

In 1959, Hope Madison, the beautiful daughter of wealthy, controlling parents, feels her world spiral out of control when she meets Drew Bartlett, Colorado's football star. Dreams soar and a life together is planned. Until he vanishes.


The Other Part of Her

By Kay Aline Turner

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*The
Other
Part
of Her*

KAY ALINE TURNER

READERS LOVE THE OTHER PART OF HER

“Powerful! Impeccably researched and emotionally enriching.”

-Commander Gary Forsberg, US Navy

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“For readers who appreciate beautiful love stories with twists and turns, and delightful characters guided by courage and faith, you will be undoubtedly pleased that you took the time to read Kay Turner’s book, *The Other Part of Her*.”

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Paperback ISBN: 978-1-958892-73-2

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-958892-74-9

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88531-733-7

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2024

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Turner, Kay Aline
THE OTHER PART OF HER by Kay Aline Turner
Library of Congress Control Number: 2024908731

ONE

1959

Hope Madison yanked on the black silk dress crawling up her long legs, as the funeral procession inched toward the church. Pangs of grief scaled her body like a mountain climber.

Her grandfather. Her pilot. Her hero. Heart Attack. Gone.

Exhaustion, the crowd in the limousine, plus reality, overwhelmed her. She closed her swollen eyes while leaning her head on her father's shoulder as Riley, her older sister, powdered her face for the photographers lining the sidewalks.

"By the way, Hope," Riley whispered. "Your best friend, Sarah Whitmire, called while you were in the shower. She wants you to return her call after the funeral."

Hope stared ahead, confused. "Sarah Whitmire? Did she say what she wanted?"

"No, but she said it was urgent!"

The conversation ceased as the church steeple edged into view along with a crowd of people, as thick as a bed of ants. Men in uniform were standing rigid, as they saluted. Their hollow eyes were scarred by war. Non-military men removed their hats, placing them over their heart. Women were filled with memories of how he had touched their families' lives. Some whispered amongst themselves, while recalling their first plane ride with her grandfather, or how he had thrilled them with acrobats, wing walkers, and landing in the middle of the main street in Tyler, Texas. All were touched by the loss of the East Texas pioneer, Colonel O.C. Palmer. A legend, the "local Lindbergh," they said on this warm, spring day in May.

The limousine halted and Hope sat upright. Her hollow eyes stared ahead, as she exited the car.

Hope slowly hung up the phone while Riley, standing impatiently in the doorway of their grandparent's home, twirled her long brown hair around her finger.

"Well, what did Sarah say?" Riley asked.

"She wanted to know if I could have lunch with her, as soon as I return to Boulder," Hope stated, numbly.

"Why would Sarah spend so much money on a long-distance call for the single purpose of asking if we could have lunch? We ALWAYS have lunch after I return home from school."

"Did the operator break in?" Riley's eyes glowered.

"Yes. She uttered in a condescending tone, as she always does, 'Your three minutes are up.' The line immediately went dead. We didn't even get to say goodbye."

"Cheer up, Hope. You'll be in Boulder tomorrow. You can see her then."

"The wait will be agony."

"Perhaps, she has a new boyfriend," Riley teased.

"That's quite possible. One blink and they're gone."

"Write and tell me all about it," Riley ordered.

Hope studied her sister, uncertain how to respond. Riley's sudden interest baffled her. In a downcast tone, Hope mumbled, "I will, but I doubt there will be anything to share."

"We never know what God has planned for us, Hope."

An unrelenting grin stretched across Riley's face, into her brown eyes.

TWO

Hope rushed into Boulder's popular restaurant, Timber Tavern, promptly at noon. Fifteen minutes later, she was still pacing near the front door and nervously checking her watch while an overflowing lunch crowd, mostly comprised of University of Colorado students, grew louder. Hope wondered if they were competing with Elvis Presley, as he belted his latest hit from the brightly lit jukebox in the corner.

Suddenly, Sarah Whitmire appeared in the doorway and every head in the restaurant swiveled at the sight of her and the red dress molded to her curvaceous body. Hope grimaced, realizing the spotlight shone on her, too. She was the tall one, the one in a crumpled yellow dress. The one who dropped her shoulders a bit, but she still stood a head taller than Sarah. Anxiety tightened in her throat.

