

Photographer, History Professor, Mystery Novelist KODACHROME

# 2

**Scene Two**  
**The History Professor and the Mystery Novelist**

: Marjory

*(Projected: photo of Harry's Place. An older couple sit at a picnic table or rustic outdoor table, the HISTORY PROFESSOR and the MYSTERY NOVELIST.)*

START

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** Harry's Place, established nineteen twenty. Drive-in, takeout, affordable hot dogs, burgers and fries. The History Professor and the Mystery Novelist sit in the shade. It's a mild August afternoon. The History Professor fiddles with his wedding ring.

**HISTORY PROFESSOR.** So.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** He says.

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** Yes.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** She says.

**HISTORY PROFESSOR.** I guess it's time.

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** No point in denying it.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** She takes a bite from her lobster roll. Butter drips down her chin.

**HISTORY PROFESSOR.** I'll have it all drawn up.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** She smiles at this, a small smile. A slight breeze. They watch a hummingbird pass.

*(PHOTOGRAPHER takes a photo of her, projected on the back wall.)*

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** I do appreciate, of course, your sense of humor.

**HISTORY PROFESSOR.** Humor?

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** Irony. Finality. History? I see how you are rounding it out, putting up bookends as it were.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** He thinks for a moment of the oak bookcase in his study crammed with Civil War tomes. He never liked bookends but he appreciates her appreciation.

**HISTORY PROFESSOR.** Our first date.

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** Yes. You wore a letter jacket. How did you ever letter in anything?

**HISTORY PROFESSOR.** It was out of pity. You were cold. Wearing a tiny dress. I draped it over you.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** She remembers the moustache he tried to grow. He thinks of her seventeen year old legs. They settle into an unsettled silence. That was then. But now - now -

**HISTORY PROFESSOR.** I'll move into the cottage.

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** No, no.

**HISTORY PROFESSOR.** I insist.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** He says goodbye in his mind to his oak bookcase and the red couch in his study. She feels the pull of the novel she's writing. How to get her heroine out of the water. Do boats just come along? Does she float for a while? Was she perhaps a champion swimmer? Reminds herself to look up how long it takes for hypothermia to set in. Instead what she says is -

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** What will we tell the kids?

**HISTORY PROFESSOR.** Jonathan will take it in stride. But Marjory. I worry about Marjory.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** She doesn't tell him that Marjory already knows. Over the phone. Last week. Marjory pleaded. Marjory cried.

*(MARJORY appears in spot, in pain.)*

**MARJORY.** Mother, please. Don't do this. He loves you. You love him.

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** It wasn't enough.

**MARJORY.** Are you fighting?

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** No. No.

**MARJORY.** I don't understand.

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** I long for an empty bed. I want to drink coffee alone in the morning. I want to be lonely.

**MARJORY.** Is he having an affair? Are you?

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** No. No. I want him to move out before I begin to hate him. His toenails. His breath. The grumpy way he stands up.

**MARJORY.** Don't do this. Please!

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** We will be civil when we see you. It is all very civil. We will come visit together maybe. We will have dinner. We will smile and we will enjoy each other's company. How's your roommate?

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** And Marjory is distracted for twenty minutes talking about the trials of life in Boston and the HR game. She might switch companies. It is what people do, to get ahead, to climb the ladder and ascending is what it's all about, right? But it would mean leaving her team who she has grown fond of. And starting over with new people and new processes.

**MARJORY.** Do you think I'm ambitious enough? It's something I want to be true about me. But sometimes I can't tell the difference between what I want and what I think I should want. What do you think?

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** And then she becomes aware of how dull she must sound to her mother, how unartistic, how grounded. Her mother admires her daughter with her feet on the ground, but then there never is the clouds of the mind to discuss. That much they don't share. But the Mystery Novelist asks questions to show she is listening. Like -

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** How is the transition to the new software? How did you feel about last quarter?

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** And Marjory knows her mother is trying. Did she try in her marriage? Marjory cries and pleads and cries.

**MARJORY.** Noooo!

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** She feels sorry for herself and imagines she now comes from a broken home. She looks at the bean bag chair and remembers when her parents helped her move in. Was there tension that day? She's not sure. She makes microwave popcorn and falls asleep to *Casablanca*.

(**MARJORY exits. Light change.**)

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** I'll tell Marjory.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** She says to her still husband. And a weight he didn't know was there is lifted off his shoulders.

**HISTORY PROFESSOR.** I'll say something to Jonathan.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** And like that, the plan becomes all too very real.

**HISTORY PROFESSOR.** I'll leave tonight. Pack a few things. Next week, I'll come for more.

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** There is no rush.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** She says. But doesn't mean it.

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** How is your burger?

**HISTORY PROFESSOR.** It's good. They're always good.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** He thinks of Gettysburg. Maybe this year he'll make the reenactments. Where did that tin cup go? He thinks of the student with the short skirt in the front row of History One O One. He looks at his soon to be ex-wife. He fiddles with his wedding ring.

**HISTORY PROFESSOR.** Supposed to rain later. I'll leave tonight.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** She feels the relief of his impending departure. She is able to better taste her food now. It doesn't stick in her throat. It melts. She savors it. His lips are chapped and the ketchup stings just a little.

**MYSTERY NOVELIST.** I need to stop at the pharmacy on the way back.

**PHOTOGRAPHER.** She doesn't say, "On the way home." It is a house they no longer share. Let's move on.

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