

What if I Loved You?

By

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Pearl Harbor Dec 6, 1941

The floors of the hospital were painted red with blood. The cries of the fallen echoed down the hall. The nurses struggled to keep their balance on the slippery tile as they wheeled another soldier to the surgical room.

“There’s no more room in here,” the doctor hollered as they pulled him in. “Fill all the surfaces.”

The nurses turned the cart around in a blur of panic. Another blast could be heard outside, and another mess of soldiers began to run towards the hospital, and another mess of men were dying too fast to help. The nurses pulled him into a room across the hall and hoisted him onto a cleared off counter top. They left him there bleeding.

It was a minute or two before another panicked doctor ran to his side. The right side of his face had a grotesque mask of blood covering it, and his blonde hair was now a shade of red. The doctor pulled up the sailor’s shirt, searching for

an injury. A sad and overwhelmed look came over his face and he called a nurse over.

“He’s got internal bleeding,” the doctor said, pointing out the black spots covering the sailor’s body, “We’re going to have to operate.”

The nurse wiped the blood off her hands. “I’m sorry, doctor, there’s no room in the operation room. All our surgeons are in an operation.” she said.

“This man is a priority, he can live.” The doctor replied, exasperated. “Make sure you mark him as a priority.”

Before she could say anything more, the doctor ran off to help another wounded sailor. The nurse was left there. With a shaky hand, she gently wiped the hair off of his forehead spattered with a mix of blood and sweat, and on his forehead she marked a “P” with the lipstick she pulled out of her pocket.

“You’re going to be okay.” She said and ran off in the direction of another wounded man.

The man, lying on the counter, watched as soldiers and sailors poured into the hospital. Nurses ran furiously across the room, helping as many as possible. Some men were too far gone and collapsed onto the floor in a heap of death, others rushed to opened areas and called in vain for help. The devastation piled itself into the room and filled the air.

There was a man lying on a table nearby, his stomach loosing blood quickly. The man wore the insignia of a navy corpsman. His hands clenched at his sides as he cried in pain.

A nurse ran to the corps side and ripped open his shirt, he let out another cry of pain. She wiped the blood from his stomach to find the bullet hole. Below his ribs, on the right side of his body, there was a small hole gushing the life from his body.

“I need forceps!” The nurse called as she pulled her scarf off her neck and pressed it against the man’s wound. Another nurse ran to her with a small pair of medical pliers, she thrust it to her with outstretched hands as she ran across the room to a man falling with a friend in his hands.

The corpsman’s nurse removed the scarf from his wound. The man watching turned his face away feeling as he heard the screams of pain from the nurse’s patient. He felt himself losing life, a cold sweat began to collect on his neck, a lightheaded feeling filled his head. It wouldn’t be long now.

The cries of the corpsman were drowned out as another flood of men push into the hospital. Through the door he could see the hall filling with soldiers. A large doctor ran down the hall pushing men out of the way.

“We need a path!” The doctor cried “Make way, we need a path.”

The man looked out the window across the room. The skies were filled with smoke, and tormented by the enemy. The music of fear fell from the plane infested clouds. So many men were dying, too many men.

The large doctor tumbled into the room, tripping over the dead and the men too far gone. The nurse beside the corpsman cried to the doctor.

“He’s losing too much blood, we need to get him more now, or he’ll die.”

“He’s not going to make it.” The doctor said.

The nurse pressed harder on the wound, trying to save as much blood as possible. “Yes, he can make it. We just need to get him blood. Doctor, he can make it.” She said. She lightly slapped the corpsman’s face, trying to keep him conscious. She search for a dog tag around his neck. The tag read “B negative”

“B, negative!” she cried. The Nurse bent her head back in frustration.

“We don’t have B negative.” The doctor said.

“I have B negative.” The man lying on the countertop said, breathing hard. The doctor turned to him with a quizzical look. The man repeated it, “I have B negative. Use mine.”

“You won’t survive if you lose any more blood.” The doctor said.

“I know.”

The doctor looked at him as he had lost his mind. “You might have a chance if you get into surgery, keep your blood.”

The doctor turned back to the nurse and gave her instructions to help another soldier. The man reached out his hand, taking all his energy, and clenched it around the doctor’s wrist. “Use my blood! That man is going to survive, I am not. I have blood to give, and he needs it. Take my blood.”

Chapter 1

January 1, 1942

Some said she was too young to die alongside her fiancé, and a girl her age would learn to live again. She didn't believe it. No woman would after losing the one person who actually cared about her. All her heart had gone with him, and all that was left were the roots of something left to grow back.

Evelyn was the only person in white at the funeral. She received scowls from those he didn't know Ricky well enough to understand. She wore his large button up shirt, a long winter jacket, and a string of pearls around her neck. She wore a sad rose color on her lips and mourned without tears.

There were bags beneath her brown eyes. She was tired, overwhelmed. Her arms were folded across her chest as they lowered him into the ground. The earth swallowed all that was left of her life and she was alone.

A general, whom she didn't care enough about to remember his name, presented her with a flag. He said some brief words concerning the sorrow he felt about losing such an honorable man. She took the flag without looking at it and folded it under her arm.

Any who did not know her would have thought she did not love this man at all, for her eyes were dry, she had said nothing at his wake, and she now carried his flag with such a disinterest that many would have thought it dishonorable.

She stood motionless at the edge of his grave as his friends and family gave her their condolences. A soldier whom she didn't know hugged her tightly. An old man- probably from Ricky's church- told her he would pray for her. Several of his friends asked if she needed help with anything, as if trying to move on with life so soon.

After some time, the small crowd dispersed and went their different ways, and Evelyn was left alone. The cold clawed at her throat and a loud sob escaped from her lips. The suppressed tears began to run down her cheeks as her legs lost their strength. She lay there in the snow sobbing in a pitiful, broken, mess.

She stayed there for some time, the sun began to drop behind the skyline of New York city. Finally, after they crying had slowed, she pulled herself to her feet and began to make her way home. Beneath the street lights walked the lifeless and numb creature.

By the time she had reached her home, the lights of the city were high and bright. The music of the night began. Evelyn dragged herself to her bedroom and managed to change out of the funeral clothes, which she placed in a chest at the end of her bed, along with the pearls around her neck and the lipstick she had been wearing. She changed into a long, baggy shirt that had belonged to Ricky.

Evelyn went through the house cleaning and straightening things. She leveled the picture of Ricky and herself, which hung above her living room couch. She straightened the cushions, and washed the dishes. She swept the floor and made the bed. When all these were done, she looked at the clock, which

she had previously dusted, and saw that it had only been half an hour.

“How am I going to live without you, Ricky?” She whispered, as a silent tear raced down her cheek. There would never be enough chores to keep him from her mind. She wrapped herself in a blanket and curled up into a ball upon the bed, breathing slowly and listening to the minutes pass.

On the floor, beside the flag she had thrown there, was a card written from her mother. When she had opened it, she found that it was nothing more than another disappointment from another person.

The card read “My daughter, I’m sorry I won’t be able to make it to your Richard’s funeral. I’m expected at another engagement that same day. I’ll be sure to stop by next time I’m in town though. Again, I’m sorry about Richard.”

She threw the card on the floor and left it there, soaking in its selfishness.

Beneath the card was a letter from a nameless someone who had taken it into their heart to thank Evelyn for her Fiancé’s kindness. The envelope had no return address and was written to a Mrs. Ricky Gillmore. Nevertheless, Evelyn had opened the letter, knowing that it was for her although it wasn’t her name on the envelope.

“Dear Mrs. Gillmore,” It began. “I can’t begin to thank you enough for the sacrifice you have made for this country. Your husband was a good and noble man, who gave his life to save me. It should have been me who died, not him.

He was kind and gracious, I can only thank you for the goodness that he

showed. And pray that you find some comfort, knowing that he didn't die in vain."

That was all it said, there was no name and no signature. In a bitter fit, Evelyn had thrown it on the floor, swearing at it profusely. It stayed there, and Evelyn could see it from where she lay on the bed. It stared at her with the most foul, tormenting look.

For a long while, Evelyn contemplated what to do with the letter. She considered trying to find the man who sent it, and telling him to go to hell, and that no amount of thanks could justify that he had lived and Ricky had not. She thought of perhaps burning the letter and never thinking of this man again. Finally she decided to lock the letter in the chest at the end of her bed, along with anything else related to her dear fiancé—except her mother's card, which she threw away without a second thought.

She pulled herself off the bed and knelt beside the chest of memories. She opened up the heavy top, her fingers ran over the delicate things inside. On the top were the clothes she had worn to his funeral, things she would rather never have to wear again. Beneath that there were pictures of the two of them, becoming best friends, falling in love, learning to compromise. Beneath the pictures, at the very bottom of the chest, she had placed the small black box, which held the simple engagement ring she had sworn not to remove until the day they married.

The truth is that everything should have been in the chest, because her

whole world reminded her of him. Each little thing reminded her of his handsome brown eyes, his dark and perpetually messy hair, and the sweet things he used to say when he knew she was angry.

Evelyn stood up, letting the top of the chest fall shut. She walked to her window and sat on the sill. Her apartment was on the ninth floor, she could see the city lights for miles. Evelyn pulled her bare feet up and rested her head against the window pane. She watched the world so many stories below walking and moving.

From the inside looking out, the world moved fast like a bright and lit up river. It never stopped and never slowed down, there was no room to breathe and no place to rest. But from the outside looking in, Evelyn's little world was a cage, there was no sunlight and no happiness.

Evelyn stayed this way, looking out at the world, until she fell asleep. Her blanket fell from her lap and her breath fogged the window pane. She was silent and almost dead looking. Her pulse was soft and slow.

Often, before he had gone to war, Ricky had said that she glowed. He used to tell her that there was a small sun living inside her heart, and that if he could only understand how it had gotten there, he would understand the meaning of life. Evelyn had no glow now, instead she was pale and lost within herself.

Outside, the world was alive and moving fast. Passing her by.

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Jan 2, 1942

Walker Galliano had nothing left of ambition. No hope, no dream, no passion. He allowed himself to become a ghost in his New York apartment. It was only because of his mother's occasional visits that anyone might know he still lived there at all.

This particular day of nothingness was the same as any other. He woke to the sound of New York life, and rolled out of his bed onto the floor. He strolled in a stupor to the bathroom, his face in the mirror was a familiar villain. He avoided glancing at himself in the eyes as he took off his shirt. On his bronzed body, beneath his right ribs, was a small scar which had barely healed over. Walker dressed the wound with confident hands, familiar with what he was doing.

Slowly and gently, he pulled his shirt back over his body and over his bandages. He washed his hands off in the sink and combed back his unwashed hair that had grown long over the past month.

Walker wandered into his living room to a floor littered with crumpled papers, beer bottles, and newspapers-these of which were possibly his only liaison to the world outside. On the table there was a messy pile of books, their bindings were not creased, their pages were unread, and each of them had a good half-inch of dust lying on them. They were there only as a reminder of something forgotten and unfinished.

On a chair in the corner there was a large pile of newspaper clippings, their headlines reported the war effort, the sacrifice made by certain soldiers, and the lives of the people attempting to move on. Near the bottom of this pile, there was one particular headline that read "Valiant soldier gives his life to save a comrade!" This clipping was crumpled and worn, and in certain places, if you looked close enough, you would see the faded marks where tears had wetted the page.

Walker collapsed on the couch across from the table, he pulled his feet up and attempted to go into a coma. His weighted eyes dropped slowly as the harsh winter light filtered into the room through the window. The light stopped directly in his eyes telling him to wake up. It was at this moment, when he was about to get up and pull the shades, that a knock was heard at the door.

Walker opened one eye, he looked towards the hall, there was another knock at the door. *Go away...please.* The knock stayed and was quite persistent until there was a long pause. Walker rolled to his side, thinking whoever it was had given up, then he heard the loud, booming voice that accompanied the knock.

"Walker! Let your Momma inside!"

Walker groaned as he pulled himself up. There were several more knocks and a demand to be let in after each one before he managed to unbolt his heavy front door. There in the doorway, frowning with a scowl on her face, stood a crooked little woman. She had graying hair and jolly, laughing eyes, although

she seemed to be quite distressed at the moment.

The little old woman marched herself into his apartment without being asked in. She took off her thick winter jacket and pulled off her winter boots without saying a word to her host. It wasn't until she had walked herself right into the kitchen and began cleaning that the two said a word to each other.

"Mom-"

"Momma." The old woman corrected him.

"Momma, what are you doing?" Walker asked her. The woman was washing the pile of dirty dishes that sat upon the counter.

"I'm cleaning." She replied with a heavy Italian accent, which she never seemed to be able to shake off no matter how often she spoke English. "What the matter with that?"

"It's not your house, mom," he said, sitting down at the table, which was covered with trash.

"Momma." She corrected him again. Her son watched her helplessly, knowing that she would continue, no matter what he said. "It doesn't matter if it's my house, it's my little boy and he's living in a mess."

Walker gave up, he watched the wrinkled old lady wash the dishes, sweep the floor, clear the table, and finally begin to make him food. She pulled a pan from inside his stove, which he apparently had no better use for other than storage. She greased the pan and broke two eggs, which she somehow managed to find inside the filthy fridge. Within ten minutes the strange little woman had

pulled together a small breakfast for her son. She placed the plate in front of him and watched him inhale it as if he hadn't eaten for weeks.

