

BEHIND THE WALLPAPER

Written by

Caroline Acton

EXT. HERON AVE - DAY

Charlotte is riding her yellow bike home from work. She waves to her neighbors as she rides along the beach. An old hotel is visible in the distance. She veers right, turning onto her street. She parks her bike in front of the willow tree in her yard and walks in the back door.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - DAY

Charlotte walks inside the kitchen and shuts the back door. Her mom, Laura, is sitting on her computer at the table.

LAURA

Hey, Char. How was work?

She doesn't look up from her computer.

CHARLOTTE

It was fine. I'm going over to Bea's in a little though. Can I borrow a sweater?

Laura still isn't looking at Charlotte, who is now walking away from her.

LAURA

I guess. Just not one from the top shelf, those are cashmere and you'll ruin it somehow. I mean it!

Charlotte had stopped listening and walked upstairs.

INT. LAURA'S ROOM - DAY

Charlotte walks into her mom's room and shuts the door. She goes into her mom's closet to find a sweater. She stands on a stool to reach the top shelf but tips over, falls, and brings a few coats down with her. She stands up, picks up the coats, and realizes a photo fell out of the pocket. She holds it up, examining. It's a photo of Laura and her friends in front of a burning building.

Charlotte's younger sister Ella, a spunky 14-year-old with dirty blonde hair, hears her fall and walks over to her mom's room.

ELLA

What are you doing?!

CHARLOTTE

I was looking for a sweater and I
fell off of the stool. Look what
was in her coat pocket though.

Still laying on the ground, she hands the photo to Ella.

ELLA

Is that mom?

CHARLOTTE

Yeah, I want to know the whole
story.

ELLA

Are you gonna ask her?

CHARLOTTE

She isn't one to share. I'm gonna
ask Bea tonight. Her mom is in it.

ELLA

Good idea. Here, take a picture of
it on your phone and put it back.

Ella walks away.

Charlotte takes a photo of the photo and shoves the picture
into a random coat.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S ROOM - EVENING

Charlotte walks back into her room and shuts her door. She
throws on her mom's sweater and some jeans then walks back
downstairs.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Charlotte looks over at her mom, who still hasn't left the
kitchen, or looked up from the computer. Charlotte rolls her
eyes and goes out the front door instead.

INT. BEA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Charlotte walks through Bea's back door.

CHARLOTTE

Heyyyy. You'll never believe what I
found.

BEA
Ooooh. Exciting. What is it? A
puppy?

Bea puts her hands up in excitement. Charlotte looks back at her and scrunches her nose.

CHARLOTTE
Let's go to your room.

INT. BEA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlotte and Bea go upstairs and shut Bea's door. Bea plops onto the bed. Charlotte pulls up the photo on her phone and tosses it over onto Bea's bed, where she's sitting.

BEA
Well, I wasn't expecting this. What
is it?

CHARLOTTE
I don't know, our moms committing a
crime?

They sit in silence for a moment, thinking.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Does your mom have her old
yearbooks still?

BEA
Yeah, I'm sure she does. Why?

CHARLOTTE
Maybe we should try to find who
else is in the photo?

BEA
Yeah! She isn't home so we're free
to look.

INT. BEA'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Charlotte and Bea look around, struggling to find the yearbooks. Bea walks into a closet and comes out wearing vintage clothing.

BEA
You like? I think this is such a
good vintage look.

CHARLOTTE

Sure, can we get back to looking please?

BEA

Yeah, sorry. Why do you seem so stressed about this?

CHARLOTTE

I just feel like I know nothing about my mom or her past. This could've been a crime. I can't let this go, I want to know the story.

BEA

We'll figure it out. I'll check in one more place.

Bea walks back into the closet and comes out holding the stack of yearbooks and wearing her normal clothing.

Charlotte smiles excitedly.

INT. BEA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlotte and Bea look through the yearbooks, comparing who is in it to the photo. They see a group photo of their moms and the others from the photo under the activity portion.

