What makes a bird sing
by msarahv

Summary

Will is a melancholic, shy young man. He meets Sonny and befriends him. It's a quiet bittersweet fic. The pace will be slow.
Chapter 1

Will was seating at his desk, looking out the window. It was dusk and the wind was pushing the remaining leaves on the ground, the one he had forgotten to sweep. The garden was bare and cold-looking. His mother was out at a cocktail party for work. She had managed as always to make herself look smashing, hiding the wear of her face, the shadows under her eyes that she got trying and manage it all. Will helped as much as he could, but she had put her foot down at some point. His studies were important. Enjoying his youth was important. So, here he was, his books open, his attention drifting after two hours focusing. A bird started singing outside, a heartfelt, simple melody, with shrill notes, that made it happy. Will felt melancholic. Youth was turning out to be less easy than it had seemed. For example, girls. He liked girls. Hanging out with them was fun. Wanting to kiss them didn't occur though and after some soul-searching, he had sat his mother down and told her that he was thinking of trying it with men instead. She had resisted, hard at first, and when he didn't cave, she had backed off, seemingly keeping her thought to herself and they lived in that awkward balance, full of love, but also of incomprehension. Her main argument was that he hadn't tried yet, that if he did, he might realize he was mistaken. With girls, she meant. But truth was he hadn't with anyone. So she could be right.

It was a small house they were all tucked in. His mother had married twice and never to his father. Now she was alone and his siblings were growing up. Filling the house with cries and running down the many stairs. Will didn't believe in love. But he dreamt of it. A manuscript lay beside him, filled with a story that would never happen, where he met someone who would make his life better because he would think Will was the most important person on the planet.

He decided to take a walk before dark, to clear his head of the hopes and sorrows that were nested in here, like a big sad bird with a broken voice. He went to the park at the end of the street. The real bird had followed him there, or it was another one and Will whistled in accompaniment, aware that this one had a busy little life and had chosen to be happy about it. He could build a bird feeder with his brother and sisters and hang it outside. They could paint it in bright colors to attract the bright birds. The one he was listening to came flying just under his eyes. He was all red, even the beak and sported a crest that made it look quite cocky. Will smiled and walked on, pressing his jacket against his chest. He should have taken his winter coat. He was about to turn around when he saw someone on one of the bench.

If that man had been a bird, he would have been a raven or a crow. Because of his dark crumpled hair, like creased wings, but also because of the way his head was bent, supported by big, virile hands. He looked like he had given up and Will didn't want to turn his back to him and leave him there with his worries. He sat, careful not to make any noise, his hands in his pockets, shivering lightly under the strengthening whiffs of wind.

After a minute or so, the fingers changed positions, allowing Will to spot a brown eye looking sideways. He looked ahead, not sure if he could intrude. Maybe the man wanted solitude. Maybe he would get up and go to another bench, or even walked out of the park. When he was sure both of them weren't moving, he smiled just a little and turned his head a quarter of an inch:

"Hello", said the stranger. He looked surprised but not guarded, so Will relaxed a little

- Hello.

- You look cold.
You look sad."

The man managed a smile, while his eyes were still sad. He sighed and sat uptight, his back now against the wood and the metal. Will had avoided the cold contact and suggested, as if in passing: "We can go have a drink somewhere and you can tell me why you're sad?"

- You might not want to hear it."

There was hope in the man's voice, prompting Will to answer: "Give me the benefit of the doubt. I'm not in a great mood myself and tonight, I'm on my own."

The man looked at him thoughtfully, weighing him down. Then, he nodded and got up. They walked in silence. Will had taken note of the new coffee place a few streets away and intended to try it so now was the moment. He gestured to it and saw the man hesitate, then give in.

It was warm inside, but not too heated. They could come here for Allie's birthday. He could ask if they did cakes. Their mother didn't. She couldn't even cook pastas. On the list of things to do as an adult, Will had "learn how to cook" somewhere. If he was to live alone he would have to, not to spend too much. He had no clear idea of what he would do. So he was studying economics. It was down-to-earth, far from the dreams he was living in, most of the time.

He sat in front of him, him he still called "the man" and defied his shyness once again:

"My name is Will, short for William.

- I'm Jackson, but you can call me Sonny."

Will put his head on his hand and looked straight in the brown eyes. They looked a little cheerier or maybe it was his imagination, hard to say. He went on:

"So, what is putting you down? A woman? Or is it your job?"

- Neither. There's no woman in my life and my job is doing fine.

- So, what is it? You can tell me anything. I'm a stranger, you don't have to hide or pretend.

- What were you doing in that park if you're a stranger?

- I was following a bird song. I live here but I don't think we've met before.

- No, we haven't. I would have remembered. I'm good with faces.

- I'm not. But I'm good with expressions and you look like talking would do you some good.

- You're not going to let this go, are you?

- Nope. I don't have lots of people to confide in either. There's my grandma but she's in Europe now.

- How old are you, Will?
- 19. And you?

- I'm 23. You look younger.

- I know. My mom appreciates it, it makes people think she's younger too."

He chuckled and Will had won. He waited. Sonny, of the bright, funny name, and the bright, friendly smile, would open up. Will's body was relaxed, as it hadn't been for a while. Maybe it was the coffee-house atmosphere, intimate and colored at the same time. Maybe it was the pride of having acted out of concern. He didn't make many friends, not real ones. He kept big parts of him secret and it impeded on his freedom of movement. So, he understood the restraint the man was showing. He studied his traits. He was handsome but there was something more. Even looking gloomy, he carried an energy that blew Will away. He wanted to know why, to reach him, to find out what explained the warmth in the dark eyes.

He was studied back and a sparkle appeared in these very eyes. Then Sonny talked, and Will forgot himself for a moment:

"I've been facing a ghost, recently. Someone from my past I had almost forgotten about. Someone I'd left behind.

- What does he want?

- She wants me to be with her. And I can't. Things have changed and she doesn't get it. She's been very insistent. I've spent two hours talking her out of killing herself.

- Holy crap! I can see why you're down...

- I'm feeling a little better actually. Thanks for listening. So what about you? What are you hiding?

- I'm not sure you'd be interested to know.

- That's not fair. I opened up, now it's your turn."

A barista brought two cups of coffee and placed them on the small table. Will inhaled the intoxicating smell of his dark coffee and frowned when he saw Sonny's cup.

"I don't recall you ordering. How did she know? The place just opened and you're already a regular?

- Not really, no. Although I think your order will be easy to remember. You don't like fancy coffees?

- No, just the basic stuff. I'm easy to please.

- I'll keep that in mind. But you've changed the subject. What are your ghosts?

- None, really. I just feel out-of-place, sometimes. I'm quiet, so life tends to pass me by. I don't want to make mistakes but if I don't make any, how will I know who I am?

- Well, you are a kind soul, for one. And observant, too. Thanks again for your time.

- Sure, maybe we'll meet again, who knows?
- It depends how much you like coffee."

And with that, Sonny got up and went behind the counter to take something. Will looked at the barista, as she barely acknowledged it. So, he was working here. Well, Will liked coffee a lot. And he liked Sonny too. Maybe, he could make a friend, a real one this time.

Sonny came back with a muffin and hold it to Will:

"There, hope you like blueberry.

- I do, thank you. Is it baked here?

- Yes. These are the easiest for me. I hope you'll like it.

- If I do, will you teach me how to bake?" Will paused. The man must be very busy. He was assuming...

- That's a deal. Come back when you want, I'm often here.

He grinned fully and Will caught his breath. He nodded and walked to the door. When he got there, Sonny handed him his coat.

- Here, you'll need it. It's even colder out.

- No, it's OK, I don't live that far. Keep it.

- I live upstairs and I have another coat. That way, I'm sure I'll see you again.

- Are you that desperate for new customers?

- Absolutely."

Will moved on the side, not wanting to hug the man, not wanting to just go out. So, he held his hand awkwardly. Sonny's skin was soft and his grip was firm. Will liked that. He walked out, in the windy and cloudy night and walked home. The birds were silent now, it was time to go to sleep. But Will felt he had gotten past his melancholic state, and felt hopeful for the future. He would have to return the coat to its owner. He opened the front door, whistling again, a smile on his soul.
Chapter 2

His sister Allie was back the next day. She hugged their mother, Sami, who squeezed her so much, Allie had to say:

"Mom, you're hurting me." Sami released her grip and sniffed. She wasn't one for doing things halfway.

- I've missed you so much, my baby. Did you enjoy your week with your dad?" Allie looked sideways at Will. He grinned and nodded.

- It was great mom! He took me ice-skating everyday. He says, I should take lessons, because I'm so good at it."

What Will was good at was not to show how he felt when he heard that. He hadn't bothered putting "learn how to skate" on his list. You could be an adult without that. Lucas had tried, for a while, to make up for the lost years. He had given up when Will had asked him to. He wasn't a kid anymore, it was too late. His father didn't know him, it was fine. But he had stopped going. It hurt to see Allie share this bond with him and stand there, like a stranger to his own family. Sami wasn't perfect but the way she didn't tiptoe around him made feel Will intimate. She was his mother, he was her son, so no need to handle him like a fragile possession. He knew very well that he was fragile, though. So, he let Sami and Allie reconnect and get some alone-time before the arrival of their sibling from another father the next day and went to the bookstore.

It was one of those place that you wonder how they still exist, how they make a profit. Only second-hand books, the one that had been loved by others, that had been handled. Will could afford new ones, but he liked those more. Once every week, he bought one and read it whenever his eyes got tired by the glow of the computer screen. When he went to bed and he needed to put his lonely feelings at bay. He chose one called On the road. He had heard about it. He was reading the summary on the back page, squinting his eyes to decipher the words on the used cover, while closing the glass door behind him, which made the bell chimes as always, when a hand patted his shoulder, soft as a bird. He looked up and saw a cocky smile. He remembered the red, crested bird and smiled back. Sonny looked different, this morning. Apparently, he healed fast. Will envied him that.

"Are you looking for books?" Will asked, hoping he would say yes and they had that in common. But Sonny shook his head.

- No, I just saw you. I'm headed to the post office.

- Oh." Will was disappointed but he didn't feel like letting him go. He liked the informality of this meeting, as if they were friends already. So he proposed "You mind company?"

Sonny smiled even more, then said, gently

"Sure. I got lost the last time I went there. Maybe you can guide me?"

- Have you lived here long?" Sonny shook his hair again and Will felt himself blushing. He was the one asking questions but the stare he was under was asking questions of his own and he didn't know which ones. Sonny finally answered
- About a month. I came before to see how the builders were working. It took a long time, but now we've opened and it seems we struck gold."

Will laughed. It seemed Sonny's presence was alighting his spirits, whatever he said. They started walking and passed one of the tree form the park. Will looked up but saw a new bird, this one yellow. This one wasn't singing, it was moving its head comically, with quick, weird movements. Will pointed him silently to his walking companion. Sonny followed the direction with keen eyes and Will saw him beam. The smile he addressed Will felt too much, too overwhelming.

They reached the post office five minutes later and Will stopped.

- You see, next time, you won't need help." Sonny's eyes sparkled.

- It's a pity then. So, when will I see you at Common Grounds?

- Hum... Soon. I still have your coat. It's very warm." Not as warm as these dark brown eyes.

Now Will was sweating. He stepped backward and said

- Have a good day!" and practically ran away.

Back at home, he took the coat in his arms. Maybe, he could put it on the coat rack at the coffee-house when no one was looking. Sonny had noticed him in the street but if he was working and busy... The coat made a creasing sound. Will fished in one of the inside pocket and found a postcard. He shouldn't be reading it. But he did anyway, fascinated. It was signed Crystal, with a little heart after. It said things Will wanted to write someone. It wasn't very good prose but it must have done the trick if Sonny had kept it. There was something else in the pocket. A map. It had been used a lot, like the book that was in Will's pocket. It had strange concentric circles and annotations he didn't know. There were pencil lines all over it and Will put it on his desk, to look at it and dream.

Sami came into his bedroom and kisses his temple

"You're still working for this exam... Are you anxious?"

Will nodded. Sami had moments of subtlety and kindness that had to be fully appreciated. Will massaged his forehead and asked

"You need help?

- Not really. I thought I would take you and Allie out tonight, maybe to the diner that she likes so much?

- As long as it's not a fast-food place, I'm in.

Will loved all his siblings, but in her quiet way, Allie was the one he related to the most. And she loved him back, being the only one in the world to think he was marvelous. He felt like a giant when she looked up at him. So, when she asked him for another place to go, before coming home, as it was still early and it wasn't as if Sydney was here, they were all quite old now (Will didn't fight the smile. She was ten, she didn't know what old was. He didn't even know), Will said the first thing that crossed his mind.

"There's the new coffee place, on the main road."
There is?“ Sami worked in the city. She didn't walk around the house as much as Will did. He felt proud to have something to show him, a finding. So much that he forgot until they had crossed the threshold.

"Will?“ The voice was singing almost. Sonny's smile filled the room.

Sami and Allie looked at Will who fidgeted on his feet, trying not to look too much into Sonny’s eyes. He was going backward in this budding friendship. The more confident Sonny was getting, the more withdrawn it made Will. He couldn't believe he had had the nerve to make him confess private painful things just a few days ago. He thought about the postcard. And about the coat.

"We just ate out and I wanted to show the coffee-house to my sister Allie."

Sonny turned his brightness to Allie and Will felt less strung, but also lost, back in his shadows. Sami shook Sonny's hand after her daughter did and started chatting. It was easy for her. Sonny seemed to like her and Will prepared to be sidetracked by his own Mom. She was bright too and loud and present. That's how she managed well in her field, that's how Will felt second violin in his own life.

Sonny had given them his best table. He brought some chocolate to Allie with the drawing of a cat and she was hooked too. Will decided to ask her and Sami.

"What do you say you have your birthday party here, Allie?

- Yes, I'd like that" she answered, looking around with her usual reserve. Will could see she was happy.

Sami had ordered a latte and Will hadn't say anything. He wasn't disappointed. Sonny put the black plain coffee in front of him, with a chocolate muffin next to the plate. He didn't look at Will and asked.

"Would you ladies like something to eat too?

- No, thank you Sonny. We just ate dinner and I have to look after my figure.

- Now, that is impossible, Ma'am. You look fantastic. And may I add, way too young to be the mother of so many children. Do you have a secret?"

Sami was beaming. Will smirked and looked away. Allie hadn't answered, so Will cut the muffin in half and offered it to her. She smiled at him. Will plucked his courage and looked at Sonny. He was staring again.

"So, it's on the house. I'm glad to have meet you all. I hope you'll visit once in a while.

- With such a welcome, how could we not? Don't you think so, Will?"

Will looked down at his coffee, wishing he was alone with Sonny to recapture this moment of easiness, this meeting of two souls. Now, he was embarrassed, reminded of his limitations. He looked longingly at the figure of Sonny retreating and greetings new customers.

Allie saved him, without knowing it, when she yawned. Sami frowned.
"Did your dad pay attention to your bedtime, honey?

- He said it's the holidays. That it's funny to talk late." Sami shook her head and sighed.

- We'll leave now, Will. Don't forget to lock when you come home."

Will looked at them get out of the door in a daze. He was wondering if he should go too, but Sonny sat in front of him. Having him at his level helped a lot. Will fiddled with his napkin and asked

"So, how is she? The girl you were worried about?" Sonny looked at him thoughtfully.

- A little better. Thank you for asking."

There was an awkwardness now. Will wanted to ask about the map, about the girlfriend but he couldn't. All other questions seemed dull. Sonny coughed

"So, you like to read a lot?

- Oh, hum... yeah, I like to read. But it's not my only interest.

- Bird watching?" Will looked up, startled.

- You remember?

- You reminded to listen to the bird song and to take a breath, look around. I needed that. I've worked hard to open this place but I've forgotten to enjoy simple things. You have helped me in many ways." he placed his hand on Will's. A tickling current went from it to Will's veins. Maybe now he was glowing, like a lamp. He slid his hand away and put it on his knees. Sonny got up

"So, I'll see you around?

- Yes, yes, sure... Hum...

- Yes?

- Nothing." Sonny sat back and looked at him with a straightforwardness that helped. Will smiled shyly. "Your muffins are delicious and if... But I don't think you have time for it, so..."

Sonny was still staring, his eyes digging holes in Will's mind. He whispered

"I have time for you. Come back tomorrow. It's my day off. I'll teach you."

Will went home and put the coat next to his bed, not to forget it the next day. The house was silent, expect from the cracking of woods that he had grown used to. There was one howl, outside. Every night, the same bird, the same spot. Wherever he slept, Will heard the lament, regular and deep. He focused on it, on the quiet that he hated and craved for. Tomorrow, he would bake, for the first time ever.
Chapter 3

Will didn't like mirrors. They made him look one-dimensional, limited to a pale washy exterior, when he knew that he had colors on the inside, worlds of beauty hidden in his imagination. But, for once, he stood before the big one, in the bathroom, looking at himself from head to toe. He looked OK. No crumpled shirt, no strange color association. He wouldn't stand out in the streets and that's what he was aiming at. Passing.

He went out the main door and heard two little birds in a tree. They were singing loudly, as if competing, out of tune with each other. Will wanted one of them to fly away and find another tree where it could be the only master, the only singer. But they kept on their vocal battle and he left them here.

Sonny had said to come around three. It was five to. Will was very punctual. Maybe it would bother Sonny. But if he came later, it might be too late and he would regret this. So, he entered the coffee-house just as his watch was showing three. Sonny was there, or so it seemed. There was a back bent, over apron-wearing legs and it was familiar. There was the sound of broken glass being scraped from the floor.

Sonny's voice came, filled with stress and anger

"Is nothing going to be working good today? Can't you be more focused?"

A young woman was running from one table to the other. She came back to the counter as Will was approaching and answered

- I'm sorry Sonny, I am. We're so short-staffed, today."

She saw Will and smiled, waving him to go sit. He gestured towards Sonny's still bent shape. She called him

- Sonny, there's someone to see you..."

Will waited as Sonny slowly got up, his back turned to him, grumbling

"What is it this time? If it's not important, they can wait?" With that he turned, facing Will who had his hand gripped on the coat. Sonny's face changed immediately to a shy smile, but Will put the coat on the counter and said

"Sorry to bother you. I won't...

- No, Will, I'm sorry, I didn't mean..." he said the last words to Will's retreating back. If he could have run outside, he would have.

Once back in the street, he walked fast, not caring where to, just making sure to leave the place far behind. He had presumed too much. People had lives, busy ones. He couldn't ask them to pause for him. He was glad he had given back the coat. He might not have to come back, ever. The map would remain a mystery and...

He stopped, dead in his track. The map was home, on his desk, along with the postcard. He took his
head in his hands. How stupid... He had created a complex situation, out of nothing, sheer curiosity and lack of control. He turned back, then turned again, not knowing how to act, what to do. It was getting colder and none of the shops were open. He walked on, fighting the wind, hating his tears, hating his over-sensitive heart.

"Will!"

No, it wasn't real. He was putting words in the wind's howl.

"Will, wait! Please!"

But the wind was literate and knew many words. Will wanted to pretend he didn't hear anything. But he remembered hearing tiredness in Sonny's tone earlier. He slowed down, to a halt. The trick was to make the sweeping movement over his face natural. He wasn't crying that hard, Sonny may not notice.

"Will, I didn't know it was you. That's why I was crossed. I don't work today, and everything went wrong. And I saw the time pass and I knew I wouldn't be ready for you, and...

- But you don't have to. We can postpone. Or never do it. Your work comes first and you look exhausted. Don't mind me. It isn't important."

Sonny's eyes were open wide. He looked a little like the first time Will had seen him. Vulnerable. Not like a raven this time but like an eagle with a limp.

"It is important to me, Will. I want to spend time with you. Forget about my work for a while, forget what's dark in my life, do something fun for a change." Will smiled.

- You think baking is fun?" Sonny let out a sigh. He must have been running to catch Will.

- I do. And you're fun too." Will had a wry smile

- You're just trying to make me change my mind.

- Is it working?"

Will hesitated. He knew the danger of expecting too much, of being let down by others, like his father. But Sonny's expression was one of one in need and Will could go on with that. If people needed him, he had a place, a purpose. He offered a smile and saw Sonny's shoulder droop.

They walked back to the street where the coffee place stood but Sonny turned before the entrance in a little alley that led to the backyard. There were stairs, leading to a balcony. Sonny opened the door and showed Will in.

Because Sonny made the muffins at work, Will had assumed they would go to the professional kitchen to do this but Sonny had taken him to his apartment. It felt weird as if he was entering someone's head and he tried not to look around, focusing on Sonny's features, on the way his energetic steps made his body almost jump, as he opened his cupboards and started taking things out. He was still wearing his apron and handed another to Will. It was one of these funny ones, surely a gift. Maybe from his girlfriend.

Sonny started whistling and Will grimaced. Sonny looked like a bright bird but he couldn't carry a
tune. He joined him, trying to subtly correct the melody and Sonny turned sparkling eyes to him. They both grinned. Sonny put the eggs and sugar on the table, then took a box that sent thin white powder everywhere.

The wheat was hard to fight against. It deposited its tiny particle everywhere it could and Will and Sonny were becoming snowmen fast. The white in Sonny's hair made him look older. Will chuckled and kept pouring it in the scale.

"Can't you see that's too much?"

- No, not before I've read the scale." He chuckled again. Sonny had white on his cheek now.

- You could make muffins for twenty people with that."

Sonny caught the box and put some of the content back. He showed Will how to mix the baking powder, which looked almost the same, albeit whiter and more compact, then sat directly next to Will on the same chair. Will's body went through a series of short spasms that he had to control quickly and discreetly. He didn't like the proximity but Sonny had gotten hold of an egg and a container.

"I'm going to teach you something primordial to baking, so you better focus.

- I'll focus better if I have room to move my arms.

- Well, I need to help you through it. It will be faster that way."

He placed the egg in Will's hand.

"Careful" He whispered next to Will's ear.

The warning was unnecessary. Will's arm was petrified. Sonny slowly turned the egg

"You must press it only at the top, that's where it's the most solid. Between your fingers, like that.

- It won't break?

- No. It's only fragile in the middle. But when you break it, you have to be careful with the shell. If you leave some in the mix, the whole mix will be spoilt. This is a practice egg." The hair along Will's arm was standing. He swallowed with difficulty. Sonny went on

"The trick is to break it with one strong movement, but not too strong."

He caught Will's hand and demonstrated. The egg broke in half, the liquid pouring down the bowl. Sonny caught it and showed it to Will

"You see", he pointed "those are shell pieces. We can salvage them with a spoon."

Will was about to faint. Luckily, Sonny had to get up to fetch the spoon and didn't sit back. Will carefully took the offending shell out and waited. Sonny handed him a new egg and a new bowl. Will frowned

"You really need one bowl per egg?" Sonny laughed and Will felt light as a feather.
- No, you don't. But it's your first time, so I'm cautious. You're on your own for this one."

Will focused. The egg broke perfectly. He realized his tongue was sticking out and blushed. Sonny grinned and added the second egg's content to the first one. After a long set of manipulations, the butter came in and things started going awry. Their hands were sticky and the apron and shirt quite dirty. Will had managed to knocked down every single thing on the table with elbows he didn't know where to put. Sonny laughed so hard, he had to sit down. On another chair this time. Will pouted and mischievously ran his hand along Sonny's cheek. Sonny gave a start and looked at Will "You have flour there. Buggers me seeing it.

- Well, now I'm covered with muffin mix, how is that better?

- Sorry..." Sonny shook his head and pointed to a closed door

- Go and tidy up in here. I'll use the kitchen sink."

Will went into the bathroom. The mirror greeted him with a very different sight than that morning. He was grateful for the apron, at least his jeans were still clean. It was difficult to really take everything out, so he concentrated on his hair and face, so as to look human again.

Sonny's head popped in

"I can lend you a shirt if you want." Will shrugged

- No, it's OK, thanks. Are we finished?

- Nope, time to use the oven now. But normally that's the clean part.

- What is that supposed to mean?" Sonny just chuckled and left. Will dried his hands and came back to the kitchen.

Will made efforts to earn Sonny's respect and managed not to stain anything or anyone for the last part. He smiled proudly as he looked through the oven window to the browning dish. Sonny was cleaning the table and held a hand in refusal when Will proposed his help.

So he sat on a chair and finally looked around. There were many things hanging on the walls. Photos, posters, drawings, all framed. Will wondered if Sonny's girlfriend had helped. Did she come here often?

He felt the spasms again and started being afraid. What was wrong with him. He moved on the couch and felt something under his butt. A cellphone vibrating. It said 'Crystal'.

His guts twisted in his belly. He had forgotten about the postcard. How could he confess to that? Would Sonny feel betrayed? He showed him the phone and Sonny went to take the call in his bedroom. It was weird to have put it on silence, but Will was too busy feeling guilty to try to know why.

He took his book from his own coat and sat to read a little more. There was a red feather to mark the page, one he had found in the garden while sweeping the leaves. He was taken out of his reading trance when he heard shouting. He took a few steps towards Sonny's bedroom, then changed his mind. He felt trapped. The muffins smell was permeating the room. He knelt before the oven to
check them. They looked almost black and he panicked. He looked around frantically for mittens, cursing himself for having dare tried learning something. He should stick to school material.

He was taking the dish out just as Sonny reentered the room.

"What are you doing Will?" The tone was rash and Will looked down, ashamed.

- It looked all black. But now, it doesn't, I don't get it." Will put the dish on the kitchen counter, clumsily. Sonny frowned, took out the mittens from Will's hand, put them on and put the dish back in the oven.

- The window has a dark filter, that's why. You should have waited." Will gulped. Sonny sounded weary.

- I know, you're right, I'll just go..." He grabbed his coat. Sonny took a big breath.

- I'm sorry Will, I shouldn't have shouted. I know you've never done this and it's not a big deal if it's not perfect or even eatable at all. You haven't ruined all chances, anyway." He looked at Will with peace-searching eyes and added "You want some tea?"

Will agreed. They tried talking again, but there was a strain in the conversation and once he had emptied his mug, he said good-bye.

"You don't want to taste your batch?

- I'd rather not. They must be awful. But I'll try again at home. If I make progress, I'll bring you some." He saw Sonny smile widen.

- I'm glad to hear you say that.

- Say what?

- That you'll see me again."

Will wasn't used to people being happy to see him again, expect for his siblings. Even his mother never really showed it. He bit his upper lip, then the bottom one. A ding sound alerted them. Sonny retrieved the muffins from the oven and from the mold. There were eight of them, all looking tasty.

"Take them home, Will. Children aren't very diplomatic. You'll soon know how good they really are."

Will laughed and took the batch with him. Sonny followed him out and shook his hand. They exchanged a last look, then Will was gone.
Sami was ready to leave when Will came back home. She wore a little black dress that showed plainly that she was still in her thirties. Sometimes, Will felt guilty that his coming so early in her life had robbed her of her own youth. Was it the reason she was single now? He'd never know.

"I won't come late, I think, Will. After all this is a first date." She didn't remark on Will's red cheek. She never did. "Make sure the kids don't eat all the pudding. I won't be able to go for groceries until Tuesday."

- OK. Have fun."

She went and kiss the kids good-bye. Sydney had her mouth full and happily said:

"Will made those, you know, mom! They are so good! You should bake muffins too!" Sami kissed her youngest and shook her head.

- Mommy's not very good at cooking, sweetie.

- Will is," said Allie with a serious air. "Sonny taught him." Sami had a thoughtful smile.

- Looks like you found a valuable friend, Will. Don't hesitate to invite him, here." Will said nothing.

After their mother left, Will opened the book he had found at the library with Allie, on how to build bird feeder. There were drawings and long explanations and Johnny got excited he could use his new toolbox he got at Christmas

"Remember, Johnny, you've got to share. I'm sure Allie will want to use the tools too.

- But she's a girl!" Will put the book down and looked straight in his brother's eyes.

- I think we need to have a discussion on genders, young man." He turned to Allie who was very quiet.

- You don't have to use them, if you don't want to, Allie. I just want you to participate they way you want to," She smiled shyly and Will brushed her cheek.

- I want to use the tools!" shouted Sydney. Will laughed at her enthusiasm and took her on his lap.

- I'm afraid you're too young for that. Johnny wasn't allowed to use a hammer when he was our age. I wasn't either.

- You were my age?" She did a face that had them all laugh out loud.

Will had put the girls to bed and take some time with Johnny to explain the danger of restricting gender-behavior, trying very hard to say it clearly and simply. He wished someone had done this for him at the same age. Explain that some boys could be soft-spoken and quiet without being deficient. After all, the very virile Sonny wanted to be friends with him. Of course, they had met when Sonny was down, but he was pursuing him. Will went to bed feeling warm inside.
The next day, he stared at the map on his desk and ran scenarios in his head. He didn't want to use the little sister excuse. He wouldn't stoop to that level "It must have fallen on the floor." Yes, that could work. But did he want to cheat so early in this relationship? Sonny had flaws too, as he had just witnessed. Will was used to anger. His mom erupted regularly and never gave up until you caved. But Will could be stubborn too.

On Friday night, he clenched his teeth and opened Common Ground's door. Sonny was nowhere to be seen and Will felt his resolution weaken. He walked to the counter and smiled at the barista. She looked way less stress than the last time. She smiled back and said

"Black cup of joe for you, right?

- Hum, yes, how did you know?

- I served you the first time you came here.

- Oh, sorry, I guess I didn't pay attention." he took out his wallet, calculating a nice tip to leave her but she put her hand on his

- No need. You don't pay." Will froze, trying to make sense of what she said. She pointed her finger up.

- I think you can try your luck. He spoke of you just earlier."

Will stood at the start of the stairs, unsure. He wished he had Sonny's cell number. But there was no way he could ask for it. He was about to turn around and go home when the door opened. Sonny opened his mouth in a round O. He ran down the stairs and hugged Will.

He felt stiff as a board. Sonny's body was warm and firm against him and it was a relief that it didn't last long.

"Come in, Will!

- I don't want to bother you. I thought you were working. Just had something to tell you." Sonny let Will in and asked with excitement

- Sure! What is it about?"

Will took a deep breath. Sonny deserved the truth. And the choice whether to forgive him afterward.

"I found something in your coat the other day. And I forgot to put it back. I apologize." He handed the two items to Sonny who grabbed the postcard and read it. His eyes softened and he went from bright red bird to pensive owl in seconds. Will put the map on the kitchen counter and waited for his fate.

Sonny took his coat and put the postcard back in the same pocket. He turned to Will and asked

- You read it?" Will shrugged.

- Yeah, sorry.

- It's OK. I understand." Sonny landed gracefully on his couch. Will didn't know what was
happening. Sonny looked sad. Because he had to break their friendship?