"You look great, Sarah," Hope mumbled.

"Thank you. So do you."

A handsome college waiter approached, unable to turn loose of Sarah with his eyes as he pointed to a booth, "Feel free to take that one by the window. I'll be there to take your order."

Moments later the young man appeared with menus and two glasses of water. Sarah flashed him a smile, waved away the menus, causing him to fumble with the pen in his hand. Hope nervously edged into a corner, before addressing Sarah.

"I know you want me to meet your brother's best friend, but I can't," Hope stated firmly.

"Of course, you can. We'll double date like we did in high school."

“Sarah, I refuse to go out with someone I don’t know, especially to an important event.” Hope’s face turned tomato red as she adamantly rejected the offer. Sarah waved off the outburst, but Hope refused to be ignored.

“I can’t. He’d be miserable.”

“Hope, you don’t even know who it is. It’s my brother’s best friend, the one I’ve been talking about for years.”

“Are you referring to the guy you idolize? Drew Bartlett?”

Hope’s face suddenly became as white as her napkin.

“Yes! His date cancelled at the last minute. I’m going with my brother’s other friend so the four of us can double date. Think of the fun we could have.”

Hope’s best friend was proficient in ripping down the guard that she had carefully erected. And they both knew it.

“The guys leave for the Navy in a few weeks.” Sarah continued. “Right after their graduation.” She lowered her head and in a pleading voice continued. “I wouldn’t ask you if I didn’t think you’d have a great time.”

Hope tried to summon a grain of self-confidence, however, it dimmed against the unbridling of Sarah’s beauty and relentless persuasion. She listened to Sarah’s ramblings with one ear, while nervously glancing outside, then shifted in the booth, turning her head toward the window to absorb a broad line of purple, snow-capped mountains. A meadow of green was bending like a dancer in the gentle breeze.

Sarah continued selling Hope on the idea of a double date, but she didn’t need to sell Drew. Hope knew him to be handsome from the photos Sarah had shown her, and she even thought he might be an enjoyable date, until Sarah said he had a bashful side. That made her throat as dry as a cracker.

Hope felt anticipation and dread tumbling together, but suddenly along with the feeling of obligation, the thought of waving his picture in front of her college sorority sisters filled her with excitement and a burst of confidence.

“Sarah, you’ve talked about Drew since the first day we met. It appears, from his picture, he could have any girl he wants. I’m not the one to accompany him. Besides, you know I don’t date.”

Hope felt better for speaking her mind, until a sudden surge of guilt caused her palms to sweat. Sarah had been nothing but kind, and now she was disappointing her. Remorse silently polluted the conversation, but Sarah prattled on, as if Hope had agreed.

“Do you need anything else?” the waiter inquired of Sarah while placing the pepperoni pizza in the center of the table. Sarah smiled graciously at him as she swept a lock of hair from her forehead.

“No, thank you,” she purred.

He retreated, reluctantly.

The smell of pizza, mingling with Hope’s deflation, floated between them while Sarah spoke about the formal dance in detail. Dancing to a live band gave Hope reason to consider the invitation and briefly, her spirits lifted, until she realized that she’d be dancing with Drew Bartlett the entire evening; then her stomach lurched. It was a preposterous idea to entertain.

Sarah’s star-like radiance continued for the next hour and Hope continued to shrink under her glow. After the server filled their glasses for the third time, each time ignoring Hope, Sarah began applying red lipstick to her full lips while Hope dipped the corner of her napkin into a glass of water and dabbed at the pizza stains on her wrinkled dress.

“Want to try?” Sarah extended the gold tube of lipstick across the table.

Hope shook her head. The thought of bringing attention to her mouth, or to any part of her body, sent shivers down her spine.

“Okay, I’ll go,” Hope mumbled through clenched teeth. “But if he’s as shy as you say, I know I won’t be able to think of one thing to say. His evening will be ruined.”

Sarah’s bold, red lips stretched into a grin the size of the Mississippi River.

