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## The Longest Day of the Year

### Part I

12:00am Natalie saw on the clock as she felt Andy crawl into bed next to her. *June 21<sup>st</sup>* she thought as she rolled over to him. Natalie kissed Andy on the cheek, “It’s the longest day of the year,” she whispered, “June 21<sup>st</sup>....” and sighed sleepily. As she snuggled up next to him, she couldn’t see the unsettled look on Andy’s face.

Early morning light shown in as Jameson sipped his coffee, “*Shit!*” he thought, “*That was hot! Better throw some ice in it.*” He opened the freezer, and the cool blast of arctic air refreshed him. It was hot already, a small bead of sweat dripped down his temple. *Kerplunk!* Went the ice he dropped in his coffee cup with a small splash. Forecast: chance of rain late in the day. *Right...*he couldn’t help that he rolled his eyes at that. It seemed like rain hadn’t happened in days. This week had been especially hot, so hot that it stifled the life out of you. Reluctantly he tightened up his tie and glanced at the calendar. *June 21<sup>st</sup>* Immediately he felt the need to loosen up his necktie.

“Mom! *Mommy!* **Mother!**”

“Yes?!”

“We’re going swimming!”

“Okay! Don’t--” **SLAM!** The screen door vibrated with a thud, “...slam the door.” Sylvia sighed annoyed and defeated. She stood; hand on her forehead and

watched with a tired smile as the children ran down the sidewalk. Not even noon and the sun felt like it radiated with flames. The radio announcer broke her thoughts, “Well folks it’s June 21<sup>st</sup>...the longest day of the year...” Sylvia stopped and glared at the radio. The day has crept up on her. *How did that happen?* Her face twisted in a kind of confused horror.

“It’s June 21<sup>st</sup>,” Andy said as he walked over to her.

“I know what day it is,” Charlotte replied unaffectedly while she pretended to read *The Great Gatsby*.

“Come with me,” he insisted in a whisper as he drew closer to her.

“What makes you think I wanna go anywhere with *you, Anderson?*” she said his name with a clenched jaw. His breath made the tiny hairs on her neck stand up and his finger tips on the small of her back sent a shiver through her.

“Hmmm....” Anderson hummed when he weaved the open bottle beneath her nose.

Charlotte breathed in deep the sweet bourbon scent, and as if in a trance, Andy led her away. The sun shone down while dark clouds huddled in the distance.

## Part II

The boys came home for lunch; peanut butter and jelly on white bread. Sylvia put and ice cube in both their milk glasses to keep them cool. She sat in a daze at the table while they gobbled up their food. Totally oblivious to date and time; they just wanted to get out and play.

“Slow down boys!” Sylvia tried to sound stern but it was actually funny. She tried not to laugh at their hurried attempts to chew up peanut butter. Hilarious. Mason with that sandy, floppy hair and freckled face. Just like him. Matthew had that smile; it lit up his whole face. Just like him. *Him*. How had she forgotten? Today was THE day, June 21<sup>st</sup> but her thoughts were interrupted.

“All done!”

“Bye Mom!”

Simultaneously they screeched out of their chairs

“Okay! Slow down! Don’t push your brother!” Sylvia sighed, “ And be home for dinner!” she yelled like an afterthought. She stood there Matthew looked over his shoulder with his thumb up and a huge grin on his face. *That sweet face*; she smiled too. Were those rain clouds over there? She squinted then wiped the sweat from her forehead. Lord! It was hot....

“What do you think life would be like?” Andy asked then took a swig from the bottle and handed it off to her.

“Dunno.” Charlotte mumbled and shrugged as she took the bottle.

They laid in the grass and a small breeze picked up in the air. She closed her eyes and placed the bottle to her lips. Charlotte did it all so delicately but effortlessly. Andy watched her and wondered why she tried to be so hard all the time. She nestled her head back by his shoulder and a single tear rolled down her face. Charlotte wiped it away and sniffed quietly.

