

The Moleskine

Rose Gísladóttir stirred her tea gently.

Her withered hands shook as she picked up the warm china cup. The wooden floorboards creaked as she slowly tiptoed her way to the front door. She opened the door with a gust of cool air to the coming light; the horizon beyond the trees shimmered with hues of green, purple and red.

Rose took in a deep breath. She was old, her frame had submitted to the passing of age, but her lungs, her heart, and her mind were strong. The cool air of the dying night soothed her being. Every morning she woke early to the sunrise.

Her gray eyes glanced to her rocking chair. *No*, she thought. *I shall walk today.*

She left her slippers on the steps, and she stepped into the lush grass barefoot. A delicate shiver climbed its way up her legs and up her spine as her toes were submerged into the morning dew left on the blades of grass. She took her first sip of the green tea. The sweet warmth of the drink passed through her body, washing away the goose bumps that had risen from the cold of the moist grass.

Rose made her way to the sidewalk, coarse and unwelcoming to the smooth skin of her feet. All throughout her childhood she danced down the rolling green hills of Iceland, she swam in the cold depths of its lakes, she welcomed the coming of the sun and the passing of the moon. Now she stood on the sidewalk of a small American neighborhood, watching the stars dim and vanish as the sun outshone them. She closed her eyes as she took another sip, and breathed deeply.

Then from the left she heard someone running towards her, the footsteps beating louder and louder on the cement. Her eyes flew open and she looked, and saw a boy, a teenager, running in sweats. She could hear his breath now, inhaling and exhaling with each step.

There was a flutter of her heart when she recognized who the boy was. Leifs Birgisson, the son of another Icelandic family that lived nearby.

Leifs slowed to a sudden stop once he saw Rose standing on the sidewalk with her cup of tea. The tips of his dark hair poked out from the hat he wore. His cheeks and nose were rose red from running, and his misty breath visible in the cold of the morning.

Rose smiled. “*Góðan dag,*” she greeted him in their native tongue.

Leifs offered a shaky smile. They had not had any sort of personal communication; Leifs’s parents visited Rose often, but Leifs hadn’t taken the opportunity to get to know the woman. “Hello,” he breathed.

“You are up rather early,” she said in her thick Icelandic accent with her gentle smile. She took another sip of her green tea, which was quickly losing its warmth.

“So are you,” replied Leifs, “and without any slippers, too. Aren’t you cold?” He wasn’t sure what else to say, but he thought he should show some genuine care.

“I won’t be out for long.”

There was a silence; Rose returned her glance to the sky, which was growing noticeably brighter. Leifs looked too. The beauty of it struck him, and he realized he never paid much appreciation to sunrises anymore.

“How are your parents?” Rose asked randomly.

Leifs looked at the old woman. He wondered just how old she really was. “Busy,” he stated simply. “Mom’s been out of town, but Dad has a new project for work.”

Rose looked at him again with her piercing eyes; he looked away, unable to meet them. But a sadness filled him. The woman was lonely, she was reaching out for another human being. He wondered what her story was before she moved to America.

“I see,” she nearly whispered. She was growing colder by the minute. She hugged her gown closer to her skin, wrinkled and white. She could see the boy was growing uncomfortable. “Well then, I suppose I shouldn’t keep you from your early work-out. Tell your father I hope to see him soon.”

Leifs nodded. “All right, I will. *Sjáumst síðar*,” he said in farewell.

He started to jog again, not looking back to the old woman.

Rose watched him run down the street for a moment, then turned to her house. She looked into her tea, cold and not even half empty. She poured the rest of it into the grass as she reached the steps to her porch. She did not look back at the sun as it peaked over the treetops, she did not care anymore that her feet were wet and covered in grass.

Leifs took another route to his home, avoiding the way back that would take him near Rose’s house. He ran faster, not knowing what was driving him. There was something about Rose that deeply disturbed him, something that was secretive and subtle. Whatever it was, it was there, lurking, beneath her sad eyes and frail limbs.

