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Dear Reader,

I am very excited to share a taste of Soho Teen's Fall 2014 list. True to our dual mission of introducing fabulous new talent and nurturing acclaimed authors' careers (including some who are new to our stable), you'll find amazing debuts, first-time Soho Teen offerings, and sequels you've been waiting for.

The season launches with Elizabeth Kiem's follow-up to the hit *Dancer, Daughter, Traitor, Spy*, an August 2013 Amazon Best Book of the Month and Indies Introduce Winner. *Hide, Secret, Secret Keeper* picks up the Cold War mystery of Kiem's unforgettable heroine, Marina Dukovskaya, in the present day—from the point of view of her rebellious ballerina daughter, Lana. Poised for a break-out moment in America with the infamous Bolshoi, Lana must navigate an unlikely romance and avoid traps at every turn in order to defend her family's honor and learn the truth about her past.

Next comes *Mapmaker*, which fuses the extraordinary talents of hit screenwriter Mark Bomback and award-winning bestselling author Galaxy Craze. Their protagonist, Tanya Barrett, is a seventeen-year-old orphan with a savant-like geospatial gift: she can tell you the exact measurements of any room at a glance. After uncovering a deadly secret at the digital mapmaking company founded by her deceased father, Tanya finds herself hunted and on the run—relying on her geospatial gift in ways she never imagined—and ultimately arriving at the terrifying truth about what really happened to her father.

Debut author and songwriting icon Cynthia Weil's *I'm Glad I Did* is in part "YA Mad Men with murder, set in the legendary Brill Building." (In quotes because I've used that pitch verbatim to convey the novel's glamour and authenticity.) It is also a startlingly personal coming-of-age story inspired by Weil's own experience in the early 1960s as a songwriter-for-hire, one that spawned countless Grammys and such

hits as “You Lost That Lovin’ Feeling,” “On Broadway,” and “We Gotta Get Out of This Place.”

2012 Edgar Nominee and bestselling ghostwriter (for Francine Pascal and Katherine Applegate) Barnabas Miller’s *The Girl With the Wrong Name* is a haunting down-the-rabbit-hole odyssey that explores just how far people will go to bury the past. Nothing is what it seems in this psychological thriller, not even the spectacularly original narration of its wry and introspective protagonist, seventeen-year-old Theo Lane.

January 2015 is a fitting month for *Boundary*, the second installment of Heather Terrell’s epic series *The Books of Eva*—set in a frozen world on the verge of a new beginning. As Eva trains to become Archon, preparing to lead the New North with her newly betrothed Jasper, she struggles with a secret born of her forbidden time in the Boundary land: Lukas’s belief that war is imminent and that Eva is ordained to lead the long-oppressed Boundary people to victory over her beloved Aerie. But when she uncovers the identity of her brother’s murderer, she no longer knows who can she trust or what she can call the truth.

Finally, in February comes *Stone Cove Island* by debut author Suzanne Myers. Part YA Stephen King, part Shirley Jackson’s *The Lottery*, this mystery delivers delicious twist upon twist with an ending impossible to see coming. After a catastrophic hurricane devastates a quaint summer resort community, a seventeen-year-old girl leads the recovery effort—and in the wreckage, she stumbles upon the apparent confession to a thirty-year-old unsolved murder. In the ensuing quest for the truth, she uncovers a centuries-old conspiracy that upends everything she believes about her hometown.

As always, we look forward to your feedback! If you’d like to see the full text for any of the titles in the sampler, please contact me at [dehrenhaft@sohopress.com](mailto:dehrenhaft@sohopress.com) or (212) 260-1900.

Enjoy!

Sincerely,  
Daniel Ehrenhaft  
Editorial Director

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# Soho Teen Sampler

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FALL 2014



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# Hider, Seeker, Secret Keeper

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Elizabeth Kiem

September 2014

LANA DUKOVSKAYA has never felt particularly close to her mother, who moved back to Moscow from Brighton Beach under mysterious circumstances before Lana was born—and who refuses to discuss her past, including the identity of Lana’s father. Yet, like her mother, Lana is an extraordinarily talented ballerina with the Bolshoi. A rebellious streak thwarts Lana’s dream of traveling with the Bolshoi to America, until her friend and chief rival, Danyella, is brutally attacked. Suddenly, Lana has the opportunity to leave Moscow and her mother behind and step into the spotlight . . . as a chief suspect.

Once in New York, Lana meets a mysterious old Russian named Gosha, who offers to protect her. When another Bolshoi dancer is attacked in Manhattan, Lana not only finds herself trusting Gosha, but falling for his young bodyguard, a Brighton Beach local named Lev. Soon she’s plunged into a deadly game of cat-and-mouse where strained loyalties force contact with the father she never knew. With

ELIZABETH KIEM

Lev's help, she saves herself and her estranged parents by exposing the truth behind a shadowy Russian elite and its blood feud with three generations of Duvoskaya dancers.

ELIZABETH KIEM studied Russian language and literature at Columbia University and lived in Russia immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Her nonfiction work can be read all over the World Wide Web. *Hider, Seeker, Secret Keeper*, the sequel to *Dancer, Daughter, Traitor, Spy*, is her second novel. She lives in New York.

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## Chapter One: Blood Diamond

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THE NIGHT that Danyella almost died, I wanted to kill her myself.

That sounds terrible. Not because I wanted to kill my friend but because, you know, who cares what I wanted. She's the one who will never dance again.

I can actually hear her voice. Hear her scolding: *Lana, why's it always got to be about you? Can't you just see it for what it is? Do you have to make everything personal?*

Well, no. I guess I don't. I guess I could just hold the poor girl's hand at her hospital bed and meet these suspicious glances with big, dumb eyes. I could tell myself, *this has nothing to do with you, Lana.*

But I would be wrong.

Call me a narcissist if you like, but when my friend Danyella was nearly killed—and not by me—I knew I should take it personally.

We were just out larking, me and Stas.

I was supposed to be in repertoire class but to hell with that. A warm spring day; the streets tickled with pollen and the sky blown by clouds the size of small Siberian lakes. A glorious late May afternoon like that and you've got no

business locking yourself in a windowless practice room. Not when you've put heart and soul into windowless practice for four months, broken a toe, and skipped almost all of the Vesnaya Night music festival in order to rehearse more . . . only to be passed over.

*We're sending Danyella on the New York tour. She's the more reliable performer.*

No reason, after that, to nod graciously, splint that broken toe and head back into a studio full of abuse. Not when you're in Moscow and you're staying in Moscow, and the sun dapples the city like a celestial chandelier.

*To hell with the Bolshoi, I thought, I'm taking my show on the road.*

The city was empty, the traffic sucked from its center through the western drain of Rublevskoe Highway and oozing toward the *dachas* on steroids and the "rustic" shopping malls where the wealthy people summer behind electric gates.

We had lunched, loitered, and even sunbathed on the banks of the Patriarch's Pond and now Stas wanted to head that way too. Out Rublevskoe. A boxholder, one of those odious types who bring their own Chivas Regal to the performances and an entourage backstage during intermission, was throwing a party at his country estate and had invited Stas and half the theatre. I said I wouldn't be caught dead at a party like that. Anybody with enough money for season tickets to the Bolshoi Ballet is automatically disqualified from my list of respectable fans. Anybody who calls his dacha a "country estate" is a grade-A douchebag. This guy Strelets, in particular, was a perv, as well as a philistine.

I tried shaming Stas, reminding him how Strelets had once defaced one of *The Nutcracker* sets by painting testicles on the Grandfather Clock. I figured that, as a scene painter,

Stas would be more outraged by that insult than the ones regularly endured by us ballerinas. But he just revved the engine of his bike and tried a new tactic.

“If I take the back way, through Dmitrovka, we can fly. There won’t be a car on those narrow roads. Six minutes and we’ll be in the country. Down tree-lined runways. Asphalt liftoff. Top speed.”

He saw me waver. I’m a speed demon.

“C’mon, Lana. It’s Friday night. The river is full. The tiki torches are fuller.” Stas handed me the spare helmet. “We don’t have to stay long. Just long enough for you to charm Mr. Boxholder into weighing in on your behalf. All you have to do is feed him strawberries and sniffle sadly. Tomorrow he’ll call the Theatre, indignant that you’ve been robbed of your place on the tour.”

“How’d you know?” I asked.

“Could see it on your face. They made New York assignments yesterday right?”

I nodded. I thought about my face. What exactly did it show? I’m not a sullen girl. And my face doesn’t know how to sniffle.

“Let’s see your pout, my lovely ill-used muse.”

“Cute,” I said. “You’re real cute.”

I grabbed the helmet from him. Swung it around like it was my wrecking ball.

“Ok, listen. I will go and I will take a swim in his lapis-lined pool and I will drink two glasses of wine—one to Danyella’s success and one to our corpulent host’s imminent cardiac arrest. And then we leave. Got it?”

Stas curled his lip over a smile.

“And if that fat bugger gets close to me, you are to shout, ‘There’s not a man here who can shoot a bigger machine gun than me!’”

“How about ‘There’s not a man here who can piss farther than me!’” Stas suggested.

“No—better—‘There’s not a man here who can put more ballerina toes in his mouth than me!’”

“Got it,” said Stas. “That will certainly divert his attentions.” He looked down at my feet. “Good girl. Motorcycle boots. Good for joyrides and discouraging foot fetishes alike.”

