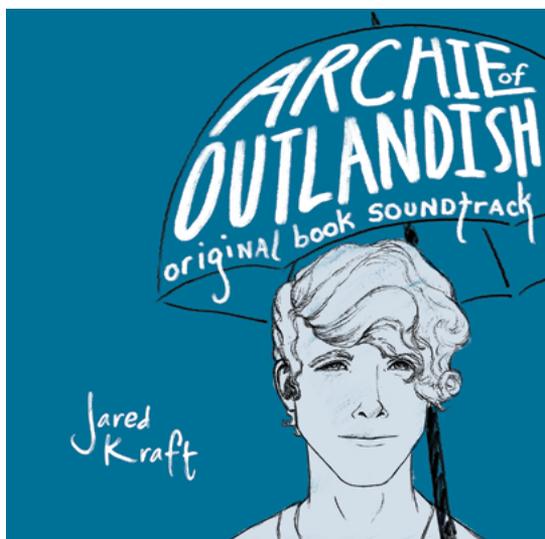


ARCHIE OF OUTLANDISH

Archie of Outlandish was created to be experienced through words, illustrations, and music.



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Lynnette Kraft



ILLUSTRATED BY ABIGAIL KRAFT
MUSIC BY JARED KRAFT



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1. Contemporary Fiction 2. Contemporary Fiction—Romance

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“A quick, absorbing read full of thought-provoking dialogue and warm moments ... Accompanying the text are full-color illustrations and an original soundtrack of dramatic instrumentals. These imaginative add-ons work to create the unique atmosphere of Outlandish.

“Offbeat, emotionally engaging, and authentic.”

-Kirkus Reviews

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For Abigail, because she wanted a love story.



Chapter 1

Outlandish wasn't your typical town. It didn't have cars rushing up and down the streets or loads of people hurrying to work. It wasn't a large, noisy city or a tiny, quiet one, either. It was an unusual, albeit charming town that sat on California's long coast, nestled in its own quaint spot between San Francisco and Monterey Bay. Because it was a coastal town, you might expect to see palm trees and colorful beach houses, and you would indeed find plenty of both, but what you might be surprised to see would be the large family of performing magicians spread out on the beach looking as though they'd fallen out of a Dickens novel (and drawing a good crowd, too). You might also wonder at the enormously sized fans that stood high above the rooftops. These fans were used to filter out the pollution that blew in from

the larger, nearby cities. It was a very clever idea, dreamed up by a local, who was quickly becoming famous for his smart invention.

The only modes of transportation allowed in Outlandish (besides feet) were bicycles, roller skates, horse-drawn carriages, and small battery operated vehicles, which were owned by the town and used mostly by the city workers, as well as an occasional transport for the elderly. You could drive your car to the edge of Outlandish, but only as far as the parking garage that sat at the only entrance into town, and there your car would have to remain until you were ready to leave.

While it might seem an odd place, and indeed it was, Outlandish was an idyllic place to visit and an even better place to live. Not only was it safe, picturesque, and clean, but it was also filled with fine food, excellent music, offbeat entertainment, and one-of-a-kind shops.

If you were people watching you would see that most of the residents were over sixty. Retired men and women appreciated the safe streets and clean air, but they loved the entertainment and fine food. However, in the summer, curious people of all ages and walks of life came to visit this town that was known for its odd charm.

There were, of course, a few residents who weren't retired and those were (for the most part) the business owners, entertainers, and employees. One of those residents of Outlandish was Archibald Plumby, better known as Archie (much to his dismay). He was neither retired nor a vacationer. He was freshly twenty and still living at home with his parents. His father, Albert, was a businessman, his mother, Annella, a chef, and Archie was a writer. Their dwelling was a cheerful blue, two-story beach cottage that changed colors as often as his mother deemed it necessary, and that was about every two years.

Archie stood six feet tall and was a thin, one hundred sixty-five pounds. His face was hidden under a clump of bushy brown curls, and those curls hid in the shadow of the umbrella he always carried over his head. He wasn't sure if he was handsome, for only his mother had ever told him he was, and we all know mothers think their own children are the best and the most beautiful. But Archie was indeed handsome in his own way, although not many were able to get close enough to discover that for themselves.

Archie didn't carry his umbrella merely to keep dry (Outlandish wasn't a particularly rainy place). Nor did he carry his umbrella to shelter his skin from

the sun, although he did have a fair complexion. Archie carried his umbrella because the sky was overwhelming to him—but not only the sky, for he couldn't even look up at an eight-foot ceiling without being afflicted with a panic attack.

Archie was born with this fearful condition. And his first few weeks of life were a bit of a nightmare for his mother and father—well, certainly for little Archie, too. Before he could voice his preference, he pulled blankets over his head and smashed his face against whatever was underneath him in order to avoid looking up. He screamed and thrashed and pitched a fuss, but his parents patiently endured those frightening beginnings, and after countless visits to doctors of every sort, and receiving no answers, they settled into Archie's world and adjusted their lives to suit his eccentricities.