As Sonny stayed silent, Will tried a new approach:

"Your barista downstairs...

- Lorna.

- OK. She said... I didn't have to pay?" Sonny looked up.

- You're a VIP customer. At least in my establishment." Will chuckled at the pretentious wording. He tried to express his gratitude, for the preferential treatment, for the kind gaze Sonny was bestowing, which said without word that things were fine, but he didn't dare speak.

"You want to go out?

- What?" Will frowned. Sonny's offer was spontaneous. But it was a loaded question, words used in different circumstances.

- Where to?

- I don't know? Is there a dance club somewhere near?" Will sat and said quickly, before he couldn't:

- There is, but I've never been there.

- Why?

- I don't know how to dance?" Sonny cocked an eyebrow.

- I will have to teach you everything, then? What will you ever teach me?" Will looked at his hands on his knees. He didn't have much to offer, he was aware of that. His only craft was painting his own mind with inner fireworks. And listening to birds. He didn't even know their names.

Sonny took his hand:

"Come on, Will, I was kidding. You're a great friend, really. Let's postpone the outing. Do you like to go the movies?"

It was another tough subject. Will knew the big multiplex theater. He had taken his siblings there a few times. But he wouldn't go on his own. His taste led him elsewhere, in smaller rooms where he was the only teen, most of the time. He tried his luck anyway. At least it was in the neighborhood, he could argue that:

"I mostly attend the art-house. I like independent and foreign movie. And you?" Sonny grinned

- I have varied taste. Saw a lot of foreign movies when I was... well abroad! Some are fantastic. You've got their number? Or are they closed on Fridays?"

They walked alongside, hands in their coats, shoulders grazing at times, to the building. It was old but unimpressive.

"It could do with some fresh paint."
- It's an association. Doesn't make much profit. They don't do discounts for students. But the tickets are cheap actually.

- As long as there's popcorn, I think I'll be OK." Will laughed. They stopped at the stand. Will wasn't hungry. His stomach was in a state of unrest for some reason, so he just bought a bottle of water.

Sonny sat on the folding chair and patted on the next one. He looked grave for a moment

"I have to warn you Will." Will didn't want to be warned. He wanted things to be simple and they weren't.

Sonny went on "When I'm watching a movie, I don't like to talk. At all. Even if I've already seen it. We can discuss it after if you want but I hope you can keep quiet."

Will nodded. Keep quiet was something he mastered. He grinned, ferociously happy to have a friend to share this with. The lights were switched off abruptly, like always. He had already watched that film. He wouldn't admit that under torture. And it was a good film at that. Made slightly better by a silent figure munching discreetly on his left.

They ate at the diner. Will didn't want anything but Sonny shared his plate and it helped.

"So, how did the muffins turn out? Did your little sister spit them out?

- No, luckily. Sydney loved them.

- Who's Sydney?" Oh, he had meant Allie.

- I have three brother and sisters: Allie, Johnny and Sydney. They're 10, 8 and 4." Sonny looked so much like an owl now, that Will pictured him with a pair of thick glasses and a collar.

- I hope I'll meet them someday then.

- You will if you allow Allie to have her birthday party at your coffee place. But maybe you don't do that kind of event... I know lots of kids together can be a handful, but it wouldn't be for too long. I've planned a treasure hunt after so...

Sonny put his spoon down, forfeiting his dessert. He seemed to like food a lot. He tilted his head and asked

"You'll need adults to supervise this hunt?" Will nodded, prudent. "When is it?"

- In two weeks.

- Will she be 10 or 11?

- 10. It's an important number so we want it to be memorable.

- That's right! What did you do for your 10th birthday?"

Will closed his eyes. When he was almost nine, he had been introduced to his father. Who had taken him to a bar with his friends for each of his birthday. He knew better now, with Allie and dutifully
took her to fast food places and theme parks. Sami had had to shout at him when Lucas had let Will try a beer at twelve. He remembered being disappointed. The stuff smelled great but tasted bitter, in a wishy-washy way. Underage drinking would not be his lot. He wasn't a problem kid. Just one on the side.

But Sonny didn't want him on the side. He put him at the center of his personal stage, unaware that it made Will uneasy. Each time he looked into Sonny's eyes, he felt his soul was punched. In a good way.
Will turned and tossed in his bed that night. Sleep eluded him and reading didn't help. So he lay in the moon's beam, replaying the evening in his head. He realized he had forgotten to ask what the map represented. But maybe, it was better that way.

Sonny's presence was pervading his life and his being and he didn't know how much room he should allow him. He seemed busy but every time Will showed up, he paused everything and focused on him. It made Will feel he was imposing but most of all, he was surprised. He wasn't used to be so important to someone. Before going to bed, he had taken his coat out and found a piece of paper with Sonny's cell number on it. The note said "Don't make yourself scarce."

Making himself scarce helped Will go on in life. But being next to Sonny was exciting. He was like a bright warm summer sky for Will to spread his wings and fly in. He caught the light switch. The note was on his desk. He typed the numbers one by one, his heart beating fast. He checked and re-checked. Sonny's handwriting was lazy. He must have used an uneven surface, the lines were trembling at places.

Will woke up with the sun and an orchestra chirping from the trees. He opened the window wide and looked at all the little colored musicians. The red bird had decided to visit him here. There was a robin too, with its red throat only visible from below, hiding it under grey and black.

"Will, they look hungry! We must build the feeder today!" Will looked down at Allie, wrapped up in a warm black coat, with her cheeks all red.

- All right, but let me get breakfast first. Where are Johnny and Syd?

- They're playing inside.

- Where's Mom?

- She's asleep.

The children argued on which color to paint the bird feeder. Finally they turned to Will who proposed:

"Bright red? That way they birds will spot it easily." There was red paint in the basement. Bought when Sam's last husband was living there. He wanted to paint the kitchen in bright happy colors. But he was gone and the room had stayed untouched. Will thought he could use the feeder as part of the treasure hunt. He had told Sami Sonny had proposed to help and she had smiled:

"Good. I'm happy we can make Allie feel special. She's so introverted..." Sami's eyes drifted to her son. Will felt she was trying to tell him something too. "And she's such a sweetheart you know. I want her to know she's loved, exactly as she is."

And that's what Will liked about Sonny, he realized, as he walked to the coffee-house the next day. He didn't ask Will to be different. He didn't try to convert him, make him 'cool'.

Will had found a book on birds at the library and he took it out as he waited at his table. He found the photo of the red cardinal and smiled at it when a sound made him look up. Sonny held a plate
with a big light-green piece of pie in it. He put it in front of Will and took two little forks out of his pocket. He started eating without ado. Will whispered

"Hi."

Sonny's eyes twinkled.

- Hi. I'm glad to see you. I'm waiting for your opinion on this one. If you like it, I can put it on the menu.

Will frowned. Big responsibility.

- What's in it?

- Limes.

- What if I don't like limes? Will you still serve it here?

- You do?" Will chuckled. Sonny sounded disappointed.

- No, I was just asking. Let me try."

His fingers went for the extra fork and bumped on Sonny's wrist on the way. There was a thin bracelet on it and Will grazed it dreamily. He caught himself and quickly grabbed the utensil, trying to act nonchalant. Sonny pushed the chair back and stood up

" I have to help customers. You can tell me what you think later on." He went to the counter. Before he talked to the couple there, he turned his eyes to Will and grinned. Will felt his throat, that was contracted a second ago, allow him now to taste the pie. He took a bite.

When he had finished eating, Will waited again. He took a clean napkin and opened it then wrote with the small pencil he carried in his pocket:

'On the menu, this lime pie, fresh, exotic and delicious, made in our own kitchen by baking wonder Sonny...' Sonny what? He had his number but not his first name. It didn't matter, he wanted to make him smile and the pie was actually good.

Sonny was now talking with a dark-haired tall guy. They were looking in his direction and laughing. Will didn't want to interrupt so he stayed seated. But Sonny came back, introducing the newcomer:

"Will, this is Chad. He's apparently a caffeine addict, so it seems he'll be there a lot... Chad this is my friend, Will." The words echoed in Will's head long after they were uttered. My friend. My.

Will shook the man's hand who said

- Hi, Will, nice meeting you. I think I must have seen you already." Will smiled politely. The guy was vaguely familiar. He looked a little older than him so he ventured

- Maybe in High School, but I don't think we were in the same year.

- Oh, yeah, must be it!" He sat next to Will and started talking, mostly to Sonny. Will slowly hid the napkin and crumpled it.
He liked Chad. He was a chill, funny guy, interested in indie music. He spoke with a loud voice without effort and Will felt the familiar feelings creeping in his bones. As if someone had taken an eraser and was brushing him into oblivion.

He tried joining in the conversation but he spoke too low. Sonny wasn't looking at him anymore and Will understood why. He was being replaced by someone who was better company. He was used to it and it still hurt like hell. He sighed. It was time to bow.

It was easy to leave, his good-bye wasn't even heard. Sonny and Chad were joking about a movie he hadn't seen. Will hesitated at the door. He didn't want to flee. But hurting and feeling yourself disappear wasn't how he had planned to spend his afternoon. It was OK. He would go back to his books, to his studies, the children. As he walked through the park, he had a moment's wonder about his sister's birthday. He had liked the idea of Sonny helping but now he wanted him to know he didn't have to if something else came up. He would understand. He took out his cell phone and typed it, his first and surely last message to him.

Not to let the tears come out, he took out his computer and worked on his next essay. The words danced in front of his eyes and he forced himself to focus. This was important, this was for later, when the world wouldn't accept mediocrity, when he would need the best marks to make it some way or other.

But as the minutes passed, he found himself doodling on the papers next to him. He remembered his lime pie note and started writing a little story about it, shaped like a restaurant review that subtly gave hints of secrets and tensions between the employee of the fictional kitchen. At some point, he fished in his pocket to retrieve the napkin and put it with his writing but his fingers were unsuccessful. He had left it there.

Just at that moment, he got the text. He jumped on his chair and took a few deep breath before opening it.

'Thanks for the menu wording, I guess I can use it. And it's Kiriakis. Sorry you had to go. Care to go out again this week? I have Wednesday night off.'

There were two path in front of him. One was dangerous and could end up being a dead-end. The other one was familiar, shaded by bird-bearing trees, one of solitude and security. His answer would make him choose one. He closed his eyes. Another text was announced.

'Can I beg or is it not a good idea? I feel like I ignored you a little and I'm so sorry. Give me another chance?'

Of course, the thing with dangerous paths is that, in general, they were the ones with the better view.

'I'm free at six.'

The last message sounded like the orchestra of birds of the previous day:

'Great. You like meat pie? I'm feeling inspired.' Will laughed. He was intensely relieved.

On Monday night, after walking in the dark from the bus station, Will stopped to get something warm. He pushed the door and saw Sonny talking with the other barista. She was grinning. She
spotted Will and whispered to Sonny who turned briskly. There was something new in his eyes and his smile. A softness and something like... humility, maybe? Will joined them and Sonny said excitedly:

"Hi, Will! Good news, I've just hired someone new." Will smiled back, happy to see him happy.

- Great! You sure need that. The place is full every time I come in." Sonny nodded.

- That way I won't get mad at Ellie that much, I guess." The barista laughed and left them to empty some tables. Sonny added:

"In fact, you've met the guy. That's Chad. I was telling him yesterday that you were a non-paying customer and he asked me if I intended to make profit if I was so friendly." That must have been why they had laughed. Will blushed. Sonny went on "So I told him you were special and he'd better make his own friends pay. Giving free stuff have to be approved by the boss.

- So you gave yourself the permission, nice.

- You're complaining?

- No" said Will, the 'special' customer. He was busy analyzing the word while Sonny went behind the counter.

- I've got something for you by the way."

He handed Will a folded paper. It was a map of the neighborhood. Quite precise and recent enough to mention the new fire station a street away.

"You could use this for the treasure hunt. Kids love maps. I must still be one, I love them too.

- Thanks. That's perfect. I owe you.

- It's OK, I'm glad to help. What's the treasure?

- Sweets, I think. Or maybe chocolate candy bars. Oh, by the way, we have to talk about the birthday cake. When can we do that?

- Now is fine. Come in the back."

It was true, Will felt special when he passed the door labeled 'Personnel only.' He didn't stay too long, he was helping his mother with the kid tonight and dinner time was approaching fast, but the moments he passed in the coffee-house gave him the beginning of a new confidence. And it had a name: Sonny.
Chapter 6

His course load wasn't important on Wednesdays, so Will was home early. Sonny finished his shift at 7, so Will sat down in front of his books, then in front of his computer, then took a shower, then walked outside and watched the kid run in the garden as they played tag and checked the feeder to see if the birds had used it, then came back and made coffee, then sat on the couch and turned the TV on, then gave up. He was going to be early at the coffee-house. As in two hours early, and with nothing to do, as he had finished his last book and the library wasn't on his way.

He came and felt disappointed. Sonny wasn't in the room and Will sat, wondering why he was reacting like that. He felt unbalanced, maybe because he was giving up his inner independence and entering a friendship with someone who was ready to make efforts for him, a completely new experience for him, and that made him worry that he would fail. Talking to a depressed stranger had been easy, because of the role he was playing in it, the compassionate and objective ear to someone's problems, but now Sonny wanted to "hang out" a lot and while Will had hated feeling forgotten, he was still uneasy. So much that he didn't notice the state of the napkin until someone pointed it to him. A young woman had sat that on the opposite chair and was smirking. He looked down and saw that the ink from the pen he had taken out instinctively, was soaking the paper. Apparently he had been scribbling all over. He chuckled and so did the woman. She asked

"Nervous much?"

- It seems so. I was deep in thought actually. I didn't notice I had company.

- Yeah, sorry about that" she answered in a tone that wasn't contrite in the least. "The place is packed. I'm thinking of coming back later actually, at a quieter moment."

Will looked at her more closely. She had long dark blond hair and blue eyes. Those were like steel and he wondered what fracture made her like that, what her sad story was. He felt guilty for thinking that. People's pain was private and searching for insight wasn't a compassionate thing to do. She didn't look like she wanted to confide anyway, so he was relieved to see her stand up.

"I suggest you ask for a new napkin.

- Thanks, I will. Along with something to eat, I think.

- Is the baking good here?"

- Yes, it is. I'm not an expert but it is delicious.

- Well, not surprising I guess..."

Will shot inquisitive eyebrows but she turned and left. However weird the conversation had been, it had been a good distraction and he spent the remaining time making up silly reasons in his mind about what she had said, or what her past was. He quite liked the theory that she had been stood up for a date and was trying to hide it by saying cryptic things. It didn't explain the eyes, though and he shivered when he remembered them. However pretty she was, she didn't look appealing. He was again snapped off his thought but this time by an offering. He smiled at Ellie and decided she would get a tip, any way, then started eating the blueberry muffin. He closed his eyes and savored it. When he finished, he gathered the remaining crumbs with his finger.
Sonny had arrived in the meantime and when Will spotted him, he seemed deep in thought, looking in his direction but not really watching anything. Will smiled and walked to the counter. He dished his wallet from his back pocket and took out some change that he put in the tipping box. Sonny frowned

"Do you know you're not supposed to tip owners?

- I'm not tipping you, it's for Ellie. She deserves it for always being nice and thoughtful.

- And I'm not?

- So, you want a tip?" Sonny smiled and shook his head.

- No, I want your time. Starting in five minutes. But before that, I have a question to ask. If you don't say yes, it's fine, really, but I'll be really happy if you do." Will looked at the counter, the nervousness creeping in again.

- OK, what is it about?

Sonny tapped on the counter excitedly and asked

"Do you like watching baseball?

- Ohhh... Yes, sure.

- Really? Are you saying that to be nice or is it true?

- It is. I'm not a hardcore fan but I like watching a game now and then. Why?"

Sonny didn't answer and beckoned him to the service door. Will followed through, feeling very, very light, almost like floating. The walked up to the apartment door and as they came in, Sonny caught something off the coat rack. He handed Will a baseball cap and put another one on his head. They sat on the couch and Sonny grabbed the remote

"It's this afternoon match, so if you tell me the score beforehand, I will have to kill you.

- What a great host you are, I'll be sure to avoid coming if you're so threatening." Will answered tongue-in-cheek, touched that Sonny had waited for him to watch it when he was free the whole day. Sonny pressed the wrong button. Will laughed at him swearing and panicking and waited a bit to offer his assistance. He fixed it in a few seconds. Sonny relaxed and they watched for a while.

When his team started loosing, Sonny lost some of his excited energy. He stopped blabbing and joking and looked at the screen silently. Then he turned to Will and asked

"What is making you smile like that?" Will shook his head. He wasn't sure if he could tell Sonny everything that went through his mind. But Sonny insisted, gently and he whispered

- There are times, like now, when you look like an owl.

Sonny's eyes went round, making him even more owlish. He didn't look offended and Will sighed. Sonny shoved him and noted
"Hey, I'm not the one wearing glasses, here.

- Owls don't either. They look pensive, though, as if trying to understand something profound or something.

The match went on, to its sad defeat but Sonny didn't really watch it anymore. He took Will to the kitchen and made him lay the table as he took out a dish from the fridge and put it in the oven.

- It's just reheating. It won't be long. You're not too hungry?

- No, it's fine, I had a muffin earlier. Liked it a lot.

- Yeah, I noticed." Sonny took the chair and scooped it next to where Will was sitting. He put some salad in their plates. Will started eating, content. He liked how informal the evening was and the way Sonny's eyes sparkled now and then. He wasn't tense or brooding and Will liked that he was part of what made Sonny better.

He came home with a contented stomach and a quiet mind. A fluffing sound made him look up. He could make up two round eyes and wondered if it belonged to an owl, but the bird stayed prudently silent, so he couldn't say.

He spent Friday hunting for places to hide clues and writing them. The hard thing was to get them to children's level. Not too easy, not too hard. In the evening he walked to Common Ground to get Sonny's opinion about them and also to talk about logistics. He came in and sat at the counter. Chad was waiting on customers, looking aloof and efficient. He greeted Will and they exchanged a few words, then he let him with a smoking cup.

Will was sipping it, his feet tapping the wooden surface of the counter's side, when he heard a cough. He recognized the woman. She looked even more strung than the first time he met her. She sat and asked for a latte. Will wasn't interested in a conversation but she didn't really care.

"He's such an ass...

- Sorry?

- My ex. I came here to discuss with him and he's never here. Typical.

Will smiled at how his theory was quite near the truth and she must have taken that for an invitation to continue and exclaimed

"And it's not as if I didn't know he's seeing someone else, anyway! That little slut, I wonder how she looks like? Probably all cute and stupid, I'm sure."

Will knew a bitter tone when he heard one. It reminded him of his mother after her divorces. She rebounded, she always did but she still complained. He tried to look away but she insisted

"I'm sure if he saw me with a new man too, he'd regret it. Realize what he's lost and all."

She put her hand under Will's chin and before he could process what happened, pulled him to her for a kiss on the mouth. Will's arms, useless because she was a girl and you don't fight them, ever, flayed around, uncontrollably. He was about to tell her off, when he heard a gasp. He looked around and
saw Sonny, distress on his face and hands trembling. He shut in eyes and stood up in disgust. The woman shouted:

"See, Sonny, that's how I kiss, remember?"

Will ran out, tears blinding him. He ran to the park and stopped to catch his breath then sat on the cold bench. He felt the angle of a book against his butt and took it out his coat. It was the book about bird watching. He opened it and started reading.

'Cardinals are social birds in general, even open to other birds joining their groups. They can be quite aggressive though in defending their territory. During mating season, they leave the group for a mate.'

"Will."

'the male birds tend to their partners' needs until the eggs latch. They can have in general two to four babies.'

"Will."

If he focused enough, the world disappeared. And he ceased being a crying grown man, alone on a bench, as long as the reading went on.

The book was shut.

"Will, we need to talk."
Chapter 7

Will refused to look up. He didn't want to hear the accusations, not when he was that shook up. Hours spent dreaming about a first kiss and this is what he got? And he would have an argument, the next time his mother would raise the subject with him. Being kissed by a woman was like seeing a nice little bird and hearing it sing completely off-key. Disharmonious somehow.

And he had been a pawn to her, too, in her war against Sonny. Was it the "ghost", who had threatened suicide? Kind words for such an angry creature. It was like being bullied by a dragon. He waited for Sonny's words. Ready to get up and leave.

"I'm so sorry, Will. I hope you don't feel hurt."

- I'm not hurt Sonny, I'm mad. Do you know that happens to me, sometimes too? I don't know when you entered the room but I was barely listening to her. And if you're afraid I liked it, don't worry, it was far from the truth. I want to puke. I know you feel bad for her and all, but I'm afraid I can't."

Sonny's eyes were so soft, when Will finally me them, that he felt even angrier. What was going on in his head? He sighed and remembered the postcard.

- I won't take her side, Will. What she did was vile, especially because it was you... In fact it's my fault it happened, so I understand that you're mad at me. I'm the one who left, the one who lied. So many times.

- What did you lie about?

- About how I felt, about who she was for me. I want her to realize I'm not worth all that angst, that I'm just one guy among others and she can find much better, but she's stubborn.

Will shrugged

"Here is another lie, then, cause you're not just one of the guys, you're much better than most people. You're not fair." Will didn't make much sense of the words that were coming out of his own mouth, but Sonny stopped being soft-looking. He touched Will's arm tentatively and gave it a tender brush, just as Will was speaking again "In fact you lie all the time, don't you. When we met, you said you had no woman in your life..."

- She isn't in my life, Will, we're not even friends. It's just that I feel guilty at times and she tries to use that."

- I'm not talking about her, Sonny." Will was feeling the bitterness pervade his cells, invade his mouth. "Your new girlfriend, the one she was jealous about. You don't talk about her. Are you ashamed of her or of me?"

- I don't have a new girlfriend, Will. She was my last one." 

- So, it's someone you have a crush on?" He didn't understand at all. Who wrote that letter?

- Well, I... Yes, there is someone. That makes my days brighter and life much easier to bear but Crystal doesn't know about it." Sonny was certainly not lying now. His face was open like a book
that had been read too much. He looked frightened. Will gathered his thoughts, tried and make connections. It was so hard to analyze reality. His own fictional word was easy and followed his will but real people like Sonny were a puzzle he couldn't solve.

- Who's Crystal?

- The girl who kissed you.

- And phoned and wrote you.

- The letter is old. I kept it because sometimes it feels good to be reminded of having been loved, even if it was all wrong. And I won't apologize for that. You don't know my life."

Will felt cold and tired. He crossed his arms on his knees and whispered

- I don't ask for apologies, just explanations. I'm part of this, now, even though I didn't want it."

Sonny knelt and took Will's hand in his. There were no spasms this time. It helped.

"Crystal and I broke up a while ago. We were teens back then and I was struggling with who I was, I felt different. We were together for a year, but it never was really... physical. I have lived my life since we broke up and it turns out, she came to live here because she found out that I would. I think she called my mom or something like that. I had to listen to her, be very firm and be yelled at... and then you sat next to me and..." Sonny's eyes finished the sentence somehow.

Will didn't know what to do. He had no business asking about this crush. Sonny wanted to keep his secrets and given the circumstances, it made sense. He felt bad for all he had said... demanded. Sonny was a red bird to look at and admire from afar, but not expect too much from. He would soon fly away to another woman wanting most of his time and Will finally agreed to that. He and Sonny would be pals, watching films or games once in a while but he had to be intense in his need for friendship. It wasn't as if he could ask for more, Sonny did treat him as someone he cared a lot for.

The melancholic one-note bird song came from the trees above and Will decided to listen and go to sleep. To make peace, he asked:

"I'm going home, it's just round the corner. Can you walk with and finish this conversation? I feel bad, I really do. I don't want to lose what we have."

But even though Sonny followed him, he didn't say anything else and looked at his shoes the whole way. Will didn't press him and started unlocking the door when he heard some indistinct words. He turned and frowned. Sonny repeated

"I'll be out of town, next week. I have a conquest to make. But when I'm back, I'll take you dancing and I'll teach you all the steps I know. And you better say yes." and he was gone.

Allie's birthday was a success. Will checked for the presence of the deranged ex when, they entered the coffee-house, but she never showed up. Sonny made the kids laugh and gave Allie a gift. Something twitched Will's heart for a second. Each adult took a pair of giggling ten-years-old with and took the group to a different location. So, after that, he barely saw him. He sent a text to thank him for being a great friend to him and to Allie. He didn't get an answer.

The snow was covering the ground and the children were crazy with delight. School was even
canceled one day and Will skipped class to build snowmen with them. A robin perched on the hat and sang merrily, then noticed the feeder and flew quickly to it. Will took out a board game for the rest of the afternoon and made hot chocolate. Syd gave him a sticky kiss on the cheek and he tickled her until she shrieked.

He was fine, in a dull way. Sometimes, he hardly felt his limbs, at others, he took out his cell, looked at it and put it back. Sonny would contact him when he’d be back. The evening, when his mom went to put the kids to bed, he took out his notebook and poured his heart on the paper. On it, he lay the feelings of being forgotten, of being different. He wrote his hopes and despairs and his needs, which were few and all began with one thing. Being wanted.

The next day, the white turned grey and all nuances of dirty. It was freezing and Will stepped into Common Ground to say hello to Ellie and finally manage to pay for his drink. He tapped his boots against the wall and pushed the door. There were few people, here and there. At the counter, he saw the back of a man wearing a climber's backpack. The equipment was peeking out and Will felt a twinge of admiration, tinted by his strong fear of heights. He saw Chad and Ellie walk to the counter. Chad put his hand on the man's shoulder and whispered to him. Then he waved at Will.

"Hi, Will." The spasms were back. And Will didn't really care. Sonny was sitting here and he looked tired and peaceful.

- Hi, how did the conquest go?
- Great. I hadn't climbed in a while and being on top of mountains is one of the best feelings ever. How are you doing?
- OK. I'm glad to see you.
- Why?" Sonny asked bluntly. Will was taken aback but answered as honestly as he could.
- I missed seeing you, I guess. It's been a while."

Of course, he didn't pay for his coffee. Which was good, because he didn't drink it. Sonny grabbed his arms and took him to his apartment's door. Will came in, taking in the mess. Sonny put the backpack on the couch and just said

"Stay here." Then, he went to his bedroom.

Will waited, feeling like a bird in a cage, but not knowing what the key to freedom what. Ten minutes later, Sonny was back, having changed clothes and shaved.

"You looked nice with that beard."

Sonny was looking better but he must have lost his smile on that mountain. Or his teasing ways. He looked grave and his eyes were the only part of his face that was dancing.

"How nice, Will? Why would you say that?" He took a step to Will, making his heart feel encased in his chest. Will mumbled

- I don't know, I just... I wasn't mocking you. You know I wouldn't.
- I do. And I have to know Will. Do you think I look good?
- You look better, more tired, but less stressed and...

- No, Will, that's not what I'm asking.

A gentle touch of the hand, like a robin hoping on his shoulder, a shade of night in Sonny's eyes, a pull to press their chest together and Will's heart started singing. Sonny's mouth was opening his, with a sweet determination. Suddenly, it all made sense. Here was what he was looking for, here was the wanting, the tenderness. Will joined in the kiss slowly, his lips taking their wings, absorbing the sensations and all the emotions Sonny was sending. Now, he wouldn't argue with Sami about this. Because it wasn't theory any more. It was his life and it was just beginning.
Sonny had put his forehead against Will's. His eyes were closed and he was breathing heavily. For all his strong male body, he felt frail in Will's arms, vulnerable. Will felt his heart had taken a leap from a mountain cliff and was now gliding above wonderful sceneries. He didn't dare move. The moment was precious and fleeting. He had never kissed anyone, never been a boyfriend. He lacked practice and it would be something else Sonny would have to teach him. Unless he was mistaken and Sonny didn't want anything serious. Was that possible?

Sonny was immobile too. Will hoped he had answered correctly to the kiss. He didn't want Sonny to think he didn't want it.

"Sonny?

- Shhh." A hand brushed his cheek and rested on his back. Will breathed in, a smile spreading on his face. Sonny opened his eyes and whispered:

- God, you're gorgeous!

- Thank you."

He should say it back. Or maybe not. He could decide how he wanted to be a boyfriend. Apparently Sonny wanted him, not a cooler guy. And what he wanted to say was:

"I liked that kiss. Thank you." Sonny grinned. He put his thumb on Will's lips

- You don't have to thank me. I'm glad you're OK with it, though. I wasn't sure how you would respond.

- I didn't expect it. I'm not used to being wanted that way."

Sonny smiled.

- I've wanted to kiss you from the day we met. But I needed to know you before, make sure we both went along apart from the attraction... At least the one I felt." Will's lower belly felt cavernous and spasmodic again, as it his blood flow had lost its way out. This was attraction, he'd just been told. He had pictured it as a more... intellectual feeling. Like finding the solution to the crossword and being so damn happy. But this was about overwhelmingness and it was somewhat scary.

"I think I feel it too. I mean, I... I do. Since that day as well." The way Sonny exhaled was adding to Will's enjoyment of the moment. He seemed to have too much air in his lung and not to know what to make with the surplus. So, it would travel in his skin, making it shiver slightly, like the leaves of the birch tree under a light breeze.

Sonny kissed him again and this time Will was floating. It wasn't a long kiss, rather a smooch and it left Will wanting more. He carefully leaned towards Sonny's chin and bumped into it. He pushed back the embarrassing feeling and pressed his lips softly on Sonny's mouth. Sonny moved his arms. Will felt himself twirl down and land on the couch. Sonny was encircling his shoulders. Will hesitated. That was a lot of contact. He slid back on the cushions, intent on making things clearer.
"Sonny?

- Yes?" Sonny had a hungry look in his eyes. Will wanted to go home now, to reflect on what had happened, replay the memories, sort his feelings. But he didn't want to push Sonny away and make him feel bad or frustrated. He admired the risk his friend had taken. If it had only depended on him, they would still be dancing their way around each other. The analogy gave him an idea to project the relationship in the future.

- You said you would teach me to dance. Do you still want to?" Sonny had a mischievous smile.

- More than ever. But only if you want to.

- Well, I don't think I could do complicated steps but yes, I would like to. So that I can dance with you."

Sonny accepted the offering and let Will stand up.

"Can I call you? Or text or something?

- Sure. I'll be looking forward to it.

- Really, Will?" It was difficult to take care of his own insecurities when Sonny was displaying his heart like that. Will had a bruised soul and he wasn't sure how much at a time he could let Sonny touch one of the inner scars that had made him such a cautious man. He resisted the urge to say something soothing, that would bring up a smile and chose honesty

- Well, it's all very new and a little frightening. Can I call you instead. Maybe tomorrow?"

