

Rose of Anzio is an original, published novel series which began on this forum. It is an epic WWII love story that begins in pre-war Chicago, and continues on to Anzio, Italy, where the Allies waged their Southern Campaign. Although not a fanfic, the hero of this story, Anthony Ardley, is inspired by the character Anthony Brown in *Candy Candy*. The heroine of the story, Tessa Graham, is an original character I created based on my imagination of Candy and Terry's daughter. I have chosen January 22 as the official release date for *Rose of Anzio, Book One ~ Moonlight* to commemorate the D-Day anniversary of the Battle of Anzio.

(For Candy Candy fans, I hope you will have fun guessing which characters in Rose of Anzio are inspired by characters in Candy Candy. You will be pleased to know also that Tessa has inherited Terry's personality!)

You can visit my author's website at www.alexakang.com. *Moonlight* will be available for sale on Amazon January 22, 2016.

Book One ~ Moonlight Synopsis:

Summer 1940. Fourteen-year-old Tessa Graham finds herself in a new, unfamiliar world. For her safety, she is sent from England to Chicago to live with the prominent Ardley family just before the London Blitz. Stifled by the ways of the rich, she is soon drawn to the city's infamous South Side. A world where she discovers jitterbug dancing, and the intrigues of the powerful Irish community. But is this the escape she really wants?

On the University of Chicago campus, eighteen-year-old Anthony Ardley has to make a choice. His country stands at the brink of war. Conscription threatens to become reality. As sole heir to the Ardley fortune, should he stand with his beloved uncle, a staunch isolationist, or join his radical classmates clamoring for American intervention?

What will happen when Tessa and Anthony cross paths on the way to discovering themselves?

A coming of age tale that emerges into an epic love story, this book takes you back to Chicago in the pre-war era, when two young people must find their paths in a world that is fast falling out of control.

Book Excerpt:

Chapter 1

It all began in the rose garden.

A light blue Buick convertible pulled up to the entrance of the driveway leading to a limestone mansion. The mansion itself was barely visible from the street, but from there, the passersby could catch glimpses of the magnificent rose garden in front of the house.

Anthony Ardley got out of the car, said goodbye to his friend who had driven him, and walked toward his home. It was only the end of May, still early in the summer, but the Chicago heat had already started to swell. He didn't mind though. With the heat, his summer vacation had begun.

Home at last.

Exams, over. No more term papers. No more endless debate team meetings. His first year at the University of Chicago, finished.

He slung his duffle bag over his shoulder. In the familiar front yard ahead, the roses in the garden should be in full bloom.

Indeed, the blossoms were as spectacular as he expected. What he didn't expect was a teenage girl kneeling on the ground, chopping away at the flowers surrounding the tiered water fountain. Her brown hair, cut just below her shoulders, fell forward down her neck. Her arms were lithe and quick as she gathered the cut roses. He had never seen her before.

Vandal! He walked closer. She was an unusual-looking girl. She wore her hair straight. Girls didn't usually wear their hair straight. Her bangs dampened by perspiration, she wiped the sweat dripping down the side of her face, leaving a dirt mark on her left cheek. Her hands and slender fingers were covered in soil. So immersed in her task of ravaging the roses, she didn't look up when he approached.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "You're trespassing."

"Who are you?" she asked him back, surprising him with her British accent. "Why do I have to answer to you?"

"Because this is my home," he said. A large patch of the flowerbed was now in disarray. "What have you done? You're destroying private property."

The girl barely raised an eyebrow. Without answering him, she picked up the cut flowers and put them into a bag next to her, then got up and walked away.

"Hey!" he called out after her. "Come back here! I'm not done talking to you."

Ignoring him, she disappeared onto the street, leaving him with no answer except the gurgles of water flowing down the fountain.

He looked at the ravaged scene she left behind. His family had set aside this part of the garden as a dedication. They had planted the most beautiful species of roses here. Several home and gardening magazines had even printed feature articles about it. Now, patches of leaves and shrubs were crushed. Headless stems stuck out from what was once an enchanting arrangement of flowers. The garden's beauty was ruined.

Their gardener would surely have a fit tomorrow.

He crouched down and removed the leaves that covered the small memorial plaque lying flat on the ground. Designed in the shape of a rock, the plaque was placed in a conspicuous spot of the flowerbed to naturally blend into the garden's landscape. Engraved on the plaque were the words, "Anthony Browning, 1903-1919 ~ Gone but not forgotten." He had never met the person named on the plaque. Anthony Browning, who was his father's cousin, had passed away before he was born. He did, however, feel a special kinship with the deceased. His father named him in memory of Browning. Growing up,

many people had said he and Browning looked alike, with the same blonde hair and athletic built.