Once he reached his home, he closed the door quietly. His father would not be up yet. He quickly reached his room and began to change for school. He gathered his notebooks and textbooks, stuffing them all into his bag.

Leifs's high school was small. He was a senior, and there was only a month left till summer break. He often thought of what rested beyond that one month mark, once he walked the final steps to his graduation. It was a void, unknown, as abysmal as outer space.

It was near noon, and the day had grown warmer. Leifs stuffed his jacket into his locker, and walked through the crowded hallways to his advanced art class. Girls laughed and gossiped about new happenings as he walked past. A group of football players huddled nearby. Leifs clutched his sketchbook closer, felt the pocket of his jeans to ensure his art pens were there. He felt blind, worthless, without these objects in his hands.

Then he felt someone join him. Leifs looked up to the taller boy, and smiled to see it was Kale, his most trusted friend. Kale had accompanied Leifs all throughout high school. He brought Leifs away from the isolation he often went through in school; Kale reminded Leifs he was a teenager, and he taught him to revel in the freedom this brought.

Kale looked at Leifs closely. He was from New Zealand, and spoke with a slight but noticeable accent. Although he was taller, Kale was of the same complexion as Leifs's Icelandic heritage, but he was carefree while Leifs was pensive. Kale was fire and Leifs was ice; Kale was outgoing and Leifs was reserved.

“So, you know I know something’s wrong. You’ve got that look,” said Kale as he dodged a boy who wasn’t looking where he was going as he yelled something behind his back. He always had a bounce in his step, and he moved quickly.

Leifs sighed, and looked away. “It’s nothing. I just saw someone this morning and she left some kind of impression on me.”

“Yeah? Tell me about it.”

“I said it’s nothing.”

“Well, obviously not.”

Leifs said nothing and continued to their art class, which was in sight.

“Come on, Leafy. You can’t hide anything from me,” said Kale, a goofy smile on his thin lips.

Leifs gave up. “Fine. I’ll tell you in art.”

They both dived into their art class as the final bell tolled. They went to their table in the back, secluded from the rest of the small art class. The collection of artist students here was eclectic: a cheerleader, a punk rocker, a hippy, and other representatives of various cliques. Kale and Leifs were the foreigners.

“You know that old woman from Iceland? Rose? My parents know her, and visit her a lot,” said Leifs as he opened his sketchbook to his pen drawing of a violin.

“Nope,” said Kale. He was working on a portrait of a dancing couple in a sharp tux and eloquent, but fun, polka dot dress. It looked as if it could have been taken straight from the 40’s.

“Well, I saw her when I was on my morning run, just standing there on the sidewalk watching the sunrise. She looked... sad. Alone. And it just, I don’t know, made me feel different.”

“Different how?” Kale was mixing paints to get a right shade of purple; he always rendered his artwork into swirling colors. He could take a picture of an ordinary man and turn him into a being of a dozen different rainbows with a dozen more shades of various colors, all intertwined and flowing.

Leifs paused, thinking. “I felt that there was a lot in her. I wanted to rip it out of her, uncover whatever it is that makes her who she is.”

Kale paused too, and looked at Leifs. It was never an odd look that Kale would give him. It was curious, thoughtful, almost innocent. This was another reason why Leifs liked having Kale around: he never treated Leifs as if he was insane.

“Maybe you should get to know her,” stated Kale. He returned to his portrait.

“I don’t know. Maybe. My dad might visit her today or tomorrow if I tell him Rose said hello.”

“Then go! You know, if there were someone that lived here who lived most of their life in New Zealand, I would want to get to know them. You’ve lived most of your life here in America, Leifs. You should see what this woman could offer you,” said Kale, his brown eyes locked onto Leifs’s blue eyes.

“I guess you’re right... my parents don’t talk much about Iceland, and they don’t speak much Icelandic anymore,” replied Leifs quietly.

Kale smiled encouragingly. “I kind of want to meet her, now.”

Leifs's face brightened. "Will you come with me? It would make things a lot easier."

Kale chuckled. "Thank you for inviting me, I would love to come."

