz” of a handsome man smiling in a grey suit, holding the hand of his wife. The Guatemalan president looked sharp, young, and happy.

“All the reforms up until that point weren’t really going to change the country since foreign companies and a few oligarchical families still owned all the land,” James said. “As long as they did, they would still find ways to control the transportation, oppress the indigenous peasants, and stall any serious change the politicians wanted. But then Árbenz passed Decree 900, the Land Reform Bill, in June of 1952, and United Fruit and the oligarchies—”

“Grew nervous?” I said. He shook his head.

“They were nervous in the 1940s. When the Land Reform Bill passed, they were furious.”

“Why? What did it say?” I pulled my sweater tighter around my chest. I barely followed everything he said, but I still felt chills spread over my body.

“It bought unused plots of land over 224 acres and distributed it to indigenous peasants.” “So basically if you owned this much land,” he said, spreading his hands to the width of the coffee table, “but you only farmed using this much,” he shorted his hands to about a quarter of the coffee table, “then the government would buy the rest,” he motioned to the three-quarters of the rest of the table. “The bill gave the land back to the same people from whom it was originally stolen. And it didn’t touch land smaller than 223 acres or land larger than that amount that still used most of the land. Do you follow?”

I nodded slowly. “So, it took the land that large landowners weren’t using, bought it, and gave it in pieces to the indigenous people?”

“Yes,” he confirmed.

“So, but if they were paid for the land, then what was the—”

“They bought it for the amount that the landowners had always appraised it for tax purposes, which was considerably less than what it was actually worth,” he explained.

“Okay.” I gave him a slow nod.

“And it wasn’t like United Fruit was the only one affected by this. Everyone, including President Árbenz himself and plenty of his supporters and officials in government, with that much land was subject to the bill.”

“So how do you factor into all of this?” I asked, I looked at the clock. It was now close to two in the morning.

“United Fruit tried fighting back against the land reforms in a number of ways,” he started. “One of those was to lead groups of reporters around the country in carefully orchestrated tours to convince them of the company’s progressiveness and benevolence in bringing the country into the twentieth century.”

I nodded. He pulled out a few pictures from one of the folders. One showed workers standing beside bunches of bananas that came up to their waists. Another showed two men walking down a mud path that cut through rows of banana trees that towered above them. The third showed a mustached man with a scowl and a Panama hat at a makeshift podium.

“Edward Bernays, the PR genius behind it all, took the other reporters and me to several places himself. Everywhere we went had been polished over. We saw plantations with newly paved roads where workers had fresh clothes, and plenty of water and breaks. They showed us schools with kids in white collared shirts who sang the Guatemalan national anthem and “God Bless America” for us. We rode through the prettiest sections, and the coordinators let marvel at the giant mountains and volcanos. They planted people in towns for us to interview, people who

would stick to the party line about the company, making us think we were picking these folks at random. Mayors in every town said the same thing: thank God for United Fruit.”

“So you realized something was wrong?” I asked.

“No,” he said. “At first, I didn’t. My first tour was in 1952 before the land reform bill went into effect, but I suspect the company knew what was coming. I didn’t notice anything out of the ordinary. Sure, I thought some of it had to be staged for our benefit, but I took most of it at face value. After all, everyone we spoke to told us of the apparently tangible improvements that the credited to the company. And to be honest, I wasn’t looking that hard.”

“Why not?” I asked. I shifted my weight on the couch.

“I don’t know,” he answered. He ran his fingers through his hair and rubbed his face. “I... guess I was still in a daze from the war. I still felt tired. It was easy to go on the tours and let yourself go with whatever they told you. They blamed every problem on the rising threat of communist dissidents. They said there were rumors that USSR organizers had come over to destabilize the region. That’s how they phrased everything. Not so much a direct lie, but hearsay that gave them plausible deniability if they ever got caught fabricating stories.

“I saw a few reporters press, ask questions that came close to probing. Things like, “how recent are these renovations,” “can workers exchange the company tokens for actual money,” or “a They usually left the tour early. I didn’t see them again. So I didn’t ask those questions.

“So, then what changed?” I asked. He paused again, this time rubbing his face before looking back at me and squeezing my hand, shoring me up for what would come next.