The memorial garden. What a mess it had become. Who was that girl? Was she a neighbor's kid? Perhaps a British family had moved into the neighborhood? He needed to tell his mother and ask her if she knew the girl. They should tell the girl's parents what she had done. He hurried up the lane toward the circular driveway in front of the house.

Inside his home, his Uncle Leon was visiting with his parents in the main parlor. Actually, Leon Caldwell was his father's other cousin. But as far back as he could remember, he had always called him Uncle Leon.

His mother, Sophia, rose from her seat when he walked in. "Anthony! You're home."

"Mother." He threw down his duffle bag and gave her a hug. "Father," he said to his father.

His father, William, also got up to greet him. "Welcome home."

"Did you see what happened outside? A girl stole roses from the memorial garden. She made a total mess of it. Do you know who she is? Is she a neighbor's kid?"

"She's not a neighbor." Sophia took his arm and walked him into the room. "That was Tessa. Tessa Graham. She's staying with us."

"Staying with us?"

"Come. Take a seat," William said. "We'll tell you all about her later."

Anthony sat down next to his mother. "Uncle Leon, what brought you here today?"

"Came to talk to your father about trade opportunities in Latin America," Leon said. "Europe is having widespread shortages of everything with that war they got themselves into. Oil, metals, sugar, everything. If all I care about are profits, we should absolutely invest more in South America, for access to raw materials if nothing else. As it is, though," he said and rubbed his chin, "I have a lot of misgivings about putting my money into anything that might get us more involved with that pot of trouble in Europe. A lot."

“What’s happening with the war?” Anthony asked. “I haven’t kept up with the news. Been buried with exams the last few weeks.”

“Things aren’t looking good,” William said. “The war. It’s spreading like a disease through the Continent.”

“Tell me about it. It’s a plague. They better keep their illness in quarantine. Don’t let us catch a whiff and infect us with it,” Leon said, finishing the last drop of his brandy. “I don’t understand those people. Wasn’t the last time bad enough? Wasn’t it supposed to be the war to end all wars? But no, they’re at it all over again. Well I say, let them stew in their own juice this time. Keep us out of it.”

Neither William nor Anthony disputed him. They knew well how vocal Leon could be with his anti-intervention views. Few people were as well-versed as he in the political and economic arguments against American involvement, and he would be the first to debate anyone on the subject. As his family, though, they knew the real reason why he felt this way. His brother, Lex, had been an Air-Force pilot. Lex died in the Great War twenty-two years ago. Before he died, they had been close.

William Ardley, Leon and Lex Caldwell, and Anthony Browning. The four cousins had grown up together and were very close.

“But Juliet and Dean are over there in London,” Sophia said. Her mention of Juliet piqued Anthony’s attention. Juliet was an unspoken taboo in the Ardley household. He didn’t know all the details as to why. Juliet left the family before he was born and he had never met her. All he knew was, Anthony Browning’s father had adopted her after his son passed away, and as a result, she became part of their extended family. Something happened afterward and led to a fall-out. The fall-out was so bad that his late grandmother Helen Ardley had absolutely forbidden anyone from mentioning Juliet in her presence when she was alive. Even now, with his grandmother no longer here, his parents and uncle became somber at the mere mention of Juliet’s name.

“Since we’re on the subject, Anthony. The girl you asked about before, Tessa, she’s Dean and Juliet’s daughter,” William said.

“Dean and Juliet’s daughter? Are you serious?”

“We didn't tell you earlier because you were busy with exams and there was no reason to disturb you. I went to London last month to see Juliet and Dean. London's unsafe. I invited them to come back with me but they didn't want to. They did agree Tessa should come live with us until they're sure England is safe.”

"Oh." He couldn't believe his father had gone to London. No one in the family had spoken to Juliet in years.

“It must be tough for Tessa,” Sophia said. "She's young. She's in a foreign country away from her parents, living with people she never met before she came.”

"I don't know about that, Sophie," William said and smiled at his wife. He always called her “Sophie” as a term of affection. “If she's anything like her mother, she won't be fazed by any of this.” He spoke with the tone of fondness he used whenever he talked about Anthony Browning and Lex. Anthony had never heard his father speak this way about Juliet before.

“She's been good with Alexander,” Leon said, referring to his ten-year-old son. “I wish she and Katherine could be friends though. They're the same age. I thought they would become best friends." Katherine was Leon's fourteen-year-old daughter.