Stas had been right. It was a grand ride. We crossed the river and crossed it again and scattered crows on the side of the road disoriented by the lengthening days. Once the city was behind us, it felt as if we were in another era. An era when Moscow stopped after three rings and didn’t impose itself further. I closed my eyes and wished that the road would not end, or that when it did, it would end at a lopsided wooden dacha with wide verandahs and hand-carved window sills and paint faded to the color of afternoon shade. At a place where wealth was measured in books. Or letters. Or teacups chipped with time. Or best . . . acres of woods and fields.

Instead, after about forty-five minutes of escapism and a final undulate stretch on which we caught air, Stas turned left and then right and then right again, and we joined the inching parade of weekenders on the Rublevskoe Highway. We hadn’t really left Moscow after all. Just made a ruckus down her underarm and got caught in her fist. We weaved between the sudden reality of gridlock, our reflections everywhere. There’s a lot of tinted window glass on the Rublevskoe Highway. There’s a lot of money on Rublevskoe Highway. We arrived at a hot mess of both ten minutes later.

The guard sprawled in front of the high metal gates stood when Stas pulled up. I could see him checking me out. In my jeans, boots, and helmet, I didn’t exactly exude

ballerina. But Stas dropped the right name and the guard nodded. He opened the gates and let us pass, but I could feel him searching me for my supple, slender calling card. *Sorry champ*, I thought. *I left my wings and tiara backstage tonight.*

Roman Strelets, president of Krylatskoe Bank, trustee of the Bolshoi Ballet and member of the parliamentary committee on cultural investment, was walking his greyhounds down the driveway as we pulled in. He wore tight black jeans that looked terrifically uncomfortable and a silk shirt unbuttoned to his navel. He reminded me of whatever you call a squirmy slow thing coming out of its wrappings. A chrysalis maybe. A grub. With gold and cellulite markings.

I groaned. But Stas was already striding toward our host, hand outstretched. Strelets looked up, bored, at this lanky young artisan scattering his fine gravel. I saw him crane his neck, looking for the young company Stas might have brought. I quickly sidestepped into a grove of palm trees. Grateful, by god, for fake imported palm trees where once stood native alders, gooseberry bushes, and I suppose, an outhouse. I heard the crackle of a sound system on overdrive. Then the cackle of Julia Zemphira, the most coveted dance DJ in Moscow.

*“Rebyata—kakaya okhuitelnaya vecherka nas zhdet!”* Oh yes, Julia. A fucktastic evening indeed. I was already sick of this party. And it wasn’t even dark yet.

Look. I gave it my best shot. I drank the wine and I swam in the pool. I even accepted a warm white robe from one of Strelets’s associates who had scooped up my clothes the minute I stripped them off and refused to give them back unless I danced with him. “Sure I’ll dance with you,” I said, and then I pulled up the robe and turned thirty fouettés in a row around him while he tried to groove to Rihanna.

(Okay, that was a little arrogant, I'll grant you. Carla sneered at me. *Showy bitch*. But Regina applauded. And Regina is better billed than Carla, for the record.) Whatever—I got my clothes back and the guy moved on to more pleasant partners.

After an hour I was done. Done with the overly loud laughter, the bad dance music, the manic staccato *New York, New York, New York*, coming from all quarters like crickets.

I found Stas in the billiard room, holding his own with two tight-lipped oligarchs and a half-dozen drunk dancers who thought it terribly funny to snatch the billiard balls before they dropped in the pockets. He squeezed my shoulder. "As soon as this game's over, 'kay? I think I got these guys." I was about to point out that the game was not going to end as long the ball-snatcher brigade held court, when the mean crack of wood on skin cut through the giggles and the languid roll of a perfectly balanced bank shot.

Silence reigned as I took in the tableau: One of the men—an oil executive maybe or maybe that guy who owns all the foreign car dealerships—stood frozen, his face a rictus, his pool cue extended down the cool green gutter. My eyes followed the cue to its tip. To the splayed white hand trapped under it. Up the thin wrist and tapered arm to the soft shoulder topped by a face flickering with shock and pain. Tatiana Ribakova bit her lip and, after an endless moment, let out a small wounded protest.

"Touch my balls once more, my pigeon," hissed the man.

And then one of the ugliest threats I have ever heard out of the mouth of one of our Bolshoi patrons. And that's saying something.

Stas stepped in and handled it. Soon Tatiana had her hand in an ice bucket and the offended billiard player had an iced bottle in his. By the time we made our exit Tatiana

was pleading for forgiveness: “Nu vas . . . please sweetheart, it was just in fun. Did you have money on it? Because you know I can make it up to you. You know I’m your balls’ biggest fan.”

So you see what I’m saying, here? I was sick to my stomach when we left. But it still wasn’t over.

As we made our way back to the city, dusk trailing us like a cape, we saw them: Danyella and Vartukh. They were at one of those roadside strips where you can buy sushi, sauvignon blanc, and hothouse roses. Danyella had a bouquet in her arms and Vartukh had Danyella’s waist in his. I thought I saw discomfort flash across my friend’s face. A visceral reaction to bodies out of alignment. This, after all, was not rehearsal. This was Friday night on Rublevskoe Highway. This was the artistic director of the Bolshoi Ballet in a very public display of close relations with a junior dancer who until one month ago was still a minor. Not that it was a first. Not for Pasha Vartukh. For Danyella, maybe. But not for Vartukh.

I tapped Stas on the shoulder and he nodded. He saw too. He knew what it meant that Danyella was going to New York and now was in Vartukh’s arms. Once upon a time, Stas and Danyella were a thing, and even though that ended a while ago, he’s probably a better friend to her than I am. That’s just how it is. Stas is an ex; I am a rival. I mean, I thought we were more than that. I thought we were two-thirds of a tight triangle—Danyella, Nina, and I. Anyone will tell you we’re the *boykaya troika*, the “sassy lassies” (which incidentally does not sound nearly as dumb in Russian). We are the closest friends you will find in the Theatre, I’d wager.

But the bottom line? No friendship at the Bolshoi outweighs aspiration.

I know that now. I knew it the moment I saw Danyella

on Vartukh's arm. Saw her glance up at the sound of Stas's bike. Saw her toss her head in fake laughter and turn her back to the road.

With that, she broke my heart harder than she ever hurt Stas.

"Run them down?" he asked over his shoulder.

"With glee," I said.

Stas lowered his visor, revved his engine, and we leaped toward the shallow roadside pull-off like it was dinner. We were ten meters from them when I panicked and gripped his forearm, just where a partner in a *pas de deux* would touch mine to signal a turn. But Stas had already adjusted, and with a squeal we swerved into a service road parallel to the highway and sped past the tarted-up sushi lounge. Stas stopped at the next traffic light, though it was only just yellow. We didn't say a word. We didn't say a word all the way into town, and Stas drove at a respectable speed.

Then I was home, lying on the couch watching a bad crime series on TV. I had purged my nausea and ignored my heartsick. But I felt this residue. These freaked-out goosebumps like a light sheen of mental sweat. Like I had had a close call.

Not that any of it had anything to do with me, mind you.

That was three nights ago. A million years ago. And now I am at Danyella's bedside. Holding her hand. Wishing she could say it: *Lana, why's it always got to be about you? You had nothing to do with this.* But Danyella's not talking. Not yet. The motorcycle that ran her down outside that suhsi bar, (a Ducati, say the investigators) broke her back and ruined her face on the asphalt. The doctors say that she will recover. In time she might walk, they say. She won't dance. Not ever.

My phone rings. It's my mother.



She delivered the news that night, waking me from a deep sleep on the couch to tell me that Vartukh and Danyella were both in the hospital. At first, it didn't register—the part about “hit and run.” It sounded like some sort of new choreography I hadn't learned, that's how groggy I was from too-early sleep. But the more she talked, the more I prayed I was still asleep. In the middle of a bad dream.

“Imagine—a motorcyclist! There's no way you can jump the curb on a motorcycle, hit two people, and not even know it,” she had said. “It must have been intentional. Imagine—someone deliberately ran them down. On a motorcycle.”

My mother has a gift for stating the obvious.

I have that gift too. But for me it has mostly been a curse. Like when I told a journalist that I thought most of the money for the Theatre's billion dollar renovation went to the publicity campaigns about the Theatre's billion dollar renovation. Or when I told my trainer, Anna Kirilovna, that she's a sadist. Or when I told Vartukh himself that he's a misogynist. Or when I announced to the entire cafeteria that if they put *Spartacus* on the spring schedule again I would organize a boycott against bare-chested ballets.

“*Pochemu s toboi vseгда skandaly?*” my mother asks. “Why must you always make a scene?”

I don't have an answer. I can see pretty clearly where my big mouth has gotten me: third-tier status and a world of suspicion. But I can't help it. It's hard for me to bite my tongue. As some old dissident (or maybe it was Tolstoy) once declared: “*Ne mogu molchat!*” Maybe it's because my mother can. And does. *Molchat*, that is: remain silent. Oh, the untold injustices that she has silently endured, Marina Dukovskaya. And I say untold because, well, she's never told me about them. She states the obvious, sure. But she won't say a word about the secrets. And she has many. My mother,

Marina Dukovskaya, is a cipher. A riddle. A mystery she refuses to help me solve.

So what have I become? A spectacle.

Danyella used to say so, too: *It does you no good, Lana. These spectacles of yours. Save it for the stage.*

I step away from Danyella's bed and answer the call.

"Da, mama . . ."

"Lana. I went to the Theatre and spoke with Anastasia Volshebnikova."

"You what?"

"I had too. They know. You were on the highway, you were with Stas. You left the party on a motorcycle . . . I had to cover for you. I said you met me at eight thirty. We were at the Novodevichy Cemetery. It was All Saints' Day on Friday, Lana."

