

Part 1

"You know those days when you've got the mean reds... the blues are because you're getting fat or maybe it's been raining too long. You're sad, that's all. But the mean reds are horrible. You're afraid and you sweat like hell, but you don't know what you're afraid of. Except something bad is going to happen, only you don't know what it is." - Truman Capote, Breakfast at Tiffany's

—A new spa is opening up today and I wait in line for a free pedicure. Graduation is coming up and I want to look nice for the ceremony. After four years of studying all the time and working in a coffee shop, all I seem to have gotten in return is a mountain of student debt. It seems every day that rejection letters are the only things welcoming me home. My friends talk excitedly about their futures: new jobs, new cities, new apartments, planning new looks to match their new jobs and breaking up with their college boyfriends for better men that have as of yet have not appeared. Their majors had been more practical than mine: had been with business, medicine, nursing, and even philosophy. My dream had has always been to find the inspiration to write a book, but I may have to accept defeat and join my Aunt Ramona as a teacher. This lackluster profession may be my only option right now; student loans will kick in soon enough. Under the weight of the unfairness of this, I rest my head on the steering wheel. Forget being a writer, your career will be teaching a teacher. At least you'll have the summers off to bartend or work back at the coffee shop. *All that hard work for nothing*, the mean voice inside my head taunts.

**Comment [KT1]:** Nothing comes of this – maybe instead of waiting in line at the beginning she's actually getting the pedicure?

*Something has to come up*, I soothe myself for a few minutes before gathering my strength. My salad days at Saint Martin's Academy seem so long ago. I had my own online fanzine: Catholic Girl, railing against being in a Catholic school. It was easy to be brave then; I did not need money. My parents paid for everything, which gave me the luxury of my artistic integrity being protected at any cost. Now I just wanted a consistent paycheck and to keep a roof over my head. Oh, how the mighty have fallen.

**Comment [KT2]:** Ditto last comment – maybe she props her head on her hands while sitting in the spa chair?

**Formatted:** Font: Italic

**Formatted:** Font: Italic

**Comment [KT3]:** Maybe just 'zine' since she's not a fan of Catholic school?

—I turn on the college radio station for a brief second, looking for some sign from the universe. The Dead Milkmen come on full force. Not since high school, with Ray, have I heard the chords to "Punk Rock Girl". *Where is Mr. Wonderful now?* Ray Constantine was the son of my mom's best friend, which meant we were each other's quasi siblings. We were born only two months apart and neither of us had real siblings and. Our moms had been best friends from college and got to share all the major milestones of their children together: first step, first tooth, training wheels, birthdays and the thankless task of potty training. We spent all our time together, yet still managed to be each other's favorite person. Downstairs our moms would be laughing over a bottle of wine, and upstairs we would pretend to hunt ghosts with flashlights.

**Comment [KT4]:** Haven't gotten a read on Ray yet, so I'm not sure if this is sarcastic or genuine. On one hand, they had a nice relationship and the breakup wasn't his fault, but on the other, he barely spoke to her after he moved. I suspect, especially with that name, he has a dark side!

—Most of my childhood memories are of us together. He was such a part of my life until the day he left. People said we were a package deal: Ray Constantine and Catherine Oscura. Our secret names for each other were Ray Ray and Coco.

**Comment [KT5]:** 'big' part?

—End of sophomore year our hands lingered on each other and our easy level of comfort evolved into something much more intimate. One day in our tree house, he laid one on me. At first, I tried to pull away. He pulled me closer in response. We only came up for air when our moms called us in for dinner. That day began our month of just fun. Everything was just easy between us. We found new things to do

**Comment [KT6]:** At the end? By the end?

**Comment [KT7]:** Seems an unlikely hangout spot for 15-16 year olds – maybe it's coming later in the story, but consider establishing why they've stuck with this place for so long

~~together~~ as a couple, but most of our time was spent kissing. I went with him to his guitar lessons and was a captive audience for his first attempts at songwriting. He helped me brainstorm for my readers and drew a new logo ~~for Catholic Girl~~. Secretly, I wanted him to write a song for me. As an indulgence ~~towards me~~, he watched my favorite movie Breakfast at Tiffany's with me. Sometimes, when ~~I'm~~ stressed, I either watch the movie or read the novella. It just gives me hope ~~that~~ everything will turn out ok for me like it did for Holly Golightly.

**Comment [KT8]:** Consider adding for clarity - took me a minute to figure out why she needed a logo.

Turns out, we never got a chance to name the cat. He knocked at my window one morning with croissants and hot chocolate. We were celebrating our one month anniversary. He looked away and sighed instead of kissing me.

