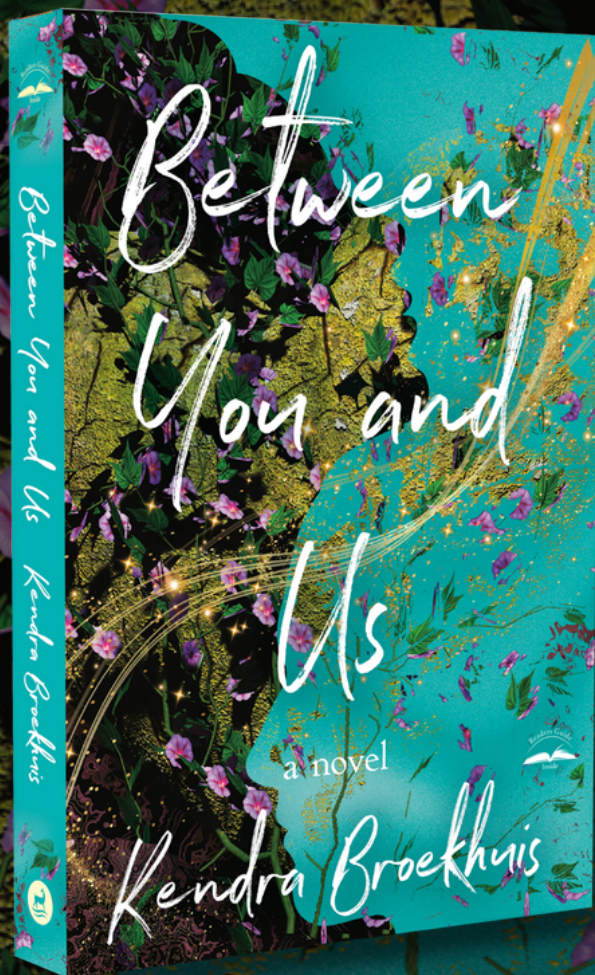


Between You and Us **BOOK CLUB** Kit

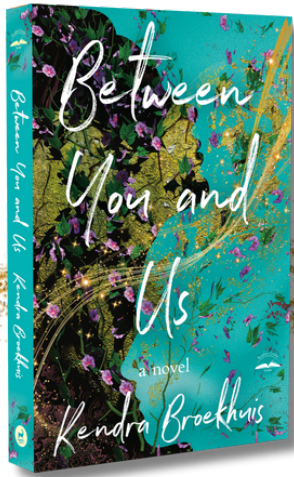


WATERBROOK

Penguin
Random
House

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SYNOPSIS

**Two possible lives to live.
One impossible choice to make.**

When Leona Warlon heads across the city to meet her husband, David, for a rare dinner out, she hopes they can share a moment of relief after their year of loss. But Leona quickly realizes this is no ordinary date night. She hasn't just stepped into an upscale restaurant; she's stepped into a different version of her life. One in which her marriage is no longer tender, in which her days are pressured by her powerful in-laws, and in which her precious baby girl lived.

Now Leona must weigh the bitter and sweet of both trajectories, facing an unimaginable choice: Stay in a world where tragedy hasn't struck but where the meaningful life she built with David is gone? Or return to a reality that's filled with struggle and sorrow but also deep and enduring love?

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HELLO friends,



I'm delighted to share my debut novel with you, which released from WaterBrook in March 2024. *Between You and Us* follows protagonist Leona Warlon through two starkly different versions of her life: The one altered by grief with the kind, funny man she's loved since college. And the one where her marriage is in shambles from her powerful in-laws, but her precious daughter Vera is still alive.

Though the events in *Between You and Us* are fiction, this book was inspired by my personal grief of losing a baby at 33 weeks pregnant in 2015—a girl we named Aliza Joyce. I wanted to take what I learned through my own sorrow to create a story that wouldn't rush its characters through their "what if" questions or force them to tie a pretty bow on their pain. A story that also happens to be sprinkled with some magical realism, a vexing mother-in-law, and a little banter of course.

My desire is that throughout the story, you'll experience safe spaces to lament life's sorrows while also finding glimmering reminders of hope.

THANK YOU & HAPPY READING!
Kendra Broekhuis

P.S. Go to www.kendrabroekhuis.com/contact to connect with me about a 30 minute Zoom visit with your book club!

DISCUSSION *questions:*



1. How does Leona react to conflict, both in ordinary circumstances and unbelievable situations? Do you think her reactions are realistic? Why or why not?
2. Describe the progression of David and Leona's relationship, including the various hardships they face. What would you consider the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship?
3. Leona talks about motherhood being exhausting, but she's offended by a nanny showing up at her doorstep to watch Vera. Why do you think she has these mixed feelings? How do the struggles of parenting look different in each outcome of Leona's life?
4. Talk about Leona's relationship with her sister, Rose. How do they grow up to react differently to their shared adversity? Which character do you relate to more?
5. How do Evelyn's experiences shape her perspective and motivate her behavior? Does learning Evelyn's backstory make you feel more compassion toward her? Why or why not?
6. How does grief drive Leona's decisions in both timelines? What do you think about Eden's assessment that a person can't get over grief; they can only go through it?

DISCUSSION *questions:*



7. Leona suspects that David #2 is having an affair only to find out Leona #2 is the one who has been unfaithful with her high school ex-boyfriend, Derek. Explain why Leona #2's indiscretions with Derek might be considered understandable or unforgivable.

8. How does Leona's view of wealth compare to the views of Evelyn, Delaney, and Patrice? Whose views do you relate to? What do you think of David's decision to walk away from his family's money? In your experience, have you seen access to money build community or isolate people from community?

9. When Leona goes to BioThrive to ask Eden for help, Eden ends their conversation because Leona #2 hasn't invested in their friendship in a long time. What do you think about Eden's boundary? How does Eden show both strength and vulnerability as a character?

10. Leona visits an outcome of her life that answers some big what-if questions about how things might have turned out differently if she'd made different choices. Do you agree with her final decision between the two trajectories of her life? In what ways would visiting this different outcome affect the reality she came from?