“Oh, don’t be silly. Just be yourself, like you are with me. In fact, why don’t you come over to our house for dinner on Friday night so you can meet him? Mother is having an early graduation celebration dinner for my brother, Ken, and of course, Drew. I can’t believe they graduate from the university in a few weeks.”

Hope, the studious one, the one who preferred spending time at the library, immediately regretted accepting the invitation. But thoughts of how envious her friends would be, when they saw his picture, calmed her frazzled nerves.

Sarah swiftly launched a plan. “You and Drew can meet at my house tomorrow night, but on the night of the ball, let’s get ready in your luxurious bedroom and private bath,” she said excitedly. “I can even fix your hair in one of those new upswept hairstyles, like the movie stars wear.”

Sarah’s determination ricocheted like a bullet bouncing off steel when she tried to convince Hope that her long, silky hair could be tamed, an achievement that her own mother, had not yet accomplished. And considering how Kathryn Madison controlled everything within the walls of their home, Sarah’s idea created a lingering smile. Hope imagined her mother skittering across the floor, joyfully thanking the angels for the special young man who would soon be at their door. In Mrs. Madison’s mind, the time for Hope to find a suitable husband had arrived.

Hope had ignored her mother's desperate pleas, and, at times, she had accomplished the feat with a degree of success. But she couldn't ignore the hurt when her mother would trill in a sing-song voice, "You need to find a husband before the bloom is gone from the rose." The phrase made Hope vow she'd never insist her own daughter, should she be blessed with one, feel her worth, intelligence, and beauty depended on having a man.

In truth, though her mother wouldn't admit it, Hope knew she didn't understand her. It was Riley, her older sister, who was the carbon copy of Kathryn Madison, both in looks and personality. Hope, on the other hand, was told she exited the womb with the same coloring and temperament of her father, including his tall frame and love for adventure. On one occasion, Hope overheard him boasting about her athletic prowess, especially at golf, and how she could throw a football farther than any of the neighborhood boys in junior high. His words had warmed Hope from the inside.

Now, after waiting for years, the upcoming dance would present her mother with ample fodder for her next church luncheon, bridge group, book club, and garden club. But first, her mother would notify Miss Bain, her personal shopping assistant at Neiman Marcus, that a shipment of white dresses, matching Drew's white uniform, would arrive soon.

Hope bid good-bye to Sarah then turned her convertible toward home while marveling at the breathtaking view. Regardless of how long she was away, she frequently visualized the mountains and continued to be amazed, even today. "God's perfect handiwork," she declared quietly.

On the short drive, she determined the first person she'd tell, about her upcoming date was Odie B, the Madison's housekeeper, her closest friend, and ally. Their bond was tighter than any of

Hope's familial connections since they had celebrated large and small triumphs from the time Hope was three years old.

"Can you believe it, Odie B? I'm going to a dance with a graduating senior!"

Odie B's face, as bright as twinkling lights on a Christmas tree, brought encouragement to Hope and together they shared the excitement. Odie B, her ears warm with the likes of Drew Bartlett, began dancing around the kitchen stretching her hands high in the air.

"Thank ya, Jesus! Thank ya!"

Hope stood alone in her bedroom that evening, staring into the mirror at her long, slender legs, round bust, narrow waist, and smooth hips. The explanation of her figure became the subject of her mother's annual report to their personal shopper at Neiman Marcus.

"She matured early," her mother would say, as if Hope had a disease. Judging from the sneer on Miss Bain's face, Hope would have welcomed the alternative.

It was true. Her figure had blossomed into one of a woman by the age of fourteen, making her the target of jealous girls and gawking boys. She also reached her full height the same year. "As tall as a giraffe," they'd say. Very few boys could meet her at eye level. Awkwardness prevailed.

Hope couldn't help but compare herself to her sister, Riley, diminutive in stature and not too curvy. Riley's flawless olive skin, dark hair, and chocolate-brown eyes trimmed in thick lashes were perfection in Hope's opinion. The contrast had provoked Hope to approach her mother for encouragement, following her first day in high school.

"Mother, why can't I be beautiful like Riley?"