It was a sad scene, the mother watching the son she rarely ever saw. She sat across from him with a sad sort of smile, which was an improvement from the scowl she had worn earlier. Walker finished his eggs and glanced up across the table to see his mother, it was a hollow glance without understanding.

"Momma, why are you here?" he asked after a long silence between the two of them.

"What? A momma can't come to see her son?" he asked with a obviously forced laugh.

"Momma. Really," he said. His mother stood up and took the place from in front of him. She carried it to the sink and began to wash it.

"You are just like a child," She began, "you keep saying that you have forever to do things, so you wait. You can't wait anymore, walker, you need to do the things you need to do."

"Like what momma?" he asked standing up. He walked towards her and took the plate from her hands. "Like the dishes, momma? Like my laundry?"

"Yes. Just like your dishes and your laundry." she said in an exasperated tone. She shuffled off into the living room. Walker followed her, kicking the piles of debris out of his way. He found her folding the clothes from the floor and neatly piling them onto the couch. He took her hands and stared intently at her until she finally sat down on and let her hands flop into her lap.

“Mom-”

“Momma.”

“Momma, what is the use? What are you trying to do?” he asked, though his voice was a bit softer than before. He sat down next to her trying to understand why she was so upset.

Her gray hair sat behind her ears, she had bags under her eyes, her callused hands were folded on her lap. It was a long while before walker realized that the little old lady, who cared so deeply about him, had tears forming in her eyes.

“Momma,” he turned her face towards himself “Why are you crying?”

His mother dropped her face away and wiped a tear. As she turned back towards she put a soft hand against his face, as if trying to understand something. “My happiest day was when you came home.” She paused before continuing, “But now my little boy never leaves his home, he never comes to see his momma, or his papa, any more. Walker, what happened to you? What happened to everything you wanted to do?”

“Like what, momma?” He asked.

“Like being a doctor? What happened to that?” She demanded suddenly.

“Momma, you know-” He began but was cut off again.

“Well, then what about a girl. I’m almost sixty and I don’t have no grandkids to love.” She stood back up and began cleaning again. She went to the pile of books on the table and began to dust them off with a shirt from the floor.

Walker didn't say anything, he simply let the silence between them sit, brooding.

"You're going to try to find someone. I don't wanna' hear you say no."

Walker began to protest but the spirited little woman interrupted, like she had a knack of doing. "You're going to start seeing girls, like you used to. It's time for you to live your life again. There is gonna' be no more of this sitting at home sleeping all your days away."

Walker made no attempt to argue, he had found that after years of fighting with this woman he would never win. His mother finished her dusting and promptly stomped off to the coat rack. She put on her coat and shoes and left without a goodbye. Leaving only a name and an address that she had scribbled on a piece of paper she had ripped out of one of the useless books lying on the table.

Chapter 2

April 10, 1942

Evelyn's head was filled with complaints as she walked down the street towards the Copacabana. The sky was low and thick with fog. The lights illuminated the evening air, the current of people moved down the side walk towards various destinations.

Cindy's long blonde hair bounced in her eyes as she turned around to face her friend. The red scarf she wore about her neck contrasted Evelyn's black dress. The two were a strange mix standing in the midst of the New York bustle.

"Evelyn, hurry up! We're going to miss the music." Cindy called to her friend, grabbing her by the hand and dragging her faster down the street. Evelyn wrenched free of the strong nurse and continued at her slow pace.

"We'll get there when we get there," she said. Cindy pursed her lips and let out a loud and unusually fake sigh. Evelyn rolled her eyes, speeding up to appease the impatient blonde. The two arrived at the door of the club, the music danced into the street to greet them. The light pouring through the door revealed the nicks and crannies of her reticence.

Through the door way a wave of energy hit the young girls. Couples danced on the floor in beautiful sporadic patterns. Young girls wore their hair in elaborate curls and down over their eyes, their knee length dresses spun out around them as their partners twirled them about. The band played lighthearted

upbeat music that should have made any girl seek a partner. Evelyn sought a bar side stool.

Before she had made it to her destination, Evelyn's arm was grasped tightly, spinning her around. Cindy made an annoyed face at her and cocked her head towards a group of dazzling young men in Army uniforms.

"There are cute guys here. At least try having a good time," she said as she released Evelyn's arm. Cindy turned and bounced off towards the dance floor where she, needless to say would find a man willing to try his luck with her.

Evelyn shook her head and headed back to the bar. She avoided eye contact with any of the military men who roamed about. Her eyes stayed fixed on her destination as she passed several men eyeing her with useless ambition. She reached the bar and sat down, her lips were pursed with a shade of disgust.

"What'll you have?" The bartender asked, leaning towards her. His dark curly hair was slicked back, allowing his ebony eyes to reach out to his young and beautiful costumer. Evelyn neither seemed to notice his attractiveness, nor would she have cared, her eyes were cast down at her purse as she thought up her drink of choice.

"Scotch," she said without looking up. She heard a group of giggling girls behind her, passing her, and heading towards the bathroom. She rolled her eyes at their juvenile prancing and laughing. They were much too fond of boys who wouldn't be there in the morning.

After a moment or two the tune of the music changed to an upbeat song that everyone seemed to know. Girls dragged their dates to the dance floor. Before long the floor was packed.

Beside her, where there had been an empty seat, a man sat down. Evelyn ignored him entirely until he rested his arm on the back of her chair, she smelled the odor of cigarettes from his clothing. Evelyn turned her head to look at him, his hair was cropped short, making his head look especially small. His beady eyes looked steadily at her. He wore an intense, hungry smile, and seemed to delight in the discomfort he gave her.

“Excuse me,” Evelyn leaned her elbow against the counter top and away from him. “Can you move your arm?”

She hadn’t the energy to be polite, her smile was a bit worn, and she had no intention of wasting it on someone whom she would never see again. The man removed his arm, but his eyes remained on her.

“Miss,” He paused to take a drink of the beer he had in his hand, “I don’t see you with a date. I was wondering if you were free to dance?”

Evelyn downed her scotch and requested another one from the bartender. Her patience was wearing thin and this man made it that much harder for her to justify leaving her home tonight. The music was a large and very loud presence bearing down on her.

“No,” she said to the man beside her.

“No, there’s no date? Or no, you won’t dance?” He asked, she noticed a

bit of attempted humor in his voice. She tapped her fingernails against the counter. *Click, click, click.*

“No. I don’t date. And no, I won’t dance with you,” she replied with in a harsh tone. Her hands wrapped around the drink the bartender had just placed in front of her. She let the cold glass numb her hands. Her neighbor was still sitting beside her, watching her.

“Listen,” he said politely, “ I’m not going to step on your feet, or ask you for your number, I just wanted to dance with you.”

He waited for a reply and when there was none, he stood from his seat and moved on to another girl. He wandered from seat to seat. Evelyn let out a loud sigh, and hung her head, a guilty feeling passed over her, she glanced over at the man wandering about. She considered taking him up on his offer, thinking maybe a dance wouldn’t hurt. She let the thought pass, the energy it took to be kind at this moment wasn’t worth it.

She thought back to times when she used to go out of her way to be kind. Days when she used to do things just to make certain people happy. She used to go out of her way to be kind to Cindy, going out with her to keep her from going home with men she didn’t know, and taking shifts at the hospital for her when she knew she had had a rough week. There was a time when she used to go out of her way to do things for Ricky, too. She closed her eyes tightly and thought of other things.

A beautiful woman in a polka-dotted dress passed behind her. Her black

hair streamed behind her as she flounced towards the doorway. Behind her walked an attractive young man, his white shirt was tucked into his slacks and he walked with his hands in his pockets. He looked as if he wanted to be there only as much as Evelyn did.

She felt a strange flutter inside her chest, she couldn't keep her eyes from this man. Discreetly, her eyes followed him to the doorway, where his beautiful date stopped and conversed with him for a short moment. She seemed to be waiting for a kiss that she wasn't going to get. She left when she noticed his date turn slowly and look intently at her.

Evelyn turned quickly and drank her scotch. She felt like a little school girl, developing such a feeling after a single glance. She felt tremors run through her body, and stood allowing them to shake out. Evelyn headed towards the restroom to escape the temptation to walk over and talk to him.

The tiled walls of the bathroom created an echo as Evelyn walked in. A group of young girls were standing around gossiping. They talked about their love interests and the romantic things they did with them. Evelyn smiled, it felt odd on her face. It was a distant smile that she only remembered doing at one point, and not actually how to do it.

She looked at herself in the mirror, there was a face she recognized as someone she had long ago left behind. She looked at herself smile, letting out a giggle, and lifted her hand to pull her hair behind her ear. She stopped her hand and examined the empty ring finger. She watched the happy girl in the mirror

slip away.

~*~

April 10, 1942

Walker fumbled with the food on his plate. The beat of the music pounded against his skin. His date, another one of his mother's attempted matches, sat across from him running her fingers through her raven hair, which offset the dark blue polka-dotted dress wrapped tightly around her.

"So, you were in the Navy?" she asked with a canary like voice. She cocked her shoulder up and flirtatiously flicked her hair away from her face, exposing her terribly pale neck.

A group of girls pranced by, giggling and twirling the hair. Some of them turned as they walked by, to eye the handsome soldier and his extravagant date. They would whispered to each other and then danced off to the restroom, like all girls are apt to do.

"Uh, yeah. I was a corpsman" walker said, he brushed it off in hopes that she might drop the subject. He had no such luck.

"Oh! So, you're a doctor?" she asked, letting her mouth hang lightly open. Her bright red lips made her skin look almost white, as if she had only ever known a life of night and champagne. She rested her head in her hands and chewed on her pinky finger.

"Not really." He took a bite of his food, "I'm a corpsman, we're supposed to save people, not fix them. That's the difference between a doctor and a

corpsman.”

Walker took a large sip of his brandy, dreaming up a scheme to disappear. His mother would have hell to pay for setting him up on yet another blind date. The girl laughed, flicking her hair back again.

“You soldiers have such a sense of humor,” she said. The band began a new tune, a familiar one to everyone besides Walker. The girl’s eyes widened and a long, red smile spread across her face. “I love this song! Dance with me!”

She held out her hand with begging eyes, such a joy seemed to wash over her, Walker hadn’t the heart to refuse. He reluctantly took her hand and led her to the dance floor. They stood waiting to catch the beat, then they began.

She danced a sloppy lindy hop, as he took all the steps with precision. He wrapped his arms around her waist with grace, leading her into a side by side step. She looked up at him, a grin was spread far across her face, Walker rolled his eyes with how easy it was to please her. He attempted to pull her out from their cuddle, but her wrists were loose and hard to lead. She stepped on his foot, tripped over her own, and fell into his arms. Ending their dance.

Her face was quite red when Walker stood her back up. She straightened her dress, flicking her hair out of her face as she was bumped by a dancing couple.

“Are you okay?” Walker asked. Even as much as this girl annoyed him, he didn’t have it in him to be cruel to her.

She nodded, laughing though her face had turned a deep shade of purple.

She recovered her wits and headed back to their table. Walker followed her, watching her collect her things and gather her jacket.

“I have to go home, Walker,” she said, her voice was suddenly serious. A relief swept over him.

“Are you sure?” He asked, muscling all his kindness out from inside him.

“Yes, I’ve got a lot to do tomorrow.” It was obvious she was quite embarrassed of her dancing mishap. Walker began to escort her to the door.

She sauntered off in front of him, perhaps in hopes of capturing his attention at least once before the night was out. She walked past the bar without looking over. Walker, however, did look over and saw a young woman turned away.

He saw her sadness written in the way she slouched over her drink. He saw the beauty of her in one glance. His body resisted his sense’s demands to turn her towards himself, so that he may see, just once, the radiance of the young girl.

He strolled past her nonchalantly. Walker’s insides were in panic, while his outside appeared calm and reserved. There was the strong smell of whisky in the air as he passed by her, the aroma followed him like a long lost friend.

On approaching the door, Walker stopped short of where his date waited. She presented herself one last time and apparently waited for a kiss. Walker felt eyes on his back, he ignored his acquaintance’s dark and pleading eyes. He slowly looked back towards the bar to see a young lady watching him.

It was perhaps the music which sang of love at first sight, or perhaps the drinks he had consumed that night, which urged him to go after her. The sight of the young girl sped his heart and nearly stopped his breath.

Walker offered his date a quick, apparently disappointing, hug. He wished her goodnight. He nearly shoved her through the door and spun around in the direction of the bar. Every fiber in his body told him not to lose this girl, every nerve in his brain told him that she was his life line. He desperately rushed towards the bar, every ounce of his sturdy posture and agility was lost by his love-sick blindness.

Walker reached the place where the young lady had been seated there was nothing but an empty glass of what looked like scotch. He scanned the tables around him, he watched the dance floor, and she was not there. She had disappeared. An angel without wings.

It was an indescribable heart break. The music stirred, laughter broke out here and there, and the night ran on as Walker left the Copacabana. He headed back to the small apartment he called home. Oddly enough, the New York streets were quiet, almost ghostly as if someone else was sharing the deep misunderstood pain that he felt on this night.

