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I'LL BE SEEING YOU

Chapter 1

Present day—January

Brianna Hastings slipped into the rear of the classroom, choosing the corner with the poorest lighting. Perhaps she wouldn't be noticed by the professor back there. She'd registered for this class because, first, it would fulfill one of her requirements, and second, her mom had badgered her into it.

"History is interesting. Give it a chance. You'll love it."

Right. Fascinating. Sure.

She sank onto the chair and pulled her laptop from the bag, setting it on the table in front of her. After connecting to the college Wi-Fi, she clicked to open her messaging app. Quickly, she typed a text.

Meet for lunch at Dairy Queen?

She watched the moving bubbles indicate her best friend, Hannah Smith, was reading the message. Seconds later, the reply came.

👍 12:30

Other students continued to file into the classroom. Lots of them. Apparently this was a popular course. Maybe it was an easy A. She shook her head. Probably not. But an easy C would make her happy.

"Hey, Brianna." Adam Wentworth, one of her best friends since childhood, slid onto the chair to her right. "How's it going?"

"Okay."

Some girls in the row ahead of them turned, smiled, and greeted Adam then Brianna before

facing forward again.

Adam leaned toward Brianna. “I’ve heard great things about Professor Meyer. This should be a good semester.”

Adam was one of those guys everybody liked. He was regular looking but had a smile that made friends in an instant. He was smart too. But what made him stand out was how nice he was. He was the sort of guy who stood up for the weird kid getting bullied in school. He was the guy who would set aside something he wanted to do in order to help someone in need. She’d seen all of that for herself ever since they’d become friends in elementary school.

She slid down in her chair. “I’ve never cared much for history.”

“Really? But it’s fascinating to learn how people used to live, used to think. Dad likes to say that the more things change, the more they stay the same. That’s what I’ve seen when I study history. We’ve got things to learn from both the bad and the good of other times, other cultures.”

He might have gone on, but he fell quiet, along with the rest of the room, when a man with glasses and salt-and-pepper hair stepped to the front. Professor Joseph Meyer, Brianna presumed. As soon as he began to welcome the students to his class, she zoned out. All of her professors had basically said the same thing for her past three semesters. She didn’t expect Professor Meyer to break the pattern.

She opened her email app. Her friends rarely communicated that way, but the college did, so she’d learned to check at least once a day during the term. Nothing of importance showed up in her in-box. She closed the app and was about to open her browser when the professor’s words caught her attention.

“This assignment will count for fifty percent of your grade and will have several parts.”

Brianna glanced at Adam. “What assignment?”

He gave her one of those looks that said, *You should have paid attention,* before turning his eyes toward the front again.

“You’ll find more information about it on page five of your syllabus, and more detailed instructions will be included in the weekly modules you’ll find online.”

Something told her she could say bye-bye to an easy A, B, or C.

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Later that afternoon, Brianna sat at the kitchen counter, slicing carrots, while her mom peeled potatoes opposite her.

“At least you don’t have to wonder who you’ll interview,” her mom said. “The oldest member of our family is GeeGee. Interviewing her will be a delight.”

“A delight”? Brianna loved her great-grandmother, but spending hours listening to a ninety-eight-year-old woman talk about the past didn’t sound like much fun to her.

If only she could have gone away to a university in another city like several of her friends. They got to do what they wanted, go where they wanted, study when they wanted. If only she

wasn't stuck living at home with her parents, Mrs. Thrifty and Mr. Practicality.

Her mom took the prepared potatoes and placed them into the pot on the stove. "Would you like me to call Grandma? Set up a time for you to meet? This doesn't sound like a project you can put off. An early start will serve you well."

"Fine."

The look her mom sent her wasn't all that dissimilar to the one Adam had given her that morning, and it made her want to grind her teeth. Who were they to judge her? She had a right to her opinions, to her likes and dislikes.

It's not fair. None of it.

It would serve her parents right if she failed everything. All that tuition, all those fees and textbooks, wasted. She could bail on her classes and just hang with friends until another semester was over. Only all of her friends were in college or had jobs. Nobody would be free to hang with her. And she didn't *really* want to flunk her classes. Nor did she want to disappoint her parents, especially not her dad.