“Well what do you think *it* would be like?” he took another drink.

“I don’t know. I stopped dreaming about that a while ago, Anderson.” She said with force laced in bitterness.

He liked it when she called him by his formal name, and only Charlotte could do it. It sounded special when it left her lips. Anyone else would get a beat down. Andy knew she was out of his league. Always was and would always be out of his reach. He realized she grabbed his hand, and traced his ring.

“I can’t believe you’re married!” Charlotte mumbled as the bourbon started to set in her speech.

He sighed, “Yep.” *I wish it could’ve been you...* Andy thought and rested his head on hers.

She took in a deep breath, the smell of bourbon, the fresh air, and ...*him*. *Oh! How she loved the smell of him...* right along his neck. Charlotte wanted to kiss him right there, and the thought gave her goosebumps. She glided her fingertips over his calloused palms. *Oh why...why...* she thought as the breeze picked up a little more.

All day Jameson couldn’t focus and he had this constant urge to pull on his collar. It’s one of his usual work shirts, but for some reason it choked him. He found it difficult to swallow as he tried to eat lunch. Jameson looked at the clock and he pulled on his collar again. Sweat trickled down his temple. He was a wreck. He shuffled almost in a daze to the restroom to splash some cold water on his face. “It’s gonna be okay,” he whispered to himself in the mirror.

### Part III

The car radio crooned on and on as they lay there silently. They continued to pass the bottle back and forth. Charlotte mumbled this or that from her college classes. What this professor thinks, and this one likes or didn't like...she laughed. She had not laughed like this for a long time. Suddenly she stopped, "Oh! I love this one!" Charlotte scrambled to get up, and lost a shoe that was stuck in the grass. She giggled playfully while she tried to stand up in front of the car. She had always been a sloppy drunk, and today was no different. Charlotte danced, Andy laughed at her and after she begged him...finally he joined her.

It was cloudy and Charlotte thought she felt a sprinkle of rain. But it was still *so hot*...and the bourbon...and his body *so close* to her. It wasn't until Andy stood up that he realized the drink had affected him too. "It's just...it was a *baby*...ours...OUR baby," he stumbled over his words. She grabbed him and kissed him as he picked her up. Andy placed her on the hood of the car with her legs wrapped around him. There was the faint roll of thunder far away. *Too...far...away.*

They were sloppy and drunk—but it was real and honest. More real than anything they had experienced in a long time. They were electric together. Suddenly Charlotte pulled away, "Oh Anderson," she cried, "You're married"

He kissed her again, “I don’t care,” he whispered while their faces were pressed together. The tears rolled down her face “She has me 364 days out of the year...June 21<sup>st</sup> is you. It’s the day my whole life changed.”

“Anderson....” Charlotte whispered as they kissed again, and there it was, like an angel singing a heavenly tune. Maybe it was because he was drunk but her voice echoed through his brain.

“I know a baby is not what you wanted but *you* were all I wanted.” He said She couldn’t help but kiss him again and the sprinkles of rain started to fall.

Sylvia put away laundry and cleaned the house while the boys were out to play. She caught her reflection for a moment. No make up but still so young; she touched her face, and ran her fingers over it. *‘Such a pity’* they said.

*‘Too young’* they said.

*‘Single mother? Raising two young boys?’* they said.

*‘Widow’* they said.

“Hey Mom!” Sylvia startled and realized it was Matthew’s voice at her window.

“Mom?!”

“Yes?”

“We’re going over to Jimmy’s now, if that’s okay”

“Yes, that’s fine, just be careful,” she said as she heard the thunder move closer.

“Sure Mom, oh and they invited us for dinner is that okay too?”

“Yes,” she sighed, “That’s fine too.”

“Bye Mom!”

Now she was really alone...on this day. Sylvia fixed herself a bourbon on the rocks and drew up a bath. She had only been seventeen when she married that sharp looking Marine, Benjamin Williams. It was not even a year before she had Matthew, then Mason followed the next year. Sylvia sipped her bourbon and lit a cigarette as she slid back into the cold tub. She watched as the rain silently trickled down outside the window.