“Patricia Montroy,” he answered. I shifted my weight again. My foot had fallen asleep, and as I moved, I felt the hundreds of sharp stabs pulse in my leg. He opened the journal, and showed the inside cover, which had a black and white picture of a woman with long, dark hair

taped to it. She sat at a wooden table and was in the middle of laughing. Her hair piled up in a careless bun, and she wore a loose, collared dress, but still, she was undeniably beautiful. I tried to picture James taping the picture there, and I wondered how often he looked at it as he wrote in the journal and if he still looked at it now. I didn't have it in me to be jealous. I knew what was coming.

“She was a Guatemalan reporter. I met her on my second press junket at the beginning of 1954. President Árbenz had passed Decree 900 over a year and half ago, and the government had already set about expropriating about forty percent of the United Fruit Company land. It was a major blow. So this time, the tour had amped itself up. We sat through lectures with PR men like Ed Whitman on how the Communists had begun to overrun the Guatemalan government. All the people they sprinkled in front of our way said the same thing. So we wrote the articles they wanted, wired them to our editors, and ate at nicer restaurants than we should have.

“But then at the end of the junket, my flight back to Mexico City got delayed, and I got sick. I spent two days in a hospital in Guatemala City with severe food poisoning, and even when I got out, I felt too weak to fly right away. So I booked myself a room in a small, family-run hotel, and explored on my own. The United Fruit men were diligent, but not that diligent. Or maybe they were. I don't know. As far as I knew anyhow, they didn't follow me. So for the first time, I toured the city on my own. And I met Patricia.

“She worked at a local paper, *El Nacional*. I met her at local taqueria in town, *El Limón*. It was an inconspicuous café. Not very big. Only six items on the menu, all served with the corn tortillas they made on the stone grinder in the back. It had bright yellow walls, one counter where you could order, and only a handful of wooden tables with benches to sit at. You could see the two cooks in the back, one of which was usually Graciela, the teenaged daughter who also ran

the counter. Angél and Rosalia, her parents, cooked and served. They tossed the tortillas back and forth between their hands, clapping them into shape, and then tossing them onto the comal frying pan to cook. Patricia was a friend of the family, and she ate there most afternoons for lunch. Once I figured that out, so did I. She,” he hesitated for a moment, but then continued, making sure to keep eye contact with me, as if to promise what he was saying was the truth.

“She was striking. I saw her for the first time balancing papers on each knee and bent over a notepad while she took quick bites of her friend plantain in between writing sentences. It took me two days to approach her.” I laughed quietly.

“Really? You?”

“I was different then. Younger and more gun-shy. And even then in the middle of the era of reform in Guatemala, I knew that female reporters were rare. To be one, I knew she must have been brilliant. So she intimidated me. The first time we spoke, she barely looked up at me from her work. The second time, we argued, just like we did,” he said, pointing at the both of us. “I can’t even remember what about, but she lectured me so much that even Graciela and Angél laughed at me as I paid and left. You would have liked her.”

I smiled and held his hand. I felt a clotting in my throat. I felt on the verge of mourning this woman, knowing how much losing her must have destroyed James.

“It took her two weeks to trust me. By that time, I had filed with my editor and asked to stay since tensions had started to rise. Talk of an anti-communist liberation army had started. One morning, everyone woke up to the droning hum of planes zipping over the city. Flyers dropped from planes, all criticizing the communist movement. Then the planes started coming at all hours. Radio broadcasts barked against the President.

“It was Patricia who finally shouted at me one night, ‘Look at those planes! What make are they? What country do you think they came from?’ She was the one who had done all the research into the U.S. Ambassador at the time, John Peurifoy. ‘He was called the Butcher of Greece at his last station in Athens,’ she told me. She had a friend who worked on the inside of his house who told her he took calls from Miami and Washington D.C. daily. Back then, everyone in just about every country had a conspiracy about the U.S. and the CIA. But when Patricia showed me the notes from some of John Peurifoy’s calls, I realized this one might actually be real.”

He pulled a stack of twenty-some papers from a folder. All were handwritten in hasty Spanish, all had yellowed with age. I scanned them. My eyes fell on one line. “Peurifoy: Do we have the go ahead then? Wisner: The brothers have given the agency the approval to start Operation PBSuccess against Árbenz.”

“Who are the brothers?” I asked.