11. Discuss the significance of the title, *Between You and Us*. How does this capture the tension Leona feels between motherhood and marriage? Where else do you see Leona and David living in tension? (Consider their neighborhoods, marriage, relationships, and roles.) Have you ever felt caught between the different roles you embody?

Q&A with Kendra



For a complete list of articles and interviews related to *Between You and Us*, visit Kendra's website:
www.kendrabroekhuis.com/between-you-and-us

TMJ4's Morning Blend: *Between You and Us* was featured on a local Milwaukee morning show. Listen to Kendra give a live interview about the premise, themes, and inspiration behind her book.

<https://www.tmj4.com/shows/the-morning-blend/between-you-and-us-a-debut-novel>

Writer's Digest: In this article, Kendra writes about the genre of magical realism, how it differs from sci-fi and fantasy, and what it was like to incorporate certain elements into *Between You and Us*.

<https://www.writersdigest.com/write-better-fiction/utilizing-magical-realism-to-tell-a-story>

Reading is my Superpower: This lighthearted interview with Carrie Booth Schmidt dives into Kendra's life as an author.

<https://readingismysuperpower.org/2024/03/13/author-interview-and-a-giveaway-kendra-broekhuis-between-you-and-us/>

Hasty Book List: This interview with Ashley Hasty shares the books and authors who inspire Kendra.

<https://www.hastybooklist.com/blog/author-interview-kendra-broekhuis>

Hope-Filled Fiction w/ Deena Adams: While *Between You and Us* is considered "clean fiction," this interview with Deena Adams gives a behind-the-scenes look at how Kendra's faith forms her writing.

<https://deenaadams.com/author-interview-with-kendra-broekhuis/>

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SETTING *Tour*

Between You and Us is set in the city of Milwaukee. Here's a few peeks at some of the specific locations mentioned in the book.

Atwater Beach

Atwater Beach is where Leona liked to escape to when she she was in college and needed to clear her head. The shoreline is at the bottom of a long, winding path or set of stairs, depending on how one wants to get there. There's a beautiful beach, playground, and sculpture there too.

(Photos: Kendra Broekhuis)



Bradford Beach

Bradford Beach is where Leona and David went together to celebrate anniversaries or get a breath of fresh air. It's located just east of downtown Milwaukee and is the area's largest public beach. It's home to Moosa's Custard Stand, a tiki bar, and many beach volleyball nets.



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SETTING *Tour*

Bartolotta's Lake Park Bistro



Bartolotta's Lake Park Bistro is where Leona met David for their tenth wedding anniversary and unexpectedly stepped into a different outcome of her life! This French bistro is one of many restaurants in Bartolotta's Group of fine dining establishments, but this particular location is known for its pavilion overlooking gorgeous views of Lake Michigan. (Photo: TripAdvisor)

Izzy Hops Swig and Nosh

Izzy Hops is where David took Leona on their first date in college. The restaurant is known for its delicious food in a cozy environment. With 30 craft beers on tap, this hot spot is pure Milwaukee.

(Photo: Izzy Hops Swig & Nosh)



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SETTING *Tour*

Uihlein Mansion



The mansion where David grew up with his parents, Charles and Delaney Warlon, is based on the Uihlein Mansion. Though *Between You and Us* says the mansion is located in the suburb of Fox Point, it's actually located in Whitefish Bay. This 9 bedroom mansion was on the market for multiple years, including Zillow, where Kendra could research its photos for scenes in the book. In 2023, it sold for \$3.9 million dollars.

(Photo: OnMilwaukee)

Milwaukee Art Museum

The Milwaukee Art Museum is where the Medical Miracle Charity held the one and only gala Leona attended when she and David were dating. The museum is not only known for its A-list art but also for its creative architecture. According to MAM's website, "it's comprised of three buildings designed by three legendary architects: Eero Saarinen, David Kahler, and Santiago Calatrava." (Photos: Kendra Broekhuis)



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SETTING *Tour*

Coffee Makes You Black



Coffee Makes You Black is the restaurant Patrice Perry mentions to Leona when listing her favorite things about the North Division neighborhood. As stated on their website, Coffee Makes You Black “offers fresh food and networking opportunities in an urban afrocentric space; serving as a social, political and economic resource center with southern comfort inspired cuisine.” Patrice loves their chicken and waffles. Kendra’s favorite is the omelet with the house potatoes.
(Photo: Google Reviews)

Blu Lounge

Blu Lounge is the restaurant Delaney rented to host her Friday morning brunch with the Medical Miracle Charity board. It’s located on the 23rd floor of the historic Pfister Hotel, offering beautiful views of the city and lake, as well as delicious cocktails and live music.
(Photo: Blu)



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SETTING *Tour*

Lush Popcorn @ Sherman Phoenix

Lush Popcorn is where David and Leona grabbed a snack for their eleventh wedding anniversary before going to the beach. Lush Popcorn makes flavor-infused popcorn like maple bourbon, caramel and cheese, Wisconsin cheddar, cookies and cream--to name a few. At the time *Between You and Us* was written, Lush Popcorn was located in Sherman Phoenix, a marketplace that supports Milwaukee's community of color through cultural celebration, entrepreneurship support, and wellness resources. Today, Lush Popcorn is at a new location in the Riverwest neighborhood.

(Photo: Lush Popcorn)



BioThrive



BioThrive is the name of David and Eden's medical research start-up and is based on this building that was formerly a Briggs & Stratton factory. In 2022, it was refurbished and opened as affordable apartments called Community Within the Corridor, but within a year was shut down due to high levels of dangerous chemicals.

