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Category: 19 & Above

Word Count : 951

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OVER COFFEE

The coffee shop was a sanctuary of warmth and aroma, a place where the world buzzed incessantly around me, yet I felt as though I was cocooned in silence. I had chosen a small table in the corner, my usual spot, where the sunlight poured in through the window, illuminating the dust motes dancing in the air. Today, however, the chatter of conversations, the clinking of cups, and the gentle whir of the espresso machine faded into the background as I focused on the small, worn book resting in my hands.

I picked it up lovingly, swallowing over the ache forming in my throat, and the film of tears blurring my vision. I closed my eyes momentarily and the tears squeezed through, broke free, and landed with a splash on the book. Not just any book, but one that had passed down from three generations of women and now belonged to me. I felt honoured but saddened by it, as it meant that I had only received it by losing the most loved person in my life. Such was life and death...and it served no purpose to linger on it.

I wiped away the tears and concentrated on what I held. The cover was red leather with a delicate embossed pattern around the edges. I ran my fingers over the ridges and hollows and wondered at the fingers that must have done the same over the years. The edges were frayed, and the bottom corners were bent with wear, the spine had its title printed in gold. The closed pages were mottled and speckled with age and lifting the book reverently to my nose I inhaled the dusty pages, absorbing the essence.

Not yet wanting to open my treasure, I savoured the anticipation, feeling the weight of it in my hands, imaging the Victorian parlours of old it must have sat in, as my great-grandmother moved from London to the diamond fields of Kimberly in South Africa at the height of the 'rush'. I smiled at the thought of her world being turned upside down at the brashness of her new country and her strong spirit embracing it.

I remembered the book lying in my grandmother's cosy sitting room, never far from her chair and side by side with her current knitting project, the aroma of baked delights in the background. My most constant memory, however, is of my mother sitting in her favourite chair by the fireplace with the treasured book on her lap, smiling contentedly as she devoured the pages through glasses perched on the end of her nose.

Taking the plunge, I slowly opened the cover, the spine creaking as if awakening from a long slumber. The pages were filled with handwritten letters, each penned in elegant cursive, the ink slightly smudged in places. As I began to read the first letter, the words seemed to shimmer before my eyes, and the sights and sounds of the coffee shop began to recede.

I felt as if I were standing in the very room my grandmother had inhabited, every detail vivid and real. The letters were not just words on a page; they were windows into a life rich with emotion and experience

I felt a pang of longing, wishing I could reach out and touch my grandmother's shoulder, to feel the connection of generations. "I wonder what it will be like to be a mother," my grandmother had mused, her tone filled with both excitement and uncertainty. "Will I be as nurturing as my mother? Will I make the right choices?"

My heart ached at the thought. I had often heard stories of my grandmother's strength and resilience, but seeing her in this moment, vulnerable and hopeful, made me feel closer to her than ever before. I was very young when she passed away and the letters sharpened my understanding. She was a woman with dreams, fears, and desires.

I opened the next letter and the scene she described shifted, I found myself in a small kitchen, where the warmth of a crackling fire filled the air. My grandmother was now a few years older, her face radiant with joy as she cradled a tiny bundle in her arms. The kitchen was alive with activity; relatives bustled around, laughter mingling with the scent of freshly baked bread. Grandmother's eyes shone with love as she gazed down at her newborn daughter, my mother.

As the final scene unfolded in front of me, I saw my grandmother sitting on a porch swing, her hair now silver, and a peaceful smile on her face. Her garden was in full bloom, mirroring the beauty that radiated from her. My heart ached for her, as I remembered the challenges that had shaped her into the woman she had become. The strength in her words was a testament to the love she had for her family, a determination that had been passed down.

As the sights and sounds of the coffee shop slowly returned, I found myself back at my table, the book resting open in front of me. I now have the letters which I can pull out at will, like golden threads, and weave a rich tapestry of remembrance, and know that they will always be with me. I wiped my tears, my heart still racing with the emotions I had just experienced.

Taking a deep breath, I closed the book gently, feeling its weight in my hands, and realized the importance of storytelling in preserving family history. I took a sip of my now cold coffee and promised myself that I would start a journal to continue the story.

I ordered another cup of coffee and began to write.