"Are you insane?" I ask. But it sounds like a statement. "Are. You. Insane. 'Cover for me?' That's what you said, ma, that you 'covered for me?' What's this, you suspect me too?"

"I didn't say that. I used the wrong word."

I can hear the defense lock elbows in my mother's voice.

"I meant that you need a better alibi. It looks bad."

"Of course it looks bad, ma. And everyone at Roman Strelets's place saw us. Looking bad. Leaving, as a matter of fact, around nine P.M. Not looking like we were on our way to an evening All Saints' Day service."

There's a long silence. Neither of us can think of something more obvious to say.

"Novodevichy?" I ask eventually. "We don't even have family in Novodevichy Cemetery."

"Everyone has family in Novodevichy," says my mother.

I lift a dusty slat in the plastic blind. From Danyella's hospital room, I can see the golden domes of the Novodevichy convent grounds. I repeat my mother's words silently but

don't bother to ask. Who, among the tortured artists laid to rest under the crenellated whitewashed walls, does my mother consider family? Does she mean Galina Ulanova, Joseph Stalin's pet ballerina? Or the cellist, Rostropovich? Is it the novelist who threw his unfinished masterpiece in the flames rather than die the author of an unfinished masterpiece? The poet who figured suicide was better than censorship?

I'm not surprised that my mother, a woman who once left Russia for America and buried her father there before returning to her homeland to dance, feels a kinship with the legends lying deep under carpets of pine needles. They are resting even deeper in the false nostalgia of Marina's generation. The Soviet Union's last youth—disenchanted, disassociated, and orphaned (literally, in my mother's case) by a swift current of change.

Still, it galls me that she could say something like that: "everyone has family," when I, in fact, don't. I have only Marina and her secrets.

"How is she? Danyella?" asks Marina.

"Still unconscious. She looks dreadful. They really messed her up, ma."

I turn and look again at Danyella's bruised face. Her eyes are slits of pain. There are lacerations down her neck and a terrible burn on her left cheek. I have a sudden, unbidden thought that I'm looking at a professional make-up job.

"But Vartukh is already discharged," I say. "Nothing but a dislocated shoulder."

My mother mumbles platitudes: *Thank God for that.*

I wonder. It seems unlikely that God had much to do with it. Danyella is maimed and Pasha Vartukh, artistic genius and serial womanizer, will wave at the paparazzi and go back to work. That doesn't strike me as divine will.

“Is there anything you aren’t telling me, Lana? Anything that could explain . . .”

And that’s when I know: That yes, there might be something. Something I haven’t told my mother that might explain why Danyella is lying in a hospital bed and why I feel as though it’s not just about her. It might also be about me. And the reason I know this is because when she asks if there is something I’m not telling her, it doesn’t even occur to me to lash out with a retort about the things she has not told me. Things that might explain . . .

Instead I tell Marina we should talk when I’m home. She understands this. She grew up in a world of paranoia. To this day, she distrusts the phone. I’m not a fan of it myself. For such a critical tool, it’s strangely limited. Like an instrument you can only play one-handed. There’s no body language option on a phone, even if you have the latest textually enhanced, visually optimized, vocally commanded device. I’m rarely at a loss for words . . . but still, I can’t fully explain myself if I am not moving. So I hang up and resolve to go straight from the hospital to the Theatre. To explain.

I move back to the bed and lean over my friend’s disfigured face. “Danyella, I’ll be back tomorrow. I’ll be back with Nina. So try to make yourself presentable, girl. *Devushka, derzhi’s*. Hang on.”

It’s a long walk from the hospital to the Bolshoi, but the sun is out and it feels healing, antiseptic. Every step of the way I am replaying the events of seventy-two hours ago.

I think again of the pain I felt when Anastasia Volsheb-nikova delivered her verdict: *Danyella is the more reliable dancer*. And there was more—Nina had been chosen as the *corps* understudy. Our *troika* divided, and I was the odd girl out.

It hurts again. But not just because I was passed over. I know I am the better dancer; and also not the most reliable dancer. This is something else. I think it hurts because (and now I stop dead in the middle of the sidewalk so that the woman behind me, an enormous specimen attired in a florid dress and various bundled accessories, runs smack into me and drops the first of her many errands) because I suspect that Danyella sold me out.

The woman who ran into me is sputtering abuse, so I bend down to help her collect the leaflets that have spilled from one of her half-dozen shopping bags. I apologize and turn to go on my way but she stops me and, recovering a shard of civility, thrusts a flyer in my hand. "*Devushka khudaya*," she entreats, "you are much too skinny. You need to consider the healthful benefits of organic, homeopathic supplements. Call the number. They are made of the finest herbs and natural chemicals."

I nod and carry on, fanning myself with the promise of natural chemicals.

Falsity on all fronts.

Here's the truth: as much as I want to be a soloist, a prima, an international star—I'm no longer sure that I want it from the Bolshoi. Because the Bolshoi, with its prestige and pedigree, its fat budget and fatter trustees, its gilded front, corrupt guts, moldering foundation and scalped tickets . . . the Bolshoi is as fake as "natural chemicals." I'm not alone in thinking it. Plenty of our best dancers have defected—to Covent Garden, to Berlin, to American Ballet Theater in New York. The corruption, the cynicism, the god-awful public—who wants to perform for a swinish crowd who only come to wear their Italian shoes and French silk and then leave at intermission for some other "event?"

Okay, maybe the junior dancers without contracts do.

I'm the only one of us who isn't afraid to state the obvious. But I know others agree. Danyella did. She said as much, but only to me. As often as she admonished my outbursts, she still had my back. *Lana's gonna run this show one day*, she sometimes joked.

Look, I knew we were in direct competition—that is as natural a state for a ballerina as first position *en face*. But I thought that we were both flirting with another possibility: we could be partners. We could be pioneers. We could be the first to leave the Bolshoi for something better but not flat-out traitorous. We could join a new, independent dance troupe here in Moscow. A clean stage. With no money. And no baggage. No Vartukh. No *Spartacus*.

“We could dance to music from the twenty-first century!” Danyella used to giggle.

“Goodbye, limp dicks and hardened arteries!” I would cheer.

We even brought Ninochka in on it, dropping hints, feeling her out. And she surprised us both by saying she had already had a few exchanges with the director of Dolgoruk, a four-year-old company that got excellent reviews last year for its a capella ballet *Vox Pop*. We went together, the three of us, to a few other recitals—small theater affairs—and tried to convince ourselves that we didn't need union representation or dressing rooms with heated floors. I thought, *Maybe this could happen*. Sort of. Because assignments for the New York tour were also happening.

I don't mean to say I expected Danyella or Nina to turn down the opportunity to go to New York. Of course not. I certainly wouldn't, in their position.

But there was something about the way she turned her back. The way the driver held the door outside the roadside sushi bar. The way I could feel all the way across the lanes of

self-absorbed traffic a whisper campaign starring Danyella Mitrokin, with Pasha Vartukh as her confessor: *You do know, don't you, that Lana Dukovskaya is arranging meetings with Dolgoruk? I'm not even sure she could find time in her schedule to accompany the corps to New York.*

That's why I wanted to kill her. Because I took her about-face personally.

And it's what I had not told Marina. Because my mother would too. If I left the Bolshoi, she would take it personally. Because for Marina, the Bolshoi is a crown jewel.

For me, it's a blood diamond.

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## Chapter Two: Danse Sacrale

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It's hard to recognize the accomplished ballerina that Anastasia Dmitrivena once was. That is, it's hard to recognize the ballerina. The accomplishment is every bit as bright as her platinum hair, as outlined as her fuchsia lips and scapular brows, as enhanced as . . . well, everything in Anastasia's well-appointed office in the Bolshoi Theatre overlooking the very heart of Moscow.

She had me wait, as usual, outside in the corridor. I looked out over the fountain and the Kremlin walls beyond, and, not for the first time, imagined myself a surgeon surveying my patient, ready to perform a bypass. A single incision through the congested plain that once served as a pedestal for the city's most vaunted landmarks would reveal an underground mall. Not that it's a particularly bad one. I've been known to shop there myself. It's just interesting that you can find commercialism literally everywhere in this city. When just a generation ago, all that was considered criminal—capitalist rot, speculative parasitism, an attack on

the working class, a cancer. I guess there was some truth to that communist propaganda, for consumer fever is malignant in this town.

“So. You have seen Danyella?” asks Anastasia once I am seated across from her. “Poor darling. What a tragedy. An absolute tragedy. And I can only hope and pray that such a personal, heartbreaking tragedy for our sweet Danya does not bring even more tragedy in tow. Your mother came to see me.”

“Yes, Anastasia Dmitrievna, I wanted to explain that,” I begin with formality. But she puts an expensively manicured hand to my testimony.

“Your mother is overexcited,” she says. “Of course. All mothers would be and yours, *nu* . . . let’s just say that I welcome her involvement. We have waited a long time.”

There is something barbed here. My mother’s ambivalence, her precipitous yet incomplete severance from the Bolshoi after three years as its prima ballerina—well, it is one of those things that is too troublesome to be a conversation. It is more like a specter, emerging from the wings at set times in the performance. A wrong entrance throws everyone off. My mother, I feel, has made a miscue.

I start again. “It was my choice to skip class on Friday. I was . . .”

But Anastasia runs over my attempts to explain.

“Lana, you are replacing Danyella on the New York tour.”

I’m uncharacteristically speechless.