“You want them to be the way we used to be with Juliet,” William said. Leon smiled and didn't deny it.

“Sometimes, you just can't go back.” William looked over at a framed photo on the display cabinet. In the photo, he, Leon, Lex, and Anthony Browning were still teenagers. They had their arms around each other's shoulders.

“At least Juliet is back on speaking terms with us,” Sophia said. "Anthony?”

“Yes, Mother?”

“Try to make Tessa feel welcome and at home, will you? We must all try.”

“Of course.” Feeling a little ashamed, he shifted his eyes away from her. Maybe he shouldn't have been so confrontational with the girl earlier. "But why was she picking the flowers in the rose garden?"

“She takes them to the hospital. Apparently, Juliet planted a rose garden in memory of your uncle Anthony in London too. Juliet’s a nurse now. When the flowers bloom, she brings them to her patients. In the summer, she always took Tessa with her.” Sophia took a sip of her tea. “Tessa asked us if she could take our roses to the hospital. I guess it’s a way for her to keep something consistent in her life.”

“Isn't it strange to take flowers away from a memorial garden?”

“Not for Juliet,” William said. “Anthony and Juliet used to bring roses to the hospitals every week for the Great War veterans. They started doing that after Lex died. As for taking roses from the memorial garden...” He glanced at Leon. “She said that’s what Anthony would’ve wanted.” He turned back to his son, “You know, our rose garden was originally her idea.”

That their rose garden was Juliet’s idea was news to Anthony. The garden had been there since before he was born. He had never thought to ask how it came about. He wished he had been friendlier when he met Tessa earlier. He would have to properly introduce himself and make it up to her later.

“Leon, why don't you and Anna bring Katherine and Alexander over this Sunday?” Sophia asked. “Now that Anthony's home, we can have a nice family reunion, and Tessa can get to know everyone better.”

“Sure. I'll tell Anna.”

“How about we make it a pool party?” Anthony said. “Katherine and Alexander can invite their friends.”

“That’s a wonderful idea,” Sophia said. “Tessa can meet some new friends. What do you think, Leon?”

“I'm all for it.”

“It’s settled then.” She leaned back into her seat. A gush of admiration rose in Anthony’s heart. His mother was always so thoughtful and considerate. She knew exactly how to make everyone around her feel important. His father’s success owed no small part to her ability to make his clients feel special when she accompanied him to social functions.

“What?” she asked, noticing her son staring at her.

“Nothing,” he said. “Just, it’s good to be home.”

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When Leon left in the late afternoon, Anthony finally had time for the swim he had been looking forward to all day. Back in high school, he had been a swimming champion and the captain of his academy’s swim team. He competed at the university level now, usually with excellent results.

He couldn’t wait to dive into the pool. His parents built this swimming pool especially for him. In the water, he could move around with the kind of freedom he had nowhere else. For him, swimming felt like flying in the air.

On his way to the pool, he saw Tessa lying under a tree. The girl didn’t tell anyone she had come back and no one knew she had returned. *So aloof*, he thought.

Remembering what his mother had said, he decided to take a detour to reintroduce himself. Beneath the tree, she lay with her eyes closed and a book by her side. He couldn’t tell if she was asleep or if she heard him coming.

“Hello, Tessa?”

She opened her eyes. Standing under the tree, he towered over her. He thought she would get up but she didn’t. Without acknowledging him, she closed her eyes again.

“I’m Anthony.” He crouched down. She opened her eyes again. He smiled and made an effort to be friendly.

“You’re Uncle William and Aunt Sophia’s son.”

“Yes. I heard you’ll be living with us for a while.”

"Apparently so."

“Sorry about before. I thought you were one of the neighbors’ kids vandalizing our property.”

"Apology accepted."

Her answer put him off. He didn't expect her to say that. He wasn't really apologizing to her. It was only a polite way to break the ice. She ought to know that. After all, he hadn't known who she was and she had made a mess of the garden. And now, it was as if he had done something wrong and he was apologizing to a kid.

“You should talk to Mr. Miller. He's our gardener. He can teach you how to handle the roses properly.”

She didn't answer him, only frowned. She closed her eyes again. Her attitude was beginning to annoy him. Still, he held his tongue. “What are you reading?”

“A book.”

He might as well be talking to a wall. He picked up the book next to her. *Damian*, by Herman Hesse. An unusual read for a girl, he thought. Definitely not a book of choice for any girl he knew. Not even for the older girls at his school. More popular with them would be something by Jane Austen or Edith Wharton. Maybe poetry by Wordsworth or Emerson. Or Charles Dickens if they liked something deeper.

