

**Author's Note: This is an early version of Chapter One from The Bomber Jacket. It gives some backstory to Beth's relationship with her grandmother, Naomi. Most of it was deleted from the final draft in order to tighten up the beginning of the novel.**

## **Part 1: 1996-1997**

### **Chapter One**

"You can wear history, lovey," the brassy-blond, British-born owner of the vintage clothing shop said, in the accent Beth practiced in secret.

"It's authentic," the shop owner continued, pointing out the insignia of the British Royal Air Force on the bomber jacket Beth had been eyeing for months. "World War Two. RAF. And look, it's got the Bomber Command patch as well. And wings. He was a pilot. It's a bargain for the price I'm asking, lovey."

Beth stroked the fleece collar, admiring the wonderful faded brown leather of the jacket where it hung among other pieces of wearable history.

"I do like it, Lydia," Beth sighed in agreement.

"Go on then, Beth, try it on. I've seen you lusting after it since last spring when it came in," Lydia urged with a throaty laugh. "Put it on and just imagine that handsome fighter boy wrapping his arms around you."

Blushing faintly at Lydia's teasing, Beth complied. The jacket was cozy and fit perfectly. She tucked her hands into the deep pockets. Beth was a tall girl who had to search hard to find jackets that covered her wrists and jeans that covered her ankles. This was a real find.

"It's perfect, Bethie. Like it was made for you. And you look so chic in it." Beth caught Lydia's eyes in the mirror and returned her admiring smile.

Without hesitation Beth plunked down the seventy-five dollar deposit and scurried down the street to the bank to pull out the other two-hundred and fifty to pay the rest. She had a fleeting twinge as she handed Lydia so much cash, but it was only a small portion of her savings from the numbingly boring, but amazingly lucrative summer job as a road crew flagger.

*Flag girl*, the men called her.

*Flag person*, she defiantly retorted.

The summer job had fortunately extended into the fall and this coat would keep her stylishly warm through the end of the road construction season. Thus she could stash away more money for her long-dreamed of semester in England, where at last she would see first-hand the land of Shakespeare, Byron and Tennyson.

Any regret in parting with her money disappeared as soon as she walked out of *Wear it Again, Sam*, the vintage shop where she often browsed but rarely indulged. She felt immediately relaxed in the jacket, as she would with a long-acquainted friend.

The October afternoon in south central Pennsylvania was one of those brilliant autumn days painted in shades of gold, crimson, and green, set alight by a sparkling sun hanging in an azure sky. The air was nippy, but full of the promised reward that a long walk in autumn holds: a warm house, piping hot chocolate, and a generously sized piece of her grandmother's homemade pumpkin pie.

By the time Beth finished the ten-block walk from downtown Carlisle to the house on North Pitt Street where she lived with her grandparents, her cheeks were bright from the crisp air. Her hazel eyes, slightly obscured by her delicate wire-rim glasses, were snapping with delight at her new purchase. Her long, straight brown hair, still streaked with summer blonde highlights from days in the stifling sun, was pulled back in a smart ponytail that bobbed enthusiastically as she walked.

When Beth entered the front door of the faded Victorian house, the darkness was nearly blinding. Her grandmother, Naomi, kept the heavy, worn burgundy velvet draperies in the front rooms pulled shut against the afternoon sunlight to ward off frequent migraines. But the luscious scent of baking pie laced with cinnamon and nutmeg drew Beth to the back of the house. The light from the open kitchen door guided her through the dimly lit living and dining rooms.

As usual for a Saturday afternoon, Beth found her grandmother puttering about in the huge kitchen. Naomi was just pulling the pie out of the oven when Beth walked through the doorway.

The gasp that broke from her grandmother's mouth startled Beth almost more than the crack of breaking glass as the pie smashed on the floor. Naomi stood motionless, staring at Beth as though she were an apparition, her blue-veined hands clutching the starched lacy white apron that covered her flowered housedress. Her deeply wrinkled, patrician face was washed of all color. A startled look of pain and shock flickered in her eyes.

"Nana!" Beth resorted to the childhood nickname, as she started toward her grandmother in alarm.

"No, absolutely not!" Naomi said in a strangled voice, one hand forward as if to ward off an attacker.

Beth stopped, confused.

Naomi pointed to the bomber jacket. Her hand trembled. "Where...did...you. Where did you get that... thing? I told you a thousand times to stay out of the garage attic."