“Allen Dulles and John Foster Dulles,” he answered. “Allen was the director of the CIA, and John Foster was Secretary of State.” The names sounded familiar to me. “Both had worked as lawyers for United Fruit Company as young men, and both owned stock in the company.”

“Jesus.”

“So when Patricia showed me these,” James continued, “I called my father and my brother Daniel. They both worked in the State Department back in Washington. My mother hated those years, living away from Philadelphia and Mexico. When I called Daniel, he said he had no idea what I was talking about, and I believed him. When I called my father and he said the same thing, I didn’t. My father’s response sounded less shocked, more rehearsed. Daniel had promised to look into it for me, but my father told me there was nothing to worry about. Daniel wired me a

note he found at his boss' desk. It was from Dave Phillips and Howard Hunt at the CIA. They wanted to coordinate with the State Department on blasting Árbenz in the media for trying to buy weapons from Czechoslovakia. They wanted to time it right, hold the information until the shipments actually arrived in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala. I saw the memo two days before the shipment arrived and it went exactly as Hunt and Phillips said it would."

"So there was communism in Guatemala?" I asked.

"Not in the way you think," he said. "There were probably more communists per capita in the U.S. than there were in Guatemala. Their congress at the time only had four communists, and neither president, Arévalo nor Árbenz, appointed any communists to their cabinets. Frankly, the land reform in Mexico was more radical than the one in Guatemala."

"Why did the U.S. just go after Guatemala then?"

"Guatemala was an easier target. And Mexico's situation still favored American businesses. The U.S. had banned Guatemala from buying any weapons from them or any of the U.S. allies, so when it became clear that the CIA had fabricated a fake revolution, Árbenz turned to the Czechs out of desperation for any weapons they could scrounge. It didn't matter anyhow. The weapons were defective, and didn't stop the U.S. fighter pilots, paid privately by the CIA, from bombing Guatemala City and Zacapa. Communism was a thin-veiled excuse for the U.S. to overthrow the Guatemalan government and Árbenz"

"How did this even happen? How did the CIA even get support for this within the country?"

"Plenty of land owners who had lost out just like United Fruit aided. And the CIA interviewed dissidents outside of Guatemala to officially lead the staged revolution."

"What? Jesus Christ, they auditioned people for dictator?"

“Pretty much,” James said. “They settled on Carlos Castillo Armas, a Guatemalan exile in Mexico banned after he had failed at a stupid coup. He worked in Mexico as a furniture salesman, and loved leather jackets. In other words, he was pliable. Patricia was the one who got the telegraphs from the Ambassador’s house where he went back and forth with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’s office about Castillo Armas.”

“How high did all of this go?” I asked. “Did, did President Eisenhower know about all of this?”

“That’s what I don’t know. I know he had to know of the operation, PBSuccess, and it’s most basic components. He had to give his approval to it anyhow. What I don’t know is whether he knew how fabricated the mythical threat of communism in Guatemala was. That’s the thread I can’t find the start of. I see it blatantly with Howard Hunt and David Phillips in the CIA. I see it with Ambassador Peurifoy. I don’t know whether they sold their superiors of the lie about communism infecting the Guatemalan government, or whether they didn’t have to.”

James let me sit with this. I thought of my father. I thought of how many stories he had always told from the war when he got to meet Eisenhower; of the newspapers he always clipped to save articles and pictures of him; of the framed picture he bought me for my first office. I couldn’t imagine the man he described being the same one that James did. How would someone like my father take this news?

“By May and June of 1954, everyone in Guatemala felt like the Liberation Army’s takeover was inevitable. Patricia was one of the few who knew better. She went to the rural edges and saw the sad state of the alleged Guatemalan freedom fighters, a mix of mercenaries from Nicaragua, Honduras, and the peripheries of Guatemala. She sent me letters detailing their

incompetency, but in the city, their shadows loomed large and it looked like a monster was approaching.”

He pulled out the letters. I read them. Patricia called the Liberation Army “just a group of idiots with more sticks than guns, standing around, occasionally burning a small farm or two.” “There’s no way they can succeed,” she wrote. She had signed each one with “te amo.” I love you.

“She got back to Guatemala City just in time for the surrender,” James said.

“Why did they surrender?” I asked.