(Photo: Google Street View)

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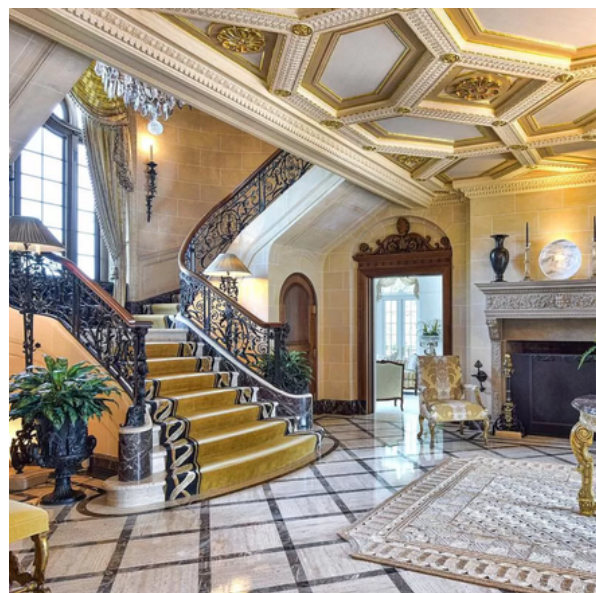
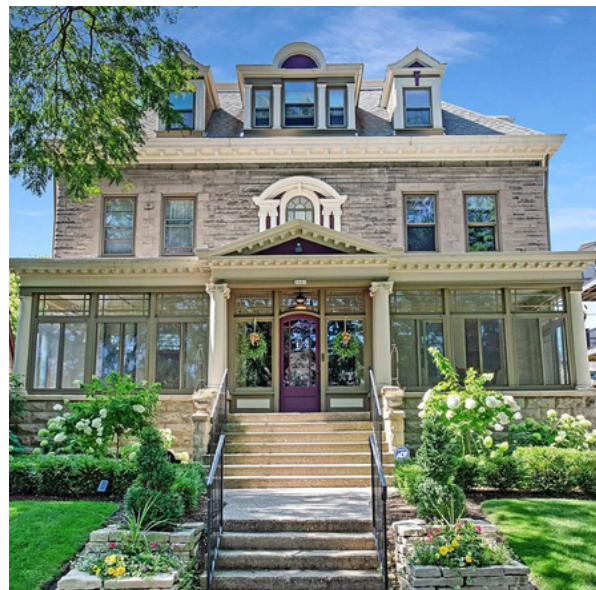
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SETTING *Tour*

Two Different Worlds

Using Milwaukee as the setting for *Between You and Us* was meant to establish the two worlds Leona moves between not only based on her grief, but also based on her socioeconomic status.

(Photos: Google Street View, Zillow, Kendra Broekhuis, OnMilwaukee)



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MOVIE recommendations

For movie lovers who enjoy “what if” themes and/or elements of time travel, check out these films. (Warning: some contain mature content. Please check online reviews before deciding if it’s something you’re comfortable watching.)

PAST LIVES (2023, PG-13) Prime

Nora and Hae Sung, two deeply connected childhood friends, are wrest apart after Nora's family emigrates from South Korea. Decades later, they are reunited for one fateful week as they confront destiny, love and the choices that make a life.

THE ADAM PROJECT (2022, PG-13) Netflix

Time-travelling fighter pilot Adam Reed teams up with his 12-year-old self for a mission to save the future after unintentionally crash landing in 2022.

LOOK BOTH WAYS (2022, R) Netflix

On the eve of her college graduation, Natalie's life diverges into two parallel realities: one in which she becomes pregnant and must navigate motherhood in her Texas hometown, the other in which she moves to Los Angeles to pursue her career.

PALM SPRINGS (2020, R) Hulu

Stuck in a time loop, two wedding guests develop a budding romance while living the same day over and over again.

13 GOING ON 30 (2004, PG-13) Netflix

A girl who's sick of the social strictures of junior high is transformed into a grownup overnight. In this feel-good fairy tale, teenager Jenna wants a boyfriend, and when she's unable to find one, she fantasizes about being a well-adjusted adult. Suddenly, her secret desire becomes a reality, and she is transformed into a 30-year-old. But adulthood, with its own set of male-female challenges, isn't as easy as it looks.

SLIDING DOORS (1998, PG-13) Peacock

When Helen, a London ad executive, is fired from her job and rushes out to catch a train, two scenarios take place. In one, she gets on the train and comes home to find her boyfriend, Gerry, in bed with another woman. In the second, she misses the train and arrives after the woman has left. In the first scenario, Helen dumps Gerry, finds a new man and gradually improves her life. In the second, she becomes suspicious of Gerry's fidelity and grows miserable.

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SUPPORT *the book*



If you loved *Between You and Us*, would you consider helping to get the word out? Posting a review online is the biggest help, but here's a list of other ideas too:

- Mark *BYAU* on Goodreads as “to read” or “read,” or add it to your Amazon wish list.
- Review *BYAU* on Goodreads, Amazon, or your other favorite retailers.
- Request *BYAU* at your local library or bookstore. (Let bookstores know Kendra can send signed book plates.)
- Share a picture of *BYAU* on social media and tag @kendrabroekhuis and #BetweenYouAndUs
- Mention *BYAU* in your newsletter or blog.
- Include *BYAU* in a gift basket, birthday present, or care package.
- Host Kendra on your podcast or Instagram Live.
- Tell a friend about *BYAU* and why you liked it.

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BONUS chapters



Did you ever wonder what David's dinner with his parents was like the night after he proposed to Leona the first time? Or how Leona #2 reacted to David #2's proposal? Or what Frank and Evelyn's marriage was like? These deleted chapters just might answer a few of those questions!

CHAPTER 10.5

David's point of view. He just proposed to Leona the first time, which she rejected. He visits his parents to have dinner with them and decide what to do.

CHAPTER 11.5

Leona #2's point of view. They are at the house on Courtney Boulevard, and David just proposed to her.

CHAPTER 14.5

Both Frank and Evelyn's points of view. This is the day they first met, as well as a behind-the-scenes look into their sixteen-year marriage.

CHAPTER 10.5

Scene: David's point of view. He just proposed to Leona the first time, which she rejected.

He visits his parents to have dinner with them and decide what to do.

The drive from 2638 Courtney Boulevard back to Leona's apartment the night he proposed was the most awkward car ride David ever experienced. Even though the scene was private, it felt like he'd been rejected on the jumbotron inside a stadium filled to capacity. She'd treated him with absolute dignity, but he was still humiliated and couldn't drive away fast enough.