“*Lana, ochni*’s. Wake up, Lana. This is real. Could I get an acknowledgement?”

“Anastasia Dmitrievna, thank you so much,” I manage. “My mind just wasn’t there. I mean I just came from the hospital and . . .”

I know I need to start at the beginning. Confirm each step that led to this unexpected turn of events.



“So, the tour has not been cancelled? Because of the . . . accident?”

With a single exhalation, Anastasia expresses surprise at my ignorance, certainty in her answer, and confusion with my question. She vocalizes all these things, like a French philosopher, flapping her lips and blowing out her cheeks. An affected gesture. And not very attractive. She knows it and recovers.

“*Lana. Shto ty?* Of course the tour goes on. Do you have any idea of the expenditure behind such an operation? The corporate sponsorship involved? The Metropolitan Opera House is booked for ten days. It’s a three-million-dollar commitment. This tragedy has no impact whatsoever on the Bolshoi’s international engagement. Pasha Vartukh, as you know, sustained minor injuries—nothing graver than a dancer should expect once or twice in a career.”

I am looking at this woman, struggling to remember that she, too, was once a Bolshoi ballerina, retiring from the stage just a few years before Vartukh. A hard-working, professional performer who danced through injuries and gracefully acknowledged her thousands of fans. And now she is second in command to the Executive Director of the entire theatre, with the ballet as her responsibility. I watch her smooth her skirt and glance sideways at her reflection in the blackened computer monitor, and I marvel that even as the Theatre itself has been reduced to corporate funding and indifferent programming, so too have Bolshoi’s best dancers. I very nearly close my eyes, the better to consider this woman, the assistant to the director in charge of personnel and union relations, as the artist she once was, an idol of the stage, a vision under spotlights.

But it is impossible. This happens all the time. And when it does, I experience a moment of relief for my

mother and a moment of panic for me. There but for the grace of God . . .

“Of course, Anastasia,” I say. “You are right, of course. Vartukh has certainly overcome greater challenges. But Danyella . . .”

I stop, mostly because Anastasia’s eyes are so ice cold. It’s a non-starter. Danyella is immaterial.

“I thought Nina could easily replace Danyella in the *corps*,” I say, still thinking I’ve misunderstood.

She waits a beat for me to reach complete discomfort and then says: “For the bulk of the program, yes. Nina will replace Danyella in the *corps* for *Sylphide*, for example. But we have made some changes to the program. We’ve added a variation. A solo.”

Anastasia laces her fingers together and rests them on the desk. How do these gestures become so stereotypical? Did she have to practice them? Train her fingers to express management rather than grace?

“We will be doing three performances—two matinees and an evening—of a selection of interpretive excerpts. We had planned for Danyella to perform the *Danse Sacrale* from *The Rite of Spring*.”

I consider this. The *Danse Sacrale* is four minutes long. It is not technically challenging. But it is among the most avant garde of the classic ballets. It doesn’t cause a riot among the audience like it did when it was first performed a century ago, and compared with modern choreography it’s pretty tame stuff. But it is one of the more esoteric works in the canon. Why would they give it to a junior? Why would they give it to me?

“A brilliant concept, I think,” continues Anastasia. “I have been encouraging Pasha for sometime now. I have long thought that it’s absurd to see a veteran soloist dance the

*Sacrale*. After all, it's meant to be the Chosen One dancing for her elders, is it not? And we know perfectly well that in pagan rituals, the Chosen One would have been a virgin."

There is so much wrong with this I don't know where to start.

"In the archaic sense of the word, of course," says Anastasia with a laugh that is almost merry. "We know you are a modern girl, Lana. But we want your youth. Your . . . untested quality. In truth, we want your spark. Even—and I never thought I would say it—your tattoo!"

Again, the conspiratorial chuckle. I can't help but rub the miniature spotlight inside the crook of my arm. Such a tiny precision of ink that most people mistake it for a birthmark. The first tattoo to ever make it through the Bolshoi. The smallest tattoo to ever make it out of my friend Vlad's parlor.

But I'm unnerved. The *Danse Sacrale* is legend, yes. It's a wonderful opportunity. But the Chosen One? The one selected to dance for her elders? She's meant to dance to her death. It is not merely a sacred dance. It is a sacrificial dance. And this has not escaped me—that Danyella was chosen for a sacrificial dance. That I am the next chosen one.

"We feel it is too much for Nina. We want you to dance it."

There is no time for me to brood on this. There is piano music rising from the floor below. A breeze blows through the window. Spring. Call me a pagan, but I'm suddenly utterly tuned in to the mystical sensation that there is rebirth and there is ritual, and as long as piano music floats freely through the Bolshoi Theatre, they can both have a home here.

"Nu, *devushka*, this is your cue to accept graciously and go find a rehearsal room," says Anastasia. "Or have I miscalculated you?"

I am about to answer but Anastasia is leaning forward now. Her fingers unlaced. Her blouse is open against her cleavage and I see a flush of red against her breastbone. I hear the rash spread to her voice. “Your mother will be heartbroken if you miss this opportunity, Lana. If I tell her that I don’t for a minute believe that you were in Novodevichy Cemetery last Friday evening.”

My choice is made. I am going to New York as the Chosen One. Which means it’s not really my choice after all, is it?

Ten days is not much time to learn the *Danse Sacrale*. Even if it is a repetitive piece. All rhythm and energy. The dance of a girl desperate to please. Anastasia had said I could tap Larisa Odelnikova as a trainer, but I’ve seen her rendition of desperate. I don’t do that sort of desperate. I have already decided that my Chosen One will dance to her death because there’s nothing worth living for once she’s done dancing.

On the stairs to the dressing room I glance over the railing and see familiar freckled shoulders crowned with an auburn bun—Nina.

I hesitate. I haven’t spoken with her since yesterday, when she just blubbered the entire time about Danyella and Pasha. *Pasha?* I had thought. *Now “Vartukh the fartukh,” was “Pasha?” How quickly we warm to the jackasses when they take a fall.*

I call down to her. She lifts her cupid face. I see relief register and she runs quickly up one flight to hug me.

“I know I should have gone but I just couldn’t get the nerve,” she says. “How is she? Is she better? Does she look awful? I sent flowers—did you see the flowers? I know I should have gone but . . .”

“Nina, we’ll go tomorrow,” I say. “She’ll be better tomorrow.”

Nina nods. She hugs her elbows. We never had a chance

to talk about the tour and I can see that she wants to now. I'm glad that she won't have to feel guilty any more, about me being left out. I want her not to worry about that, so I beat her to the punch.

"Ninotchka. We're going to New York. We're going to dance for Danyella, okay? That's what we'll do."

I misguessed. Nina is confused. "I thought that . . ."

"I just came from Anastasia's office. It turns out that they are adding a variation. One that Danya was to perform. It's for a junior." Nina's mouth opens, just slightly. Like she might be nauseated. Like she needs more air.

"You will dance all of *Sylphide*," I say quickly. "But I'm going, too. It's only three performances, but I'll be there too. You won't go alone."

"What variation?" she asks quietly.

"*Danse Sacrale*."

"*The Rite of Spring*?"

I nod. Nina nods. She lifts her chin, closes her mouth with a snap.

*Oh please, Nina, be my ally. Be my partner.*

"I've never danced it, Ninotchka. I don't even know it."

I see many emotions cross her pretty face. None of them are ugly—but I can see the traces of a suspicion that she doesn't even feel yet. Is it my imagination? Or is this shadow of doubt on every face I see? Even my mother's.

Nina reaches out and grasps my hand. "You'll be amazing," she says. "Call me tomorrow and we can meet to go to the hospital." She's halfway down the steps when she stops and looks back up at me.

"Congratulations."

I need to tell Marina. I pull out my phone. It says I've missed a call from Stas. He left a text. *Call me*. I do.

“So they brought me in. And I told them what we agreed. We didn’t see them on the highway. We were home in Moscow by nine thirty.”

“Stas, I’ll tell them whatever you tell me to. I’ll back everything you say—but I don’t think anyone really cares. I mean. I don’t know. I came in expecting to have to defend myself, but instead . . .”

“Instead what?”

“Well, I mean my mother apparently came in on a pre-emptive strike and now . . .”

“Now, what?” I hear his impatience. Stas is worried. Stas feels guilty.

“She’s still unconscious, by the way,” I say. “Danyella. We’re going to see her tomorrow, me and Nina.”

“Okay, sure,” he says. “But you need to watch your back too, Lana. I have a bad feeling. Like it’s, I don’t know, a setup. It’s just such a weird coincidence.”

He’s silent.

“I’m thinking of selling my bike,” he says a minute later.

“That’s absurd.”

“Maybe.”

“Plus it would look bad.”

“I guess.”

“Listen, I have to go. This is going to sound really weird, but I just found out that I’m going to New York.”

More silence.

“Stas, did you hear me.”

“Yeah. That’s just . . . a strange coincidence.”

He doesn’t say what we’re both thinking: *and it looks bad.*

“Are you coming in today?” I ask.

“No. The tech head told me I could take the day off.”

*And that looks bad too.*

“I’ll see you tomorrow.” Stas hangs up. It feels like he’s

hung up on me. It feels, impossibly, like Stas suspects me as well.

It's not even ten when I get home, but Marina is already in bed.

I tiptoe into her room to turn off the light she's left burning. Her book is pinioned on the opposite pillow, her reading glasses perched on its spine. I've seen this pose many times. My fingers are on the switch when she stirs.

"You're home."

"Uh-huh."

"*Danse Sacrale*, huh?"