"I prefer to be left alone if you don't mind," she said.

She preferred to be alone? Did she think he didn't have better things to do? He tried to be nice, and all she did was give him a bad attitude.

“All right. Suit yourself.” He put the book back on the ground and walked away. He told his mother he would welcome her. He tried. It was not his concern to waste time befriending a sulking teenager.

He walked to the pool and jumped in. In the cool refreshing water, he gave no more thought to the girl under the tree.



Chapter 2

It was a festive Sunday afternoon at the Ardley residence. Leon Caldwell, along with his wife Anna and his children Katherine and Alexander, had come for the pool party as planned. The Ardleys had invited the Lowes, their long-time neighbors. Their son, Brandon Lowe, was Anthony's friend and university classmate who had driven him home several days ago when the school year ended.

As much as she would have rather spent the day by herself instead of being with a group of strangers, Tessa had no choice but to come down and meet everyone. The men didn't trouble her. They withdrew into the library soon after their arrival to enjoy their brandies. Their wives, eager to hear from Anthony and Brandon about their past year's studies at school, remained outside, enjoying cold summer drinks at a patio table. Alexander and his best friend Robbie were the only ones frolicking in the water. They had been in there since the moment they arrived. Tessa almost wished she could join them, but Aunt Anna wanted her to meet Katherine's friends.

Katherine had invited two schoolmates, Lilith and Isabelle. They were both juniors two years above Katherine. When Anna introduced them, Lilith and Isabelle had greeted Tessa with all the proper pleasantries, but Tessa knew right then Anna's efforts were hopeless. Katherine and her friends, in their expensive designer swimming suits, looked to her like dolls on display. Isabelle's bright pink and white checkerboard one-piece cried out for attention. Lilith's forest green two-piece, which exposed her midriff, showed off her body too much considering the number of adults here. Katherine's blue and white bathing suit with a bow in the front, though more conservative, was too cute.

When they got to the pool, Tessa decided not to put on a bathing suit. Keeping up with these girls would be too tiresome, and competing with them too boring. She kept what she had on, a light off-the-shoulder top and a soft, flowing skirt with a small floral print. Her clothes hung loosely on her body. "Like a bohemian," as her mother would say. That was how she normally dressed. Next to the dressy threesome, she looked strange and out of place.

No matter. The girls weren't much interested in her anyway. They had more pressing concerns on their minds. Whenever Anthony or Brandon came near, Lilith and Isabelle would become self-conscious. They would talk just a bit louder, and laugh just a bit harder. They shifted their bodies this way and that way while trying hard to act natural. Tessa felt embarrassed for them, the way they acted. Meanwhile, Katherine paid no attention to Anthony and Brandon. She was too busy trying to please her friends, following them around and laughing at their every joke.

Tessa stayed with them only to please Anna. Once outside, Katherine and her friends decided to lounge by the pool, preferring not to get their hair wet. They began blathering on about the recent trips they had taken on holiday and the grand places where their classmates were spending their summers. Next to them, Tessa lay on a lounge chair and pretended to be asleep. She had no idea who or what they were talking about, and they didn't try to talk to her or ask her anything. That was all right. She never enjoyed crowds and she didn't like talking. All was fine as long as everyone left her alone. She closed her eyes and let her mind wander. The warmth of the summer sun soothed her. The voices of everyone around her became background noises. In the heat, her surroundings faded from her consciousness and she drifted off into sleep.

A loud splash jolted her awake. Screechy yells and screams followed. Startled by the commotion, Tessa woke up just in time to see Anthony swim his last lap.

While she dozed off, Anthony had decided to take a swim. As he stood on the edge of the pool, Katherine's friends took notice of the young man whose golden hair shone in the sun. His tall, toned physique was as beautiful as if Adonis had come to life. They knew his record as a swimming champion, and he didn't disappoint. He dove in and swam several laps with flying speed. Lilith and Isabelle screamed in delight, cheering him on.

As he climbed out of the pool, his body still halfway in the water, he turned to the girls. Seeing them watching him, he pulled himself all the way out, waved, and walked to the other side of the pool to join Brandon.

Afterward, Katherine's friends would not stop talking about him.

"He's such a dream!" Lilith swooned. "Katherine, do you know if he has a girlfriend?"

"I don't think so," Katherine said. "If he does, she can't be that important because he hasn't introduced her to the family."