Life wasn't fair. That's what Dad would tell her if he knew her thoughts. Hadn't he said it a million times to her already? And that wasn't all he liked to say. *"You have it easy, Brianna. You don't know what hard is. Your parents aren't rich, but you've never spent a winter's night without heat. You've never known real hunger. You've never had to do without any real need and not very many wants either. I love you to death, Brianna, but I'm afraid you and your whole generation have been spoiled."*

"If you keep frowning like that," her mom said, intruding on her thoughts, "you're going to get a horrid crease in the middle of your forehead."

She sighed. "I can't do anything right."

"Oh, sweetheart. What a thing to say."

Brianna got up from the kitchen stool. "I'll call GeeGee. I might as well get started. Like you said."

Her mom smiled as she returned to chopping more vegetables for the stew.

Chapter 2

Saturday, December 6, 1941

"Come on, Daisy. I swear, you're as slow as molasses."

Daisy Abbott turned her attention from the downtown department-store window to her older sister, who'd stopped near the entrance.

Lillian gave her an impatient look. "Are you coming or not?"

"I'm coming."

Lillian pushed open the door and stepped inside. Daisy followed right behind her. She was thankful for the warmth awaiting them after the bitter cold of outdoors and paused long enough to enjoy it.

The store was busy on this first Saturday in December. Other Christmas shoppers moved about the aisles, and the air was richly scented with perfume from a display to their right.

Daisy sneezed into her gloved hand. "Let's get away from here." She sneezed again.

Her sister released a sound of exasperation. Lillian loved perfume, but she had to know Daisy wouldn't stop sneezing until they were well away from the fragrance counter. With a slight toss of her head, she hurried down an aisle.

"Why are we here?" Daisy asked as she trailed behind. "We bought everything on your list already."

"Not everything. I still have to get Brandan's gift."

As usual, Daisy's heart skipped a beat at the sound of Brandan's name. He was coming home on leave for Christmas, but of course he wasn't coming home to see her. Brandan Gallagher was Lillian's boyfriend. Still, Daisy would get to see him when he came to their house.

Lillian stopped at the display of men's watches. "Father prefers a gold watch, but I think silver looks better on Brandan." She looked down through the glass. "Don't you?"

Perhaps it's his blue-gray eyes. I love his eyes.

"Daisy, are you listening to me?"

"Yes, I'm listening."

"I asked if you think a silver watch is better than gold for Brandan."

"Yes. You should get the silver."

Daisy knew it didn't matter how she answered. Lillian didn't want her opinion. She wanted an audience. All her life, Lillian had enjoyed being the center of attention. She was the beautiful Abbott sister. She was the sister who could walk down the street and stop a man in his tracks.

The same way she'd stopped Brandan in his tracks when she was sixteen.

Jealousy coiled in Daisy's stomach. Speaking softly, she said, "You think he's going to

propose when he's home for Christmas. Don't you?"

"Of course he's going to propose. Why wouldn't he?" Lillian met her gaze and smiled. "We're in love. He's got his college degree, and soon he'll finish his aviation training. Marriage is the natural next step for us."

"He hasn't seen you in months. Maybe he found a new girl in Louisiana."

For a moment, Lillian's smile faltered. Daisy didn't feel like smiling either. It was bad enough that Brandan loved her sister and barely knew Daisy was alive. It would be even worse if he fell for someone so far from home. What if she never saw him again?

Lillian tilted her chin. "I know Brandan. He would never betray me. Never. He's devoted to me. By summer, he'll be a pilot in the US Army Air Corps. A second lieutenant. That's what he's worked toward all these years, and I've waited as he asked me to. Now the waiting is almost over. Wherever he's posted next year, he'll want me with him."

Daisy wondered if her sister was as confident as she sounded.

A salesclerk stepped to the opposite side of the display case. "May I help you, miss?"

Lillian turned her gaze on the man. "Yes, thank you. I would like to see that watch." She looked down and pointed at the item beneath the glass.

"Of course."

Daisy leaned close and whispered, "Lillian, how can you afford that?"

"I've saved for it."

"Maybe Brandan doesn't need a new watch. If his watch still works, he won't want to replace it."

"What do you know about what Brandan wants?"

The words stung. Daisy knew a lot about Brandan. Much more than Lillian would ever guess. She knew he liked the attention that other girls gave him. She knew that he was ambitious and meant to follow his plans to achieve success with continued resolve. She knew he didn't mind going without something now if it meant having more later. She knew he was smart, sometimes caring, and sometimes careless. And she knew he wouldn't want a new watch if his old one worked.