"*Da. Chudovishno. A monster.*"

"I never danced it."

"Should I turn this off?" I ask.

"No."

My mother sits up, rubs her eyes, props a pillow behind her back.

"I'm not pleased," she says.

I sigh and run my fingers through my hair. It's about three inches long. Running my fingers through it is like scratching an emotional itch. "You never are, ma."

"Lana, it's a great honor. To be chosen for a solo. But why not here? On your home stage? Why do you have to go all the way to New York for your debut? I just . . . I wish I could go with you."

"That's sweet. But it's not happening."

Her jaw tenses. Her brow knits. I bend my head and she runs her fingers through my hair. It has the same effect on both of us. Which, I realize, not many things do. I'm feeling gracious. I am going to solo on the Metropolitan stage in New York City, I can afford to bite my tongue. By which I mean, I really should bite my tongue. I should humor my mother. I should make this our triumph. Not mine.

“I have a right to intercede, you know. I’m still your mother. And I still have more experience with those people than you do.”

“Okay, ma. But making up stupid stories about All Saints’ Day—that’s not the way.”

“I’ve kept my distance. I know that it’s your turn. But Lana, I have too many scars to not feel phantom pain.”

More cryptic talk. I wait, not moving. I will her to tell me what, exactly, she is talking about. I give her five seconds and then conclude what I always conclude. My mother is an overly dramatic, damaged former ballerina. And she can’t figure out if I will heal her or hurt her.

“Anastasia said your participation was ‘welcome,’” I say, wondering if that was the word she used.

My mother’s fingers stop.

“Anastasia is a manipulative shrew.”

“Of course she is, ma. She’s practically second in command.”

Marina leans over and flips on the radio.

*I understand he’s the youngest director to have held the position, which of course was a question of some debate when he was first appointed. But the last two seasons have been, I would say overall, successes—at least in terms of the box office if not uniformly well-received by the critics.*

We’ve landed in the middle of the skewer-the-Bolshoi hour on government radio. So much for my good mood.

*Indeed, yes Vartukh is a controversial director. There are those who applaud some of his innovations—they see that there could be more attempts to modernize the Theatre in respects not always seen from the audience perspective but*



*naturally, it being the Bolshoi there are just so many time-honored and traditional practices, not to mention persons of political power and influence . . . it's an interesting comparison to consider the legacy, for example, of Arkady Danilov, who ran the Bolshoi Ballet for thirty years from—*

Marina moves quickly. The voices are silenced. I hear the radiator reconsider whether it's really spring yet. She turns her back to me and pulls the blanket close.

"Turn the light off please. I'm tired."

I do. In the dark I feel her reach out. I put my hand in hers. I know I should bite my tongue. But I don't.

"What did that man do to you, ma?" I ask.

"Arkady Grigorevich Danilov ruined many people I loved," she says quietly.

But I think that the truth is that Arkady Grigorevich Danilov, Vartukh's predecessor, ruined my mother.



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# Mapmaker

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Mark Bombback and Galaxy Craze

October 2014

SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD TANYA Barrett has a preternatural geospatial gift. Put her in a room and she'll tell you the exact measurements at a glance; her widowed father was an expert cartographer. But Tanya is an orphan now, having lost her father to his job and passion a year ago. Michael Barrett was co-founder of MapOut, a digital map-making start-up; he traveled the globe, surveying with his own eyes remote areas that were to be catalogued by satellite. At the urging of Michael's partner, Harrison, Tanya takes an internship at the company. She hopes it will help get her into a college far away from her detached stepmom, Beth. But she doesn't expect to fall for Connor—Harrison's nineteen-year-old son, a fellow intern and a boy she's known all her life.

Late one night at the office, the two stumble upon what appears to be evidence that Michael was cheating on Beth before his death. While Tanya and Beth aren't close, Tanya can't bring herself to believe that her father would have betrayed her stepmom this way. Then Connor suddenly

disappears, and the next day, Tanya herself is almost kidnapped by a team that is clearly professional. After a harrowing escape, she embarks alone and hunted on a search for Connor, relying on her geo-spatial gift in ways she'd never imagined—a search that plunges her into the heart of an international conspiracy with the highest possible stakes, and exposes the horrifying truth about what really happened to her father.

MARK BOMBACK is a screenwriter whose credits include *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*, *The Wolverine*, *Unstoppable*, *Race to Witch Mountain*, and *Live Free or Die Hard*. While primarily a writer of feature films, he recently co-developed the TV series *Legends* for TNT with Howard Gordon (*Homeland*). When his schedule permits, he teaches a class in screenwriting at his alma mater, Wesleyan University. He lives in Westchester County, NY with his wife and four children.

Born in London, author Galaxy Craze moved to America in the '80s with her mother and younger brother. Before becoming a writer, she appeared as an actress in several independent films. A Los Angeles Times Book Prize Finalist and Booker nominee for her bestselling debut novel, *By the Shore*, she is also the author of the acclaimed *Tiger, Tiger* and Alloy Entertainment's The Last Princess series.

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## Prologue: One Month After My Father Died

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### *DAD'S HOME.*

That was the first thought I had when I saw the trail of footprints leading to the front door of our house. My eyes went from the white sky to the white ground. The footprints were just a faint impression now, quickly disappearing under the falling snow. They were large, a man's shoe size, and as I looked closer I saw the zigzag imprint my dad's boots made. He must have come home early, walking the back way.

I stared at our house. It was white with black shutters and two red brick chimneys on either side. The house reminded me of a guard dog, with leaded glass windows for eyes, the two chimneys for ears, and the black front door the nose. I'd lived here my whole life. The house was the one constant thing, the one thing that had remained while so much was lost and changed. The house was the one place I felt safe. The house was my guard dog.

### *Dad's home.*

I felt an excitement that surprised me. An excitement I hadn't felt for a long time, like waking up at dawn and knowing it was Christmas morning. I looked at the garage. Beth's car wasn't here yet; she wouldn't be back for an hour or two. I smiled; my dad and I would have some time

together without my stepmom. Maybe we could play a game of chess and make extra-strong hot chocolate with plain coco, maple syrup, and milk. If he was working (I knew he would be), I would just curl up on the couch in his office with the wood stove, and I'd watch the cinders burn.

I ran, following the trail of his footsteps. The snowflakes landed on my lashes, blurring my vision as I ran toward the house. *Dad's home*: the words sounded in my head like a bell, my backpack heavy with a laptop, books hitting against me as I ran, my feet sliding in the snow-covered grass. Then I did something I hadn't let myself do in a very long time. I stepped in his footsteps in the snow, my boot print covering his.

I had a memory of being a child, accompanying my father on a hike through the Adirondacks. Whenever we came across footsteps, human or animal, we would follow them to where they led. He was measuring, creating a picture of the world. But I was trying to guess, as I followed: *in whose footsteps am I walking?* What did it feel like to be that person or animal, walking in those footsteps? I imagined the creature's spirit left a trace behind, like a scent almost, drawn by the precise markings on the ground. Somehow it overcame me. I knew, or believed I knew, how that creature walked—*exactly* how they walked. But the thing I couldn't describe or even tell anyone without sounding crazy was that I knew what it felt to *be* them. Sometimes, I could almost hear a voice in my head, plotting out those footsteps in precise measurements.

As I placed my feet into my father's footprints, I recoiled. Something was wrong.

The footsteps were too close together—measuring four inches shorter than my dad's had been. My whole body ran cold, shivering uncontrollably.

I slipped as I scrambled toward the front porch. My knee cracked against the edge of the first wooden step. Pain shot through my body as I pushed myself up to stand; my fingers burned red from the cold. I reached for the handle of the front door, placing my foot in the last footprint when I stopped cold.

I stared blankly at my reflection in door window, dumfounded.

These were not my father's footprints. My father was dead.

I'm not sure if the scream I heard was only in my head or if I managed to make a sound through my numb lips. My hand fell from the cold doorknob. I took a step back, away from the house. What was wrong with me? I could barely catch my breath. I felt the cold flakes of snow melt on my lips, on my tongue, as I tried calm myself down.

How could I have forgotten? How could I have let myself pretend that my father wasn't dead? I pressed my hands together trying to bring some circulation back into my fingers. I followed the length of my own footsteps, now trying to calculate how many steps and how many seconds or minutes I'd deluded myself. It was only twenty to thirty seconds at the most, but the feeling I'd had was so hopeful, so *real*.

Now, standing a few feet away from the house, staring at the black shutters and the windows as dark as lake water, I felt a fear I could barely name. For the first time in my life, I was afraid of my own mind. How could I have let myself forget? My mother died when I was ten—and never, not once, not even in my dreams, had I ever forgotten. My mother's death was like a badge I wore, forever, pinned to my chest.

My eyes stung with tears. The reality of my life fell back

into focus: the loneliness of the house, the empty rooms behind the windows, the dark glass reflecting the falling snow, the evergreen branches closing in like a gate.

Inside, the house would be cold, the heat set low for the workday. My father's office empty and still, no fire in the small wood stove, no one sitting at his desk, no game of chess. The large upstairs bedroom my mother and father once shared: empty now. Even my stepmother wouldn't sleep in it alone. After my father's death, Beth moved into the tiny guest room my mother had painted her favorite shade of blue.

I took another step backward. Our house was my guard dog, but looking at it now, it filled me with dread. I wasn't afraid of what I would find inside, but of what I wouldn't find.

Why had I let myself believe he was alive? I stared down at the edge of the boot mark, at the zigzag pattern at the indent of stars. Those were his favorite boots. He had bought them in Vermont, when he had gone there for work. I was too old for this, too old and too smart to let myself ever be fooled by signs or miracles or look-a-likes.