“Operation PBSuccess and the Liberation Army were all smoke and mirrors, but the illusion worked. The government was scared of all-out war. So late on June 27th, President Jacobo Árbenz went on the radio one last time and told the country he surrendered. He agreed to step down to his colleague, Colonel Diaz in the military, who would take over on the condition that he never negotiate with the CIA’s puppet, Carlos Castillo Armas. I think Diaz hated Castillo Armas as much as the president, and that he meant it when he promised he wouldn’t.

“Half of Árbenz’s speech cut out to the CIA-scripted ‘Voice of Liberation’ broadcast. Patricia and I sat in my hotel room listening and managed to hear him say, ‘They have used the pretext of anti-communism. The truth is very different. The truth is to be found in the financial interests of the fruit company and the other U.S. monopolies which have invested great amounts of money in Latin America and fear that the example of Guatemala would be followed by other Latin countries.’”

“God,” I said. I felt sober, but my whole body tensed. “What happened next?”

“I proposed,” James said. “Right in the hotel room while we both cried and cursed all the insanity that had descended. She said yes, and for a few hours...” his voice trailed off. He rubbed

his forehead again and sighed. “It would be cliché to say we were happy. We weren’t. We were miserable. Castillo Armas strong armed his way past Diaz and every other defense. Within weeks he was the new acting president of Guatemala, and the U.S. was welcoming him into the international community with open arms. We knew this was coming that night, but we thought we might still manage to carve out our own happiness underneath it all.”

“What happened to her?” I whispered, tears coming down my face.

“She was kidnapped a week later. She saw her informant from the Ambassador’s house shot dead right in front of her, and then they disappeared her. That was a new word that started because of all this craziness in Guatemala: desaparecerse. To disappear someone. I never saw her again,” James said.

I thought of Spain. It was close to two-thirty in the morning. Our faces were both raw and red around the eyes from crying. I pulled James close to me and held him in my arms, wrapping my body around him, trying to press myself against him as tight as I could.

“I looked for her for months,” he said. His voice cracked, but he regained it. “I called the police, called my editor, my father, my brother. No one could find her. No one could even find any record of her. One day I went to her apartment and found a new family living there. All of her stuff was gone, and it was the same at her office at the newspaper. Even people like Angél, Graciela, and Rosalia suddenly said they never knew her. In a matter of days, she had never existed. The only records were the ones that I kept, her notes and evidence from her investigation into the coup.

“What did you do with them?” I asked.

“I kept them,” he motioned to the room. “I expanded them. I found connections between United Fruit and the U.S. government, interviewed people, took pictures, found as much as I could, and hoarded it all.”

“Why didn’t you try—”

“I did,” James said. “I sent draft after draft of reports of the coup to my editor, Bertram Keating back in Washington.”

“That was the man we met at the banquet in the summer,” I said.

“Yes,” he said. That night James hadn’t been avoiding Elise. He was avoiding Bertram.

“At first Bertram published heavily edited drafts of them. He probably didn’t want to spend the money to send another reporter down there and risk them finding the same things I had. But by August 1954, after the coup, he had stopped publishing all my work completely. By September, I got a call saying to take the 7:30 Copa Airline flight the next morning, and that I would meet with Keating after I landed.”

“What did he do?” I asked.

“I walked into to his office expecting to be fired. If my father hadn’t worked for the State Department, I’m sure I would have been. I saw reporters from other papers fired for much less. When I saw Bertram, he looked like he’d aged ten years, like presidents do after a term in office. He told me to take a seat. Before I could go on a rant about all the evidence I had that would prove the claims in my submitted articles, he said he knew whatever I was about to say and show him was probably true and also probably pointless.

“I ranted anyway, starting with how the United Fruit Company men under Bernays had practically ushered the reporters to their typewriters and pressed their fingers into the right keys.

“‘And you managed to escape the brainwashing?’ Keating asked me. I told him just barely. When I mentioned Patricia’s name, he cut me off.

“‘This is the part where you don’t talk again for a while,’ Bertram said. ‘This meeting was supposed to be with the Chairman of the paper. He would have told you to shut the hell up and told you that was the end of discussion.’

“‘And what are you telling me?’ I asked him. He told me he was telling me to shut up too, but that he was also going to at least tell me why.