Rose sat in her rocking chair on the porch. She rocked back and forth slowly as the day passed. She wore linen garments, decorated with intricate designs. They were light and comfortable, and her favorite thing to wear at home.

She watched cars pass. She watched little children play in the streets, joggers with dogs on leashes. Hours seemed to go by, ticking the day away.

Then clouds blotted out the sun and a cool breeze brushed her thin white hair across her shoulders. She could smell rain coming. She stopped the movement of her chair and stood. Her spine cracked as she stretched.

Once inside, she went to her living room. The interior of her home was decorated with old art from her younger days in Iceland. She rarely told anyone that the art was her own. The walls were a dark wood. It looked like her home could be a cabin, somewhere in the mountains, secluded with a fire going constantly, tea on the stove, and hundreds of books to read on the bookshelves.

But no... regret clouded her heart as she recognized the truth. She was living in an American neighborhood, where she barely knew anyone. Her past was left behind her, and barely anything physical was left from those days. Except for one thing.

She moved into another room through the kitchen, into the study, deeper in her house. Three of the walls were covered with bookcases. The fourth wall had a desk, which was littered with stacks of old papers, and a small lamp. She walked to the back

wall, and she reached up, scanning the spines of the books with her fingers. There was a fine layer of dust coating the books.

For decades, she had collected many books: biographies, mysteries, romances, classics, poetry, non-fiction, and photography collections. In Iceland, books were treasure to many people she knew. She remembered times when everyone spent the days reading, letting imaginations soar when the real world grew lonely.

She smiled once she found what she was seeking. On the fourth shelf, there was a series of untitled black books, some large and thick, some pocket-sized and thin. They all had the same meaning to her. They were her journals and her sketchbooks, each filled with her sketches and her thoughts. There was one in particular she wanted in this moment; she recognized it at once. She removed it from the shelf. It was pocket-sized, and some of the pages within were puffed from watercolors and small collages she had created long ago. She moved her hand over the smooth, plain black cover of the notebook, and she moved the elastic band that kept it closed. She flipped through the pages, remembering.

Watercolor paintings of sunsets and sunrises, of old friends that had passed away, collages cut out from magazines and excerpts from books, quotes from famous speakers, her daily thoughts scribbled down in pen in a rush. This one was created at the zenith of her life; it marked a period when she was in love, when she felt like she could soar across the oceans. It marked a period when she was at home. She held the notebook close to her breast, and closed her eyes.

Then there was a knock at the door, and she jumped with a quiet gasp. She turned to the open door of the room and peered down the hall, and saw through the front door

that it was Birgis, Leifs's father, Leifs himself, and a tall young boy she had not seen before. She could tell the boy was not Icelandic, but he had a pale complexion with light hair that was some sort of European. She looked down at the notebook in her hands, and decided against putting it back on the shelf. She trotted to the desk, grabbing a pen before turning to the last page of the notebook and jotted something down at the bottom.

She then walked slowly through the kitchen, and placed her notebook on the table as she reached the door. She opened it, and smiled at her visitors. "*Gott kvöld!*" she said with a quiet enthusiasm, quickly masking her nostalgia.

Birgis smiled and took Rose's hands, and kissed her on the cheek. "*Hallo! Hvað segir þú?*" he said quickly in Icelandic. Birgis was slightly taller than Leifs. It was easy to see that they were father and son. They both had dark brown hair and the same blue eyes.

Rose looked to the third boy, and realized he didn't quite understand a word she and Birgis had said. "Oh, perhaps we should speak English, dear boy. I see your friend is not Icelandic," she said with a friendly giggle.

Birgis turned to Kale. "Oh, yes, I forgot. Rose, this is Leifs's friend, Kale. He's from New Zealand. Kale, this is Rose Gísladóttir."

"Ahh, I was wondering where you were from. *Gleður mig að kynnast þér.* It's so nice to meet you, Kale," said Rose.

"And it's lovely to meet you as well, Miss, er, Gisla—Miss Rose," said Kale with his sheepish grin.