Sonny looked at Will gravely, then nodded. Will took his jacket and said

"Have a good night then. You must be exhausted from your trip.

- I am. But it was worth it. I have found something there.

- Really, what?

- Plenty new birds. I saw nests in crevices and I heard concerts when I woke up in my tent. And each time, I wanted to talk with you about it and you weren't there. So I came back, to be near you again."

Will turned to the door, the tear following it's path along his chin. He was beginning to worry. Why couldn't he be more joyful, carefree? But again, when had he ever been?

His mother was reading a report when he came in. She didn't look pleased with it and Will wondered how she behaved at work. Every time he came home, he offered to help with the kids or the chores. But now, he needed the quiet of his room. He hung his jacket over the brightly colored ones (the brighter one was hers. She was never one for discretion or dull.) and gestured upstairs. She frowned but nodded.

There was no nightly sound in the room and it felt empty. Will sat at his desk and put his head in his hands. Somewhere in his mind, he was thrilled. He could still feel the kiss on his lips and again, it was the right kind of one. On the other hand, though, he was now responsible for someone's happiness, at least for a while and he didn't like even small responsibilities. His siblings were his
flesh and blood, part of him forever so the efforts he made for them always seemed easy. Sonny was challenging him all the time, even when he wasn't the one asking.

He did what he was good at. Writing. Putting down his feelings helped and made him realize their depth. So he closed his notebook and lay on the bed, his cell in his right hand. He typed I like you. A lot. and sent it quickly. He put the phone on the bedside table and started dozing off. He was woken up by the lonely note of the big night-bird and sat in his bed, felling better that things were back to normal. Another note answered the bird, twice. He took his cell in the dark and brushed the words on it with the side of his thumb Thank you. I think you're the best.

His alarm rang the next day, directly in his hand. He focused on his phone and remembered the texts. For someone who wrote so much, he had been laconic. But barring his soul to Sonny felt even more impossible at the moment than barring his body. And yet the possibility was becoming real for both things. In a nearer future than he could have thought. He was grateful that it was Sonny who made him do that transition to emotional adulthood. He trusted him not to cheat over his feelings for him. And so, Will closed the door and walked in the early morning street lights to the coffee-house for a morning call.

Chad was at the counter and greeted him with a nod as he finished helping a frantic customer who kept barking in a phone. He looked up again after the man left and grinned widely. He pointed to a table. Will sat next to the window, feeling excited and exposed. It had started raining on the muddy snow and the fog was enveloping the houses and trees. It would be a quiet morning for the birds.

He heard the back door and Sonny came in, beaming, and walked to his barista. Chad seemed to be teasing him, pushing his elbow playfully. Sonny shrugged and took two plates. He stopped near the chair next to Will

"Excuse-me sir... Is this seat taken? Are you waiting for someone?" Will smiled. This game was easy.

- I am. He's very handsome and gives memorable kisses. Would you have seen him by any chance?
- I might, but given the description, I should wait for him myself." Will pretended to get up and felt a hand on his shoulder.
- Unless it's me, of course, in which case, I am very willing to provide fresh deliveries of this kisses.
- Actually, I have class soon, so it's just a quick hello. This muffins look good, though, can I take one to go?
- Will...
- Yes?
- Stop asking."

But Will did ask. For a new kiss after all. Sonny gave three. He whispered in his ear, just before Will left

"So, tomorrow night?
- Tomorrow night, OK. What time?
- Eight?"

Will nodded and walked out to the bus station. He turned and saw Sonny's silhouette in the window. His cocky red bird, with his spiky hair and his sweet efficiency. His.
Chapter 9

How was it possible for simple kisses to have such a cheering effect? Will was used to his melancholic state and here he was, happy beyond belief, feeling light and different. He was still nervous but it was bearable. One of his concern though was what Sonny would plan to do on this date the next day. He was a man who climbed mountains, who was outspoken, who wanted to dance. Will felt he was making giant steps, eager to meet Sonny's expectation and he had to remind himself to stay true to his nature.

What he was sure about was that he was grateful. For Sonny to show him he was desirable, that he was worth it. He wondered what he would be bringing in exchange. Maybe he could write him something...

He put the kids to bed, pecking kisses on Syd's cheek and spending a few minutes talking with Allie. Johnny wanted a story. He closed the door and went to his room. Should he write an email? He didn't have Sonny's address. So, it would be a letter. He took his headset and looked for a deep, emotional but quiet song. He sat and stared at the blank paper. Should he be cautious? Poetic? Rough? He closed his eyes and pictured Sonny walking to him, intent on kissing him for the first time. That very moment Will's heart had twisted. That moment he knew himself and things made sense. Maybe he should start with that. He wrote for half an hour, then yawned and went to bed. The unfinished letter lay on the desk, his most important piece of writing.

He didn't finish it the next day and left the room wearing the deep blue shirt he got the previous year at his birthday and had only worn once. The air was warmer so he just put a jacket over it. He didn't want to put too much effort on his appearance, as it was something he easily forgot completely, but he still wanted to see Sonny's eyes twinkle when he would see him. He had put off leaving to a few minutes too late, helping with the chores and talking with his mom, learning all about her new boyfriend, keeping his own a secret for now.

He walked directly to the back of the coffee-house, the back of his knees trembling a little. He wanted to start the evening with Sonny on his own, only for him. Was it good to want that? Was it selfish? Sonny opened the door and it didn't matter. His eyes did twinkle and his smile opened a door in Will's heart from which a tiny blue bird started singing happily.

Will waited on the doorstep, for a second then remembered Sonny treating him like someone he was close to, from the start, letting him in his intimacy. So he just walked in and took off his jacket. Sonny coughed and walked to the kitchen. Was Will going to get new muffins? It seems it was all he was eating these days. But Sonny grabbed his keys for the counter and wiggled them. So much for spending time alone. Will turned to take back his jacket but Sonny was faster than him and gently helped him with his sleeves. He leaned to Will's face and placed a delicate kiss on his lips. Will smiled and asked

"So, where a we going?"

- You'll see...

- Hum, you remember you didn't actually teach me how to dance? So if you were planning to...

- Don't worry we're not going to dance."

He had pictured Sonny with an old secondhand car and was surprised to see a brand new dark station wagon. Sonny let him in and sat at the wheel, his whole body turned toward Will who said
"That's a nice car.

- Thanks. It's a present from my parents. It's been weird using it, last time I drove, it was a european stick very small car.

- I did drive stick, my... my brother's father has an english car and I learned how to drive on it." He had been about to say 'my ex-stepfather' but it sounded weird. Sonny nodded and started the engine.

Will planned on explaining he didn't like being in the dark, about anything, even for a well-meant surprise. He looked nervously through the window, his hands on his laps. Sonny was silent mostly. Will glanced at him. His face was a careful blank.

"Are we going far?

- Why?" He was still wearing the blank expression. Will didn't know what to make of it.

- If we do, we could listen to some music?"

Sonny tapped on the CD player button and the local radio started playing. Will wasn't found of their musical choice but could not let go of his shyness. What if Sonny felt he was being too snobbish? He wasn't, not really. He just was very careful in his tastes and didn't adhere to hype. He took his time and stayed faithful. He guessed he would be like that in this relationship too.

Sonny parked and turned his still-buckled torso to Will.

"OK, Will, did I do something wrong?" The direct question was even worse for Will. But he had to answer.

- Not really, I'm just not used to dating. Or going out. I would feel better if I knew where we're going. I'm sorry, I guess you wanted to surprise me but that's not really easy for me.

- I see." Sonny looked grave now and Will waited, his insides remembering him he was attracted to him like hell.

Sonny unbuckled and took Will's hand in his, gently. He whispered

"I'm not used to dating you, either. I'm not sure whether you're in or not." He sighed. Was he criticizing or just explaining? His tone was neutral. He went on "In fact, earlier in the car, you were like a little bird, nervous and cute and I felt that if I cracked the window open, you would have flown away and leave me there.

- I wouldn't leave. But I'm shy."

Sonny grinned.

- I'm aware and I love it. It is endearing and it makes me want to be a better person so that I can keep you.

- You don't have to change, you're a great guy. I guess we just have to know each other's boundaries and expectations. One of mine is that I like to have music. Soft and harmonious if possible.

- So if there are no birds around, you switch to digital?

- Yep!" Will was smiling broadly now. Sonny let go of his hand to get out of the car.

They entered the Asian restaurant. It was an all-you-can-eat. So no need for complex interactions
with waiters. Given how young his siblings were, Sami had rarely took him to fancy places and his father was a bar type of person. Will liked that Sonny was keeping it simple. He said so and even kissed him lightly on the cheek. Sonny kept his smile plastered on his face for the rest of the evening. It was a little frightening and quite thrilling for Will to realize he could gather such reactions.

He didn't eat much, even if it was quite good. He was busy looking at Sonny but also at the other customers. He remembered his piece with the fake restaurant review and wondered if he had kept it. Which reminded him of the letter...

He expected Sonny to drive him home but he took them to his apartment. Will was feeling comfortable enough to joke

"I'm not that easy, you know." Sonny chuckled loudly

- You're not? That's too bad, then, I'll have to go to plan B, then.

- What is it?

- The dance lessons I promised you."

Sonny was a good teacher, patient and sticking to simple steps. Will worked on being less stiff and managed quite well as Sonny's touch was very light, more friendly than lusting. After an hour, they were swirling around in harmony to the soft latino music in the background. Sonny suddenly stole a kiss and Will's knees gave way. He was kept from falling by a firm grip and it felt good.

"I really have to go, Sonny, I have classes in the morning.

- I know. When do I get to see you again?

- Tomorrow night? I can pop in for a few minutes." Sonny pouted.

- I meant for another date?

- This week-end? The house will be kid-free.

- And it's a relief?

- Actually, no. It feels empty.

- So you need a distraction?" The tone suggested jesting but the voice was trembling a little. Doing the reassuring felt new.

- I don't. But I want to go on a date with you. And I can't when I have to help my mom.

- What about tonight?

- She finished early. She tries to leave me space to live my youth." This time Sonny shook his head.

- Why am I not surprised you need to be reminded of that? OK, let's say Saturday, then.

- So you don't want to see me tomorrow?

- I want to see you every day. I want to touch you, like I just did while we were dancing. I need to have daily reminder of my great taste in boyfriends and of my insane luck."

Will left soon after. Part of him wanted to grab a blanket and snuggle on the couch with his
boyfriend (apparently the term was official now). Part of him wanted to finish the letter. It would be easier to communicate his feelings that way. He had a feeling it would help Sonny to know those. It would help him to sort all of his heart out.

He put the paper in an envelope and placed it next to his wallet. Should he post it? Leave it at Sonny's place? Hand it in person?

The house was silent from all the inhabitants' slumbers. Will listened to the music of his Sonny-filled-heart and fell asleep lulled by its lullaby.
The snow had finished melting during the night. The sun was low in the sky, sending harsh hot rays in Will's eyes. He came back in and looked through the living-room drawer to find his sunglasses. They were prescription, like the classic pair. He could see correctly without them but if he took them off for too long, he started having headaches.

"Hey, Will!" Will turned, startled. Chad was waving at him from the other side of the street. Will walked slowly to him, rehearsing greetings. What had changed in him that not only Sonny but his employees all liked him and wanted to talk? He reached him and nodded, his hands still in his pockets. Chad started walking again, headed to his work place.

- So, my girlfriend Mel and me, we're going to a concert in two weeks. I remembered when I talked about that group you seemed to like it. So, if you and Sonny wants to join us, it could be fun!

He had been to a few indie concerts before, on his own. The music had to be really good to make the anonymous crowd bearable. He wondered if Sonny had talked about him to his barista. They seemed to have bonded quite fast, and now Will realized a few things. Sonny made new friends easily. But he had never wanted to be friends with him. His whole behavior had betrayed his interest. It was just that Will didn't want to see.

"You think Sonny will like it?" For instance, he didn't know his boyfriend's taste. Maybe Chad didn't either.

- I guess, I think he's quite open-minded. Not die-hard music fan though. Have you heard him sing?"

Will grinned. The two men exchanged a merry glance. Chad was really nice, no wonder Sonny had taken to him like that. "Anyway, he'll go if you do. I think he'd follow you in hell."

Will turned his head on the side to hide his blush. Chad pushed the door and went straight to the "personnel-only" door. He patted Sonny's shoulder on the way and pointed to Will with his thumb in the same motion. The interior looked a little dark, in contrast with the bright daylight. Will locked eyes with Sonny and forgot everything else for a minute.

He stood in the doorway, while his boyfriend walked to him, taking his apron away and raising his hands. He gently took the sunglasses and it was much easier to see, all of a sudden. He got a kiss on the nose, but Sonny kept the glasses in his hand and turned to Chad who was already taking care of orders.

"I'm off! See you later and don't mess up the accounts this time."

Chad shook his head, laughing. Sonny walked out and pulled Will to his chest. He gave him a real kiss on the lips, then raised the sunglasses, then stopped and gave another peck. Will waited patiently. He was feeling light and happy, and also grateful for some time with Sonny he didn't know he would have this afternoon.

"You look really good with those on.

- I have blue eyes. I can't stand direct sunlight for long. I'll only wear them outside. They're very dark.
- So, if I want you to keep them on, I'll have to find something to do outdoor." He crunched his eyes and grinned. Will would have stayed where he was, staring at Sonny's eyes, rendered even darker by the sun filters. He might be frightened of making dating faux-pas or taking things further, but that very moment was what he had waited for all his life.

They walked to the car. Will sat and bravely took a CD out of his jacket. It was the one he had written the letter to. He wanted to lend it to Sonny but first, he put it in the car's CD player. The quiet melody made Sonny smile.

"Looks like I have a new boyfriend, the other one used to be shy."

Will looked at him gravely and whispered:

- You are kidding, right? Because if you mind, I mean, it's your car, I understand..." Sonny's hand landed on his, stroking softly, like a wing.

- I am. I like all kinds of music and I want to know what you like.

- Chad was right, then.

- Why?

- He invited us to a concert with him and his girl. I'm surprised he asked me instead of you. You're his friend." Sonny's eyes were shaking slightly and over-flowing with kindness.

- He wants to be yours, too. When we talked about you, he said I should go for it because you really seemed great and I would regret it." Will must really had been good at hiding his feelings, then, if Sonny needed a push.

- Sooo, I should thank him?

- You can, but I would have tried anyway, maybe a little later. The more I know you, the more I want to spend time with you. Like now. By the way, where are we going?

- What?

- You're the one living here, aren't you? Is there a place in the country that you like best?

- Oh. Hum, there is, but in winter it's not the same.

- OK. Shall we drive back to town?

- Wait. We could go and walk near the lake I go to somewhere with my brother and sisters. The weather is really nice and that way, we can be alone." Sonny released some blocked air from his lungs and asked:

- You really want to be alone with me?" OK, Will had to give him that letter.

He supplied the directions. They drove in semi-silence. Will tried not to look too much out of his window, so he studied Sonny's profile. He had very straight features and Will finally saw why they called it a Greek nose. The skin was much darker than his, even without the sunglasses on and the
hair looked thick and unkempt.

They parked and strode to a little path that circled the small lake. Most of the trees were leafless but they were still inhabited. The birds were happy to feel the sun's heat and chirped with gusto. Sonny looked up, his smile wobbling. Will put his hand behind Sonny's neck and kissed him. After a moment, a tongue came to meet his. Will jumped at the lightning bolt that aimed like an arrow to his belt region. He didn't stop the kiss and accepted the return of the spasm in his belly. Both his hands had their palms pressed and their fingers intertwined with Sonny's.

They resumed their walk and sat under a willow tree. Will took off the sunglasses and didn't replace them with the regulars. He sat crossed leg and fished for the letter in his coat. Sonny took it, perplexed. Will lied on the long grass, focusing on the nearest bird song, instead of the loud beating of his own heart. He heard the rustling sound of the paper being turned. Sonny was completely silent. Will replayed the words he had written in his head, wondering...

"Sonny,

I wanted to thank you, again. And tell you what's in my heart, because there is a lot there, it just cannot reach you at the moment. I'm a lonely soul. Growing up has been its own weird adventure and it has left me cautious. But with you, I've gone further than I ever could, from the start. When I saw you on that bench, looking defeated, I took a risk and I'm glad I did. Every minute I've spent with you have been peaceful, filled with respect and I hope you've felt the same.

I don't wish to go too fast, though and I hope you'll agree to it. Your presence has cast a sunshine on the shadows where I spent my life, I don't want to lose that, I want this to work. When you kissed me, it felt perfect, because you're a man and I needed the answer to the questions I had about that, but also because you've let me into your life, because I feel comfortable in your presence. And because my body feels different when you're around. I feel embarrassed talking about that, though. I had never kissed anyone until this month and while your ex at least showed me that girls were out of the question for me, I still feel weird about it.

I don't know how dating works at all. I'm frightened that I may get burned. I trust you, I'm just asking for patience and acceptance. I hope I won't disappoint you. It is exciting to start this discovery.

You know how I love nature... I've always compared you to a bright bird, the one with the cocky air and the little crest, the red cardinal. It's energetic and efficient and, from what I read, very loyal.

I like that we are boyfriends. I need it to be exclusive. I like that you grin after I've kissed you. It makes me feel like I'm flying. I like your smile all the time, how it complements your eyes to tell about all of you without any words needed. I like that you're so direct when you're not sure of what's going on. I like reassuring you.

I don't know if you think this kind of letter is a good thing or if it's "uncool" but I hope it's not the latter, because I am pretty uncool myself (I don't like going to clubs, I don't follow fashions in general...). If you do like it, don't feel obliged to write one back. We are different and I'm fine with that.

I'm quite busy with classes at the moment, so if I say no to a date once or twice, know that it is because an exam is nearing and I'm fully focusing on it. Even my mom knows better than to insist I help at those moments.

I'm aware you're quite busy too, so if you want to call or text or email, don't hesitate. I'll write my
email address at the end of the letter.

Your boyfriend, Will"

There was still no reaction, so he sat up and saw Sonny looking at him. His cheeks were glistening. His hand caught his coat that was lying next to Will's. Will was a little disappointed not to get any feedback. Sonny opened the inside pocket and took out the letter signed by his ex. He tore it in half and threw it in the water. Then he carefully folded the new one and put it at its place. He mouthed 'Thank you' and crept nearer to Will. His arm went around his shoulder. Will lay his head in the crook of Sonny's neck, watching the light reflected in myriad ways on the water before them, wishing this moment to be absorbed in his heart and become something he could come back too, whenever he would feel down.

A king fisher was diving in the lake repeatedly, its little wings whirling at high speed, its beak carrying large fishes. Will chuckled.

"This one has a nice crest too. It could use a brush." He raised his hand slowly and let his finger roam in Sonny's own crest.

- Will?

- Yes?

- You want to go to that concert? It's up to you. I'm happy to be where you are, really."

Will reflected. He didn't know Chad's girlfriend and as Sonny had proven it, nice guys sometimes went out with toxic women. Of course, she could be sweet, like his cousin, Abby. He recounted all the small victories he had achieved recently. He could give it a go.

Sonny had to close the coffee shop and do some rearranging in the back room, so he took Will straight to his mother's house. He went to the door with him and asked

"You don't have your own car?" Will shook his head.

- I can't afford one. I talked with my mum and we decided I wouldn't take a job to pay for my studies so that I could be rested enough and still help at home. She lets me use her to take the kids somewhere. I take buses to my classes, I only go out in the neighborhood and for the rest, I tend to live in my head, so...

- So..." Sonny punctuated this with a kiss "Now..." another "You have your private chauffeur..." and a last one.

- Looks like it. I've had summer jobs, though so I can pay for the gas sometimes if you want.

Sonny's eyebrows were as severe as his smile was playful.

- No way.

- Can I pay for the concert tickets, then?

- OK."
Will kissed him and went inside. He had found what he could teach back his off-key man. How to appreciate good music. Not just the kind birds produced. And maybe how to sing a little better...
Will entered the coffee place as the evening was turning dark. It was busy inside, but in a quiet way. Chad and Ellie were going back and forth, with cups or wet clothes to wipe after customers, their aprons fluttering as they strode. Sonny was preparing an order, chatting with the customer waiting for it. He never seemed to make an effort to be friendly. It made Will admiring and slightly envious.

There was a new decoration on the wall opposite the counter, a photo of a bird. Will walked to it quietly, letting Sonny finish the transaction. It had a pink crest and a plump white body, like a snowball with dark coal eyes. He heard:

"It's a cardinal..."

He turned to his boyfriend and was greeted by a wide grin. Will whispered:

- Is it how the female look like? I thought they were greyer.

- Nope, it's a male too, just the pale kind. I saw this at the bookstore the other day and it made me think of you and your cardinal comments. I thought, if you were a bird, you might be like this one.

- "Plump?" Sonny chuckled and brushed Will's cheek:

- No, discreet. Harder to spot and yet so beautiful." His voice was raspier and Will shivered.

He stood there, waiting for what Sonny would do next. He saw him take his apron off and hold out his hand. Will took it, trembling and followed him to his office. It was small and cluttered with drawers and folders. There was a frame on the desk and Will got a glimpse of a smiling couple. It was weird that Sonny had met his mother and his sister but he didn't know anything about his family, not even where they lived.

He pushed the thoughts away when Sonny hugged him, then kept him in his arms and kissed him. His knees felt absent, the only thing supporting him was his hands, placed on the wooden surface beneath him. He felt some of his defenses crumble, each time Sonny's body came closer to him.

Sonny sat in his chair, looking up at him, his eyes drinking him in. He rummaged the pile of papers until he found his cellphone. He raised it and asked shyly:

"Can I... ? I need a wallpaper.

- So?

- I don't have any photo of you, to look at when I'm tired or stressed.

- Oh." His picture could help with that? He didn't like posing or even appear on photos, so he tended to be the one taking them. Or he walked away quietly. This time he couldn't. He turned his lips into a grin but Sonny frowned and put the cell down.

- Maybe I should wait a little. Not a good light in here..." Will sighed softly. Even Sonny was realizing he wasn't photogenic. He wondered suddenly what he was attracted to in Will. His looks? His personality? What if Sonny was only dreaming about an imaginary boyfriend and he couldn't
He didn't want to be here anymore, all alone in that tiny room. He needed to be somewhere more familiar, where they could recapture their comfortable intimacy. He asked

"Your shift will be over soon?

- It is over. I was helping with the rush. You want to come upstairs?" Will nodded. Sonny started walking, his hands hanging at his side. Will felt like he was tumbling down. What was going on? Could dating stop this quick? Was Sonny going to tell him this was a mistake?

He thought about the letter as Sonny was hanging Will's coat next to his. It was there, nested against Sonny's heart. He had written down his insecurities, the ones no one knew about. He trusted Sonny with it but was it all in vain? He hadn't open up about everything, there were things he preferred buried, but it was till rough. Especially the fact that he didn't know where they were standing. He could be completely reading Sonny wrong or he could have his heart crushed in a few minutes, seconds if Sonny's worried eyes were an indication. He sat on the couch, nervous, his stomach twisting. He was the one needing reassurance now. Or at least an explanation, anything would be better than this uncomfortable silence, that even the memories they had made in this apartment could not make better.

Sonny sat at the table and raised his eyes to Will's. He took a long breath and asked:

"Is there something wrong?" Will frowned. What did he mean?

- No, there isn't. Why are you asking?" Sonny looked down again, his hands neatly folded on his lap.

- I don't know, you seem so cautious, like you don't really want to be around. It isn't the first time and I'm never sure. Sometimes you smile like you do when you're watching a bird sing, with genuine happiness and sometimes you look like you want out. I just wanted a picture for myself, not to boast or anything, I swear. I've spent the last days counting the minutes till I see you again and you didn't call or text. And you look so solemn...

- Well, neither did you! You didn't even take my hand downstairs and we were alone. Are you fed up with me being shy? I can't change in a few days. One of the things that I like about you is that you didn't ask me to, you accept me even though I'm dull and introverted.

- You're not dull, Will! You're the greatest guy I've ever dated. I've dreamt about you every night since we met. But in my dreams you're more...

- More what? Physical?" Sonny shook his head again, looking defeated.

Will looked at the gorgeous man seated a few feet away and something struck him. It was going to be hard to say it, yet it needed to be said. He closed his eyes, focusing on an image in his head. The little red cardinal bird that he had spotted a few times now, and the white one on the photo. Same species but very different individuals. Singing a song in disharmony. Maybe before teaching Sonny how to sing, he should fix that. He whispered

- It is something I struggle with a lot in the past and I had come to peace with it. Now you're challenging it with your words.
- What?" Sonny's voice was strung. Will kept his eyelids close and explained:

- It's hard for me to believe you. It's not that I think you're lying but maybe you're trying to make me feel better and that means you're awesome, really. But I don't need this. It's OK, I know I'm not gorgeous or fascinating. Just say honest things." He finally looked at Sonny. He had stood up and was walking to the couch with prudent steps.

- Is that why you looked so tensed earlier? You feel you don't look good on photos?

- You've met my mom. She's fantastic and always looking at her best. I am barely a shadow in life. It's hard to see a shadow on a picture." Sonny sat on the edge of the cushion. He took one of Will's hand in his, tenderly. Will felt his throat hitch.

- You are exactly what I look for in a guy, on the outside and the inside. I could lose myself in your eyes. I have troubles refraining myself to ….

- To what?

- Make you mine..." Will felt his pelvis get a life on his own, moving forward on the seat. This part of his body was accepting Sonny's advances eagerly, it seems. Will bent a little and captured Sonny's lips. He felt, once again, Sonny's desire and also his need. He was grinning after that.

Sonny didn't lose a second and pointed his phone at Will's face. He smiled at the result and watched the photo for a long time, his eyes dreamy. Will understood something. Sonny wasn't going anywhere. By total luck, Will had made him his. He fished in his pocket and took out his cell. He typed 'Let's kiss again. More seriously, I have lots to learn.' The message beeped and when he saw it was from Will, Sonny turned to him. He was still beaming and Will took the picture. He didn't look at the result, as Sonny wrapped him in his arms and started teaching him how kissing and caressing could go a little further.

It was easier when he let go of his fears. Sonny was respectful, delicate in his movement, his hands staying mostly on Will's back. Sometimes, one ventured on a thigh, short-circuiting Will's brain. He tried to mirror it and Sonny groaned in the kiss.

He nested himself in his boyfriend's arms. He could feel his breath on his hair. There was a whisper in it:

"Your letter...

- Yea?

- If you feel like writing others... I had no idea I could feel like that, ever. You're precious, you know. I really want you to be mine.

- I am yours." Sonny's chest inflated, lifting Will's head up.

- Wow."

They ate in silence, this time because they didn't need to talk to feel connected. Afterward, Will asked Sonny to open his laptop and chose a song that would be easy enough. They spent half-an-hour working on Sonny repeating the right notes. It was only partially effective, as each time Sonny failed, he asked for a kiss, and each time he managed, Will congratulated him with another one.
Then Sonny changed the song and got Will up.

"It's your time to learn, mister. Show me what's left of the steps we worked on the last time."

Will walked on his feet, giving his answer. Sonny swore and had them take off their shoes. Now the socks bumped against each other, resting on the other one's ankles or toes.

"Where do you come from?

- Lots of places. I was born in Texas, but I grew up abroad.

- Really? Where?

- In Dubai. My father was a lawyer there.

- Is he still practicing?

- Yes, but they're living in the States now. What about you? Do you see your dad often?

- I used to see him every two weeks but not anymore. We've never been close. He's a good dad to Allie and that's great. You may have notice how cautious and fragile she looks. I love all my brothers and sisters but she's the one that makes me want to protect her the most, you know?

- I do. You have no idea." Will remembered his mother's remark, about inviting Sonny. Things were different now, but why not.

- Would you like to come at my house on Saturday? Allie would love to see you again. She could show you the bird feeder she helped make. It would be nice to have you at my place for once."

Sonny hugged Will in a strong grateful embrace, murmuring "Yes, I'd like that. And until, then, you have to promise to call me, every evening. OK?"
Chapter 12

Will had troubles sleeping that night. Not because Sonny would be coming here in a few days, nor because he said all these sweet things. All this actually helped. He was nervous, because he could remember his feet bumping against Sonny's sock, as they were dancing, escalating his ankles and each time he did, his spine shook.

He got up and attempted to write, but his mind was blank. The overpopulated, noisy house had reached its point of quiet and solitude, leaving him with no one to take care for to take his mind off this. He sat back on the bed, rubbing his feet on the wooden edges. It had a narrow frame, not to take too much space in the tiny bedroom. This was not how grown-ups slept, though, he knew that. He had never been to Sonny's bedroom but he was certain he owned a double bed. And right now, he was sleeping in it alone because he was waiting for Will to be ready to join him in here. And Will wanted to, very much, but he was trembling at the thought. It was too soon, and it was also all what he could think of.

He got dressed, warmly enough for an early spring night, and walked into the light of the street lamps. The neighborhood was tranquil, he was never afraid to walk at night, although he only did during summer, when the air had cooled off, leaving a wonderful sensation. He had been feeling like that, these days, when he came back from his dates, a fresh air that still carried memories of burning heat.

He wandered alone but he knew where his feet were leading him. He took the time inhaling the scent of the trees in the park and peered at the firmament, to see if he could spot a few stars, as he walked in darker areas, but it was all a way to postpone the inevitable.

At the door, he felt silly. He had just spent the evening with Sonny and now he must be asleep. He had long hours of work the next day and it wasn't as if Will had suddenly gotten ready to make it worth it while. It was more that he was nervous and nothing was curing this. And if he was honest with himself, he wanted other touches from Sonny, feel his reality, his heartbeat against his chest.

He chickened out and dragged his feet around the building. At least the walking around might tire him a little. His eyes caught a ray of light. He stopped and looked at the lit window. His brain was wide awake too and started calculating against his will. It had to be Sonny's bedroom. So he wasn't sleeping either.

Will's hands were playing with his cell in his coat's pocket. He went back and sit on the stair's first step. He could see the stars from here, but it was too late. He needed to do something else.

'Hey, you're awake?'

He waited. The answer was so quick it already gave him the answer

'Yes, I'm reading. And you?'

It was taking all of Will's provisions of daring spirit to type.

'I miss you. A little too much.'

Sonny took his time to reply there, but Will had plenty empty minutes to offer. The cell beeped.
'You could come. If you want.'

'I'm already here.'

He didn't move, drained from the effort, the excitement, the throe coming from the spasms. Now they didn't need Sonny's physical presence to manifest, just the promise of it.

The door creaked. Sonny turned the porch light on. He wasn't in his pajamas, which was sensible in this cold. His thick jeans rubbed on Will's knees as he sat close to him.