What most children do for fun, Archie did out of necessity. He played inside blanket forts, ate underneath the dining room table, and slept in a short room, under a low canopy. Since nothing could be done to fix what was, by some, deemed a problem, Archie's parents embraced it and taught Archie to do the same.

Archie had always been a watcher as well as a writer and that was why he was employed at the

local newspaper, *Stay Afloat*. His steady work, although only part-time, was in writing the observation column for the paper, but he also wrote (and updated as necessary), the *Outlandish Travelers Pamphlet*. He had lived in Outlandish his entire life, so who better to fill visitors in on all of the charms and appeal of his beloved town?

The regulars in Outlandish knew Archie, but mostly through his written words . . . and he never seemed to run out of them.

WELCOME TO *Outlandish!*

Our motto here in Outlandish is “Lovely enough to do nothing and see everything. Lively enough to keep you entertained for days on end!”

Whether you’re here for remarkable shows, exclusive shops and mouth-watering cuisine, or solely for pure air, quiet streets, and scenic views, we welcome you to our extraordinary town.



DON'T MISS THESE SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

FIVE-STAR RESTAURANTS

1 **The Jazz House** (Chef Jeremiah Salisbury)

Known for its exceptional salads and award-winning cardamom rolls—with a wine list and large dance floor to take you into the evening hours.

Flavors of the Earth 2 (Chef Annella Plumby)

Charismatic flavor blends and fresh tasting dishes are Chef Annella's forte. Set on the cliff, this restaurant offers a spectacular view of the coast.

SPECIALTY SHOPS

Hamlet's Salt Boutique 3

Brother and sister, Piccolo & Clarinet present a shop like none other—an ALL salt shop. It's spectacular to see all that can be done with salt. Go home with a local favorite: Chocolate Mint Sucking Salt.

4 The Poncho Bungalow

Ponchos of varying style in every color and pattern imaginable. Recently featured in *Mallory's Magnificent Finds*. Don't leave without your poncho!

ENTERTAINMENT

5

Tickle Me Pink Dinner Theatre

A stunning theater with a multitiered dining room overlooking the large stage. Fantastic shows and food all year long!

*The Pretentious Pindabrooks Magic Show

A mischievous bunch of shoddily dressed magicians—all from one huge family! The Pindabrooks are well-known, well-loved, and sure to entertain you.

6

Carriage Rides

Shire horses trot along in front of classic carriages and treat you to a unique view of Outlandish. But, perhaps the most unique element of the ride is the clown who will be your coachman.

*See performance schedule and locations on back cover



Chapter 2

It was Archie's twentieth birthday, and his mother had cooked him an afternoon meal instead of an evening one, because she needed to fill in at the restaurant for an ill cook that evening.

Mr. and Mrs. Plumby didn't often join Archie underneath the table for meals, but since it was his birthday, they moved all of the tall chairs away from the table and feasted together. Just for fun.

"The Coconut Shrimp was delicious, Mother. Really splendid."

His mother smiled. "But do you know why? See if you can distinguish the flavors, Archie."

His father put a finger up and said, "Ah! Let me do it."

Annella put her fingertips to her husband's lips and said, "No, no, no. I already told you, Albert. Now hush and let's see if Archie can figure it out."

Archie tilted his chin up, closed his eyes, and moved his lips around as if tasting the Coconut Shrimp all over again.

"Hm . . . shrimp, of course. Toasted coconut. Coconut milk. Aaaaand . . ." Tilting his head to one side, he continued, "Egg yolk. Cayenne pepper. Let's see . . . Oh! Scallions!" Eyes still closed . . . "Bread crumbs. Orange zest. Apricots . . . and . . ."

His mother watched him closely as if transmitting the secret ingredient to his mind.

Opening his eyes, he seemed to know the answer, but then when he opened his mouth to speak, the answer came out timidly and in the form of a question. "Almonds?"

"Yes! Very good, Archie! I tossed the coconut with almond oil before baking. You picked up a *very* subtle flavor. Impressive."

"Now why can't I do that?" Albert said with a pout.

"Because," answered Annella, "you don't savor your bites as you should. Flavors want your attention, Albert."

Albert laughed and shook his head, "Well, I *do* know the clam chowder had clams. Ha!"



“Now how about dessert?” Annella asked as she scooted away from the table and toward the kitchen.

“What have you come up with?” Archie asked.

His mother spoke with confidence, knowing it would please Archie, “Pistachio Cake with Pistachio Butter Cream Frosting.”

Albert’s eyes grew a little bit every time he heard the word *butter*, but when you added the word *frosting* to it, they grew even larger. Archie loved sweets, too, but not quite as much as his father did and his waistline proved it.

Archie’s birthday meal was all very delicious . . . and filling; so much so, that Archie unbuttoned his pants to give his swollen belly room to breathe a bit.

“I think I’d better go for a walk,” he said. “I don’t know if I’ve ever felt so close to bursting.”

His father said with an exaggerated, serious expression, “No, no. We can’t have that. Can you imagine? Dying, on your twentieth birthday . . . from overeating of all things!”

Archie laughed, wrapping his belly in his arms as he did.