"What's going on?" I asked, biting into a croissant.

"I... I have to tell you something and I ..."

"What? Tell me."

"Can I kiss you one more time?" He asked.

I gave him an exaggerated grandmother peck to break the tension.

"C'mon, I know it is early. Give me a real kiss... please."

I ~~leaned~~ over and ~~kissed~~ him like it was the first time.

"Better?" I ask.

"Better," he responds.

I take a sip of my sickly sweet drink and notice how tense he is.

"Ray, what is going on?"

"There is no easy way to say this, especially since, y'know, we just got started."

"Just say it. ~~y~~ You know you can tell me anything."

I grew nervous; Ray was not the type to cheat so I was not sure what was going on.

"I have to move... my dad can get tenure at a college in Maine."

He sat there with ~~clenched eyes~~. I started crying and he held me. Soon he started crying as well. Neither of us knew what to do. We knew we were ending just as we began. Our heads rested against each other and I remember feeling so alone with him beside me.

**Comment [KT9]:** Maybe personal preference, but this sounds so painful – 'eyes clenched shut' instead maybe?

-After reading another rejection letter that ~~'s had been~~ waiting for me when I ~~got-get~~ home, I sit down and meditate for ten minutes. One of my friends dragged me to a mystical store for a workshop a few weeks ago and ~~I've had~~ been trying to keep up my breath work. I wish I could be something clichéd like a

**Comment [KT10]:** 'from the spa'?

tea drinker just to have a soothing ritual as-like preparing a teapot. Meditation is cheap, but not easy. I crumple the letter and try to make a basket with it. Noiselessly, it lands on the floor. Thanks Universe, maybe I can trip in the shower next...

**Comment [KT11]:** Haha! Nice!

Once more, I think of Ray and make a mental note to ask Mom what he has been up to. For some reason, my mom and Mrs. Constantine did not remain best friends after their move. I never asked why. After a while, it hurt too much to think of them leaving our lives and choosing to be strangers. Both of us missed them too much to talk about it with each other.

**Comment [KT12]:** How will she know what Ray's up to then?

—I sit down at my desk and stare at myself in the monitor of my laptop. My black hair is long and frazzled, giving off the impression of a sea-bound pirate. The roundness of my face has given in to the puffiness from of another late night worrying. The green in my eyes looks dull, as if they have permanently adjusted to the dimness of the coffee shop. Having to be on my feet with the orders helps keep me in reasonable shape, but now my stomach seems to be getting smaller. My Aunt Ramona saw me a few days ago and said she would kill for my tiny waist and hourglass figure. Then as we filled out my teaching application, she kept refilling my Bellinis. while I explained to her my need for employment that does not require textbooks or watching the clock.

**Comment [KT13]:** Love this detail

“You know, teaching does not have to be forever. Most people don't last more than five years anyways. College grads need jobs and it is way better than the coffee shop.”

“Why did you make a career out of it?”

“Because my father married a gold digger and she did not want any money going to anyone, but herself. I did what I had to do. If I could do it over again, who knows? I might have married or learned something else. It was safe to me and after my mother died, security was my top priority.”

Aunt Ramona is my father's half-sister with their mother. She is so helpful and I appreciate it. Maybe there can be something else.

**Formatted:** Font: Italic

I blink back to the present, but nothing in my email gives me hope. There are plenty of invitations to graduation parties. I will not attend most of them: because I cannot afford the expected gifts. To distract myself, I check America's favorite time waster – Facebook.

**Comment [KT14]:** Consider adding a line about checking the email when she sits down at the computer – where we left off before the flashback it sounded like the computer was off and she was just looking in the reflection of the monitor.

-I see a friend request and blink a few times to make sure it is real. Ray Constantine. Is he still cute? The answer was-is a yes. His face has angled out and he looks like a rock star. I copy and paste his profile picture into Google to do an image search. To my surprise, hundreds of pictures pop up of him on stage, sweaty and with a sea of hands reach up for his touch pop up. I go to his band's website and discover Ray Constantine, leader singer of The Mean Reds, and my one-time boyfriend, is starting an American tour in a month. The pictures from what I gather are from small-scale arenas in Asian countries.

I accept his friend request and he opens a window to chat with me.

Are you big in Japan? I type.

**Comment [KT15]:** Since the chat section is fairly long, I think tags would help keep who's talking straight. An alternative option would be one in Italics or one in quotes.

Ray: Actually, yeah.

Me: Are you going to try to break into the American market?

Ray: Yeah...wanna help?

Me: How?

Ray: We need a road manager.

Me: I have an English degree.