Will smiled shyly in the semi-dark. Sonny didn't smile back. So it was a bad idea, he had crossed a line, and now he needed to apologize. He started working on a little speech in his mind, pushing back the begging, focusing on staying light, but he didn't get to say it.

Sonny's mouth covered him.

His lips felt liquid, wider than he remembered, his tongue entering Will's mouth and stroking his own tongue. Will surrendered to the intrusion. It was like a dream, and as they couldn't sleep, at least they could dream along.

Sonny didn't press further. He lied uncomfortably with Will on the steps and they looked at the stars, pointing at them, letting their chatter zigzag on some vague convoluted paths. Will's back ached a little, from feeling the metal through his jacket, but his body was imbricated with Sonny's and it was OK. It was a weird moment, not a date, not being busy or even focused and it was perfect.

They heard the birds waking up one by one. Soon, they were competing for who was the loudest and the malest. Will appreciated fully he didn't need to be dominant or in competition with Sonny. His inside were burning up but he let them be. He felt beat, but still not in the mood for sleeping. Unless it would include having Sonny's leg around his like that.

When it was time for breakfast, Sonny gave him a peck and slowly got up. Will bore with the loss of touch and oscillated on his numb limbs. He looked into Sonny's shining eyes and didn't detect exhaustion, only sheer happiness. He kissed him back and followed him to the coffee-house kitchen.

Sonny started working, while Will sat at the table, being forbidden to help

"Unless you want to wear one of those baking a hair net, too, and look ridiculous.

- Well, you're wearing one and I don't feel like mocking you.

- Really?

- Yes, really, I like seeing you cook. You're talented. I'm in awe."

Sonny had stopped. He had gulped, then he had resumed the baking. While the muffins and cookies were in the big oven, he served the coffee. It was the first time Will was served it on the other side of the door. He was past being a special customer. He was now in the wings, an extra that could go wherever he wanted.

Of course, he still went to college and fought sleep, giving his damnest to understand the lectures. Sometimes the words he heard turned into nonsense, as if he was only half-awake. This had to be a
one-time thing. It was important to study, to be independent. Where would they be if Sami had only relied on her men to pay their bills? With Johnny and Sydney's father, they had live in luxury, but it hadn't last. That was the lesson. Work before pleasure, security before feelings. And being extra cautious, always.

He remembered Sonny's requests and called him in the evening, just before going to bed, at 8 pm. Sonny was yawning on the phone and they chuckled. Will didn't tell him how hard it had been in class, he didn't want him to feel guilty for something that had felt so great. Instead, he told him how he missed the bus back home and was offered a ride by one of his teacher, who drove like a maniac and he almost had a heat attack. Sonny laughed and told him about some weird customers who had started picnicking in the shop. Apparently they had brought soup. It was so easy talking with Sonny, it had always been. Will hung up. When he opened his eyes, it was Friday. He had slept like a baby.

The day went easier, which was good, because the children were in great form in the evening, running around and doing mischief. Will loved them but sometimes he really felt like a second parent. He would have loved having someone nearer his age.

He told his mom about the visit before they went to bed. Sami smiled and nodded. She didn't ask so he didn't clarify they were dating. He was resolved not to kiss Sonny in front of her, he would coach him into it if he had to. He would see how it would go. She could be harsh and insensitive at times and there was no way he would let her drive Sonny away. Will needed him, needed to hear his voice, so he called again, to tell Sonny Allie was impatient to see him. He could hear the smile in the answers although he couldn't see the eyes. After the call, he stared at Sonny's photo on his cell screen. He brushed it with his finger and sighed. Sonny had reeled him in and he didn't want out.
Sami wasn't in a good mood that day. Each child got an earful before lunch and she even snapped at Will when he asked her if he should cancel Sonny's visit.

"I can behave in company, young man! Are you afraid I'll embarrass you in front of your friend?

- No, mom. But I don't want to stress you. Looks like your work week was hard, you need a quiet week-end."

Sami looked at him, frowning, then took his hand.

- I'm sure Sonny won't stress me, darling. He was so sweet at Allie's birthday party. In fact, if you two can take care of the kids, I'll even have time to finish my work on my laptop."

It wasn't exactly what Will had in mind, but he agreed. Sami looked more tired than crossed and he hated that. He would have given up his whole love life, if that could help her cope in life.

He had wanted to surprise Sonny and he and the kids had worked on a cookie recipe. Sami had been forbidden to enter the kitchen, not to see the disaster until after it was all cleaned up but the cookies looked eatable if a little burned on the edges. Syd had patiently put chocolate chips on each one and Johnny and Allie had only eaten four so far, when Will wasn't looking. The cookies ended up in his bedroom until Sonny's arrival.

He was busy reading them a story when he heard the doorbell. Syd was up and running before he had the time to ask her to wait. She opened her mouth wide and ran back to Will's chair, hiding behind him. Will shook his head and got up, wondering how to greet Sonny, is he couldn't kiss him. They had never been formal. He placed his hand on Sonny's shoulder and pressed it tenderly. Sonny grinned and shook the kids hand solemnly, offering a finger to Syd who was gaping at him. Allie was chuckling and Johnny started tugging on Will's sleeve, presumably to remind him of the cookies, when they heard a noise in the stairs. Sami looked better and Will realized she must have taken a nap.

She greeted Sonny with genuine pleasure and Will felt proud of Sonny. He had brought some flowers for her and a little bag for the kids.

"What is it, what is it?" Johnny started tearing it. Will put his hand on his and shook his head.

Sonny explained:

- Bird seeds, for your feeder?

- Yeah! Come in the garden to see how it looks. We did it all by ourselves.

- I know, Will told me. Lead the way."

The cookies were produced proudly, at least by the children. Will wasn't very happy with the result, although given how good Sonny was at baking, it was not a fair competition, anyway. He looked at him nervously as he tried one and sighed of relief when Sonny met his eyes and nodded.
Sami had joined them again and prepared some tea while Will served juice to the children. She left again later and Will followed her to the stairs.

"Can you tell me when you're done mom? I'd like to show Sonny my room and chat a little.

- OK, sure. I'm glad he came today, he fits so well with our little family." Will smiled. Sami smiled back with a little smirk.

- And you know, you can kiss him in front of us, it's no big deal. Johnny and Allie might make some yucky noises but you know how it is at that age..." She brushed Will's cheek and he remembered to close his mouth.

- How did you know?

- From how you were looking at each other the first time I met him. You were right you know, being with a guy is good for you. You smile more easily."

She kissed his nose and walked upstairs.

Will found Sonny with happy family cards in his hand, looking very serious and careful not to look at Sydney's hands. She was still working on how to hide them and often forgot about it. Will walked behind the dining chair and kissed Sonny's temple. Sonny got distracted and asked for the wrong card. Johnny won and Syd asked for another round but Will proposed they go for a walk. It was always a good idea to tire them before bed time.

Once outside, he laced his fingers with Sonny's. It got him a soft look and a discreet peek. They reached the deserted playground and sat on a bench to watch them run around yelling at the top of their lungs.

They were still holding hands and Sonny asked:

"So, you've told your mom?

- I didn't need to. She's OK with it. She likes you a lot.

- Like mother, like son?" Will nudged him softly. Sonny looked happy. When Will let go of his hand to help Syd with her coat's zipper, he waited a bit, then put it on Will's thigh. Will took a breath and looked for a distraction.

"So, did Chad get the concert tickets?

- He did. I asked if his girlfriend was OK double dating with gay guys and apparently she doesn't mind at all. He's more concerned about me embarrassing everyone by my ignorance over music.

- I'll make sure you don't sing and it should be alright..."

Sonny gave him a sharp look, then caught on the teasing. He kissed Will's cheek, his hair brushing his temple.

Johnny called them from the other side of the playground. He had found a bird on the ground. It looked wounded. Too much to be helped and Will hugged his little brother tightly, making sure Syd was still playing and hadn't notice anything. Sonny looked bummed. It was strange to see him lose
his efficient manners for a change.

They walked back to Sami, who had met her deadline and looked more human. Johnny wept on her knees while the girls went to play with the doll house. Will finally took Sonny upstairs. He felt terribly young, he who was still living with his mother and just had a small bedroom to present.

Sonny looked around and saw the cardinal photo on the desk almost immediately. It was a bright red in a red frame, about the only bright colors in the room. Will wasn't very much into decoration or displaying his tastes, even in music. He had a big stack of CDs but no posters on the wall and the bookshelf was plain and messy. There was a shoe box that he filled with all his writings and it was starting to overflow.

Sonny sat on the bed and tapped the mattress next to him. Will's knees went weak. His boyfriend was warmly clothed and his hair was messier than ever, yet Will's inside disagreed with the invite. He tried to recapture the magic of the night they had spent together on the stairs, remember the deep kiss, how great it was. He took a step and bent his face to Sonny's mouth. They lay on the bed, still kissing, their hands on each other's hip bones.

"You were good with your brother this afternoon. I felt useless, he looked so sad."

Will pinched his lips.

- I didn't like the sight, but yes, I'm used to comforting them. When he was a baby I learned how to calm him down when he was crying.

- Poor birdy... I wish I had know you at Johnny's age. You must have been cute as hell, like him.

- Well, he's my half-brother, so that's not sure at all." Sonny's mouth twisted a little. He sat up on the bed and walked to the window.

- It's night already, I should go.

- Oh, OK. Thanks for spending the afternoon, it was really great. I hope you weren't bored."

Sonny shook his head but looked absent-minded. Will waited. After a minute or so, Sonny mumbled

- You know, if your mom doesn't mind, one day you could... I mean, one night...

- Yes?

- You could stay at my place?

- Like the other night?" Will was about to tell him how much he had liked it but Sonny said

- No." He looked straight into Will's eyes. It was getting difficult to breathe. Will focused on it, then searched in his head for what he should answer. There was a little war up there and no side was clearly winning.

- Maybe. I'll tell you when..."

Sonny looked defeated. Will didn't want him to leave like that. He got up and hugged him tightly.
"I'm in love with you."

Sonny broke the hug and took a step back. Will started eating his lower lip until he saw how Sonny's face lit up from within. He kissed Will, then kissed him again, then whispered:

"Thank you. I love you too. So, so much."

They walked down the stairs slowly. Sonny went to say good-bye and thank everyone, including Johnny who looked better and was eating the last cookie. Will handed him his coat and walked him outside.

He looked at the silhouette fading in the dark, hearing the words echoing in his head. Allie had joined him and looked a little sad. Like brother, like sister too.

- You know we could go there Thursday afternoon. I'm sure Sonny will be happy to see you again.

- He will? What if he only want to see you?" Will looked at her, frowning. Her face was as tranquil as ever, yet he heard the doubts.

- He'll be happy to see us both. Like this afternoon, he said he had a great time with all of you.

- Then why was he looking upset when he left?" Will didn't reply. Allie was smart but it was hard to explain, even to himself.

- He had a lot on his mind. You could make him a nice card, like the one you did for grandma.

- Will you write in it? You're better at it.

- I'll help you."

he had left his cell on his desk. There were two texts. One was long, one was three-words long. The first one was planning their next date. The second filled his heart again.
Will was woken up by a sun ray. It was entering through the window as he had forgotten to draw the curtains the night before. There was no sound in the house and that was suspicious. He had learned the hard way that the children were the most effective vandalizing when completely silent. Of course, they could still be asleep but it was bright outside, it was way past their usual week-end waking time.

There was some noise outside, though and Will smiled at the bird's morning chants. It reminded him of the night he had spent with Sonny. And as he lay there, head buried in his pillow, a smile spreading on his lips as he could still hear Sonny's words I love you too...

He didn't move, he wanted to keep that feeling of peace that was seeping in his muscles, in his nerves ending, and this quietness his brain had reached, for the first time since he could remember.

His door moved slightly, pushed by five determined little fingers. He heard the tiptoe and moved to allow his sister on the mattress. Her hair was sticking into odd places and she had that sleepy look that was adorable. Will could easily remember the baby she had been, a few years ago. It was before his stepdad started cheating on his mother, before she threw him out. Now, she was like him, asking Sami why her daddy wasn't living at home. Not many of her friends were in that case, most of them had young parents, who hadn't reached the divorce stage yet. It would come for most of them, Will knew it. That's why you shouldn't marry, that's why you shouldn't have joint bank accounts. Burt had almost emptied it before he had left. They had to live with his grandmother for a while. He wondered if Sami would give all this another try. She had been burned badly, but Will thought that she would.

Syd had fallen asleep and Will didn't dare move. Instead he closed his eyes and thought about Sonny. The peace had left, his heart was beating a little too fast. Sonny had cleared his Saturday afternoon to spend time with them, so today, he was working all the time. And Will had to study. It was strange as how each days seemed much longer than usual. His life was full. Before that he had been busy and never really bored, but time passed fast, as months could go by without anything important happening.

Now he was learning how to make friends, how to take risks and he was nervous. But in a good way.

The children had overslept and made Sami pay for it, later, running around the house until she decided to take them to the park. Now that the deadline had been met, she was much more relaxed and ready to leave Will alone. He looked through the window at the sun shining brightly and sat in the garden.

He was busy reviewing the notes he had asked after Thursday's lesson, the one he had almost slept through, trying to make sense of them, when his cell beeped.

'I love you.'

He decided to be playful. Sonny could be intense at times, but he accepted light teasing and Will appreciated that. He appreciated a lot of things in his boyfriend, if he thought about it.

'I know.'
'Good, then I don't have to say it anymore then.'

Will smirked and typed 'It's only been a day. Later, I might forget. Did I mention I loved you too?'

He looked down at his work and some time had passed till he was startled away from it again.

'You did. I have screwed up half the orders today thanks to that. I don't regret anything. Say it again?'

Will chuckled. Then he felt his chest contract. How could he have such an effect? How long would it last?

That stopped the studying and he leafed through his notebook. He found what he had written before. Before Sonny kissed him, before he became someone's whole focus. He re-read what he had yearned for, and most of his wants had been met. Except from one crucial one : being sure. Even Sonny's attentiveness could not give him that, Sonny who had broken up with other people before, who had changed his mind or discovered flaws he couldn't bear with.

But he had felt so bad at that time, so lonely and now he had someone who was making him smile. He couldn't go back, so he would have to face these fears.

So, he didn't answer. He packed his books and headed to the coffee-house. He came in at a busy hour, at least for a Sunday, but he was able to meet Sonny's eyes at the end of the room and mouth the words to him. Then he sat at the only empty table. There was a sort of star painted on it, with big dots everywhere and on the side, there were six little boxes with wooden colored pawns in them. He took one and observed it. They were all identical. He brushed them, enjoying the softness, wondering how you played.

"It's Chinese checkers."

He looked up at Ellie. She was carrying a tray and smiled:

- I know you don't want me to take your order, I just wanted to say hello.

Will fidgeted on his chair. But he had to accept. Ellie was very sweet.

- I'm glad you did. I can see you're busy but if one day you feel like talking, I'd... I mean I'm not..."

He coughed and looked for the right words. She put a hand on his shoulder and answered:

- Sure, Will. I'll leave you to your work for now."

She went to the next table and put the orders in front of the customers with a polite smile, very different from the one she had given him. He had too many friends now. He felt overwhelmed.

He didn't feel like working though so he placed the pawns on the colored triangles in front of him. He was about to put the last one when a hand held his and followed his gesture. He liked it when Sonny did that. He liked even more when the tray was laid down, with a cookie plate and two coffees. It meant they would have a little time.

"Thank you.
- For what?

- For coming. I don't want to sound too needy, but I long to see you everyday, even for five minutes."

Will couldn't promise that. Sometimes his mom called to ask him to look after the kids and sometimes he had to work late, without distractions. And he also needed time for himself, time to dream, time to be something else than a brother or a student. He took a bite in one of the cookies and let out a discreet moan.

- Is that your way of showing me how real cookies should taste like?" Sonny grinned and shook his head.

- No. That's my way of luring you here.

- I've never come here because of the food. It's delicious, but you're the only real reason." Sonny sighed, his chest expanding under the apron. He leaned toward Will and placed his hands around Will's neck to kiss him. Will felt safe, taken care of.

So, he didn't leave. He put the pawns back in the boxes and studied a while. Then he looked through the window and was rewarded by the sight of two birds zooming around. Spring was coming. Soon there would be mating rituals. The birds had specific seasons to be in love. They had short but busy lives. Maybe he could find the time to be here for Sonny.

When the coffee-house closed, Sonny came back to the table and took a pawn in his hand.

- You want to play?

Will looked at him carefully. Sonny made efforts, all the time. It was difficult to know whether he wanted to do something or when he wanted to please him. It was even more difficult because most times he didn't seem to mind.

- Only if you want to. You like this game?

- I do." He looked at Will's face and chuckled "You don't believe me?

- I believe that you like it but what would you really want to do? Go out?

- Well, I haven't planned anything. Our next date is Tuesday so tonight is just going with the flow.

Will thought it over.

- Let's make a bargain then, tonight we play and Tuesday, we do something else. I love Hitchcock movies but I know them by heart. What do you want to do with me?"

It took a moment for the blush to be noticeable on Sonny's skin. Will swallowed the lump in his throat and waited.

"The swimming pool is opened late.
- What?" How would this make Sonny blush, Will had no idea. Will only felt like swimming in the summer, but as he mulled it over, it began to feel nice. Much easier than going to a dance club or try to climb. He nodded.

Will won and got a muffin as a prize. And five long kisses, that left him with weakened knees. He opened the door to the heavy rain. They had been so engrossed in each other, they had failed to notice.

- I can drive you home.

- It's really not far, Sonny. There's no need."

Sonny looked around and walked to the umbrella stand. He took a small one out and walked out to join Will.

- Is it yours?" Sonny shook his head. He opened the umbrella and they both squeezed under it.

Sonny put his arm around Will's waist and they walked in the dark, touching each other from shoulder to knee. Despite the shelter, Sonny's hair ended all wet. Will had trouble breathing. He hesitated, he really did, to ask Sonny upstairs. But he still knew he couldn't. He watched him leave, with regrets coursing down his bloodstream. He went to his room and sent a last text 'Thank you for being you.’
Chapter 15

Will was always a little weirded out when Sonny saw him and smiled. He could remember his loving declarations, he could present Sonny's attentiveness and patience as proof to his doubting mind, it was still difficult to believe. It faded after a while in Sonny's company, luckily.

It wasn't that late, but the winter's sun was still setting. A few birds were finishing their days, making the tree leaves flutter, chirping a few last notes to the coming night. The swimming pool was a little far but Will had asked to walk. Sonny had agreed, like he always did and Will wondered when he would start opposing him, how it would make him feel. He felt spoiled and grateful and deep down, quite worried that he wasn't making enough efforts.

He bravely took Sonny's hand in his and shot him a shy smile. Sonny was looking very nice, his hair neatly done, his clothes wrinkle-free. Will wondered why he had bothered, swimming would flatten everything, but he didn't ask.

Will changed in his trunks, left the changing room and joined his boyfriend. He started shivering. With the winter's weather, he had seen very small parts of Sonny's skin. He felt himself blush and suddenly understood why Sonny had done the same on Sunday. He felt very exposed, knowing he couldn't back out of it, and he couldn't help his eyes from following the shape of his man, especially, the way his hip bones were drawing the beginning of a triangle that continued underneath the trunks. Will knew he was built the same way, but on Sonny, it was much hotter.

He turned his eyes away, his stomach aching, his mind pushing back images that he wasn't ready to face. They walked to the showers and, as he had predicted, Sonny's hair clung to his skull. It was a good thing the water was somewhat cold.

Will was starting to build pretexts in his head, like saying he felt sick. But he was also drawn to Sonny's tanned skin and followed him to the pool. Once inside the water, he felt his body relax, enjoying the lightness of lower gravity. He began swimming lazily, letting the softness of the water surround him, felling good, despite the smell of chlorine. Sonny was still entering the water, inch by inch. Will swam to him and thought about splashing him or at least putting his wet hand on his back. The way his body reacted to that idea stopped him and he switched to verbal teasing

"The pool will be closed before you're fully immersed, Son.

- It's not my fault they're not heating this enough. What's the point of an inside pool if it's freezing.

- It's not. Come on, I’m waiting.

- Don't say that, It makes it even harder.

- Serves you right for wanting to see me naked..." Will shut his mouth too late. Sonny had paused his descent and turned, his eyes boring into Will, serious, like they always were when he was turned on. It did the trick and a few seconds later, he was hugging Will in the pool. His shoulders were still dry and Will buried his head in the left one, feeling it's softness against his cheek.

His trunks shifted, so he took a step back and decided he could go with the splashing now. Sonny looked startled and jumped toward him but Will swam away. They fooled around, in the quasi deserted pool. There were only two or three people, focused on exercising, so no one was paying
attention. Will stole a kiss and was forgiven immediately.

After swimming for a while, Sonny got out of the water and walked to the diving boards. Will looked at him, entranced. Sonny was good at a lot of things.

He didn't notice he was trembling until Sonny came near him and put his hand on his cheek.

- You look like a baby bird. We should stop or your lips will turn blue." He kissed them and Will closed his eyes, reveling in their warmth.

They ran to their towels. Sonny's was gigantic and Will thought that he should have taken a bigger one himself. He dried his legs and torso, wetting it in seconds. Sonny opened his and gestured him closer. Will grinned as Sonny rubbed his back gently and returned the favor. He was almost on Sonny's lap, struggling to stay just a little apart, while their chest were touching frequently. Sonny's hand moved to his hair, ruffling it and he laughed and fought a little bit. It was unnerving and arousing, yet at the same time, it felt like they were two kids, fooling around innocently. This was, to Will, one of the reason he could date him. Because of the lightness.

Sonny pecked Will's neck, then brushed his face with his. Their eyes met and the easiness went away. Will didn't move, letting Sonny's gaze invade him, grinding his teeth to stay still and not run. Their lips met again, hungry and warm.

A whistle startled them and Will's heart started beating faster, waiting to be admonished for their public behavior. But it was just the pool closing. They went back to the shower and Will put the shampoo on his hair, then grabbed Sonny's hands and put them on his skull. Sonny started massaging, his breath shallow. He started spreading the shampoo on Will's shoulders and back. Will let him for a few seconds, then patted his arm gently. He didn't feel equal to returning it and went back under the spray.

It took Sonny endless minutes to style his hair back, with the help of the lazy hairdryer fastened to the wall. Will just flicked his fingers through his locks and looked at Sonny teasingly.

"You don't have to look perfect all the time, you know. It's late and you'll go to bed soon anyway." Sonny blushed faintly but didn't listen. They exited the building, hands firmly in each other's and walked to the park. Sonny pulled Will to a bench and took him in his arms.

"I met you there...

- I remember.

- I was a wreck and you took care of me.

- You would have done the same.

- Not as well." He kissed Will's temple. Their skulls touched, arms around the waist, taking in the quiet of the residential neighborhood. Will wanted to stay like that forever.

"So, the concert is still on?

- You're excited to go?" Will felt bashful but he nodded in the dark.

- I like good music. And Chad is funny.
- Will I see you until then" Sonny's voice was just a little pleading. Will breathed faster.

- Can I come Thursday with Allie? She was sad you left Saturday.

- She was? Awe... Sure, come to the coffee-shop. I have a late shift but I can provide treats.

- Yeah... That's the only reason I'm coming." Sonny chuckled

- I love it when you're kidding. You look so serious all the time. I love it too, but it's always a nice surprise.

Will smiled. Sonny was the one who was always grinning and got serious very rarely and only for Will.

He had an early class so they had to get up. Will took Sonny to his place, feeling better that way. He loved how protective and caring Sonny could be, but he wanted to feel like that too.

The walk back home was cold, inside and outside. Will fought the urge to turn back.

Allie had made four drawings for Sonny and didn't know which one to bring him. Will suggested she take all of them and promised that Sonny would hang them in his office. It was getting warmer every day now and Will only put a jacket over his shirt.

Brother and sister looked at a pigeon hopping its way to the rest of a sandwich in the street, while Sonny was busy, running and taking care of everything in the shop. He had followed on Will's promise and taken the drawings to the back. Will felt proud. He had a boyfriend who got on well with his family. It felt a dream. He just hoped he could overcome his fears and take things further before Sonny go too frustrated. He counted the times Sonny smiled at him, between customers. Fifteen. He felt like he was Allie's age. Next thing he knew, he would be counting the days since their first kiss...
He had an exam that Friday but he wasn't worried. He had studied seriously everyday and he was starting to master the capacity of pushing thoughts of Sonny aside, to focus on learning. He changed his alarm, to be on the safe side. He didn't mind waking up early, with the birds, as the proverb said.

He opened one eye and frowned at the dawn. It was supposed to be dark. His hand searched frantically, making his night-table shake and objects fall. He caught his cell and stared. The alarm was off. It was way, way too late.

He didn't have time for coffee. He grabbed a fruit and ran out the door. The last bus he could catch before his exam started would be arriving soon. He reached the bus stop, panting, but with five minutes to spare. He started relaxing and day-dreamt. Sonny's eyes, in the coffee-house, searching him, sending him messages that were warm and soft. The flood that washed him away, each time, threatening to break his inner dams. He shivered and heard people talking next to him. Worried mumbling. He looked at the time. The bus was late. Very late.

He didn't know what to do. The exam was important, too much to miss. His mother had left for work, taking the kids to the daycare, and they had no other cars. He started wrecking his brain but the only answer he could find was this: call Sonny. He had to be quick. He sent a text first. If Sonny was still asleep, he would hate himself.

Sonny's car came into view and Will felt a mix of relief and guilt. His boyfriend's hair was more messy than usual and he was driving slowly. Will hoped in the car and gave directions. Sonny was looking straight away, as if trying to be more focused.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't know what to do.

- Don't be sorry, sweetheart. You were right to call me. You've got to take this exam. I'm glad to help.

- You didn't have to. I kind of panicked. I'll try to find another way to manage if it happens again."

Sonny was frowning and his hands tensed on the wheel. Will's breathing was painful. Here it was, one moment that didn't go well. Sonny was pissed that he asked him to come and while Will was aware they had to go through this kind of problems and work it out, he didn't know what to say or do. He looked out through the window.

"I'd rather you wouldn't." Will turned his head. Sonny looked even angrier. He was pressing his lips.

- I overslept Sonny. It doesn't happen often. I could have called the college to explain, but I wasn't sure the reason would be enough...

- No, Will, stop. That's not it. I've overslept once or twice too. It's your reaction, it's...

- OK, OK, I get it! I won't ask for help in the future! I was desperate!"

Sonny parked the car in the students' parking lot and looked Will straight in the eyes.

- Will, if you don't expect me to want to help, you don't really thing we're serious. I want to be the
first person you ask! I'm sick of your apologies!

Will got his point but didn't feel better. His own eyes were teary and his voice was trembling

- I'm someone who apologizes a lot, Sonny. Get used to it. Or give up, I don't know! Am I supposed not to care you look half-asleep? It's my fault I didn't catch the previous bus!

Sonny looked away and Will got out of the car. He would have slammed the door, but he didn't like the idea. It was too loud and he was upset enough.

The positive thing was he wasn't late for the exam. He had a little time to sit and breathe slowly, focusing on his fragile heart's beats, wishing he could exchange it for a tougher one, making him a different, more normal person. He hated having that power to piss Sonny off, to hurt him. He was starting to feel really bad about himself when the exam sheet was put on his desk. After all that, he at least owed it to himself to ace it. He owed it to Sonny too.

The exam's questions had felt easy. Will hoped it didn't mean he hadn't really understood them, but it was something he didn't really believe. He was a hard worker and got enough top grades for that. His mood was fluctuating, though, between upset and worried, to relieved and thoughtful. He walked to the bus stop, looking up at the wires, populated by black silent shapes. Birds knew how to belong with their companions better than him. They didn't even need to talk. Which was the problem, maybe. He was a polite person by nature, more than his own parents, as it was driven by the need to be left alone, to avoid aggressions. Did he want Sonny to leave him alone?

Which meant he couldn't even say sorry and it sucked. He pondered on writing another letter but he didn't think it would be a good idea. He could text 'I love you'. He thought about the fight that morning. He had said the wrong things but so had Sonny. He had to accept Will's nature, get how bad Will felt when asking for help. He felt a failure when he did. It was stupid, he was aware of that, but it was working for him. It kept him from giving up. It wasn't as if he had that many people to ask anyway. Better be used to it.

The honk made him jump and stumble on his feet. The car was parked a few feet away. He could make out the shape of Sonny's head at the driver's seat but the sun rays were making it hard to see his traits.

Will grit his teeth and walked prudently to the vehicle's passenger door. He opened it and sat, looking ahead. He would not talk first, as it was one of the problems. He would listen rather and see what happens. It was difficult to feel so passive but he could give Sonny that at least.

Sonny let on a discreet but long sigh. He started the engine without a word, without a glance either. Will, who hadn't ask for the ride home, felt guilty again. His neck was starting to hurt with the tension. As the car started sliding under big trees, leaving the city behind, Sonny right hand left the wheel and landed on Will's, like a small bird. Will's breathing changed. His heart felt even more fragile.

"Would you like me to be stronger?" Sonny's head turned on instinct. He was frowning.

- What do you mean?"

Will waited for him to watch the road again and replied

- I don't know what you see in me. I don't do things right. We should be happy and carefree and I
blow it all the time. I lack practice at relationships. Not just romantic ones. I don't know how I'm supposed to behave. I thought I could make my own choices, be myself and also be a great boyfriend, but...

- I am happy..." Will caught Sonny's eyes. He didn't look groggy, like that morning. Rather serene and hopeful. Will smiled back.

Sonny parked the car and Will looked around, surprised. He had no idea where they were. Sonny was supposed to be working this afternoon. He got out of the car. Sonny grabbed something from the backseat. He walked to Will, carrying a backpack, and took him in his arms.

"There is no "right" way to be in a relationship. I was wrong to yell this morning, you were stressed enough. How did the exam go?

- Great, I think. Why are we here?"

Sonny opened the backpack and took out two pairs of binoculars. He handed one to Will and pointed to the top of a nearby tree. Will used the instrument and was rewarded with the sight of a yellow-feathered body.

"What else is in the bag?

- A picnic. Well, it's mostly sandwiches.

- But you're working today.

- No, I'm being a boyfriend today. I'm the boss, I can find ways." His smile was so sweet and mischievous, Will felt a lump in his throat. He gulped and tried to chuckle to hide the depth of his emotions. No need to ruin the moment.

He took Sonny's hand in his and squeezed it as tight as he could. He pointed the binoculars to his gorgeous boyfriend, glad to find such a rare and delightful sight. Sonny mirrored him and they laughed for a few minutes. Then they kissed again and it felt carefree.
Chapter 17

The next morning, Will stayed home with Allie. Johnny and Syd's father had taken them with him but their own father hadn't showed up. Will would have done anything for the look on his sister's face to go away. He too his laptop and asked her to help him with the bird photos from the day before.