After my mom died I suppose I also refused to believe she was really dead. I prayed and prayed for a miracle. I knew people never came back, but I let myself think maybe, just maybe she would be the only one. It's like when you are a little kid and you don't think you'll ever grow old. It's so unreal; you actually think you might be the only person in human history that won't grow up—until it happens.

The footprints must have belonged to the mailman, the furnace repairman, a college or high school kid working for Mass Environmental or Greenpeace. The fact this person wore the same boots was just a cruel coincidence.

My eyes tracked the prints once again. They came from



the woods leading to the front door, but beyond the tree line the falling snow had already buried their point of origin: the bike path in the evergreens. I followed the steps to the shed. Before I'd gone four yards, I could see an arch-pattern that would have only resulted from the door being opened.

Fear was a feeling cold as snow. I took a step backward, then another and another. This was a safe town. We never locked our house or car. The crime here was zero. Sometimes police were called for an overly noisy frat party or a lost dog wondering the streets, but that was it. I told myself this, even as I backed away from the house, studying the pattern of footprints slowly disappearing under the blanket of snow.

I hurried up the slope to the sidewalk. The afternoon was growing dim, the white sky turning grey. The lights of the passing cars glowed through the snowflakes. I stood on the roadside in what I assumed was the safety of passersby, traffic, neighbors. I stood with my hands in my pockets, hidden behind a large maple.

From the top of the slope, I squinted again at the trail of footsteps. I saw the route clearly now: he had come from the woods and walked to our front door before returning around the side of our house across the yard to the shed.

I drew in a breath. My heart thumped.

The footsteps ended at the shed. Meaning someone was still inside. Why?

There was nothing of any value that a thief would want. The shed was full of my father's old maps, a large wooden desk made from two-by-fours, and a wooden chair. He used to work there in the spring and summer when the weather was nice. The windows looked out to the narrow creel, the maple trees.

My dad never brought his computer into the shed, just his books and a thermos of tea. He scoured rare travel diaries and out-of-print history texts, studied landscape and waterways and topography. He read about nomads, exotic expeditions, import and export shipping. He told me that he learned how people think through the routes they took. The art of mapmaking was not just in precision and measurements, but in the ways we negotiate the climate and texture of the land around us.

There was only one thing of any value in the shed. Between the two windows on the wide plank wooden boards hung a framed lithograph of the Piri Reis map. Like a favorite painting or poem or song, he had a favorite map. The original was drawn in 1513, on gazelle skin parchment. The most amazing thing about it was its incredible accuracy. Peri Reis, a navigator—a bit of a wild man, according to my father—rendered it long before there was any sort of technology or satellite imagery.

Like Peri Reis, my father passionately believed that to make a map, one had to explore the terrain firsthand. He never sent assistants armed with high-tech computers to do the job for him. Wherever and whenever he traveled for work, he always took a roller measuring stick, a good supply of water, and sunblock. I remember his associates snickering behind his back when he'd start rambling. "I map the land with my own eyes."

That was the motto he lived by. That was the motto he died by.

My mother had found the print in an antique shop in Boston. It was expensive for her at the time; Dad had just started MapOut with his best friend and my godfather, and he had put most of our family's savings into the business. I remember standing beside her in the shop as she examined

the detail for what seemed like hours. I remember tugging at her hand, impatient to leave a place that smelled of dust and old books. She told the man she would have to think about it and we left the shop without it. She'd gone back without telling either my dad or me.

I crouched low, moving quickly from my spot behind the maple. I got down on my hands and knees in the snow, crawling through the underbrush of hedgerows, to get a closer look at the shed. I was no more than fifty feet away—maybe fifty-one at most—but the falling snow and the darkening sky blurred the edges of anything visible. Dusk, my mother used to warn, was the most dangerous light.

I had never once wanted Beth to come home, but now I realized I was anxious for her to return. I pulled my phone from my pocket. I was going to call Beth or the police. I looked at the lit-up screen, pressing my pass code to open it. But my fingers were frozen white. The phone wouldn't respond to my touch. I yelled out in frustration trying again and again. Nothing. It had frozen in the cold. I stared at the locked screen as the snowflakes landed and melted on it. Useless, just when I needed it most.

The police station was just under a mile away: 1,460 yards from doorstep to doorstep. Running, I could make it there in less than fifteen minutes. But that calculation was on a day without snow. The slip of the snow would add an extra three inches per step, making it closer to a twenty-minute walk. Besides, I knew I would never leave. I would wait. This was my house. If I wanted to feel safe again, to sleep tonight, I needed to know that whomever was in the shed was gone. I needed to see it with my own eyes

I hugged my knees closer to my chest, pulling my coat sleeves around my numb fingers. I sat on my backpack, with my arms wrapped around my legs, crouching, making myself

as small as possible. I wasn't sure how long I sat watching the door. The grey afternoon turned charcoal. I was so cold I lost feeling in my hands and toes.

Finally a sound came from the shed: wood hitting wood. The door opened, only an inch or two, slowly, pushing against the weight of the snow. I peered forward, as close as I could get without being seen. The air was like smoke now, thick and impenetrable. The houses and trees had lost all definition and were only silhouettes. I saw the shape of a man in the doorway, looking from left to right, but I could not make out his features.

I crawled forward, inching through the snow beneath the hedge. The man wore a hat, a heavy coat. He was not tall but not short, wide shouldered. I squinted, desperate, but he was only a dark shadow. I assumed he would head back the way of the bike path but he didn't. He stopped; he placed his hands in his coat pocket, looking up at the windows of our house. He stood there for what must have only been two or three seconds, but I was struck by his confidence or the arrogance of the gesture.

He turned quickly down the slope, leaping across the narrowest part of the creek. Clearly, he knew this property well. Who was he? What was he doing here? But now he was gone; disappearing into the darkness.

I stood, brushing the snow from me. The house was safe now. But I couldn't go inside. I had waited all this time only to see a shadow. I reached for my backpack, soaked from the snow. I walked quickly down Lincoln Road into the center of town. I couldn't be alone now.

As I waited for the streetlight to change, I recalled the way the figure had put his hands in his coat pockets and turned to our house. There was something so familiar about the man's attitude, the tilt of his head, his gait. I stared at the blinking

streetlight, with a strange haunted feeling inside. I was sure I knew him. But at the same time I had no clue who he was.

## Part I: Five Months Later

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### Chapter 1

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From the corner of my eye I could see Beth's shadow cross the floor. Why was she up so early? She had promised she would sleep in. School was out for summer; she wouldn't be back in the kindergarten classroom until after Labor Day. The last thing I wanted to have this morning was a conversation with Beth. I searched my pockets for my phone. I'd already put it in my backpack. It was too early to fake-text like I normally did.

Outside the kitchen window everything was green and gold, except for the river, which ran a glittering dark blue. The birds flitted from the porch roof to the small wooden birdhouse. Back and forth, back and forth, again and again. They were so nervous. Maybe they thought that they were stealing Beth's stash of seeds. Beth's stash wouldn't run out if every bird in New England showed up.

The kitchen floor felt cold against my bare feet, and I stared at the teakettle. The flame under it burned blue and red. I placed two Earl Grey tea bags in a tall mug and waited for the water to boil.

"Good morning," Beth called from the doorway.

How could she move so quietly through this old house? Like a ghost, never creaking. So many times, I thought I was alone, and then she would appear in a doorway or in a room, watching me, asking me questions.

“Morning,” I muttered.

She walked into the kitchen, looking as though she had just stepped out of a 1985 L.L. Bean catalogue. She wore a pink oxford shirt tucked into her high-waisted, baggy blue jeans. Her belt had a pattern of whales printed on it. I guess it was the type of clothing kindergartners might think was cute. Her thick brown hair was pulled back into a high ponytail. She even had a rope bracelet—a gift from one of her kindergarten students.

I forced a smile, which felt more like a grimace. Why couldn't I relax around her, now of all days? I always felt like she was watching, following, listening, looking through keyholes to see what I was doing. And it was her summer vacation! I knew she only had good intentions. She wanted to be here for me on my first day of “work,” like a mother or father would have been, like mine should have been. But her worry about me was only irritating, like an itch. Like the time I had poison ivy inside my wrists. “Work” was a paid internship at my dad's company, MapOut, the company he'd devoted the last part of his short life to founding.

The kettle whistled. I reached for the handle without thinking, burning the palm of my hand.

“Shit,” I snapped, flinching away. Before I even had a chance to look up, Beth was beside me with an ice pack wrapped in a cloth.

“It's okay,” I said, hiding my stinging hand against my chest. I fought back tears of pain and frustration. I glanced up at the clock—7:15—and decided to leave. I'd be an hour and a half early, but that was fine. “Let me help you,” Beth said, laying a hand on my shoulder.

Reluctantly I took the ice and held it against my palm. I sat down in the kitchen chair and stared down at my hands. Through the window the birds carried on. They were lucky.

They were stupid and they were unaware and they were part of a family. I knew exactly what they'd do for the rest of the day. They'd fly back and forth and back and forth, swept up in their happy belief that they were stealing seeds. What would the rest of my day look like?

I pressed the ice to my palm, numbing the throbbing. Beth made me my tea with milk and a little honey. She buttered my toast, spread blueberry jam she had canned last summer over it, cut it in half, and placed the tea and toast and a folded cloth napkin on the table in front of me.

"Thanks."

She sat down with her cup of coffee. "Hand any better?"

"A little."

