

Time's Secrets
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Meg ran her fingers through her short, black hair, stretched, and stood up to get a soda from the fridge. She needed a break from studying for tomorrow's chemistry final but she simply could not look at one more formula right now. She walked around the apartment to stretch her legs, idly looked in the mirror at the dark circles that were under her cobalt eyes, and decided to check her e-mail before she plunged back into studying.

She kept telling herself that school was almost over. That was a lie. It would all start again in the fall when she began med school. But that was not until fall. Once tomorrow's chem exam was over there was only graduation, then a blessedly carefree summer!

She smiled when she saw the message from her grandfather. Taking another swig of her soda, she opened it and settled in to read it.

Good morning! (or Evening as the case may be!)

How are my girls? It seems much too long since either of you have been home to visit. Even though we have Annie to spoil, your grandmother and I miss you.

I have a conference in Belfast in June, after your graduation, Meg. Since you'll already be here for the ceremony, Betta, I have a proposal for the both of you. I'd like you to come along to Ireland with me. My conference is only 4 days. I thought maybe we could take the rest of two weeks to explore my homeland before the chance is lost. A colleague of mine will be away for the month and has kindly offered us the use of his house while he's gone. Your grandmother can't go since she'll be running a retreat. So I thought I'd see if the two of you would like to come keep your old Granddad company.

Ireland's beautiful then...let me share it with you.

Your loving,

Abuelo

She smiled as she read her grandfather's message. He was so much fun to be with that she knew this trip would be great. It was only two weeks. That still left her time to visit her Florida grandparents and spend time with Laura and Taylor and Annie.

Before she answered Sean, she sent a quick note to Betta in Milan. They'd already made plans for Betta to take time off so they could be home at the same time. If they worked this out right, they could spend some time in New York with the family, then Betta could fly back to Italy from Ireland. Maybe she'd go back with Betta for a few days, too. As she wrote the message, Meg could feel some of the pressure receding and a smile lit up her face as she typed.

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Betta really didn't care if she ever saw another pin or swatch of cloth again. Aldo had been a total slave driver these last few weeks as they readied the fall collection for showing. This week had been beyond awful as he threw temper tantrums and fussed at every stitch and fold. Still, he'd chosen one of her designs to feature—a soft copper-colored silk dress and shawl that she'd designed with Laura in mind. It wasn't by accident that the sample was being made in Laura's size either.

She'd been in Italy for four years now, studying fashion design, apprenticed to Aldo for two of those years. She'd learned a lot but Aldo was almost a caricature of the temperamental designer. She'd been feeling for a while now that it might be time to move on.

After scooping fabric off of her computer, she pulled her long, brown hair back into a ponytail. She was a head taller than Meg with the figure and grace of a model. Unlike Meg's striking cobalt eyes, Betta's were so dark they were almost black.

She logged into her e-mail and smiled as she saw Sean's message followed by Meg's. She opened Sean's first.

Ireland! Just the three of them. What fun that would be! Aldo was closing the studio for June and she'd already planned on being home. She was pretty sure that Meg's message had it all figured out.

As she opened her sister's message, her exhaustion fell away and she smiled.

* * *

Meg was excited about the trip and dreading tomorrow's exam. But, neither of them were what kept her awake that night. After tossing and turning for a couple of hours, she got up and went to her computer, opening a file that she had never looked in since she had created it years earlier. In it was everything she knew about her birth father.

She'd been curious about him and had decided to see what she could find in a computer search. It wasn't much...almost nothing really. His name, Cary Edwards, a couple of clips about his working for television news, and a small note that said he'd died in Ireland when she had been only thirteen.

It had only been curiosity that led her to look. She'd had a wonderful childhood. Taylor had taken the role of father anytime she needed one. But, when her mother had died, she'd wondered if she had more family out there somewhere. It had been a fruitless search and she'd never given him much thought after that.

Now, though, she was going to Ireland, to the city where he'd died. Maybe if she found his grave, there would be a birthdate and she could do some more genealogical searching for his side of her family. Not that she needed more family! The one she had was more than enough to make her feel loved and secure.

Silly idea, she thought, as she closed the file and shut down her computer. If the opportunity arose, she might follow through. But she was through with not sleeping tonight...that chem exam would be hard enough without suffering from sleep deprivation.

Resolutely, she put it out of her mind and, going back to bed, she quickly fell into dreamless sleep.