He'd wondered how long he could ride the fence between being with the woman he loved and trying to keep his parents happy. While he and Leona were dating, his mother had scheduled multiple sit-downs with him to talk about his future. About "the kind of woman" he envisioned by his side. He knew exactly what Delaney was doing and tried to tolerate it as best as he could for the sake of family.

When Leona rejected the house and most of his marriage proposal, he realized there was no "best of both worlds" scenario in his future.

He understood where Leona was coming from. A little. When he presented her with the house, he'd skipped the part of the story when his father tried to convince him not to marry her. And the part after that when Charles relented but said, "You should look at the other estates along the lakeshore instead. A few years at Warlon Tech, and you could have any one of those properties paid in full."

However, David insisted. He knew he would be taking a massive step away from the mansion lifestyle he grew up in, but he also thought Leona would better appreciate a house like 2638 Courtney Boulevard. It was far more down to earth.

Thanks to the women who had raised them, Leona only experienced the worst of what David's lifestyle had to offer. She had yet to see all the miracles money could perform, like building brand new schools and rehabbing homes in low-income neighborhoods—including the one she grew up in that was in dire straits the last time they visited her dad.

She hadn't met the people at Warlon Tech who'd mentored David's character more than his own father did.

And, yes, she hadn't yet taken an extended cruise through the Mediterranean, or figured out which restaurant in Vienna was her favorite.

Leona's counter proposal surprised him. He knew she thoroughly enjoyed challenging him on all sorts of insignificant things, such as whether or not the city bus was a safe way to commute. However, she hadn't challenged him on some of the bigger matters their relationship posed, except for right before she met his parents. That turned into a big fight.

David remembered being frustrated by how quickly she ran away at their first real disagreement, but they'd worked it out. At least, he thought they worked it out. Apparently, he was not a mind reader.

His marriage proposal conjured this other side of Leona again—a woman who was sure of what she wanted and confident enough to stand up for herself. It threw him off. It didn't mean that when he regained his balance he wouldn't appreciate this side of her. He just had to get used to it.

The thing he didn't think Leona completely understood was that what she wanted required a lot more than him simply accepting her counter proposal. Which was why he'd asked her for some time to think about it.

The very next morning, he called his mom and invited himself over for dinner.

"Are both of you coming?" Delaney asked over the phone.

David noticed she didn't use Leona's name.

"No, Leona's not," he answered.

He was usually great at compartmentalizing when a situation required his charm, but after last night, he couldn't hide his profound disappointment.

"Oh?" His mother couldn't seem to hide her feelings either. She was tickled by the news.

Something inside David wanted to spill everything that happened last night. His mother was a complicated woman, and he had an educated guess as to what she would say, but maybe he needed to give her a chance to surprise him. Maybe he shouldn't assume.

"Mom?" he said, feeling like a six-year-old again.

"Yes, David?"

"Can we talk? Tonight, I mean?"

"Of course. You can talk to me anytime. I am your mother, afterall," she laughed warmly.

"Thanks." David said, feeling a little lighter.

That evening, when Charles and David took their seats in the formal dining room, his mother remained standing at her chair. “I would like to note how special it is to be able to spend time with the three of us—the *original* Warlons.” Raising her glass of pinot noir, she toasted with fervor, “To family.”

The men mumbled back, “To family.”

Charles saluted his glass of aged scotch, downed the entire drink, then picked up his newspaper.

David tried to grin at his mom, hoping it would make up for his father’s lackluster attendance. However, he was also cringing inside. He wanted this evening with his parents to offer the direction he needed. That exclusionary toast awarded one point to Leona.

Dinner began with small talk and news, and when they ran out of constructive things to say, David brought up a strange memory jogged by last night.

“Do you remember when Kimberly was in that Christmas car commercial?”

His mom chuckled. “Yes, I do. It all happened because your uncle’s friend owed him a big favor. Well, Uncle Jim’s friend was a prominent advertising director, so he gave your cousin—a dreadful actress on her best day—the part. Kimberly’s unfortunate acting career began and ended with that commercial. Isn’t that right, Charles?”

His father grunted.

Delaney sighed, then smiled at David. “Why do you ask?”

“No reason,” he muttered.

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There was a pause in the conversation, which was when his mother began sharing the latest gossip. She named a few single women returning to Milwaukee after graduation.

Another point for Leona.

“I have a girlfriend, Mom, remember?” It stabbed him that he couldn’t call her his fiancé.

“I know,” his mother took a large swallow of wine. “I’m just saying if things don’t work out, there’s plenty of other very eligible fish in our neighborhood. For example, remember Elise Mason? I hear she’s back in town. You two were quite the little power couple back in high school.”

David wished he could forget people like Elise Mason existed. “Did I ever tell you the story of how that relationship ended?”

Delaney shook her head.

“She broke up with me because she thought her food at Carson’s Steakhouse was too cold and I didn’t complain enough to the waiter. She said I should have ‘defended her right as an American to quality service.’”

His mother didn’t seem as put off by that as David thought she should be. Leona now had 3 points.

“Well, customer service isn’t what it used to be,” Delaney reasoned.

“I’d rather be single for the rest of my life,” he replied, full of mood.

“I highly doubt that. Ms. Mason’s name has been thrown around as a possible candidate for city council someday *because* she has such a sharp eye for wanting to right wrongs,” Delaney reported. “Besides, you wouldn’t ridicule a man for being confident enough

to know what he wants, would you, David? Let's make sure we're not tearing down women who have the same kind of traits, hmm?"

It took every ounce of patience within him not to roll his eyes out loud.

His mother, however, was clearly proud of herself. "Look at me, being so openminded. I might even be turning into a feminist. Whoever would have thought we'd see the day?"

David couldn't take it. "Feminism isn't an excuse to be an idiot, Mom."

"David. Language." She glanced at Charles whose head was deep into headlines. "What's wrong with you tonight? You're being very unlike your usual enchanting self."