Lillian looked at the salesclerk and all but batted her eyelashes at him. "My fiancé will want this watch, won't he?"

"Yes, miss. It's the best model we offer." He draped the band over his fingers and began to detail the watch's features.

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After the dishes were washed and dried that night, Daisy took Jupiter, the family dog, for a walk. It was dark and cold outside, but she didn't care. She needed some time to herself.

Lillian had gone on and on about Brandan during dinner. He was scheduled to return to Boise in a week, and Lillian had made plans for nearly every minute of his leave. Daisy hoped her

sister remembered that Brandan had a mom, a dad, and a couple of brothers who wanted to see him too.

And me. I want to see him.

She wiped away a tear with the back of her knitted glove.

Like it was yesterday, Daisy remembered the first time she'd seen Brandan Gallagher. She'd been not quite fifteen, a sophomore in high school, and hideous looking, her mousy brown hair too curly and her nose too long. Brandan was eighteen, a freshman at Boise Junior College, and as tall and handsome as a Greek god. He hadn't noticed her at the time. Why would he? She'd been just another kid in the crowd at a football game.

"Years later, and he still doesn't notice me," she said to Jupiter.

Somehow, before Daisy had had a chance to change from a girl into a woman and learn to tame her hair and apply makeup, her own sister had set her cap for Brandan, and he'd fallen hard for her. They'd been a couple ever since. Everyone—especially Lillian—believed they would get married soon.

Even Daisy believed it. "If only I didn't."

"Daisy? Is that you?" Todd Kinnear, the Abbotts' next-door neighbor, appeared in the light from his front porch.

She stopped and answered in a loud voice. "Yes. It's me."

Daisy didn't remember a time when the Kinnears hadn't lived next door. The two families had been close while Todd's parents were still living, everyone going back and forth between yards. Todd had been more like a big brother than a neighbor. More than once, she'd gone to him with a problem she hadn't felt ready to share with Lillian or their mom. Six years her senior, Todd had seemed wise and steady. She still thought of him that way, although he didn't joke with her the way he had when she was younger. He was much more serious now, perhaps because he'd been managing Kinnear Canning ever since his father's death. At sixteen, he'd started helping his mom run the business then had become the owner after she passed away when he was twenty-one.

"Cold night for a walk," he said.

"Yes." She pulled up the collar of her coat. "Jupiter needed some exercise."

"How's your family?"

"Everyone's well."

"Ready for Christmas?"

She thought of Brandan coming home on leave. Home to Lillian. "Yes, we're ready."

"Good. That's good." Todd cleared his throat. "Well, I won't keep you out there freezing. Good night."

"Good night, Todd."

He turned and went inside, and she and Jupiter continued on their way.

Daisy entered the back door of the house a few minutes later. The dog ran on ahead of her while she removed her gloves and stuck them into her pockets, then took off her coat and hat and hung them on the coat rack in the corner. By the time she reached the living room, Jupiter was lying on the rug in front of the fireplace. Her father sat near a lamp, reading a newspaper while smoking his pipe, and her mother was on the sofa, knitting a scarf.

"Did you have a nice walk?" Her mother's needles paused mid-air as she waited for an answer.

"Jupiter liked it." Daisy sank onto the sofa beside her. "Where's Lillian?"

"In her room. She said she had gifts to wrap and some cards to write. I've never seen her this excited for Christmas. Not even as a child." She resumed knitting. "I suppose it all has to do with Brandan. Not Christmas itself. She is so head over heels for him. I hope she doesn't get her heart broken."

"He's a sensible young man." Her father turned a page in his newspaper. "Brandan knows it's important to stay focused on his studies until he graduates. Priorities. A man with his priorities straight will do well. He'll make a fine officer, and he'll make Lillian a good husband when the time is right."

Poor Brandan. It must be hard to stay focused with Lillian doing her darnedest to distract him.

A log tumbled in the fireplace, sending up red and orange sparks. Jupiter groaned as he shifted position on the rug. Her mother's knitting needles clicked at a steady pace.