Chapter 3

New Year's Eve, 1943

A long year, and something more than that, had passed since Evelyn had felt the sort of lovely joy that she had felt in the Copacabana. She had lived each day by each day. She found no pleasure in going out, except for the hope that she might see that certain stranger again and bear the guilt that accompanied the happiness he had brought her. She never had seen that man again, but occasionally while walking the down town streets, she would feel a strange pull upon her, as if she were connected to someone passing by. This anything but numb feeling was enough to keep her hoping.

This particular evening, Evelyn had painted a light smile on her lips and found herself in a simple gown. She was satisfied with herself as she left the mirror to call a cab. As she headed down the stairs of her apartment building, her mind wandered to a place some years before, when Ricky had led her off to her first Navy new year's party...

"Ricky, are you sure I'm not too fancy?" she asked with her hair all up in curls. Her ankle peeked out from under her dress as she took a step. Ricky took her hand to steady her.

"Evelyn, really, you look beautiful. You always look beautiful." Ricky said, pulling her close to himself and kissing her on the forehead. He tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear and ran his finger gently down her jaw line.

“I wish you could stay. I hate this war for taking you from me.” Evelyn wrapped her arms tightly around him, in hopes of keeping him with her forever. If only she could have held him a bit longer...

Evelyn nearly tripped down the stairs as she reached the landing. There was a cab waiting to take her to the pier. It was a short ride guided by lights and distant music. Evelyn watched the city fall behind the cab they pulled into the harbor. The bay was nearly lit up, splashed with gold light from the cruise ship floating above. The ice in the water like plates of gold, drifted from place to place. Evelyn left the taxi driver with a small tip and climbed the stairs towards the lobby inside.

Waiters with trays of champagne and martini glasses walked about wearing white gloves and black vests. Sweet music played, filling the air with a sort of unexplainable ambition. There were countless nurses mixing among the young and fearless soldiers, they were a picture of naivety, and a memory that Evelyn had hardly lost.

Cindy spotted Evelyn from across the room, she beckon her over. She was talking with a couple of soldiers about her love of nursing, one was leaning his arm up against the wall behind her, while the other had his hands stuffed deep into his pockets.

“Evelyn!” Cindy wrapped her arms around her. “This is Danny, he works on the submarines as an engineer.” She pointed to the man leaning against the

wall, he nodded an informal hello. "And this is Charles. He is a sailor."

Charles took a hand out of his pocket to shake Evelyn's. He had a sweet smile that seemed quite shy. Cindy excused herself from the two men and pulled Evelyn aside.

"Charles was at Pearl Harbor," She nodded off in his direction,. "You should talk to him."

"Cindy, I don't really want to talk about that. I just want to have fun tonight." Evelyn headed off in the direction of the dance floor, a man met her half way. He had hair down over his eyes and smelled too deeply of cologne.

"Miss, can I dance with you?" he asked, politely. Evelyn smiled, relieved that Cindy couldn't come after her now.

"Sure." She took his hand and followed him to an empty space on the floor. The music changed its pace, it slowed to a stop and was replaced by a soft song. The man pulled her close and wrapped his arm around her waist. Something about the song was much too familiar, and the embrace far too gentle. Evelyn began to feel a discomfort creeping towards her as she recognized the song. She pulled away from her dance partner. "I'm sorry, I'm not feeling quite well."

She left him on the floor to find another partner. She found herself a chair and emptily sat down into it. Her plans of attempting to have fun were foiled, like she had known they would be all along. She waited for a waiter to come by and took a glass of champagne as he did, she attempted to sip it slowly.

The dance floor was several steps below the main level of the lobby. Behind her, or rather above her, she could over hear a ground of ladies speaking. One of these voices belonged to Cindy and was unfortunately the loudest of them all.

“...She keeps saying that she is moving on with her life, but she all she’s really doing is keeping herself tucked away in that apartment of hers.” Cindy said.

“It’s been two years since he died, and she still won’t go out with her friends. Well, except for you, Cindy. I mean, I’m still covering shifts for her sometimes when she’s having an emotional day.” Evelyn stopped herself from looking behind her to see which of her friends had said this.

“Ricky wouldn’t have wanted her to live her life like this. She-” Evelyn turned her head enough to see Cindy nudge the speaker and point in Evelyn’s direction, the group wandered away shamefully. Evelyn stayed at the table a moment longer. Her eyes began to gloss over as she fumbled through her purse for her flask.

“May I join you?” Charles had managed to approach the table without her realizing it. Evelyn nodded after taking a large gulp of whiskey. He sat down beside her, he leaned his head back against the wall. “Most of these people don’t even know,” He said.

“Know what?” she asked, offering him the flask, it seemed that he might need it as much as her. Charles took it willingly, taking a long sip.

“About the war. They barley know it’s happening. It’s like a heroic fairy tale to them.” He pointed to a group of young soldiers who looked barely nineteen. “Those men are probably dying to get into action. They don’t even know who they are yet, and they want to lose it already.”

Evelyn nodded in agreement. She didn’t have much to say, her mind began to wonder about the things that he knew. She began to wonder whether he had known Ricky, and whether he knew the man who Ricky had saved. She didn’t know whether to ask or to let it go.

“Did you know a Ricky Gilmore when you were in Pearl Harbor?” she asked, letting her curiosity get the better of her. Charles gave her a quizzical look. “Cindy told me you were at Pearl Harbor,” she explained.

“Oh,” Charles thought for a moment. “Yeah, I did. He sailed with me. Why?”

“He was my Fiancé,” she said, smiling a lopsided and somewhat sad smile. “Do you know anything about his death?”

“No, I’m sorry,” He answered. Charles handed her flask back to her and watched her take a long drink. Evelyn had grown to be slightly rude over the past year. She was often too tired to be polite, so she excused herself from the table and left Charles alone in a puzzled state. She left the warm air of the lobby and went out onto the balcony.

She stared out at the night sky. She thought of climbing over the edge and jumping off. She let the cold air numb her as she stared out at the stars. They

stared straight back at her. They seemed to pity her, and yet they were so far away, like every love she had ever known.

~x~

New Year's Eve, 1943

The dark blue of the water was filled with gold twinkling that stared up at Walker, who watched them intently, perhaps waiting for a sign. He leaned his arms against the railing, letting his throbbing head fall forward. The mindless noise of the ship was much too close to home, a home he would rather not remember.

A tall red headed woman left the lobby with two glasses of champagne, as she reached walker she handed him the fuller of the glasses. The lady mimicked his position by leaning over the rail, she cocked her head and rested it in her free hand. She was the picture of beauty, her silky hair sat in victory curls on her head, her delicate arms were covered by the longest white gloves. She took a thoughtful drink before she nudged her date in the shoulder.

"Walker, I'm sorry. You know I'm grateful that you let me come with you tonight, but I came so I could do two things, research my story for the paper, and have at least a little fun." Her voice was hard and established. "You should try to have some too." Walker turned his body to face her, keeping one arm rested on the rail. His voice had grown raspy, possibly from long periods of silence during which he was alone in his home, or the long hours he spent whispering to a grave. "Sherry, I shouldn't have even come tonight. This place is just a dump of

people who think they are heroes.”

He ran his fingers over the rail, feeling the rust on its underside. The music drifted here and there around him, but never quite touched him. Walker's eyes lifted from the water to Sherry, who shook her head and pulled a loose curl back behind her ear. She rolled her face towards him and leaned in until her shoulder met his, she left him with a small kiss on the cheek.

“These people are heroes, walker, or they will be.” She began to walk back inside but stopped herself again. “You’re the same man I wrote about in the papers. You’ve got nothing to regret.”

Sherry disappeared inside. Walker thought back on all the papers collecting dust in his apartment, of the articles about certain corpsmen and certain heroes. There had more than two years of dust upon them, and had just about as much use as his old Navy uniform. For a moment the world began to quiet, walker sighed a deep breath and turned to follow his date.

Inside the lobby, walker shadowed his eyes against the blaring light, and the roar of the music. He searched the room for the young reporter he had brought that night. Across the room, just below where he had mistaken a woman for his date, there was a man walker recognized from some years before.

Walker's heart began to race. There was a force inside him that seemed to stop his breath. Every ounce of himself was racing, yet so still and petrified. Beside the old acquaintance, a rugged memory, sat a lady. She had a bold face, brave, and strong, yet desperate for something. She had an aura of grace, and

some magnetic quality dancing about her.

Everything inside Walker told him not to let this moment pass, not to let this angel, this shooting star, get away again. Walker's feet couldn't move fast enough, something held him in place. The world around him slowed, the stars could be heard above the sky, so quiet and so surely singing.

"Hey. creep, get you're paws off me!" A powerful voice demanded behind him. Walker turned to spot a tall dark haired man with a hand clamped tightly around sherry's arm. She slapped the man across the face. A group of people gathered around the two, and the man took her other arm.

Walker made a last glance at the woman across the room and changed his course. He stumbled over himself as he hurried to the bar. As he approached, walker realized that the man was considerably larger closer up, and a great deal more intimidating. The man's knuckles were white where he held sherry's arm with great strength.

"Let go of her." Walker placed a secure hand on the man's shoulder, though he didn't feel quite the same security inside. "Now."

The man turned his face to see his challenger, his face was beet-red and angry. He let go of sherry and faced his body fully towards Walker.

"Is this your woman?" The man demanded. Walker glanced over at Sherry, not sure what to answer. She stared back at him with wide eyes.

"No" Walker answered. The man placed a firm hand on Walker's chest and pushed him away.

“Then this isn’t your fight. I only told the lady that she ought to let me take care of her.” The man cast the girl a dark glare, “And you know what she does? She tells me to get lost.”

The crowd tightened around as Walker pushed the hand off his chest.

Walker took a step closer the man countered by standing, revealing that he was a whole foot taller than walker. “Leave her alone.”

“I don’t think I will.” The man paused to evaluate his opponent, “And I don’t think you are going to make me.”

Walker didn’t wait any longer, he pulled his arm back and delivered a heavy jab straight to the man’s jaw. The man stumbled back and rubbed his chin. Before he could return the punch walker hit him again, this time in the stomach, knocking the wind out of his opponent. His heart pounded in his chest, he waited for the man to stand and fight back but the man only sat down dumbly, keeling over in his chair.

Walker looked to sherry, who stared at the man gasping for breath. Walker looked to the crowd around him, there seemed to be a mix of emotions all around, some horror, some approving nods. Walker left them with the man still gasping for breath and headed towards the place where he had seen his old acquaintance and the beautiful young woman who haunted his emotions.

Walker scanned the whole room. He glanced at every girl on the dance floor, he eyed every table, and saw every person. The girl was gone. A wind blew inside from the deck, the winter air chilled him to the heart.

Walker gave up. He left the room, and found himself staring, once again, up at the stars with no idea what he was thinking. His head began to spin and his breath came in short stabs. Who was this girl? Why did she have this effect on him?

Walker watched the stars twinkle, he saw them shine and dance. They seemed to be telling him something. Perhaps they knew the answers, perhaps they knew his pain. He watched and listened, and for a brief second he could hear a heartbeat, distant and cold as his.

August 14, 1945

Some days are filled with hidden magic. Often they feel nothing more than ordinary, yet are leaking some tragic beauty at the seams. These days, although rare and possibly quite dangerous, are the days when a life is changed, a hope is born, or two lives collide.

Evelyn wiped the sweat off of the young soldier's brow. He had such a determined face, strong and noble, yet childish and frail. She gently pressed a wet rag against his forehead, all her attention fell on breaking his fever. There wasn't a thing in the world that could pry her from his bedside. Not when he needed her.

At the feet of his bed lay a clip board containing his medical records, Evie took it, memorizing his name one more time. Her delicate fingers checked his pulse, feeling for the slightest imperfection. All of her thoughts gathered around him.

The patient fell through his slumber into consciousness. His eyes gazed up toward his guardian angel. Evelyn smiled with satisfaction, she straightened her white uniform and stood up from the bed.

"Why are you always here?" He asked. "Don't get me wrong, I am grateful, but it's as if you never go home."

The soldier pulled himself into a sitting position. He watched as Evelyn

made her rounds to the other patients. She tenderly pulled up one soldier's blanket before walking to another and helping him fluff his pillow.

"I go home sometimes," she said as she reached the young man's bed again. "But most of the time I try to stay as long as I can. I've got more reason to be here than I do to go home."

The soldier gave her a quizzical frown that softened to a look of pity. "Well, today things seem to be safe." He grinned at her playfully. "Go home, there are plenty of people to help us if we need it."

Evelyn looked down at her shoes, smiling sheepishly inside. She began to feel as if she had done enough for the day. She glanced at the clock behind her, it was nearly six. "Okay, I guess I'll head home. Maybe I'll go out tonight or something." She laughed inwardly at herself. She straightened his blanket before showing off a large smile and heading out.

Evelyn made her way down the marble steps out of the hospital. As she reached the street something like muscle memory told her to go her regular route, but her heart, perhaps out of fate, told her to go the opposite direction. Simply because she was in a tremendous mood, she followed the instruction of her heart.

