

Author’s Note: This is an early version of Chapter Two from The Bomber Jacket. It gives some more backstory to Beth’s relationship with her grandmother, Naomi. As with the early version of Chapter 1, most of it was deleted from the final draft in order to tighten up the beginning of the novel.

Chapter Two

Beth was not surprised by her grandmother’s reaction when she came into the dining room at ten after ten the next morning in her pajamas, bathrobe and slippers.

“Beth! You’re late for breakfast and you’re not even dressed for church. You know it’s the height of slovenliness to eat in your night clothes!”

Beth said nothing, but simply sat down wearily at the table which, unlike her, was dressed in its Sunday best—white linen tablecloth and Grandma Dunst’s blue willow china, kept in the glass-faced corner cupboard except for Sunday breakfast and special holidays.

Sighing, Beth took several swallows of orange juice, already poured in a cut-glass tumbler and waiting at her place.

“You did have nightmares, didn’t you! I told you so!” her grandmother said in a triumphant voice.

Beth’s grandfather frowned at his wife. “Naomi, leave the girl alone. She looks exhausted. Are you okay, Susie Q?”

“I wish you wouldn’t call her that!” her grandmother shot back as she stood up and went into the kitchen.

“Well, her name *is* Susanna Elizabeth, now isn’t it, Naomi?” Henry said loudly in Naomi’s direction as he winked at Beth, who smiled in return, but wished her grandmother would stop speaking in exclamation points.

Naomi came back into the dining room with a gold-trimmed oval platter mounded high with fat, blueberry-laden pancakes, and started piling a stack on Beth’s plate.

Beth held up her hand in protest. “No, Grandma, really, I’m not at all hungry. I’m just going to have some yogurt and granola, if I have anything at all.”

Naomi fiercely speared the innocent pancakes and thrust them back on the platter.

“Did you have a nightmare, honey?” her grandfather asked in a concerned voice.

“Oh, not a nightmare, really. Just an odd dream. Then I couldn’t get back to sleep once I woke up from the dream.”

“Told you not to eat sweets late at night,” her grandmother interjected.”

Her grandfather looked at Beth in surprise. “Did you come down later for a snack?” He glanced over at Naomi and said, his brow wrinkling, “I thought you had gone to bed. I was

watching the History Channel and didn't hear anyone."

"You know you're half deaf in one ear anyway, so no surprise you didn't hear us. She did come down and I had gone to bed, but I wasn't asleep and I thought I heard the attic door open," Naomi explained as she put a large portion of pancakes and plump sausages on Henry's plate, and then a much smaller amount on her own. The intense, meaty odor of the juicy, fried meat made Beth slightly nauseous and brought back an instant recollection of the smells from her dream.

Her grandfather leaned over and patted Beth's hand gently, "Do you want to stay home from church this morning? You should go back to bed. I can bring you a cup of piping hot tea." Beth always found it amusing that her grandfather preferred tea to coffee, another habit he said he picked up in England during the war, along with the warm ale.

Naomi set the platter down with a thud. "There you go again, coddling her as if she was a baby. One sleepless night is no excuse for missing church."

Beth was too weary to argue, but the thought of lounging in her pajamas on a cold October Sunday was immensely appealing. She stood up. "Thanks, Grandpa, I think I will stay home in bed. You don't have to bother with the tea. I'll come down later this afternoon if I'm hungry."

Her grandfather stood up and put his arm around her shoulders. "You go on now, honey, up to bed. After church I'll come up and bring you that tea. If you're asleep, I'll drink it myself and bring you a fresh cup later in the day."

"Hans Albert Schmidt, you never bring me a cup of tea when I'm in bed with a migraine," her grandmother retorted, emphasizing each part of her grandfather's name, something Beth knew indicated her grandmother's ire was up.

As Beth walked out of the dining room, she heard her grandfather reply in a surprisingly bitter voice, "I used to, years ago when we were first married, don't you remember, Naomi? But you said you wanted to be left in peace."

Beth wondered if her grandfather was still perturbed with her grandmother about yesterday's argument in the kitchen. She rarely heard her grandfather get angry or express frustration with her grandmother. His usual response was to be passively nonreactive to her moods, which often made her grandmother angrier. *Wonder if she's just looking for a good fight and Grandpa never gives her one*, she thought as she climbed the two sets of stairs to her attic room.

Beth was grateful to crawl back into bed, though she lay awake for some time listening as the wind thumped the nearest branches of ancient oak tree against the side of the house. But then, deliciously warm, she succumbed to sleep.

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The dream was exactly the same. The same progression and awareness of smells,

sensations and tastes: engine oil, cold metal, leather and damp wool. The same sense of fear, only this time it settled in the pit of her stomach. Then there was something new. thumping sound, a steady thumping sound that kept getting closer and closer...