CHARLOTTE

I didn't know they all played tennis. Is that over at the old hotel?

BEA

Yeah, it is. The photo background is similar to the fire picture. Look at the trees.

They look at each other and suddenly know what they're going to do. Charlotte heads home for the night.

INT. ELLA'S ROOM - MORNING

Charlotte goes into Ella's room to tell her the plan.

CHARLOTTE

Hey, want to go to the beach with me and Bea? We have an theory about the photo.

ELLA

I have a new bikini that I want to wear. So, yes. Now?

CHARLOTTE

Yep. Bea's waiting out front.

ELLA

Okay. Gimme 5.

EXT. CHARLOTTE'S FRONT YARD - DAY

Charlotte and Ella walk outside and see Bea.

INT. LAURA'S CLOSET - DAY

Laura is in her closet and notices the photo sticking out of the coat. She calls Marina, Bea's mom. She is biting her nail and her face is tensed.

LAURA

Marina. You're going to be mad. I kept something that I wasn't supposed to and I think Charlotte found it.

MARINA

What? What is it?

LAURA

The photo of us all in front of the burning hotel. I don't know I've just never been able to part with it.

MARINA

Laura! It shouldn't have even been taken.

The phone is silent on both ends of a second.

MARINA (CONT'D)

How do you know she found it?

LAURA

I still have it, she didn't take it. I don't even know if she saw it. Its just, I keep it in an old coat in the back of my closet, but today I found it sticking out of a different coat.

MARINA

Maybe we should just tell them.

LAURA

No. No, I'm not telling anyone.

MARINA

Then make something up. We can't have them digging around or talking about this.

LAURA

I know. I'll fix this. Bye.

They hang up the phone. Laura grabs the photo and burns it in the fire place. She watches it burn.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

Young Laura, Marina and their five friends are drunk and laughing on the roof of the Grand Victorian hotel.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Charlotte, Bea, and Ella walk along the beach to the old Victorian Hotel. It is surrounded by willow trees and a big, open field. They walk down the dock up to the entrance of it, which is now a little museum.

BEA

Hello? Are you guys open?

CHARLOTTE

Let's just walk around. It'll be fine.

A sign reads "A hotel that represents Bay Ridge history. The hangout for locals and travelers alike until 1998"

ELLA

Look, it burned summer of 1998. And was considered an important hotel if that means anything to you.

BEA

Interesting. Does it say how it burned?

CHARLOTTE

Electrical issues.

BEA
It looks like it started
downstairs. We could examine the V
shape and see where exactly it
started. If the point that is most
burnt is an outlet or near a wire,
then it's electrical.

Charlotte stares at her blankly, confused why she knows that.

BEA (CONT'D)
I took a criminology class.

CHARLOTTE
Huh. So you're a criminologist now?

BEA
Detective works too.

Bea and Charlotte smile at each other. Ella giggles.

ELLA
Do you want to walk down further to
get a better look?

CHARLOTTE
For a second, yeah let's do that.

Charlotte, Bea, and Ella walk down the beach until they see
the full hotel. Bea walk closer to the hotel while Charlotte
and Ella sit and stare for a moment.

ELLA
The tree is the same as in the
photo.

Charlotte holds up her phone with the photo to the tree.

CHARLOTTE
You're right. We know for sure
where the photo is taken at least.

Bea walks over to them.

BEA
It looks like it started near the
kitchen... no signs of forced
entry...and maybe the use of an
accelerant.

Charlotte rolls her eyes.

CHARLOTTE
Let's go, Sherlock Holmes.

ELLA
I didn't even get to show off my
new bikini.

Charlotte snaps a quick picture. They walk home.

EXT. BARRY AVENUE - AFTERNOON

Bea goes inside her house, while Charlotte and Ella go inside theirs.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Charlotte and Ella walk in to see Laura headed towards the door.

CHARLOTTE
Hi. What's up?

LAURA
I just need to clear my head. I'll
be back.

ELLA
Mom?