"Are you nervous?"

I took a sip of tea and shrugged. "Not really." I'd spent plenty of time at MapOut, so I felt pretty comfortable there. Besides, Harrison Worth, dad's best friend and MapOut's co-founder, would take care of me. Of course he would. He'd arranged the entire thing. This was all an effort on his part to make up for the fact my grades had fallen in the past six months. And while I resented him for it, I also loved him for it.

I knew I could make more money pouring lattes and cappuccinos at Rao's Coffee or waiting tables at Judy's. I could have been a nanny to seven-year-old twin girls in Provincetown and spent the summer on the beach, but this would look a lot better on my college applications. That was Harrison's argument, and I couldn't argue back. Dad could never argue with Harrison, shrewd and suave and convincing, everything Dad wasn't. It's also why he and my dad made such a great team.

Beth's smile tightened. "You know, you can borrow my car."

"I want to bike," I said, maybe a bit too quickly. Cars still

upset me too much; I could barely ride in one, let alone drive, without thinking of Dad. “*If you’re gonna make use of your license, you better damn well know how to change a tire or check the oil or jumpstart a battery. Two things you can count on in the middle of nowhere, anywhere on the planet: useless cell phones and fixable cars.*” So many afternoons last summer I’d wasted rolling my eyes while he tried to teach me how to use a tire jack . . .

“Your dad would have given anything to be able to take you to work today,” Beth said, not even looking at me.

Was she trying to make me cry? I stared back at her, forcing myself not to say, *Don’t talk about him anymore*. I knew from experience that one way to stop thinking about someone was to stop talking about them. To push forward, to pretend you didn’t feel anything. How much longing or regret? How many morning or evenings could I say I wish my mom was here? I wish my dad was here? How much sadness could you let yourself feel? It could swallow you like the sea.

“Tanya . . .” she started to add.

“I better go,” I mumbled. I stood up, leaving the tea almost full and the toast untouched. The burn on my hand was still there, pulsing in my palm like a heartbeat. My voice fell onto the ring-stained and scratched wooden tabletop.

Beth nodded, glued to her coffee. “Have a good day,” she whispered.

My last image of her that day was her hands wrapped around the mug, sitting alone at the kitchen table, her shoulders hunched forward, her brown eyes full of loneliness, shadows of the birds outside playing across her face.

How would Beth spend the rest of the day? Alone, gardening, cleaning the house? Would she wonder what it was she had said to me that had gone so wrong? Would she remember



all the times our conversations had ended up with me slamming my bedroom door? With me reminding her again and again that she was NOT my mother and NEVER would be? When would she give up trying with me? I guess that's what I wanted, and that's what I was trying to make her do: give up on me.

Maybe she would go upstairs and lie on my father's side of the bed and sob into the covers. She was forty-four, childless, a widow now. Beth had wanted a child with my father and they'd spent their marriage trying. They'd visited specialists in Boston. I imagined them climbing up a ladder, a baby waiting at the top. Once it had worked. Beth was pregnant and for two months she was the happiest I'd ever seen her. Then the heartbeat stopped.

I imagined myself having the courage to go back inside, to give her a hug goodbye. I imagined myself as a different type of girl: someone kinder, less angry. In my mind, when I hugged Beth, I even looked different. In that vision, I smiled. I knew something as simple as that would change her day. It would also change mine.

But the screen door had slammed. I was already halfway across the lawn to the garage.

I pictured myself from above. I was a speck moving across the grass, a bright point in the miles of river, the road cutting through the town, the division of houses and properties in a multi-patterned graph. I rose, and the land below moved outward and outward in my mind until I could see the whole town of Amherst . . . the highest church steeples, the grid of streets, the darker threadlike line of the roads, the thick lane of highway in the distance, the uneven hills surrounding the entire valley. In my map, I was a pinprick the color of dust, making a wrong turn.

It's so hard to make the easiest change. As I moved farther

and farther away from the house, I could see myself, lost on the map, ignoring the voice inside that says, "*Turn back, turn back. Go back inside the house. Don't go that way, don't go there.*"

I squeezed my eyes shut, pulling my mind back into focus. The edges of the town disintegrated and I sank, my focus became closer, shorter, then back to real life. The present.

My father thought I had a gift: photographic memory of geospatial imagery. Sometimes it felt like a curse. Sometimes I got lost in it. Sometimes I could see less clearly what was right in front of me than I could see a landscape, miles away. It would start with one image, like the house, then, as though I were floating up away from the earth, the image would grow and grow, each point getting smaller and smaller as the area grew wider. Sometimes I felt like I couldn't land. And sometimes I didn't want to.

I grabbed my bike from the garage. My dad's silver ten-speed hung from the rack on the opposite wall. A spider had built her web inside the spokes of the wheel. One day the whole bike would be covered in webs, wrapped in a cocoon. I hopped on and fastened my helmet, which constantly slid forward, and started peddling. It was a clear, beautiful morning. Beth's comment about my dad, "he would have given anything to take you to work," stuck in my head. Another itch I couldn't get rid of.

I gripped the handlebars, ignoring the pain in my hand, as I rode fast then faster.

I took a deep breath. My hands were trembling. "Pull yourself together, Tanya," I said to myself. I slammed on the brakes, jolting forward.

A bicyclist behind swerved around me. "Watch what you're doing!" she screamed over her shoulder.

Her voice reminded me of my friend, Rebs. I knew it wasn't her, though. If it had been Rebs, she would have leapt off the bike and swept me into a hug. Or slapped me in the face. I'd shut Rebs out since my dad had died. Anyway, Rebs wasn't even in town right now. Her summer fun had begun. And she deserved it.

"Sorry," I stammered. I unfastened my helmet. Once I could breathe, I threw it down on the concrete, reveling in the satisfying crack of the plastic against the road.

After my mother died, after the funeral, after the mourners with flowers and well-wishers who came to the door with baked goods and casseroles, I was filled with a sadness so heavy that sometimes I could barely stand up against the weight of it. I knew she was dead. I was young and still believed in heaven and would lie on my bed sending kisses up to the sky. I had an imaginary room where I would store them in case she needed them later on. In case one day I forgot to send them to her.

But for my father, there was no funeral, no ashes, or burial. Only a memorial where mourners brought flowers to an empty gravesite. He disappeared on a work trip in Cambodia. I could picture just what had happened. He had strayed from the team, walking off with his old fashioned compass and measuring stick—alone. That was what he did; that was what made him who he was: exploring the unknown, by himself, with his own eyes. He wandered out of cell range (if there had even been any at all), off the GPS and satellite locators. Then he was caught in a flash flood, gone in an instant.

There was nothing left of him. The only thing that turned up was his waterlogged notebook. The ink was so smeared across the page, it looked like a watercolor of a river. And

his baseball hat from his college days: his good luck charm. There is an image taken by satellite, of water rising above the riverbanks. Everything just goes blue, though. You don't hear the screams of people, you don't hear their cries. In silence, death seems painless. The water rose for less than a day, and then receded, taking my father with it.

I sat down on the grass that lined the road, my bike beside me. The sun fell through the tree branches, warm and yellow, like a blanket across my shoulders. I ran my hand over the daffodils. That splash of yellow would be gone soon; Amherst didn't like weeds.

I guess I understood why dead bodies were flown hundreds of miles home to be buried. The living need to see the body. They need to see it turn to ashes, or to bury it in a casket beneath the ground. It was a boundary. It was a map's edge, a final ending. I yanked a daffodil from its roots, feeling the damp and soft prickle of the grass. I wanted so badly to pretend Dad was beside me to ask questions. "*Dad, why did you always want to go somewhere you'd never been to before? Why couldn't you have been more like Harrison? The rich one, the happy one, content to stay put?*" I'd actually asked him that once before, a long time ago, when he left on his first business trip.

*"Because Harrison is good with what people want, and because I'm good with where people go."*

His exact words. It should have been MapOut's slogan. I pressed my hand firmly into the earth. Maybe this would be my funeral for him. No more pretending or letting myself imagine he was beside me, talking to me, giving me advice. I dug my fingers into the dirt. I took a handful and threw it onto the road, where it would scatter in infinite directions. Then I pushed myself to my feet and picked up my helmet and bike.

The sun was just at the tree tops. It would be nearly nine. Today was a new day. Today was the beginning of the end of my life here in Amherst, MA. The end of the life I once had and wanted so badly to have again. But I had to put that longing behind me. I couldn't let myself imagine my father's voice anymore. I was talking to a ghost.

"Goodbye," I whispered.

I pulled my bike back to the path. It was the middle of June, the summer before senior year. I had a few goals: to do well at this internship, to get good grades, to get into a college that would take me far away from here. And still I didn't want to leave; this was my home. Some part of me kept hoping for the impossible. Kept hoping that the life I had, and had lost, would come back. Hope is that daffodil, that beautiful weed. It gets mowed down. But Harrison understood that better than my dad. The truth was I didn't want to keep hoping for what I knew could never come true.

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## Chapter Two

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The MapOut office was once a paper-manufacturing factory—industrial red brick and tall windows, renovated for a hoped-for boom—perched on the banks of the Mill River. Last time I was here, MapOut occupied only the third floor, but in the past year it had taken over the entire building.

I knew there had been some big acquisition by a major tech company, Rytech International; Harrison had explained it all to me even though I didn't care. All I really remembered from that conversation was that Harrison felt guilty. Right after my dad died, he'd offered Beth a deal: she could sell out my dad's shares in MapOut or she could keep them. Harrison told her there was a good chance the

company might sink. I knew he believed it. If MapOut failed, we would be left with nothing, except dealing with bankruptcy lawyers. Beth agreed to the payout and accepted a settlement for \$350,000 last year.