David knew he wasn't hiding his emotions very well, but he still credited his mom multiple points for being able to read him. She always seemed to know when he needed management and when he needed space.

He wanted to answer her: *I'm sad. I'm confused. I don't know what to do.*

But his family never bore their feelings to each other. Feelings were too fickle of capital to invest any trust in. When his mom asked him what was wrong, she was expecting a retelling of events to which she would offer bureaucratic guidance. He wasn't in the mood for any of that.

The three original Warlons finished the second course of their meal, crab meltaways. The third course of toasted quinoa salad was being delivered by a new housemaid David didn't recognize. The maid appeared older than David, maybe in her early thirties. Her blonde hair was pulled back into a tight bun. She was neatly put together in her uniform, but carried a weariness about her. He wondered at the fact that she probably knew much about his family's life, while they knew almost nothing about hers.

He set down his flatware and folded his hands, unsure where he was going with this. “Mom? What you said about Elise earlier, about being a woman who knows what she wants and fights for it, do you think that’s an important trait to have in a spouse?”

His mother perked up.

She thinks she successfully planted an influential seed in the soil of her family’s future, David guessed.

“Yes, David. I do,” she answered.

“Do you have everything you want in life?” he asked.

His mother’s mouth fell open. “I . . .uh. . .”

David thought he saw a thousand stories of sacrifice and submission flash through his mother’s eyes. Stories of the person she was before she became Mrs. Charles Warlon. She told none of them.

Regaining control over her facial muscles, his mother said, “Of course I got what I wanted, David. I’ve had the pleasure of watching your father build an extremely successful company. I’ve had the honor of serving our Lord at the Medical Miracle Charity. And I’ve been blessed with a wonderful son, who I’m so proud of and excited to see take his place at Warlon Tech.”

She reached over and squeezed David’s hand, then quickly tuned back into her salad.

David observed his dad, now reading the business section of the newspaper to scan the day’s stock market activity. David was sure that if he whipped a plate across the room and it shattered against the wall, his dad would first finish reading how Boeing performed before looking up to see what all the ruckus was about.

Charles had been absent from most of his life, except for the times David wanted to talk about Warlon Tech or trust funds. He could count on one hand how many of his baseball games and performances his father attended, and the list didn't include his high school graduation ceremony. Around conference room and gala tables, his father was animated and charming. But at their family's dinner table, he was nonexistent, ever preparing for his next meeting or decompressing from the long hours he worked.

David had an important kind of stability growing up, he awarded his parents a million points for that. But now he had something new, something that didn't come around every day like the newspaper. He knew exactly what he wanted. He wanted to be with the woman who knew what she wanted, but whose desires were far more meaningful than demanding their \$60 steak be heated to a perfectly sizzling 150 degrees.

"Mom? Dad? I have something to tell you." He wished his voice wasn't so shaky and sad. Knowing what he wanted didn't change how scared he was to take his next steps into uncharted waters.

His mother's fork clattered against her plate. When David looked, he realized she didn't seem nervous but hopeful.

"I know this will be hard to hear, but—"

"You broke up with her, didn't you?" His mother blurted him into silence. "That's the real reason the girl isn't here tonight, right? Oh David, I'm so relieved. The two of you just weren't the right kind of match. I know her mother is from this side of town, but coming from a broken family just isn't—"

"The girl?" David got louder. "Her name is *Leona*. And I guess I have to repeat myself. She's my girlfriend."

Even though Leona had a few more points coming her way, David stopped scoring each of his options. It was too upsetting.

“If she’s your girlfriend, then why isn’t she here tonight?” Delaney was clearly disappointed.

“It’s finals week, Mom. Most people on campus are frantically studying or finishing up their last projects.” He couldn’t believe after being with Leona for two entire years, this was where his mother’s mind first jumped—elation over their imaginary break-up, and matchmaking him with “more suitable” women.

And yet, he could believe it, because this was exactly the kind of social detachment Leona was talking about. His mother could read when he needed space and when he needed management, but she couldn’t read when he needed love. How could she, with Charles Warlon for a husband?

David cleared his throat, wishing he could calm the heavy pounding in his chest. “I changed my mind about working at Warlon Tech after I graduate from med school. I still want to pursue a degree in medical research, but I want to start my own biotech company with my friend, Eden. Also, Dad, I’ll need help putting the house back on the market.”

The scene in the Warlon’s formal dining room digressed.

His mother protested as if he literally stabbed her in the back. She cursed “that ungrateful drunk,” and listed all the ways “that daughter of a gold-digging whore” had tainted him. When she had unleashed every last one of her opinions of Leona, she pivoted her anger toward him. If he was rejecting the job offer; rejecting the house he bought with an advance on the trust fund his father worked so hard to give him, then he must be an ungrateful child too.

“I’ve poured my entire life into you, and this is the thanks I get?” Delaney spit across the dining room table. “You know your medical school tuition and trust fund are contingent on accepting the position at Warlon Tech, and you’re going to throw it all away over some girl? How could you be so stupid?”

David looked at Charles. He’d finally earned his father’s attention.

Charles folded his newspaper and set it on the table. “It’s your grave, Son.”

His father pushed his chair back and, before leaving the room, patted his only child on the shoulder.

It was the closest thing to a hug David received in nearly twenty years.

To his wife and son, the patriarch said, “I’ve got a red eye flight out in the morning. Better get to bed.”

David didn’t leave the safety net of his parents confidently, not as confidently as Leona was when she invited him out from the tangle of their net. However, the more steps he took, the more he realized his steps made perfect sense. He hadn’t told his parents they couldn’t be a part of his life anymore. He just said he wanted a different job and that he needed to sell a house.

But their reaction said everything.

He wasn’t Delaney’s son—he was her prop.

He wasn’t Charles’ son either—Warlon Tech was.

The only real comfort and security his parents offered was financial.

David stood up from his chair, eager to get to the life he wanted, no matter what it cost. He didn’t know what to say—*Thanks for dinner, Ma?* So, he started toward the door.

“You’re cut off.”

