

Writers' Prompt: A Cup of Coffee, New York City, 1950s

Kate Bailey is sitting nervously by the window at Caffè Reggìo in New York City. The early morning light is breaking through the stained glass windows and casting rays of colourful light onto the table and floor.

The room is filled with Renaissance-era paintings and statues that had been collected over the years. In the air you can smell freshly ground coffee made from what the owner claims to be the first imported espresso machine from Italy.

The cafe, which originally opened in 1902, used to be a barbershop that served their clients a 10-cent cup of coffee. In 1927, this family-run business changed its focus from a barbershop to serving caffeinated drinks full-time and quickly became one of New York City's favourite places to stop.

In fact, just last year on the 09th of October, 1956, the night before the grand premier of their Oscar winning movie "Giant", Rock Hudson walked through the door of the cafe along with Elizabeth Taylor. Rock tipped his hat to the owner, walked up to the counter and said, "Elizabeth told me that if I needed a real cup of coffee, I should come here to Cafe Reggìo and when Liz tells me where to go, I go."

When Kate was a young girl, she used to meet her grandfather at the cafe everyday after school. She would find him sitting at the same table with his retired buddies from the docks reminiscing about the good o'l days. Kate loved to hear their stories and learn more about her grandfather's life as a

young man. He had been quite the adventurer in his early days.

Any minute now, Kate would be meeting someone from her past, a boy she was once in love with, Andrew Dunn. Kate had all kinds of questions racing through her head as she waited for Andrew. Would he be the same person she loved back then? Did he ever marry? What did he do all these years? She felt very nervous and kept stirring her coffee but not drinking it.

Kate and Andrew grew up together in New York City and fell in love when they were 15. They had always enjoyed each others company and they shared a lot in common. It was during a school dance that Kate and Andrew realized that they were more than just friends.

Andrew had stopped at Kate's house to pick her up for the dance and as she came down the stairs in her new pink satin dress his heart stopped for a moment. Andrew knew at that moment that their relationship would never be the same.

Overnight it seemed, Kate had turned into a beautiful young woman. She was no longer the tomboy Andrew used to run around the neighbourhood with climbing fences and hanging around the brownstone steps.

Andrew couldn't keep his eyes off her all night and when he tried to speak, he kept tripping over his tongue. Kate found Andrew's new nervousness around her endearing and she welcomed his new interest in her. She too felt that their relationship had taken a new turn.

Then one day, just after Kate had celebrated her 17th birthday, Andrew's father received a promotion and was offered a raise with the insurance company that he worked for, New York City Insurance. However, this would mean a move for the Dunn family. A move to Dallas, Texas.

This new position would provide a better life for Andrew's family and new opportunities. Perhaps the Dunn children would now be able to afford college and live the life their parents imagined for them. At least they would have a chance.

Andrew's father did not have a college degree. He had started in the mailroom and worked his way up in the company. He had worked hard, was a quick learner and was always eager to help out when others would refuse. This did not go unnoticed by management and this helped to move his father quickly up the ladder.

Kate believed that she and Andrew would get married one day and raise a family together in the city. She had started a scrapbook filled with clippings from various wedding magazines with handwritten notes across the pages. She had even started a hope chest where she began gathering little things for their home such as fancy hand towels and various kitchen utensils. Kate and Andrew were in love and the future looked bright for them.

When Andrew told Kate that his family was moving, Kate felt like someone had kicked her in the stomach. She had trouble catching her breath. Her head began to spin and she felt like

she was going to be sick. She could no longer hear anything that Andrew was saying to her. She sat down on the ground and tried to compose herself.

It took a few days for Kate to take it all in and come to terms with the news. Perhaps things would be ok and they could still get married one day. Maybe this would be better for them in the long run.

Kate and Andrew promised to write each other once a week but over time the letters began to arrive only once a month and eventually they stopped coming all together. Kate wondered if Andrew had found someone new in his life.

When she did not receive an answer to her last letter, Kate decided to move on with her life and instead focused her attention on her friends and school.