“Great...just great...” Jameson thought as he drove with the wipers that squeaked across the windshield. He pulled at his collar once more and checked the time. It was a summer rain to be sure...the sun still shined and it was hotter than before it started. Humidity suffocated the air around him. Jameson patted down his pockets...searching for it...okay it was there. “Deep breath...deep breath...” he whispered to himself as he put the car in park. He took a big gulp as is preparing to go diving deep in the water, and got out of his car. Slowly he walked toward the front door, it seemed like it took an eternity before he reached the entrance. He patted his jacket again and breathed a sigh of relief. Jameson checked the time again and pulled at his collar. He sat down at the table; the waiter brought him a glass of water. He glanced up at him for a second while the waiter lit the candles on the table. Jameson put his wallet down and it fell open to her picture. His throat started to tighten as he closed the wallet.

#### Part IV

“Andy,” Charlotte whispered, “I’m so sorry.”

“Hmm?...why?...For what? This was--”

“No,” she cut him off, “for losing the baby.” Charlotte didn't think there was a tear left to cry, but the tears welled up in her eyes. She could feel his eyes on her as Andy stared in disbelief.

“What?” he asked, “Why would you say such a thing?” Charlotte couldn't look at him.

“You were right. I didn't want it,” she wiped her face, “until it was gone...and then I knew you were gone too.” She finally looked at him.

“Oh, come here,” Andy said with sympathy and drew her closer to him on the front seat. They had dived into the car when the rain came down harder. Charlotte cried into his chest and he stroked her arm. He squeezed her a little tighter. “You were only eighteen Char...” Andy trailed, “bound for college with the best and brightest...”

“Then I just left you here...” she sobbed, “I had—had to go...I'm so sorry!”

“Hey, it's okay...you didn't deserve to be tied up with someone like me. Born to die here.” He said it with such certainty and a little sadness. Charlotte stared up at him with her big green eyes. She didn't know what to say, only that it was true. She ran her finger along his jaw...Charlotte knew it very well might be the last time. “Not you though,” Andy said with a wistful sigh, “Honey you were meant to be outta this place...see the world.” She continued to stare at him, while he glanced at her from the corner of his eye. He cracked the window as he lit a cigarette. The humid air rushed in. “I think the rain stopped.” Andy exhaled a puff of smoke, and it as if her heart broke all over again.



Jameson glanced at his watch, and checked it with the clock on the wall. *Okay, making good time...* He still had the nagging urge to loosen his collar...that tightness in his throat. His heart started to pound, it rang in his ears as he watched the second hand on the clock. Jameson was overwhelmed with anxiety. He wondered if he could cut and run...no...can't do that. Then it happened. Jameson looked up ever so slowly, and his eyes met hers when she appeared in the doorway. She smiled. It was so mysterious, because the moment she did, it all went away. Every care, worry, and that terrible notion to rip his collar off...it all evaporated into the air. He watched her walk, enchanted by her every move toward him. She leaned in and kissed his cheek. It was so soft and ethereal. The young lady sat down and the waiter brought her a glass of water. Jameson snapped back to reality and touched his pocket. Flustered, he grabbed the tiny box and hit the floor. She had her glass up to her mouth and almost choked on her water.

“Mary, my love, will you marry me?”

## Part V

“Looks like the sun is finally starting to set,” Andy stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray.

“Yup.” Charlotte said robotically while she stared out away from him. He glanced at her sideways and sighed, “Well guess I better get you home.”