“‘You know, back in 1934 when I was a reporter,’ Bertram said, ‘no one here wanted to hear about the atrocities of Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist Party. Even then he had begun his vice-grip of terror and anyone in Berlin could tell he was fucking crazy. But in Washington, most people didn’t want it to be their problem because if it was, well hell, that’d be the most terrifying thing since the Great War. Ten years later in the forties during the Second World War, no one wanted to remember that we hadn’t always been the moral heroes. I felt mystified at how some invisible hand guided even my own reporting.’

“‘He went on to say, maybe I’d seen everything correctly down in Guatemala, maybe I saw eighty percent correctly, or maybe only ten. ‘Most likely,’ he said, ‘we won’t be able to determine that or its implications for years. For now, consider who really owns this newspaper. I assure you, son, it sure the hell isn’t me and it isn’t even the Chairman.’”

“‘What?’ I asked James. “‘What did he mean by that?’”

“‘Probably that someone in the State Department, maybe even Secretary Dulles himself, called the newspaper and told them to put me down. I can only guess that my father stopped them from firing me and blackballing me from journalism completely.’”

“‘God,’ I whispered.

“I pushed back for a while,” James went on, “but then he said, ‘*The Washington Times* isn’t shutting you down because it satisfies some evil craving of newspaper bureaucracy. Everything is economic. Do you know who owns the shares in the newspaper?’ I said I didn’t, but I had an idea. Later I looked up the public trading profile of the newspaper. United Fruit Company President Sam Zemurray owned eight percent. The PR man, Edward Bernays owned five. Another four percent was in his wife Doris’ name. Tommy Corcoran, Rockefeller, and everyone else with money who had even a second cousin involved in UFC has a stake in this newspaper. All in total, that company influences nearly forty-eight percent of the company stock.”

I sighed and ran hands through my hair. I pulled it up into a knot and then let it fall down again. It all sounded like a conspiracy too extreme to be true.

“Eventually, I stopped fighting Bertram. ‘This is why I can’t publish anything real about Guatemala or United Fruit?’ I asked.

“‘Yet,’ Bertram said. ‘You can’t publish anything yet, you aren’t ready and neither are we. Do you understand?’ I told him I did. The last thing he said to me that day was that I had two choices and that I already knew what they were.”

“Keep your head down or die a martyr,” I said to James, having worked it out. He nodded.

“Yeah.”

“And you’ve kept it a secret this whole time?” I asked, knowing the answer.

“Pretty much. I went back to being the good soldier and reporting on the Latin American desk for another few years. I never got back to Guatemala. A few months after I returned to Mexico City, a man named Miguel Isodoro approached me. He told me he was a

friend of Patricia. I tried to blow him off, assuming it was a set up, but he showed me some of her documents, some I had and some I hadn't seen. He told me she'd given him copies as security. He was from Antigua, forty minutes away from Guatemala City. When he heard that I was back in Mexico City, he waited to approach me until he thought it was safe."

"You trusted him?" I asked. I wasn't sure that I did.

"Yes. Miguel, it turns out, was her cousin. He showed me the birth certificate and pictures of him and her as kids." At this he pulled out a photograph from the box. I saw a teenaged girl and boy laughing against a church wall, both dressed in their best clothes.

"This is her?" I asked, pointing at Patricia. He nodded without saying anything.

"What happened next?"

"For a year, Miguel and I combed through as much as we could find. My father had passed away, but Daniel still worked at the State Department. I didn't want to risk asking him for things directly, but every once and a while when we couldn't find something anywhere else, I contacted him and asked as circuitously as I could. But in 1956, I got transferred. They called it a promotion. I would report in D.C. on the Metro desk, covering local crime and municipal politics. That's where I met Charlie."

Another woman explained, I thought.

"By 1960, when I heard from the States that Armas had been overthrown and civil war had broken out, I gave up trying to pursue the story on Guatemala altogether. After that, I left the *Times* within a year. Went and got my doctorate. I've been at Georgetown ever since. I had given up investigating all of this until we heard about Eli Black's suicide. I thought maybe it connected back to Guatemala, and maybe now that several United Fruit heads had left United Brands, I could actually move forward with it all."

“That’s why you’ve been so busy lately,” I said.

“Yeah,” he said. “I’m sorry.” He kissed my temple and said it again. “Really, Eva, I’m so sorry. I should have told you sooner. It’s just that don’t know when I would have.”

“Me neither.”