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She was sitting up in her bed when her grandfather opened the door at the top of the stairs that led into her bedroom.

“Beth, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to wake you.”

He set a wooden bed tray on the trunk at the foot of her bed. He had brought an individual-sized teapot, a china cup and saucer, a plate of scones, cut and slathered with butter and her Grandma’s homemade strawberry jam. Beth saw him pause and look intently at the bomber jacket as he set the tray down.

Her grandfather had changed from his black Sunday suit into his everyday outfit of creased, cuffed, khaki serge pants, a plaid shirt, polished leather tie shoes, along with his favorite faded maroon cardigan with patches at the elbows. He sat on the edge of her bed next to her where she had lain back down, now fully awake.

“Susie Q, are you still upset about the argument with Grandma yesterday? I really didn’t mean to lose my temper.”

Beth felt her heart melt at her grandfather’s apology. How like him to take the blame. *It’s Grandma who should apologize*, she thought angrily to herself, *but that’ll never happen.*

“No, no, I’m not. Really. I just had a weird dream... last night... and then couldn’t sleep. So I’m a bit tired. Been doing a lot of school work and have a mid-term coming up.” She was oddly reluctant to tell him about her dream or that she just had the same dream again.

“Well, sit up and have some tea. I’ll pour it for you.”

He brought over the tray and held it till she got settled, then placed it so it formed a table across her lap. “Good, strong Darjeeling,” he said as he poured the tea.

He kept her company while she sipped the tea and nibbled the buttery scones, one of his favorite afternoon treats. He was so pleased when the local bakery started making them. “Nothing like fresh baked scones with your afternoon tea. Wish I could talk Naomi into making them.”

Beth’s grandmother always refused to indulge in her husband’s “strange English tastes.” Telling her grandmother that scones were Scottish, not English, the first time her grandfather brought them home hadn’t won her any points.

“Hogwash. They’re on the same island. What’s the difference,” her grandmother retorted.

“Well, like the difference between the United States and Canada, Grandma,” Beth replied, getting her grandmother’s the usual silent glare in response.

After Beth and her grandfather had passed a pleasant hour chatting about her plans for the spring semester in England and places she might go visit in the U.K. and Europe, he gathered the

tea things and started toward the door. Just as he reached it, she said hesitantly, “Grandpa, does the bomber jacket bother you?”

Her grandfather turned around slowly, then stared for a long time at the jacket, hanging on the post at the foot of her bed.

“Grandpa?” Beth said quietly, wondering at his silence.

He continued to look at the jacket as he replied in a thoughtful voice, “It was a shock to see you wearing it.”

“A shock?” Beth sat up taller. “Why a shock? Does it look so awful on me?”

“No, no, sweetheart, it looks absolutely perfect on you,” he said, smiling at her. “That’s why it was a shock, I guess.”

“I don’t understand, Grandpa.”

He shook his head. “Never you mind. You bought it with your own money. It’s no wonder you like such things. After all, I’ve filled your head with old movies and war documentaries over the years.”

“But you never talk about your own experience.”

She thought his pale blue eyes looked terribly sad as he said so softly she barely heard him, “Some things are best left in the past.”

“Now you sound like Grandma. She said it’s best to let the dead rest in peace.”

“For once I agree with your Grandmother.”

Beth looked at her grandfather, startled, and then they both started laughing at the same time.

“Now that’s a rare occasion, indeed,” her grandfather said as he walked back to the bed and, holding the tray to one side, gave her a kiss on the cheek. “You rest up, now. And wear your jacket proudly, pumpkin. It has a noble history. Pay no mind to your Grandma. You know how she is. She’ll get over it, soon enough.”

Beth nodded and watched her grandfather leave, but wondered what things in her grandparents’ past had been so stirred up by a leather coat.

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The bomber jacket kept her wonderfully warm throughout the remaining four weeks of the construction season, which ended in mid-November. During those weeks she continued, night after night, to have the same dream, and continued to find herself awake at the same time each night, sitting up in her bed, disoriented, her stomach in knots.

Gradually it got easier to fall back to sleep without tossing and turning. Beth also noticed that the dream began to change subtly. When she first realized something was different, she started to detail the differences in a section at the back of her journal, keeping her journal and

pen on her bedside table so she could write about THE DREAM as she began to think of it, the moment she woke up with the alarm.

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*Oct. 29, 1996
Monday
6:05 a.m.*

Last night was the 16th night in a row that I had THE DREAM. And last night something changed. Most of it was exactly the same as ever: I could dream it with my eyes open: the smell of engine oil, old leather, and damp wool. The bitter taste of cold metal. The sensation of muffled breathing, as if someone has a hand over my mouth and nose. And the knot of fear in the pit of my stomach.

