

Two

May 1980

Halfway through supper, Carrie said, “I saw Charlotte Rose Gordon.”

Her grandparents’ heads jerked up. They could’ve gotten whiplash. Oma sniffed. “*Grote grutten!* Charlotte Rose, indeed.”

“The thorn part fits.” Opa chortled.

“That’s not her real name?”

“You’d change your name, too,” Oma said, “if it were Lodemia Jane.”

Carrie nearly choked on her squash. “Lodemia?”

“Sawyer Broderick owned the farm, cranberry bog, icehouse, peach grove, and tearoom.” Opa buttered a biscuit. “Charlotte inherited the Broderick fortune and was sole proprietor of the tearoom for decades.”

Oma pointed to Carrie. “Don’t get snared by her wiles, *liefje*.”

Opa squeezed Oma’s shoulder. “Don’t get cranked up, Tanna. Give the benefit of the doubt, like usual.”

“What happened, Oma?”

Oma stared ahead as if the past projected on a screen. “Spring, 1920. I was eight. *Moeder* and I drove to Wolcott’s general store. When I wandered outside, a young woman bustled out. *Her*. Lodemia Jane Gordon. Didn’t know her name, but she was pretty. She stooped over me. ‘Tantje De Haan, are you?’ She knew my name.”

“She heard your mother use it.”

“But this woman somehow *knew* me.” Oma shuddered. “Then she spoke. ‘You must walk. It is a long journey, through a country that is sometimes pleasant and sometimes dark and terrible.’”

Opa patted his wife’s arm. “Tanna, it’s just a quote.”

Carrie nodded. “Yup. The Good Witch of the North, from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.” She’d reread it for Children’s Lit. “What’d you do?”

“My heart was clanging like a spoon on a frying pan, but I managed to ask, ‘What journey?’ She replied, ‘In a utilitarian age, of all other times, it’s a matter of grave importance that fairy tales should be respected.’”

Carrie’s eyes widened. “You remember that line? It’s Charles Dickens.”

“Moeder heard it, too, and explained it.”

“Crazy.” Carrie skewered squash chunks. “Maybe Lodemia was inspiring you to great things.”

“She only inspired fear. She never spoke to me at the tearoom, however, she’d pick me out of a crowd. Those beady eyes ...”

“Beautiful blue eyes,” Opa said. “Oma just likes remembering them as beady. Right, Tanna? The woman’s reputation spares nothing. Much is hearsay.”

“Like her husband’s so-called crime?” Carrie asked.

Oma gasped. “How’d you know?”

“She told me. She hired me to help prove his innocence.”

“*Nou breekt m’n klomp*.” Hand flying to her forehead, Oma

translated. “That breaks my wooden shoe.” When Oma grew agitated, Dutch spilled forth like sand from a pail.

“Takes the cake, all right.” Opa sliced his beef. “Newspapers reported Walter Gordon would be found guilty of homicide. Lucky he didn’t live to see the day.”

“Such a scandal for a pharmacist. Folks still talked about it decades later. Tarnished the whole town.” Oma shook her finger. “Save yourself trouble and bow out gracefully.”

The full magnitude of Carrie’s private summer rebellion swelled within. “She’s paying good money, double minimum wage.”

“Is your sanity worth only a few hundred dollars to you?” Oma stabbed her beef.

“That’s one way to test your mettle, Carrie Bell.”

Carrie twirled butter into her potatoes. “I’ll ask why she quoted those two lines.”

“No, don’t mention me,” Oma said.

Opa chuckled. “Be back for supper by five-thirty sharp so Oma doesn’t think you’ve been swallowed by that big ol’ house. We’ll tie a rope ’round your ankle to pull you out.”

Carrie giggled. “Oma, weren’t you inspired? You read me a thousand fairy tales.”

“If I spoke to a child once, it wouldn’t be *those* words.”

“She’d warn not to overcook meat.” Opa smirked.

After dessert, Carrie washed dishes. Her head spun with the novelty of an unconventional job her parents would frown upon, though working for prickly Mrs. Gordon would take all the gumption she had. But gleaning from the woman’s tearoom experiences and literary inclination was worth far more than twice minimum wage. What could go wrong?

Outside in Oma’s garden, sunflower seeds lurked in the dirt, ruminating—surely the only thing Tanna Groothuis had in common with strange Mrs. Gordon. Why’d she choose Baum’s words for young Tantje? *A girl rooted to the ground is scorned, doomed to face the sun, forever from reach.*

Perhaps Carrie was embarking on a fairy tale of her own, which included Phase Two: perfecting recipes in Oma's kitchen.

As much as Brian supported her café aspirations, he wouldn't be happy about her sudden move to Wolcott, spoiling their summer plans.

She'd call him tomorrow. Today, this was her secret.