"He's so good-looking, and such an amazing athlete." Isabelle stole glances at Anthony while pretending she wasn't staring at the same time. "Katherine, can't you get him to come over and talk to us? Oh no. Wait! Don't do that. If he comes over, I won't know what to say to him. I'll make a fool of myself!"

Lying on her back with her hands clasped behind her head, Tessa stared up at the sky. She thought she would go crazy if she had to listen to any more of this. They sounded like all the silly women who fancied her father, the ones who shamelessly schemed to meet him and sought his attention. At least her father was one of the most admired actors in the West End. What were these girls fawning over? She glanced at Anthony, this man-child who got all riled up over flowers in the rose garden. She had seen so many similarly good-looking young men come and go in the London theaters. There were plenty of them everywhere. Why all the fuss? Katherine and her friends were laughably shallow.

Over by the gazebo, Alexander and Robbie were playing marbles. They had finally gotten out of the water. She decided to get up and join them.

Anthony dried himself with a towel and sat down next to Brandon, who was reading a magazine on a lounge chair near the ladies at the patio table.

"She doesn't seem to mix well with the girls." Anthony overheard his mother say behind him. He looked across the pool. Tessa had left the girls to join Alexander and Robbie.

"Maybe she's a late bloomer," Anna said.

"Perhaps the other girls are a little more mature," said Mrs. Lowe. "Give her time. She'll lose interest in playing games with children soon enough."

"I'm not sure it'll be that simple." Sophia said. "She's different from what I expected."

His mother sounded slightly distressed. He looked over at Tessa again. She had just said something that made Alexander and Robbie laugh. She sure was having fun being with the younger kids.

“How’d she come to live with you anyway?” Mrs. Lowe asked.

“It’s a long story. It goes back many years, starting with Tessa’s mother,” Sophia said.

The mention of what happened to Tessa’s mother roused Anthony’s curiosity. No one ever told him the whole story about Juliet and why she left. Vaguely, he got the impression that she left under a cloud of disgrace, but a scandal that happened more than a decade before he was born didn’t interest him and he never thought to ask anyone about it. With Tessa living with them now, though, he had begun to wonder. Discreetly, he turned toward his mother to hear what she was saying.

Sophia put down her glass of iced tea. “Tessa’s mother, Juliet, grew up with William and Leon.”

“And Lex, Leon’s older brother,” Anna said.

“That’s right. Lex too. And their cousin Anthony Browning. Anthony’s mother was William’s aunt. She gave Juliet’s mother a job as her personal maid when Juliet’s father died from measles. Juliet was still a baby back then. The Brownings treated them like family and Juliet grew up with the boys. William said she was a precocious child. Outgoing. Always knew the right things to say. Everybody adored her. But the good times didn’t last.” Sophia stopped. Mrs. Lowe leaned closer to the table, waiting for her to go on.

“When Juliet was fifteen, Mrs. Browning and Anthony died in a car accident,” Sophia said. “Juliet’s mother was in the car with them and she died too.”

“My goodness.” Mrs. Lowe put her hand to her mouth.

This was news to Anthony. He didn’t know Juliet’s mother had died in that same car accident.

“It was a sad time for everyone. Juliet became an orphan. In the grieving process, Mr. Browning adopted Juliet because she had no place to go. It was the only good thing that came out of that tragedy.”

Interesting, Anthony thought. So that was how Juliet became part of the family.

“Until Dean came along,” Anna said.

“Yes. Dean Graham. Tessa’s father,” Sophia said.

“Dean Graham? The British actor? Dean Graham is Tessa’s father?”

Anna nodded. “It was big scandal back then.”

“Why? What happened?”

Sophia shook her head lightly at Anna. “That was a long time ago. Old news. Not worth bringing up anymore.” She turned around and signaled their housekeeper to give them another round of drinks. The other two women took the hint and dropped the subject.

Anthony shifted back toward the pool. Too bad his mother decided not to go on. He wanted to know what happened too.

“Look at her,” Mrs. Lowe said while watching Tessa. “What a remarkable resemblance between her and her father.”

He glanced at Tessa. For a kid, her expressions were hard to read. He couldn’t tell just by looking at her what she was thinking. When she smiled, there always seemed to be layers of meaning behind her smile. He wondered if she had picked up some of her father’s acting habits.

“I’m a huge fan of Dean Graham,” Mrs. Lowe continued. “I saw him in *Henry V* on stage when I went to London four years ago. He’s an amazing Shakespearean actor.”