Eventually, Kate met a handsome young man named Robert Bailey. Robert was the kind of guy that stood out in a crowd. He was smart and confident but he did not have a huge ego. He was not in love with himself like some of the other boys Kate had dated. Robert was also funny and had such a great attitude about life. It was hard not to like him.

Robert was first blown away by Kate's beautiful green eyes and her smile. He had never seen such a beauty, especially someone who had no idea how beautiful they were. He quickly fell in love with her. To others, Robert and Kate seemed like the perfect match.

Robert knew the moment he met her that he wanted to marry Kate but she did not share those same feelings. Kate found that no one could really make her feel the same way that Andrew had. Every boy that she dated since Andrew never matched up to him in comparison.

Although Robert was a great guy and she enjoyed his company, she did not love him the way that she had loved Andrew. The same passion was not there.

However, as the months passed by, Kate began to question her earlier feelings for Andrew. Had she really been in love with him or was it just an infatuation - a teenage romance. Perhaps real love felt differently. Maybe she did love Robert and didn't know it.

Although Kate was unsure about her feelings for Robert, she did believe that he would love her till his dying day. He would be a loving husband, a good provider and wonderful father. So, when Robert asked Kate if she would make him the happiest man in the world by saying yes to his proposal, she decided to say "Yes". Kate felt that maybe it was time to move on with her life. She would always remember Andrew with fondness and think of their time together as an important FIRST LOVE experience. She was an adult now, no longer a teenager.

Robert and Kate lived a good life in the city. Robert had a very successful career in the publishing world and was quickly advancing in the company. They now had two children, Kevin a fair-skinned and red-headed adventurer like Kate's

grandfather and Susan a very smart and "mature for her age" little girl who wanted to be a doctor, mother and philanthropist when she grew up. Things were looking good for Kate and Robert.

Shortly after Christmas, Robert began to tire easily and was finding it difficult to do some of the things he was used to doing. Their evening walks became shorter and shorter, and where Robert normally took the stairs up to his 8th floor office, he began having difficulties keeping up with that.

Kate was worried about Robert. She suggested they take some time off and go on vacation for a couple of weeks. Go to a beautiful warm beach somewhere and do absolutely nothing. Perhaps that was just what he needed - a short break away from it all. But when they returned and Robert's health began to worsen, they decided to see a doctor. After several tests and consultations, Robert was finally diagnosed with lung cancer.

At the beginning, Robert and Kate were hopeful. The doctors felt that it was still early and that with proper treatment and rest Robert might still be able to live a long life. The doctors told him that in cases similar to his, individuals who had a lung removed could still live a good life. There were no guarantees but it was possible. Unfortunately for Robert, he would not be one of those lucky ones.

A month before Robert died, as he was laying in bed one morning reflecting on his love for Kate, their children and their life together, Robert tried to imagine what Kate's future would look like without him. He knew that she was a strong,

independent woman, capable of being on her own, but it broke his heart to think of her spending the rest of her life without someone by her side, someone who would protect her, love her and always be there for her. Robert never imagined that he would be leaving Kate so soon. He had always joked about them dying together at 100 years old while waterskiing. This was not the way he had imagined things.

Kate was always upbeat and positive around Robert and would never allow anyone, including Robert, to talk about giving up. She believed that giving up was like signing a death certificate. If it happened it happened but they were not going to give up so quickly. Not without a fight first.

Robert understood Kate's reasons and he followed her lead. Lately though, Robert could feel his body weakening and something in him knew that he did not have much time left. He now realized that they would have to start making plans for the inevitable.

For Robert, the idea of leaving this world and the life he enjoyed was the sad part. He had enjoyed his life and wasn't ready to leave yet. There was so much more that he wanted to do with his life.

Robert had already gone through the other emotions: denial, anger, bargaining, depression. Now he was coming to the point of acceptance and with this acceptance Robert received a surprising gift, peace.

Perhaps life on earth was just one part of the story. Perhaps when one dies it is not really an end but a graduation. This was very comforting to Robert. He was no longer afraid of death. Now, Robert wondered what he would see on the other side.