Mrs. Madison, sitting at her mahogany desk with reading glasses perched on her nose, glanced up and studied her youngest daughter's face.

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“You’re unusual,” she said in a flat tone, then returned to the checkbook.

The invisible scar remained.

THREE

Dreams paraded across the mirror, one by one in radiant splendor, while Hope turned from side to side, checking her reflection. Her new hairstyle, moving like a butterfly lightly brushing her shoulders, offered no indication of her pounding heart, wet palms, and jittery nerves. Floating in the air was one question: why had she relented to Sarah's request? Regret plagued her.

"Not much longer until the favor is granted, then I can go about my summer," Hope mumbled while glancing at the crimson sun sinking behind the mountains outside her bedroom window.

"Are you ready, Hope?" Irritation could be heard in her mother's voice as she yelled up the stairs.

"Coming, Mother." Hope imagined her standing in the foyer, pursing her lips, checking her watch.

Hope nervously slipped into a cornflower-blue dress before clasp a strand of pearls around her neck. Next came the challenge she faced with every date, especially a blind date. Her height.

Hurriedly, she tried on several pairs of shoes before finally deciding on a pair of low heels. She then raced down the carpeted stairs with a white wool jacket flung over her arm.

"I'm ready," she announced in a breathless tone.

"Your father is pulling the car around," her mother replied coolly while draping a cashmere wrap around her shoulders. "I told you we could go in one car, since our dinner parties are a block apart, but we must be punctual, Hope."

"Yes, Mother." Hope's nerves stretched to the tipping point when she heard a page from her youth return, but once again, she let the rebuke slide, as she always did.

“You look beautiful, Hope.” Tennessee Madison murmured while opening her car door.

Hope smiled and planted a light kiss on her father’s smooth-shaven face, before slipping into the back seat. The scent of his pipe tobacco and the familiar splashes of Old Spice cologne clung to her, as did the comments from her friends, “Your father is such a dignified gentleman,” they’d say. She’d grin with pride knowing he captivated the youngest, the oldest, the least, and the greatest with his charm and twinkling eyes.

Tension and silence curled together like a tight ball of yarn. Only the hum of Mrs. Madison’s new Cadillac could be heard. Ten minutes later, Hope began taking several deep breaths before exiting the car. There was Sarah eagerly waiting at the window of her home. Hope’s knees weakened as she stepped into the entry.

“I can’t believe this, Sarah. I haven’t even been home twenty-four hours.” Hope’s eyes stretched wide. She knew it wasn’t anything out of the ordinary for Sarah to plan dates faster than a rainbow fades, but she needed time to prepare for such an occasion. Lots of time.

Sarah smiled, dismissing the sight of Hope’s ashen face while brushing aside the dark curls falling on her forehead.

“In a few minutes, I’m going to step outside and wait for Drew on the porch. It’s what I always do.”

Sarah’s eyes were full of merriment, as she took out a coat hanger from the coat closet. Hope handed the jacket to her, and as Sarah placed it inside the small space, Sarah eagerly explained,

“If Drew weren’t like a member of our family, I’d be going to the dance with him. Instead, I’m setting up my best friend with the greatest guy I know. I can’t believe his date cancelled!”

“Sarah, I appreciate your attempt at finding him a date, but I clam up around guys, as you are well aware.” Hope felt her palms growing wet like a lawn layered with dew.

Across town, Drew Bartlett carefully selected a handful of small river stones from the rocky banks of Boulder Creek while two red-tailed hawks circled above him. The creek beckoned him to where he now stood, where he stood every day at this time. He liked to come to the place where he could free his mind amidst a kaleidoscope of sights and sounds found only in nature. Today, the stream’s foamy bubbles, swiftly flowing across rocks like a spilled bottle of champagne, filled him with melancholy. He rolled his tense neck from side to side, silently counting the remaining days until his imminent departure.

Nostalgia vanished as fast as a meteor’s tail when he realized in four weeks, he would be a commissioned Naval officer with a degree in Aeronautical Engineering. His lifelong dream of being a pilot in the US Navy, the diamond he had been mining since he sat in Mrs. Spencer’s third grade class, neared at the age of twenty-two. A cool spring breeze blew, as the dwindling daylight caught his attention.