For a minute, the two of us sat in silence. When I finally spoke, I rubbed my throat. Somehow that felt sorer than anything else. It burned from the shouting earlier in the night.

“You know, I thought it was an affair,” I said.

“What?” James shook his head, confused. His brown curls still bounced lightly in a way that made my heart collide with my rib cage.

“I knew you were hiding something,” I explained. “Back in June I started thinking it was an affair. First I thought it was Charlie, then Elise, then just about every woman I saw you with and all the ones I didn’t but imagined.”

“Eva,” he started, but I held up my hand. I looked across the room at the window looking out on the street, and then around his whole apartment. His TV. His bookshelf and kitchen, and then the hallway leading to the door at the end, which stayed cracked open from where we’d left it. “I’m so sorry. I know this is beyond logic,” he said.

“Yeah.” I couldn’t think of what else to say. How to respond to hearing that your government crushed another one in between its fingers just because it wanted to?

“You can go through all the other files and boxes whenever you want, in the morning, in a week, right now—whenever.” I took a deep breath and exhaled.

“Okay,” I whispered.

“Okay.”

“I want to look at them now,” I told him. “You should go to bed.”

“Are you sure? I could stay up with you,” he offered, not yet moving from his spot next to me on the couch.

“No, I think, I think I need some time to digest this on my own,” I said. He nodded and stood up. Before he walked to his bedroom, he leaned down and kissed me. It was a long kiss, one that didn’t move, but begged you to stay still with it.

“I still love you,” he said.

“I know,” I said. “I think I still do too.” I wasn’t trying to be harsh or glib. I wasn’t even saying it as a reflection on James. I had changed. In a matter of hours, I felt everything in the world split open and shift. I think I still do too was just about all I could offer.

That night and for the next two I sifted through that box and three others I dug out of that back room. I found every name I’d seen on that cork board that I hadn’t heard about from James, and connected it to his research.

Guillermo Toreillo was the Guatemalan diplomat that pleaded Ambassador John Peurifoy repeatedly to call off the coup.

Mohammad Mossadegh was the Prime Minister in Iran who was ousted by Hunt and others with the same basic plan one year earlier than Guatemala.

Both Dulles brothers and their stakes in United Fruit.

Thomas Cabot acted as President of United Fruit Company for a time, and his brother John Moors Cabot worked as the Assistant Secretary of State.

Henry Cabot Lodge spoke on the U.S. Senate floor, denouncing Decree 900 and the rising communism in Guatemala.

Anne Whitman was the personal secretary to President Eisenhower, and her Edmund Whitman direct PR, including the press junkets that James went on.

Colonel Albert Haney acted as the military field commander for the coup.

Anastasio Somoza García, president of Nicaragua, not only encouraged the coup, but also aided the CIA throughout the whole process.

Howard Hunt ran the CIA's political and psychological warfare for the operation.

Frank Wisner acted as CIA Director of Operations in Guatemala, and devised the pirate radio scheme that broadcasted the "Voices of the Liberation" propaganda.

Inside Wisner's folder I found text from one of the Voices of Liberation broadcasts. "CITIZENS OF GUATEMALA, WE MUST NOT LET THE GROWING RED THREAT CONSUME OUR BELOVED NATION. THE RADICALISM HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO PUT OUR COUNTRY AT RISK WITH THE SO-CALLED REFORMS OF LAND DICTATED BY THE ARBENZ GOVERNMENT. WE ARE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT, BROADCASTING AT YOU ON THE JUNGLE WHERE WE ARE SAFE FROM THE RESTRICTIONS OF THE ARBENZ REGIME. THIS IS NOT FOREIGN INTERVENTION—WE ARE FREEDOM-LOVING GUATEMALANS THAT WISH KEEPING THE COUNTRY OUT OF THE HANDS OF THE SOVIET COMMUNISTS. RISE UP AGAINST THE RED REGIME OF PRESIDENT ARBENZ AND TAKE GUATEMALA BACK FOR THE PEOPLE OF GUATEMALA! THE RESISTANCE WILL BEGIN SOON, JOIN UP!"

Each night I fell asleep reading that over and over on the couch. On the fourth morning when I woke up, having finished all of the files, I found James sitting across from me on a chair he'd pulled up. He was reading the newspaper, waiting for me.

I sat up and asked him, “So what’s next?”

ACADEMIC VITA

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