Albert continued, “And what would happen to your mother’s career if word got out? Her days as a chef would be over for sure.”

Archie continued laughing and said, “Father . . . please . . . stop.”

“Go have your walk then,” Albert said with a chuckle.

The beach was often a little cool, but since it was March, it was just a little bit cooler, so Archie pulled on his favorite orange sweater, slipped on his shoes, grabbed his large black umbrella, and headed out to the beach for an afternoon stroll. He walked close enough to the shore to feel the ocean water spray against his face and decided it was a little too chilly for that. As he turned to move away from the water, the wind, which was a little stronger than usual, caught his umbrella and threatened to make it topple, which would have been an absolute nightmare for Archie. He turned back toward the water and angled his umbrella so it would not be affected by the wind and decided to make his way back toward home in little sidestepping movements in order to keep his umbrella steady.

As he moved awkwardly along the beach, he saw a blond-haired lady walking toward him. *Surely she’s not—*

For whatever reason, Archie had always been especially shy of the opposite sex. He could tell

you many stories of close encounters . . . but he wouldn't.

“Oh gosh,” he said out loud to himself, panicking.

Archie worried a little less about his umbrella and turned to walk a little more swiftly toward home (but he did still hold onto the left side of his umbrella canopy so the wind wouldn't catch it). He turned once to look back and saw the lady was moving a little faster, obviously attempting to catch up to him. He quickened his pace yet a little more in order to get away.

When he reached the door of his home, he turned to look and saw that she had given up trying to catch him but was still looking in the direction of his house. He moved inside, closing his umbrella a bit to fit in.

His mother was standing near the door when he entered, so she asked, “What are you doing, Archie?”

His head had been down, so he startled as he opened his smaller umbrella.

“Oh, um. Nothing, Mother. What are you doing?”

“The same as when you left a few minutes ago. Getting ready to go to work. I thought *you* were going for a walk. Why are you rushing back in so quickly?”

He knew he had been caught in the act of fleeing (it wasn't the first time), and so he did what he

usually did; he tried to act casual, and as usual, he didn't do a very good job of it.

His mother walked over to where he stood and looked out the front window.

"Who are you running from now?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Who is she?" she said pointing to the lady who was just turning to walk the other direction.

"I don't know whom you're referring to," he said without looking out the window.

"The blond girl over there? Were you talking to her before you came rushing in?"

Still avoiding the window, he quickly said, "Of course not. I was only cold. That's why I came back."

"Now, Archie. It's not *that* cold outside."

"The wind was brutal," he said much too dramatically.

"You ran from her, didn't you?"

Archie could feel his face flush. "Well. Why would I run from a female?"

His mother laughed. "A female? Really, Archie?"

"Well. She is, after all, a female. I mean, technically."

His mother's smirk bothered him, but he was so glad to see her shrug her shoulders and walk away that he decided not to say any more.

From the other room she hollered, “I’m sorry I have to work tonight. Especially since it’s your birthday. It shouldn’t be too busy though. Why don’t you pop by for a bit? We’ll visit in between things, and I’ll bring out some extras from the kitchen.”

“Well, I might come for tea, but please don’t feed me another bite. I’m stuffed!” he said, showing that his pants were still unbuttoned.

Archie’s mother walked back in to put a pair of shoes by the stairs and patted Archie’s arm as she did.

“All right dear, no more food for you. Bring your notebook. Maybe you’ll observe a thing or two for your column.”

She chuckled as she walked back toward the kitchen, so Archie followed her.

“Mother. Why did you laugh?”

“I didn’t laugh.”

“Yes, it was just a little bit, but you did laugh. Why?”

“Archie. I didn’t even realize I did. Why are *you* being so sensitive? What’s come over you?”

Archie stood in silence for a moment and wondered, *What has come over me?*

Looking at his mother he asked seriously, “Now that I’m twenty, do you think I should look for more work?”

She looked at him thoughtfully.

He continued, "I mean, I don't know what else there is to be done in the way of an occupation. We both know my limitations."

Archie knew as soon as he said it, it was the wrong thing to say. His mother had always told him, "The only things you can't do are the things you aren't meant to do."

So naturally her response was, "Limitations?" and she said it as though she'd never heard the word before.

"That's not what I meant," Archie said. "You know I've never felt inadequate. I've accepted the things about me that are different. If I ever had the opportunity to feel sorry for myself, I don't remember it."

Archie's mother went to stand with him under his umbrella.

"Then what's changed? Aren't *you* satisfied with your column?"

"Yes," he answered quickly. "I am satisfied, but it doesn't pay very well, at least not much in the way of supporting myself, and I will have to support myself at some point."

Archie hesitated, "What if. Well . . . what if . . ." He dropped his head and sighed.

Annella lifted his chin. “What if what, Archie?”

Archie looked at his mother with one eye squinted, “What if I were to fall in love?”

Annella was surprised by Archie’s confession. “Have you met someone?”

Archie quickly shook his head, “No, no. I haven’t met anyone.”

“No?” she asked with curiosity.