Quickly, he began sprinting across the University of Colorado campus. The Whitmires expected him in twenty minutes, and he had yet to shower and dress.

Racing up the dorm stairs, taking two at a time, he reached his room and turned on the shower before applying white dollops of shaving cream to his dark, facial stubble. A few swipes with the razor erased all traces of the shadows and he then stepped into the cool water, washing away sweat and fatigue.

The comment previously made by Mrs. Whitmire, “It would be a more formal dinner than usual,” popped into his mind as he stood,

staring into his closet. Hurriedly, he chose a pale-blue dress shirt, gray slacks, and a lightweight wool sport coat before splashing a few drops of Old Spice cologne on his face. He then ran a comb through his short chestnut-colored hair, glancing at his watch as he did.

Drew then galloped toward the parking lot, jumped into his sports car and pressed on the accelerator. He was aware he was exceeding the speed limit when he turned toward the Whitmire's neighborhood, but nothing, he vowed, would diminish his punctuality record. Not now, not ever!

Sarah would be on the front porch, that he knew; however, the tradition would close this evening. A mix of emotions swirled, as he hastily parked in the usual place, in front of the Whitmire's white stately mansion, but a knot bulged in his throat when he saw Sarah shivering in the cold. He jumped out of the car, checking his watch as he did, and smiled to himself. His record for punctuality remained intact.

"Your warm welcome is appreciated, Sarah, especially with this chilly breeze." His voice hinted of the emotions the night would hold. The Whitmires were as close to having a family as he had ever experienced, other than his grandmother. And this was their final time together, prior to graduation.

"I always want the first hug," Sarah said, smiling.

He tenderly put his arm around her shoulder and together they strode into the entry where Hope stood unmoving with the Whitmire's dog snuggled in her arms. Tongue-tied and shy, Hope began frantically searching for a corner in which to hide. Then she tried to hide behind Sarah who was happily chirping the introduction.

"Drew, I'd like for you to meet my good friend, Hope Madison." Immediately, Hope jostled the dog and extended her hand, though she found it hard to keep her mouth from dropping open like a fish.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Drew,” Hope mumbled in a nervous, high-pitched voice, while trying to avert her eyes from looking directly into his. Her height made it almost impossible. He was over six feet tall, and with her low heels, she could tilt her head slightly, and stare directly into his face, which she was doing now. Drew flashed her a side-grin, his eyes snapping of amusement.

“The pleasure is all mine, I assure you.” His voice was as smooth as a coat of honey while gripping her hand. Hope was not aware that her large, sapphire-blue eyes were taking him on a journey, one he didn’t want to end.

Hope found his appearance immobilizing, especially his turquoise eyes. They were so intense they almost overpowered his slender build, olive skin and rich chestnut-colored hair. She quickly glanced away, unable to linger on his face. That’s when she noted his expensive clothes and shoes.

Irritated that Sarah had purposefully withheld information about him, including his affable manner and finely chiseled features worthy of Hollywood films, Hope searched for a corner in which to hide. Until she realized he still had hold of her hand.

When Mrs. Whitmire entered, Hope felt his grip gradually surrender, as if he were reluctantly pulling away.

“Dinner is ready,” she announced. “We’ll be eating in the dining room tonight, in honor of Ken’s and Drew’s upcoming graduation.” Hope noticed Mrs. Whitmire’s eyes watering as Drew stepped toward her with his arms open. A quick hug had them both wiping their eyes.

Hope headed for the long dining table draped with linens, china, crystal, and freshly cut daffodils. Drafts of cool air, creeping in around the windows, was a reminder that summer had yet to arrive, as it had in Texas. An oversized marble fireplace with crackling flames warmed her.

Mrs. Whitmire pointed to an empty chair by Sarah. “That one is for you, Hope.” She then seated Drew opposite the girls.

