

EPILOGUE

OCTOBER 1944

As the sun crested the eastern horizon, a breeze carried the scent of oncidiums across the patio table, where PJ sat with his arms crossed. Chloe snuck up from behind and kissed his neck.

“Do you smell vanilla?” She asked.

He set down his coffee cup. “Ernest said growing these orchids is like playing roulette. You never know if they’ll smell like chocolate, vanilla, or sewage.”

“How is it coming?”

He sighed. “I don’t know. It’s all in my head. I can think it all through, but it doesn’t come out . . . here.” He smacked the return on the typewriter. “It’s like trying to pull a damn mule.”

She tsked him. “You are cursing again. May I see?”

He yanked the paper from the typewriter and handed it to her.

Rope Swing

The oak tree by the water was very old and very big. The boy layed on the ground and watched the sunlight poke though the leaves.

“I like it.”

He huffed.

“No, really. I can see you there, under the Big Tree the day we met. It will be a wonderful story. It is only that you have never written, yes? You hardly wrote me from China, remember?” She

pinched his forearm, sat herself down and perused a loose page lying on the table. “It will take time for you to learn to write well.”

He slunk in his chair.

“Tell me, how long did it take you to learn to fly well?”

“Are you kidding me?”

She placed her hand on his. “I believe people should hear the story, PJ. I do. But you cannot walk into La Palma and chat over your café Americano at the bar with thousands of people. You must write it.”

He rolled his eye.

“May I offer a suggestion? Of course Ernest is in Europe, writing for the magazine.”

“Yeah?”

“So let me help you.”

“We talked about that. You’re too busy with school and the baby.”

“Yes, we talked about it, and yes, I am busy. But I have been thinking. Now we have Benita here to help with our *pequeña natilla*, Espwa, and Francie is here for her, too. So I will drop my history class. I will help you gather your thoughts and help edit your writing. For me, this will be easy, and I think you will not become so frustrated, and the words will flow more smoothly. We will be a team!”

Pink-and-white cabbage butterflies were dancing among the cerca de lily cubanas when a monarch fluttered through to land on the table’s edge where she slowly, rhythmically flexed her wings.

“Voila! It is a sign.” Chloe beamed.

“But I’ve always . . . I don’t know. I’ve always just done my thing. I ain’t needed help.”

“And I, too, have always done my thing, PJ.” She patted his hand as the monarch launched. They watched it flutter and vanish in the trees.

“But *this* thing, this we will do together, yes?”