Archie shook his head and continued, “It’s just that when I helped you cater the wedding last week, I couldn’t take my eyes off of the bride and groom. I found myself wondering if it would ever be me.”

“Why wouldn’t it be?” she asked.

“I don’t know. I want it to be. But what if it’s not meant to be? What if I can’t ever move beyond the Observation Column?” He rolled his eyes as he said it.

“Archie, the only thing that can stop you from having the life you desire is you. You have to pursue life as it presents itself to you.”

Archie asked, “But should I be looking?”

“Perhaps,” she answered, “but remember, your future will be established one day at a time just as each day you’ve already lived has been. There may not be any doors open for you today, but that doesn’t mean there won’t be any tomorrow. Try not to be

anxious about it. You can't force things that aren't meant to be. See what I'm saying?"

"Yes. I see," was all he said.

Looking up at her son, she added, "Archie, falling in love is entirely possible."

A look of relief spread over his face, "Thank you, Mother."

His mother shook her head and asked, "Who was that girl, Archie?"

"Honestly, I have no idea."



Chapter 3

Archie's mother, known by most as Chef Annella, was one of three notable chefs who lived in Outlandish. Each of them owned their own restaurants and they'd all won awards for their dishes.

Annella didn't work at the restaurant because she had to, for her husband, Albert, was rich; Annella worked because cooking made her happy. She would have done it for free just to watch people react to the flavors of her dishes, but Albert, an entrepreneur, bought her the seaside restaurant so they could make a profit off of her talent. He would say, "It's just good business."

Albert wanted to call the restaurant "Annella's," but she insisted on calling it Flavors of the Earth, because flavors were Annella's life. She'd invested a

good many years establishing what tasted good with what. Her admiration for food was slightly amusing, but she took it so seriously that no one would ever dream of laughing at her.

Flavors of the Earth only had one table inside with an umbrella, and it sat in the back corner by the kitchen. That table was Archie's, and it was where he sat reading his book on the evening of his birthday. His mother did come out of the kitchen on occasion, and his father even popped by for a bit while on an errand, but Archie mostly entertained himself.

He had just returned to his table with a cup of tea and stuck his head back in his book when he heard a voice say, "Hello. Is this seat taken?"

When Archie looked up and saw the same blonde from earlier in the day, he felt his heart quicken and worried he'd find himself in a full-fledged panic attack, so he purposely took some slow, deep breaths (hoping it wouldn't be obvious that he was trying to recover).

Though he knew his voice would certainly be shaky, he still attempted to speak. Unfortunately, when his lips parted, no sound came out. He opened his eyes a little too widely in surprise at his failure and then tucked his chin toward his neck.

Determined to prevail, he tried again.

“This. This table is private,” he managed to say. “I mean to say . . . um . . . there are other tables available . . . ones you *may* sit at.”

“Oh,” she said, looking a little disappointed.

“Would you like me to locate one for you?” he asked. “This *is* my mother’s restaurant, after all.”

“Oh, is it?” she asked, sounding surprised.

“Yes,” answered Archie.

She turned to take a quick look around the restaurant, looked back at Archie, and said, “So I can’t sit here with you?”

Archie, caught off guard by her question said, “Well, *no*. I mean . . . there’s no need for that.”

Spreading his arms toward the room, he said, “Look. Tables. Everywhere.”

Archie noticed red blotches beginning to appear on her face and neck.

“Are you all right?” he asked.

Her eyes narrowed a bit. “Ye-es. Why do you ask?”

He put his palms out toward his face and wiggled his fingers a bit. “Well, you’re a bit . . . um . . . well, a bit, splotchy.”

She put her hands up covering her lower face and neck.

Speaking through her hands, her words were a muffled, "Oh, I *always* do that."

"But you are all right?" Archie asked again.

"Yes," she said removing her hands from her face. "I do that when I'm embarrassed."

"Oh, did I embarrass you?" Archie asked.

"Yes, I guess you did," she replied with a little smile.

"I'm sorry," he said, dropping his head, feeling a little shame. "I'm afraid if I did it is because I am a bit shy of strangers. It wasn't my intention."

The lady put her hand out with a little reservation and said, "I'm Tallie. Tallie Greenleaf."

Archie hesitated in putting his hand out to shake as he still felt a little jittery, but because her hand was outstretched, he could think of no way around it.

"Ms. Greenleaf," he said, holding out his hand.

"Oh, no, just call me Tallie," she said, taking his hand.

Archie nodded.

Tallie stood waiting for Archie to introduce himself, but when he remained quiet, she asked, "And you are?"

Archie's body jerked as if coming out of a trance, and he said with a nervous laugh, "Oh, sorry. I'm Archibald Plumby."

Tallie smiled, “It’s very nice to meet you, Archibald. Please forgive me for being persistent. I’m not stalking you. I do have a purpose.”

“Oh?” said Archie.

“Yes, I’m a photographer-in-training, actually. I’ve been working with Gemma Perrelli.”

Tallie waited for Archie to react to the name *Gemma Perrelli*, but his expression didn’t change.