Rose smiled lightly in return. "Would you three like some tea, perhaps?"

Birgis nodded, but Leifs and Kale both declined.

Rose nodded and shuffled into the kitchen, with the three men following her. She gathered her teacups and filled them with water. Birgis joined her, both of them chatting in the flowing sounds of Icelandic.

Kale walked to the table, noticing the black notebook. He looked to Rose and made sure she was distracted. He glanced over to Leifs who was examining the art on the walls of the living room. He picked up the notebook and glanced through it. The pages that had writings on them were written in a language he could not read—Icelandic, he presumed. But there were also sketches and collages that caught his eye. Smoothly, he slipped the notebook into the pocket of his jacket before he joined Leifs in the living room.

He stood next to him, and looked at the art. Some were photographs of rolling hills and mountains in the background, small towns around lakes, and little children playing in fields. Others were drawings and paintings, watercolors of still life and sunrises. Each was beautiful and unique. Each was a masterpiece.

He placed a hand on Leifs's shoulder. "She's got a beautiful place. And she seems really nice. She lives here alone?" Outside, it had begun to rain, but the sun still shone.

"Yeah." Leifs didn't look away from the art. He moved closer, and traced the frame of an old photograph of a boy, about his age, playing an old grand piano. "These feel familiar," he whispered.

"Familiar? You haven't been in here before?" asked Kale.

“I have, but... I never really looked at these before. We were always in the kitchen, or on the porch, drinking coffee or tea,” said Leifs. “I can’t place it, but... I feel like I’ve seen these somewhere else.”

Kale’s hand lifted away from Leifs’s shoulder. “You really got to find out who this woman is. Your parents have never talked to you about her before?”

Leifs’s hand fell to his side as he thought. “No,” he said. “In fact they barely ever talk about her at home.”

“Hm. Curious,” Kale said.

Birgis called to Kale and Leifs from the kitchen, and the boys turned. Birgis gestured for them to come into the kitchen. Then Rose led them through an open door, into the study with the bookcases.

“Wow. That’s a lot of books,” said Kale.

Rose smiled and held her open palm to the room. “Please, look through them,” she said.

Leifs looked at Rose, and she gave him an odd smirk before she looked into her cup of tea and took a delicate sip. He looked away quickly and began to look at the books on the nearest shelf. He saw Shakespeare plays, Virginia Woolf, ee cummings, and many other literary figures. It occurred to him he had not read anything in many months, besides assignments he was given for school.

His eyes also fell to photography collections of Ansel Adams, David Hockney, and the drawings of Da Vinci. Then there were dictionaries in German, French, and Russian. Rose had an entire library of a wide range of topics. He was impressed.

“I had always wanted to read this book,” said Birgis as he removed a copy of *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy, which was thick and heavy. “May I borrow it for a while?”

Rose chuckled, “You’ll be borrowing it for a long time. It has just about 900 pages of Russian angst in it.”

Birgis grinned. “Well, we do tend to read a lot.”

Rose moved to Leifs’s side. “Is there anything you see that interests you, Leifs?”

Leifs was startled, but quickly recovered. “You have an impressive collection, but I couldn’t possibly take anything to read now. Busy time, you know, with graduation nearby.”

Rose looked at him with a twinkle in her eye, and then nodded. “Of course,” she said understandingly.

Birgis looked up from *Anna Karenina* at Rose and Leifs, and cleared his throat. “Well, I think it’s time we left. I have a lot to finish for work tomorrow. Ready, Kale?”

Kale had been looking at the back bookcase, the fourth shelf, at the black unmarked notebooks. “Oh, uh, yeah. I’m ready.”

All four left the room. Rose led them to the front door. “Thank you for the visit, all of you,” she said in her quiet voice. Leifs thought she didn’t want them to go for some reason. But once again he caught her eyes, and he was filled with the same feeling as before; she was hiding something, or perhaps she knew something that he didn’t.

“I’m sorry we couldn’t stay longer,” said Birgis. “But I assure you, once Ása returns from her trip, we’ll all visit you again and have dinner.”