David turned around to find his mother staring blankly across the room. He knew what her words meant, but the lackluster way they fell out of her mouth said a lot more. If he had to interpret, he'd guess his mother was praying a harsh punishment would bring her boy back to his senses. Back to the values he was raised with.

David replied, "Am I cut off from your money? Or from you?"

She didn't answer. Or look at him.

He walked around the table to where his mother was sitting, and leaned down to kiss her on the cheek. Even more than he was hurt or angry, he felt sorry for her.

"Bye, Mom." His voice cracked.

David would call his mother from time to time, but in this version of his life, they would never share another five-course meal.

CHAPTER 11.5

Scene: Leona #2's point of view. They are at the house on Courtney Boulevard, and David #2 just proposed to her.

David #1 and Leona #1 wed in July on the western shore of Lake Michigan in front of a modest gathering of their favorite loved ones.

They were completely unaware of the grief their future would bring, but completely confident in choosing each other to face it.

In another version of their lives, David's first proposal on Courtney Boulevard ended differently.

After Leona #2 was presented with the key and the ring, and after she was speechless with shock and bewilderment and anger, she felt a strange sensation run through her body, like it was being pulled in at least five different directions.

Then, Leona reasoned herself out of all the red flags. Everything felt wrong, but David was so right for her. She could make it work—the house, the marriage, the mother-in-law. He wanted to take care of her, so she would trust that he would.

She accepted his proposal, a little hesitantly at first, then persuaded herself into an outward excitement. “Yes, David. I was yours then. I'm yours now. And I'll be yours forever.”

David beamed as he slid the large diamond ring onto her left hand. Leona was caught off guard by how heavy it weighed on her finger, hoping it wasn't a dooming metaphor. Her

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first thought was she might have to wear gloves when she rode the city bus. Although, her days of riding the bus would probably soon be over.

She only asked him for one thing. “Is it okay if we get married in July? I’ve always wanted a summer wedding. We could have a simple ceremony on the beach.”

David agreed, kissing her neck and her cheek and her mouth and telling her she could have whatever she wanted.

Within hours of the news, Delaney insisted the Warlon family would pay for the entire affair and took over all preparations. “Autumn would be a far better season for the wedding, and the guest list will be as large as the Grain Exchange will allow.”

As Leona walked down the aisle of Milwaukee’s oldest cathedral toward David, she was completely unaware of the grief her future would bring.

And unsure of who she would have to be in order to face it.

CHAPTER 14.5

Scene: Both Frank and Evelyn's points of view. This is the day they first met.

There was only one reason teenagers Frank Murphy and Evelyn Abbot would ever cross paths in a city like Milwaukee, which was East High's homecoming football game. On the night that changed the course of their two lives, they both attended.

East always scheduled homecoming against West High. West didn't have the money to hire qualified coaches or a lot of students with the margin for things like extra-curriculars. Wearing the same green, musty jerseys with the peeling numbers for the past eighteen seasons, they looked beatable no matter who they played.

Frank wasn't really into sports, but he liked cars, and going to a football game at East High School meant getting to walk through a parking lot of the most expensive vehicles he would ever get to see in real life. Besides, a few of his friends were on West's team, and this was the first year in a long time they had a chance of giving East a run for their money.

Pun intended, he thought, remembering the rumor that east side folks were so rich, they wiped with twenty-dollar bills. He wanted West to finally beat East at something besides dropout rates. Even if high school felt like a prison sentence sometimes.

Frank meandered through rows of shiny cars. It took everything in him not to slide his finger along the black paint of the Buick GNX, or pop the hood to take a look inside of the Porsche Turbo.

A marching band started playing from inside the packed stadium, which made Frank look up just in time to see a limousine pull into the parking lot. The driver got out and opened

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the side door, and five high school boys piled onto the asphalt, all wearing the same black tuxedos. They pushed each other, tugged on each other's bowties.

After their rough housing, they each went back to the door of the limo and offered a hand. One at a time, a girl carefully stepped out in a puffy sleeved dress and even bigger hair. Frank felt like he was watching a pageant.

The last girl was the real show stopper. Her dark hair was permed to perfection, and even though she had on more makeup than the clown at his niece's last birthday party, he could tell she was one of those girls who was just plain pretty without it too.

The group lined up in front of the limousine, and a photographer began to snap pictures. Every few clicks, one of the girls would squeal, turn around, and slap the boy behind her for touching something he wasn't invited to. The boy would laugh, then pose for the camera again.

The photographer directed them. "Say, 'Homecoming Court!'"

The ten seniors raised their hands and yelled it back to him.

Frank found himself walking toward her, no longer paying attention to the cars he usually drooled over. His eyes were on something else. Someone else. He was only a few rows away.

One of the boys spotted him. "Hey, man! Get your filthy hands away from that car and head back west!"

All the boys laughed. But one girl, not his girl, scolded her classmate. "Hey, be nice! You don't know where he's from."

Frank could barely hear them though, not the boys protesting nor the girls who started whispering about him to each other. He just walked until he was standing right in front of her.

“What’s your name?” Frank asked.

The girl stood straight and lifted her chin. “Why do you think I should tell *you*?”

He took a step closer. “Because I go to East High but I’ve never seen you before,” he lied.

She didn’t shrink back. “Oh? Which teacher do you have for AP Chemistry?”

One more step. “Why take classes when there is enough chemistry between us right here?” he winked.

“If you think I’m going to fall for a pathetic line like that, you greatly underestimate my standards,” she said, looking him up and down.

The other nine members of court started toward the stadium. One of the girls yelled back, “Evelyn, it’s time to go! We’re about to be introduced!”

“I’ll be there in a second, Dely!” she yelled back, not breaking eye contact with Frank.

“Evelyn,” Frank said her name. “Will you let me take you out after the game, *Evelyn*?”

“No.” She turned on her heels and walked away.

Frank had a girlfriend or two before, but nobody blew him away like this gorgeous girl probably about to be crowned homecoming queen.

“What if we make a bet on it?” Frank followed her, catching up and then gently sliding his hand into hers. “If West wins the game, you let me take you out.”