Her heart happened to lead her past a small market, where she watched mothers with their children and sweet old couples compare tomatoes. She wandered past an Italian restaurant where she felt the quiet music sift through her. Finally she strolled into time square; the center of the world.

A large clock, hanging above some shop showed that it was nearly seven when the streets erupted with excitement. The doors of a nearby movie theatre burst open, women streamed out screaming, men flowed out behind them in similar hysteria. After a moment of panic Evelyn realized that, to her relief, these were not shouts of fear, but of joy; inexpressible joy.

The streets were quickly being filled with dancing people and celebrating soldiers. Evelyn stood in the middle of the road, spinning around in search of answers. Behind her was a journalist frantically clicking pictures, capturing the waves of emotion overcoming the city. Evelyn pushed past a dancing couple until she was feet away from the journalist.

“What’s going on?” she asked, raising her voice over the madness of the celebrations.

The journalist stopped photographing the people around him long enough to process Evelyn’s question. “Didn’t you hear? It’s over! The war is over!”

Evelyn’s head began to spin. Her heart began to dance, although she stood paralyzed. The rush of the world buzzed around her. She felt it all, yet none of it. She thought she might pass out when someone took hold of her shoulder.

Evelyn was spun around on her feet. An arm wrapped around her neck as a hand took hold of her waist. Before she could resist she was dipped deep down and kissed firmly on the lips.

Her captor held her in a gentle embrace, his kiss was soft but steady. One

of Evelyn's hands pushed against his chest, pinned between the two of them, while the other tightened into a fist near her hips. She gave up resistance as a warm, safe, feeling fell over her. A distantly familiar giddiness rushed through her, pumping her heart faster and faster.

Slowly, the man ended his kiss, releasing her softly. He gently stood her to her feet, and for the first time, she looked into his eyes. Evelyn's heart stopped, the rush froze momentarily, as recognition kicked in. She took an astonished step back and slapped the man hard in the face.

~*~

August 14, 1945

"She's got to be the most beautiful woman I've ever seen." Walker said. The subway clambered upon its rails, bumping and shifting with each movement across the city.

"What's her name?" Walker's brother asked, giving him a look of disbelief. Walker fumbled with his dark naval uniform. He searched the aisle of the subway train one more time and gave up feeling quite sheepish.

"I don't know. I see her places and when I try to talk to her, she's gone. Anthony, it's like nothing I've ever felt. I feel as if I already belong to her." Even talking about the mysterious young woman put him in a state of desperation for her. His mind wandered across the city to all the places where he had seen her and the places where he had dreamed of seeing her.

Walker peered out the window as they approached a substation. His eyes

sifted through the people waiting to board the bus. He searched for a specific face, a specific pair of broken eyes in need of rescue. He knew them so well. For a moment Walker held his breath as a brunette woman turned her face toward him. He thought of everything he could do to get to her in that moment, only to be disappointed by an unfamiliar face.

“You’ve lost your mind over this girl, haven’t you?” Anthony observed the evident disappointment washing over Walker’s face. “What makes you think that she’s so special, anyway?”

Walker thought on this for a moment. In his mind he knew what it was. It was something much deeper than love at first sight that made her special, it was that he knew her. Deep down, someplace beneath his fears and dreams, he knew her. And she somehow knew him. His thoughts were interrupted by a voice over the radio.

“...The war to which we have devoted all the resources and all the energy of our country for more than 3 1/2 years has now produced total victory over all of our enemies....” The voice stated with a tone of pride and triumph. There was something else said but it was drowned out by the excited noise of the passengers.

Behind Walker a woman dropped her paper bag, groceries tumbled out onto the dirt covered floor. Walker bent to assist the woman, he handed her an onion next to his foot. The woman took it with trembling hands and silent tears streaming down her face. “Thank you.”

Walker began to realize the significance of her tears, her someone was coming home to her. Everyone was coming home. A disbelief filled walkers lungs, rendering him speechless and yet overcome with joy. A dance pursued him finger tips, then his arms. His very body began to shake like the floor of the train as it lurched to a stop. The doors swung open and a crowd of overly excited riders poured out into the subway station. Walker washed out into the streets with the stream of dancing bodies.

Walker was pulled along by the current of celebrations that now flooded the city. He felt himself join in the spirited dancing and the rousing songs of the street. He filled his lungs with his heart, each fiber of his body drowned with adrenaline, and he let out a soul-filled cry.

Then, as sudden as the rush had started, everything stopped- or so it seemed. Walker could hear his heart inside his chest, though it suddenly felt incomplete. Far from him, in the middle of the street, facing the world away from him stood his mystery woman. Every detail was exactly as he had remembered, and as he had dreamed.

Walker hadn't the time to think about it. His body reacted for him, rather than with him. He took long strides across the pavement. Thoughts raced through his mind, buzzing madly inside him. When he reached the point where he could almost touch her, he simply stood in awe of her beauty. Although he couldn't see her face, he knew it was her because of the magnetic pull he felt, bringing him closer and closer to her.

Walker took a final step, held back his nerves, and spun her around. He wrapped his arm around her neck with all the gentleness he could muster inside himself. With the other hand he supported the small of her back. Without hesitation, he kissed her square on the mouth. His pulse quickened. His soul separated from him and floated in bliss far above the street. All the love he had ever felt was concentrated in this kiss, though he felt it fade as he realized that she was attempting to shove him off her.

Walker reeled himself back to sanity and slowly released his precious captive. He stood her to her feet gently, with a heart of guilt. He looked into the eyes of his love, and saw the familiar brokenness which he recognized in the mirror many mornings. He saw in that moment that this woman knew his eyes as well as he knew hers.

Then, much to his surprise, she slapped him.

Chapter 5

Every step was a conscious decision. The farther she traveled from him, the more she had to stop herself from turning back. Every thought in her mind argued with her actions. She reached the sidewalk and headed far away from the man she had left in the street, or rather whom she thought she had left.

"I'm sorry, I deserved that." She heard behind her. Evelyn turned to see the mysterious man directly behind her, bearing a fading red slap across his cheekbone. He wore an expression of guilt, though something told her that he found it entirely worth the pain. "Please, let me make it up to you."

Evelyn couldn't seem to understand the things that he was saying. She stared at him dumbly for a moment, trying to muster up some common sense inside herself.

"No." She threw the word at him, wanting to take it back before it was entirely out in the open. "I don't even know who you are, and I'm supposed to let you 'make it up to me?' I don't think so."

Without another word she turned and pushed herself forward. Although she was intrigued by this man who seemed to have stolen her heart without trying, she feared that he might not return again. Her heart sank as she reflected on the past two years. She had searched for this very man every time she walked down the sidewalk, hoping to see him just once more, to feel something other than pain. Now, for no reason other than her common sense told her to, she was walking away from him?

Evelyn stopped herself, turning just enough to see the man dart off across the street and disappear into the crowds. She debated following him or waiting for him to return, but stopped herself before she had the chance. All around her the celebrations continued, paper fell to the ground, like confetti, from the sky scrapers above. A motherly looking woman passed her with sobs of joy. Men hoisted their ladies up in the air, spinning them in circles. The whole world felt what Evelyn could only feel on the rare occasion that she spotted the man whom she now feared she had lost. Evie turned back and continued away from the street, away from the crowds, away from the last place where she had mistakenly left him.

Evelyn gave up and began to walk again. Before she had taken even two steps she heard a grunt and what sounded like a painful fall. She spun to see the strange men struggling to get onto one knee. He was quite out of breath, his hat was gone, his hair was now in a frazzled mess, he was holding a mangled bouquet of flowers with such a look of plea that she might have let him kiss her again, if he had asked.

“Please.” He paused, perhaps searching for some hope that he must have found, for he let out a breath that he had apparently been holding back. “Just one dinner, I’ll be respectful, I promise. Just one dinner.”

Evelyn’s common sense surrendered to her heart, with no strength to fight what seemed to be fate. She glanced into the streets, the electric commotion urged her to trust him, although all logic told her not to.

She smiled in spite of herself as she took the bouquet from him. "You're funny" She said laughing a bit, "and I'm not sure how much I should trust you....I'll tell you what, you can walk with me, and when I get to where I'm going, then we will decide if you can take me to dinner."

"Where are you going?" He asked, pulling himself to his feet. Evelyn noticed that he was wearing a navy corpsman's uniform; she began to write him off in her mind.

"Bryant Park," she said "It's at the corner of 6th."

"I know where it is." He held his arm out from his body and motioned for her to take it. He gave her a sly, yet adoring, look as she took hold of the now more familiar stranger. They walked together, her hand on his arm, his feet leading the way. There was a certain comfort that seeped into Evelyn's heart as she observed the young man.

His eyes were dark, almost black, but sincere and soft. He carried hero's shoulders and a cocky smile, but with best intent-so it seemed. He quite reminded her of one of those statues that have a terrible amount of meaning, representing something full of honor or bravery. For the first time in over two years, she felt safe.

"What's your name?" He glanced down at her.

"Evelyn," she said, "Evelyn Cosset Shane. What's yours?"

"Walker Galliano." His voice was deep and raspy, much like then men she had met in the hospital. There seemed to be a certain softness that men forgot

while in the hospital, and often it was replaced by some sort of bitterness, or regret, that comes out in the form of hoarseness.

“Tell me, Walker Galliano, do you always assault women before taking them on dates?” Evelyn smile coyly. She tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear and ran her fingers through her curls, with a curious flick of the wrist she pushing it out of the way.

“Not always, sometimes I ask them on a date, and then I assault them,” he said jokingly. “Do you always slap men after the first kiss?” Evelyn felt herself blush and attempted hide her embarrassment.

“I don’t share secrets like that,” she teased. They walked on, each with giddiness in their steps. Evelyn occasionally caught the man staring down at her; however, he would quickly glance away when she noticed it. They walked in silence while Evie lost herself in thought. *Where are your senses? Why are you walking with this man you’ve never met before in your life?* She brushed off her thoughts, letting them dance away and be forgotten.

They soon reached Bryant park. Walker slowed down his pace. The two of them watched the sun jump between buildings and into their eyes. Evelyn felt quite safe beside him, though she hadn’t the slightest clue why. His presence gave her the same sort of feeling you get when you meet up with a long lost friend, something like remembrance, and excitement, and guilt-a very faint, lost guilt.

They approached a park bench where Evelyn stopped them. She turned to

face walker, her hand drifted in mid-air from where it had been sitting on his arm. He wore a crooked smile. Evelyn's hair fell slightly down over her eyes creating a shy blanket between his eyes and hers.

"This is the part where we go our separate ways," she said holding out her hand, he watched it but did not take it.

"I can't leave until I know if I get to see you again," he said. Evelyn laughed, beaming a smile that had been hidden for years.

"I don't know" She said jokingly. "You seem a little suspicious."

"Oh, I do?" He teased back. Walker tentatively reached out and pushed a tendril of hair out of her eyes, She blushed. His eyes teased her as he waited for her to say something. Evelyn's thoughts went completely blank.

"Not at my house." Evelyn blurted out.

Walker frowned in confusion. "What do you mean 'not at my house'?"

"Oh, I meant you can't pick me up at my house." Evelyn clarified. "If we're going to go out for dinner, you have to pick me up here."

Walker smiled brightly, "Deal." He shook the hand that she had offered only a minute earlier. The palm of his hand had the remains of hard work, though softer, as if faded by time. She nearly didn't let go as he released her hand and began to walk away.

"What time?" She called after him.

"Let's make it eight, tomorrow," he answered over his shoulder. Evelyn watched him walking away, observing every perfect detail of him.

“Walker Galliano” She whispered to herself.

August 15, 1945

The park rained soft red from the tree tops. Walker was early. He sat at the park bench with nervous twitching hands holding a bouquet. Every sound made him turn and search for the girl he had met the previous day. He sheepishly laughed at himself. His sanity had seemed to disappear overnight and was replaced by some sort of madness.

Walker stood up from the bench and began to pace. He couldn't understand for the life of him. Why he was so nervous about this girl. She might not be everything he thought she was. Walker tried to tell himself that she was probably just like any other girl he had taken out, he couldn't believe it, however. He ended up being even more excited than before.

When walker finally placed himself back on the bench he could see Evelyn walking towards him. Her hair was down upon her shoulders and she wore a red dress. Walker shot out of his seat again. He waved, then feeling quite silly, shoved his hand into his pocket. As she neared, walker could tell hear her laughing at him.

“What are you laughing about?” He asked when she was close enough.

“You,” She laughed again, “you're pacing.”

Walker realized that he had indeed begun pacing again, he stopped himself immediately . Evelyn smiled a sweet little smile and glanced at the flowers in his hands.

“Oh! These are for you,” He said and handed them to her. This date had already become an utter disaster. He didn’t give up. “Well, should we go?” He offered his arm as an escort she took it.

At the end of the park, a cab waited to take them to their destination. Walker assisted her inside and climbed in next to her.

“The Copa” He said to the driver before settling his attention on Evelyn. “You look beautiful.”

Evelyn smiled brightly, her cheeks turned a light shade of pink. “Thank you.”

As the taxi headed down the road, the couple discussed small talk and simple things that offered walker no insight on what she was really like. His curiosity continued to build, every word she spoke was something he dissected without prevail. Finally, the cab pulled up in front of the Copacabana.