Beth's brow wrinkled in surprise. "I wasn't in the garage attic, Grandma. I never go up there. You keep it locked, anyway."

Naomi pulled a ladder-back chair out from the huge farmhouse table that stood in the center of the cavernous kitchen and sat down, shaking. The pie was an orange splatter on the spotless, washed-out linoleum floor. Beth continued to watch her grandmother carefully.

"Do you want me to clean up the pie?" Beth made a motion toward the pantry where the cleaning supplies were kept in neat, organized cupboards.

Naomi shook her head wordlessly, still staring at Beth with a stunned look on her face.

"Where's Grandpa?" Beth turned toward the basement door, figuring her grandfather, Henry, would be tinkering as usual in his woodshop, making toys for the annual Marine Corps Christmas toy collection.

"Out. Doing some errands. I don't know. He doesn't. Tell me. All. His comings and goings." Naomi's words came in short spurts, as if she were having difficulty catching her breath. Beth, growing more concerned, said, "Grandma, should I call the..."

Naomi, shaking her head vigorously, pointed again at the bomber jacket, interrupting. "Answer me. Where'd you. Get. That. Thing."

"At *Wear It Again, Sam*, the vintage clothing shop on High Street," Beth answered, running the fingers of her right hand over the smooth, aged leather, unconsciously smiling. "It's genuine, Lydia said. And you know Lydia would know cause she's from..."

"I know damn well where Lydia is from." Naomi voice was pitched low, filled with rage. Beth stiffened. Naomi rarely swore. When she did, it was not a good omen.

"I want to know why... you would buy it. It's ugly." Naomi's breath came a little easier.

Beth's face flattened. Her eyes lost their luster. "I like it. It's warm. It's what I need for the job." Her words were clipped, even.

But she stood taller. Something about wearing he jacket made her feel more comfortable with her height. After all, her grandmother was forever nagging her to stop hunching over.

"Why you ever took that job in the first place is beyond me," Naomi replied, her trembling hands repositioning the already secure bobby pins that held her thinning grey hair into a tight bun at the nape of her neck. "It's unseemly. Why half the Women's Guild was shocked to see you out on the highway in a hard hat."

"It's not called the Women's Guild anymore."

Naomi's brown, piercing eyes narrowed at Beth's contrary tone. "It was the Women's Guild in 1945 when I joined it. Why they have to change everything, I'll never know."

"It's not 1945," Beth shot back. She balled up her hands and thrust them into the pockets of the bomber jacket, even though the old-fashioned gas oven was baking the kitchen as well as the pies.

"Then why are you acting like it is, wearing that ridiculous thing from a war that everyone wants to forget. It's not even a woman's coat," Naomi went on.

In spite of being agitated, Beth frowned at the continued tremor in her grandmother's hands as they rested on the highly polished kitchen table in front of her, her back slightly bowed from age.

"I want you to take it back this very minute!" Naomi demanded, misinterpreting Beth's frown.

Beth held her head higher. "No. I paid for it out of my own money. I need a serviceable, heavy jacket and I'm not going to take it back. Besides it's cool. Everybody has them."

"I don't give a damn about what everybody has," Naomi sputtered. "Take it back now. I can't stand to..." The pitch of her voice was rising as she clenched her hands in front of her on the table.

Beth softened a bit. Obviously the jacket reminded Grandma of the war. Beth knew her grandmother's brother and sister both died during that time, though Beth was fuzzy about the details. What little she knew about it came from Grandpa, who told her that Naomi's brother died in the Pacific and her sister died in England. Beth never figured out why Grandma's sister was in England and no one explained.

"Is it your sister? Gretchen?" Beth asked in a quiet, reverent tone.

Naomi reacted with startling speed, springing to her feet so quickly that she knocked over the kitchen chair. It clattered on the floor behind her. Naomi's thin, wrinkled face flushed a mottled red, emphasizing the brown age spots, the sunken cheeks. Her severe, narrow chin quivered as she practically spat out a response.

"Don't...don't you...ever...don't you...dare..."

Beth gritted her teeth, preparing for one of her grandmother's tirades.

"Don't you ever talk about her. You know nothing. Nothing!"

Beth glared back at her grandmother, her own high cheekbones flushed now from anger, rather than the cold October air.

"It's about time I did know something about her. She was your sister. My mother's aunt. I have a right to know something about my family heritage. I'm not some little kid anymore. I'm going to be twenty-three next month. I'm a grown woman. I'm sorry she died in the war..."

