

THE SHOTLEY MARSH – by Hannah King

The day that place first became significant to her, the sky was overcast. The rain made little pitter patters on the hood of the red raincoat she was wearing, borrowed from the back of the blue 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air convertible. They hadn't planned to come to the Shotley marshes, it was getting late and everything was bathed in a warm evening glow. Her previously perfectly ironed yellow dress snagged on the thorns, Ma would kill her later, as they made their way swiftly along the shingle path, her hand in his and her little brown boots getting covered in the marsh mud.

She'd loved growing up in Suffolk. Always a moment away from playing in the countryside, throwing sticks at her brothers and climbing trees; coming home covered in the mud and being rushed straight up to the bathroom to get rid of the smell, something close to rotten eggs. But they lived close enough to Ipswich that she could secure her hair with bobby pins, put on her best dress, and spend a night drinking too much Tom Collins and dancing till her feet hurt.

It was strange to be back, especially alone.

She walked for a good while till she found the gap in the hedge, remembering how he'd laughed and pulled the leaves out of her hair. This had been what he wanted to show her; if she turned her head to the left, she could see the muddy river Orwell, if she turned it to the right, she could see golden fields stretching for miles. Two typical Suffolk scenes meeting in one spot 'for those days when you can't decide where to go'.

They had often sat here, watching the boats come and go, or the wind disturb the crops, and exchanged books with each other. She still had his copy of *Catcher in the Rye*, though honestly, she couldn't see what he saw in it. The last book she had lent him was *East of Eden*, she wondered if he still had it. He liked to sail, so her books were always returned a little crinkled on the edges from the water. Sometimes she could even trace the dents to exactly where he had held the book. They had often talked of art, too, passing a Bell's Whiskey bottle between them. She liked John Constable because he captured the places she

loved so much around her home. He thought Constable dull, preferred the new abstract expressionism movement. But she boldly disagreed with him, it was all an indistinguishable mess of paint. They'd spent hours upon hours like this. The land and its wild inhabitants the only witness to their laughter, tears and pretentious arguments.

So, if you're ever there, in that spot between the river and the fields, look closely and maybe you'll see a little glimpse of two young people disturbing the weeds beneath their feet, there and gone. A blink in the timeline of the Shotley marshes.