

## Hidin' From Him

My name is Rhett Hollis. I'm nineteen.

I wanna tell you, my story. I wish I could have gotten to know you, but I've always been that awkward kid who sought out the corner of any room I found myself, attemptin' to blend into the background.

I once owned dreams, but none ever knocked upon my door. Daddy always preached *at* me whenever he was drunk. He'd say, "Boy... believe me when I tell you... life deals what it deals. You can wish for somethin' that'll change circumstance and place it in one hand while takin' a crap in the other. See which fills up quicker."

What usually followed was a slap across my temple to enforce his words were gospel. He didn't treat momma much different, and life got harder after she died. She found her escape from him through a bottle of vodka.

My momma named me Rhett. It was the name of some writer she read paperbacks she'd bought at Walmart. Romance stories 'bout fallin' in love and runnin' off. I reckon because of the poor choice of a man she bedded down with.

She used to tell me there's a girl out there in the world somewhere lookin' for a boy just like me and that we'd likely stumble into each other someday, somewhere.

"Rhett, you'll feel the magic, son. The entire world will come to a joltin' halt. I swear your insides will feel jittery and ticklish until you won't be able to stand it. Promise me you'll never settle for anything less like I did. You are the single treasure that seals my choice as right... no regrets."

When momma laughed, which wasn't often, even the walls of this house seemed to breathe easier not havin' to listen for *him*. I stopped calling *him* Daddy after he made her apologize for cryin'. I try to remember her smile. Her eyes were the purest blue, and they looked like they'd been pasted onto the wrong life. How could she have married the shell of a man God allowed to push his way into her keepin'? It ain't right for a woman as special as her, to be his prize, just so I could be born. I reckon the Lord has his plans, but left unattended, plans fail. His was certainly a mistake... that makes me one too.

I know it's not proper to question our Creator, but the outcome seems to call for it. I certainly don't understand the why of it.

Momma never lied and before she passed, she warned it would make things more difficult for my soulmate to find me if I continued hidin' in the shadows. But damn it, I can't make myself do what don't live inside my heart.

Sometimes, I can hear *his* anger in the voice comin' from *my* mouth. Not loud, just the beginnin' edge of it. But enough to warn me it's a chance I can't risk.

I'll be honest, I don't even let my eyes look with hope of seein' that special girl my momma told me is out there searchin' for me. I'm pretty sure I couldn't even speak up if those jittery tickles flooded over me at her sight.

Lately I been thinkin' 'bout how quietly a guy could exit this world. I catch myself studyin' bridges, imaginin' how tall it might take. Or wonderin' how many pills in the bottle on *his* nightstand would do the job properly. These thoughts scare me.

That's why I'm tellin' my story. I don't want to just disappear from this earth without reachin' out in some way to help the person who finds this note of mine. I hope it's the one person I somehow missed or unknowingly avoided. Wouldn't that be somethin', if it were you? I pray it is *you* who reads my message inside this bottle.

If you are the one who finds it, it'd be a miracle... it just washin' up from the ocean's depths, the tide placin' it at your feet left leavin' your footprints pressed into the wet sand.

I would want you to know how I imagined at least a million times 'bout sharin' my world with someone like you. I was simply too afraid of who I'd come from. Far too scared *his* dark side that's likely bred into my soul, might slip out and force me into becomin' the person I feared my entire life.

I was never hidin' from you; I was hidin' from becomin' him.