“That sounds lovely,” said Rose.

She looked to Kale. “Please come again, Kale. It’s so nice to see someone else from another part of the world.”

“I’ll be sure to come again, Miss. Thank you for having me,” replied Kale with a charming smile.

“*Bless allir*,” said Rose as she closed the door.

As the three walked back to Leifs’s and Birgis’s home in the rain, Kale tugged at Leifs’s sleeve and showed him the black notebook. Leifs glanced at it and gave Kale an angry glare. “Why the hell did you take that?” he demanded quietly. Birgis didn’t hear.

Kale gave a pained shrug. “I just... I dunno, I thought you would want to take a look at it. It was just lying there on the kitchen table.”

“Then she’ll notice someone took it! We have to go back there and give it back, right away.” Leifs was furious, and ashamed. Why would Kale do such a thing?

“Leifs, please! It’s all right, we’ll bring it back to her soon. I’ll take all the blame, okay? I just want to help you figure this lady out.”

Leifs gave an exasperated sigh, and brought his hand to his temple. “Fine... we’ll go to the creek and look at it, then.” He ran to catch up to his father and spoke to him in Icelandic. Kale waited behind.

Birgis nodded, and as Leifs ran back to Kale, he said something in Icelandic and Leifs stopped to give his father a confused look. “Okay, I won’t,” he said in reply.

Birgis turned to walk back to their home.

“What was that about?” asked Kale.

“He said not to go back to Rose’s.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know.”

The two boys cut right into the woods and followed a path into an open field. Kale took off his sandals and ran barefoot out of the cover of the trees and into the open. Rain darkened his gray jacket, and soon his feet were covered in mud and long blades of grass, but he laughed as he shook his head, sending water everywhere like a big, friendly dog. Then he tilted back his head and stuck out his tongue, catching raindrops.

Leifs smiled, and found his anger at Kale subsided. He could never stay angry with him. Kale had an energy that brought the light out of any predicament; even if he stole an old lady’s notebook and Leifs had no idea how to return it, what excuse he would give her, there was still a field to run through, rain to catch with your tongue, there was still a life to live.

They reached a small creek that flowed between two small hills. There was a large tree that offered shelter. Kale and Leifs often came here on their free days. They had climbed this tree many times.

Kale handed Leifs the notebook once they reached the base of the tree. “It’s written in Icelandic, I think.”

Leifs felt the cover, and turned the notebook over in his hands. “It’s a moleskine,” he said. He hadn’t noticed it before.

“A what?”

“A moleskine. They’re legendary notebooks... a lot of artists and writers had one. Picasso, Van Gogh, Hemingway, Bruce Chatwin. They all owned one. I thought about getting my own. It’d nice to have something like this in your pocket.”

Leifs opened Rose's moleskine. He sat on the dry grass. Kale sat next to him, peering at the notebook. The rain had slowed to a light drizzle.

Leifs began reading the first page. After a few seconds, Kale cleared his throat. "Well? What does it say?"

"Oh, sorry." He began to translate the first page for Kale.

I discovered the meaning of life. It is the will to find out the meaning of life, and it is the hope to find love in every possible corner of the world, and it is the parting of knowledge we leave to others as we face these obstacles. Geir showed me this today in

Reykjavik. He is so wonderful, I think I have fallen in love...

He brought me to a coffeehouse, and we saw a local band play. He asked me to dance with him. I was nervous at first, but he took my hand without an answer and he dragged me to the dancefloor. And we shared something more beautiful than roses.

Leifs paused. "Geir..." he whispered.

"What is it?" said Kale.

Leifs did not answer and he flipped through the pages, scanning the words. "That was my grandfather," he said quietly when he found the man's full name scribbled under a photograph of a man he recognized.

Kale looked at the photograph. The man was handsome, perhaps eighteen or nineteen years old at the time the picture was taken. "He has your smile," said Kale.

