Chapter 14: Treasured Ladies: New Found Independence

The year 1967 marked the close of my studies at Eastern Michigan University. Armed with a Bachelor's and a Master's degree, I was eager to begin a time of independence and purpose. When I accepted a teaching position at Adams Junior High in Dearborn, Michigan, I finally earned a steady income. It was exhilarating to be self-sufficient—able to pay for essentials and indulge in occasional luxuries.

I had put myself through college and, after years of careful budgeting and modest living as a student, shopping felt almost indulgent. After a day of teaching, I would often stroll through the elegant shops in West Dearborn, which were just a short distance from my school. My favorite stop was Jacobson's, a refined department store with high-end fashion and tasteful décor. More than the merchandise, it was the experience that mattered—it made me feel grown-up, capable, and entirely on my own.

One afternoon while browsing, something unusual caught my eye: a pair of small, gold-framed portraits displayed near the register. Each portrait depicted a poised, graceful lady reminiscent of the famed Gibson Girls. These iconic illustrations from the late 19th century celebrated the ideal modern woman: intelligent, stylish, self-assured, and independent. Instantly, I was drawn to them.

Though simple black-and-white headshots, the images carried a certain charm. One woman wore her hair piled high in an elegant bouffant; the other's locks tumbled freely in loose curls, as if debating which pompadour she might try next. Their fine necklines, modest expressions, and soft blush suggested innocence and confidence—a blend of beauty and strength. To me, they weren't just pictures. They embodied the kind of woman I was becoming.

Soft Blushed Cheeks, Resolute Look…

Loose Curls, Purposeful Eyes…

Each framed piece was no larger than four by five inches and cost less than ten dollars. Yet over the years, their value to me has grown immeasurably. On that day, those ladies came

home with me—they were the first significant personal purchase I made after college. Rather than being a mark of extravagance, they became a symbol of possibility. With them, I realized I could choose how to spend my money, how to adorn my space, and how to define myself.

Since then, the ladies have accompanied me through countless moves, including journeys across the country. In every new place I call home, I choose a spot where I can see them each morning as I prepare for the day. Over time, they have become familiar faces in my home and a quiet reminder of the woman I was becoming in those early years of independence.

Though their frames are modest and their financial value minimal, I hold them dear. They are more than just décor; they represent a moment of self-affirmation. Marking the joy of stepping into adulthood with grace, confidence, and a sense of style all my own, they carry meaning beyond their appearance. One day, I hope to pass them on to my granddaughters. Perhaps they will see in those portraits not just vintage charm but the story behind them: a young woman claiming her independence, one thoughtful choice at a time.