"You could make a wallpaper for your computer.

- That's a great idea, Allie. Could help me do it?

There were a few shots of Sonny too, smiling at him, and Will's heart beat a little faster. They opened a picture software and started pasting. Sonny was in the center, as he was in the center of Will's world, a grinning promise of happiness.

Allie asked for one photo to be developed, the one with the yellow little bird Will had first spotted. It suited her, it was a fearful animal, never getting to near, and quietly beautiful.

"I've got a better idea, why don't you draw it?

- It might not look very good.

- I'll help you.

His mother was at work again, so very busy Will had to walk outside when she started to get angry at Lucas.

"Mom, I know you're pissed at him, but let's not make Allie feel like a burden, shall we? I've spent the day distracting her, so please...

- I'm sorry, Will, but I can't come home now and you might be angry too when you have to cancel your date with Sonny.

- Do you really have to stay that late on a Saturday?" He heard her sigh on the phone

- Deadlines are deadlines, Will. You miss one, you lose a client. This is what being a grown-up means, you should know that, already. I don't have the luxury of staying home, daydreaming like you..." She had stopped. One of this instance when her words were hurtful, although she really wasn't.

- Bye, Mom, I'll call Sonny. Send a text when you get home."

- Will, I'm sorry..." He hung up and came back in the living-room.

He sat next to his sister and looked over her shoulder

"This is getting good, Allie. We'll have it framed if you want." Allie blushed and didn't answer. Will took his cell out, thinking. He had spent two weeks getting mentally ready to go to the concert, growing quietly excited at the thought. He was supposed to meet Sonny at the end of his shift, eat at his place and then join Chad to carpool. If Sami came home early enough, they could still go to the
concert, maybe. He sent a text to his boyfriend and went to the kitchen to fix dinner.

His cell beeped twice. He frowned. Maybe it was Sonny as well as Sami.

It wasn't. They read 'Add a third plate on your dinner table, I'll be with you in ten.' and 'I'll bring dessert.' He smiled. This would help Allie's mood so much, make her day worth it after all.

They were laying the table when the door rang. Will went to open and was swept away in a kiss. He put his forehead against Sonny's, eyes closed, breathing him in.

"Have I told you I loved you?

- Mmm, no, do tell." It felt odd to act like a child that way, as if he was doing something reprehensible. On the other hand, it felt good, it made their relationship innocent enough that he could keep it going. He took Sonny's hand and took him to the table.

Allie's mouth was covered in chocolate and Will was busy wiping it with a tender gesture when they heard the door open. Apparently his mother hadn't bothered text or call to say she was leaving work. Allie ran to the bathroom and Will turned and saw Sonny's eyes shining at him, while a hand came on his own lips

- Looks like both of you like chocolate a lot." Will smirked and stopped when Sonny kissed him.

"Oh, come on!" Will's heart did a double-take. It had been a long time since he heard that voice.

- Dad? How did you come in?

- Allie forgot her key the last time." His voice was hazy. It was difficult to say how much he had drunk but enough apparently to speak too loud and with an aggressive tone.

- You show up now? Allie was wondering what had happened to you!

- Some stuff came up! And don't you change the subject again, Will! That guy just kissed you!" He took a threatening step towards them, leading Sonny to place himself in front of Will.

Will wasn't afraid, not yet. He was mostly stunned, not that his dad would turn homophobic, he had long ago accepted the man's many flaws, but that he would give a damn at all about what his son was doing.

"Dad, don't pretend you care who I go out with. You haven't talked to me in years.

- My son is not a damn fa...!"

- Dad!" Allie's voice was shocked. Lucas turned to her and his eyes softened immediately

- Don't worry, sweetheart, I'll kick this disgusting man out.

- Are you talking about Sonny? Don't dad, he's great and Will is in love with him.

- Men don't love other man, Allie, that's not right." His speech was faltering even more but he was still standing, looking pissed.
Will wanted all this to stop and things to go back to normal. He felt weak and angry. Sonny's arm was around his shoulder, tensed but reassuring.

"Dad, I'm attracted to men, deal with it. I'm sorry your macho's pride is offended that you would have sired a gay child, but why don't we all forget all that and be back to ignoring each other. It worked for you before, didn't it?

- I don't ignore you, I didn't know you existed!

- You did when I was ten and yet I don't recall you even asking about me recently!" he had forgotten Allie was still here until he head her gasp. He didn't want her to feel guilty, nor witness her father act drunk. He was the only one who had had the privilege before and he would have wanted to keep it that way.

His big-brotherly instincts took over and he hugged her, whispering

"Dad's not himself, honey, he doesn't really mean it. I'm sorry I yelled.

- No, Will don't be sorry. He shouldn't say things like that to Sonny.

- I'll say whatever I feel like! I don't want a pervert near my daughter!

- Then, dad, I would have to leave home! I am gay too."

"Lucas Desmond Horton! Don't you talk to my children that way!" Sami was in the same state as earlier when she had phoned, but this time, it came in handy. In about two minutes, Lucas had been thrown out the house, mumbling "I came to pick Allie up" to which she had replied "Not with that breath, not on my watch."

Will tucked Allie, listening to her cries until she fell asleep, then he joined the two others on the couch. Sami looked fierce, while Sonny looked wearied. He reached out to Will and arranged them so that Will's leg was on his lap, his head on his chest. Sonny's heart's beating soothed him and he turned to his mother.

"I'm sorry, mom, he had Allie's key.

- Don't be sorry, Will, none of this is your fault. It is mine for having chosen such a father for my children.

- Was he already like that?

- The first time, I didn't care, he was a Bad Boy, with an attitude and I was a teenager... The second time, he was making efforts and I wanted to believe it, so you would have a father in your life...

- You didn't have to..." She looked up, with something like pity in her eyes.

- Will, you deserve everything. You deserve Sonny's love, don't you ever listen to Lucas. He's the best thing that has happened to you." Will felt the chest next to his cheek move. Sonny was chuckling.

- Thank you, Sami." Will closed his eyes. He wanted to make the most of the few minutes he had left being on Sonny's lap that way, until he would have to leave.
Sami sighed and walked to the kitchen

"I'll make some tea. You guys want some before you go?

- Go where?

- To your concert. Isn't it tonight? It hasn't begun yet, has it?

- No, but don't you want me to stay?

- What for? He won't come back.

- You're sure about that?" She nodded. He couldn't help being worried and he didn't want her to put up a brave front for him.

- I'm sure. I can handle your father any day. He fears me."

Sonny was very sweet as he led Will out to his car.

"We can cancel everything and just go to Common Ground. It's almost closed but we can play another game and you can calm down." Will shook his head. He needed a bigger distraction.

- Let's go meet Chad. I paid for those tickets, remember." Sonny laughed and kissed Will's cheek.

- I do. I sometimes forget how strong you can be. Let's go."

The car lights revealed two figures near the diner, on way too tall (that would be Chad) and one with long hair. Will was curious about the girlfriend. He didn't need any new homophobic attitude for the night. Before they got out of the car, he caught Sonny's chin and gave him a tender kiss

- Thank you for being so sweet tonight. It felt good not to be alone against my dad. I owe you." Sonny smiled and answered with a light tone

- You do owe me. I'll ask you to enjoy this evening as much as possible and kiss me a lot, and we'll be even.

- OK, I can do that..." He felt he could do a little bit more, maybe, but didn't voice it. He wasn't sure he'd follow through already.
Once inside the diner, Will was introduced to Chad's girlfriend. Apparently, she already knew Sonny and gave him a bright, but slightly shy smile, giggling, one of her fingers playing with her hair. Will felt himself relax a little. Chad sounded all exited, which was also good at distracting him, after all the highly shattering interactions Will had gone through.

"Will, this is the beautiful Melanie, my girlfriend. Mel, this is Will, Sonny's boyfriend.

- Hey, Will, nice meeting you. Sonny talks about you all the time." Will turned his head, hiding his emotion behind a smirk

- Does he? I hope I'll live up to your expectations, then." Sonny returned his gaze in a cocky way and gave him a quick peck. His arm was around Will's chest and it was a welcome physical support.

"So, let's go and order, I'm starving and there's no way I'm late to the concert!" Mel turned to Chad and patted his hand

- Concerts rarely start on time, you know that.

- That doesn't mean nothing is going on. You can have great new bands doing the opening, you can meet some of the musicians sometimes, or talk to the security guys and then later, they let you in the wings..." Once, again Chad was doing most of the conversation, in his lively way. Will sat next to Mel and gave her a friendly smile. She let out a tiny sigh and smiled back.

- What about you Will? What band do you listen to?" Will was startled out of his thoughts. Chad and Sonny had been talking about some popular song that Sonny said he liked, even if it was "...not indie enough for you. It's catchy!" and suddenly all three pair of eyes were on Will. He looked into Sonny's soft eyes, absorbing their silent soothing reality and tried to answer slowly, not to get overwhelmed. He focused on what his taste actually was, looking down on the table, so as not to react to Chad's body language and change his answers.

He lift his head when he heard him chuckle

"What are you doing with Sonny, man! You are waaay more advanced musically than he ever will be!" Sonny was giving him a dark look. Will felt warmth and confusion in his chest.

- I don't like the same stuff you do, though, and I don't know most of the new bands...

- Well, then, if I can have you discover new songs you like, I'll be delighted. I hope you'll like those we are hearing tonight." Will tried dealing with Chad's attitude as quietly as he could. It sounded that Chad cared about his opinion, that he saw him as someone who mattered. Sonny did too, of course, but Sonny was in love so it explained it. Chad was a confident, edgy kind of guy, the kind that looked down at Will in High School, or didn't even notice him in college. To be fair, Will recognized himself a little in Mel, in the way her eyes fluttered everywhere when spoken too, in the way she almost swallowed back her words when she wasn't sure. She was very shy too and Chad was into her.

They took Chad's car to the open field where the concert was taking place. There was indeed a security team, all dressed in black and taking off the cap of water bottles. They chose a spot on the
grass and were about to put their jackets on the floor, but Sonny took a thin blanket from his backpack and spread it. Will was thankful for it, while it was getting warmer everyday, it was still cold. In order for them to fit on it, each couple had to squeeze tightly and Will wondered if it was intentional on Sonny's part or if it was just a lucky upside for him.

Their hands were clasped in each other's, Sonny's warmth shielding Will's back from the chilly air. Will gave him a grateful kiss, then turned to the stage where a group of very young teenagers were bringing their instruments. They were very bad and Will laughed hard as he and Chad commented on it, devising ways of getting them to stop in various creative ways.

- Remind me never to get on your bad side, sweetheart. You hide your psychotic tendencies well..." Sonny was laughing but Will froze. It took his boyfriend a few second to catch up, then he buried his forehead in Will's shoulder, whispering: "Sorry, I'm an ass..." Will sighed and looked at the stage, where another band was assembling, looking more seasoned than the last one. Thankfully they were all right and had quite a good stage presence, getting the audience to repeat their chorus and some of those who were standing to dance.

They weren't the main band, though. Chad left for a while to buy some drinks and shy Mel really had to talk to them on her own.

"So, Will, what do you like besides music?"

- Oh, hum... I like writing. And bird watching..." The list was short, when he put it like that. He liked Sonny a lot too, but that he kept to himself.

- Will is fantastic with little kids too. And he's good at spotting beautiful sights. Walking with him is eye-opening." Sonny added.

Will was trembling now, wondering once again how on earth someone as gentle and considerate was interested in him.

Sonny tried to sing along with the catchiest songs. Will found him too cute to interfere. When the tune was so off, it was becoming painful to hear, he twisted his chest and pressed his lips on Sonny's, who forgot about the concert instantly, responding with enthusiasm. When the song ended, he whispered:

"You still love me, even though I can't sing?" The tone was playful, but there was an uncertainty somewhere. Will had learned to spot it every time.

- I love you so much, I want us to come back to your place when the show is over." He felt Sonny's breath hitched in his throat, making his own chest flutter. Their eyes met in the artificial multicolored lightning and now they were alone, in the whole universe. Will felt the trust Sonny had established between them give him wings, make him brave. He swallowed, feeling his body heating up.

There was still half-an-hour of show left and maybe Chad would want to meet the band afterward. Will stopped paying attention to the music, even though he loved it and was planning to buy the CD to support the band. His mind was all absorbed in Sonny's hungry stare.

Mel's jaw looked a little rigid, as they followed Chad in his quest for CD's and autographs. Will asked, as gently as he could:

"You're getting tired?" Mel giggled and nodded. She was discreet but Chad caught it and directed
them to his car, mumbling:

- Sorry guys, but I have a lady to tuck up." Sonny pressed Will's hand almost roughly and replied

- It's okay, Chad. The evening was great but we are all in a hurry to go to bed." They were in a dark area now, so Will was relieved that his blushing wouldn't be visible. He tapped Sonny's arms in teasing reproach and sat next to him in the car.

They kissed while climbing the stairs, with no tenderness or delicacy. Will felt he was being eaten alive and loved it. The had to stop while Sonny looked for his keys. Will took the opportunity to breathe and deal with the rising panic in his throat. He wanted something to happen, his body was totally on par with the development but something else was getting in the way, short-circuiting his brain-process. His legs were driven in two opposite directions and it hurt.

He followed Sonny in nevertheless. He followed him in the living-room and he followed him to the bedroom. It was the first time he saw Sonny's bed and it was a narrow double bed.

Sonny's hand were groping him, restless but suddenly they stopped. Two brown serious eyes captured Will's blue ones and he heard a whisper

"Are you sure? I can stop." It was exactly what had to be asked and Will knew he loved Sonny even more for making sure but the answer was difficult to find. He racked his brain. He didn't know a lot. He had never given sex a lot of thought or researched it one way or another but he knew there wasn't just one way, even for gay men.

- I don't think I can go all the way, Son. But you can undress me for a start." Sonny shivered, his face looking vulnerable and virile at the same time.

- I love you, Will. You're so precious to me... I love you..." His voice was getting lower and softer and he whispered the same things, helping Will relax until they were both in their boxers.

Sonny was caressing him with only one finger, planting small kisses at random. Will was trembling again.

"Don't fly away, my little bird..." So he wasn't hiding his inner agitation. Will gave up and answered:

- I want to, Sonny. I'm terrified too, I'm sorry.

- Don't be, I understand. We can go slow. Tell me what you want to do or what you allow me to try. Take your time.

- Won't it be too frustrating for you?" Sonny had a crooked weird smile.

- Very, you have no idea. But I want you to enjoy yourself, not act out of fear of losing me. You won't, whatever happens."

As Will's hand began to slowly explore the content of his boyfriend's boxer's, he had a fleeting vision of his father gagging at the sight of him doing that. He pushed it away as well as he could and inch by inch approached the end of Sonny's erection. Here was something that he knew very well as he'd dealt with his own before, but that belonged to someone who made his heart twist, rendering it mesmerizing and very frightening...
Will was surprised that, among all the various emotions he was experiencing at the same time, the strongest one was joy. Joy from the warmth feeling of Sonny's skin. Joy from being surrounded by his strong arms. Joy from the way Sonny's eyes were widening more than Will would have thought possible, letting him be sucked in their rich brown. Joy from being in control, allowed and free, being given reins by someone who was putting him first.

But when Sonny started moaning, his voice dark and filled with lust, the joy, though still there, was overshadowed by tension. His own body was wound as a spring, stopping his movements, paralyzing his brain. His eyes sent a silent plea to his boyfriend. Sonny was trembling and panting, but he was still very conscious. His body shifted, as he extracted Will's hand from his boxers and he placed his chin on Will's shoulder. He enveloped him with his legs and arms, so well Will felt like he was surrounded by a soft loving cloud. Sonny's voice traveled on Will's neck, sending shivers, as he whispered "It's okay. Take your time. You want to cuddle for a while?"

Will couldn't answer but he didn't resist when Sonny lay him on the bed and wrapped them in the comforter. He focused on his breathing, searching in his memory, once again, for that trigger, this explanation for his inability to function properly. Was it his dad? The fight was still fresh. Yet Will had never put any weight in the man's opinion, he was hardly a father figure to him. Was it his bigger-than-life mother? She had been reticent at first but she liked Sonny a lot and had always been respectful of Will's right to privacy. Why couldn't he be simple like that Melanie, who had virile, confident Chad wrapped around her little finger? She deserved him and he didn't deserve Sonny. His eyes were prickling and he hated himself for crying, for ruining their first time.

"I love you. Exactly how you are, Will. I have nightmares where you leave me and you tell me it's better this way. I've woken up crying. Please, believe me..."

Will managed to reply:

- I'm useless here Sonny. I trust you and I love you but my body doesn't listen. You feel so good in my hand, it's painfully arousing.

- Maybe I could do something, if you trust me so much. Something that will help you relax."

Will nodded slightly. Sonny put the comforter away, as well as his boxers. Will gulped. He wanted Sonny so much. He wanted to recapture that joy from earlier, share it with Sonny.

Sonny's pecks on his chest were as soft as the patters of a sparrow on the snow. Will barely registers how far he had progressed until he felt a tongue at the base of his penis. It wasn't invasive, rather volatile, leaving small patches of wetness, making Will groan in pleasure. His head was thrown back and he felt that, indeed, he was relaxing.
Sonny became bolder and Will not only let him, but put his own fingers in Sonny's bushy dark hair, caressing it.

"Yes, yes... That's good...

- You like it? Say it if you like it...

- Yes, it's... I like it..."

Slowly, Sonny brought him to the brim, giving him his body back. Will felt grateful and content, the enjoyment of orgasm being replaced by a strange serenity. Sonny cleaned him and took him in his arms. He was still hard, so Will went back to stroking him softly

"It's okay, Will, you don't have to...

- Shhhh" He kissed him silent, on hand on Sonny's sweaty back, another obeying his mind once again and when Sonny came all over the sheets, Will grinned victoriously.

The afterglow was longest than the act itself. Sonny was the one needing reassurance now, his fingers smoothing the sheet nervously, his words asking if Will was all right, his eyes betraying his vulnerability. And Will felt he didn't mind it. Here he was, lying naked, telling someone else his deepest secrets, his hidden fears. Revealing his sensuality, even to himself. He felt different. He offered that revelation to Sonny to thank him.

They must have fallen asleep at some point, because when Will opened his eyes, the clock said it was morning. Will sat up, his thoughts all chaotic, but swept by strong instinctive currents, telling him he had to leave, to see his sister and deal with her hurting, but another telling him to stay with Sonny, so as not to wound him, and a third one, all sensations, reacting to what had happened the night before. He ran ahead and ended in the bathroom, throwing up. He blindly searched in the drawer next to the sink for a toothbrush and once he was better, he went back to the bed. Sonny was surfacing, his hair sticking in all direction, looking sexy in an almost dirty way.

"Hello, sunshine. We can cuddle a little but then I have to go. My sister needs me.

- I know... You want me to come with?

- I do, but you can't. She got all wound up defending you yesterday. She needs to stay calm. I'd rather stay with you...

- You're a great brother, Will. You have the biggest heart. I'm lucky to get a fraction of it." Will smiled shyly.

- You own more than that. I'm yours Sonny.

- So, why are you resisting at times? What's wrong?

- I don't know..." Sleepy Sonny was pouty. His tone more frustrated. Will didn't blame him.

They kissed and rubbed the other's skin and hair for a few minutes, then Will got dressed and went home.

He hadn't told his mother he was coming late but he was over eighteen and he knew she wouldn't be
shocked. Or even worried. Will hoped his father hadn't try to come back.

The birds were sending pure notes in the crystal air, like a parade for him after such a fated night. Will's heart provided the big drum and his feet were marking the rhythm. He reached his door, opening it quietly. He found his mother and his sisters on the couch, drinking hot chocolate. He joined them, exchanging a meaningful look with Sami, then focusing on Allie.

By the time EJ's driver had taken back John and Sydney, Allie was back to her quiet self. Will had shared his stories of what he had witnessed when Lucas got drunk and shown that when he wasn't, he was always back to decent. He had also apologized for calling him on his emotional abandon, saying he never resented her for it. She had said she understood, nevertheless, he spent the day cuddling her, hugging her, only letting go to prepare the food. It was a frozen meal. He would have to ask Sonny for more lessons in cooking, not just for cookies.

In the evening, they all played a board game. The children's laughs were soothing, feeling him with hope. True, he was a virtual orphan on his father's side, but his future was wide open. And he was even loved.

He called Sonny before bed, feeling horribly far, even though he knew he could reach Sonny's place in less than ten minutes. He wasn't going to, anyway. He had classes on the next day and another exam at the end of the week. This one was very easy but he still needed his sleep. He checked his cell alarm a few times, being greeted by the photo he had taken of Sonny. His bed felt foreign. Maybe he should buy a bigger one. The room was spacious enough and was the only bedroom at this floor...

He dreamt of Sonny all night.
Spring was definitely there and Will noticed the first flowers on the tree as he looked at the bird's morning dances while waiting for the bus. The trees were waking up and offering their beauty to the world after having lived in lethargy throughout winter. Will knew what it felt like.

"So, Will" his mother said that night "This man I've been seeing, you know?"

Will frowned. He ventured:

- The police officer?, hoping he wasn't wrong, she moved on pretty fast at times.

But her smile was content and cat-like. He liked seeing her like this, even though a part of him was already placing itself in full alert mode. His intelligent, self-reliable, charming mother had a very bad track-record with men. EJ had been the tamest but she had still hurt like hell. He was a great attentive father and it felt like such a waste to Will. But he understood her decision, very well. For a fleeting moment, he pictured himself having to break-up with Sonny, for the same reason.

"So, what's his name?

- Rafe. Well, Rafael, really, he's latino and he's a stud." Will let it pass. Sami was all in her memories, barely aware Will was still here. She shook her head softly and said "Anyway, things are getting serious between us and I thought, I could invite him to dinner. To meet you all, so he knows what he's getting into." She winked. Will raised an eyebrow at the poor joke but replied

- Sure. Just tell me when, so that I don't plan anything with Sonny." He heard the small sigh of relief. She must have thought he would have ask her to wait. He was tempted but on the other hand, that's what life was, you get wounded, but you moved on. Especially Sami, with all her flirty nature and need for male attention. Plus he would get to meet the guy and appraise him. Sami strangely listened to his opinions sometimes.

He got up from his chair and was about to leave the kitchen when she added:

"Maybe you could ask Sonny to join us?" He stopped and turned to her, choosing to be light about it, as the emotion threatened to make his chest explode.

- Why, you want him to bring a home-made dessert?"

She smirked

- Absolutely. In fact, he could come early and..." She closed her mouth, then after a second, said sheepishly "No, of course, I can't ask him that. But if we were to offer, just don't turn him down."

Sonny laughed on the phone. Will had chosen to tell him the conversation verbatim. Underneath the merriment, he could recognize the same emotion in Sonny's voice. After Saturday's debacle, it was good to be accepted as a serious couple. Sonny took his time to think.

"I guess it'll depend what day it is. If I have an afternoon shift, it'll be just dessert, I'm afraid.

- Thank you, Son. I appreciate it and you really don't need to do anything more.
- But what if I can and want to. Would you stay with me in the kitchen?
- To keep you company or to do the menial tasks?
- Both? I'm still your cooking teacher, remember?"

In the meantime, Will worked. Sometimes in college's library, sometimes home, but mostly at the coffee-house. He had to fight treats offers, or he would have to buy new pants at the end of the week. Sonny was extremely attentive with hint of possessiveness whenever someone would be over-friendly with Will. Will unashamedly loved it. They hadn't slept together again. Sonny was patient but his restraint showed in the open-mouthed kisses he stole from Will in his office or in the storage room. Will sometimes had to comb his hair again. He would walk back in the main room and feel self-conscious, as if all the customers were watching him and noticing.

But nobody commented and sometimes he had company. Mel would come to wait for Chad to end his shift and she was an easy company, although she didn't speak much. Will studied on and got himself ready for his exam. He borrowed his brother's alarm clock and triple-checked his cell phone. He even timed it earlier so that he could go get a coffee and a good-luck kiss.

But when he walked in, Sonny was nowhere in sight. He was sure he had told him he was swinging by and he left the shop with his coffee-to go, feeling morose. He walked to the park, as he had ample time to catch his bus and sat to listen to the birds and cheer up. A minute later, Sonny sat beside him

"You came earlier than I thought. Sorry I wasn't there.
- It's okay, I'm glad to see you now. You have no idea.
- I do, Will. In fact, let's make the moment last. I'm taking you to your exam." He raised a finger to Will's lips and added in a stern tone "No argument. It is for my selfish pleasure and Will-watching needs." Will's grin grew behind the hand.

The exam was harsh and he had to leave a question blank. Time was running out and he came out a ball of nerves. This time he had to take the bus as Sonny was on the afternoon shift. He paced at the bus stop, while listening to the annoying drone of a woman on her cell and teenagers goofing off. He wanted to shout and get them to shut up. Of course, he just kept the frustration locked inside and sat at the back, where he could be on his own. He tapped on the seat, creating a soothing rhythm. He should have taken his mp3 player.

Johnny was annoying Syd and making her pout, Allie was looking sour again and his mom had texted she would be late. Will loved his siblings but was saturating. When Sami finally came in and had a drink, she released him, so he went to his room to crash on his bed. The cell ringing startled him and he took a breath to keep a steady tone.

"Hi, sweetheart, I'm almost done. You want to walk here or do you need your knight at your door to escort you?" Will sighed. It was going to be hard.
- Actually, Son, I'm not in the mood to go out. The exam was stressing as hell and I'm exhausted.
- Oh." Will closed his eyes. What had he expected? For Sonny to understand and be all detached about it? He was telling him Will he missed him everyday, even when he was in his arms. If he had a larger bed, Will would have propose he just join him in his room. He had no energy left and felt
guilty, which didn't help.

- I'm sure I'll be more human tomorrow, honey. I miss you right now, but I'm so frustrated I might take my bad mood on you.

- I can take it, Will. Always.

- I'm sure you can, but I need my rest. I know you want me to make the effort, but...

- No, I don't. I'm just whiny. Don't listen to me. See you tomorrow, then? I'm off at two.

- Maybe before that. I might want coffee.

- I'll try and provide that, then." Sonny's voice softened "I love you." Will's heart crumbled.

- I love you too. Good-night."

He woke up late. He looked at his cell with incredulity. It was 11am and the house was silent. He wondered if his family had been abducted by a UFO but there was a note on the table. They were at the swimming pool. He smiled as he was reminded of his date there. Before they tried further. He regretted that time, somehow. Being with Sonny was overwhelming even though he was fantastic.

Before going for coffee, Will stopped at the florist and bought a red rose. His boyfriend deserved it.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

If you're uncomfortable with M/M intimacy, you shouldn't read the second half of the chapter.

Will's eyes traveled to the counter. His boyfriend was putting a cup down, grinning widely. Then he spotted Will and opened his mouth, his chest expanding for a shaky sigh. Will almost dropped the flower. He walked slowly and held the rose shyly. Sonny's smile came back even more beautiful than before.

"You're feeling better today?

- Yea. Sorry about yesterday. I went to sleep a few seconds after I hung up."

Sonny put down the rose and took Will's hands in his own

- Don't be sorry, sweetie. You're allowed to cancel stuff. As I'm allowed to whine about it. My job means I'll be much more likely to be unavailable and we'll have to deal with that. It's just...

- Yes?" Now Sonny was looking at the counter's top and Will had to lean to hear what he said.

- Last week... It was... soo good. I kind of... can't stop thinking about doing it again."

Will knew that but it was still making his stomach turn. He wondered if it was fear or if it was what being turned on felt like. It was his turn to answer but he wasn't sure. He closed his eyes, trying to recapture the ease he had felt after the fact, lying next to Sonny's naked body. And the pleasure, just before.

- Maybe tonight..." He opened his eyes again to see Sonny's lips coming at him. The kiss was soft. A finger was tracing his shoulder-blade. They stayed for a minute looking at each other until they heard a cough.

- If you don't mind, I'd like to order, sir." Will blushed and took a step back. Sonny didn't look embarrassed, he rarely did. Will wanted to become like him, strong and confident, unfazed.

He sat under the white bird's photograph. Sonny joined him fifteen minutes later, with his coffee and some lime pie. Will smiled as he remembered the time he had tasted the first one and written the fake review. Sonny smiled back and Will felt sure they were thinking the same thing. Being connected that way was like being just them alone in the world. They didn't talk, just ate and brushed each other's fingers.

As Sonny was finishing his shift, Will got a text from his mother. Her boyfriend Rafe was free Sunday evening. Will passed the message.

"Cool, I'm free tomorrow. Let's go grocery shopping so that I can cook you all a great meal.
Sonny laughed and tugged Will's hand. "Grocery shopping? You're calling that a date?"

Will shook his head. "No, I just want to spend time with you. Remember that night when we watched the stars?"

Sonny nodded. "One of the best night of my life... Well, along with the last one we had of course."

"Maybe..."

"Yes?"

Will struggled with the words but he wanted to say it.

"We could go to the park. The air is warm enough and if it isn't, then we can warm up each other. And we can morph these two nights into one..."

Grocery shopping was hilarious. Sonny behaved like a frustrated artist, sighing at the quality of the vegetables, closing one eye to examine a fruit, changing his mind every five minutes. Will kept a smirk on his face all through it, making Sonny glare at him repeatedly. Will was so happy, he could hardly contain his laughter. Having sex with Sonny again frightened him but being near him also made him desire it more and more.

They took a blanket and walked to the park. It was empty but plenty wings were creasing past their head. The lay on the thick fabric, cuddling, their faces turned towards the black unending space. Sonny was lost into the contemplation, barely caressing Will's belly now and then.

Will was busy trying to recognize a nocturnal bird's hoot when he felt Sonny's nose burying itself in his neck. He passed a hand in the dark soft hair and asked: "You're sleepy?" There was a nod against his shoulder. Will took a big breath in and said, his voice trembling "We'd better go to your place, then. Your bed is much more comfortable to sleep in."

Sonny wasn't that sleepy afterward. He was kissing Will whenever he could, his tongue finding its way through Will's lips, tasting him thoroughly. When they reached the bedroom, he lay Will on the bed and paused.

"You liked it last time?" Will nodded slowly. "You want to do it the same way?"

"I don't know, Sonny... What can we do else?" They were both blushing now, both hearts beating way too fast, one in Will's chest, the other under his palm.

Sonny gently took out Will's clothes, his hand adoring and respectful. Will was trembling from head to toe. He let Sonny open him up, his mind focused on the new painful sensations, his breathing short, his eyes lost in Sonny's brown ones. He didn't move, didn't moan, not even when Sonny came inside him. He didn't know what to do, how to feel. His body was dull, the pain and the pleasure absent, his head empty. But Sonny wasn't silent, he was calling him, groaning and pressing in.
He didn't come. Tears were pooling under his eyelids, but he didn't let them fall. Sonny had finished and was now kissing Will gratefully. Will closed his eyes and wished him a good-night. Sleep came in fast, erasing the disappointment.