Geir Eysteinnsson. It was undoubtedly his grandfather. Somehow, Rose had known him, had even fallen in love with him. His grandfather had taught Rose things she carried with her for the rest of her life.

“So this it,” Leifs said.

“You’re not telling me she’s your grandmother, are you?” asked Kale.

“No. My grandmother died when she gave birth to my dad.”

“Are you sure that’s your grandfather? Eysteinsson is not even your last name,” Kale pointed out.

“Last names don’t work the same in Iceland as they do here. Your last name is taken from whatever your father’s first name is. That’s why my last name is Birgisson, and my father’s last name is Geirsson,” explained Kale.

“Oh,” said Kale, and he sat back against the tree as he thought of his newfound trivia. “Didn’t know that.”

“I’m sure this is him, though,” said Leifs. “But I don’t understand why none of them told me this before.”

“Yeah, that’s a bit odd.”

Leifs continued to read from the notebook, and Kale listened. They came across paintings and drawings of events she had seen, of people she knew, there were photographs of places in Iceland, she recounted a trip to Paris with Geir. She fell more in love with Leifs’s grandfather in these entries, written so long ago in his homeland. He felt like he held an entire life in his hands, the life of a woman who was once young and vibrant, who sang at the tops of mountains because she was hopelessly in love.

Hours seemed to pass as Leifs and Kale read page after page. There was a profound beauty that encompassed them. Rose had truly been happy; it could be seen in the way she wrote the words lightly, the way she wrote her poetry, and the photographs she took. She was a different woman. Leifs wondered what had happened to cause her

to become a quiet, secretive woman. Why had she never spoken to Leifs about his grandfather? He felt the answer lie here, in her moleskine.

The sun was beginning to set. Two hours had to have passed since Leifs and Kale came to the creek. Leifs turned to Kale and said, "It's getting late. You should go back home."

Kale gave him a questioning look. "While you stay here and read this? I don't think so. Either we're both going home, or we're both staying here and finding out what this thing holds."

Leifs smiled. He said nothing more, but felt a great admiration and fondness for Kale. There was nothing more he could ask from him. Kale always supported him, was always there to set him back on his path to keep him moving forward.

And so they stayed there, under the tree, accompanied only by the red passing of the day and the soft whisper of the creek nearby. They read.

They came to a passage that touched Leifs more than he thought words could ever touch. It said,

Look for meanings in the way things are set around you; secrets and destinies are hidden everywhere. Open your heart and mind to the people around you; there are lovers and geniuses to be found in complete strangers. But most importantly, you must first find the secrets, the destinies, the genius and the lover within yourself.

And then, they came to the last few pages of the notebook. Rose wrote of a growing stagnation of her love. The beauty of her art and her poetry faded. The passages

become insensitive, and shorter, and lifeless. She recorded the hurtful words Geir had said to her in an argument. The ink on the page was blotched with tears, dried long ago, but their mark was eternal. It pained Leifs to see such beauty harmed.

Then came a passage written the day Geir left her. She discovered he had fallen in love with another woman, whom Leifs recognized to be his grandmother.

“That’s terrible,” said Kale.

“Yeah,” muttered Leifs. He felt guilty almost. He was the living evidence of his grandfather’s affair with his grandmother, the product.

There was one last line on the last page of the journal. It was directed to him. Leifs felt his heart go up into his throat, and it started to pound deafeningly.

leifs, i wanted you to take this and read it. i wanted you to know. please come see me, but do not tell your father or mother.

Leifs looked to Kale in the growing darkness. He was shocked. Was it by mere chance Kale took the notebook Rose deliberately set out for Leifs to take? The question burned a hole into his mind. The moleskine slipped out of his fingers and onto the grass.

“She must’ve written that when we arrived. But maybe she didn’t intend for us to steal it, maybe she was going to give it to you?” thought Kale aloud.

“She did ask me if I wanted to borrow anything from her library, and she gave me this weird look,” remembered Leifs. “She was trying to let me know something, without letting my father know. I have to go see her, now.”

Kale nodded, grabbed the notebook, and stood up. He offered his hand to help Leifs up. “Okay, then, let’s go.”