Evelyn seemed startled but not upset. She removed her hand from his. “*If* West wins the game and I’m *not* crowned homecoming queen, you can take me out.”

Frank laughed. Her confidence made him want her even more. “Basically, I’m your consolation prize if you have a terrible night?”

She shrugged, then walked away.

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Evelyn didn't use coarse language often; it was considered unfitting for a debutante, but she was *pissed off* at her mother.

In a stroke of bad luck, Mrs. Abbot signed up to be one of the chaperones at the homecoming dance, and she hadn't stopped pestering Evelyn all night. She would barge into the middle of Evelyn's circle of girlfriends to fix a stray curl, or insist Evelyn put on another layer of lipstick. She would point out to every boy she thought Evelyn should dance with. And no matter how many times Evelyn begged and pleaded, Mrs. Abbot wouldn't push back her curfew even an extra half hour.

"Nothing good happens after ten o'clock," Mrs. Abbot worried. "You'll either be killed or ruin your reputation. And, you have volunteering in the morning. You can't show up with giant bags under your eyes. That wouldn't be of much service to the community."

Those were the two fears that fueled Mrs. Abbot's parenting: other people's opinions and murder.

At the dance, Evelyn kept her responses mild compared to the way she usually reacted behind closed doors. When her friends weren't around, her anger was nothing short of explosive. She knew her mother wasn't coldhearted and mean like Delaney's mom, for instance. She knew her mother loved her and wanted what was best for her. But her mother was a constant worrier who never stopped hovering.

Evelyn was counting down the days until she could be free from Mrs. Abbot's claustrophobic anxiety.

In the meantime, she needed to escape being in the same gymnasium as her. The air was getting too stuffy with sweaty teenagers dancing and her mother refusing to give her room to breathe. She ran outside and leaned against the school's brick wall. The crisp October wind refreshed her lungs and soothed her sticky skin.

"I'm here to take you out on that date," someone hollered from across the parking lot.

Evelyn was surprised to see him, the guy who begged to take her out. The fact that he went to West already disqualified him. As Mr. Abbot preached: That school isn't launching anyone into a bright and purposeful future.

She tried flipping some hair off her shoulder. It was securely hairsprayed in place, so she crossed her arms instead. "West lost the game; quite badly might I add. *And*, I was crowned homecoming queen."

She pointed to the sash across her chest and sparkly tiara on her head.

"I know," he said, walking closer. "I watched the whole game on your sideline so I could get a better view."

Evelyn tried not to act surprised by that news. "Then what are you doing here?"

"I made another bet with you." He was only ten feet away now. "I bet if I waited out here long enough, you would let me take you out."

It wasn't a sense of connection that Evelyn was feeling as she listened to the guy declare his clear desire for her. What attracted her to him was a sense of adventure and rebellion. He obviously worshipped the ground she walked on, and he wanted to take her away from this place.

Evelyn could use a little of that—if nothing else but to spite her mother.

"You can take me out," she said.

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The guy offered her his arm.

Some of Evelyn's excitement wore off when they reached his rusty pickup truck. She reminded herself that Mrs. Abbot hated everything dirty or unsafe and then she was okay with it.

"I'm Frank, by the way," he said as they buckled their seatbelts.

"Okay," Evelyn replied.

Frank drove them to Oscar's Diner. The parking lot was full, so Frank parked in the alley between Oscar's and a grocery store that was closed until morning. Inside, they ordered fries and chocolate shakes.

Evelyn was delighted. "My mother never lets me eat food like this. She doesn't want me ruining my delicate figure."

"Everyone's figure needs fried food and ice cream," Frank said, and then launched into a long sermon about how ice cream was present at all of his favorite childhood memories.

Frank talks a lot, Evelyn noticed.

He talked about how much he hated school and how much he loved working at Mack's Auto Garage. He was a mechanic in training, a tidbit that would give her mother another dastardly wrinkle between her eyebrows.

The more he talked, the less decent Evelyn felt about using him as her getaway. He was kind, dropping compliments about her every other sentence. Evelyn just wanted to have a little fun. Which is why, back in the truck, she was the first to lean over and kiss Frank on the mouth.

She never expected that kiss would go as far as it did.

Right after they finished, Evelyn jumped off of Frank.

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“This was a mistake,” she said over and over, readjusting her dress.

Frank zipped his pants, smoothed his shirt, and then grazed her elbow with his thumb.

“I like you, Evelyn.”

The fondness in his voice scared her. She could see herself liking his affectionate company from time to time too, but she couldn’t see herself riding in a truck that reeked of motor oil forever.

“Please drive me home,” she said.

She refused to give him her number.

Four months later, Evelyn finally told her parents she was pregnant.

Mrs. Abbot cried until she had a panic attack.

Mr. Abbot looked at her and said, “When are you getting married?”

Evelyn begged them to let her stay under their roof. She cried and screamed, hoping her hysterics would make them change their minds.

“I have no choice in the matter,” Mrs. Abbot answered through her own tears, “I have the standards of the PTA to live up to, as well as a duty to submit to my husband.”

Mr. Abbot just shook his head and said his last words to Evelyn. “You are such a disappointment.”

Frank couldn’t believe his eyes when Evelyn walked through the door of Mack’s Auto Garage. It had been three months since the first and last time he saw her, and he thought

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about her every day since. She stuck out in her clean clothes, like a shiny pearl in a bucket of greasy bolts.

She looked different too. Flushed.

He didn't mean to have sex with her that night, but she was so beautiful; she seemed so earnest. His desires got the best of him.

Frank ran to her, wishing he wasn't wearing his dirty coveralls.

Evelyn held up her hands. "We need to talk."

The very next Wednesday, eighteen-year-olds Frank Murphy and Evelyn Abbot stood in front of a judge at the courthouse, vowing to be husband and wife until death overcame one of them.

Frank's parents, Vera and Lawrence, were the only witnesses.

Before repeating her vows, Evelyn inhaled sharply. "For richer, for poorer."

Five months later, Leona was born. After five more years, Rose.