He woke up first and took his notebook from his bag. He sat on the bed and wrote for a while but it was too sad. So he went back to his restaurant review, the one he had started a while ago. He was frowning on naming one of the characters when he felt a hand on his knee. He jerked up, almost knocking Sonny's jaw.

"Sorry, honey, you startled me..." Sonny didn't answer and walked to the bathroom, without looking back. Will felt terrible. He knew he hadn't met his lover's expectations, even though he had been the one to ask. He pinched his lips and focused on his story. It was when Sonny came by and wiped his tears away that he realized he was weeping.

Sonny sat next to him and mumbled

"You forgive me, Will?" The pain in his eyes was too much to bear, so Will looked away.

- Forgive you for what? I asked you for it, for everything.
- Yes and I didn't manage. You didn't like it. I failed you." This wasn't Sonny, it couldn't be.
- I was the one who failed you. I didn't feel what I was supposed to. Does it mean I'm not gay? It barely hurt." Sonny looked slapped. Will wanted to reassure him, he loved that, but this morning they needed to communicate.

"Maybe we could try again, Sonny?" His boyfriend looked unsure. Will didn't like to beg but it was important "I mean, maybe it's because... I've never been much into it, you see, so my body is new to all this. After all the other night was great."

- Do you want to switch?" Will paused. He hadn't thought about that. Somehow he couldn't picture it.
- No. I just want to do it all over again. Until it works."

This time, Sonny caressed him even more. His tongue was everywhere on Will's skin. He kept asking "You like this" and Will answered truthfully every time. Sonny's fingers entered him again. Will felt a shock and moaned. And for the first time since he had woken up, Sonny grinned.

It wasn't mind-melting but it was definitely better. Slowly, Will felt his belly fill with pleasure and when Sonny stroke him, he reached his orgasm. He yelled "Yes!", his fingers digging into Sonny's back.

Sonny was back to normal. Which meant he made a sumptuous breakfast, kissed Will at every turn and finally put the TV on to watch a baseball match while they snuggled on the couch.

But he turned into a cooking tyrant when he entered Sami's kitchen. When Will started complaining, Sami poked him:

- Don't argue with my chef, Will!
- Well, why don't you help him, then?

- I would, but the children have been asking me to play with them all day." Will caught up the worried look underneath Sami's teasing. He knew how important this was to her, so he sent her to the garden, then walked to Sonny who was busy doing three things at the same time and put his chin on his man's shoulder

"Honey, I'm aware you're a perfectionist, but you know I can't do much in the kitchen. Remember when you were patient about it..." Sonny finished his task then took Will in his arms.

- I want to impress your mom, Will.

- She's already impressed. And it's early. Relax a little."

Sonny nodded. He had Will break the eggs and showed him how to beat the egg whites until stiff. Then he watched him lick what was left in the bowl, his mouth open, in a trance. Will felt stupidly attractive. Which was a good thing, because when Rafe came in, he saw immediately what Sami saw in him. The guy wasn't wearing a police suit but that was the only thing missing. Even Sonny eyed the guy up. He turned to kiss Will as an apology.

"Wow, Sami! I thought you said you couldn't cook?" Sami was beaming at Rafe. She gestured to Sonny.

- I still can't. Will's boyfriend is a wonder. I'm thinking of granting him Will's hand." The whole table laughed, even Syd who didn't understand and whispered to Allie for explanations.

Rafe looked nice and straightforward. He was attentive to Sami and seemed reasonable. All in all it allowed Will to give his mother an appreciative nod. When their guest left, Sami pushed the boys out of the house:

"Sonny lives a street away, you'll catch your bus anyway. You've been too busy with your exams, Will, you need to relax." Will agreed so that she would stop embarrassing him.

That night he tried to give Sonny some pleasure. He licked him, took the tip in his mouth, went as far as he could. It wasn't easy but he was getting there. Sonny was too great a boyfriend to let him slip from his fingers.
Chapter 22

Sami was right, Will did get his bus. Through luck, mostly, as it turned up five minutes late and Will was running to the bus stop, panting. He went in, fidgeting with his jacket's collar. He was afraid every passenger could see the mark. Sonny hadn't been aware he was doing it. He had apologized, but with a lingering pride in his voice too. "I guess I think of you as mine and it feels right... I normally don't make such a big one, though. I can lend you a scarf." So Will was wearing one, even though it was clearly not winter anymore, but it kept sliding. He hadn't like the remark, either. He didn't want to hear about Sonny being with other guys before him. They hadn't really come up. Just the fact that Will was Sonny's real first boyfriend and that, while traveling, he had tried out his newfound sexuality quite a bit. It felt so easy, the way he said it. Will loved Sonny but rarely understood him.

Will was walking to his next class when he spotted a tall lean figure. He frowned. He didn't know Chad was a student too. It made sense, though. Will hesitated. He didn't like the idea of calling him in the middle of the hallway but on the other hand, Chad had always been nice to him so he could try and make the effort. So Will walked faster until he reached the man, then he patted his shoulder. Chad looked startled but smiled when he recognized him.

"Hey, man, it's been a while! How are you and Sonny doing?

- Fine, thanks. How's Mel?

- Great! She was talking about you the other day. Said we should go out again, the four of us." Will grinned. Mel was easy company.

- I didn't know you studied here. What's your major?

- Music theory of course! What about you?

- Economics.

- Really?" There was such surprise in Chad's tone that Will felt slightly offended. Did he look stupid? He took a step back without noticing.

Chad was stuttering

- I mean... It's great, man. It's just... Sonny says you're always writing and you're good. I would have thought...something like English, you know?"

Will sighed. He was always overreacting. He was sorry it had shown and he vowed to be more careful. He put a polite smile on display and answered truthfully.

- Writing is something I love doing but it rarely pays the bill. I'll still be able and choose that path later, but I would want to have a steady job. I can't afford to dream."

Chad pinched his lips.

- Maybe. I guess I'm a dreamer then... Well, if anything, I can always fall back on being a barista." Will blinked. He hadn't realized Chad could be hurt by the statement. It humanized him a lot all of a
sudden.

- I didn't mean that. I'm sorry. I'm sure it'll work out for you. Plus Mel looks really serious in working in management. So, she'll bring home the bacon." Chad laughed loudly at that and they walked together until Will reached his classroom. They parted with Chad playfully tapping Will's shoulder and saying:

- Given how good Sonny is as managing the coffee-house, you could decide on a more risky career too. Maybe you guys should talk about that."

Will reflected on that as he was commuting that night. He was very aware how serious Chad and Mel were. She had told him they had dated for five years. He had been with Sonny for a month or so, there was no comparison. But envisioning a future with him came easily. It felt right. Will wasn't naive enough to act upon it but maybe they should talk about how serious all of this was.

Sonny was waiting for him with an offering the next day. It had a long green stem, thin leaves and delicate small white flowers. Will accepted solemnly, stuttering a little. That made Sonny beam.

On Wednesday, they went to the multiplex. There was a movie Sonny really wanted to see.

- You don't have to come with me, love, but I'd like it if you did. I'll pay of course."

Will agreed to come but insisted on paying. They walked in the big parking lot, hands in hands, talking about what they could do on a night out with Chad and his girlfriend. There was a long line but they were early enough. Sonny's hand was ruffling Will's hair lazily. It stopped and Sonny whispered

- Isn't that your mother's boyfriend?" Will craned his neck. It was Rafe, a few feet away, standing next to a gorgeous young woman with long black hair. Will wondered who she was. He didn't want to jump on conclusion. He could still picture Sami coming home furious, after having walked in on her husband kissing someone else. Sonny was still talking

- They look a lot alike. Maybe she's his cousin. Or his sister, he said he was used to kids because he was the eldest of a large family, remember?" Will nodded. That made sense.

They reached the right door at the same time as the odd couple. Rafe called them

- Hey, Will, Sonny! Nice to meet you like that. This is my sister, Gabriella." Sonny rubbed Will's back with a sided smile.

He shook hands but slowed his pace so as not to be seated next to them. Rafe was still a stranger to him and even if they weren't going to talk during the movie, he didn't want to be invited to coffee afterward or anything like that. He could see Sonny's frown in the glow of the exit's green light. Will kept silent and they found two seats near the back. Sonny put his arms around Will's shoulders and captured his fingers. It was unnerving. Will could feel his hand getting sweaty and didn't like the fact he could hardly move it. The movie had started so he stayed like that, feeling his back stiffen.

At one point, a humid kiss was pressed on his cheek, along with a whispered "I love you." Will relaxed a little. It was possible to enjoy being enveloped like that, if he let himself trust his boyfriend. So he answered "Me too." and dug deeper in the seat. One of the few advantages of the place compared to the art-house was the comfort.
They drove back to Sonny's apartment, with Will half-asleep in the car. Sonny woke him up when he asked:

- What about a karaoke bar?” Will shot him a disbelieving look but Sonny insisted ”I know you and Chad are purist but frankly we could have all fun and I'm sure Chad wouldn't pass the possibility to serenade Mel.

- Hum, sure, why not?” Sonny got out of the car and hold out his hand.

- I'm aware of my singing limitation, of course. But you can teach me a little more and anyway bad singing is expected there.”

Will thought it over. Sonny was right, it would be okay for him to be singing off-key. It was his turn now to allow Sonny to go to places where he would be comfortable too. At least it wouldn't be a night-club. Will grinned and they walked the stairs slowly.

They were lying, all sweaty, Will's heart beating crazily fast after having blacked-out for a few seconds. Sonny was getting better and better at making him react. Will was still quite passive but at least he enjoyed himself. He turned to Sonny who was already closing his eyes and breathing evenly. Nevertheless, Will asked, softly

"You think I should buy a new bed?"

In the dark, he could make out Sonny's brown eyes opening, staring.

- What?

- So that you can sleep at my home too. I know my mom would be okay with it and it would feel great to have you there.” There was a long pause. Will waited, tranquil. Finally he heard

- Or you could move in with me...” And the tranquility was gone. Will stirred in the bed but Sonny switched the light on and took his hand.

- Calm down. It just came out, I guess I'm tired, I didn't think. I think about moving in together one day, in the future, but I know it's early...” He kissed Will's finger and added "What about Allie and Johnny? Wouldn't it be weird if they saw me at breakfast?” Will smirked.

- Not really, no. Mom always wait until she's really serious with a guy, but when she's sure, we all wake up to him, so they're used to it.

- Okay... Sure, then. You need help choosing it?” Will nodded. His chest was about to explode with happiness. No need to talk about how serious they were, after all. Sonny was all in. They kissed and cuddled until sleep swept them away.

It was the bird's songs that always felt weird when he woke up at Sonny's. Will was used to the one he could hear from his bedroom's window, so, in his half-sleep, he already felt off. He turned and met Sonny's soft skin. Their eyes opened at the same time. Will kissed him slowly but kept his hands to himself. He didn't want to run to the bus stop again but he still wanted to spend a few minutes pressed against his warmth.

Sonny walked him to the bus stop and kissed him good-bye. He glowed so much he looked like a peacock with his tail on display. He only let go of Will's hand a second before the door was shut.
Will watched him get smaller as the bus drove on, until a turn that made him disappear. He took his notebook and remembered Chad's remark. If he were to become a writer, what subject could he choose? Maybe Sonny...
Chapter 23

Will was sitting on the couch, his laptop on the coffee table but he could hardly type. Johnny was doing his best to make Sydney shriek and didn't listen to lectures about it. Allie was walking in and out, a worried look on her face. Will was trying to get her to open up to him but he had to deal with the over-excited kids too. It was his mother's turn to be on a date with the stunning Rafe and sometimes Will was wishing she would hire a babysitter.

So he shouted. Both kids froze and looked at him fearfully. He felt bad but they were pushing it. He never raised his voice, unlike Sami, preferring to bring back peace and quiet through his own example. It worked at times but he was well aware it was a defense mechanism. Sonny shouted sometimes and yet people still loved him, even his employees. Nevertheless, it was filling him with bitterness. He directed Syd and Johnny to their respective rooms with firm instructions of reading books or playing with their own toys and not bother the other one, then he called Allie.

She was looking terrified, even though he hadn't yelled at her. Will took her to the couch and brought a hot chocolate. He waited while working on his essay and finally she opened up.

"Are there other families like ours?

- What do you mean honey?" His tone was gentle, careful not to frighten his little birdie of a sister.

- I mean... At school, most kids' parents are divorced...

- I guess, so yes. It happens a lot.

- Yes, but Mom and Dad aren't divorced. And we don't live with Syd and Johnny's father either." Will looked at her thoughtfully. What was she really talking about? He tried to remember being a child who had a different

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- I mean... At school, most kids' parents are divorced...
- I guess, so yes. It happens a lot.

- Yes, but Mom and Dad aren't divorced. And we don't live with Syd and Johnny's father either." Will looked at her thoughtfully. What was she really talking about? He tried to remember being a child who had a different home than others... He ventured:

- Are other girls making fun of you?" Allie blushed and hung her head low. Will's heart was on the verge of breaking.

- No, but they say things... Like Mom always changes boyfriends and their mothers say..."

Will took his little sister's hand in his and squeezed it. So some mothers were using Sami's situation as a learning tool for their daughters. It was sickening and yet a small part of Will got their point. They had no idea what had happened each time and Sami had made bad choices. Dating was a hard path. Would he want Allie to go through all of this? Should she be presented with her mother's mistakes, so that she would learn from them? Will wasn't sure it would be a good idea. Plus Allie was more like him, so she would more likely share his flawed path. Would there be a 'Sonny' somewhere down her road?

He cuddled her and let her talk first, put everything out in the open, cry a little. She tended to keep a lot to herself and he didn't like that. Then he whispered:

"Do you love Mom?

- Yes.

- Isn't she a good mother, would you want another one?" She shook her head decisively. Will smiled. "Then let them talk. It's difficult being an adult but what's important is being a good parent. If you're managing that, you've made all the difference."

Allie thought this over and frowned. Will waited again. She whispered in a broken voice

"Dad isn't... He wasn't a good dad to you. You said..."

For once, Will chose honesty. She deserved it.

- No, he wasn't. He didn't know how to. He was too young, younger than me...

- But you are great. You always know what to say to us.

- Well... I have all of you to help me. Dad had a different life. He's being a good parent to you, though, so in my book, he's forgiven." Allie hold him tight and murmured

- I love you, Will.

- Love you Allie."

He took all of them in Syd's bedroom for a bedtime story. His younger siblings were acting adorable, maybe to make sure he wasn't still mad at them. Will really wasn't but he was tired. He thought about Sonny's offer and wondered how it would feel not to live at home anymore. Of course, he was aware it came with new responsibilities and other kind of worries. Or he could live on his own? But he'd have to take a part-time job and his studies would suffer. It was in this time that he was angry at Sami. She could have a live-in companion that would help with the kids and share the housework.

He went to bed but couldn't sleep. The lonely deep hoot was keeping him company. Which was the
problem with living alone. He liked the quiet but he needed to feel needed and useful too. On his own, he would probably forget to cook or clean. How did Sonny do it? How did he went through the evening when he didn't work and Will wasn't there?

'Hey! You're still up?'

'Yep. What's up?'

'Was wondering what you were doing?'

Sonny didn't reply, instead he called. His deep warm voice was soothing Will's fear already.

"You're not in front of the building again, are you?

- No. Mom is still out on her date. I was just curious. Don't you get bored sometimes?" He heard a soft laugh.

- I just spent an hour on my paperwork. It's dreary but it passes the time. I'll go out, afterward, though." Will felt like he was hit in the gut. His voice was trembling and he couldn't help it

- Yeah... Like where?

- A nightclub with a few friends. I might sleep at their place too." Will's heartbeat was deafening him. He didn't answer at first, trying not to cry. He had never thought of Sonny going out without him. It made sense of course. Will could still picture EJ coming home, looking a little drunk and with a big smile. It had seemed inconspicuous and yet it was the start of his affair. After she had thrown him out a few months later, Sami had spent her time lamenting about being blind and not seeing the signs. She had burdened Will with it as she often did and now he was incapable of giving the benefit of the doubt.

Sonny picked up on the silence and asked:

- You're okay, with this, right? You know I love you and I'm always faithful.

- I... I know you are, Sonny. It's just..." Will didn't want to burden Sonny. He wanted desperately to behave like an adult.

- You told me you never dated before... Where is this coming from?" Sonny sounded a little angry, but also concerned. Will was fighting a lost war. He had to open up. Like Allie.

- I trust you Sonny. It's just... My stepdad cheated on my mom and I witnessed it. It was messy. I don't know how to..."

- Will..." There was a click. Will stared at his cell in disbelief. Had Sonny hung up on him? Or had the conversation be cut, maybe by bad reception?

He waited for Sonny to call again. His heart was a wreck. It was horrible not to understand and not to be able to stop scenarios popping up in his head. Once again, he was clueless, not knowing what he should have done. Moving in with Sonny? Try and go to the nightclubs with him, even though he was still not comfortable with the idea? Or accept that Sonny could find someone better and just appreciate whatever time left they had together? This last one hurt like hell.

He didn't fall asleep. He heard the door close and walked downstairs. Sami was drinking a glass of rum with coco in the kitchen. She looked bummed. Will sat next to her and took the bottle. She put her hand on his arm before he could fill his glass.
"What is going on, Will? You don't drink." Will sighed.

- Well, it seems to help you when things go wrong. I could give it a try." Sami looked at him and frowned. She took both glasses and emptied hers in the sink.

- How about some coffee? I won't be able to sleep and you don't look like you could either."

She prepared the coffee maker and sat back. She took his hand and said

- You want to talk about it?

- No.

- Okay. I'm sorry to be such a downer when you need me but Rafe said...

- Don't!" Will pulled his hand to him in a harsh gesture. The tears were filling his eyes. Sami looked hurt but Will couldn't take it anymore.

- You're my mother, Sami. Not my best friend. If you tell me all about your love life, it makes me afraid and useless in mine. I feel older than you sometimes and I have barely started dating."

Sami got up without a word and walked upstairs. Will was cold now, lost in an ocean of depressing thoughts.

There was an annoying noise coming from outside. It was getting louder and the night bird had turned silent. Will walked to the front door, wiping his eyes. Sonny was standing there, looking sad.

They kissed with desperation. Sonny's hand was following the path of Will's tears on his face, while he was whispering between kisses:

"I'm sorry I got angry and hung up, Will. I didn't... I... She was very possessive... Crystal was... It felt like that for a second. I'm such an ass..."

Will couldn't talk. He felt trapped in a stony dungeon, with no key available. Guilt, doubts, fears, were circling in his head like dark vultures in a silent oppressive flight. Love was too complicated. It wasn't worth it. He should stop and go back to his old life.

Sonny must have felt the shift. He took a step back and said

"I'll sleep on the couch. I promise, I'll just listen, I won't judge. I can't lose you Will. We can work our way through this, please..." Will started crying again.

He told Sonny about EJ. Of his charm and possessive manners. Of how he was flawed and yet loving. Of how Will missed him, the only person he had seen as a father. How betrayed he had been too.

"I know you're better than that, Sonny but... There are people who will try and won't care you're with me. And you're gorgeous and kind-hearted. What if you meet someone better for you? I should let you be happy. I don't want to turn into a Crystal ever.

- You won't... I'm sorry. I need a little bit of freedom but I should have asked. Sometimes I forget you're not in my head. I would do anything for you. I can't bear you doubting me. It makes me feel like you kicked me out of your heart and it hurts and it makes me mad."

Will took a deep breath. The sobbing was almost completely gone but he was still unwell. Sonny twirled one of Will's lock with his finger and added
"Anyway, Chad told me I'd better not mess up with you. He likes you a lot and he says you and Mel are both precious and fragile. He said if I leave you, he'll come and kick my ass." Will smiled shyly.

- So you'll stay with me out of fear?

- No. I'll stay with you because you're worth it. I have never been so happy than since I met you, I swear. I've faced temptation a lot. The gay scene is not very prudish. And yes, I've done casual in the past. But I was also with a guy for a few months and I know that I would never had cheated on him. We broke up because our feelings weren't very strong and I wanted to come back to the States. But I don't want to break up with you. Tell me I have a chance, please."

Will felt exhausted. He got up and took Sonny's hand, leading him upstairs. Sonny followed, looking sheepish. Will pushed his bed against the wall and motioned to Sonny. They lay, cuddled up in each other, on the verge of falling but it was a restful night.
Will woke up with an elbow shoving his back. He rolled and almost fell off his mattress. He turned his head and looked at his boyfriend squished against the wall, yet still deeply asleep. The previous day's memories crept in, leaving Will ashamed and grateful at the same time. He had yelled at everyone, showed Sonny he didn't trust him, upset his whole quiet world. Somehow, though, Sonny was still there, next to him, in his uncomfortable bed and they hadn't even had sex the night before. His siblings had forgiven him with the alacrity children showed in all things, kissing him good-night with big sleepy smiles. The last unresolved problem was Sami.

Will stayed pressed against Sonny's warm body, gathering the strength to face his mother. He knew what he told her was true, she was treating him like a friend, not like a son, but he should have told her a long time ago, with care and kindness. She would have listened, he was sure. Although she might have difficulties applying it.

But it had been too much. Sharing her responsibility that way, the stress and worries, he couldn't take it anymore, not with this new life he had just started, with friends his age and late-night activities. Now he didn't have time to dream, to write, to listen to the birds singing at his window. He felt burned out. Part of him feared his mother's response, either anger or the silent treatment. So he stayed pressed against Sonny's accepting love, hoping the tears running down his cheeks would dry against the sheets.

He felt a kiss before they did, drinking his sadness away. Sonny was fully awake, his arms surrounding Will and he was looking concerned.

"You're still upset about our fight?

- No... I fought with my Mom too... And with the kids... It wasn't a good day.

- Why didn't you tell me yesterday?

- Mom came in after we first talked... I was stressed before but I didn't want to bore you with that." Sonny was frowning, one finger brushing Will's face tenderly.

- Don't you know you can't bore me? That you can tell me anything?

- Well... I'm kind of used to keeping to myself, you see. I'm not used to talking about my feelings. Telling you I loved you took a lot of courage but I was afraid you would leave me if you didn't know."

Sonny sat on the bed, still holding Will and kissed his forehead.

- I think we need to establish a few things, Will. First one, whatever tension or even actual fight happens between us, doesn't mean we're over. You're too important. And couples fight, all of them. What helps mending things, though, is communication. I need to know how you feel. I can't guess." Will thought about the last month, with Sonny getting frustrated with Will's slowness when it came to dating. So he whispered:

- You don't always tell me how you feel. You wait until you're angry and then you yell, just like I did with my family yesterday. I've come to terms with my social awkwardness, but you don't seem to
realize its extent.

- I know, and I'm sorry. You have opened up so much and taken big risks, I don't always know if I'm helping or if it's too much. I admire you a lot.” Will's head shot up. He wasn't expecting Sonny to say that. Was he being supportive or truthful?

- You do? Why?

- Because... Here you are taking care of this kids like a pro, studying hard, being all responsible. I wasn't like that at your age. I'm in charge of a business now, I have employees to coach, but I still don't consider life as seriously as you do."

Maybe that was the problem, being too serious. But who would step in if Sami had a problem? Not useless Lucas, nor the absent EJ. And things didn't seem to go smoothly with Rafe. Will couldn't let his guard down. Anything could happen, fast.

- One thing is for sure for today, anyway." Sonny said, his tone lighter, like he was saying a joke.

- What?

- We're going bed-shopping. I am not spending another night in this thing."

Will laughed, feeling a little better. They shared a shower for the first time, caressing the other's body with the soap bubbles, kissing slowly. Sonny's hand went downstairs, wrapping around Will, who mirrored him. For a few blissful minutes, all his worries were forgotten. Being intimate with Sonny was becoming easier and really pleasurable. Will liked this part of himself and he loved how Sonny behaved after coming, showering him with kisses and acting with acute tenderness.

A shriek welcomed them when they came down the stairs. A pajama-clad Sydney whooshed in Sonny's arms, babbling;

"Sonny, you're here! You came to play with us!" Sonny grinned, keeping her in his arms

- Of course! I was missing you guys." Syd's head tilted as she asked

- Did you sleep here?" Sonny blushed but answered steadily.

- Yes, I did.

- Did you play with Will yesterday, then?" Both boys blushed but Syd's remark was innocent. She whined "I was already sleeping, I didn't hear you come in." She looked so devastated that Will took her from Sonny's embrace and said:

- He came very late and we went to sleep right away, honey. How about you both go down to the kitchen and Sonny fixes your breakfast while I go talk to mom?" Syd's face lit up. Sonny smiled but sent a sideways glance to Will. Will nodded and put his sister down. She trotted happily down the last flight of stairs, followed by Will's too-beautiful-to-be-true lover.

Sami was still getting dressed when Will knocked. She looked rested but still grim. Will's inside coiled. He was failing his mother, again, acting selfishly. He stared at the floor, getting himself ready for his big apology when Sami spoke.
"I'm so sorry, Will." He looked up in shock. His mother rarely acknowledged her wrongs. And Will was the one to blame. Before he could answer that, she added "I know I rely on you too much. You make it so easy. Most of the time, I try to let you live your youth, I really do. But with Rafe in the mix, I've let my guard down." She passed her hand in her hair and sighed "I wish I was a better mother. You're so reliable and sweet, I forget to put any filter and I can see it's been affecting you.

- I... I shouldn't have yelled, though...

- You were upset, I get it. I kind of eavesdrop yesterday. You and Sonny... He's not EJ, Will. If I thought he was like him, I would have warned you.

- And Rafe isn't either?" Sami pursed her lips. She was the one looking shy now.

- He wants us to move in together. I said it was way too soon. The children barely know him. We fought. It was so stupid. And you know me, too arrogant to make the first step." Will chuckled, feeling harmonized again.

- You just apologized to me. You can do it. I think you should wait though. He is going too fast. I don't want you to make a mistake..." Sami's eyes met his and he didn't need to finish his sentence.

They joined the kids at the breakfast table. Sonny looked overwhelmed. He was laughing and joking though. Will fell in love with him again.

After they all finished eating, Sonny sat on the couch with Syd and Allie as they watched a family of small colored birds hopping in the garden through the window. Will noticed it was time to clean it and scheduled to do that the next day. He and Johnny played with his cars until the girls and Sonny joined him.

Sami finished her week-end extra-work early and told them they were free to go around 10 am. Sonny had his shift at 3pm. Will insisted they stay clear of the coffee-house so as to have his boyfriend for himself. He kissed Sami on the cheek and calmly explained to John and Syd that Sonny and him needed to be on their own for a while.

Spring had transformed the lake's surrounding. There was a clatter of birds singing at the top of their lungs, surely out of competition for the quieter, dull-looking females. They had to press their hands on their ears when they passed the first set of trees, chuckling. Sonny led Will to the same spot they had been to. They lay on the grass, smiling at each other. Will put his hand on Sonny's chest and let his mind wander.

"Son...?"

- Mmmm?

- This friends you mentioned yesterday?" Sonny reacted immediately, with a big reassuring grin.

- They are just friends, don't worry Will.

- I... No... I meant... could I meet them?" Sonny frowned at that. Will watched him mull this over, patient.

- Are you sure? They're... kind of loud. You know when you said you had trouble socializing. I'm not sure if you guys would get on with each other." He put a finger on Will's mouth, who noticed he
was biting it and added "Not that you aren't great company, not at all. But you might get bored. They mostly go to bars and night clubs.

- Oh, okay then. Maybe one day." Sonny smiled:

- Maybe. I like it that you want to meet my friends, though. By the way..." He looked bashful. Will tilted his head, taking in the novelty. "... My parents are visiting next week. I would like you to meet them."

Will smiled and asked:

- Are they like my dad?

- No! They're completely okay with me coming out.

- Then, yes, with pleasure." Sonny kissed him hard on the lips.
Chapter 25

Will walked around in the furniture store, embarrassed. They were looking at bed frames and mattresses and Sonny was lying on each one to test them out, gesturing to Will to join him. Will blushed and carefully sat on the edge of one of the firm mattresses.

"You've got to lie on them, sweetheart. You can't compare correctly otherwise." Will tried to, but they were too many people around. He swallowed and whispered:

- Can I trust you with this? I don't feel comfortable..." Sonny sat too, his hungry eyes on Will's lips. Then, he looked up and said:

- OK, sure. We'll try it tonight, then." Will looked around in alarm. Sonny chuckled and jumped on his feet. "This one is too soft. It feels like drowning. You like average or very firm?"

Soon, it was time for Sonny to leave for work. He took Will to a secluded corner of the shop and kissed him. Will sighed, content. He walked back to the bed frames and chose one in wood with a simple design. It looked a little childish, he guessed, but he liked it.

He went to the bedding section and looked around for sheets. He found a light blue, like the sky and found a comforter cover with a pattern of birds. The total was a much lower price than what Sami had agreed to. Maybe, he could buy a bedside table... or two. He could picture Sonny reading a book and laying it next to him before cuddling with Will. He really had tame fantasies. It was enough to make him blush again, though.

He took back everything in his car and spent the rest of the afternoon taking every part upstairs, then on his knees, assembling the pieces.

He was putting the sheets on when his door opened and a troupe of little feet stormed in and started jumping on the mattress. The bed proved solid and a few tickles had his siblings running away, screaming. He sat on the new comforter, exhausted. His bedroom looked very different, more grown-up. It was a difficult transition. The same tree was holding out the same branch outside the window, but the nest in it was mirroring the new cozy shelter Will had just created for him and his boyfriend.

He heard voices downstairs, Sami's tone all excited and walked down hurriedly, wondering if she was going out with Rafe and had forgotten to tell him.

Sonny was seated in the kitchen, drinking a beer. Will, who had no idea there was beer at his place, sat down and received an alcooled kiss. He swiped his mouth to get the foul taste off and Sonny whined softly. Sami laughed:

"You two are so cute. Have a good night, I'm turning in."

"So" Sonny said suggestively, his eyebrows comically raised "...this bed...?"

- Which bed?" asked Will. He had succeeded at sounding serious as Sonny looked taken aback.

- You didn't buy it?
- Yes, I did.

- So you… what? Waited for me to do all the manual work?

- What if I did?" Sonny's pout looked genuine. Will felt almost bad for teasing him. He got up and hold out a hand.

- Let's go to my room, no time to waste."

Sonny followed him, noiselessly. Will pushed his door, inspecting Sonny's face, catching the look of surprise and relief. Strong hands circled his waist and he was thrust on the bed, Sonny pinning him down.