Naomi waved aside Beth's words with a snap of her hand. "I'm not going to speak about it."

"Maybe it's time you did speak about it, Grandma," Beth retorted, her voice beginning to quaver. She paused to bite her trembling lips. She wouldn't let her grandmother's rantings, no matter how virulent, get to her. She had worked for years to school herself against them. "The only way to deal with the past is to face it."

Beth saw her grandmother turn suddenly pale. "The past..." the words strangled in her throat. After a deep, shaky breath she continued, her voice growing more strident with each word. "Don't give me any of that psychology mumbo jumbo you learn at college. You are not going to keep that jacket. I will not ever, ever, see you in it. Do you understand?"

Beth suddenly lost the effort to stay calm. "I'll wear it on the job. I'll wear it to school. I'll wear it anywhere I want to. It's mine. I bought it and I intend to wear it. Every day."

She cringed to hear the angry little girl in her voice, arguing futilely against her grandmother's unbendable will. The subject was different, but the argument was exhaustingly familiar.

The slam of the back door barely distracted her. Even as she heard her grandfather's steps behind her, Beth's frustration and fury at her grandmother's unfairness were getting the better of her.

"I may as well tell you now." Beth felt Grandpa's firm, warm hands on her shoulders, felt his comforting, supporting presence behind her, and relaxed slightly, but continued to face her grandmother.

"I've signed up for a semester abroad. In England. I leave in January, the Seventh. I've already paid for the tuition and room and board. With the money I'll earn this fall, I'll be able to pay for the plane fare and have some left over to spend on books and touring." Her words came tumbling out in a rush, like a torrent bursting through a broken dam.

With an indrawn breath she continued. "I'll be gone through the spring and maybe even the summer. I'm going to try to get some sort of job while I'm there so I can stay longer and travel throughout the U.K. and maybe Europe."

Naomi's stance crumpled and she leaned again the table. The strong, overbearing grandmother Beth knew gave way to a worn, tired and frail eighty-two-year-old-woman.

Her grandfather walked around Beth toward her grandmother. He picked up the chair and helped Naomi sit down. Then he turned to look at Beth. Though he smiled at her, she saw concern in his round, jowly face. His nearly transparent blue eyes were watery.

"You seem to have it all planned out, Beth. Why did you wait so long to tell us?" His voice was its usual gentle, low pitched tone, but Beth heard the chiding notes beneath it. And the sadness.

Beth shrugged, refusing to feel guilty. She usually talked over her ideas and plans with her grandfather first so they could strategize on to approach Naomi for approval, even if it was given grudgingly. Henry had always been a silent champion in Beth's battles with her grandmother.

"I wanted to be sure I could pay for it. It's a full semester, fulltime, not part-time like I've been doing since I started college at Shippensburg."

The sadness in Henry's eyes became more apparent. Beth knew he hated that she had to earn her own way through school and had to commute, rather than live on campus.

She walked over and gave her grandfather a soft kiss on his aging face. He put his arm around her and gently squeezed her shoulder. She matched her grandfather's five-foot, eight-inch height.

They turned together to face Naomi. Beth saw familiar bitterness in her grandmother's uplifted face, her usual shuttered eyes and crossed arms. Her grandmother tossed her head dismissively as her grandfather began to speak.

"Naomi, she's going to be twenty-three. She's paying her own way through school. She hasn't been able to go the university she wanted to. She's worked hard. She deserves this. If we can't help her financially, at least we can help by encouraging her to have this adventure."

Naomi's eyes were the shade of bitter coffee. "You've always done this, you know," she shot back. "Always been on their side. First Gretchen. Then Rhiannon. Now Beth. You're always taken their side."

"Now, Naomi." Beth watched her grandfather lay his free hand gently on her grandmother's shoulder. Naomi shrugged it off.

Beth glanced between her grandparents. She knew the ongoing arguments between them about her mother, Rhiannon, who had left Beth in their care when Beth was a just a few months old, going off to San Francisco with her "peace-nik hippie friends" as her grandmother called them. In less than a year, she had died of a drug overdose.

All her life, Beth heard her grandmother's arguments that her grandfather spoiled Beth's mother and they weren't going to spoil Beth the same way. Arguments that her grandpa usually responded to by saying softly, with a sigh, "Now Naomi."

But Naomi had never brought her sister, Gretchen, into the argument. In fact, her grandmother rarely talked about her childhood on a farm near East Berlin in York County, twenty-miles southeast of their home in Carlisle. Or about her siblings. Naomi's mother, Nana Dunst, had died when Beth was six, so Beth never had a chance to hear family stories.