“You haven’t heard of her?” she asked, shaking her head.

“No.”

“Oh. Well, she’s a very well-known photojournalist,” she answered.

“Is she?” Archie asked.

“Yeah, anyway, I’m somewhere between her personal assistant and her student. Still learning the ropes, you know.”

Archie nodded and asked, “And is she here with you in Outlandish?”

“She will be. Tomorrow. She’s been in Europe. She sent me ahead to look for some new material.”

“Why Outlandish?” Archie asked.

“You tell me. Why is everyone so enamored with this place?”

Archie surprised himself by saying, “Well, maybe you should have a seat then?”

“I was hoping you’d say that,” she said with a look of satisfaction.

Archie stood and put his hand out to the chair across from him. Tallie sat down.

“You’ve not been here before?” he asked.

“No, I’m from Portland. Well, not actually from Portland. I’m staying with a friend there.”

“I see.”

“So Ms. Perrelli tells me Outlandish is known for being a little odd.”

“Odd?” asked Archie.

“Oh no. Did I offend you?” Before he had time to answer, she added, “Ms. Perrelli just said Outlandish has its own sort of culture—that things are different here. That’s all I meant.”

Archie shrugged and said, “I’ve lived here my entire life. In fact, I’ve only been away from Outlandish a few times, and not for many years, so I don’t really have a basis for comparison.”

“Okay,” Tallie said with a nod. “So why do you think people like Outlandish? I mean, people obviously love visiting.”

Archie surprised Tallie by asking, “Do you find it odd?”

“Well, I’ve only been here a couple of days, but yeah, a little bit.”

“Maybe I’m just a little odd myself and that’s why I don’t see it,” Archie said while shrugging one shoulder.

Tallie smiled at Archie. “Well, I only just met you, so I wouldn’t know, but who’s *normal* anyway? I think we’re all odd in our own way.”

Archie said, “I quite agree,” but then he looked up at the umbrella above him and turned his attention back to Tallie. “But then there’s my umbrella. It *is* what caught your attention, yes?”

“Yes,” she said with a smile, “I’ll admit, it did. I’ve been here a couple of days and every time I’ve seen you, you’ve been underneath it.”

“There are a lot of umbrellas on the beach. How did I manage to stand out?”

“Oh, it’s just that you seem to be the first one on the beach in the morning, and what’s visually appealing to me as a photographer is the look of the one man . . . under the umbrella with the wide shore . . . and the large sky.”

Archie lifted his eyebrows, surprised by her attention to detail.

She put both of her palms against the tabletop, leaned forward, and said, “And if you could see it from my point of view, you’d totally understand.”

“I think I can understand.”

“May I ask where you get your umbrellas?” Tallie asked. “Every time I’ve seen you, you’ve had a different one.”

“We actually order them from a man in London.”

“London, really? Why all the way from London?”

“Mostly because of the way they fold up. They’re much easier to manage.”

“How does it fold up?” she asked.

Archie took his umbrella from the wall and demonstrated underneath the large table umbrella. Holding it up, he said, “See how it looks like it’s inside out?”



“Yeah, upside down, too . . . like the handle’s on the wrong side.”

“That’s right,” he said. “What you’re looking at is the interior of the umbrella, not the exterior. When you push on this,” he said pushing up on the shaft’s runner, “it opens down over you instead of out and up.”

Pulling back down on the runner he added, “Then when you pull down on this to close it, the umbrella collapses from the outside in.”

Tallie looked perplexed and shook her head.

“It’s made my life much easier,” Archie added.

“You make it sound like you need the umbrella on more occasions than most people.”

Archie smiled and added, “The truth is, looking up into open space is quite a challenge for me. Impossible actually.”

“What do you mean, *impossible*?” she asked.

“Well, I can turn my head and look up. It’s not a physical inability. It’s my mind. It doesn’t quite know what to do with what it sees.”

“So you need the umbrella as a shelter?” Tallie asked.

“Yes, that’s it.”

“Oh. Is there a name for it?” she asked.

“Doctors have told us it is similar to anablephobia—which is the fear of looking up—but most people with anablephobia are only bothered by large open spaces, like the sky or an auditorium. I can’t even look at an eight-foot ceiling.”

Tallie didn’t want him to regret opening up to her. She had a feeling it wasn’t something he did often. So in hopes of conveying a general curiosity without prying too much, she only said, “Interesting.”

Archie nodded. “Most people with anablephobia can just avoid looking up. They walk with their

heads down or keep their eyes lowered. I don't think there are many that require an umbrella."

"Could it just be a more severe case?" Tallie asked.

"Maybe. But typically cases develop over time or after a trauma. I seem to have been born with it."

"Will you ever be cured of it?" she asked.

"Not likely," Archie answered. "I've tried a good deal of therapies through the years, but here I am, still me. Right where I started. Well, not exactly where I started, I guess. I do cope a little . . . a lot better now."

"Do you mean you've learned how to live with it?"

Archie explained, "When I was twelve, my mother asked me if I would like to continue searching for treatment or just accept it and move on with my life. I decided I would like to accept it, and I've never given it another thought. It's just the way I am. I have no quarrel with it."