It was a winter evening like so many other winter evenings gone before, and Daisy suddenly felt stir crazy. Would her life go on like this forever? The family finances didn't allow for college. Not that it mattered. Most girls got married and stayed at home, whether or not they'd continued their education. After graduating from high school the previous spring, Daisy had found a job in a drugstore three blocks from the house. She worked there five days a week from nine to four. The money wasn't great, but she couldn't complain. Not after others had been out of work for years because of the Depression. What she could complain about was the sameness of the job. Nothing about it challenged her. Nothing occupied her mind. It was simply the same dull work, day after day after day.

As for boys and the possibility of marriage . . . Well, that was another problem, wasn't it? She wasn't interested in boys her own age. She wanted a man. Someone with something interesting to say. Someone who would sweep her off her feet. She wanted a man like Brandan Gallagher.

But there isn't anybody else like Brandan.

"Daisy, dear," her mother said, intruding on her thoughts. "Is something wrong?"

She shook her head. "No."

"Well, do stop frowning. If you don't, you'll have a crease on the bridge of your nose before

you're thirty."

Who would notice?

She pushed up from the sofa. "I think I'll go to my room." She stepped to her mother and kissed her forehead. "Good night." She repeated the action and words with her father, then made her way up the stairs.

She stopped at the door to Lillian's room, intending to knock. After a moment's hesitation, she instead moved on to her own bedroom.

Daisy couldn't remember a time when she hadn't tagged along everywhere with her older sister. They'd shared a bedroom for a while. They'd played with dolls and taught school to their teddy bears. They'd been as close as two peas in a pod—until Daisy fell for Brandan. If only Daisy had told her sister how she felt about him, way back at the beginning, maybe Lillian wouldn't have felt the same. Then again, would Lillian have taken her seriously? Who cared about the romantic crush of a fourteen-year-old except for the fourteen-year-old herself? And besides, Lillian did tend to get what she wanted. And she'd wanted Brandan.

Daisy flopped onto the bed and stared at the ceiling. "I have to stop thinking about him. He doesn't see me except as Lillian's little sister. He'll never see me the way I want him to. Give up. Give up. Give up."

Tears welled again. They trickled over her temples and into her hair.

"Why can't he love me instead?"

She knew all the reasons, of course. Lillian was the beauty in the family. Lillian had a sparkling, irresistible personality. Men were drawn to her like the bees were to their honey.

And Brandan was drawn to Lillian. He would never belong to Daisy.

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Todd Kinnear settled into the comfortable chair beside the fireplace and picked up his book. But he didn't open it. Instead, he listened to the silence filling the house. Most of the time, the stillness didn't bother him. He was used to it. But tonight it did. Maybe he should have asked to join Daisy and Jupiter and gone with them to the Abbott home. He was always welcome there.

Todd had a vague memory of the day he and his parents had moved into this two-bedroom house on Eastman Street. He'd been four and a half at the time. After that, he couldn't think of a time when the Kinnears and the Abbotts hadn't moved freely back and forth through the gate that joined their backyards. The men helped each other with home repairs. The women shared recipes. When Lillian and Daisy were sick with the mumps, Todd's mother had made a huge pot of chicken soup for them. When Todd had the accident that left him with a bum leg and less-than-perfect hearing, Nancy Abbott had taken turns with his own mom, sitting next to his hospital bed, reading to him, comforting him.

Todd had been sixteen when his father died from a heart attack, and Carl Abbott had been there to advise Todd as he struggled with finishing high school while trying to help his mom

make sure the cannery didn't fail. Carl and Nancy Abbott had been there for Todd again when he buried his mom three years later.

As for the little Abbott girls . . .

He closed his eyes and rested his head against the chair back.

The Abbott girls weren't little anymore. Lillian was twenty and hoping to get married soon, and Daisy was eighteen. Or was she nineteen by now? No, still eighteen.

He smiled as he pictured the younger sister. Daisy wasn't the natural beauty that Lillian was, but she had a sweetness of spirit that he'd always found far more attractive. Lillian's beauty seemed only skin deep. Todd had caught more than a few glimpses over the years of her self-centeredness. Any man who took the time to really look would see the difference between the two sisters.

If it were me, I'd choose—

He broke off the thought before it could fully form. Daisy would never be interested in a guy like him. Not as anything more than a surrogate big brother, the way she'd always seen him. And he couldn't blame her. She was special and deserved somebody special. Not an ordinary working stiff like Todd.

Annoyed at the direction of his thoughts, he straightened and set the unread book on the nearby end table. Then he turned the knob on the Philco. Music came through the speaker, chasing silence into the corners of the small living room.

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