"I've done my best, Naomi," Henry said with a heavy sigh. "I've tried my hardest. I know that hasn't been good enough for you. I know life didn't turn out the way you wanted it to."

Beth saw Naomi's mouth form an ugly snarl. "I know why you take her side. Why, in that jacket, she... I don't need those reminders, Henry. But you, you still haven't forgotten. You've never even tried to forget. You've never wanted to forget. And mark my words, Henry Schmidt, she'll turn out just like..."

The sudden slam of her grandfather's fist on the kitchen cabinet startled a gasp from Beth. She spun away from his arm, shocked at this uncharacteristic show of anger.

His voice was low, even, but filled with fury.

"That's enough. I've had enough. You will stop this minute."

Naomi's face was a mixture of stunned alarm and mounting anger. "You just won't let it lie, Henry. I've tried to put it behind us, but you..."

But as Henry took a menacing step toward her, Naomi's face filled with wariness, then weariness, and then a terrible sadness. She dropped her head into her hands and began to sob loudly. Sobs that shook her thin body.

Beth stood, speechless, watching this unnerving display of emotion from her grandmother. She knew Grandma's changing moods: enraged, bitter, scathing, sarcastic, silent, cold. But never weeping.

Grandpa's face softened and he groaned softly. "Naomi, the war did terrible things to all of us. We... all... all of us... suffered."

He pulled up a chair next to his wife and put his arm gently around her shoulder. "There, there," he said softly. Beth slipped out of the kitchen silently, leaving them to each other. And to whatever ghosts haunted them.

\* \* \*

That night, curled up in the huge white wicker armchair in the turret of her attic bedroom, Beth relived the day's events in her journal, a practice she had taken up at age thirteen, after learning that many famous writers kept journals. Maybe someday she'd be a famous writer. But for now the journal helped her survive her grandmother's unpredictable and often ferocious moods.

*Maybe it's just menopause, she scribbled in her journal. Women get really moody when they go through menopause, she added. Pausing, she looked up and frowned. But her grandmother was eighty-two. She added, If it's menopause, it'd be the longest one on record!!! and chuckled at her own joke.*

*But then she frowned and continued in her journal. But she was really over the top today. I never saw Grandpa react that way, though how he tolerates her snipping, I'll never know.*

Not for the first time in her life, Beth wished she had a mother rather than a grandmother to raise her. She would never ask her grandmother about menopause. Naomi was simply unapproachable about anything that hinted of *private matters*, as she put it.

What Beth learned about being a woman was through health class, women's magazines, girlfriends, and a kindly mother of a friend who had given her a "Your First Period" kit when she was eleven.

*But I don't have a mother to help me deal with my moody grandmother, she continued in her journal. And Grandpa can only help so much. He's got to deal with her himself. I'm glad I'm getting out of here for a couple months. It'll be so cool to go to England and study. Maybe I'll look into finding a place of my own..."*

The rattled windows caught her attention and she paused to listen to the rain beat against the house. The October night had turned much colder. Somehow the damp, miserable weather fit her mood. Beth sighed and put her journal down on the white wicker coffee table she used as a footstool and curled deeper into her thick, fleece bathrobe, glad for her flannel pajamas. In spite her Saturday night ritual of a long, lingering soak in the claw foot bathtub with lilac-scented bubble bath and lots of after-bath powder and a mindless romance novel, she didn't feel at all relaxed.

She was a voracious reader, with her usual reading fare being classics, literary novels or assignments from her college literature classes. Saturday night, though, was solely escapist reading. She thought her British Lit prof would be horrified to know she read novels with heaving bosoms and pirates on the cover, but she always imagined herself arguing that Robert Louis Stevenson was a classic writer and wasn't his genre romance? Or what about the Bronte sisters. Or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, for all that.

Tonight, ironically enough, the romance novel was set in World War II. She could almost picture the hero of the book in a bomber jacket just like the one she bought today. But the story only increased her simmering anger at her grandmother's scathing reaction to the bomber jacket, a purchase which had pleased Beth so much.

Her grumbling stomach reminded Beth she had skipped supper. When Grandpa had opened the attic door at five-thirty and called upstairs to tell her it was time to eat, she had shouted back, "I'm not hungry, Grandpa. I had a late lunch in town. Go ahead without me."