Tallie said in almost a whisper, "See, I knew there was something special about you."

Archie set the left side of his face down into his palm and raised his eyebrows exaggeratedly. "Oh no, not special. Just an additional helping of peculiar."

"Exactly!" said Tallie. "That's what I mean. That's why I'm here."

Archie moved his hand off of his face and clasped his hands in front of him. “So what *is* it you want with me?” he asked.

“I would like to photograph you.”

“I’m afraid that will be impossible,” Archie was serious. “Posing for photographs has never been my forte. You’ve seen how much I like attention.”

“But would you be willing to let me get my photographs if I didn’t bother you at all? I’d like to photograph you as you go about your normal routine. I promise you won’t even know I’m there.”

“What will you do with your photographs once you have them?” Archie asked.

“I’m not sure, but I promise not to use them unless I have your permission.”

Archie sighed. “Well, go ahead and practice on me then, but I *can* promise you, if I see you taking them, I’m bound to run.”

Tallie laughed, “Yes, I believe you will.”

Annella walked out of the kitchen and over to the table with a fresh pot of tea, thinking she would share it with Archie. When she saw Archie sitting with someone (and wondered if it might be the same girl she had seen out the window), she decided she would serve them the tea instead.

She walked up to the table with the tea tray in hand and said to Tallie, "Hello. I'm Annella, Archie's mother."

"Oh, hi, I'm Tallie."

"It's lovely to meet you, Tallie. Are you new to Outlandish?"

Tallie heard Annella's question but was too delighted with her accent to answer. "You have an English accent! I love it!"

Archie looked at his mother and smiled. Annella smiled back at him before turning her attention back to Tallie. "Yes, I was born and raised in England."

Tallie appeared a little embarrassed and said, "I'm sorry. I've always had this thing for English accents."

Annella said, "Don't worry dear, newcomers often take notice of it."

"Oh good," Tallie said. "Anyway, yes, I'm new here, but I'm just visiting. Doing some work actually. I'm a student photographer."

Annella smiled, "Outlandish is a perfect place for a photographer. Isn't it beautiful here?"

"Really amazing."

"And how did you come to meet Archie?" Annella asked.

Archie didn't wait for Tallie to answer. "Oh, she came in looking for a table, so I invited her to sit with me."

Archie's mother looked at him in disbelief, but then said with a smile, "Well, wasn't that nice of you. Do you take tea, Tallie?" she asked, holding up the teapot.

"Not usually, but how can I refuse tea from an Englishwoman?"

Annella laughed while setting an orange teacup and turquoise saucer in front of Tallie. "I hope you'll enjoy it," she said pouring the tea.

"What pretty dish colors," said Tallie as she ran her finger along the turquoise saucer.

"Mother loves colors—*all* of them." Archie smiled at his mother.

Annella nodded. "Well, Archie, how nice to have someone join you for tea on your birthday."

"It's your birthday?" Tallie asked with surprise.

Archie was a little embarrassed by the attention and glanced at his mother with an accusing expression. Looking back at Tallie he said, "Yes. I guess it is."

"Let me guess," she said tapping her finger against her lip. "Twenty five?"

"No. Only twenty," Archie said through a grin.

"Oh wow, I'm older than you! I was sure you had to be older than I am." When Archie raised his

eyebrows, she said, "I only meant you seem more *mature* than I am, that's all."

Archie nodded expressing doubt. "How old are you?" he asked.

"Well, not much older than you. Just twenty one."

Annella chuckled. "I'll just leave the tea tray and get back to work. You two enjoy yourselves." Annella touched Tallie's shoulder and said, "It was lovely meeting you, Tallie."

"Yeah, you too!" Tallie answered.

"Enjoy yourself, Archie."

Archie smiled and watched his mother walk away.

"Your mom called you *Archie*. Would you prefer if I did, too?" Tallie asked.

"No, I actually prefer *Archibald*, if you don't mind. I've never been able to figure out why parents name their children one thing and then call them another."

"Yeah, it is a little funny, isn't it?" said Tallie. "But I think it's like a pet name that's meant to make a person feel special. Don't you?"

"Yes," Archibald admitted. "I'm sure that's what it is, but still, I do like my full name and I don't get to hear it very often" he said with a chuckle.

"Well then, *Archibald* it is."

"Thank you," Archie said with a look of satisfaction.

“So now that I’ve met your mom,” Tallie said, “I’ve solved a little mystery.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I noticed you say things a little formally and wondered why. Now I know.”

Archie waited for her answer.

“It’s because your mom’s English, right?”

“I suppose it might be. Honestly, I’ve never given it any thought.”

“Well, take it from me, someone who uses way too much slang, you speak very properly. Is your dad English, too?”

“No, Father is American.”

“Oh,” she said with some curiosity. “Well, your mother is stunning. I can see where you got your fair complexion.”

“Yes, Mother comes from a long line of blond hair and blue eyes.”

Tallie moved a little closer. “Your eyes aren’t blue though, are they? It’s a little dark in here. I can’t quite tell.”

