

Cedar Cove.

How long had it been? When last had I been on this unchanged small road flanked by vast lush greenery and the warm breeze that smelled like tranquility? It'd been ten years, and I could not believe how much I used to hate it here.

The charming house I grew up in stood at the end of this road, and closing in on it, I could hear Eddy's laughter boom across our small yard. He was the finest man I had ever known, and I missed him terribly.

The taxi pulled up in front of home, and there she was. Beautiful as I remember. Smiling at me. My heart did little nostalgic backflips in my chest as I got off the vehicle and rushed into her open arms like her little girl.

"Oh, my darling," her soft, frail voice found my ears. "Welcome, darling."

There was no holding back the tears anymore. I let them roll down my face to her back shoulder. Her warm embrace could only keep the tears coming, and I did not stop them.

"Aggy," I sobbed, reminiscing on how my life had been without her. "I'm so sorry, Aggy..."

"Hush now, darling. It was no fault of yours." Her voice, so soothing and refreshing, was all I needed to hear to believe it. "Come, let's get you inside."

'Inside' was the peak nostalgia. Photos of Aggy, Eddy, and me which adorned the stair wall were arranged in the same order as ten years ago. The old hand-crafted oaken dresser was still in position, polished to shine—as were other items of furniture. The rustic feel of this place, and how the smell of fresh flowers harmonized with the aroma of Aggy's homemade bread were all intact.

"I baked you a pie."

Of course, she did. She was the love of my life who knew how much I'd missed her cooking. Nowhere in New York could I find anything quite as delightful. Not for a hundred years.

I trailed Aggy to the kitchen and stood at its doorpost to watch her ready my homecoming dinner. The doorbell rang, and I told Aggy I'd get it. Whoever was behind that door would be someone I'd known while growing up, so I braced for what would be a clumsy or heartwarming reunion.

My heart stopped working when I pulled the door open.

"Mason?"

"Kelly."

His eyes latched onto mine and kept them locked for moments until we hugged it out. His body was taut and strong and secure. We broke it off and a smile rose to my lips.

“It’s...so great to see you,” he said with a smile that showed off his perfect denture. “How long has it been?”

“A decade, at least. Come on in.”

That’s when I noticed that he had a bag of tools with him. Woodwork? He was one of Eddy’s most enthusiastic students back in the day, but I need to get around to seeing him build anything.

“Mason,” Aggy called out to him from behind me. “I wasn’t expecting you so early.”

“Yes, I wasn’t expecting *me* so early either, but I had it in me to work on the slabs all night,” Mason explained.

“You still work late nights, Mason?” Aggy scolded. She had always been too kind to be any good at it. “We talked about this, didn’t we?”

“Believe me; I fought tooth and nail, Aggy. But insomnia is a persistent son of a gun. Looking on the bright side, though, it got me a job done.”

There were clues in the conversation that I could piece together to follow along, but I found myself more engrossed with the view of this man. With how that face had morphed from youthful charm to rare manly gorgeousness.

“The shelf is for your room, Kelly,” Aggy announced to me. “Show Mason up and let’s all have pie when Mason’s finished. I have a few last-minute orders to fill, so I’ll be in the kitchen.”

I had neither requested a shelf nor expected to meet Mason on my first day back, but Aggy was out of our sight before I could string any words together. Mason turned to me and smiled again.

“So, do you need help with the slabs?” I offered as a trite courtesy.

Mason’s eyebrows furrowed comically. “Are you expecting me to decline thankfully?”

“Maybe?” I giggled.

“Well, then. I’m thrilled to disappoint you. Come on, they’re in the truck.”

*Good heavens*, I’d forgotten how heavy slabs of wood were. The weight of one slab on my shoulder pressured my knees for the first few steps, and Mason did not pass up a chance to jest at my awkward gait.

“Do you need to sit down, grandma?”

“Shut up, Mason,” I said, straightening up as we approached the stairs. As I recalled, there was a sharp bend at the end of this stairwell.

“You go up first so we don’t collide,” Mason instructed.

‘Collide’ was an ordinary word, but something about how he said it made me look back at him. Of course, he was grinning. I rolled my eyes playfully and continued upward.

My pretty little room received me with a flurry of memories from my childhood.

This was my sanctuary. My escape from a world I could never be content with. That study table was where I studied like my life depended on it, and above it was a floating shelf for every award I won for it. On that four-poster bed, I'd spent half of my nights dreaming up a storm about a future far away from here.

My bookshelf was the only piece missing, and it's why Mason had come over. After all the slabs were moved up, he pulled off his shirt to get to work.

*Good Lord.*