Hope felt dread snaking through her body. Her tongue went lifeless. Conversing with the guys about football, of which he and Ken were stars, along with his destined career to be a Navy pilot, were topics out of her realm. Yet something about him intrigued her. Under his handsome veneer, she sensed a genuine vulnerability.

She also thought him capable of breaking her heart, so she shifted her focus to the candles flickering in the center of the table. It was while studying the flames, she determined Drew to be a foreign entity. He was the direct opposite from the guys in her study group, the same group that comprised her social life at Texas Christian University. Suddenly, she felt strangely excited. Sarah’s idol appeared to have the same desire to squeeze enthusiasm into every moment, as she did, and her grandfather before her. But Drew, she noted, also carried a layer of vulnerability in his eyes.

Drew noticed her stealing quick glances at him. He found himself doing the same with her, even at times, almost staring, more frequently than he felt appropriate. Her poise and beauty in the glow of the crystal chandelier captivated him. For the first time, he found himself unable to concentrate on Sarah’s friendly banter, until thankfully, Mrs. Whitmire placed large bowls of beef stroganoff, buttered noodles, and fragrant bread on the table.

“I’m sure going to miss your cooking, Mrs. Whitmire.”

“Drew, how many times have I told you to call me ‘Doris’? After all, you’re part of our family.”

Drew sent her a lopsided grin, while twirling the pasta. “I’m not sure my grandmother would approve, but I’ll try.”

Hope silently engaged in the conversation until a tall, antique clock, standing in the corner, chimed eight times. She welcomed the sound, knowing Drew’s presence would soon end. Then, to her

surprise, Sarah launched into stories of when Drew came into their lives. Immediately, Hope recalled the conversation when Sarah first mentioned him.

“Drew was denied the bond of a family, at least, the kind he longed to have, after his mother died when he was young. His grandmother raised him and now, during college, our home has been his refuge. He’s like family.”

Sitting across from the one who had dominated many of Sarah’s conversations, Hope felt a connection. Drew knew obstacles. A hole in his heart, he knew. Erecting imperceptible walls were a natural part of his life, as it was hers. Her eyes quickly filled with a glimmer of acknowledgement, and she sat up straighter.

Unaware the room had grown quiet, Hope suddenly realized all eyes were focused on her. She blinked. Then blinked again. Now, she imagined herself invisible. But they continued holding her with their eyes. Finally, she responded,

“I’m sorry. What was the question?”

Mrs. Whitmire graciously repeated the inquiry,

“What are your plans for the summer, Hope?”

“I have no definite plans. I’d like to play golf with my dad and do a considerable amount of pleasure reading. School doesn’t allow much time for either.”

Hope’s face turned as hot as a tropical rain forest when she realized the shallowness of her response. The guys would soon depart for the Navy. The Vietnam War threatened. Playing golf at the country club sounded inappropriate, at the very least.

Drew’s deep voice shattered the quiet.

“What do you like to read?”

“Stories about World War II. My grandfather was an Air Force pilot. His handwritten postcards from foreign lands began arriving when I was four years old. I still have them.”

Tears formed in her throat with the memory. She swallowed hard, as she covered her trembling hands with a napkin. Mrs. Whitmire rushed to fill her empty tea glass.

Drew leaned back and stared at her, surprised that she found stories regarding the war interesting.

“Did he make it home?”

“Yes. From both World Wars. He didn’t talk about them, except to say he enjoyed training pilots on the Flying Fortress, his favorite airplane.” She lowered her head, and her voice became a whisper.

“He retired as a Colonel.”

“That’s a great plane and legacy you have.”

“Thank you.” She murmured, desperately wishing to reserve the tender topic for a private meeting.

“I’m very proud of all the men and women who serve,” she whispered. “Plus, those who keep their families intact while their loved ones are away.”

Her hands continued to shake when she met his eyes.

Hours of silence passed, or so it seemed, before Mrs. Whitmire and Sarah cheerfully entered the room, carrying the dessert on a large silver tray.

“Ken and Drew, your favorite dessert, Baked Alaska,” Sarah proudly stated while slicing the elegant finale to the delicious meal they had served.