“Okay.” She responded emotionlessly. Charlotte checked her reflection in the mirror. It has seen better days; make-up and hair all out of place. She adjusted her clothes and buttoned up her shirt. Everything stuck to her body. The sweat-drenched skin adhered to them in all the wrong places. They drove in silence, only the radio spoke, for they had

nothing to say to each other. Andy watched her carefully from the corner of his eye. He knew this could be the last time he would get to be so close to her. Charlotte would go back to college at the end of the summer. She closed her eyes while the breeze hit her face from the open window. June 21<sup>st</sup>—the day the baby died. Andy wanted to grab her, hold her hand, tell her how he loved her. But it didn't matter now, it was over, and that would only make it worse. Slowly he pulled the car up to her parents' house. They sat in silence and Charlotte's head hung down. Andy looked straight ahead and neither could bear to look at each other. "Thanks for the ride," she whispered--her voice, sounded a little hoarse.

"Yep." He said as he lit another cigarette. The glow caught her eye when she leaned down to pick up her shoes from the floorboard. Charlotte opened the door slowly into the loathsome night. The car door shut and immediately Andy drove off. He left Charlotte in a surprise and watched her fade into a silhouette of the night in his rearview mirror. She turned around with a sigh, and saw her mother on the porch.

"Who was that?"

"No one momma," Charlotte walked up the path, shoes in hand, one heel caked with mud and grass like it was a stake in the ground.

"Well, where have you been? You told me you were going to the bookstore and--"

Charlotte cut her off as she entered the house.

"Momma—I'm fine. And I'm 21 years old. Relax"

"Have you been drinking?"

"Yup." She said over her shoulder as she walked upstairs. Her mother watched her go with the most curious expression.

The boys were upstairs in bed and Sylvia was in her favorite blue nightgown. She pulled out some old records—some of Ben’s favorites. Sylvia clicked on the old record player out on the porch, and poured herself another drink. She had been hitting the bottles pretty hard since the boys went to sleep. Sylvia raised her glass as she dropped the needle, “To you Benjamin, my darling, June 21<sup>st</sup>! The day I found out you weren’t coming home from the war!” she slurred her speech then took a big gulp. “I don't wanna see you sad and blue! I just wanna make sweet love to you!” Sylvia drunkenly sang along and danced to the music. She didn’t care that those pervy teenage boys were watching her across the street. Little creeps always offered to mow her lawn or something else to see if they could get a peek of something while they were there. Sylvia swayed slowly with the seductive beat of the music. Oh it was so damn hot out...she took another drink. It hurt to miss him—her whole body ached. She leaned against the post and held the cold glass to her face. Sylvia pushed a ringlet of red hair out of her face, and rocked with the music. It had been two years since he went missing as war. She had to face facts, and that was, he wasn’t coming home. The tears flowed fast down her cheeks, burning as they rolled down. Sylvia danced to the music...*let the neighborhood talk...I dare them...*she muttered under her breath while her eyes darted back and forth. Finally she curled up in the porch swing with the drink still in hand

*“Oh Benjamin...how could you leave me? And why?”* She sighed, *“Why did you never come home?”*

“Hey Honey!” Natalie said with a smile as Andy came in the door.

“Hi Sweetie,” he responded with a weak smile, and hugged her.

“Wait!” she insisted, “Feel it!” Natalie put his palm on her pregnant belly, “She kicked!” she squealed with excitement. Andy smiled as he watched her face light up. His chest started to hurt and he felt this terrible pain in his gut. “Have you been thinking of any baby names?” she asked, “Whew! Somebody stopped to have a few drinks, didn’t they?”

“Yeah...” Andy mumbled

“Drink the whole bottle did ya?” Natalie winked at him.

“Nope...not the whole bottle.” He said covering his face as he stretched his back.

“Well? Have you thought of any names?”

“You know...” Andy said with his back to her, “I always liked the name Charlotte.”

It was quiet behind him, so he turned to see Natalie’s expression. She had a furrowed brow, and he felt a lump rise up in his throat.

“Charlotte McCarthy...I like it!”

“Yeah, sounds pretty good, huh?” Natalie hugged him as tightly as she could.

“Charlotte,” Andy whispered and kissed the top of her head.