But then something new happened. I heard something. There's been that occasional thumping noise in the background but now it was a constant, low roar that seemed to take up the empty spaces so the dream felt full.

It was smell. Taste. Touch. Sound.

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*Nov. 3, 1996
Sunday
8:37 a.m.*

Yesterday was 3 weeks since I bought the bomber jacket and it seems as if THE DREAM is growing, widening, expanding. As if at first, I was in a tight cocoon limited only to smells, tastes, and then sound. Now there is a sense of being in a place, a confined space, but a contained space. That there is an inside and an outside and I'm on the inside. And that constant, low roar seems to be coming from the inside. THE DREAM always starts the same way, but now it's longer, fuller, and more complex.

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*Nov. 7, 1996
Thursday
6:01 a.m.*

Since Sunday THE DREAM has been the same with that sensation of being inside some

contained space. But now another thing. Last night I heard a voice. It was close to my ears but not like it came from somewhere or someone nearby, but right beside my ears, almost echoing. But I knew it wasn't my own voice. Weird. I don't know how I knew that, but I do. And it didn't come from within my head, so it wasn't my own voice, but next to my head and muffled, crackly, and even weirder yet, I think it was a guy's voice.

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Nov. 9, 1996

Saturday

7:35 a.m.

Have to get up and get to the bookstore by 9, but wanted to jot down the new changes to THE DREAM. It was a sensation of movement and a feeling of holding onto something. I could feel my hands and I realized I am seated. Everything else the same, with all the new sensations and still the crackly, male voice next to my ears, but this new sensation of movement and holding onto something. THE DREAM just keeps getting bigger. And clearer, in some way. As if some fog in my brain is clearing away and I can see it. No, I don't really see anything, it's all the other senses except sight, but I can now sense it more clearly.

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On the second Sunday of November, there was a guest preacher at their church, The First Presbyterian Church of Carlisle. He was a visiting minister from the Church of Scotland, which Beth knew was the predecessor of the American Presbyterian Church. She sat enthralled with his accent—the clipped words, soft burr and smatterings of Scottish words and phrases that slipped through his Anglicized voice: *wee lassies, aye, 'twas a brilliant thought*. Beth thought if he preached every Sunday she'd never have a problem staying awake.

That night she awoke at 3:27 a.m., alert, awake.

Nov. 12, 1996

Monday

3:27 a.m.

I had to write. Right away. I'm wide awake and sitting here in the middle of the night with my bedside light on and it feels like my bed is an island surrounded by a dark sea. Weird. But that's not it, no, not at all. Tonight THE DREAM changed completely.

I heard a voice. My voice. I AM the person in the dream. I mean, I'm not, but it's like I am. I'm experiencing what the person in the dream is experiencing: the smells, tastes, sensations, sounds, feelings. So it feels like I am the person.

I heard my voice. Responding to that crackly voice next to my ears.

"Roger that. Five miles to target."

I'm the pilot. And I'm Scottish. And I'm wearing a bomber jacket.

Beth stared at her bomber jacket hanging at the foot of her bed. A slow, creeping chill inched up her spine. Shivering, the last words of her entry were as quivery as her thoughts. *That bomber jacket at the foot of my bed.*

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Thanksgiving morning, ten days later, Beth was thinking about the latest version of THE DREAM as she was setting the table for the feast her grandmother was preparing, as usual, way too much food for three people: a large turkey (*You can't get a decent-tasting small one*, was her grandmother's excuse), cranberry-orange relish, mashed potatoes, potato filling, sweet potatoes with marshmallows, green beans, homemade applesauce, baked corn, creamed onions, and giblet gravy. Beth always picked out the chopped-up pieces of liver, heart, and other unspeakable parts from the gravy. And of course, three kinds of pie.

Wonder if he got food like this on Thanksgiving during the war, she mused. *Wait, you idiot, the Brits don't celebrate Thanksgiving.* She chuckled to herself and was startled by her grandfather's voice, "Hey, Duckie, what's so funny? Hand me those glasses."

Setting the table on Thanksgiving was the chore assigned to Beth and her grandfather. The table was set as for Sunday breakfast, except with a blue tablecloth instead of the normal white one and with the addition of all of the cut glassware and relish dishes. Plus they used Grandma Dunst's silverware, taken out of its velvet-lined flatware box for its thrice-yearly airing at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter.

Fresh flowers had the place of honor at the center of the table. Grandpa always got Grandma a Thanksgiving arrangement at the local florist. *Silly waste of money*, Grandma always said, but Beth saw the small smile on her grandmother's face when she unwrapped it.