Leifs took the hand, and wiped the dirt of his jeans. His entire body was stiff from sitting for so long. “You don’t have to come, Kale. You can go home if you want.”

“No, I want to see what she has to say, and what happened,” he said without hesitation.

Leifs hugged him then. Surprised, Kale laughed and hugged him back. “Thank you, for being such a great friend—a brother. I don’t know what I’d do without you,” said Leifs.

“No problem.”

They released, and walked under the light of the moon back to the woods.

Rose sat in her living room on her cushioned chair, by the small fire she had going. Her face was wet with tears. She held a framed picture of Geir Eysteinnsson. Her thumb traced the outlines of his jaw. The picture was taken when they went camping long ago in the highlands of Iceland, in the Skaftafell National Park. It was a pristine memory.

Her mourning was interrupted when she heard footsteps on the porch, then a knock at the door. She had been expecting this once she saw it was Leifs and Kale. She wiped her face with the sleeve of her nightgown, and went to the door. Opening it, Leifs and Kale came in without a word. Leifs faced her, and looked her in the eyes with conviction, something Rose had noticed he was incapable of before.

Leifs noticed the photograph Rose held.

Rose noticed the moleskine notebook Leifs held.

“I was surprised to see it gone after you had left. I planned on giving it to you under your father’s notice, but then I saw the effort was unnecessary,” said Rose.

Leifs motioned to Kale. “You’ve got him to thank for that.”

Kale smirked, and gave a simple shrug.

Rose glanced to the tall New Zealander boy. Then she looked back to Leifs, and smiled. “Friendship is a pearl in this age, and I’m glad you two share it so freely.”

Leifs almost felt like she could see the camaraderie that existed between Kale and him. Perhaps it was the way they stood by one another, or the way Leifs talked to him.

“We wanted to see you. We read your notebook. It’s beautiful. It’s changed the way I feel,” said Leifs. “But we wanted to find out why you had to keep this from me.”

Rose walked to her cushioned chair, and set the photograph down on the side table. She sat into the chair, gazing into the fire. “I loved your grandfather very much, and when he married your grandmother, Eva, I was devastated. I moved on for a while, and tried to forget. I did art.” She motioned to the wall with her masterpieces. Leifs then remembered seeing some of those paintings at his grandfather’s house, so long ago. “I taught at universities,” Rose continued.

“Years later I heard Eva died in childbirth. I went and found Geir in Reykjavik. I tried to help him. He was depressed, but he raised Birgis on his own. He allowed me to take care of Birgis once in a while, and I watched him grow in Geir’s shadow. Birgis met and married your mother Ása in college, and they had you. I was there, you know.”

Rose looked at him. Leifs thought she looked very old in the light of the fire, the only light in the room. She had been through a life of art and love, had created so much

beauty with those old withered hands, and now here she sat before him, sad and lonely and nostalgic.

“Everything felt like it would be all right. Geir and I went to coffeehouses again, and we went hiking when we could. It was so nice to taste those days once more. Revitalizing. But, then Geir died in a car crash. You were about five years old.”

Leifs nodded. He remembered the funeral, but did not remember seeing Rose there. He was young, but the funeral was small and he felt as if he had met everyone there.

“Your father did not allow me to attend. He felt it would be better for me if I moved on. He said, Geir left me long ago, and I should have left him then too. It would be no good for me to mourn there. I know he was thinking of what was best for me, but it was the one last thing I wanted.”

Kale stirred next to Leifs. Leifs knew that would disturb Kale, the thought of being prevented from attending the funeral of someone that meant so much to you.

“And so shortly thereafter, you and your family moved here, to America. I stayed in Iceland and returned to teaching art. But soon I felt empty inside. The family of the one man I loved was thousands of miles away. I had to be near, I wanted to help, I wanted to make sure the world would know the greatness that lies in your blood.

“I moved here, too. But once your parents found out I followed, they forbade me from revealing myself to you. They thought I was insane to follow them here, especially for that reason. They truly believed I would be a bad presence, that Geir would have wanted me to find someone else instead of following and taking care of his grandson.

