



Chapter 8

Bởi:

unknown

“Bye, Mom. I love you.” Like the bitter-sweetness of salt poured on ice cream, Robbie’s parting words touched my soul and broke my heart. He was going to be gone for almost two weeks, on a fishing trip with his uncle. I wasn’t really listening to Maggie as she chattered away, sitting on the windowsill by The Healing Tree (my little patch of forest and mountain had been moved from the bedside table so it would get more sunshine). Rather, I was surrendering to the melancholic inner voice telling me that my son was a three-quarters orphan – no father and only half a mother – and the only remaining proof that I once was a woman.

“Poem is sort of a weak word, don’t you think?” Maggie had a special knack for discerning when I wasn’t paying attention to her, and forcing me back with an unanswerable question. I simply shrugged, which seemed to satisfy her that I was sufficiently attuned. “Kind of like dream or love, you know. The word is so wimpy, you hardly even think of it as being a noun. It doesn’t have real substance to it. Like, say, job. Or dollar bill. Words with meat on them. Of course, air doesn’t have any real substance to it either, but you can’t live without air. Same with love and dreams. Can’t live without them.” Maggie pulled off her wig and pulled at the wild hairs. Then she continued, “for you and me, Carrie Anne, it’s the same with poetry. We can’t live without it.”

“Well, I’m sure that’s true for you, Maggie, but I’ve managed to live without poetry for 38 years, and I’m sure I’ll get by without it for whatever years I have remaining.” As she usually did, Maggie had something printed on the front of her T-shirt. I squinted to read it: *I have lots of friends –you just can’t see them.* I pointed at her chest. “Your invisible friends – members of the Dead Poets Society?”

“Yeah. Except they’re not really dead, you know. As long as someone is reading their poems, a part of them is still alive. That’s why you’ve got to write, Carrie Anne. It’s like what Anne Frank said in her diary, that when you write it helps you live forever.”

“Well, writing in her diary sure didn’t help Anne Frank live forever.”

“Did you ever read her diary?”

“Back in high school.”

“So you see – through her diary she was still alive even then, alive enough to talk to you. The only question is, were you listening?”

I closed my eyes and thought back to that high school English class assignment. I couldn't remember a single thing that Anne Frank had written in her diary, but had a vivid recollection of the emotions I felt while reading about this young girl who could write of love and hope even when she was trapped in a tiny and fragile refuge surrounded by hate and despair. She had been no older than my Robbie. It was half a century too late, but I still wanted to reach out and hug that frail child, to protect her from the evil men who had dragged her away to die, leaving behind only the diary in which her words would live forever. “I was listening, Maggie, only it's taken a long time for me to really hear.”