

a church you could bear

Lark woke early, and together they left the house quietly, leaving Kellan upstairs. Lark prepared an armful of lilacs and a maple bough, creating a lush spray for the car ride to Labrino's. As day broke, Lark comforted Rainy, reassuring him that listening to their friend was a sign of true friendship despite his feelings of failure. They adorned the fence with the flowers and soon turned their attention to the local shop, Bread.

Owned by Maudie Antoinette, Bread began as a bakery known for delicious domed peasant loaves made from a secret recipe left by a vanished Spanish baker. In less than a year, Lark had befriended Maudie, bonding over cherished books and a barter arrangement with a local distiller. Their friendship led to integrating a used book shelf into the bakery, slowly expanding into an entire wall of bookshelves, transforming it into a quaint bookshop filled with character.

As they unpacked books, customers appeared, primarily for Maudie's bread and pastries. An old man entered the shop, bringing an air of delight as he browsed the shelves. Lark's pride in their shop was evident. The old man engaged Lark, eventually inquiring about what lay under the counter. When Lark revealed the rare Molly Thorn, he was taken aback and expressed his longing to purchase it, although she hesitated. He promised to return.

As they prepared for Lark's upcoming birthday, Rainy felt anticipation overshadowing earlier grief. Meanwhile, Kellan organized decorations while Rainy contacted friends for food and drinks. The night of the celebration was lively, filled with music and laughter, reminiscent of a communal gathering without the pressure of correctness.

The old man also attended, enjoying the music and community spirit as the gathering grew. He shared whiskey and offered thoughtful reflections on life, appreciating Lark's presence as a treasure to the community. However, Rainy noted Kellan's absence and sought him out, frustrated but eventually rejoining the celebration.

As the night wound down and guests departed, Lark found warmth in Rainy's embrace. They discussed the merry chaos of the evening and turned toward dreams of children they never had. In a tender moment, Lark shared visions of adventures and names fitting their imagined son and daughter, drawing Rainy into a dreamlike conversation as the night slipped away.