The golden light of the club pranced into the evening street. Music had lovely banter with the city noises as it strolled out onto the sidewalk. Couples rushed in and out of the restaurant, giggling and holding hand all the while.

Walker climbed out of the car and ran around the other side to open her door. Evelyn took his hand as she climbed out. Walker longed to hold her hand for the rest of the night; he released it however and respectfully led her inside.

The dance floor was packed with twirling couples. The atmosphere was filled with some sort of possibility. Walker remembered a night long ago when he had seen Evelyn there, he kept the memory to himself. He led her to a table,

pulling her seat out before seating himself across from her. It wasn't long before a waiter came to the table.

"What will you have tonight?" He asked. Walker caught him eyeing his date. He protectively leaned closer.

"I'll have the club special" He said and gave the waiter a stern look that told him to back off.

"Same" She said with a sweet voice. Evelyn had a certain glow about her that pleased him very much; he hoped to be the cause of such a glow.

"So, what do you do for a living?" He asked

"I'm a nurse," She replied proudly. "What about you?"

"Currently, nothing" He took a long sip of his water. "But, I'm trying to go to school to become a doctor."

"Trying?" she asked with a curious little frown. Walker looked away with embarrassment.

"Well, see, I went through a bit of a lazy period of my life," He smiled a guilty, crooked smile, "and I didn't even try to get into school until this fall, and I turned in my application a bit late."

"That's not so bad," She smiled at him.

"I also failed the entrance exam," he confessed. Evelyn laughed out loud. "It's not funny!" He said and laughed along with her.

"That would be a setback, but it's nothing that can't be fixed with the right connections" she said. "So, what did you do before the lazy period?"

Walker reflected on the time he had spent in the army. A spot beneath his right ribs ached at the memory. "I was a corpsman." He quickly changed the subject, "do you want to dance?"

"Sure." She pulled herself out of her chair and took his hand. Walker led her onto the floor, he gently placed a hand on her waist and held her close. The music swayed them slowly, they drifted across the floor. The fragile girl he held in his arm was the very woman whom he had dreamed of so many times. He knew it without a doubt. She cocked her head up at him, "Where did you learn to dance so well?"

Walker laughed when he thought back on the story. "When my brother moved out, my mother-she likes to be called mamma, if you ever meet her- well, she was very sad. She immediately started thinking about grandchildren to take care of. It was around this time as well that I started meeting girls." Walker laughed and shook his head. "She came to me one day and said 'Walker, your momma wants grand kids, she wants them soon.'" Walker imitated the thick Italian accent of his mother. "I told her it was almost impossible, but she started teaching me right then how to dance. She told me that dancing was the way into a woman's heart."

Evelyn laughed, "Oh really? So, am I going to fall madly in love with you now?" She giggled.

"Honestly, the whole dancing thing never really worked. But if it pleases mamma..." He pulled her closer and shot her a sheepish grin. "Is it working?"

Evelyn blushed and glanced down at her feet. Her porcelain skin peeked out from under her hair. Walker stroked the side of her hand with his thumb. The sweet smell of her hair danced in the air around them.

“You’re going to have to try harder than that” she said as the song ended. She released his hand and strolled gracefully back to the table. Walker resisted the urge to take her back into his arms. He followed her to their seats where their food waited for them. Evelyn smiled a sweet smile and rested her elbow on the table. “So Walker, where were you stationed as a corpsman?”

“I was in Hawaii.” Walker didn’t look at her. Instead he focused on the plate of food in front of him. He took a large bite. “When did you move to New York?” He asked after several more bites.

Evelyn thought on the question for a moment. “I think it was seven years ago. I came out here when I met my fiancé.” She paused; Walker watched her eyes flicker towards her empty ring finger. “He died in the attack on Pearl Harbor.”

Walker felt something inside him ache for her. Something connected to her, perhaps, breaking with her-for her. He longed with all his heart to gather her into his arms and absorb her pain. She, of all people, deserved for her fiancé to live. She deserved to be happily married. ‘I’m Sorry’ wouldn’t be the right thing to say, Walker knew well enough. He thought back on the young man who had given his life. Walker’s jaw clenched at the memory.

Walker strolled beside her that evening as he walked her back to the park.

The stars hid behind the glow of the city lights. His hand hung lightly at his side, available if she chose to take it. He thanked God, in his head, for the wonderful night he had just had. He couldn't fathom a better person to spend it with.

As they approached the low lights of the park, walker felt her take his hand. The touch was only there for a moment before she let go and turned to face him.

"Goodnight Walker, thank you for dinner." She leaned up and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

"May I call you?" He called after her as she walked away.

"Absolutely."

Chapter 6

August 17, 1945

Cindy pulled her long golden hair into a bun and tucked it underneath her cap. She grabbed a clip board from the counter in front of her.

“So, let me get this straight... This man chased you down after planting one on you and you agreed to go out with him?” Cindy asked. Evelyn blushed. She weaved her fingers together and nodded. “Good for you! It’s about time!”

Evelyn laughed at her friend’s reaction and took her own clip board from the counter. There was a short list of men for her to take care of. It was going to be a slow day. “Well, I didn’t let him know where I live or anything.”

“Why not?” Cindy teased. Evelyn gave her a playful tap with her clip board.

“Cindy! Of course I’m not going to tell him where I live. I hardly know the man.” Evelyn laughed and pulled a stethoscope around her neck. She strolled into the large room lined with hospital beds and bedside tables. Evelyn checked the first name on her list, a private by the name of Weisberg. She pulled up a chair beside his bed. Evelyn went through the procedures for checking his vital signs. “You seem to be doing great” She said to the young man. He gave her a cocky smile.

“You don’t have to worry about me miss. Although I might be in some serious trouble if you don’t agree to let me take you on a date.” Evelyn laughed at the soldier’s confidence and shook her head.

"I don't that would be a good idea. I've got a very possessive brother, I'm sure you would end up right in here again." She lied and shot him a sweet smile. Evelyn spotted Cindy shaking her head.

"You can take me out. I don't have a brother." Cindy called across the room. Evelyn knew very well that Cindy had three brothers, all of whom are very possessive. Perhaps that was the reason behind her flippancy towards men.

Evelyn moved towards her next patient, the man suffered a deep gash in the stomach and an almost healed bullet wound. Cindy came up behind her and peered over her shoulder.

"So, tell me about the date" She urged.

Evelyn worked on redressing the wounds. "It was fun, he was very sweet. What else am I going to say about it?" She replied without looking away from her work.

"Was he cute? Was he charming? Tell me details" Cindy demanded. She strolled over to her unit to take care of a moaning patient. "For goodness sakes, stop whining, I'm trying to listen to a story." The patient didn't stop moaning, in fact, he moaned louder. Cindy handed him a cup of water and slipped him a sleeping pill.

"You are the worst nurse I've ever seen" Evelyn said and Cindy pulled up a chair at the end of the bed.

"Well, by the time that I get fired, some fine and handsome man will have picked me up and I won't have to worry about it anyway."

Evelyn stood again and strolled to the front desk. There was a woman standing there, her hair delicately pulled up in curls. She didn't look a day over twenty.

"Can I help you?" Evelyn asked and pulled out the visitor registration book.

"Yes. I'm looking for Private Alborne. I was told I could find him here," she said, wringing her glazes. Evelyn had her fill out the visitor forms and led her down the hall.

"How long have you two been married?" Evelyn asked noticing the ring on the woman's finger.

"We married right before he went off to war. It's been three years and forty-seven days," She said in a nervous voice. "We met at the state fair. He almost broke his leg when he came running after me. Believe me, I thought he was off his rocker, but he told me that he had seen me from the Ferris wheel and he was crazy about me. I couldn't say 'no' to that."

Evelyn recalled those days when she had waited and waited for the mail to come. She answered the door in constant fear that there would be bad news. She pitied the girl for the past two years that she had to endure.

"Well, your husband is going to be just fine" she said as they entered the large hall. The woman instantly recognized her husband and rushed to his side. She covered him in kisses and happy tears. Evelyn watched from the door.

"You've got to stop wishing that had been you" Cindy said lightly behind

her. Evelyn turned and headed back to work, a sad smile drifted from her face. She sat down across from a sleeping patient who had suffered severe head injuries in an accident.

“This man’s wife had an affair” Evelyn stated.

“How do you know that?”

“She came in the day he ended up here. He was in a coma.” She paused and brushed the hair out of the patient’s face. “She told him when he was sleeping. I had been dressing his head when she told him. Do you know what she said to him? She said ‘Henry, I’m a lucky woman; a worthless and very lucky woman. When other wives were patiently waiting for their husbands to come home from the war, I found someone else. I didn’t deserve you in the first place. I’m such a lucky woman’ She looked at me with tear filled eyes and asked me not to tell him.” Evelyn wiped a tear from her eye.

“What does that have to do with-“

“I don’t want to be the woman who can’t wait” She whispered. Cindy knelt in front of her and place a hand on her knee. She looked up into Evelyn’s eyes.

“You are not that woman. You have been waiting, and he’s not coming. Ricky is not going to show up and you know that.” Cindy kissed her lightly on the forehead and held her in her arms.

They sat there for a long while before they were interrupted by a patient. Evelyn let go, wiped her eyes and began redressing the man’s head. She

regarded him with soft hands of pity, dreading the day when he would wake and he would walk out with a wife who would lie to him all the days of her life.

When she was finished she followed Cindy to the hall. The front door of the hospital was open and Evelyn could see people strolling by. The light colors of fall had begun to show on the trees.

“So, are you going out with this guy again?” Cindy asked. Evelyn shrugged and glanced at the charts on the wall. There was a large illustration of the human body, beside it were photos of many of the nurses who had worked there.

“I’m not sure if I’m ready. I mean, it’s been a long time, and I had a good time with him, but I’m not sure if I could-“ Cindy cut her off.

“You can. This man sounds great, just go for it.” Cindy urged. “Think about it, how long had it been since you felt happy; not just a little happy, but honestly happy without a real reason why?”

Evelyn immediately remembered the night at the Copacabana, the way she had felt giddy and girlish after just one glance at Walker. She could hardly contain herself when he had asked her to dinner, so why was she trying to ignore the whole romance of it all?

“With him, actually” Evelyn admitted.

August 19, 1945

Walker took her hand as he simultaneously opened her door. The world around seemed in a fog of nostalgic beauty. Walker took a final glance at the sky

before he climbed into the Taxi after her. Evelyn's hair was up, her makeup was light and carefree, she wore a knee length dress.

"So, are you ready to meet my family? Mind you, they are Italian....that means that they will be loud" walker warned her.

"I think I can handle it." Evelyn smiled and looked out the window, the lights danced by outside. They cast lovely shadows on and off her face in an almost glamorous sort of way. Walker watched her, completely mesmerized. He had struggle taking his eyes off her.

As the taxi pulled up in front of his parent's apartment, Walker glanced up to the third floor window. A golden glow floated out into the chill of the night. Walker helped Evelyn out of the cab and pointed towards the window, a loud burst of laughter spilled over the windowsill.

"That's my family's apartment." Evelyn gazed up with a look of glee and started towards the door. Walker followed her, surprised at her eagerness to meet his family. "Don't go too fast now" he teased.

"I'm excited to meet the parents of my most memorable first impression." She swung open the door and climbed the stairs. Walker laughed and chased her to the third floor. A week ago he thought he might never bring a girl to meet his family, now he couldn't believe it when he knocked on the door.

Evelyn straightened her dress and giggled. "I don't know why I'm so nervous" she said.

Inside the apartment, music played loudly and an older sounding woman

could be heard laughing. A moment later the front door swung open, in front of them stood Walker's mother. She wrapped Walker in an embrace that only a mother would give, rocking him back and forth with joy, it was a sweet reunion. When she finally released Walker she turned her gaze on Evelyn.

"You must be the mystery woman!" She pulled Evelyn into a large and welcoming hug. "Walker told us about you."

"I'm Evelyn..." she paused hesitantly, "...mamma?" His mother laughed and nodded an approving nod. She led them both into the living room which was filled with laughter and wonderful traveling memories. Anthony stood up from the worn out and overly stuffed couch to give him a hug.

He pointed at Evelyn with some question in his eyes. Walker recognized the question and nodded his head.

"You must be Evelyn!" Anthony gave her another hug, one of many to come. Walker wrapped a nervous arm around her as his two sisters approached.

"Evelyn, these are my sisters, Olivia and Sofia." The two girls contained themselves more than the rest of his family; they gave her light and quick hugs. Behind him, Walker heard his father enter the room. Before he could warn her Evelyn was lifted off the floor in a tight bear hug and kissed on both cheeks.

"She is a beautiful woman!" He proclaimed after he released her, his Italian accent was nearly as thick as his wife's. Evelyn cast Walker an entertained look, her face had turned slightly pink during the whole ordeal. Walker filled with shame for the whole mess she had just been pulled into. A family was

hardly second date material, what was he thinking?

“You are all very sweet” Evelyn said. The family erupted in laughter over something that Walker could tell Evelyn didn’t understand. He came up behind her and placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder. To his surprise, she seemed highly entertained by his family.