She stops for a second, biting her nails and holding her arm around her waist.

You can talk to us.

LAURA
No. Everything is perfect.

Ella and Charlotte go upstairs, confused. Laura gets in her car and leaves.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

Charlotte lays on her bed and stares at the ceiling. She gets up and pulls out a photo from a drawer of her and Ella in their mom's closet. Next to them are a stack of diaries. Her eyes get wide and she looks towards the door. She calls Bea.

CHARLOTTE
Bea? I'm onto something. Come here.

Bea comes over.

INT. ELLA'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

CHARLOTTE

Ell, let's go to mom's room.

Ella looks up from her phone and hops off of her bed. She follows Charlotte and Bea.

INT. LAURA'S CLOSET - AFTERNOON

Ella, Charlotte, and Bea walk over to the closet.

CHARLOTTE

I was looking at this old photo of us in her closet and there's a stack of diaries in the background.

They push aside the clothing and see the closet nook. Ella reaches in and grabs a box.

ELLA

Guys, look what's inside.

CHARLOTTE

Open, open!

They move onto the ground closer together and look inside. They sift through a old photos, old jewelry, concert tickets, and 3 diaries. Charlotte opens the diary dated 1998.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Listen to this.

Charlotte begins to read, but fades into Laura's voice.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)

The hotel down past Heron Avenue and Bay Drive, the Grand Victorian on the Chesapeake will never leave my mind. Beautiful, but not a smashing success. Close to bankruptcy for years.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. GRAND VICTORIAN HOTEL - EVENING

The hotel is visible with the roof lit up and teenagers drinking. The beach is calm and glistening in the night.

LAURA (V.O.)

My friends and I would drink on the roof of it sometimes, or throw a party on the lawn. Our neighbors owned it and didn't really care about 24 hour service. As long as it looked pretty. We were drinking on the roof with the owners' daughter Karen.

EXT. ROOF OF THE GRAND VICTORIAN HOTEL - NIGHT

Marina, Laura, Karen, and their friends are drinking on the roof. They're taking polaroid photos of each other, then realize they're out of alcohol.

KAREN

Don't worry, there's more.

She motions for them to follow her to the liquor cabinet; they follow.

LAURA

You sure it's fine?

KAREN

Yeah. It's not like we sell much of it.

On the way down, they pass a living room space. Marina drops her partially lit cigarette onto a couch without realizing. They keep walking down to the liquor cabinet in the kitchen. The flames quickly become uncontrollable.

INT. HOTEL KITCHEN - NIGHT

KAREN

So, guys, when do you leave for college? You're going to be roommates right?

MARINA

Ye--

Laura cuts her off.

LAURA

I'm not going, actually.

MARINA

What? This whole night is to celebrate us going to college soon.

They stop when smoke starts to seep into the kitchen.

LAURA

I know it's just--Oh my God, is that fire?

MARINA

Karen, what do we do?

KAREN

Leave!

They run outside. Marina and Laura look at each other, shocked. Soon the whole side of the hotel is engulfed in flames. The teenagers all run out and look at the fire.

MARINA

I can't believe this.

LAURA

I know.

Karen butts in, very drunk.

KAREN

Guys. I know what will make you feel better.

She snaps a photo of them on the polaroid.

LAURA

Karen, no this is bad.

MARINA

Yeah, we should go.

They run down the beach, away from what they did. Karen slips the photo in Laura's back pocket.

LAURA (V.O.)

We were naive. Of course we shouldn't have run away. Karen and her parents took care of it and we were all told to never speak of it again. I didn't even realize she put that photo in my pocket for a couple of weeks. I couldn't seem to get rid of it. I hated what we did but it felt even worse to just erase the snapshot of it. We should've gotten in trouble, but the guilt has stuck all these years.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. LAURA'S CLOSET - NIGHT

Ella, Bea, and Charlotte look at each other, surprised, then look up and see Laura standing there. She doesn't say anything but sits next to them.

They talk as the audio and camera fade out.