

December 4, 1950

*Slam!* Marilyn's textbook snapped shut, falling to the floor in her frustration.

"Audrey, I don't think I can take any more of this Norwegian grammar," Marilyn exclaimed with a groan, burying her face in her hands.

"So don't," she shrugged nonchalantly, walking over from the frosty December window.

"I have to. I've gotten too many Ds and Fs on my latest assignments, and only just this week I *finally* got my grade up to a C. While my family never pressured me to take this class, I felt obligated. My grandparents came from Norway."

"Yes, well, there are many things we do for family," Audrey stated absentmindedly, staring at the gentle snow falling outside.

"It's horrific! I just need to get back at it and see my professor for help. And I feel terrible because I've done nothing else around here. Joan was cleaning the rooms a few days ago: I mean, she even washed the windows! What does that make me, Audrey?" she questioned demandingly.

"A slob?" Audrey teased.

Marilyn picked up the book and threw it across the room, only for Audrey to catch it easily and hide it behind her back. "I'm serious," she exclaimed. "This can't all be about choir, and voice lessons, and accompanist jobs. I have to get my academics under control too!"

"Okay, okay, I hear you," Audrey said soothingly. "What can I do to help?"

"I'm so behind on letters. Write home for me?" Marilyn joked.

"You got it!" And with that, Audrey sat down with a flourish, scrounging around for a pencil and paper. Her energy was so out of the blue, Marilyn stared, unsure of how to react.

"You know I'm kidding right?! I'm not sure what my mother would think if you wrote one of your crazy stories home."

Audrey ignored her.

"Audrey?" she questioned imploringly.

"Oh, your letters home are so bland sometimes Marilyn. Time to spice things up with a grand essay from *me*, Miss Audrey Z. Fraasch," she teased. Pulling out a pink pen from between the sofa cushions and an old napkin, she sat like regal royalty perched on her throne.

"Audrey..." Marilyn cautioned.

"Ahem, ahem!" Audrey cleared her throat with dramatic flair, putting pink pen to napkin.

"Are you *seriously* going to write to my mother on *that*?" Marilyn squealed, leaving her desk in a flurry of paper flying everywhere as she scrambled across the room.

Audrey dodged her, and with pink pen poised high, began scribbling as she narrated aloud,

"Dear Solbergs - Tonight Marilyn is in two moods, "fancy" and "cheap:" too fancy to write herself and too cheap to give me any more than a napkin, salvaged from an ice cream bar, to write for her to you."

"*Salvaged from an ice cream bar?* Really, Audrey?"

"Sssh, Marilyn. You're ruining my *obviously* amazing, comedic writing effect," she scolded as she jumped up onto the sofa, pulling a scarf over her head at a jaunty angle. Marilyn snorted with laughter as Audrey flamboyantly continued, waving her pink pen through the air like a sword:

"Just kidding though! She's indulged in her Norsk (she upped her grade from a D to a C) and also she's dreaming of a 'home Christmas.' Just now we're having a typical Minnesota winter night! Flakes as big as your fists are floating down!"

"That is *such* an exaggeration, Audrey! Take a look outside, those are the most measly snowflakes I've ever seen!"

"It's called hyperbole, darling. You should try it some time. Makes for a more interesting narrative," she exclaimed as she hopped from the sofa to a chair, once again dodging Marilyn's attempt at trying to take her silly letter away. She proceeded,

"You should move to Minnesota, I feel sorry for *any* poor soul who has to while his time in such a desolate territory as No. Dakota."

By this point Marilyn gave up, collapsing in a chair in a heap of laughter, listening to her ramble on. She knew what Audrey was trying to do, after all - distract her from her stress. *I don't know how I deserve such amazing friends*, Marilyn thought, *but I am so grateful*.

Unaware of her internal reverie, Audrey shot Marilyn a quieting look, knowing she now had her captivated one-person audience hooked on her next words. Adjusting the scarf, she tied it over her forehead pirate-style, swinging the long ends of the pale blue silk over her shoulder. Chewing the end of the pen in thought, she pressed on,

"What did you use to get Marilyn up in time for school? I've thought of dynamite--"

By this point Marilyn had lost it, doubled over in laughter. "Dynamite? *Really?* I'm not *that* hard to wake up in the morning!" she protested.