Suddenly, Walker’s mother burst into a frenzy, claiming that the food was burning. The air did indeed carry the faint smell of burnt meat. She rushed away into the kitchen, Walker shook his head and laughed. “Don’t worry, it’s not burnt, it always smells like that. It’s my mother’s cooking” he whispered into her ear.

A moment later the family was shuffling into the kitchen, Walker and Evelyn ended up by Anthony and a smaller lady to his right. She held out a hand and Evelyn shook it. “I’m Beth, Anthony’s-” Anthony cut her off with a hush. She blushed and cuddled up next to him. Walker eyed Anthony with suspicion.

The kitchen was a tight room filled with hanging pots and pans. The walls had quaint decorations and several light pictures. The oven sat beside the fridge with stains around its edges. All the kitchen was surrounded in cozy memories and warm welcomes.

“Sit! Sit!” Walker’s mother urged. They all placed themselves around the little table. It was a tight squeeze but they all managed to fit in. Walker sat beside Evelyn, Anthony sat beside Beth with his arm around her. Olivia and Sofia sat across from Evelyn and Walker, while Walker’s parents sat at one end of the

table.

The table was filled with traditional Italian foods. The sweet smell of pasta and tomatoes danced across the table. Anthony reached across for a roll only to have his hand smacked by his mother.

“We pray, then we eat” she stated and folded her hands in front of her.
“Walker, will you pray?”

Walker nodded, closed his eyes and said a short prayer. Before he had even opened his eyes people were reaching for the food. He leaned towards Evelyn and whispered a word of advice to her. “Fight for it.”

Walker observed while Evelyn strategically watched the hands darting across the table. Suddenly he arm shot out and returned with a plate of pasta which she dished up for Walker before dishing for herself.

“You learn fast” Walker’s Father said with a laugh. He passed her a bowl of sauce and gave her a wink. Sofia and Olivia entered a conversation with Beth, while Walker’s father and brother argued about baseball. Walker watched with curiosity as Evelyn and his mother conversed.

“What do you do?” His mother asked her. Her heavy Italian accent surprisingly didn’t throw Evelyn too far off.

“I’m a nurse. I love my job.” Evelyn glanced over at Walker, her eyes danced with joy as she took in the surrounding family. “What did you do?”

“I was working in the factory” She replied. “But my sons do very well better-”

“Very much better, mamma” Sofia corrected. Her mother gave her a ruffled and embarrassed look.

“My sons do much better, they go to school,” she said with pride. Evelyn pushed her plate away from her, Walker’s mother’s eyes widened. She quickly grabbed a spoon full of the nearest food and plopped it down on Evelyn’s plate.

“You too skinny! Eat more-”

“You are too skinny, Mamma” Olivia interjected a correction.

Walker’s mother ignored the correction and continued on. “When walker was a little boy, I give him so much food. He grow so big and strong, you must eat more food....” She could have gone on all night when Anthony stood from his seat.

“I’ve got something to say” He announced.

“We’ve all got something to say” Walker’s father joked. Anthony glared at him and continued on. He placed a hand on Beth’s shoulder.

“Beth and I are in love-”

“That’s very nice, very nice” Walker’s mother interrupted.

“Yes, thank you. We are in love and We have decided to go married.”

The table went silent. Sofia and Olivia stared at Beth with wide and confused eyes. Walker’s mother wiped sudden tears out of her eyes. Evelyn seemed unsure what to do. Walker’s Father stood with a solemn face and took his son’s hand and shook it. As sudden as the table had gone silent, the noise appeared again.

“I’m so happy!” Walker’s mother cried. She stood out of her seat and attempted to give Beth a hug over the table. “I’mma going to have grandchildren! I’mma so happy!”

“Who’s your maid of honor going to be?” Olivia asked.

“Let’s not get overly excited.” Anthony attempted to calm his family.

Walker stood and took his brother’s hand, he pulled him into a hug and held him there for a long time. When he finished he turned to Evelyn and leaned close to her.

“Do you want to see something amazing?” Evelyn nodded. “Come with me” He whispered.

They left the overzealous state of the kitchen. The conversations could be clearly heard in the other room. Walker led her to the front door and opened it as quietly as possible.

Chapter 7

August 19, 1945

She knew these stars that watched them with beautiful curiosity. Evelyn stared back at them, remembering a far back New Year's Eve when she had shared her heart with them. Walker helped her onto the roof top from the staircase. He pulled her close to him, the embrace surprised her in a way that she shied away from. Walker let her go respectfully, he smiled an understanding smile, empty of judgment.

"This place is beautiful." Evelyn gazed out at the city, the world lit up in an almost sad way. They were sad in the way that they encouraged to let go of her beloved trap.

"I know. This is my world." Walker said. He guided her to the edge of the building, he pointed out the lovely little sights, such as the people strolling along the sidewalk, the way that you could see all the lights change on the street at the same time, and lights dripping into the bay that lay far in the distance. "I used to come out here just to watch the world go. Watch it existing."

Evelyn watched him with amazement. She remembers days when she used to do just the same thing. She took his arm and drew close to him, she allowed him to wrap an arm around her shoulder.

"After my fiancé died, I spent a lot of time watching. I would just watch people, I liked to count the car lights cast shadows on my ceiling. I guess it's a little silly, but I just let it remind me that there was a world out there still." She

tucked a bashful strand of hair behind her ear.

Walker pulled away to look her in the eye. "I didn't even know, I'm sorry, I guess I should have but I--"

"I didn't tell you. It's okay." She reassured him. "Anyway, this is a great place up here."

Walker took a seat on the ledge. She sucked in a nervous breath, but let it go as she realized he knew "his world" well. She resisted the urge to sit next to him, knowing her lack of courage near him.

"What do you do?" he asked.

"What do you mean? I'm a nurse." Evelyn replied.

Walker stood and began to dance with her. He spun her far away from him, pulled her in close, and let go again. "I mean, do you dance? Do you paint? Do you people watch?"

Evelyn couldn't even remember a time that she had done something for herself. She hardly spent a day at home anymore. Cindy was an artist, because of this Evelyn determined that she was an artist as well.

"I draw" She threw out and smiled a tense smile. She hated herself in moments like this. A lie wasn't foolproof without details. Evelyn attempted to remember something Cindy had shown her, anything that might convince him that she could actually be an artist. "My favorite picture was one I drew of the market. There was this couple bantering over a certain head of lettuce. They were young and very much in love."

Walker's crooked smile surprised her, although it was one she was becoming quite familiar with.

"When I'm a doctor, I'm going to get an apartment on the very top floor of some glorious penthouse and waste away all my nights watching the lights of the city flick on and off." Walker motioned at the grand city.

The statement sparked Evelyn's memory. Hesitantly she pulled from her purse a card, on the back of which she had scribbled a number. She thrust the card towards Walker who took it, looking quite confused. "That's the number of someone who would like to help you get into (insert college here). He works at the Doctor's Hospital."

Walker seemed speechless; he stared down at the card. He held it with such delicateness, Evelyn watched with a guilty expression. Her hope that perhaps he wouldn't want the card was put to death as he captured her in a warm hug. "Thank you" he said, fighting a stutter. "You are so amazing. Thank you."

She forced a smile. He would leave her, she knew it already.

"You'll be a great doctor." Evelyn turned away from him, peering out at New York City. She was small again. "What makes you want to be a doctor anyway?"

A sweet song drifted from someplace across the street. Evelyn envisioned a sweet window where a mother was perhaps hanging the laundry out the window to dry. Maybe her husband played the violin for her, while the children

drifted to sleep. Walker came to stand next to her, they looked out at the city together.

“I used to be a corpsman.” He slipped his hands into his pockets. “I owe it to someone to keep trying. If I can do better than just saving soldiers on the battle field, then I’ve made a difference.”

Evelyn’s eyes drifted down towards her hands, she was surprised to see them trembling. Why was she so afraid of losing someone she had only just met? She forced herself to share his happiness. *You have got to stop being so selfish*, the voice of her mother reverberated in her head.

A burst of old Italian laughter floated out onto the roof from the staircase, Evelyn smiled at the sound. Walker seemed to enjoy the sound as well. He took her hand in his without looking at her. It was a beautiful little secret, one which reminded her of school children, they were so young tonight.

“My mother likes you.” Walker said. “She nearly died of happiness when I told her I was bringing you home for dinner.” The two of them laughed together.

“I love your family. I hope you never have to meet mine,” she said.

“Why?”

“Actually, I don’t really have much of a family. I’ve got my mother.”

“Well, that’s something.” Walker obviously understand her idea of family.

“what happened to your father?”

“He died in world war one.” Evelyn shivered in a gust of cold air. Walker

tucked her under his arm with her glance of approval.

“I’m sorry. I’ve known some great men in the war, men who gave their lives for mine” he said.

“So have I,” Evelyn said partially to herself. Her mind wandered off to some distant memory, one so foggy she could hardly picture it in her mind. “My fiancé was in the Navy, stationed in Pearl Harbor. He died in the bombing.”

There was a quiet, but not uncomfortable, moment between them. They watched the lights of the city flicker on and off. Evelyn cast an eye towards the stars and they seemed quite satisfied.

“Let’s get you home.” Walker said as they wandered towards the staircase.

August 19, 1945

Fingers entwined, music dancing out of various windows, Walker led her home. Never had he known a more beautiful moment. The world seemed to push them closer and closer. He would never forget this night.

She couldn’t be an artist. Walker laughed to himself, thinking back on her little white lie, he glanced down to her. He watched her gaze dreamily up at the lit up apartments. Every ounce of him loved her. He bent his head and kissed her ever so softly on the top of the head. She let him.

“You’re not an artist,” he said.

Evelyn looked up at him, shame filled her eyes. “How did you know?”

He beamed a smile. “I’ve known a couple artists in my life. You’re

personality doesn't fit the bill."

She blushed and continued to walk in silence, staring up at the buildings. Walker nervously wrapped an arm around her, pulling her in as tightly as she would allow. All of his mind ran in a daze, his heart beat in an odd melodic pattern. It was a lovely embrace.

"Tell me something," she said "You said that you owe it to someone to become a doctor, who?"

Walker hesitated. "I had a comrade, he was a good man." Walker began, loathing himself all the while. "He didn't have to save me, but he did. He died."

Evelyn pulled herself closer to him. Walker laid his head on hers. The smile wiped from his face, he closed his eyes. He whispered a thanks in his head for her understanding.

"It's exciting about your brother," Evelyn said. She smiled the slightest and most beautiful smile, of course walker thought that of every smile, but this was the most delicate of all her beauty. It was a smile of compassion.

"The man deserves it. She's the only woman he's ever loved or ever could love." Although the same was true about his brother, Walker said this about himself. He quickly looked away, he didn't want to see her reaction. Why was he so determined to scare her away? All this talk of love, and he hadn't even known her more than three weeks.

Evelyn didn't seem to notice. "When did they meet?" She inquired.

"About a year ago," he said as they reached the park. They strolled

nonchalantly towards the bench where they had met several times. "Well, I suppose this is goodnight."

They stood facing each other, Walker held both her hands. A slight breeze pulled her hair away from her face. He considered kissing her, but thought better of it.

"Do you want to walk me to my apartment?" she asked squeezing his hands.

"Absolutely."

He offered his arm as an escort. The park lights led them, the sweet smell of roses filled the air as they passed by a small garden in the center of the park. Walker stopped them and bent to pick one of the lovely little ornaments.

"Walker, you shouldn't--"

Walker turned and placed the delicate rose behind her ear. He laughed at her bewildered face. "Beauty belongs with beauty."

A deep and pleasant giddiness washed through him as she blushed. They continued to walk for another couple blocks, all the while giggling like young lovers and stirring up the peace of the world. When they reached a certain building, Evelyn stopped and pointed toward a dark window on the eighth floor.

"That's my apartment," she said.

"Should I walk you up?" he asked with a hopeful voice.

She laughed and shook her head. "I think I'll make it from here."

"You never know, what if you don't?" Walker teased.

"I'll tell you what," she took a step closer to him. "You can stay out here and wait for my light to turn on, and then you'll know that I'm safe."

Walker shot her a sly smile. "Alright, deal. But if the light doesn't turn on, what apartment number should I rush to?"

"Number 27," She said shaking her head, she giggled as he took her hand and left it with a small kiss. "Goodnight walker."

She entered the building, leaving walker alone in the street. He watched the window, waiting for one last glimpse of her. His mind wandered to her apartment number, which was so strangely familiar. The number seemed to fit into a permanent memory that he couldn't recall. He looked to the street sign, searching for something that might spark his memory.

"West thirty-eighth street? Apartment 27..." He said out loud to himself. Why did that address seem so crucial? "Apartment 27, west thirty-eighth street." He rearranged it to make sense. Suddenly the memory clicked....

Walker bent over a desk, madly scribbling some apologetic letter. He furiously crumpled the paper, throwing it into a pile on the floor. He began the letter again.

"Dear Mrs. Gillmore, I can't begin to thank you enough for..." The words scribbled on the page were never going to fill the hole he had put in her life. Walker stumbled away from the desk in a drunken mess. He found himself a bottle of whiskey, laying on the floor, dripping onto his carpet. He took it back to the table where he attempted to continue the letter. "...the sacrifice you have made for this country." Walker took a long drink from the bottle...