Ray: I don't have a degree. It will pay better than those teaching jobs you are considering. I can't let you be an English teacher.

**Comment [KT16]:** A little creepy – did he get the info from her Facebook wall?

Me: How did you know?

Ray: Because you were always too cautious for your own good.

Me: True. Remember how we once joked we'd be middle school teachers if our dreams didn't work out?

Ray: God, yes. That is my back up plan. Hope it never happens. Being in charge of some many kids day in and day out would be the death of me.

We exchange smiley face emoticons.

Me: How is this going to work then?

Ray: I fly into Miami on the 12th. I will send you a ticket and we can meet there. My lawyer will have you sign a contract and we can go over your terms of employment. You can meet the guys too.

**Comment [KT17]:** Wow, that's fast! Ray doesn't mess around...

Me: Lawyer?

Ray: I know...

Me: Wow, this is really your life then.

Ray: Well, college girl, while you had your nose in a book, I was playing dive bars and anything I could get.

Me: What was the worst?

Ray: A dog show.

Me: As your road manager, I will do better.

**Comment [KT18]:** Might be helpful to add a few lines where they discuss what his road manager is going to be doing – and I assume she wants to know how much it pays.

**Ray:** I hope so ~~;~~ a dog lifted its leg on my mic~~ke~~ halfway through. The reason why I thought of you is because it would be nice to have a woman around, keep me out of ~~a little bit of~~ trouble. I need a girl I can talk to at night. Anyways, it's getting late here.

**Me:** Where are you?

**Ray:** I am in Thailand right now.

**Me:** Touring?

**Ray:** No, I found a monastery I like to meditate ~~at~~ in Phuket. Great energy here.

**Me:** I just started doing breath work. Not that long ago.

**Ray:** Keep at it...~~;~~ changed my life. Okay...~~;~~ I am going to be off the grid for a few days and then I will see you soon. You won't let me down will you?

I pause before answering and he closes the window in response.

Did I just get a job offer and reconnect ~~with to~~ my best friend?

——My hesitation is every girl's: I have been disappointed ~~in by~~ men before. Ray did not abandon me; we had a few days to prepare for our good-byes. We talked on the phone a few times after his move, but he never made mention of us being long-distance. I never saw him again. Mom visited Mrs. Constantine for a week, but that was in the midst of Mr. Constantine's ~~having an~~ affair with an undergrad. All she said was ~~that~~ Ray seemed nervous and stayed in his room playing guitar most of the time. He gave her a drawing for me, some mandala, and said he "kinda missed me." Mom waited until I was dating someone else to give it to me, so I wouldn't get my heart set on him. She was right of course, but I did still frame the picture ~~once I received it~~.

——Ray. Sweet band geek Ray, who drew tattoos on himself during art class and carried his guitar ~~slung over his shoulder with him~~ at all times ~~slung over his shoulder~~. -I want to go back to those easier times, when I felt invincible and free. All my anger could be directed towards teachers and the monks. Meals arrived on the table at least twice a day and my bedroom was a sanctuary. Catholic Girl had a ton of comments and followers ~~back then~~. My words meant something to people and I felt heard. Once I graduated, the ~~blog zine~~ didn't make sense to continue. I was no longer a Catholic girl, but a regular college girl looking for deeper meaning in everything. Many moons ago, I printed out my posts to see if I could expand any of them into paying articles, but nothing emerged ~~but except~~ laughter as I read how upset I was over A ~~minuses-s~~ and detention for chewing gum. Nothing an adult would pay to read. Still, I saw glimpses of solid writing and my voice emerging from all that angst.

The nostalgia is getting to me. I walk to my bedroom to get my memory box. I kept every note Ray sent me starting with the first one at my fifth birthday party. ~~Stepping down from the chair I used to retrieve the box,~~ I feel myself almost giddy. His notes are easy to recognize; they all have dark tribal patterns on the top. He could never quite get into the complexities of note folding despite his strong fingers. Ray

**Comment [KT19]:** Nuns?

**Comment [KT20]:** I was under the impression from the Dead Milkmen reference that this story was a little vintage, she would have been in high school in the mid- to late 80s, but if her zine was online it would have to be more recent. Maybe work in a little back story about how she and Ray got into older music?

**Comment [KT21]:** Chair detail feels extraneous, maybe she feels giddy as she's opening the box instead?

would make notes for songs on the top right corners; I wonder if ~~anything became of them~~  
~~they became of anything~~. Maybe. I run down the hallway to retrieve my laptop and plug The Mean Reds into the  
search bar of YouTube. His band pulls up right away with ~~twenty eight~~28 videos. They even have their  
own channel. Fancy.