So, Robert made a decision to bring up the subject of What if, with Kate. He felt this would be a good way to approach the conversation but he would have to wait for the right moment. Fortunately, that moment presented itself the next morning.

Kate didn't want to talk about it but Robert insisted. He could see that Kate was very uncomfortable but he had something important to say. He asked Kate to please hear him out.

Robert told Kate that he loved her very much and he was grateful for everyday that they had had together. He told Kate that if he should die, that he hoped she would remarry one day. He wanted her to be happy. To live the rest of her life with someone else who would love her even more than he did if that was even possible.

He went on to explain that it would give him some peace to believe that she would, in time, move on with her life. He wanted her to be happy again even if it meant that it would be with someone else.

Robert told Kate that he loved her more than words could express and that he didn't want her to ever worry about whether or not he would approve of her remarrying again.

Kate, could see that this was very difficult for Robert so she stopped fighting him. She assured him that she and the children would be ok and that when the time was right if she ever met someone as wonderful as Robert she would remarry. However, to herself, Kate couldn't imagine ever finding another man as loving as Robert.

It was two days later that Robert lost his battle with cancer. Exactly, one year to the day that he had first been diagnosed. Although Kate was heartbroken, she was grateful that he was no longer in any pain and that Robert had passed away in his sleep. Perhaps now, he would be at peace. As Robert had said to her just a couple of days ago, maybe death is not an ending but a new beginning. Kate found this idea comforting.

A few days later, family and friends gathered at St. Peter's Catholic Church in Manhattan to say goodbye to Robert. It was a beautiful service and Kate had a large and loving support group there for her and the children.

At the end of the service, as Kate and her family were walking down the aisle to the awaiting hearse outside, Kate noticed a man sitting alone in the last row. This struck her as odd because everyone else had been seated together. She thought perhaps he had arrived late and did not want to disturb anyone. Perhaps he was just a passerby who came in to pray, and then she recognized him. As he ran his fingers through his hair, she remembered how Andrew had done that. He was always fussing about his hair when they were teenagers. Andrew looked a little older but he hadn't changed much. She was shocked to see him there.

Kate felt a sudden rush of old feelings rising to the surface but she quickly push them aside, refocused and continued down the aisle. She was not going to think about Andrew right now.

A few days after the funeral, several condolence cards arrived in the mail. As Kate sifted through the cards, she noticed one from Andrew with a New York return address. Kate was surprised to see that Andrew had returned to the city. She was hesitant to open the card. She was not really in a good place right now to deal with her feelings about Andrew so she decided to put the card away for awhile. Kate placed the unopened card on top of the fridge, out of sight for the time being. She did not want to throw it away, but she did not want to look at it right now.

Several months passed and while Kate was doing some spring cleaning, she came across Andrew's card on top of the fridge. She thought about opening the card but she was feeling quite nervous. Kate thought about it for a moment, took a deep breath and broke the seal.

It was a standard condolence card, but inside, Andrew had left a note. The note read, "Kate, I was very sorry to hear about your husband's passing. My sister, Karen, shared the sad news with me and she gave me the details regarding the service. I was in the city and wanted to stop by the church to pay my respects. I hope that I did not upset you at the funeral. That was not my intention. When you feel up to it, perhaps we could get together for a coffee at Cafe Reggio and we could catch up. I remember how much you liked stopping in there after school. I have thought about reaching out to you several times before but it never seemed like the

right time. Again, I am very sorry for your loss. You can reach me at the number below. Love, Andrew.”

Kate wondered if it would be a good idea to meet Andrew. How did she feel about Andrew now? Why did he want to meet? Did he want to explain why he stopped writing her? Did she want to put herself through all those feelings again? She decided to give herself a couple of days to consider it.

After going back and forth for several days, Kate decided to call Andrew and she agreed to meet with him. Kate thought maybe it would be a good idea to face him and put these years of confusing emotions behind her - to finally close the book and move on. Maybe, meeting Andrew would be a good thing.

Now, Kate Bailey is sitting nervously by the window at Caffè Reggio and each time the cafe’s heavy door opens, Kate’s heart skips a beat and she asks herself if she should stay or leave.