“No, I have my father’s hazel eyes . . . and his dark, unruly hair, too.” He put both hands on his head as if to hide it. Tallie laughed and so Archie added, “I’m fairly certain I could grow a remarkable mustache like my father as well, but I think I’ll hold off for a few years.”

“Well, I don’t think your hair is very wild, and I can totally see you in a mustache.”

Archie turned his head away in embarrassment and mumbled, “Hm. Well.”

Tallie sensed his uneasiness and decided to change the subject. “So what do you do, Archibald?”

Grateful for the shift in conversation, Archie perked up. “I write a column for the local paper.”

“Oh? What column do you write?”

“The Observation Column.”

“What’s an observation column?” she asked.

“It’s a column of stories written by . . . my observations.”

“What do you mean?” Tallie questioned.

“I’ve always been one to watch activity. I see the things most people don’t stop to notice. I’m not sure why. So when something catches my attention, I hold it there for a while and see what little story I can come up with.” Archie glanced over at the restaurant entrance, looked back at Tallie, and asked her, “Would you like to see?”

“Sure . . .” she answered with a little hesitation, not knowing exactly what he would show her.

Archie grabbed his umbrella from against the wall, opened it up, and walked over to the foyer of the restaurant. He picked up a newspaper and

walked back to the table. After sitting down, he opened the paper to his column.

“Here it is,” he said, turning it toward Tallie.

“‘Savory Sunscreen on the Beach.’ What’s that about?” Tallie asked.

“Well, I often make my observations on the beach.” Archie said it seriously and then realized how luxurious his job sounded and felt foolish. “Anyway,” he continued, “one particular day, I observed the bebumists on the beach were wandering, much more frequently, to the food carts. This continued for a few days, so I decided to follow them. I assumed there must be some new delightful food, but when I investigated, it was only the same vendors selling the same refreshments.

“The bebumists seemed especially drawn to the salty food carts . . . roasted nuts, popcorn, hot dogs . . . things of that nature. As I followed, I began noticing a very distinct smell of bacon. I went home and asked Mother to take a stroll with me just to confirm.”

“Bacon?”

“Yes, but the smell wasn’t coming from the food carts, it was coming from the bebumists.”

“Wait. You’ve said that a few times and I don’t know what that is.”

“What *what* is?” Archie asked, confused.

Tallie said, “Be-bum—?”

“Oh! Sorry!” Archie said chuckling. “It’s what we Plumbys call the people on the beach. You know . . . beach, bum, tourists?”

Tallie laughed hard at that.

“Beach bum tourists! That’s hilarious! Okay, I’m following now. So the be-bumists smelled like bacon?”

Archie smiled. “Yes, so Mother asked a lady who seemed friendly enough, ‘Do you smell bacon?’ The lady said, ‘Yes! I’ve been smelling it all day.’ It took some more investigation, but we finally came to an amusing conclusion.”

Tallie put her hand on Archie’s arm and said excitedly, “The sunscreen!”

Archie nodded, “Yes, but you see, it was never meant to be. It turns out the sunscreen, which is made by a family here in Outlandish, was accidentally scented with one of their kitchen candle scents. The mistake wasn’t discovered until Mother and I went to inquire about it.”

“That’s so funny!” Tallie laughed.

“I thought so.”

Tallie slapped her hands on the table and leaned back in her chair. “I totally would have missed it!”

Archie answered. “I’m afraid I don’t miss much in the way of a story. There are days I wish I could just look past things, but I see stories everywhere. I’m constantly giving titles to scenes.”

“You should write books.”

“They would need to be very short ones. My mind moves on so fast.”

“Would you mind if I took a minute to read your article?”



Archie knew he would feel uncomfortable sitting quietly while she read his article so he responded nervously, “Yes . . . well. Why don’t I just go and grab us some more tea?”

“Okay. Yeah. Thanks,” she replied.

Archie watched Tallie from behind the swinging doors of the kitchen and only went back to the table when he could tell she had finished reading.

After Archie sat down, Tallie looked at him and said, “Archibald, your writing is so clever! Have you ever considered writing children’s books? They’re short.” She laughed and added, “But seriously, your writing has a childlike quality to it.”

Realizing he might take it as an insult, she added quickly, “I don’t mean you write like a child. I mean you write in a way that would appeal to a child. I really did mean it as a compliment. Not everybody can write like that.”

Nodding, Archie added, “Oh, don’t worry. I took it as a compliment. The lighter side of life has always appealed to me the most, and actually, I *have* played at writing children’s stories, a few of them. Of course, they’re only at home on my bookshelf.”

“They’re my favorite,” said Tallie. “I have my own little collection at home . . . although I didn’t write any of them.”

Archie looked admiringly at her. “Really?”

“Yes, really,” she said smiling. “Do you illustrate your stories?”

“I do,” he said. “Although I’m no artist. I’ve often wished I possessed both skills.”

Tallie said, “Now, you *know* you’ve piqued my curiosity!”

