

Chapter X

In the intense stillness, the deliveryman seemed to deliberate over what to do about the baby mice he had discovered nesting amongst his Bibles. His expression suggested options of poison or drowning, or perhaps even feeding us to a cat. He removed his wilted carnation and loosened his pink necktie, revealing rolled-up sleeves and a gaunt chest beneath his faded overalls. As he crossed his arms, two names appeared on his arms: **Carlene**, inscribed above a black rose, and **Rhonda**, beneath a heart marked with “Mom”.

As I observed, the letters animated themselves, morphing into the likenesses of the two bickering women. Carlene argued that Rhonda was to blame for Lester’s perceived softness, claiming he lacked fight. Rhonda retaliated by blaming Lester’s weak father and claimed Carlene demanded every penny he earned from delivering Bibles, limiting his chances to succeed. This generated a surreal atmosphere, reminiscent of comic strips come alive, contributing to my growing unease as I recalled my mission—to awaken Poppa.

At that moment, I felt a gentle touch from Samson, grounding me as I acknowledged the persistent bickering around me. The deliveryman's jittery yet melodic voice broke the silence, as he asked what we were doing. Carlene urged Lester to show backbone, while she mocked his lack of gumption.

I cautiously stepped forward, inquiring if he was headed to Kansas, explaining our need to reach Salina. Lester fumbled his words, seeming overwhelmed, giving the impression that he was not quite quick on the uptake. He ultimately stated we could not be on his bus, though his finger, pointing shakily toward us, suggested uncertainty.

I persisted, explaining that my parents were in Salina and that he would be helping us if he let us ride. Carlene taunted Lester, claiming he would cave in, while Rhonda lamented his timid nature. As I pleaded with him, it was clear I was pushing Lester to a breaking point between compassion and fear of repercussions from his boss.

In a moment of hesitation, Lester slumped into a seat, clearly wrestling with his reluctance. Finally, he inquired where we were from, reflecting a surrender of his previous resolve as he faced the inevitable reality of helping us.