"No interruptions, Marilyn! I'm on a roll!"

"Oh yes, my apologies Cap't. Please proceed," Marilyn teased as Audrey scowled at her.

"-but I know Miss Milla P. Thompson would bawl me out again for making too much noise. This morning we both felt pretty lazy and sat and talked through my first hour class. I wonder if I get a credit for my education on 'The Life of Marilyn's Family in Ray, No. Dakota.' I guess maybe not, huh?" Audrey sing-songed as she scribbled furiously on the napkin-letter.

"I would ace that class much more easily than Norsk," Marilyn grumbled.

"You really don't understand the concept of 'no interruptions,' do you, Marilyn? I am crafting a masterpiece!"

Marilyn tried to suppress her giggles with no success. Abandoning her post, Audrey skipped back over to the sofa cushions, rummaging around once again.

"What? No interruptions this time? You aren't going to ask what I'm doing?" Audrey exclaimed while she threw a cushion over her head, trying to extract something from underneath the sofa.

"Oh, am I allowed to talk now?" Marilyn asked innocently.

"Impertinent girl," Audrey grumbled, finally pulling a blue pen from between the cushions.

"What, did you decide pink was getting too girly for tomboy-ish you?" Marilyn challenged, throwing a pillow at Audrey.

Dodging the pillow effortlessly, Audrey continued, "If you must know, I'm tired of this color. I told you we are spicing up your letters home! That means writing in multiple colors. It's the end of my first page - so now, your unsuspecting family will turn over the napkin and *bam!* Blue on the backside! Surprise!"

With that, Audrey settled down on the windowsill, deep in thought as to her next words. She gazed out the window, watching the glittery snowflakes continue to fall.

"You're so ridiculous," Marilyn replied.

"I think you mean brilliant and ahead of the times," Audrey retorted.

Just then, a knock sounded at the door. As Marilyn moved to answer it, Audrey continued her letter over the conversation in

the hallway. "Got tired of pink, so we'll try blue," she mumbled as she scrawled on the napkin.

"What is Audrey muttering about?" Joan asked, looking quizzically at Marilyn as she entered the dorm room, brushing snow from her shoulders.

"Who knows?" Marie replied as she followed Joan. Tossing her navy coat onto a nearby chair, she continued, "Audrey is always up to something silly. Let her be. Let's talk about weekend plans!"

"I'm not sure I can have any, even if I wanted them," Marilyn declared forlornly.

"Why not?!" Joan demanded. "We thought about taking one of the streetcars downtown, do some shopping!"

Audrey glanced up from her letter-writing, listening intently to the conversation unfolding.

"I'm broke. We're in college. I'd have to sell a kidney to be able to afford anything downtown," Marilyn replied.

"Don't be so melodramatic, Marilyn," Marie exclaimed from the armchair. "Clearly *I'm* the one who's the most broke here! At least y'all have jobs!"

At this, Audrey gasped, tumbled off the edge of the windowsill, and sat up excitedly.

"Seriously, what is up with you Audrey?" Marie inquired.

"I HAVE FINISHED MY MASTERPIECE!" she shouted triumphantly.

"I really don't understand what her deal is right now," Marie said, looking over at Marilyn quizzically.

"She's writing a letter home to my - "

" - to Marilyn's family!" Audrey interjected excitedly. "I do think the ending is quite marvelous. Would you like to hear it?"

"Do we really have a choice?" Joan teased.

Ignoring her, Audrey recited, "Just now these gals, Joan, Marie, and 'Flirt Squirt' are arguing who is the most broke. I beat 'em all, I think, but who's passing around opinions? Around here they're cheap."

Audrey's listeners started giggling, but she continued, "And now I am going to sign it off. I think 'Marilyn's Constant Pest' is probably the best closing, don't you think?"

Before she could respond, a loud crash resounded in the corridor.