Walker felt as though he had just been punched in the stomach. His breath trapped itself in his lungs, where it attempted to burst his heart. All the guilt he had ever felt about Ricky's death was nothing compared to the thought of stealing his girl.

He stumbled backwards away from her apartment. He looked around, trying to remember the way home. He decided to go left, heading away from Apartment 27 as quickly as possible. Why hadn't he realized? Why hadn't he asked?

Walker turned just in time to see a light flick on, and a silhouette upon the sidewalk. He kept walking. He wouldn't do this to someone who had already given everything for him.

Chapter 8

August 28, 1945

Evelyn woke with the imprint of the phone cord on her cheek, her hair was matted against her neck. She pushed herself up off her couch and blinked her eyes tightly. She forced them opened again and groggily shuffled toward her kitchen.

The fridge released a foul stench as she rummaged for something to eat. She gave up and settled for a day old sandwich which she had been too lazy to eat. The crust was just stale enough to dry her mouth, leaving her dissatisfied. Her stomach argued with her, as she threw the last bite in the trash; it wasn't worth all the effort she was giving it.

Outside the window she watched the rain drip sullenly on the world. New York City wasn't nearly as bitter as she was. The fridge beside her hummed happily, singing some hopeful song, she unplugged it.

Evelyn pulled her dirty hair into a bun, dressed for work, and left her apartment. The building stairwell from her apartment was filled with the echoes of the rain. She stepped out into the city street, and shoved her hands into her jacket pockets. Evelyn strolled through the rain, allowing it to feel her hurt. There wasn't a safer place to be than in the rain when you've been crying.

She arrived at work soaking wet and somber. She hadn't even had the time to clock in when Cindy came to her side.

"What is the matter with you? You're late for work...oh no, what did that

creep do?" She demanded as she saw Evelyn's expression. "I swear I'm not afraid to--"

"He didn't do anything," Evelyn said while clocking in.

"Oh..." Cindy pretended to understand. "I don't understand. He didn't do anything? Then why are you so upset?"

"He didn't call. He didn't visit me, nothing." Evelyn picked a sheet up off the table, her eyes scanned over the patients with disinterest. Cindy took the paper from her, set it down, and turned Evelyn to face her.

"Go home. I haven't got any plans tonight. I'll come over at your place tonight after I cover your shift." Cindy pulled her into her arms.

"Thank you." Evelyn whispered.

Cindy held her for a long time before handing her an umbrella. "I might not do the best job, but for all the times that you have made sure that I don't go home with a stranger, I owe it to you."

Evelyn knew where she was going as she left the hospital. Home was much too quiet at this hour. She walked with determination past the market, there were no bantering old couples. There were no families. She passed the same Italian restaurant that she passed nearly three weeks earlier; the music drifting out was slow and almost remorseful.

She waited at a crosswalk, clutching the umbrella with white knuckles. Her jaw clenched tightly as she continued down the road. Bitterness had replaced her sullen attitude. Her clunky heels led her to time square. She

marched herself to a bench along the sidewalk and sat, not caring that it was soaking wet.

She sat there for an hour, the time ticked past with each raindrop that attempted to wash away all the little memories that she wasn't ready to let go of yet....

"Excuse me, Miss," a man laid his hand on her shoulder. "I think you dropped this."

The man got on one knee and held up a quant diamond ring. Tears escaped her eyes and rolled down her cheek before she had the chance to think of a reply.

"Ricky...are you-" She choked out half a sentence. "Are you sure?"

Ricky laughed sweetly and took her hand. "I'm positive." He placed the ring on her finger with a shaking hand.....

Evelyn shook herself out of the memory. How could she have ever thought that there could be anyone even close to him? She bit her lip as she thought back on her foolishness.

Suddenly, Evelyn spotted a man walking across the street. She knew him from his broad shoulders that she had once considered full of bravery. The man reached her side of the road as she stood from her seat.

"Walker Galliano!" She called his name without a single kindness in her voice. "You really have some nerve."

Walker stopped dead in his tracks. The rain poured upon his shoulders. Evelyn resisted the urge to punch the man. Why she had even bothered talking to him she didn't know.

"Evelyn," Walker didn't seem capable of finishing a sentence. "I'm sorry. I—"

"Save it. Don't give me some line about not having the time to call, or forgetting. You must think I'm some jerk. You honestly didn't think that I would figure it out?" She took a couple steps towards him, leaving her umbrella on the bench. Walker looked entirely confused, he tried to touch her arm but she wrenched it away from him. "You didn't think that I wouldn't realize that you were just taking me on dates so that you could get an interview for school? Did you spy on me before you met me? Huh? Did you ask around to find out who you could take a shot with?"

Walker took her by the arms, pulling her close. "What are you talking about?"

"The interview, you stupid—"

"I didn't ask you to get me that interview. I didn't even know you were a nurse." He stared at her with honest eyes. She wanted to stay angry, she wanted to have a reason to hate him. She tightened her jaw, tears welled in her eyes.

"Then why didn't you call me?" she asked quietly. "What did I do wrong?"

Walker let go of her shoulders. He looked as if he might just walk away.

Hesitation shone in his eyes. "I didn't want to steal you. Ricky gave his life for me. I didn't want to steal his girl."

Evelyn felt her knees weaken. "What?"

Walker hung his shoulders. "I was at Pearl Harbor with him. The day we were attacked, I got a shot in my stomach. I was dying...." He paused, his jaw quivered as if he might cry as well. Evelyn held back a quiet sob.

"You..." She couldn't finish her sentence. She felt as if her heart might give out. The rain pounded harder on her shoulders, her dripping hair fell into her eyes. She didn't move.

"He was lying across from me. He gave me his blood." A tear rolled down his cheek, "I should have died. You should be with him right now, instead of with me. I don't want to do this to him."

August 28, 1945

Walker took her by the waist, he ran his fingers through her wet hair. He dipped her low, the same way he had the day they had met. He kissed her and she kissed him back. All his hurt wrapped around him as she held on to his waist. He shouldn't have been kissing her, but he couldn't bring himself to stop. The rain beat his back softly.

Walker stood her back up. He looked into her ebony eyes. Every fiber of himself wanted to stay with her. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. I won't bother you again" He paused. "I got accepted to duke this morning."

His whole body resisted as he turned away from her and left her for the

last time. He couldn't stop knowing that he would inevitably go back to her. His head ached, his stomach hurt, his eyes burned as he willed them to stay open. He forced himself to keep walking.

Chapter 9

September 4, 194

Evelyn sat on her windowsill, her cheek rested against the glass. She pulled a blanket over her cold toes without taking her eyes off the window. Nine stories below, she could see a group of girls playing hopscotch on the sidewalk. They danced and skipped without a care in the world.

Evelyn looked around her barren room. The décor on the walls were gone. The chest, which had sat at the end of her bed, now rested in the closet with a lock. Her floors were littered with old pictures which she had shoved off her desk. In her hand, she held a tear stained letter.

It was Ricky's death all over again.. Her throat was sore and raw. Her stomach growled loudly without victory. She wore a thick scowl, her eyes burned with exhaustion. She could hardly hold them open when she heard a light knocking on the door.

Evelyn lifted herself out of her paralyzed state and shuffled to her front door. She opened the door to a very annoyed looking woman. The woman was tall and gangly; her hair was pulled back in a tight bun. She was dressed in a strong blue, sophisticated dress. Her lips pulled into a tight line of frustration that Evelyn knew all too well.

"Hello mom," Evelyn stepped out of the doorway to let her mother inside. "What can I do for you?" Evelyn's mother stood at a good distance, and peered

around the entryway. She cast a judgmental look at the mess in Evelyn's room.

"I just wanted to check on you," she said, wandering into the kitchen area. "I heard that you have been having others fill in your shifts at the hospital."

Evelyn knew this routine. She rolled her eyes and followed her mother through the apartment.

"Well, I'm doing okay." Evelyn said. "I haven't been feeling well, that's all."

Her mother turned to her, her hands clasped in front of her. "Evelyn, you can't do this to your friends. It's not fair for you to dump shifts onto them and for you to lazily slouch around your house all day. What kind of a woman let's others take responsibility for her?"

Evelyn shook her head, her jaw tightened. She marched back into her room. Her mother followed her, picking up things as she went.

"Evelyn, please look at me when I'm speaking to you." Her mother said in the most deathly calm voice.

"Mom, I've got nothing to say to you about this. I'm tired, I'm angry, I don't want to deal with your lectures about what is socially incorrect or selfish." Evelyn picked up the blanket from her windowsill and began to fold it.

"What do you have to be angry about?" Her mother demanded.

"Nothing, forget it." She snapped back. She chucked the blanket onto the bed and stormed into her living room. "I'm just sick." Evelyn rubbed her temple while turning to face her mother. "I'm going to get you sick, you should

probably just go.”

If there was one thing that Evelyn knew, it was that her mother wouldn't go home without a fight, not when she thought Evelyn was being socially unacceptable. The two mirrored each other in stubbornness. Her mother shook her head in apparent disappointment.

“Please, tell me. What are you so upset about?” Her mother asked again. Evelyn dropped onto the couch, her hands shook with frustration. Her head pounded as she thought back on all the things that she was angry about; Ricky's death, Walker leaving, being left alone again...

“Why didn't you come to the funeral?” Evelyn asked. She looked up at her mother with tear filled eyes. She swore she would never let her mother see her cry. Her mother gave her a quizzical look.

“What funeral?”

“Ricky's funeral! Why didn't you come?” She demanded. Her mom rolled her eyes and picked up a pile of clothes off the floor.

“I told you-”

“What could possibly merit leaving me alone at my fiancé's funeral?” She shouted. The two stood in awkward silence for a moment, outside the window the noises of the city drifted between them.

“I'm sorry,” her mother said in a stone voice. Evelyn shook her head and she tucked her dirty hair behind her ears.

“Don’t even worry about it. It was a long time ago, it doesn’t matter anymore” She whispered. Her mother sat down next to her, putting an arm around her. It was the first gentle thing she had done in years. Evelyn cried into her mother’s shoulder.

“Who did you meet and why are you crying about him?”

Evelyn looked up at her mother in shock. “How did you know?”

“You don’t think that I know you well enough to know when your heart has been broken?” Her mother kissed her softly on the top of the head. “Tell me what’s going on.”

Evelyn opened the folded letter in her hand, it was worn and faded. “I didn’t know it was him” she said as she handed it to her mother. She opened the letter and took a moment to read it before giving Evelyn a puzzled look.

“Who sent this to you?”

“Walker did. We met a couple weeks ago. I had seen him a couple times before around New York. I had no idea...,” she confessed. Her mother watched her for a long time. She wrapped her arm around Evelyn’s shoulder. All the comfort in the world couldn’t fix the fact that she had lost Walker. “He’s going to Duke to become a doctor. He told me a week ago and now he’s gone.”

Evelyn’s mother looked down at the letter and back at Evelyn. Her expression softened. She stroked the side of her daughter’s face. Evelyn didn’t have the energy to be surprised at her mother’s sudden tenderness, although she would have been any other day.

“Did I ever tell you about how I met your father?” she asked. Evelyn shook her head. “I met him in at a speakeasy. I hardly knew what I was doing, a young girl like me. I was only twenty-two and I shouldn’t have been in there at all, but I was determined to live the way I wanted, regardless of what the people around me said....Well, anyway, I was in this little speakeasy when I saw this man, the most wonderful man I had ever seen. I decided right then, that I would go introduce myself to him.” Her mother paused, her eyes glancing out into space in some state of reminiscence.

“Well, I didn’t introduce myself to him. I was going to when the police came storming into the club. Honestly, I was terrified. I didn’t want to get in trouble any more than any other girl my age, so I ran.” Her mother pulled her closer into her arms. “The entire club was filled with panic, some tried to run out the front door, others climbed through the window. I hadn’t the slightest clue how to get out of the place if not through the front door. All of a sudden a hand wrapped tightly around my own and dragged me through the kitchen to a door hidden behind a large cabinet. I could hardly believe I had gotten out, and when I realized who had saved me, I nearly passed out.” Evelyn’s mother laughed at the memory. “It was your father. It turned out that he worked there-or had worked there, the place got shut down after that. Anyway, I loved him. I loved him from the very moment I saw him. Evelyn, when God gives you chance after chance after chance at love, it’s a slap in the face for you to simply give up on it.”

September 5, 1945

Walker wriggled himself between the piles of boxes sitting in his living room. His shelves, which regularly cluttered with military memorabilia, were now barren and simple. All evidence of his time spent there was gone. The only possessions he had left out were the wadded bedding which radiated a stench that only a university student could create.

By the door sat a box containing all the once dust covered books, their bindings complained from recent late nights. Walker added another two books to the top of the pile, one an anatomy book, the other a Bible. The Bible shot him a depressed glance from between its pages. The book called to him, it begged to be read. Walker sighed a heavy breath and took the book in his tired hands. He flipped the book to a familiar page.

“Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take” Walker read from proverbs. So many times he had looked to this verse for reassurance. He ran his hands over the worn page, his heavy heart settled between the words. He was lost in self-determination these days. Walker reflected on the past several months, then the past year, and the past two years. Where had his heart gone? Where had his faith gone?

He gave up on the book and placed it back inside the box. He trudged to the kitchen, which was freshly cleaned, his dishes arranged themselves disorderly on his countertop. He reached for the box hiding under the table, dragging it to the counter. He dumped the dishes off the edge. They crashed into

the box, one of the plates breaking along the way.

As he continued to pack up his home, he trudged back and forth past the box of books. Each time he passed, he felt the tug of guilt and regret on his heart. He continually glanced at the book settled on the top, his mind wandered through thoughts of the commitment he seemed to have forgotten; the commitment to let someone else determine his life for him. He took the Bible from to the couch, huffing all the while, and sat down and attempted to listen to the voice calling to his heart.

He flipped it open, not knowing where he was going or what he was looking for. He found himself staring at a verse in Romans. *"We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."* His eyes drifted over the verse again and again. He determined that it was simply a coincidence and flipped the page to first peter. *"Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you"* the words shot straight to his heart.

"What? What do you want from me? I've got nothing left to give you, I have no faith left for you. What is it?" He demanded. His heart beat fast as he began to reflect on his first love, his most important love; Christ. He had lost his heart in all that had happened. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry I've been missing. I'm sorry I've been lost. I kept assuming that it would get better; I would talk to you tomorrow, then tomorrow turned into eventually, and eventually turned into Sunday."

The warm sun fell through the window to his back. His hands clutched the Bible with a sudden feeling of desperation. His eyes closed tightly, he breathed heavily.

He tried to remember the last time he had let God help him. How had he been getting through all this time. He thought of this school, he thought of Ricky and his sacrifice. A sharp pain shot through him as he thought of Evelyn. Her beautiful face was lost in his mind, drifting through his thoughts without control.

“Alright, what do you want from me? What is it?” Walker paused and let his heart listen like he used to. “Where do I go from here?”

Walker pulled his legs onto the couch, the Bible rested in his hands as he listened and waited. He listened to the beating of his own heart; how out of sync he had gotten. He let himself drift to sleep, into soft and memory saturated dreams.

Walker woke to a knock at his front door. He pulled himself to the door in a groggy and half-awake state. His eyes struggled to stay open as he unlocked the door. Anthony stood in the doorway holding a box of various office supplies. He let himself into the apartment, walker followed him to the living room.

“Good morning Anthony,” Walker laughed at his brother’s ability to make himself at home without any welcome. “Can I do something for you?” He leant against the archway to the living room.

“I brought you some things for school. Left over stuff from when I was at

the university." He paused. "I have to ask, what ever happened to that girl?" he asked.

Walker wandered over to the box, observing the old composition books and pens. The offering was kind but empty hearted, Walker knew better than anyone that Anthony didn't want him to leave.

"Do you remember Ricky Gilmore?" Walker asked. Anthony nodded with a puzzled look. "Evelyn was his fiancé, I just found out."

Anthony raised his eyebrows, clearly in shock. He attempted to say something but his mouth simply hung open. "How...?"

"I don't know...It just happened." Walker said. He tried not to let his voice reveal his hurt. "Listen, I've got to pack. Thanks for the supplies." Walker turned his back to his brother and repacked a box of clothing.

"Don't, Walker." Anthony placed a hand on Walker's shoulder, "You used to tell me, that you were going to wait forever until you found the one. You told me that when you found her, you would never let he go. Walker, this girl is the only one you've ever loved. When a man gives you his life, and God brings you the one, you don't just let it go and forget."

The two brothers stood facing each other. They had always understood each other so well. Walker patted his brother on the shoulder as he headed towards the door. He grabbed his jacket from the hooks on the wall.

"Where are you going?" Anthony asked.

"I've got to go talk to someone, it's sort of important." Walker left the

apartment in a hurry. He ran down the stairs, taking two at a time. As he reached the street, he made a sharp turn and began to jog down the street.

As he passed through time square, he reflected on the extraordinary memories that it held. He saw a young lady selling flowers, he dug in his pocket for his wallet.

“I need those,” He said pointing to a small arrangement of lilies. The girl seemed to recognize him as she handed him the flowers. Walker threw her an uncounted wad of money and continued down the street.

“The lord will work out his plans for my life,” He whispered to himself.

Chapter 10

September 5, 1945

Evelyn sat in front of her mirror. Her hair was delicately pulled back, she wore the pearls she had pulled from the trunk that had once sat at the end of her bed, her lips were some lovely shade of red. Her nerves raged as she thought through her plans and called for a taxi.

As she slipped on her delicate shoes, she determined that she had finally lost her mind, but she didn't care. Her simple blue dress exposed her legs as she streamed down the staircase to the landing of the apartment building. The sun made an appearance for the first time in a week, it wrapped her in reassuring warmth.

The taxi pulled up in front of her. As she headed across the sidewalk, a young school girl with bows in her hair ran by, a moment later a young boy followed. The sweet young lovers giggled and went on, playfully chasing each other and bantering with sweet remarks. Evelyn smiled at the innocence of their love and climbed into the cab. She directed him toward the apartment where she had met Walker's family.

Anxiety built inside her as she rode along in the Taxi. She attempted to look calm, the driver gave her a worried look.

"Why are you so nervous?" He inquired. Evelyn laughed at her failed efforts.

"Love."

“Oh.” The driver laughed and nodded, apparently he knew the feeling.

They finally pulled up to their destination. Evelyn requested that he stay for a couple minutes, then she stepped out onto the sidewalk. Her knees were shaky as she climbed the stairs and knocked on the door.

There was shuffling noise inside before she heard the dead bolt slip back. The door swung open. The wonderful Italian woman stood before her with a large smile. Evelyn let out a relieved breath.

“Is Walker here? I really need to talk to him,” Evelyn asked. Walker’s mother pursed her lips and shook her head.

“Walker has been packing for this past week,” she said with her warm Italian accent. “I think he is leaving tomorrow. Here, I give you Walker’s address. You go find him, keep him here.” It seemed that as she got more excited, her English got worse. The sweet little woman handed her a piece of paper with a messy address scribbled on it. Evelyn took it in a hurry and headed back toward the stairs.

“Thanks!” She said over her shoulder. As she reached the street, she heard someone calling her name. She turned to see Anthony running toward her. His breath was short when he caught up to her, he could hardly speak between huge gulps of air.

“Go to the graveyard. He’s not at his house anymore. Go to the graveyard,” he said. His hands rested on his knees as he caught his breath.

“Thank you.” Evelyn said as she climbed into the cab. “The cemetery on

fifth, let's go."

The cab driver took off as fast as he could. The world around her seemed to be urging her on in excitement. She leaned up between the two front seats and watched out the windshield like a little kid. Her face lit up as they drove through time square. She patted the driver on the shoulder and pointed to a certain spot in the road.

"That's where we met," she announced. The driver gave her a pleased smile. They continued on as she told him the story of how they met. She couldn't stop talking for fear that her nerves would tell her to give up. "...And then he never called again. I guess I just realized that I don't care and that I need to go find him."

She thought about how silly she must sound, like a sixteen year old who just went on her first date. She grinned from ear to ear, knowing she truly had lost her mind. She hadn't felt this happy or carefree in years.

The cab slowed to a stop as the road filled with traffic. Evelyn scanned the street for any opening that would enable them to continue. When she could find no way out of the traffic, she handed the driver his money and jumped out of the car. She began to run.

She ran as fast as her feet would take her. She practically danced down the sidewalk, her heart threatened to float away. She could see the graveyard in the distance. She slowed down to catch her breath.

"God, please let him still be there" She prayed. As she made her way to

the Graveyard, she let her mind wander to what she might say. She had only ever confessed her love to one man....

Evelyn danced through central park, her long coat floated behind her. Ricky followed her, he held his hands in his pockets, laughing at her from a far. The city was decorated in lovely red and gold. All the buildings had beautiful arrangements on their doors, the windows glowed with the Christmas spirit. Evelyn giggled as Ricky caught up to her. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close.

"Merry Christmas, Evie." He gave her a light kiss on the forehead. She had only been seeing him for a month or two, but she knew without a doubt that he was the one.

"Ricky, do you think we could ever live happily ever after?" she asked.

"What makes you ask that? Of course we could." He smiled such a sweet smile, she felt her stomach fill with butterflies. She gave him a peck on the cheek and snuggled into his arms.

"I love you."

Ricky squeezed her tightly in his arms. "I love you too."

That was all she had to hear. Evelyn began planning her life with this man.

Nothing could take her from his side now....

Evelyn rushed through the rows of names. As she neared the place where Ricky had been buried, she spotted a man standing before it. He had his hands shoved in his pockets. His shoulders were hung in what looked like shame.

Evelyn ached to comfort him. She held her breath to hear what he was saying.

“...back then, it shouldn’t have happened that way. I’m so sorry,” she heard him say. “I’m sorry about everything.”

Evelyn felt tears gathering in her eyes. Her heart beat fast as he turned and looked at her.

Part 2

Walker strolled through Bryant Park, he reminisced about the times he had spent at the bench. Even days when he wouldn’t see her, he sat there waiting in hopes that she might wander by. As he passed, a sense of urgency pushed him forward. He found himself running through the park without any real reason why.

Walker ran through a busy New York street, dodging oncoming traffic. As he reached the other side he could see the graveyard. He slowed down. *When a man gives you his life, and God brings you the one, you don’t just let it go and forget it.* The words echoed in his mind as he approached the graveyard.

He walked a familiar path to the tombstone of Ricky Gilmore. He stood at the edge of the grave with respect for a long while. His thoughts lingered on the fateful day nearly four years before, when the bravest man he had every met gave his life for a stranger.

You might have a chance if you get into surgery, keep your blood, Walker remembered the words of the nurse as clearly as anything. Not a day had gone by that he hadn’t looked back on that moment. Walker placed the Lilies at the

head of the grave. There was the skeleton of a previous bouquet he had left there.

“Hello Ricky” He said as he stood again. “It’s been some time since I’ve visited, but I suppose you know that.” He paused “I keep thinking back on that day and I always wonder what made you do it? How did you know? I don’t know if you knew this, but you were the luckiest man in the world, and I feel like I’m going to regret it forever if I let myself fall for your girl. But I can’t help thinking that I’m going to regret it just as much if I don’t.”

Walker let the world surround him for a moment, the traffic echoed across the ground. Walker could see a funeral being performed some yards in front of him, the casket had a flag lain over it while the priest read some passage of the bible.

“See, I met Evelyn about a month ago, and I knew I loved her. She’s beautiful and wonderful, but so heart broken. She really loved you, Ricky. Anyway, I can’t go after her until I know that- this is so ridiculous but- until I know that I talked to you about it. I can’t, with good conscience, tell her I love her without honoring you first.”

Walker’s jaw tightened as he remembered the day Ricky was buried. He hadn’t attended the funeral; he had, however, visited it hours later. He remembered the shame he had been filled with that day. What kind of man doesn’t go to a hero’s funeral? Walker hung his shoulders. He felt his eyes fill with tears, he held them back.

“I shouldn’t have been such a coward back then, it shouldn’t have

happened that way. I'm so sorry." He paused for a long time. The silence filled him with comfort. "I'm sorry about everything."

Walker turned to leave. He nearly had a heart attack when he saw Evelyn standing behind him, tears streaming down her face. He didn't know what to do. Did she hate him now? He resisted the urge to take her in his arms, he knew all too well that if she were going to forgive him, than she would do it on her own.

"How long have you been standing there?" He asked, searching for something in her eyes that would let him know that she wasn't going to leave him. He needed her, almost every ounce of himself with dependent upon being with her.

"Not long" she said before wiping a tear away from her face. "I know you didn't try....I know that you didn't mean to." Evelyn paused and turned towards the grave. "I always thought that he didn't care enough about me to stay alive, but I was wrong. Walker, you've got nothing to apologize about."

She pulled herself into his arms. Walker let out a breath of relief, his heart beat fast.

"I love you" He whispered. He kissed her on the top of the head and rested his cheek there for a moment.

"I love you too" Evelyn said. Walker could hardly believe it, he pulled her away from him to look into her eyes. She was smiling, not any smile, but the smile someone shows when they have found the one thing in life that completes them. Walker drew himself close and kissed her.

Evelyn pulled herself from his embrace. "What about school? I thought you were leaving tomorrow?"

Walker kissed her again. "How could I leave you? I'll find another way, believe me. I'm not leaving you. I promise."

He pulled her back into his arms, his hand ran through her hair. A long time passed before the couple turned to face the grave. In the distance, the sun settled behind the clouds, a light pink filled the sky. Walker wrapped his arm around her shoulder as they looked down to the man who had given them everything. He thanked Ricky in his head and gave God thanks for the plan he had made for Walker's life.

Walker took Evelyn by the hand and began to walk away. She hesitated and then stopped.

"I'll catch up in a minute."

Walker kept walking as Evelyn stayed with Ricky a moment more. As he walked away her could overhear the slightest bit of what she was saying.

"I thank God every day for you and for what you did. I'm not alone anymore....It's like you and God planned it all out. Thank you so much, Ricky. Thank you."

The End