“Yes. He made quite a name for himself after he married Juliet. Anyway, after they met, Juliet left with him for London and that was where Tessa was born. With the way the war’s going, William has been worried about them. He went to London last month and invited them all to come back to America, but Juliet and Dean decided to stay. They did agree it’d be best for Tessa to go away until they’re sure England is safe.”

“It hasn’t been easy for you, has it?” Anna said.

Sophia shook her head. “No. She’s not an easy child. I had hoped it would be like having a daughter in the house. It’s been so quiet since Anthony went off to college. I thought she and I could do a lot of things together. Go out for tea and shopping. I wanted to bring her into the Junior League. But,” Sophia paused, trying to find the right words, “Tessa has other interests.”

Other interests? Anthony thought. What other interests could she possibly have that she had to turn down his mother’s good intentions? She was a young teenager, and his mother wanted to make her feel at home with them. If he were living in someone else’s home, he would be certain to make a sincere effort to show his appreciation.

“Leon was thrilled when he heard Tessa was coming. He thought she’d be a mini-Juliet and it would be like old times for him again,” Anna said. “He was surprised at how quiet and aloof she is. She’s nothing like how he remembered Juliet. Tessa’s more like her father.”

“No matter. She’s here now, and William and I intend to do everything we can for her. It’s harder on her than on anyone. She’s in a new country. She’s far away from her parents. England might be attacked and her parents might be in danger. It’s a lot to take for a fourteen-year-old.”

Anthony looked toward Tessa one more time. Katherine had now joined her and the younger boys. At least Katherine knew how to be nice. Since Aunt Anna and Mrs. Lowe said Tessa was immature, maybe he should try to be a good role model to her like he was with Katherine and Alexander. Give her some guidance now and then. Maybe that would make things easier for his mother.

“Tessa, can we talk?” Katherine approached her, her voice unduly warm and inviting.

“Certainly,” Tessa said. Mistaking Katherine’s warmth as an attempt to befriend her, she tried to be amiable in return. “What about?”

“My mother and Aunt Sophia said you’ll be coming to my school in the fall.”

“I suppose. If that’s what they decided.”

"St. Mary's is a great place. The daughters of all the important people in Chicago go there."

Tessa didn't say anything. She didn't like the tone of Katherine's voice. It sounded too snobbish for her taste.

"Everyone at school likes Lilith and Isabelle." Katherine turned to her friends, her eyes full of admiration. "Lilith's father is a senator. Isabelle's family owns the biggest furniture production company in Illinois."

"How very nice."

"They really like Anthony." She sidled up to Tessa and lowered her voice. Tessa wasn't sure what all this had to do with her.

"They want to know if you can invite them over whenever Anthony's home."

For a minute, Tessa thought she had heard wrong, but Katherine was serious. "If you do that, they'll appreciate you and we can become good friends with them."

Tessa looked toward Lilith and Isabelle. They were smiling at her like they were her best friends.

"No."

Katherine stared at her, speechless. No one ever said no to Lilith and Isabelle. "Tessa, please! Do it as a favor to me?"

"I am sorry. I cannot help you with anything this ridiculous." Tessa got up and walked back into the house. At her abrupt departure, Alexander and Robbie stopped their game and made a face at each other. Katherine returned to the older girls, miffed.

"Oh, that's not good," Sophia said.

Anthony looked up and followed the direction of his mother's eyes. Across the pool, Tessa stood up and went back into the house, leaving poor Katherine looking upset and rejected.

“Anthony,” she called out to her son, who was sitting with Brandon near them by the pool. “Could you please go check on Tessa? I think she's upset.”

“Sure, Mother.” He grabbed his shorts and shirt from the lounge chair behind him and threw them on. His shirt still unbuttoned, he went inside the house and saw Tessa heading out the front door. Quickly, he went after her. In the circular driveway in front of their house, Tessa mounted a bike, getting ready to leave.

"Tessa!" he yelled out to her. She halted.

“Is everything okay?” He ran up to her, his voice genuinely concerned.

“Yes. Everything's fine. Why?”

“Mother thought you looked upset.”

"No. I'm fine." She blinked and looked blankly back at him. He couldn't tell if she was happy or troubled.

“Where are you going?”

"I'm heading out."

“You can't leave. This party was planned for you.”

“Was it now, really?” She gave him a sarcastic smile. “I thought it was planned for you to show off.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Don't deny it, swimming champ.” She eyed his open shirt. “You want everyone to cheer and rave about how good you are.” Her smile widened with a spark of mischief in her eyes.

"I do not," he said. “And you can't talk to me that way.”

“Why not?”

“Because it's rude. And because... because I'm older than you and you should do what I tell you.”