After Drew’s second serving, he checked the time. Almost three hours had passed. Pushing his chair back, he unfolded his long legs from under the table and began to assist Mrs. Whitmire as she cleared the table. She immediately ordered him to sit down.

“Sarah and I will clean up, Drew. You’re our honored guest, even though we think of you as our son.”

Drew's emotions climbed to the surface when he thanked the lady who had lovingly provided a second home for him during college.

He then turned to Hope, before standing to pull out her chair.

"Do you need a ride home?"

"My parents said they would pick me up after their dinner party. They're down the street."

"I'll be glad to drive you," he insisted.

Flustered by the swirl of emotions flowing through her like a sailboat being tossed on crashing waves, she felt her face warm from the blush.

"I'll check to see when they are leaving."

Hope went to the telephone in the hall and began dialing while Ken delivered Drew a silent message, the same message he sent all the guys who talked about their girlfriends, especially the seniors in the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps Unit, of which they were both a part. "We're leaving for the Navy soon and you're going to meet women all over the world," he'd say. "Don't tie yourself down. Focus on your goals."

Drew acknowledged the silent message to be true, but Hope was different. And he was not going to shy away from getting to know her because of his upcoming departure, regardless of Ken's opinion on the subject.

Hope returned bearing a tenuous smile, while nervously nodding at him. He rushed to help her with her jacket and together they walked in silence toward the car. When he opened the passenger door on his new red convertible, she gasped.

"Corvettes are my favorite sports car, Drew. It's beautiful."

He smiled and quickly slid behind the steering wheel.

"Thank you. It's a graduation present from my grandmother."

Drew twisted the knob on the radio, lowered the volume, and turned on the heater. Hope observed the fluidity of his movements. Graceful and effortless, she thought.

“Where in Texas did you live?” She could hear his warmth in the dimly lit car.

“Fort Worth. I lived there all my life until we moved to Colorado at the beginning of my senior year. That’s when I met Sarah. Now, I attend college in my hometown...just completed my sophomore year.”

“A move during your senior year in high school sounds challenging.”

“It was. I didn’t know anyone until Sarah introduced herself, but it wasn’t long before she included me with all her other friends. I can’t imagine how the year would have been without her,” she murmured.

Drew drove slowly through Boulder’s tree-lined neighborhoods, sharing a similar story of how he and Ken met in the football locker room at the University. Eventually, she pointed to a large, rambling house.

“That’s my home on the corner.”

He parked under the streetlamp, distracted by thoughts of the future. Thoughts he never expected to entertain. Especially one. *Could he transition to the Navy easily, if they were to become involved prior to his departure?*

Hope felt her nerves unwinding, as he stared out the window. Convinced he was searching for how to gracefully decline the invitation to the dance, she thought about hastily bolting from the car. Perhaps, she could mutter a few words of gratitude before racing toward the front door.

Drew broke the silence with a deep sigh of resignation. There was no choice. Not for him.

“I have something I wish to say. I realize Sarah mentioned my needing a date for the dance, but...” He paused and cleared his throat.

Hope flinched. The unspoken topic dangled between them like icicles in winter.

She had taken deliberate steps to avoid him for most of the evening, an act that prompted elbow nudges from Sarah and an occasional kick.

Now Hope waited, biting down on her bottom lip while gripping the door handle until her knuckles were white.

“I would like to offer my own personal invitation. Hope, would you do me the honor of being my date for a very special night in Denver? It’s a graduation celebration with my Navy buddies.”

What made Drew *want* to take her? He could have any girl of his choice. *Why her?* She felt her body grow rigid, angry that she had fallen victim to Sarah’s insistence as she began repeating the words in her mind. The words she knew from memory. The words that would hurt him. The words that had to be said. Always.

“Drew, I’m not the one you should be taking.”

He turned toward her, a frown creasing his forehead. “Do you like to dance, Hope?”

“Yes, I do. But I’ve made it my goal not to date until I’m out of college.”

His mouth hung agape. “Have I offended you?”

“No. Drew, I’m not cut out for dating. All the ups and downs. Broken hearts scattered on the floor. I told Sarah this, but she wouldn’t listen.”

“Do you have someone else in your life?”