Evelyn missed money. There wasn't enough of it for a ring with a diamond or for a honeymoon. There was barely enough for groceries and diapers.

Evelyn didn't miss the power money wielded; she didn't need people to bow to her. That was her best friend Delaney, who probably reveled in the homecoming queen being dethroned by scandal. She missed the way money allowed her to forfeit discomfort, to avoid the dirty work she didn't want to overexert herself on.

That sentiment included motherhood, as the needs of her two children overwhelmed her most of the time, and it included her marriage. She wished she could afford to pay

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someone else to fix her husband's meals, wash his clothes, and fulfill a few of her other marital duties, like making conversation at the dinner table.

Even talking to the man was tiresome.

He always pushed her to think positively; always insisted she tell him what would make her happy. He tried to woo her with the kindness of a gentleman, proclaiming his love in gaudy ways.

He'd fawn, "Your eyes are like doves."

Frank said he wanted to make their marriage work, but Evelyn thought he acted a fool as a means to that end. She secretly wished he'd do something bold for once—pick her up, set her roughly on their laminate kitchen counter and kiss her neck. Maybe that would jolt her into falling in love with him.

But when she shut him down with one-word answers, he'd limp away like an injured dog with his tail between his legs.

Everything that used to be Mrs. Abbot's fault quickly became Frank's fault. Her mother smothered her by worrying about everyone else's opinion, and her husband smothered her with his meekness.

Frank was always stressed.

He worried about the bills, as well as how to finance the endless list of goods and services Evelyn lusted after. He tried to keep his lonely misery out of sight. He tried to keep the faith that one day, Evelyn would wake up and decide their life together was enough.

His coworker Bill invited him out to the bar after work. “It’s where we go to drink away the pain of our wives, I mean lives.”

Bill laughed through a bloodshot gaze.

After another long day dreading the thought of returning home to the woman who didn’t want him back, Frank joined Bill at Midnighter’s Bar. One happy hour turned into two, which turned into a daily ritual. Eventually, his body told him it needed liquor at five o’clock like it needed oxygen.

Even when they moved out of their apartment into the house Frank grew up in, their family’s humble income was already squeezed down to pennies by Evelyn’s pricy coffees, the fur coat that cancelled gifts for Leona and Rose one Christmas, and the wrinkle-reducing moisturizer so expensive Frank believed it criminal.

Evelyn complained about the house repairs and the sparse fridge, but she always blamed Frank’s drinking.

He tried to hide his drinking from Leona and Rose. He never took a sip in front of them. But he couldn’t hide that he drank them into debt, like on days when they couldn’t afford a new pair of glasses for Leona or traps to catch the mice biting into their cereal boxes and chewing the toes of their shoes. Or when the electricity got turned off. Frank couldn’t hide his emotions after drinking either. Shame was his constant companion.

Once, Leona came to the door with a picture she drew. He couldn’t remember exactly how old she was—maybe ten? The timeline of that season is hazy. The picture was of the two of them standing in front of their house that said, “I love my dad.”

Everything he'd been carrying welled up at once, and he broke down sobbing over his many failures as a father. He knew he scared Leona with his outburst, which made him feel even worse. He just wanted to do right by his girls.

The last time Evelyn crossed paths with her parents was on the 4th of July the year Rose was five and Leona was ten.

Frank packed a picnic, and on the way to Lake Michigan, they stopped at a gas station to buy a few extra snacks—a rare splurge on his part. She could barely get the man to agree to a carton of orange juice on his weekly grocery run.

Frank laid out an old bedsheet for them to sit on, and Evelyn purposefully set their Styrofoam cooler in the middle of it to create a safe buffer between her and the man she married. She flipped through her magazine, coveting the luxurious lives of the people in the pictures.

And, she reapplied sunscreen every ten minutes. Crow's feet, tear troughs, and bunny lines wouldn't help her chances of eventually escaping this life.

In front of her, the girls pushed sand into rough piles. Evelyn was already lamenting the grit their feet and hands would track into the house later. She racked her brain but couldn't come up with a single thing kids contributed to the world.

They were always messing, always taking.

Rose was the one who first spotted the large white boat strolling along the shoreline. "It's bigger than our house!" the little girl yelled.

Evelyn knew right away it was her parent's yacht. Her father's favorite line of flags hung from the forward waterline to the waterline aft, and even from far away she could decipher the blurry outline in the shape of the vessel's name: *The Evelyn*.

Rose was right, it was bigger than their house, and that pissed Evelyn off. So, for the next twenty minutes, she lived as if her mother and father could recognize her from their boat. She would make them pay for the pain they caused her by only allowing them to see her happy, pretending there was no place she'd rather be than at the beach with her husband and two daughters.

She played with Leona and Rose, doing all the things they always begged her to do but she never agreed to. She swam in the frigid water and rejoiced over the pile of sand they claimed was in the shape of a castle. She even geared herself up to walk over to Frank and plant a long, passionate kiss on his lips. But when she turned around, expecting to see him sitting on their old bedsheet, he wasn't there. He was off somewhere. Probably searching for a drink.

He'd ruined her show, which made her seethe even more than his neediness.

When the yacht was finally out of sight, Evelyn quickly faded back into her sunscreen and magazines, all the while thinking about her father.

Growing up, Mr. Abbot never hugged her. He never kissed her on the cheek or said, "I love you." But he named their family's yacht after her. Mr. Abbot explained that the name "Evelyn" was derived from the French name "Aveline," which is rooted in the German word meaning "wished for, desired."

“The name eventually traveled to England where it evolved into a surname, and then a masculine name, and finally, was bestowed on hundreds of thousands of tiny lassies in the early 1900’s,” he said, almost smiling.

Every once in a while Evelyn wondered if—by the time her name crossed the channel to England where the majority of her father’s ancestors were from—“Evelyn” became a better way to describe a boat than a child.

Sixteen years after the day they first met, Frank gave in and signed Evelyn’s divorce papers on the grounds of his alcoholism.

It went undocumented in court, but Evelyn had already lined up someone who would remarry her back into the part of the city where she came from.