She heard his sigh echo up the stairs and almost recanted her lie, but refused to sit across the table from her grandmother after the scene today in the kitchen.

She was hungry and that only made her more irritable.

Impulsively, she decided to slip downstairs and eat a piece of pie. There had been a second pie in the oven and the thought of ice-cold pumpkin pie with a huge glass of milk was enough to incur her grandmother's wrath at messing up her spotless kitchen, and even more, *eating dessert later in the evening when she didn't have the courtesy to join us for dinner.*

She could hear her grandmother's voice in her head.

"So what!" she said out loud, definitely.

The small, floral alarm clock on her nightstand read eleven-forty-nine. The house was utterly quiet. Her grandmother would have long since gone to bed and her grandfather was probably nestled in the small television room off the living room watching his usual fare of the History Channel or an old movie on Turner Classic Movies. Cable television was the one thing he insisted on, in spite of her grandmother's protest at the expense.

Beth glanced at the bomber jacket which hung securely on the white wicker bedpost. The bedside lamp cast a glow on it. It was a bit out of place in her pale pink bedroom with the floral border, the room her Grandpa fixed up for her ten years ago, as a surprise for her thirteenth birthday. As she tiptoed down the creaky attic stairs, she recalled that day.

"You're a young lady now, a teenager, you should have a special place of your own," Grandpa said when he led her up to the converted attic room, which took up the front half of the large third floor. He had painted it, built in a huge walk-in closet, bookshelves and storage areas.

But even better, he created a special reading nook in the round turret, building a platform that was reached by three steps.

Her grandmother fussed and fumed about the whole thing. "Stuff and nonsense," she



said. “Henry, you spoil that child and she’ll end up just like her mother. Ungrateful. Cold hearted. Running off like that.”

It was a complaint she heard from her grandmother as long as she could remember, just as she always knew exactly how her grandfather would reply, “Hush, Naomi. Rhiannon just had a bad time of it there, at the end. But what a gift she left us in our Suzanna Elizabeth.”

Henry also bought the white wicker bedroom set, which had outraged Naomi even more. “Wicker furniture. How ridiculous. It belongs on a front porch. It’ll never hold up. And how do you expect me to climb all these stairs and clean another floor in this house?”

“I’ll clean it, Grandma, really. You won’t ever have to come up and get my laundry or dust or anything. I’ll change my sheets and everything. You won’t have to worry.”

And Beth, who already did many chores around the house, was good to her word.

The one drawback was the cold. The ancient furnace barely managed to send much heat clanging through the pipes to the attic, but it was a tradeoff Beth was glad to make. Being out of reach of her grandmother’s constant interruptions when she was in her room reading or studying or listening to music was worth the need for extra blankets in the winter and several fans in the summer.

Once she had moved to her attic retreat, her grandmother had to resort to making a list for her, because she refused *to climb one more flight of stairs. I’m out of breath enough as it is.*

As she opened the door at the bottom of the attic stairs, she paused. Silence. Treading as carefully as she could, she continued back the hall toward the bathroom and around to the back stairs which led down to the kitchen. She flipped on the stair light and started down, realizing that it’d been months since she dusted this area of the house.

Since high school graduation, when she started working fulltime and attending college part time, Beth’s list of chores had decreased, but only because her grandfather insisted.

“Naomi, she needs time to study. She keeps her room clean and does her own laundry and dusts and vacuums the whole house once a week. That’s enough.”

“She lives here. She should contribute,” was Naomi’s stiff reply.

“She does. She gives us room and board, which I think is a lot to ask, as she’s already paying her own way through college.”

“College is a waste of time. A lot of good it did Rhiannon. Just filled her head with nonsense and flighty ideas. Music. Then cultural anthropology. Never could settle on anything, that girl. What a waste. As much a waste as British Literature. Who ever heard of such a silly thing. What kind of job will that degree get her?” Naomi had demanded to know.

Beth, who was standing right there during the argument, gritted her teeth. How like her grandmother to speak about her as if she wasn’t there. Though she knew putting in her two cents was useless, she couldn’t help herself.

“My plan is to teach. In a college. Eventually. Once I get my doctorate.”

“Bah,” Naomi sputtered, her hands on her hips in her classic *don't argue with me* stance. “What college would want some American teaching British literature. Besides, how do you expect to get the money to pay for all that schooling? Not working at that bookstore you won't.”

