

— 1 — **August 4, 2004**  
**New York City**

Sunlight slaps me with jarring rhythm, jumping out from behind the abandoned buildings lining the street. “This is how epilepsy gets started,” I say, tapping the top of my head in search of my sunglasses, and sliding them down over my eyes. As the train gathers speed, I lean in against the window to get a better view of the buildings in the distance as they pop up out of the morning fog, one after the other like that old Whac-A-Mole game. At least I hope it’s fog and not the dull-white film covering the windowpane, formed from the sticky fingers of countless travelers.

“See over there?” my husband says, standing up and leaning over the seat in front of us. Our boys both look out their window as he continues. “That’s Yankee Stadium. What do you say we check it out if we have time? It’s a long way from where we’re staying but we can take the subway to the Bronx . . .”

As Jon continues pointing out other New York landmarks, I gaze out my window, drinking in the energy of the emerging city. Jon knows we’re not just here to stand at the top of the Empire State Building or to catch *The Lion King* on Broadway. Across the aisle, an older woman in a worn housecoat lets out a hacking cough, reminding me just how my window acquired the lovely white filter. I lean back from the glass and look over to the young man who has been sitting next to the woman for at least as long as we have been on the train. He was sleeping but his eyes are open now. He shifts his position away from her just as she lets out another dry cough that comes from deep inside her chest.

“This is our stop,” Jon says, grabbing his luggage. He turns to me and smiles. “We’re going to find it, honey. If it’s out there, we’re damn well going to find it for you.” “We’ll see,” I say, throwing back a half-cocked smile.

As we step off the train, rolling our suitcases behind us, we’re blocked momentarily by the woman fishing around in her large mesh bag. She pulls out a cigarette and lights it, taking a long drag so that the bright ash on the tip grows before our eyes. She exhales, and I’m hit with a familiar scent: Virginia Slims, the preferred choice for my mother who only smoked using her black cigarette holder even though the cigarettes had filters—all while striking the pose of Audrey Hepburn on a movie set. Only it wasn’t a movie . . .