"You're a dork.

- You like it.

- I do." Sonny whispered, catching Will's lips with his own. They kissed lazily, with Will interrupting a few times to ask Sonny what he thought. He got unfocused answers until Sonny moved the comforter away and smiled "I love this color.

- Sky blue?

- Will's eyes blue. The best one ever.

They made love all night. Will was surprised at his own libido. Each time got better. He had to bite his lips not to shout. The sex was also getting more meaningful. It left his body grateful and filled with warmth. Sonny was getting sleepy, but each time he felt Will's skin move against him, he opened his eyes and seduced him again.

They overslept so much they got up for lunch. The kids were playing in the garden and Sami shot them a knowing look. She stopped when Will glared and gestured to the table. They helped silently. Sonny was putting his hand over his mouth regularly, to hide his yawn. Will felt his heart melt at the sight.

After the meal they got up again and napped. Will woke up with a start, realizing he hadn't done his work for college yet. Sonny stayed with him but his incessant pecks along Will's neck proved too distracting. Will sighed. Even after the other day, he hated confrontation.

"Sonny, you know I love you?

- Yessss?" another kiss and a hand under Will's shirt. Will shook it off.

- I can't concentrate like this." Sonny put his head on Will's shoulder.

- I know. I'll leave you to it. Where will we sleep tonight?" Will stared at him, then said, shyly

- Can we go to your place? The children hate waking up early on Mondays, it takes forever to get them ready and I have an important lecture." Sonny's eyes were soft.

- Anything you want. I love you. And I love the new bed. Now I want to change mine."
Will's head must have moved because Sonny asked as he got up

- You think I shouldn't?" Will took a quiet breath.

- It's where you and I first...

- Oh! Yes that's too good a memory, so I'll keep it for now.

Will didn't finish his assignment in time. He took his notes with him and ran to Sonny's place. When he closed the door, he looked around. It felt like home. A second one. A different one where he could be more confident and more important.

Sonny was coming out of the shower. His hair glimmered with little drops that fell on his chest and the towel beneath. Will's throat constricted. What had happened? How come he had found such a beautiful, great guy? There was a little voice in his head warning him 'It's too good to be true. He'll turn up awful, or he'll get bored...'

Sonny's lips quieted the voice but Will was too tired to go further. He yawned and so did Sonny. They smiled at each other and walked to the bedroom.

There were changes in there. Will looked around, trying to find what. There was a second bedside table near the bed. Will recognized it as one of the stool of Sonny's kitchen. There was a plank laid on the top and a black lamp, the kind you found on work sites. Sonny was shuffling his foot awkwardly.

"I'm sorry it doesn't look like much but in your bedroom, you had one for me... It's Sunday so I couldn't go buy a new one yet..." Will put his notes on the plank and started taking his clothes off. He would push his exhaustion aside.

On Wednesday night, Sonny searched through Will's CD collection. Will looked out from his computer where he was busy writing something about the flock of birds he had just witnessed on the bus drive home.

"What are you looking for?

- You remember the singing lesson you gave me? I'd like to catch up on that." Will smiled and closed his laptop.

- I had forgotten that. Sit down. I'll choose." Sonny grinned. He looked at the laptop lid and asked:

- Will you let me read what you write one day? If it is as good as your letter or as you review, I'm sure I'll love it." Will couldn't help the shaking of his head.

- What if you don't? Those are just drabbles, there's no story." Sonny sat on the bed and said gently:

- I won't laugh, you know. I'll wait until you're ready. So what song shall we try? The Bohemian Rhapsody?" He winked. Will laughed and slid a CD in the player.

- Maybe later... Like way later. It's kinda out of your league at the moment.

- Like you?
- Not really. I don't know what you see in me but you could find better...

- Will..." Sonny's tone was serious. Their eyes met. Sonny's mouth opened, then closed it. He lay down on the comforter and said jokingly:

- Never met such a good singing teacher before. One who learns directly from the birds. Come on, let's start."
Chapter 26

Will couldn't help looking at the microphone on the platform. They were waiting for Chad, drinking sodas, Sonny's leg grazing against Will's under the table. Mel had arrived with a smile and was talking quietly, seemingly unaffected by the small stage behind her. Mostly, Will suspected, because she had no intention of standing on it. Will felt his heart beating too fast.

He saw a couple of guys approach the stage and soon the first notes of a famous song were playing. They were singing very low and too slowly so the group went on with their conversation.

Chad finally turned up, a little out of breath. He gave Mel a peck in a distracted way and Will saw her stiffen on her chair. Sonny didn't seem to notice and asked Chad if he had closed the shop correctly and had thought about taking the cash out and... Chad cut him calling him an over-controlling boss and soon, they were bantering good-naturedly.

Will smiled and glanced at Chad's girlfriend. She looked absent, maybe worried, it was hard to say. Will knew how hard he was to read himself, so he put his hand on Mel's forearm and lifted one eyebrow. He heard her sigh discreetly but when she got up, she didn't turn to him. Instead, she brushed Chad's shirt softly, her finger as light as a feather. Chad immediately shut up and looked up. A silent exchange passed between them, then Chad said "Excuse-us a minute. Will could you look at the list of songs they have and tell me which one are acceptable? I may try going up later!" Mel was already walking, slowly but with determination.

Sonny was frowning:

"You know what's going on?

- Not really, but Mel looked perturbed.

- She did? You're sure? Maybe they just wanted a moment on their own..." He sent Will a seducing look. Will's leg felt weak for a moment and he was glad he was seating. He accepted Sonny's light kiss with gratitude, feeling himself relax, then Sonny bent on the table and opened the folded list of songs "OK, so what will you tell Chad to sing?"

When their friends came back, half-an-hour later, Will had regained his nervous state. He was torn, not sure what to choose between safety and risk. Sonny's eyes were twinkling as he laughed at the woman singing on the stage, then cheered her. Will discovered how happy he could feel by seeing Sonny enjoy himself.

After a heated debate, Chad chose a song and walked away to get signed up. He was called a few minutes after and hopped to the stage, goofing around and hamming it up but when he started singing, it was good. He was looking straight at Mel, who was blushing and smiling, yet Will could still feel a melancholy about her.

Sonny got up to go to the bathroom and came back with no warning, before squeezing Will's chest from behind. Will let out a shriek and glared. Sonny chuckled and kissed him on the cheek.

As Will was gathering all his inner strength, he was startled by hearing the name 'Sonny' being called on the speakers. His boyfriend looked at him with a shy smile, then walked to the stage.
"This is for my boyfriend that I love so, so much. I hope he loves me just as much, and will forgive my embarrassing him!" then Sonny started singing.

Will soon recovered from his surprise. His stomach ached from how much he laughed, although Sonny wasn't as bad as he would have feared. People around were clapping and cheering, but Sonny only stared at Will throughout the whole song. It was like being serenaded by a very handsome frog. Will's heart was beating and he stood up and opened his arms to welcome Sonny with a big hug and an "I love you as much, don't worry." Sonny was beaming and not all of Chad's snark could shake his good mood.

So Will walked up, signed for the most difficult song of the karaoke's place repertoire. Then, he came back, gripped Sonny's hand and lead him to the mike.

"You stay next to me" He whispered.

The first notes of The Bohemian Rhapsody started playing. Sonny's grin and wink did the trick and Will let his voice reach his potential. It was the first time he had ever sang in public.

He didn't make a mistake, nor sang off-key. He was so focused that he didn't realize at first how silent the place had become. As he finished the song, almost everyone (but Sonny, who was listening in awe, gaping) joined Will for the chorus. Will lowered his voice:

"... nothing really matters... to me..." took a step from the mike and told Sonny "But you..."

Sonny kissed him with such strength, Will's back was bent and one foot went in the air. They went back to the table where Chad was thumping loudly on the laminate. Mel was unusually loud too and hugged Will. He could feel his cheeks burning. But the way Sonny was looking at him made it all worthwhile.

In fact Sonny had turned into a deranged groupie. The minute they were alone, he covered Will with warm, small kisses, panting and whispering "You were so good up there, and everyone loved it, and I'm dating you... I'm so proud..." It was almost too much. Will felt his inside burn, calling for more intimacy. He murmured:

- Let's sleep in my bed tonight..." Sonny sighed.

- I have a morning shift tomorrow.

- Well, you still have a change of clothes in my closet, remember?" Sonny nodded and added with a smirk:

- You should buy a wardrobe now.

- You plan to invade my bedroom?

- I like it a lot. It's your world, it's like it's made of dreams. Since you bought that bed, I feel..." He paused, thoughtful, as if the words had to be exactly right "I feel I'm a fixture in your life. Like you invited me in your soul and it's so calm and profound..."

There was nothing Will could answer to that. So he just kissed Sonny with all the emotions that had just exploded in his heart. It was enough.
They didn't spend the night awake this time but Will still gave himself completely, melting in Sonny's arms. When he got up the next morning, he looked around. Sonny was right, Will's inner world was reflected in the room. The fact that Sonny loved it made his heart sing.
Chapter 27

Will's hand was traveling on Sonny's torso, softly like a little bird hopping on the grass. He was careful not to wake him, enjoying the feel of soft skin under his finger, listening to the even breathing next to his ears. A song played in his mind, or rather a suggestion of it. Even asleep, Sonny was very present, wrapping the world around his beaming personality. Will felt like a small moon near a bright sun. His smile widened when he felt his lover shiver slightly and turn to rest on his side.

Will didn't want to get up. It was too early and Sonny's leg was wedged between his. So he grabbed his notebook on the nightstand and started writing. He described the body next to him: the shades made by the curtains, the hair that had been flattened at places, the very small smile of contentment, the one he knew well as Sonny wore it sometimes when looking at him. He didn't write about what was hidden under the sheets but about the warmth that created a nest where thoughts quieted down and sensations exploded.

He was so immersed in it that it took him a moment to realize that Sonny's head wasn't pressed against his thigh anymore. He looked down and saw two dark pupils gazing at him. In the surreal light from the stars outside, he looked like a blue-winged bird, a peacock maybe. They stared at each other, wordlessly, immobile. There was no hurry, no pressure, they could exist, in those few hours before dawn, just for each other.

Will put down the notebook and slid back under the sheets, using the extra awake time to cuddle with his man. But Sonny got impatient after a while, whispering kisses in Will's ear and gliding his hands down his back. Will felt the twist in his stomach, the slow uprise of desire, the one only Sonny could arouse in him.

They were kissing slowly, Sonny's tongue exploring Will's with appetite, when a cell rang. Will tensed, running a mental check of his family. His father...? But Sonny was already answering which made sense as it was his ringtone.

"Yes... No... 5am, Mom... No, can you wait just a few seconds?" Will sighed of frustration when Sonny sat on the mattress, looking for his pajama bottom. He had insisted on wearing one. He didn't want the kids to see him in boxers. Will put his hand on Sonny's back until he turned to him "You can stay, I don't mind." "No, it's okay, go back to sleep." Will rolled back on the pillow, listening to the last words of conversation he could catch "... No, I'm not... Yes, he is..." He wondered who the 'he' was... Him? Sonny's father? He didn't even know their names. Sonny had said he wanted him to meet them, though. They had postponed their trip and Will had forgotten about it.

In any case, meeting them couldn't go any worse than Lucas insulting Sonny. An irrational shame crept in but Will kept it at bay. He wasn't responsible for his father. He waited, ready to ask Sonny what his mother had said.

A hand shook him gently, as lips pressed on his cheek "Will, wake up..." He opened his eyes to the warm sunlight. Sonny was clothed and combed, smelling of Will's care products "I have to go, sweetheart. My parents are landing in a few hours in Chicago." He sounded excited. Will tapped his arm lightly "Why didn't you wake me up sooner?" "You looked like you needed the rest. I don't like waking you, it feels like I'm assaulting you, but I wanted to talk to you before I leave."

Will wanted to ask if he would meet them. He wasn't sure it was the right moment so he just opened his arms wide. Sonny resisted for a few seconds, then dove in, hugging, kissing, rubbing his
forehead on Will's naked chest.

Will let him go fast. He guessed there was a long drive to the airport and there might be traffic. He had never been to the international airports. He didn't have friends abroad or in other states and his family lived in the area. He wondered when he would feel, flying, above the clouds, higher than any birds. The sky was so big and empty. He imagined sliding through the clouds, watching tiny fields and roads.

He took the notebook again, but this time to write the story of a bird, on a migration route. He was interrupted after one page, but kept the idea in mind all day. Around four, Sonny texted him 'Everyone's settled.' Will frowned 'Where?' 'My place' Oh. They hadn't discussed that. Did it mean they couldn't see each other for a few days? Or at least not sleep in the same bed? As much as he valued his independence Will had become accustomed to share his nights.

Sonny texted a few loving words but didn't invite him. Will kept writing and studying. His siblings asked for a trip to the zoo, using Sonny's car. Will promised one for later. He sent 'So, I've roped you in a zoo trip with the Horton family. Is it okay?' There was no answer. Will walked to the park, wondering if he made a faux-pas or if Sonny was just too busy.

He sat on the bench and finished his bird piece. A text came in 'Sure. Is it a big zoo?' 'Big enough for the kids.' 'Okay. Come see me tonight at the coffee-house? Feeling lonely'

Will grinned and got up. He was glad they had left each other their space when needed. He pushed the door and spotted the owner at the counter, handing an espresso to Mel. She waved at Will and mouthed "Got to run..." Will nodded and turned to Sonny. He wasn't looking at Will but at a middle-aged woman sitting at a nearby table. She looked very composed and well dressed.

When he noticed Will, Sonny ran to him, gave him a peck, then gave a tug to his hand, leading him to the table in question "Mom, this is Will! Will, this is my mom Adrienne." Will took a deep breath and held a polite hand "Nice to meet you, ma'am."
Adrienne was as different from Sami as could be. She wore her hair short, discreet make-up and proper blouse and skirt. She also looked older which was completely logical, she didn't seem the type to get pregnant at 16. Another thought crossed Will's head. With his mom, you always knew how she felt, even if it was in a murderous rage. He liked that as he wasn't used to reading people and Sonny's mom looked so composed that she could have been wanting to strangle him and he wouldn't have known.

For the moment, he was being observed, Adrienne's eyes evaluating him while she gave him a polite smile “Please call me Adrienne, Will. Sonny has talked a lot about you those last few days, you're definitely not a stranger to me, now.” Will felt his cheeks burning up and looked down at his hands. Sonny's arm surrounded him and he felt a hand squeeze his back “I was thinking Will could come to dinner tonight. That way, you and Dad could get to know him.” Adrienne looked at her son, weighing his words, then nodded. Sonny's grin was as big as his face. Will's heart was competing with his favorite band, drumming a complicated rhythm out of sheer nervousness.

To calm down before dinner time, he went for a walk, with the binoculars Sonny had offered him, searching the treetops, focusing his mind on feather's color and specific chirping, not to obsess on what awaited him at Sonny's apartment. He had wanted to help but Sonny had been firm “I don't have that big a kitchen. You and mom would bump into each other. She can be stressed when she's cooking.” He had looked at Will and asked, with a serious tone “Are you okay? We can cancel...” Will shook his head. This was important to Sonny. His parents would leave soon and after all, Sonny knew his parents, it was his turn.

He let his notebook at home. His hair was perfectly styled, something he rarely did. He had ironed a white shirt and even taken clacks out of the closet but Sami had seen him and took the trousers away “Don't be ridiculous, Will. This isn't a job interview, nor Christmas dinner. Put your dark jeans and the shirt, it will be just right.” Will had listened. Sami was good at this stuff. He remembered when Rafe came to dinner. He was indeed wearing jeans and rocking them. Will knew he wasn't half as attractive, but he hoped he looked decent. Sonny's father would be there and he wanted him to be reassured Will was serious.

The man who opened the door looked like an older Sonny. He had greyish hair and beaming eyes. He looked happy to see Will, who relaxed “Come on in, Will, I'm Justin Kiriakis. The war over food is over and we may have something left to eat indeed...” “I heard that, Dad!” Will arched his eyebrow. Justin went on “He can be very territorial about his kitchen and he and his mom share a very stubborn gene.” Adrienne pushed her husband and greeted Will “That is very unfair, dear. And I haven't hear you complain about the quality of your meals since we arrived.”

Sonny was washing his hands. He gestured to Will and led him to the bedroom. He started making out, his tongue invading Will's mouth. Will was fidgeting. He didn't want Sonny's parents to see
Dinner was all right. Justin was as charming as his son, making Will feel he was the most important person in the room. He remembered the man was a lawyer, which might explain it. Adrienne was more cautious but when Will explained he liked reading and writing as well as bird watching, he saw her shoulders become less tense. Will wondered if she had met Crystal. Was she disappointed Sonny was gay? Did she want grandchildren? Her husband only seemed to want Sonny to be happy and successful and he looked at Sonny with a proud expression. Will felt hollow. He had never garnered that look, from anyone. Sami loved him but she was mostly protective, aware of Will's flaws and the only one of her partner who had liked Will too was EJ, who had a poker face that had made the cheating much easier to hide.

They talked about living in Dubai, a very beautiful and stressful city “We were thinking I should find a firm in the US. You and your brothers are all scattered around, now. It would be good to have a quiet home.” Sonny looked surprised but happy. Will pressed his hand under the table.

His body yearned for Sonny's warmth and soft skin. He could read the same longing in Sonny's eyes. They took forever to say good-night. Will walked home feeling much better. He hadn't messed up.

Sonny wasn't at the coffee-house the next evening, nor was Chad. Ellie was at the counter, looking bored. There were two or three people already seated. Will talked with the barista for a while, looking around absentmindedly. He spotted his boyfriend's mother, sipping at a tea cup. He walked to her and she gestured him to seat. He did slowly, the nervousness intact from the first encounter.

“Sonny loves you.” Will nodded. His throat was dry. “You're the first person he's ever introduced to us, do you know?” “Oh... Okay...” Adrienne's fingers were playing with her pearls. Will stared, fascinated. When she remained silent, he regretfully lift his head “You're taking my son away from me. I don't like that at all.”

Will had words at the tip of his tongue. He could have said that Sonny had traveled a lot and already left her home, long ago. Or that he was still better than Sonny's ex. But he didn't. Her face was set and he understood Justin's remark better.

She got up and turned his back on him. Will stayed seated, trying to regain some strength. A shadow obscured the tea cup “Hi, Will.” He turned to Mel, grateful to see her. But his greeting was cut short. She looked devastated.

“Chad and I are over.” Will's world shook a little. Even strong couples, clearly in love with each
other, broke up. He and Sonny could fail too. He swallowed the tremolo in his voice. She didn't need that “I'm so sorry. You know you can talk to me whenever you want, right?” “Are you sure? Chad and Sonny are great friends.” Will nodded “And I am yours, Mel. That won't change.” They didn't talk much, but she seemed a little better. Will felt useful. It was also a distraction from Adrienne's attitude.

He didn't know what to do with the words. Tell Sonny? Think over if she was right and they should break up? The mere thought hurt. He didn't see how he was bad to Sonny. He was dull, it was true but that was about it. The risk was Sonny meeting someone livelier, more handsome.

He waited three days, looking after the kids so that Sami could go out with Rafe and studying, until Sonny called

“Hey, Will... You know what?

- Hey Sonny...

- I've missed you like hell. My parents have just left and my bed is very very empty.

- So you want a quick lay, that's it?” Sonny chuckled

- Absolutely, then I'll throw you out.” Two seconds later, he added “I shouldn't kid like that, it feels wrong. So, do you want to come tonight?

- Yeah...”

Sonny was happy to see him but still observant

“What's with the long face? Your dad?

- No, no... Sonny... It's just... Did you know Chad and Mel broke up?

- What!?!?” he looked furious. Will had to beg him not to go out, looking for Chad

- It's late, Sonny and you'll see him at work tomorrow. I am very sad for Mel but I don't think we should interfere.”

Sonny sighed and brushed Will's lips.

That night, Will discovered something. Sleeping with Sonny was a cure to his dark thoughts. The sex part made him forget Adrienne's stern face and feeling his arms around him as they doze off kept the sadness away. Somehow, the idea of living together seemed more appealing.
Chad's face was like stone the next day. He nodded at Will who fled before Sonny came in and confronted his barista. He had said again that Sonny shouldn't say anything but he wasn't sure he had been heard. As for himself, he felt like his opinions wouldn't matter to Chad. He didn't know what happened between the two and he feared hearing it. But he could be supportive of the people he had learned to love, like Sonny and Mel. It was easier to do, he was well trained in the matter. Sami didn't have many real friends and Will's shy manners made him a quiet sympathetic listener. It always hurt to be in that position but he had to do something at least.

So, he sent a message to Sonny, proposing they go out, have some fun. He thought about the karaoke bar but dismissed it. If Sonny was upset about his friend, no need to go to the last place they'd been together. So, instead, Will suggested the pool.

Sonny arrived half an hour late and looking disgruntled. His eyes met Will's and his whole countenance changed. Will felt so powerful, it was almost upsetting. They entered the changing room, hand in hand. Will noticed the disgusted look one of the patrons shot at them as he was exiting the pool. He felt a shiver down his spine but clenched his teeth and focused on his boyfriend.

They entered the water, slowly. Sonny didn't try to swim, he just relaxed his body, letting himself float. Will came behind him and put a hand on his shoulder. It felt like steel.

“What got you so tensed, Honey? It can't be just Chad and Mel, can it?”

Sonny sighed, letting his head fall back and rest on Will's chest. It felt so good, Will realized he'd have to stay there for a while, until his erection went down. He started massaging a little, but it was useless.

Sonny grumbled:

- No, but I'm pissed at him, especially after all he said about me treating you right and all. He would lecture me when I didn't need to be, I mean, I'm so grateful you're in my life and … I don't like being questioned about my feelings for you.”

- Did Chad talk about that?

- No…”

Will turned him around. Sonny was still looking away.

- Who did, Sonny?

There was no answer. Will took a step back, his calf hitting the pool wall. He didn't know what he hated most, the fact that Sonny didn't tell him or the fact that he looked so upset.
Sonny started swimming, getting away from him. Will got out of the pool and sat on a bench. He looked out the window at the dusk settling in. His listening skills weren't required. What was left?

To be fair, he hadn't told Sonny about his latest encounter with Adrienne. It was always hard for him to open up about his hurt. Sonny always had to guess. Maybe it was his turn to.

He waited for Sonny to have swum enough, then he sat on the edge and let his feet sink in. Sonny spotted him and came out, panting. His damp skin, the sound of his breathing, the darkness of his eyes, it all made Will yearning.

He placed his hand on top of Sonny and asked:

“Did your mom criticized me or our relationship?”

Sonny sighed again but he answered:

“How did you know?

- She talked to me the other day. She made it quite clear I wasn't good enough for you.

- She's wrong you know...

- Is she? She's your mother, she knows you well. Sami wasn't very supportive when I told her I was into guys, but the moment she met you, she never doubted.

- Mothers can get it wrong. Your mom doesn't have a very successful love life, so, she's not that wise. I hope she's right about me being good for you, though, but I'm not very worried.”

Will caressed Sonny's fingers. He liked how Sonny seemed confident now. In fact, it was the last straw.

- Sonny...

- Yeah?” Their heads were a few inches away from each other. Will took a steadying breath but it was useless.

- I want you.”

His own spurt of confidence seemed to stun his man but not for long.

Will was restless but as he took off Sonny's shirt, he remembered his stiff muscles and decided to work on that. He had never massaged anyone, so he asked Sonny to tell him immediately if he was hurting him. There were a few times he got remarks so he slowed down. After a while, Sonny was laying on the mattress, looking as if he was asleep. Will smiled, frustrated but proud of himself, and climbed inside the covers. Sonny's eyes opened instantly as he grabbed Will's wrist.
Will felt the fire ignite in him, as strong as before. He felt daring, willing. Sonny’s mom had questioned them and somehow, he wanted to prove her wrong. Sonny looked so beautiful, so intense, he couldn’t think straight. It was such a new sensation, like being drunk, in a way.

The next day, they stayed at Sami’s house. Will took a box to bed and opened it shyly. Sonny looked at him with a question in his eyes, then grinned when Will took the lid off and extracted some papers. It wasn’t his first writings but they were still old, before he met Sonny. They weren’t poems, more like musings. Sonny sat comfortably against the pillows and Will put his head on his lap. He didn’t move, waiting, with a beating heart, to his boyfriend’s reaction.

“God, you're good.

- No need to flatter me. I’d prefer honesty.

- I am being honest. You write really well. I think that each time I reread your letter.”

Will blushed. He hadn’t written Sonny anything more since then. He should, if it made him smile like that.

- Do you know what I told her?

- Who?

- My mom. I said ‘Will is making me want to settle down and forget about traveling. Meet me in a few years, I’m sure we’ll still be sitting next to each other and still as content.’ She still seemed doubtful but I was glad I said it.

- What if we end up like Chad and Mel?

- Don’t talk like that, Will, please. I need you to have faith in us.

Will raised his head, catching Sonny’s lips. It was hard to explain to Sonny that, even though the doubts were still there, mostly because he wasn’t self-confident enough, he was with Sonny because he had faith. He just hoped reality would listen to that.
Chapter 30

Things were cooling down between Chad and Sonny and, at the end of the week, Will pushed the coffee-house door to see them talking with each other at one of the table near the windows. He hesitated, hopping from one foot to the other, then quietly walked out.

Chad was Sonny's friend, and if they were reconnecting, Will wasn't going to interrupt. Maybe, they would learn what happened, at least from Chad's point of view. Mel didn't want to talk about it and Will understood. He wouldn't either. If Sonny left him, he would keep his feelings between him and his secret pages.

He walked upstairs and took Sonny's key out of his pocket. He had found it there, a few days ago, with a sticker saying 'Sonny's humble abode'. It was the first time he would use it and it made Will's heart beat a little bit faster. His world had expanded. He was home in this building too, everywhere. He could go to the coffee-house counter and help himself to a coffee, he could help carry a dirty tray back to the kitchen and no-one minded. He wasn't transparent anymore but he was part of the scenery. Part of the gang.

He was used to Sonny's place noises, too. The birds welcoming morning outside the bedroom window didn't feel foreign anymore. The buzz of the heater felt soothing. There were a few of his things everywhere he looked. A book on the coffee table, a coat he had left in case he would need it. A picture of himself on the fridge...

This was new. He walked to the small kitchen, embarrassed and pleased at the same time. It was a photo taken during the karaoke night, surely from Chad's phone. He looked confident and focused, beaming. That couldn't be right. Unless it was due to Sonny's presence, a foot away, looking at him in awe.

There were a few post it notes on the fridge too. Will had never read them but this time, he took the time. Most were about grocery or tax deadlines. One read 'ask Will BD date?' He frowned. He could try and guess, but figured he would just wait until Sonny did ask.

He opened a cupboard to take a glass. Inside, the wooden door, there was a calendar pinned. It was quite nice, with brightly colored circles around each months. There was no year, nor days of the week and on some dates, Sonny had scribbled a name. 'Chad' was in August, 'Ellie' in October. 'Mom' and 'Dad' were circled.

Will smiled. He'd gotten the 'BD' code. This was a perpetual birthday calendar, like the one his brother had done in Kindergarten. Johnny had been thrilled to be the only one with a birthday in
June and bragged about it. Will realized he didn't know Sonny's, so he searched the calendar but couldn't find it. It made sense but it was frustrating.

The door opened and Sonny came in. He took off his jacket and turned around, a serene look on his face. Then he spotted Will and ran to hug him, laughing. Will buried his face in Sonny's chest. He could get used to this.

Sonny sat at the table and Will took a seat too. He remembered their first cooking session when his body reacted so strongly to Sonny seating next to him. He felt the same but now that he could put a name on the sensation, it was all right.

“So, Chad and I finally talked.

- Good! Are things better between you two?

- Yes, they are. The thing is, I was persuaded he had cheated on her or left her for someone else at least. But apparently, it's about what they want to do. Mel is interested in long scholarships all around the country and Chad wants to find gigs in the area and start a band, while still working for me. He's asked her to move in with him and his roommates and she won't.”

Will nodded. He wasn't surprised Mel would be the more stubborn one and Chad the one to go with the flow. And living with a bunch of quasi strangers would feel like hell for an introvert like her.

- I'm glad it's not about a betrayal too. That way, we won't think less of any of them. I like Chad a lot, even though I understand Mel better.”

Sonny's smile was quiet, he was observing Will as if he had never seen him before. The scrutiny wasn't unnerving though.

“You, know, sweetheart, the more I know you, the more I realize how much in control you are. The whole debacle had my blood boil but you held me back and told me not to interfere and you were completely right. You are…” He crunched his eyes, then finished “… wise.”

Will waited for the denial. His whole body delivered it, in general, making his blood pulse, bile rise in his throat, and his brain would yell 'no' while translating it into a polite oral version. This time, though, nothing of the sort happened. Their eyes met, their fingers wove together. It was a big compliment Sonny was paying him, as if he was offering him a precious stone, that Will could carry with him everywhere.

He wanted to give back and remembered the cupboard

“Sonny?

- Mmmm?” Sonny's eyes were unfocused. Will wanted to take the opportunity and pressed on

- When's your birthday?”
Sonny looked startled, his eyes darting to the fridge. Will nodded.

- When's yours?

- July the 3rd.

- Really?"

- Yeah. My grandmother says Mom was pissed to miss the fireworks that year.

Sonny was laughing

- So two great reasons to celebrate then.

- Actually, we rarely do anything more than a cake. The kids give me drawings and my I get a few presents from my family.

- Okay... We could have a quiet party at Common Ground. No dancing, just being with Ellie and Chad and Mel. What do you think?

- Yes, that would be nice. But do you think they can attend together?

- I hope so. Chad says he is still angry because they still care for each other so it's frustrating.”

This was a new approach to breaking up for Will. His mother went through drama and tears, she wasn't the kind to forgive betrayal. Will knew he wouldn't either. But behaving like reasonable adults, admitting it was time to stop, that was even more frightening. He was reasonable by nature so he knew he wouldn't fight. He wondered if Sonny would. He had told his mother off and stayed after meeting Lucas, so he seemed the type.

- My birthday in on March the 28th. In fact, that's why I'd like to reinstate your dancing lessons. I'd love it if you agreed to go out dancing with me.

- With your friends?

- If you're okay with it. I mostly want to spend it with you.”

Will stood up and kissed his boyfriend. Sonny became passionate but as they wobbled to the bedroom, Sonny paused and went to write on the cupboard calendar. He was someone who loved, Will realized. People close to him made his life worth it. Will knew he was colder. He helped and took care but he could live just for himself. There must be a bird like that, unlike the cardinal, who was a lonelier soul. Maybe the one that hooted at nights next to his own window. He must have a sibling, Will thought, as he heard the exact same monotonic toot. Maybe he had flown out of the nest to find a tree just for him, next to the coffee-house.