Although Beth would never admit it, last summer she had taken Naomi's point to heart, and given up her beloved job at the used bookstore where she had started working part time in high school and found a job with the construction crew as a flagger. Now she worked at the bookstore only on Saturdays.

Stealthily, Beth eased open the door at the bottom of the stairs and entered the darkened kitchen. She thought she heard the faint sounds of the television coming from the front of the house.

Once a month on a Friday night she and her grandpa had a standing date to watch old movies together. She would rent them from the video store or borrow them from the college library. They would watch Fred Astaire or Humphrey Bogart or John Wayne or her favorite were black and white films from the thirties and forties. Henry would make delicious, buttery popcorn for them. In the summer he'd make Beth a root beer float and in the winter, a big mug of hot chocolate. Then he'd pour himself his one weekly glass of ale, which he drank at room temperature, a taste he said he acquired in the service when he was stationed in England.

Naomi never joined them for their monthly movie night. She would putter around the kitchen, cleaning, cooking, or getting ready for her weekly Saturday baking. Sometimes she would work on bills and paperwork at her desk in the living room or it in the front parlor knitting or crocheting, skills she had tried to teach Beth, but gave up when Beth didn't learn fast enough to satisfy her grandmother.

What Naomi didn't know was Beth had finally learned to knit from a friend at college. Sometimes she sat in her attic room listening to Big Band music on her CD player, creating scarves and afghans which she sold to friends for pocket change.

With the light from the stairway illuminating a narrow patch of the kitchen, Beth was able to see her way to the refrigerator. She eased the door of the squat, white Frigidaire open and immediately spotted the partially eaten pumpkin pie. Pulling it out, and grabbing the milk carton, she set them on the countertop and opened a drawer next to the sink where her grandmother kept the kitchen utensils and found the pie server.

She didn't even bother with a plate, but ate the pie standing up at the kitchen sink, washing it down with the bone-chilling milk.

“I should have made hot chocolate,” she muttered to herself.

“I would have made it for you and saved the mess.”

Beth nearly dropped the glass tumbler as she spun around. Her grandmother was a silhouette backlit by the stairway light. Beth had to blink twice to be sure she was real.

“Eating sweets this late at night will give you nightmares,” her grandmother's cautionary

statement confirmed that Beth wasn't imagining things.

"I didn't hear you come down," Beth replied, trying not to sound defensive. She hated when her grandmother snuck up on her, as if trying to catch her at mischief.

"Obviously." Beth heard her grandmother's usual weary sarcasm and steeled herself for another argument.

"I didn't mean to wake you," Beth said without apology and turning back to the kitchen sink, washed the glass and pie server and put them in the dish drainer, then returned the pie and milk to the frig. She felt her grandmother's faint disapproval.

"I guess I did it wrong," Beth said, as she turned back to her grandmother.

"What?" Her grandmother seemed confused. "Did what wrong?"

Beth sighed. Maybe she wasn't going to get an argument. "I'm tired. I'm going to bed."

"Going abroad to study is a silly waste of time."

Beth gritted her teeth. *I won't let her get to me, I won't.*

"Going abroad never did anyone any good. Gretchen, William. Henry. No good came to any of them." She spoke in a weary, almost dreamy voice.

Beth frowned. Her grandmother was never pensive. Yet Beth didn't think it would be wise to point out that her grandfather seemed no worse for wear from his experience abroad. Instead she said in as even a tone as she could muster, "Well, Grandma, you're entitled to your opinion, but it's already done. I've made my deposit; the arrangements are taken care of. And it is my money."

"Utterly ridiculous waste of hard-earned money," her grandmother's voice was once again edged with bitterness.

Beth refrained from saying, "So you recognized that I work hard," and instead walked around her grandmother toward the steps, but was stopped by a hand on her arm. She looked at her grandmother, who was eyeing her intensely.

"It's best to let the dead rest in peace." Her grandmother's voice was solemn, yet edged with warning.

Beth stepped back, startled.

"I don't know what you mean, Grandma. What's that got to do with studying abroad?"

Her grandmother walked past her silently to the kitchen sink, and began to wipe off the counter. She didn't turn around, but said again, "Eating sweets this late at night will give you nightmares."

Beth sighed. "Goodnight, Grandma."

After a quick stop in the bathroom to brush her teeth, Beth returned to her snug, attic room. She untied the belt of her thick, white full length bathrobe, another of Grandpa's thoughtful presents, and laid it across the foot of her bed where it would be handy in the morning against the chill. Frost was predicted overnight.