"Oh, sorry Grandpa. I was daydreaming." Beth was also trying to figure out how to tell him about her change of plans for her semester abroad. The morning after she realized THE DREAM was about a Scottish bomber pilot, she went into the foreign studies office and found a sympathetic counselor who was touched by Beth's fabricated tale that she had just discovered Scottish ancestors and wanted to study in Scotland instead of England. With a bit of work, some extra money and some luck, all the arrangements were made and the connecting train ticket from London to Edinburgh purchased.

Now she just had to tell her grandparents. Not that it would make any difference to them; they would want to know why, though. Beth didn't want to say the real reason. Because of THE DREAM, which, ironically enough, she hadn't had once since the night she realized she was a Scottish bomber pilot.

No, she said to herself, mentally shaking her head. *He's a Scottish bomber pilot.*

"Beth, stop daydreaming you silly goose, and hand me those glasses."

Beth blinked and got to work helping her grandfather finish their chore. As they set three places at the table which seated twelve, Beth longed, as she did every Thanksgiving, for a real family—mother, father, sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles—enough people to fill up the empty spaces at the dining room table.

But there was no one else to fill up the seats. Grandma had only a smattering of cousins who lived out of state. Grandpa's siblings, two brothers and a sister, were no longer living. Only Grandpa's sister had children, and they were scattered to the wind.

Now it was her grandfather who was chuckling.

"Grandpa, what's so funny?"

"Oh, I just remembered the time when you were eleven and created those paper plate faces complete with yarn hair and taped them to the empty chairs."

"Yes," Beth nodded, remembering. "Grandma was none too pleased. Complaining about the tape on the mahogany chairs."

"Nope, but it sure was funny. I still have that picture you took. Practically had to hold your Grandma down so she wouldn't tear those paper plate faces off before you took the picture." He paused and looked at the table with satisfaction. "There, we're done. Looks right pretty. And I'm hungry," her grandfather said. "Let's go see if we can snag something from the kitchen."

"Oh, no, Grandpa, don't do that. You know how Grandma is on Thanksgiving morning."

Because Naomi was so busy on Thanksgiving morning preparing dinner, breakfast was only coffee and the cinnamon sugar pastries that she made with the leftover pie dough.

In addition to setting the table, Beth's other Thanksgiving duty was done early Wednesday evening: cook down the pumpkin and peel apples for pies and help with the applesauce. Yesterday evening, tired after her last day of work as a flagger, Beth asked, "Why don't you make the applesauce a week ahead of time and just keep it in the frig?" She only got the evil eye from her grandmother.

Beth followed her grandfather into the kitchen. It was filled with the alluring smells of roasting turkey. As expected, Naomi, dressed in her Sunday best and an apron emblazoned with a turkey, paused in her task of peeling potatoes to scold her husband when he opened the refrigerator door.

"Stop fressing, you'll spoil your appetite."

“Not likely to happen with Grandpa,” Beth chuckled.

Henry’s voice echoed inside the packed Frigidaire. “Dinner’s not for hours.”

“It’s at two o’clock. When we always have Thanksgiving dinner then. It’s after twelve, now anyway. If you must eat something, have another cinnamon swirl.”

“How about if I make Grandpa and me a salad for a light lunch?” Beth was always trying to add healthy foods to her grandparents’ high carb diet, knowing her grandfather with his history of two heart attacks, should be eating greens and fresh vegetables, not parties.

“Salad’s not a Thanksgiving food.” Naomi pulled her husband away from the refrigerator door and closed it. “We didn’t have lettuce by the end of November.”

“Maybe not in the 1930s, Grandma, but now you can get it year round in the supermarket.”

Naomi made a growling sound in her throat. “Here, peel some potatoes if you need something to do,” her grandmother said, handing her the potato peeler and a half-naked spud. “Henry, go find something to do.”

“Grandpa, no, stay here with us and tell me a story about Thanksgiving when you were a kid.” Her grandfather’s face lit up and he pulled out a chair at the kitchen table, ignoring his wife’s, “Henry, not there, you’re in the way.”

“Sure, Susie Q. Let me tell you about the time my younger brother and I...”

And so Thanksgiving Day sauntered by, her grandfather telling tales and her grandmother correcting him with details such as, “No, it was August, not September of 1932,” or “Your mother always said it was your older brother, not your younger one who refused to eat the turkey when he realized it was one he had seen on your uncle’s farm.”

In the end, she didn’t tell her grandfather about her changes of plans until early the first Friday night in December while they were watching a Clark Cable movie set in World War II. He didn’t say much, except, “I’m not surprised,” and “I’ll tell your grandmother. It won’t matter to her anyway. England, Scotland, they’re all the same to her.”

That night, her dream began again and continued sporadically until the day she left for Scotland, each time, slightly more intense, slightly more expanded, and slightly more present in her thoughts throughout the day.