Sonny's kisses directed his attention back to the bedroom and he kissed back, willing and happy. He
loved his solitude now, but only because it contrasted with the moments he passed in Sonny's company. His life was far from perfect but it was balanced and fulfilling.
March was unfolding, bringing the needed rest that was spring break. Will had heard some of the other student make excited plans to go to Malibu or Vegas, to party with all the wild girls. He felt like a searcher observing another species. He just wanted to sleep and not study for a while, focus on what made him feel whole.

Once again, his siblings would leave for the week with their father, even Allie. Sami had met with Lucas and laid down the law. One toe across the line, even postponing bedtime and she would take him to court to revoke his parental rights.

So Lucas was coming on Friday night, just after school. Will examined his strength and found himself wanting. He didn't want a fight he wasn't sure to win, he didn't want to upset his sister again. He asked Sonny if he could spend the time with him, knowing his boyfriend would make yet another remark about him really not needing to ask. He couldn't help it. He was born polite, developing the skills out of necessity instead of being taught them. Sami replaced social niceties with strength of character and it seemed to work, most of the time. Will wasn't sure he envied her though.

The coffee-house was quiet, a perfect place to unwind. Will had stopped at the bookstore and bought a book of poems by Thoreau. He let his mind get wrapped up in the dancing words, forgetting where he was. At times, he got inspired and took out his notebook to scribble down.

He didn't read all the poems at once and, after awhile, put the book down to take a look around. Ellie was refilling coffee for an elderly couple, chit-chatting. Sonny wasn't around. He had greeted Will with a quick kiss and went back to work immediately. Good chances were he was in the office. He looked tired those days. No break for him. Will's thoughts jumped from one thing to the next until he remembered it would soon be his birthday. He sighed. He had no idea what he was supposed to do about it. Should he ask Chad, see if he they should host a party? Sonny had said he wanted to dance with Will but that would be later at night. Will was only experienced in little kids' parties and he didn't even know the name of the friends Sonny had mentionned some time ago.

The emotion was threatening to engulf him. He took a deep breath and focused on one of his nicest memory, when Sonny and he were bird-watching after his exam. He felt more relaxed and reassessed the situation. He didn't have to follow a script. Maybe Sonny had ideas already, maybe Chad was already on it. What would really be his to find was a gift idea. He started thinking.

"What are you writing, love?" Will gave a start and turned the paper over, blushing. It was a good thing he wasn't involved in a surprise birthday party, he would have been found out in seconds.

- Nothing..." Sonny narrowed his eyes but didn't insist. He looked exhausted now. Will thought for a second. "Do you want me to prepare something for dinner? That way you won't have to work after your shift's over."

Sonny bit his lip. Will laughed.

- What?

- You're trying not to say it, aren't you? You don't think I can cook a meal.

- No... yesss. But there's some left-over in the fridge. I was planning to put them in the micro-wave but they would taste better with the oven...

- Right, I can do that. Just tell me the time and the temperature."
Sonny sat suddenly, as if his legs were giving way. Will was beginning to worry if maybe he was coming down with something.

"Or I could make soup?"

Sonny shook his head.

- I'm not sick, sweetheart, but thanks. I think I'll crash early though. So, if you don't want to stay, no problem."

Will frowned. Was this a hint that Sonny wanted to be alone? Or was he just his usual kind self? Right... Communication.

"I'm okay with staying, honey, I'd like to take care of you. But I can leave you alone if you prefer. Just tell me."

Sonny raised an eyebrow and smiled softly.

- I selfishly would love to have you to myself. I thought about tonight all day, to keep me going. But I'm afraid I won't be able to act on what I planned to do..."

- I'm not here just for sex, you know that..." Will was whispering, not to be heard by the elderly couple at the opposite end of the shop. Sonny took his hand and pressed it gently.

- I love you, Will, you're the best."

The oven proved docile and soon Will started smelling the oncoming dinner. Sonny was really good at cooking. He had taught Will a few new recipes, including how to cook rice or pastas. He took a trip to the bathroom and noticed the sink was stained. He opened a few doors until he found cleaning products and got to work on it, then on the toilet seat.

He was just finished when the door opened. Sonny was looking confused.

"Are you doing my cleaning?"

- Yes. I thought you would like having less work. Don't you?

- Can you stop being perfect for a moment and come eat with me? I need company."

Will winced at the word. He'd have to explain why he didn't like it but later. He followed Sonny and spent dinner checking his boyfriend didn't fall asleep on his plate. He cleared the table, after pushing a reluctant Sonny to the bathroom and started the dishes when the shower noises stopped.

Sonny was like Syd when she joined him in the bed after a nightmare, trying to snuggle a way into his chest, then refusing to move. Will was happy he wasn't aroused and opened his book with one hand, letting Sonny's even breathing soothe him down.

The next morning, he got breakfast in bed and lots of grateful kisses. He bit into a pancake and moaned:

"How do you do this, Sonny? Will you teach me again?"

- Oh, right! Just a moment."}

Sonny was back soon, holding a fat yellow book. Will was surprised, Sonny wasn't a big reader but he waited politely.
"It's a cookbook. With all the basis. I bought it last week and I forgot to give it to you.

- Thanks. Does this mean no more free lessons?"

Sonny smiled playfully:

- Yep, it's over. Now you'll have to pay. I accept kisses and sex.

- Okay, I'd like to pay in advance, then."

Will was still feeling inexperienced with oral sex, but he hoped he was progressing. He had to stop before Sonny came though. He knew it would be better not to but he just couldn't. Sonny didn't comment and just returned the favor, before changing his mind and entering him.

Sonny left for work early. Will decided to stay and enjoy the tranquility. He had two homes, now. He caught sight of the cookbook and leafed through it. Maybe he could bake Sonny's birthday cake. Something easy with lots of chocolate. He knew Sonny enough that he would love the fact that he tried.

But for the moment, he exchanged the book for the Thoreau one and laid down on the couch, a bird's melody coming from the window, the sun's rays caressing his back, his cell next to him so that he could text Sonny once and again. Just to tell him he loved him.
Sami's kitchen became a laboratory, filled with chocolated trials and errors, that the kids would eat whether it turned good or not. Will didn't understand. Why did it seem so easy for Sonny to bake so many things every day when here he was, struggling with a very detailed recipe and never achieving much?

Of course, he didn't spend all of his time on the task. He would sit and stare outside for long oblivious moments, noticing the shades of the sunset or how many nests were filling the tree in their yard.

Syd was very curious about them, asking where the eggs would come from, unsatisfied with Sami's vague explanations. The Talk would have to come sooner or later. Will remembered with painful accuracy the day his mom had explained it to his little self. He couldn't look at her for several days after that. She couldn't even say “When a dad and a mom love each other very much...” It wouldn't have made sense. So, for a long time, his existence didn't make sense either. He was a mistake, even if she had never said it, an obstacle. He had found ways to be useful, to make amends.

He wondered if he should buy a gift for Sonny. Maybe a bedside table? He went to a junk store and found a pair that looked worn and greyish. It reminded him of a boat. In his favorite second-hand bookshop, he found novels about climbers and put them inside one of the tables, with a rope in lieu of a ribbon.

He talked to Chad, one day Sonny had to go to the bank, asking him what activity he had in mind. Chad called Sonny's friends, Will bought decorations that Sami insisted on paying.

The day came. They closed the shop earlier and sent Sonny to Sami's where Will was told to keep him occupied. He did and managed to change Sonny's pouting into a goofy smile. They didn't do much, just lay next to each other, hands in hands, telling each others some memories and loving words. Sonny's skin was soft under Will's fingers.

Finally, Chad called and they walked to the coffee-house. Here they were greeted by all the guests, including Sami and Allie and four very good-looking young men. Will felt unbalanced but fought his insecurities, reminding himself that this was Sonny's night.

Ellie brought the birthday cake. She had added some cream that spelled 'Happy Birthday Sonny' and two candles shaped as numbers. Sonny pressed Will's hand as he made his silent wish and asked Allie to help him blow them out. She giggled as he propped her up, next to the edge of the counter. Will saw Sami taking a picture and thought he could have it developed and framed, maybe for
Sonny's bedroom.

The cake turned out OK. Chad congratulated him and even Sonny looked impressed. When he saw that Will had brought presents on top of the cake, he sighed softly.

“That is some serious spoiling, Will. Be careful, I'll want to keep you afterward.”

Will smiled shyly. He brushed a crumb off Sonny's chin and answered:

- That was the purpose.”

There weren't many presents, mostly gift certificates, so Will's stood out even more. Chad arched his eyebrows, but stayed silent. His friends teased Sonny about what he would need those tables for but it remained kind so Will felt comfortable. Sonny wrapped his arms around him, squeezing him and whispering “Thanks. From now on, you'll chose all my new furniture.” and kissed him.

Sami came home just after. Allie was staying with Lucas for the week-end and had asked him to come later so she could attend the party. She hadn't said it was Sonny's though and looked embarrassed when she confessed it. Will hugged her and told her she had been wise.

The rest of the party started drinking and dancing on the radio's songs, until Kareem took them out to the club, saying they would be a queue.

At this time of night, it was quite cold again and Sonny opened his jacket to let Will press against him. Will looked at the factory facade, wondering how different it would be from a concert. He was ready for mainstream music but not for the noise level and the crowd. It smelled of perfume and sweat and alcohol. But Sonny looked happy. He held his hand to Will, as if to ask him to dance. Will focused on the brown eyes, trying to forget about every other's as he swayed on the slippery floor, trying to remember Sonny's lessons. Sonny was laughing:

“Don't be so tense, sweetheart! We're supposed to have fun.”

He kissed Will's temple and tightened his grip on his waist, leading Will to let go and follow. It was very difficult. Will hated not being in control but he trusted Sonny. He refused to drink more, though. There were too many people around, he didn't want to act foolishly.

Sonny pressed him into the mattress, moaning his name in wonder. Will stretched his neck, letting the pleasure engulf him, forgetting to kiss Sonny, even.

“You're the best gift ever, Will. So good...”

As they neared their respective orgasms, Will's phone rang. He focused on the sensations, losing himself in Sonny's tender stare.
After they both came and calmed down, he grabbed his phone and realized there had been many calls, all from his mother. It wasn't usual. While Sonny walked to the bathroom to clean up, Will sat on the bed and called back.

“Mom?

-Will... Oh, Will...” She was crying. Will's blood turned cold. Sami sounded broken, like she rarely did. Was it Rafe?

- Mom, is everything okay? You want me to come home?

- No, Will. I'm in front of the hospital.” No, no, no... But she said it, anyway, the worst thing Will could expect. “There has been an accident. It's Allie.”

He was already fully dressed when Sonny came back.

“What's going on? Why are you crying?

- Allie... hospital... accident.” He couldn't say more, but Sonny understood, running to get his car keys and dress himself too.

Lucas was drunk and had driven off the road. They were both in surgery, with critical wounds. Will felt a failure as he watch his mother's wretched face, not knowing how to support her properly, how to make the fear go away. He drank numerous coffees, stared at the clock's hands wishing them to move faster so they could get news. He had stopped crying but he couldn't move.
Allie lay on the hospital bed like a bird with broken wings. Her face was grey, damaged, her arm hung on the side of the hospital bed as if it was now made of rags. Will wanted to scream. He needed to heal her, with his gaze, with his will. He was seated on the edge of a plastic chair, his muscles so loose that he would have fallen if not for the warm hand on his hips. The doctors were cautious, evasive. The surgery had taken a long time. Some more would be needed. Allie was so new, so delicate, Will didn't want hard steely needles prodding her. He was angry at the doctors, as well as grateful and the mixed feelings forbade any sleep.

Sami had left and Will knew where she was now, somewhere he refused to go, because he knew exactly how he felt there. He had a notion that if he entered his father's hospital room and saw his unconscious body, he would want to kill him. It was so out of character for Will to have these thoughts that he was afraid he was losing his mind and he couldn't do that. His mother needed him. Johnny and Syd too and mostly, Allie did. He had to be there for her, show her the way back to them, help her fight.

Will's response to hardship had always been to write, to escape in his dreams but now reality was all around, oppressive, demanding. It made him feel helpless and weak like before when he was a little kid, afraid of everyone, or like when Burt was living with them.

He talked to his sister, softly, until the nurses asked him to leave. He sat back in the waiting room, drinking absent-mindedly the hot chocolate that had appeared in his hand, wondering why the night never ended, why time was so slow.

Sami came back, and Will felt guilty when he saw how down she was. She clearly needed to talk but he couldn't hear it. She had loved Lucas, the rebel, the alcoholic, twice in her life, with her first-borns as daily reminders. She had done the right thing by allowing him to spend time with Allie and now she regretted it surely.

He didn't listen to the conversation, only heard "critical" and "they say he'll have to survive the next 24 hours", too busy repressing the emotions ransacking his body. Sami had someone to talk to, that was good.

But time did pass, after all, and some doctor came to tell them about Allie's next operation. Sami seemed incapable of taking any decision, so Will interpreted her reactions and told the woman. She nodded and gave him a pitying look. It didn't help.

The pile of muffins grew bigger and no one ate them. He only moved to go the bathroom, supported even then. He felt like a very old man, with worn joints and a worn mind.

He fell asleep against a shoulder, letting the warmth it gave fight some of the cold in his heart, nightmaring and not getting real rest. Yet it meant things had changed. A doctor came, looking relieved, while another walked to them with a serious air. Will thought that if the good news was for his dad instead of his sister, life would not be worth living. He waited, anxiety weaving through his bones, for the verdict.

Allie had come through. She would make it. Lucas' condition was helpless. If they wanted to say good-bye, now was the time.

Any anger disappeared. Not just the one about the accident, but also the one about the homophobia, and all the older frustrating memories as well. Instead, Will felt a void as deep as an abyss. He didn't
remember running but he was there first. His father didn't wake up so it made it easier to just cry and tell him he loved him anyway. He was softly pulled from Lucas' dying form so that his ex-wife could have a moment with him too.

Sami asked him to leave, gently but firmly. It was done now, he was officially an orphan, as was Allie. But she was alive, she would recover so Will obeyed the command. He sat in the car, looking outside the windows as he always did, but there was no remarks this time.

The stairs looked impossible to climb, the tiredness forcing him to stop every few steps. His clothes must have been taken off and replaced by night ones, maybe. His bed was a giant nest where he was surrounded by warmth and love. He felt rough and renewed, naked and hurting, wondering if the pain would ever leave.

The last word he heard before falling asleep where kind of an answer, as well as an echo of all the support and attention he had gotten to help him through that long night, as Sonny stood by his side wordlessly, with Will barely aware of his presence and yet only managing thanks to it.

"I love you."
Chapter 34

For the next days, Will didn't function. He kept seeing his father's body, hearing the flat sound on the monitors. He had never felt real, never important but now he felt as if half of him was missing. He stayed home and did all the chores he could think of.

Sonny was bringing meals and Will was grateful but he never invited him to stay. He had relied too much on him. Sonny looked tired, from having looked after him this during this endless night. He needed rest, he needed peace. Will would cope on his own.

He had informed the college administration and been told to stay home for the week at least. Then, he would meet a counselor and see how they could accommodate his studies. It felt so unfair how big an emotional impact Lucas' death had made on them all, when he had been so insignificant when he was alive.

Allie was still in the hospital, shielded from their pain. It was difficult to fake the smiles at times, but Will just had to think about the relief he had felt when he had learned she would live to manage. She didn't talk about the accident, nor did she show any reaction to his death and that was really worrying. Will knew his sister, they were a lot alike, so he guessed that she was keeping everything inside, not to worry them, trying to be too strong.

Sometimes, she asked for Sonny. Will said that he talked about her a lot and couldn't wait for her to come home so that he could spoil her with his muffins. Sonny had said that, the day after. But now, he just looked at Will with his big brown eyes, his head on the side, like a puzzled owl, waiting for Will to open up. But if he did now, he would get all the anger out, all the venom. He didn't want his boyfriend to witness that.

Exactly a week after the accident, Will was seated in the garden, staring at the neighbor's wall with unfocused eyes, when he heard the back door open. He waited for Sami to talk, maybe ask him to come and help but nothing came.

After a few minutes, there was another sound. Will finally turned his head, catching Sonny's departure. His head was hung low, defeated. He had ceased being the cocky, protective red bird that Will loved so much. Now, he looked as grey as Will.

Something twisted his heart. Sonny had had time to rest. Maybe something happened he hadn't told Will? They didn't talk, it was possible.
But it didn't feel that way. The guilt was encircling him, interweaving with the mourning and the pain. For once, his legs reacted. He was running without realizing.

Sonny heard him and stopped. His face had changed. Will couldn't read how he felt, couldn't reach him. He had to talk.

“Son?”

No answer.

“Sonny, are you angry at me? What's going on?”

Sonny turned around and walked back to his shop. Will followed, determined and devastated. This wasn't the time. He was barely making it and now...

The shop was closed, although it was the middle of the day. Will paused and looked at the note on the door: 'Closed for death in the family.'

He sat down, next to Sonny, who was still silent, trying to make sense of it all.

“I need you, Sonny. Don't abandon me, please...” Sonny sighed.

- Do you need me? I feel useless. You shut me out.
- I'm in pain. That's how I react. I'm an introvert, remember?”

At last, Sonny looked at him. This time, the anger was here. Will almost stood up to flee. He closed his eyes and thought about the little baby bird he had seen in one of the nest, all cute and fluffy.

“I was there, Will. All through it. I supported you, even when you barely noticed I was there. Apparently that wasn't enough.

- It was, Sonny. I couldn't have made it without you.

- Then, why?” His voice was trembling. Will felt horrible. It was hard to explain. But he had to.

- I didn't want you to yell at you. I've been so angry. I would have said things... unforgivable things. I couldn't hurt you. You don't deserve it. You've been through enough with your ex.”

Sonny was frowning, now. His hand was flat on the table. Will put his just next to it, their fingers brushing.
“You were trying to shield me? Seriously?” Will nodded. He was crying. The tears had dried out after Lucas' death and now they were back. He wiped them off, discreetly. Sonny's hand caressed his wet cheek. “Will, don't do that. It's so stupid.

- Pardon?

- Sorry, I meant... We're together, remember, through thick and thin. I can be patient, but I have feelings too. I feel awful because you just lost your dad and there's Allie...

- She's asked for you.

- She did?” Sonny's eyes were shining again. There was hope in them but also restraint. “Shall I visit her?”

He was asking for permission. It wasn't just about Allie. Will nodded. Sonny smiled shyly. They intertwined their fingers. Will looked down at the table and said:

“You still have your dad. And he loves you.

- That makes you mad?

- No, that makes me envious. You were wanted, you have room to exist. I don't.

- That's not true, Will. Your mom loves you, I see it all the time. And you're important to your brother and sisters... You're important to me. I didn't like Lucas but thanks to him, you exist. I'm grateful for that. I wish I could have made him love you as much as I love you.”

Their eyes met again. No anger left, no barriers. They kissed. Will felt his heard beat, bringing warmth to his cold limbs. Sonny moved and hugged him, wrapped himself around Will. Life could go on.

“All will you come to the funeral with me?

- Of course. I want to. When will it be?

- Next week, so that Allie can come.

- Can we go visit her, now?”

Allie was beaming. Will felt selfish. He should have brought Sonny before. He should have trusted him. He knelt next to his sister's bed, listening to her rambling about school and how much she missed her friends. She rarely talked so much. Will pressed Sonny's hand as a silent thank you.

He came back to Common Ground. He was too hurt to do anything but just lying next to Sonny was better. He remembered sleeping in his own bed after the accident, bathed in Sonny's love.
They fell asleep with their breath mingled, their legs tangled in each other. Tomorrow, he would show the baby bird to Sonny. He would hear his laugh, see his smile. Tomorrow, he would still be there, in Will's life.
Chapter 35

When Will emerged from sleep, Sonny's finger was caressing his arm. It was soft and thoughtful, as if Sonny was reflecting on a very deep subject and the answer was written on Will's body. He turned a sleepy frown toward his boyfriend, who was startled out of his contemplation, replacing his blank expression by a smile that made Will's entire day. They stayed that way, still and quiet, enjoying each other's sight.

Will felt he was waking up, not only from the night, but also from the sense-less state he had been in. Now he could feel the contrast between the warm sheets and the fresher air. Now he could notice the way the sun rays reflected on Sonny's dark hair, making it look like splash of silver. Now, he could smell the subtle scent still permeating the pillows, a mix of peppermint shampoo and something slightly bitter and sweet, that defined his boyfriend. It was comforting and a little arousing. But he couldn't do anything about that part, so he ignored the hungry look he could see in Sonny's eyes and rolled out of bed.

After all the impromptu cooking lessons, he was more of less able to prepare a simple breakfast, so he asked Sonny to take care of the coffee and had him sit down. There was an awful pop song playing on the radio, his nightclothes were too thin for the room temperature and the eggs were hell to break properly, yet he was much happier. He would never be the same, he guessed, but he had never been like everyone else, anyway, the absence of a father already ingrained in his bones. It hurt to think about him, though, so Will focused on the frying pan, determined to serve Sonny something edible.

“Mmm, I think my birthday cake was a case of beginner's luck. You still have a lot to learn, young Jedi...”

Will tried to tickle him in reprisal, but Sonny squirmed away, trapping Will in a firm embrace and stealing a kiss. He kissed him again and again, until Will open his mouth slightly. The second Sonny's tongue came in, Will panicked and pushed him away. Sonny looked shocked, but he quickly regained control and got up, still holding Will's hand.

“Sorry, sweetheart, you're hard to resist. So, what do you want to do today?

- I don't know. Aren't you opening the shop?

- I don't have to, yet. Now that you're... back in my life, I would like to spend the day with you.”

Will sipped his coffee, savoring the flavor. Sonny was good at his job. But it was true that, before the accident, he was very busy with the shop. They could use a day just for themselves. He nodded.

They were getting dressed when Sonny's cell rang. :}
“It's Chad. That's weird, it's his day off too. Do you mind?”
“No, it's okay, go ahead.”

Sonny sat on the couch, frowning and pursing his lips.
“Thanks, man, but I don't think it's a good idea...”

Will sat next to him and gestured to the phone.
“Wait a sec, Chad... What is it honey?”

Will whispered, hoping Sonny would hear:
“I don't mind if he joins us. Could be fun.”

Sonny's smile was radiant. It was so easy to please him, Will realized. And he forgave in an instant too. He watch him catch his phone and talk enthusiastically, nodding at something Chad was saying. Will felt a need arise. Something that didn't make sense and went against all his plans. But instead of fighting it, he decided to embrace it for the moment, let the idea settle in his mind. Maybe he would find a way, maybe it would be postponed for a very long time.

But it was a comfort to finally experience it, to have his emotions guide him instead of his mental barriers. One day, he was now sure, he would ask Sonny : “Do you want to live together?” He knew Sonny's answer of course. He would just need to accept that his mother and siblings could make it without him.

Chad was walking on eggs. Or at least until he understood that Will was okay, then he proposed they go see musician friends of his, help them prepare the set for their gig. Sonny accepted but insisted on taking two cars. They found themselves in an empty bar, with busy people laughing and teasing each other. Will liked it but he wouldn't do that every day. There was too much noise, too much silliness. He helped and listened to Sonny joking and making friends but after a while, he took him aside and explained he wanted to go home. Sonny nodded and said his good-byes.

“So, you see why I insisted on two cars?
- I do, thanks, it's very considerate.
- Welll... I'm glad we left too, I didn't plan to work all day. Some of these equipments weigh tons.

Will laughed:
- True. Why don't we go back to my mom's. We could sit in the backyard.
- Will you read to me?
- Sure. I think we could even take the lounges out.

- There are lounges?” Sonny sounded excited. Will felt the roles were now reversing, with him taking care of his man. It was so very important, to always have that balance.

He read to Sonny until he realized he had fallen asleep. So he stopped, closed his eyes and listened to the bird songs, his left hand in Sonny's.

Sami woke them up, apologetic. She asked Sonny to stay and have tea with them.

“Your sister is coming home tomorrow, it's official.

-Great! I'll make her her favorite cake then!” Sami smiled gently at Sonny's answer. Will was happy too, but more practical:

- How about Johnny and Syd?

- Well, their father said they could stay as long as necessary with him but I don't like the idea. What if they get used to it and don't want to come back?

- Mom...

- It could happen.

- No, you're their mother. They'd miss you too much and you know that. But maybe it's better if Allie is welcomed in a quiet house at first. That way we can make sure she's all right.

- Of course, Will.” Sami looked grateful. Will wondered how she would deal. It didn't change much, in itself, except that Allie would stay home all the time.

- And now, about the funeral…” Will's heart clenched again. He had managed to keep the feelings on the side until then but he had to face it. Sonny took his hand and placed it on his knee. Will put his head on the strong shoulder, storing courage and love.
Chapter 36

Will looked at his father's casket, wondering why he was feeling so calm inside. He had dreaded this moment, having to face his hurt in front of other people, some he didn't even know, but somehow, the funeral did its trick, giving him closure. It allowed him to focus on his sister, who was gripping hard at his hand even though they were both seated. Syd and Johnny were still at their own father's, they would come back the next day. Will missed them horribly. He wanted their laugh in the morning, to replace the silence that was permeating their house. Even one of their fights would do.

The sun was making Allie's hair shine brightly, as well as Sami's. They looked so much alike, as if Lucas had been an afterthought in making her. It was the same for him, he knew. Would Sonny have wanted him if he had looked like his virile father more? He turned to look at his boyfriend. Sonny was quiet and thoughtful like he rarely was. He had only met Lucas once and it hadn't gone well. Will wished, for a fleeting moment, that he had a more normal family to present to him. Then he caught Sonny's eyes and gentle smile and let the feeling go away. He was who he was.

Allie was like a flower, opening her petals for the spring, while busy little birdies flew around. Syd and Johnny were excited to be back, eager to include her in their games. They barely looked at him, though. He wondered why. Rafe came in the evening to spend time with them and Sami kicked Will out, telling him to go have fun.

He found himself in front of a coffee cup, in Sonny's kitchen, listening to his man's horrible attempts at singing something from the Sound of Music in the bathroom. He shouldn't be there. Looking after the children, making Allie smile, was something he had to do, all the time, now. And yet, he had been replaced, by his other siblings but also by his mother's boyfriend.

Sonny came into view, his hair glistening and unkempt. Will smiled and whispered:

“I like it when you haven't styled it, you know. It makes you look young, younger than me, even.”

Sonny paused, his eyes opening wide. With his pajamas shorts and his T-shirt with a Teddy beard on it, he indeed looked like a child. He passed a hand in his hair, ruffling it. Will took a few steps and hugged him.

They lay in bed, kissing softly and laughing when Will felt it. The pang of deep arousal, the one that made him forget everything else that wasn't sex. It had been so long, since his mother's phone call after the accident. Sonny had waited, patiently but Will was sure it must have been difficult.

He was the one taking of the cute pajamas, the one kissing Sonny deep in the mouth, the one moving around, looking for ways to seduce him. Sonny was like a doll, smiling lazily, letting Will take charge. At one point, he held his hand to open the old bed table and grab the bottle. He let Will
prepare him, climb him and sink down. It was exhilarating to be on top, as if he was an eagle flying over a gorgeous landscape. Sonny was moaning, getting harder inside of Will, but still let him do all the work.

Will lay panting over Sonny, feeling the pulse beating under the condom, not wanting to separate, just yet. He felt different and wanted to share that with Sonny for a little longer. He heard him whisper:

“Well...

- Yeah...?

- Can I ask you again?

- What?”

Sonny didn't answer. His eyes rolled around the room. Will sighed of contentment and dislodged himself. He walked to the bathroom, contemplating. He knew what Sonny had implied and it felt way less frightening than before. In his mother's home, he had been the other adult, one without which things wouldn't work. But even Allie had proved more resilient than he would have thought. And Sami had relied heavily on Rafe these last weeks, Will had heard her on the phone many times. Rafe wasn't Burt and there was no way of knowing if he would cheat or not. Will felt ready to leave the nest.

But the conversation turned complex. Will didn't know if he should live on his own or move in with Sonny:

“You won't be able to afford something in the neighborhood, love. Here, you can visit your siblings all the time. And you'll have more time to study if you don't need a job.

- Why wouldn't I need one? How about the bills that we would split up?

- The coffee-house is a success. I don't need you to pay anything.”

He felt Sonny put a finger over his own forehead, smoothing down the lines. He didn't like not paying but Sonny had a point. It was the main reason he had stayed home.

- I would feel like a child, then. You're already older than I. What kind of relationship would that be?

- One practical? You know, this isn't the Ritz here. I would love better furniture and I wouldn't mind traveling abroad again, with you this time. But it would mean we would never have time together so what's the point? One day, you'll have a paying job and no more studying to do but right now... I would call this an investment on our future.

- But what if...” Will paused. He knew Sonny didn't like it when he expressed his insecurities but now was the time to do it anyway. “... What if we break up one day? For whatever reason? I'd feel indebted to you and I doubt I could just reimburse you.”

Sonny sighed, moving just a little to let Will's head lay on his chest. His heartbeat was just a little fast but his voice was tranquil:
- When I was abroad, I stayed for a year in Spain. I studied at the University there but I couldn't find a dorm room. Campuses are different there. I met this family that let me live with them. I didn't pay for anything and they rarely asked me to babysit. They were just happy I was around.” He kissed Will's hair and went on: “This would be me giving back to the universe. It's my turn to help and it's not even as selfless. Your presence would mean the world to me. But I understand your reservations too. If you don't want it, I'll support you. You know that.”

Will did. He asked for a few days of reflection. He needed to talk to Sami anyway.

The next day, there was a blanket fort in the living-room with Rafe and Johnny playing underneath. Sami looked at Will and nodded.

He brought his new bed over. And his bookshelf and his desk. They rearranged everything. Sonny took him shopping to buy new curtains and posters:

“It is our place now, we need to match both our taste.

- But you said you got the cheapest things when you came here. So how was it to your taste?

- It wasn't. That's the point. I have a little more money now, but I never got around to changing things. You have great taste and I want to feel that it's a new beginning for the both of us, you know?”

Will smiled and pointed to a red curtain.

Chad helped a lot. At one point, Mel came with a small present but didn't stay long. She was leaving for the east coast soon so Will hugged her and made her promise to write.

Sonny looked at Will's sad expression and said:

“How about we plan our housewarming party? Who do you want here?”

Will shook himself out of his thoughts and sat down on Sonny's lap. He had done it. He had left his childhood home and now he was in full charge of his life.

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