

# The Other Side of Town

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The street is full of people. The day is September 20, 2006, and it's an unusual 83 degrees outside despite the cloud-covered sky. I walk down the freshly paved sidewalk, taking in the smell of hot cinnamon rolls and brewing coffee. Despite the heat, it is beautiful this time of year. Leaves are changing colors; the river that runs through the center of town is clear. As I cross over the old bridge into the far side of town, it's like stepping back in time.

All of sudden I'm 19 again. The houses on this side of town are smaller. They're stuck in a time of white picket fences and children running barefoot through icy sprinklers. I stop outside of the house and half expect to see her in the second story window like she always used to be. The house is still the same. A time-faded yellow with white trim and shutters. If I look close enough I can almost see her sitting on that porch swing, closing her eyes, and swaying to the music only she can hear, her dark hair flowing past her shoulders, her fingers tapping against the arm rail to the music in her head, and that favorite blue sweater of hers caught fluttering in the wind.

I walk up those steps and sit in the swing,

And for a moment I can hear the music in her head, and I find myself swaying and tapping my finger. I open my eyes and stop. There she is, almost 50 years later, looking out onto the street. Her hair is still as dark as it was when she was 15. Her figure is slender, almost too thin. Looking at her now I wish I could go up to her and touch her. But I can't. She walks over to the swing and sits next to me. She closes her eyes, and again I hear music. I reach out and touch her hand but feel nothing. A sharp pain goes through the empty space where my heart should be. Then the music stops, and she reaches into her pocket and pulls out an old piece of paper that's been folded many times. I can recognize my own handwriting. I look over her shoulder and read my last letter to her.

December 17, 1953

Dear Lizzie,

*I wish you knew how excited I am to be coming home in a few weeks. I was just telling Richards about you and the house. He thinks it's odd we decided to buy your parents' house, but I guess we've always been the odder couple. It's been a long year here. Don't get me wrong, Korea is beautiful in its own way, but it's nothing compared to home. I was*

*thinking when I get home, after we spend some time together of course, what would you think of starting our family? I know it's sudden, but being here has really made me think, and I want a son...though a daughter would be nice too. When I get home, you and me, we will go to the city and maybe buy you some nice things. I know you don't want that, but I think you deserve it. How is Charlie? Is he taking good care of you? He was always a good dog. Here in Korea dogs are like rats. They roam the streets and are disease-filled. It's kind of sad, but then again, would you take in a rat? Anyway, I will be home very soon. I hope you're counting down the days like I am.*

*I Love You,  
Henry*

I catch her tears in my hands, and as usual it is the only feeling I seem to have. The tears soak through my hands and seem to give me

strength. It is our only connection, a one way connection. She folds up the letter, and after a few minutes I can hear the music again. This time the music is sad and dark. I recognize the song as the one she played over and over again when they brought her the notice that I wouldn't be coming home. She sways to the music until the world around her is black.

Finally she goes inside. I stand by the window and watch as she goes to the mantle and places the letter in the box. The box that is me. All that's left. The name tags, the medals, that last medal she keeps wrapped in my favorite shirt.

I turn my back to the window and make my way down the stairs, down the street, and over the bridge back through a now quiet town. To my dwelling in the cold September ground. Until tomorrow, my next journey to the other side of town.