

Louisiana

Chloe Deeba

I never knew how much a summer could really change a person. Only three months passed as I watched my old life completely disappear. The humid air and mosquito bites left imprinted on my body forever, I would not be able to go back to my old life. Everything was different, everything had changed.

My mom booked my ticket to Louisiana during spring break of my sophomore year. At that time, I planned for my summer to be filled with endless days by the pool and parties that went late into the night with the perfect friends by my side through it all. I was not the type of girl to just leave. My life at home was far too important to me and so was my reputation. So, it was to my complete surprise when my mom woke me up on the first day of summer vacation with two suitcases in her hands as she explained to me that I would be leaving for three months. No words would change my mom's mind, there was nothing I could do.

The flight was longer than I expected and it seemed like we traveled into a different dimension. I watched as the scenery below quickly turned from tall buildings and busy interstates to open fields and giant lakes. Never in my life would I have thought that I would end up here.

“There ain't been but one cloud in the sky ever since Easter came around. I guess when Jesus showed up again so did the sunlight,” said the tall man sitting right next to me as he smiled.

I smiled quietly back at him. I wasn't too sure what to say. In LA, everyone avoided human interaction at all costs.

"You ain't from here young lady, are you?" the man said while a slight laugh.

"No I'm not, actually I'm from California. How did you know?" I asked.

"We know all of our people down here. It's not like that LA yous was talking about. Y'all breathe differently over there, but there's something different about you girl, you belong here, you just don't know it yet. " he answered.

I looked at the man blankly as I quickly gathered my things and deboarded the plane, his words stayed in my mind for a little.

Later, my uncle picked me up at the airport. As soon as I saw him all of the memories floated back into my brain to when he lived with me and my mom. He helped raise me when I was little because my dad was never in the picture, he was the closest thing to a dad I ever had. I missed all of the football I played with him on Saturdays and the Sunday morning SpongeBob marathons we had. He left for Louisiana when I was in fifth grade to help with my Grandpa's company. Ever since then it has just been me and my mom. I promised I would visit him all of the time; I never did until now.

"Magnolia! I missed you," he said as he put my bundles of luggage into his truck.

"I've missed you too Uncle Ric, it's been way too long. It's been different since you left. In fact, I haven't heard someone call me Magnolia in forever, I go by Maggie now," I responded as I pulled myself into his massive vehicle.

"Really? Wow clearly a lot has changed. You look older now, just like your momma. How has Cali been treatin you?" he asked.

“It’s been really good. School has been keeping me pretty busy and we all still hang out by the beach every weekend like we did when you were there,” I responded as the hot summer air began to fill up the truck.

“That’s all good news. We’ve just missed you so much down here though. We’re so happy we got you back,” said Uncle Ric.

“Get me back? I’ve been in LA my whole life Uncle Ric, you know that,” I responded while I laughed.

“Your momma hasn’t told you yet? I thought she would’ve by now especially since you’re gonna be here all summer long.” he said half concerned.

“Told me what?” I responded.

“Well it’s a long story hun and I don’t want to upset you right now,” he said trying to change the subject.

“Uncle Ric, please just tell me I need to know now. What’s going on?” I responded as my palms began to sweat.

My uncle quickly pulled over as he turned the radio down. I knew that whatever he was about to tell me was serious because he never turns down Luke Bryan.

“Magnolia, you were born here. Your dad lived just up the road from here and that’s where you spent the first three years of your life. When your dad got sick your momma took you up to LA because she wanted a fresh start. After he passed away your dad’s family has been trying to talk to you but I was the only person your mom let in. She said it was just too hard on her. I thought that since she finally sent you down she would’ve told you all of this, but I guess

she just wanted you to find out naturally,” he said slowly sipping his sweet tea as he waited for my reaction.

I sat quietly in my seat while the words of my uncle still rang in my ear. I looked out of the dusted window to a town I once thought I had never seen before. Sugar cane fields, pecan trees, and rolling farms were the only thing in sight for miles and miles. It could not get much more unfamiliar than this. I couldn’t fathom what my mom kept from me for all my life. It was more than just a place, it was my identity.

“You said that my dad’s house was just up the road from here right?” I asked my uncle after a long pause in the air.

“Yes ma’am, just a few minutes away,” he responded.

“I would like to go and see it, please. Could you take me there?” I asked.

“Alright, I can do that,” he said as he started back up his truck.

The dirt road which led up to the house made the whole car shake. The sound of the rocks crushing underneath filled the air as the car slowed down. A bright yellow frame house stood at the top partly hidden by the big oaks. There was a swing on the wooden front porch in front of a large window that peeked inside. I wanted to look in, but was too scared of what it might reveal.

“I lived here. I lived in this very house and had no remote clue of its existence until now. And not only that, but my dad was with me. I lived with my father,” I thought.

“Your cousins are still here. They couldn’t bear to sell it, it’s been in your family for over a hundred years,” said Uncle Ric.

“You mean there’s people in thier right now?” I asked.

“Not just any people, Magnolia, their your family,” said Uncle Ric.

Family. What did that truly mean?

“Can you give me a second to look around outside Uncle Ric? I’ll meet you there soon,”

I said, still entranced by the house.

“Sure thing, take your time,” he responded as he walked in and slowly shut the door.

I sat on the front porch steps looking out to the yard. I could hear the whispering inside but was not ready to go in. My fingers brushed along the rough wood under me as I noticed a carving. It read, *Magnolia December 15, 2003*.

Chills came over my body. That was the day I was born. My dad must’ve written it when my parents brought me home for the first time. He stood right where I was at the moment, and I was probably in his arms.

I stood up and walked into the house. Silence filled the air as my presence came into the room. Smiles started to appear on people’s faces as tears left some eyes.

“Hello Magnolia. We are so happy that you are finally here. Welcome home.”

I remembered the man on the plane at that moment, and he was right. I *was* right where I belonged.