She laughed. “That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. How old do you think you are?”

He stood there, lost for words. His face turned several shades of red.

“Don’t pull rank with me.” She stopped laughing. “I’m not a little child. I don’t have to listen to you.” She stared him in the eyes. For the first time since they met, he heard vulnerability in her voice. She sounded like someone all alone, fighting against the whole world.

“I…” He didn’t know what to say. He didn’t mean to upset her.

Before he could respond, her demeanor changed again and her mischievous smile returned. “By the way, you look funny when you’re all riled up.”

Her rapid change of moods left him dumbfounded.

“Bye!” She rolled away before he could answer. He watched her bike go down the driveway until she disappeared out of his sight. He had never met any girl so rude and arrogant, and so difficult to handle. The thought of being in the same house with her all summer long was starting to give him a headache.



Chapter 3

Tessa pedaled her bike faster and faster until she reached maximum speed. She wanted the wind to blow away everything unpleasant around her. She pedaled until her legs burned. When she came to a small beach by the shore of the lake, she slowed down and coasted along the path.

She got off her bike and rolled it to the side of the road. Alone, she walked to a secluded spot on the beach where she could hide under the trees. She had discovered this place two weeks ago. Here, she could enjoy her solitude.

Sunlight glittered across the expanse of Lake Michigan. She had never seen a lake this large and wide. It went out to the horizon like the ocean. She wished it really were the ocean, and the sailboats out there could take her home.

She wondered what her parents and friends were doing back in London. Normally, the theater season would end now and summer training would begin. The summer training programs always brought in new young aspiring actors and actresses to her father's theater troupe. When the school term ended, they would invite her and other sons and daughters of the troupe's members to join them for parties. They did so partly in the hope of gaining inside knowledge about the troupe members, and partly to curry favor with influential actors and directors. She didn't mind them though. Because of them, she and her friends often got to spend time at the homes of young actors, artists, and musicians. Their creative minds fascinated her.

If she could, she would go back to all of them without a second thought. She feared what could happen to them and wished she could be there with them. Every day, the newspapers brought more dreadful news about the war and more photos of places under attack. She told no one about her nightmares of her parents trapped in London facing a row of German tanks.

Everyone treated her like a child. No one would talk honestly about the war with her. Her mother never mentioned the war in her letters and telegrams. The Ardleys and the Caldwells avoided the subject around her. Her father was the only one who was forthright with her. In his last letter, he admitted it might be a long while before she could go home.

Alone, she lost track of time. She didn't want to return to the Ardleys' house. It wasn't that she was ungrateful. Aunt Sophia and Uncle William had tried hard to make her feel welcome and so did the Caldwells, but their lives were so different from hers. She missed following her father to rehearsals and watching him act on stage. She missed going to the hospital with her mother and visiting her patients. Her mother had a gift for making people happy. She could magically cheer up even the saddest and most decrepit people with ease. Too bad that gift didn't pass on to her daughter. Tessa was never very good at talking to people.

The sun began to descend and the sky turned to a luminescent yellow and gray hue. She felt someone approaching her. It was Uncle William.

“Beautiful sunset, isn’t it?” He sat down next to her.

“How’d you find me?”

“You forget I’ve lived in this area for many years. There’s no corner within a ten-mile radius of where we live that I don’t know.”

She turned to stare out at the lake again.

“But, you are your mother’s daughter. Juliet used to come here too when she wanted to be alone. Especially after your grandmother and Anthony died.”

How strange to hear him talk about her mother. Until a month ago, she had never heard of the Ardleys or the Caldwells. She found out her mother was part of their families only when her parents told her they were sending her to Chicago, and it was only now that she realized her mother had once been very close to them. They knew things about her mother she had never known before.

“Why didn’t you ever contact or visit us? Why didn’t Mother ever speak of you?”

“That was my fault,” William said with an apologetic smile. “I take full responsibility for that. I should’ve reached out much sooner.”

She waited for him to explain.

“Did your mother ever tell you? When she and your father met, it was a huge scandal in Chicago.”

“No. I don’t know anything about what happened in Chicago. I know there was a scandal with an actress. It’s still a scandal. She tells lies about my mother in the papers all the time.”

“Alina Fey.”

“You know about her?”

William nodded. “Is she still going around saying Juliet stole your father away from her?”

Tessa wrapped her arms around her legs and looked down.

“Your father and she were together once. She brought him out of obscurity. She was already an established actress on Broadway when they met. Your father

was a young actor starting out. It didn't last because she held that over him like he owed her. Maybe you're too young to understand."