But they visited me often, kept me company. Your parents wouldn't abandon me, at least."

Rose fell silent then.

Leifs placed a hand on her bony shoulder. "But now you live here alone, dwelling in the past."

Rose nodded. "My life ended when Geir died and his son and grandson moved away. I didn't want to let these days die," she said and she placed a hand on the moleskine that Leifs held.

Kale stepped around to face Rose. "Life doesn't end until you die. You of all people should know that," he said, the fire burning in his eyes.

Rose looked at him like she had never seen him before.

Leifs placed the moleskine in her lap and knelt next to the chair. "Please, Rose, don't let the words in that notebook mean nothing. You have to remember: there are destinies everywhere. There is still a destiny in you. You taught me that. But I think you have forgotten."

"And you also said the meaning of life is the will to find out the meaning, the hope to find love, and helping others to overcome the obstacles we come across," said Kale. "You breathed these things once, Rose. You lived and breathed them. You should never forget them either."

Rose blinked. She looked at Kale and Leifs both, then at the moleskine in her lap. She grasped it, and held it close to her heart. Her eyes closed, and she sighed. After a moment of silence, she whispered, "You are right. There is an entire world left to discover."

She stood slowly and moved closer to the fireplace, above which hung her art. “It has been so long since I painted or took a photograph. I think it’s time my hands remembered their strength.”

She turned to the boys, with a small and tired smile. “You both are young, and I do hope you have learned a valuable lesson from this. But most of all, treasure all your friendships. Life is a worn path that should never be traveled alone.”

Leifs and Kale left shortly after. They both said good night to Rose, who hugged them together. Kale said good-bye to Leifs as they parted ways. Leifs made his way to his home, guided by streetlights and the moon. He looked up to the stars. The Milky Way was a band across the sky, it was a canvas painted. He remembered a time when he could not look upon the stars; they reminded him that some things never change, that some things always stay where they are, and that terrified him at the time. But he was glad he could gaze upon them now. The stars were beautiful, and that was a simple enough reason to always take the time to look upon them now.

Graduation came, and went. Leifs and Kale laughed the days away and remembered their childhood, they ran barefoot through the field to the creek and climbed the tree as they did when they were kids, and they made plans to go to Iceland and New Zealand before they went off to college. They weren’t going far, so they would still be in touch over the weekends and holidays, and they hoped that would be enough.

Leifs visited Rose on his own often. Neither had told Leifs’s parents that he knew the story now. Rose took a portrait of herself with Leifs and Kale laughing in the background, and painted a copy. She gave the photograph to Leifs and the painting to

Kale. Sometimes they drank tea and discussed a book, or talked of their ideas for the future.

But it was the day before Leifs and Kale planned to depart for the airport for their trip to Iceland. They walked to Rose's house. They knocked on the door, but there was no response from within. Kale turned the doorknob, and the door opened, unlocked. Leifs feared the worst as they walked in. Rose was completely healthy, and he thought that perhaps she passed away in the night, peacefully.

But instead, they found the moleskine Kale stole on the kitchen table with a note on top. Rose had written in her lively handwriting,

I have left to pick up my life once more in the world. I will be in Spain, in Japan, in China, and maybe back to Iceland to lay the past to rest. But I wish the best to you both, and I hope you always remember me. You will find that I have left all my books and my art here. I leave them to you both, especially my moleskines. They are all I am, and I am at peace enough to leave them behind, and let others learn what I have learned in this wonderful thing we call life.

~Rose

Leifs smiled.

“She’s amazing,” said Kale.

“Yeah,” agreed Leifs. “She is.” He reached into the back pocket of his jeans and pulled out his own moleskine. He opened it and flipped through the blank, unlined pages.

“I thought I’d start my own. So I can look back through it years from now and remember.”

Kale laughed, and reached inside his jacket, and pulled out a similar moleskine.

“Funny,” he said as he opened his notebook. “Me too.”