Avoiding his eyes, she shook her head.

“This *can’t* be my final time to see you, Hope. Think about it. Please.”

Drew slowly exited the car, wondering about the words that had slipped off her tongue, almost as if they had been memorized. No expression. No regret. Did she take pleasure in saying, “No,” or had she repeated them so many times rejections had become rote? Confused, he raked his short hair in frustration, prior to opening her car door.

Still, his eyes couldn’t turn loose of her while they stood on the porch of one of Boulder’s most prominent homes, the home he had passed hundreds of times during his years at the University.

“Hope, I pray this won’t be the last time we see each other. You have something very special, something I’ve not found in other girls, though I tried. It is my belief that we could have a wonderful evening.”

“Then what, Drew? You leave for the Navy, and I go back to school?”

Drew felt the sting of her retort.

“Hope, I believe our meeting was orchestrated. Not by Sarah. She was merely an instrument. I’m not sure of the reason, but I trust it was no accident. I pray we will see each other again. I leave Boulder in three weeks.”

She lowered her head, shocked by the trace of disappointment in his voice. He took a step off the porch, then quickly spun around to face her again.

“Hope, can I call you?”

She stared at him, realizing that soon, those mesmerizing turquoise eyes would be halfway around the world.

“Hope, let me prove to you who I am. If you don’t like what you see, I won’t bother you again. But please give me a chance.”

“Drew, I don’t want a long-distance relationship. Ever. And that’s what we would have.” Her words sparked of pain and her tone was resolute.

His arms hung loosely, his voice a whisper. “Trust me, Hope, and the loving God who brought us together.” His eyes stayed glued to hers.

She glanced down, as she twisted the door handle.

“I’m glad to have met you,” she said quietly.

“You didn’t answer my question. Can I call you?”

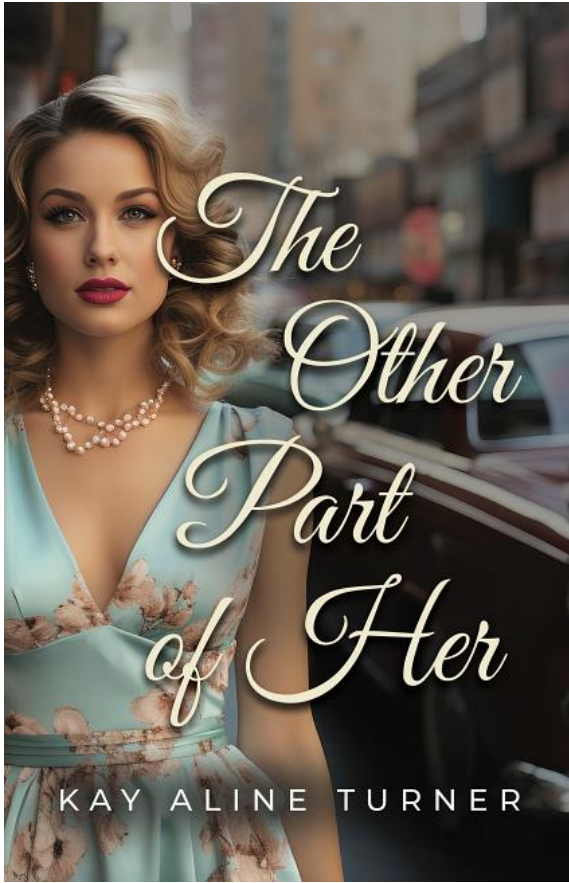
She tipped her chin and stared at him. “Think about it, Drew. Think long and hard.”

“Not necessary, Hope. Are you going to give me your phone number?”

An impish smile tugged at the corners of her mouth. “Trust your instincts, Drew. I’m quite confident that being a pilot requires the refinement of such.”

His lips curled into a grin. “I’ll get your number from Sarah.”

Amusement flickered in her eyes, an uncontrollable sparkle in his.



In 1959, Hope Madison, the beautiful daughter of wealthy, controlling parents, feels her world spiral out of control when she meets Drew Bartlett, Colorado's football star. Dreams soar and a life together is planned. Until he vanishes.

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