"I understand," she mumbled. "But that was a long time ago. She still says a lot of vile things about Mother in magazines and people believe her. She does it to get attention. She wants people to feel sorry for her."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"People think Mother is a shameless woman. A temptress. And she can't defend herself because she isn't famous. No one ever asked for her side of the story. It's so unfair."

His voice softened. "Did your parents ever tell you how they met?"

"They met and fell in love when Father was on tour in Chicago. People thought he and Alina Fey were engaged because his troupe spread that rumor, but they were not. Mother and Father eloped to get away to start over in London."

"That was true. But they left to get away from my family too."

"Why?" She couldn't see what would make her mother turn her back on the Ardleys.

"Your parents met because my family was a patron for your father's troupe at the time. In fact, my mother was the one who brought them on tour to Chicago. She didn't have any daughters or nieces, so she took Juliet with her to all the social receptions for promoting their shows, and,"—he rubbed his nose, hiding a smirk—"that was how all the troubles started. Juliet and Dean fell in love."

"But why did she have to leave your family?"

"Because your father's breakup with Alina Fey and your mother being the other woman drew our family into the scandal. Alina Fey wouldn't stop talking to the press about it. My mother was very sensitive about our family's good name. She demanded Juliet break things off with your father. Instead, they eloped."

Tessa listened, trying to absorb all she heard. Her mother had never told her anything about this. "Mother said she had no other relatives after Grandma died. I always thought the Brownings were just people Grandma worked for. They

didn't even tell me Mr. Browning had adopted her until they told me they wanted me to come to Chicago. Why didn't Mother ever talk about any of you?"

"Maybe she felt bad for leaving us the way she did. Some people thought she was ungrateful. I think she didn't want to bring any more scandal to our family. In any case, Leon and I were very sad when she left. She was practically a sister to us. But my mother was furious with her and there wasn't much we could do."

"What about Mr. Browning? Why didn't he do anything to help her?"

"He adopted her, but my mother was the one who took her under her wing. She wanted to turn Juliet into a lady. People warned her back then. They said a maid's daughter couldn't be trusted. My mother meant to prove them wrong. Of course, when the scandal broke, everyone who'd warned her was delighted to see things turn out that way. My mother felt humiliated." He sighed. "Anyway, Charles Browning worked for my father. He owed his career to my parents. He wasn't in a position to cross my mother. Besides, your mother was an adult by then. She made the decision to elope. None of us could've stopped her from doing what she wanted."

Tessa never knew so many people had opposed her mother. Feeling defensive, she wrapped her arms tighter around her legs and held up her head. "She loves my father."

William nodded. "My mother never forgave Juliet, not that there was anything to forgive. Juliet followed her heart. Later on, the scandal died down, but my mother's health started failing. I couldn't risk upsetting her to reach out to your parents. When she finally passed away, so much time had passed, I didn't know if Juliet would want to hear from us. I didn't know if she would ever forgive us."

Tessa thought for a while, then looked up with a bright smile. "There's nothing to forgive."

He breathed a sigh of relief. "Your Aunt Sophia, and Leon and Anna, they mean well." He leaned back on his elbows and stretched out his legs. She had discovered that her Uncle William, patriarch of one of Chicago's oldest and wealthiest families, was at heart a mellow man who eschewed formalities whenever he was out of public sight. "When you get to know them better, you'll find out for yourself they are kind, wonderful people."

“I know. I like Alexander. He’s a fun child.”

“But not Katherine?”

She hesitated. “I don’t dislike her... We’re very different, that’s all.”

They watched the sunset in silence. The beach was now empty and there were only the sounds of waves. A balmy breeze blew past them as the sun continued to descend and the evening twilight overtook the sky.

“Katherine’s friends,” Tessa said out of nowhere, “they like Anthony.” She looked at William. “They want me to invite them over all the time so they can be around Anthony.”

He looked back at her, and they both broke into laughter.

“You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to,” he said.

She relaxed and looked out to the lake again. She wondered how her mother felt about all that had happened between her and the Ardleys. Did she regret the lost time with Uncle William and Uncle Leon too? Did she feel the Ardleys let her down? Did she regret all these years when they had been so out of touch?

And if she did, then perhaps it was a good thing that she herself had come to Chicago. For all her misgivings about leaving London, maybe her being here could help everyone come together again.

William got up from the ground and offered her his hands. “Come on. I’ll drive you home.” She took them and let him pull her up. Together, they walked back to her bike and his car, ready to go home.

- End of excerpt.