Archie squinted as if trying to solve a mystery. He then cupped his chin with his thumb and index finger and looked at Tallie. “I don’t think many of my stories are even worth reading. I wrote many of them when I was only a child myself, but you’re welcome to read them . . . if you’d like. We could have a good laugh together if nothing else.”

Tallie responded energetically by clapping and saying, “Yay! I’m excited to read them!” but afterward felt a little silly for her reaction.

Archie was actually entertained by her enthusiasm.

“So,” she said in a decidedly calmer tone, “I’m having dinner tomorrow with Ms. Perrelli, but maybe we could meet back here after that?”

Archie tried to look as though he was considering his schedule. “Hm. Yes, I think I *am* free tomorrow night.”

“Great! Does seven-thirty work for you?”

Archie looked at his watch (realizing immediately that it made no sense to do so), and momentarily forgetting her question said, “I think I’d better be getting back.”

Tallie’s confused expression reminded Archie that she was waiting for an answer, so he shook his head as if realizing his error and said, “But, yes, tomorrow night. Seven-thirty.”

“Good. I guess I should be getting back, too.”

Archie asked, “Where are you staying? I could walk you there.”

“Oh, that’s all right. If you need to get home . . . I’m in the circle at The Lupine Inn. It’s just a little walk from here.”

“I’ll walk with you,” Archie said.

Once outside the restaurant, Archie offered Tallie a place under his umbrella. “Shall we?”

Tallie noticed he had lifted his elbow for her, so she wrapped her arm around his and grabbed the shaft of the umbrella right above his hand.

“Does this work?” she asked.

“Perfectly,” he said.

Along with a few of Outlandish’s other businesses, Flavors of the Earth sat at the top of a short cliff. There were two paths up and down the cliff—one

was a set of wooden stairs and the other was a winding road suited to those traveling on wheels.

Archie and Tallie took the stairs down to the path that followed the beach and eventually climbed a set of wooden stairs that led them away from the beach and into town. They walked in silence until Tallie stopped suddenly. Stepping out from under the umbrella, she looked up at the sky. Looking back at Archie she asked, "Archibald, can you come out from under your umbrella when the sky is dark?"

"If it's very dark, yes, sometimes I can. But it has to be a small moon. No street lamps."

"It must feel so amazing when you can!" Tallie said.

"Yes, it does. I have a place I go to just for that—away from the street lamps. But it's a little far, so I don't go often."

"I would go every night if I were you," she said.

"If you were me, you wouldn't need to go every night. I've grown quite accustomed to it."

Tallie regretted her words. "Of course. I'm sorry. I keep saying the wrong things. I just think it's great, you know . . . to have that."

Archie smiled easily at Tallie. "Please don't feel bad about it. I'm not at all offended. And yes. It is . . . *great*."

Tallie resumed her position under Archie's umbrella and they continued to walk in silence until they reached The Lupine Inn.

When they approached the door, Tallie ducked out from under the umbrella and said, "This is such a pretty little town. Have you ever stayed here in The Lupine? No, of course you haven't. You live here!"

Tallie laughed at herself and continued talking. "The floors are made of pebbles. Have you seen them? They're smooth, like river stones. But then there are rugs laid down over them. The rugs are so many different colors and textures. It's not like anything I've ever seen. I never would have thought to put them together, but they make the place so cozy. Everything in this town of yours is so vibrant . . . so . . . charming!"

Archie thought she was finished and began to respond, but then she surprised him by continuing.

"Then there's breakfast! They serve these pastries that taste like orange cheesecake. I'm in love with cheesecake. But I do feel guilty eating them for breakfast. They're definitely more like dessert."

Archie added, "The Lupine also has a reputation for having the best coffee in town."

“Oh? Well, I’m not surprised. It’s so good, I honestly wondered if they added coffee flavoring or something. Is there such a thing as extra coffee-ee coffee? Ha!”

Archie was entertained by Tallie and decided he could listen to her all night, but instead of telling her so, he only said, “Well, it sounds like you and The Lupine are getting along splendidly.”

“Yeah, I guess we are.”

“You know. They buy those pastries from my mother.”

“No way.”

“Yes, and you’re right, they’re as delectable as you say. One of my favorites as well.”

Tallie added, “You’re so lucky to have a mom who can cook. How do you stay so thin?”

“Good question. My father tells me to enjoy it while I can. So I do,” Archie said with a chuckle.

Tallie finally grew quiet, so Archie tried to fill in the void by saying, “I guess I’d better head back,” but Tallie spoke at the same moment.

“Thank you for walking with me.”

They laughed at their uncomfortable exchange but then had a second round of the same thing. Finally Archie scratched his cheek and said, “It’s been a pleasure, Tallie.”

Tallie smiled at Archie. "Yeah, it has."

Archie put his head down, shuffled his feet a little, and then turned and walked away. It was an awkward exit, but Archie wasn't sure how to avoid it. Tallie was caught off guard by his quick departure, so she wasn't sure what to do, but then she hollered, "Bye!"

Archie turned his head a little and smiled, and Tallie stood and watched him walk away under the light of the lampposts.