Beth was head-over-heels grateful. It was almost sickening. But I understood it. She came from nothing.

When she and Dad first hooked up, I was just Internet-savvy enough to research every part of her background, hoping to find something scandalous or incriminating. What I discovered only made me feel weirdly angrier. She was blameless. She came from a poor family in Pittsburgh. She won a scholarship and put herself through UMass, where she got an advanced degree in Early Childhood Education. And then she came to Amherst to teach kindergarten. She was an innocent siren whose call couldn't be resisted by a widower without prospects.

Needless to say, she immediately paid off the loan they had taken out on the house to do repairs; she paid off her car loan; she put a chunk of the payout into a seven-year CD that would be mine after college. She could have had so much more, and Harrison knew it. Maybe that was why he was so insistent that I take this internship.

As I looked up at the scaffold surrounding the building, I once again felt a pang of regret. Dad should have lived long enough to see the company's sudden success. I still remember how he and Harrison would work from the office in our house with only one intern—an Amherst junior named Fred, glued to the screen, hunchbacked with thick glasses, always guzzling Coca-Cola.

I made my way to the parking lot. Among the Subarus and Volvos, I spotted Harrison's black Audi station wagon sparkling under the sunlight. I almost felt like putting my bike on his car's roof. There was no room on the general

rack for the riff-raff, crowded with the bikes of the other paid interns from Amherst, UMass, Hampshire, and Smith. One of the reasons MapOut stayed in this area was because of the inexpensive intelligence at its disposal. "Ivy League brains at sweatshop prices," Harrison liked to say, thinking he was being funny, oblivious to how offensive he sounded. That was another difference between him and Michael Barrett, and one that I wish Dad would have called him on more.

As I hesitated, a car pulled into the lot, a navy blue Jetta. The windows were rolled down, and music spilled out into the sun. It bore a Stanford University bumper sticker.

*Connor.*

I was half-tempted to turn around and pedal away. I'd almost forgotten that Harrison's son would be a part of the MapOut operation this summer. We had been friends when we were young, until Conner left for boarding school and we lost touch, or more like he lost touch with me. I hadn't seen him in three years, not since that summer before ninth grade.

I looked down, pretending not to notice him as I walked my bike into a shady spot beneath the trees.

The engine died. The music stopped. A car door opened and closed. I stood still, gripping the handlebars of my bike, hoping I was camouflaged.

"Tanya!"

I recognized his voice from my childhood memories. It was deeper now. I gripped the handles of my bike tighter, forcing myself to be preoccupied with something on the ground.

"Hey, Tanya!" he shouted again, louder.

There was no use ignoring him. I looked up. My eyes widened. I wanted to act surprised but casual, but I felt a wave

of shock. He was nearly a spitting image of his father, only with a narrower face punctuated by bright green eyes. He'd grown exactly four-and-one-eighth inches since I'd last seen him. (Now he was six-one.) His shoulders were broader, so the messy brown "I'm-in-college" mop hair finally made sense. His jaw had lost its baby fat. He wore a navy T-shirt with Stanford University printed across the front, jeans, and grey sneakers.

"How are you doing?" He met my gaze, then avoided it, then met it again. "My dad told me you'd be working here. I'm just—I want to say I'm sorry about your dad. I wish I could have been at the service."

"Thanks." I nodded then stopped myself, wondering why I was nodding. I suddenly felt overwhelmed with self-consciousness, imagining how I looked to him. I was a tragic figure, the orphaned daughter of his dad's dead best friend. My bike helmet was still fastened tightly beneath my chin, my school backpack on, my pants tucked into my socks so they didn't get caught in the bikes gears. Were my armpits sweaty? I hurried to take off my helmet. I hoped he wouldn't notice the pants in the socks.

Connor smiled. "It's great to see you. How long has it been?"

"Three years." Then things got worse. The Velcro on my helmet stuck to my hair as I tried to pull it from my head.

"Hey, let me help you," Conner offered.

"It's okay," I said. "This happens all the time."

"Really," he said. He walked beside me, gently tugging my hair loose from the knotted strap. "There." He handed me the helmet.

"Thanks." I'd managed to get one pant leg free of the sock, and was working on the other. I put my backpack over one shoulder as casually as possible. I imagined myself



back at home with Beth, sobbing into pillows as the birds chirped. It didn't seem so bad.

"So my dad convinced you to take the internship?"

"It's good for college," I said. I sounded like a robot.

"I guess it is. That's why I took it. I . . ." He drew in a breath, not wanting to continue.

"What?" I pressed.

He smiled slightly. "I'm relieved that you said that, too—you know, that this is good for college. Honestly, I wanted to intern for Habitat for Humanity. I was all set to go to Tanzania, and help on this well-building project . . ." He broke off again, maybe embarrassed at how he was extolling his own virtues. "Never mind."

"So you go to Stanford?" I said, sarcastically nodding at his T-shirt. I don't know why I felt the need to make fun of him. His perfection practically begged for it. I thought he'd laugh it off, but instead his cheeks actually turned pink.

"It was the only clean shirt I had."

"I was just kidding." My voice was weak. I felt a pinch in my ribs—why did I say that just to be mean?

The chipper smile he'd tried to muster was gone. Of course: I was once again the poor orphan girl. "Have you been inside yet?"

I shook my head, "No."

"Come on. I'll show you around. They're completely remodeling it."

The air was dusty, barely breathable. Conner led me up the cement stairs, past two stories, cordoned off under heavy plastic drapes to keep the dust out, to the third floor.

A young woman with very pale white skin and a dyed black bob sat on the phone at a long white desk, beneath a banner of glowing lights that spelled MapOut. Her red

sandals tapped the floor as she typed the caller's information into the computer.

"Harrison is in a meeting at the moment . . ."

On the other side of the large room were office cubicles, and I saw a bunch of kids who barely looked older than me, typing away—no doubt Harrison's sweatshop Massachusetts brain-trust. Brand new boxes of unopened Macs stood against the wall. A team of deliverymen assembled Knoll furniture, red and orange chairs, white round tables. Rytech International must have given MapOut even more money than Beth had realized.

For a second I was dizzy. No wonder Harrison felt guilty. This was the same floor the old office had occupied, but it had been completely redone. It was unrecognizable. Past the young receptionist's desk were double glass doors that opened to Harrison's private suite. I wondered what had happened to my father's office, to his equipment.

Conner ushered me forward and knocked lightly, then listened for an answer.

"Come in," Harrison called.

I'm not sure why, but my eyes began to sting. That gravelly voice, that slight Boston accent that only came through in certain words; I had grown up with this voice. Conner nudged me through the doors.

"Tanya." Harrison stood up, walking around his desk. He wore a grey, summer linen suit with a white T-shirt beneath. He opened his arms wide to sweep me into the warm, familial hug he always did. "I've got that college trust set up for you. I'll take you out to lunch one day this week and we can talk about it," he murmured. Then he stepped back and gave my shoulder a gentle squeeze. I could smell the watery spice scent of his aftershave. "All you have to do is get grades again like you used to."

I nodded with a half smile. *Business first.* That was his way. “Conner, I want you to show Tanya the data input she’ll be doing. I have a lunch meeting in Boston.” He glanced quickly at the stainless steel chain-link watch hanging from his wrist.

“Sure, Dad,” Conner said, his voice equally abrupt.

“How’s Beth doing?” he asked.

At first I wasn’t sure if Harrison was talking to me. He texted a message on his phone then slipped it into his suit pocket.

“She’s okay,” I said. “She got the roof fixed finally so it’s not leaking,” I added, playing his game, alluding to the settlement he had given her. “She’s thinking about going back to work.” What I really wanted to ask, now that I was seeing the new office for the first time from the inside out, was how could MapOut afford this huge renovation? How much was the Rytech acquisition worth?

Harrison looked up at me. I could tell right away that the settlement was a subject he wanted to avoid. I flashed again to last winter, in the awful days after my father’s death, when Harrison came over to ask Beth to sign over my dad’s share of the company in exchange for the money. I tried to talk her out of it. Harrison was looking out for us, but I was sure that this wasn’t what my dad would have wanted. He never had intentions of cashing out his stock. But I had no legal rights and could not convince Beth, who was now my sole guardian. Besides, I couldn’t blame her being starstruck by the \$350,000 offer. Our roof leaked. Not to mention the mortgage, car insurance, health insurance . . .

“So, Conner, you’re Tanya’s boss today,” Harrison finished with a paternal wink. He buttoned his suit coat and grabbed his briefcase.

The pale receptionist appeared, handing him a note on MapOut letterhead: a name and phone number. A smile

crept across my lips. They'd changed the font but kept the slogan my dad and I had come up with one night playing chess in his office: *MapOut: Put Yourself on the Map*.

Conner walked me to the last empty cubicle.

My job was to type information into a database. The first folder I picked up was for a neighborhood in South Carolina called District 8. I was meant to input a breakdown of flower shop data. For instance: Florence's Flowers on Chestnut Drive charged \$22.00 for a dozen roses. If you drove five miles south out of town, The Yellow Daffodil charged only \$21.50. The data was constantly changing, with new information being updated. The intent was to create both shoppers' map and a business owners' tool. So if you, the customer, went to Florence's Flowers and you were dissatisfied, you could search the MapOut app with a command like: "Locate flower shop within five miles that sells a dozen roses for under twenty-two dollars."

Of course, the MapOut goal was that a person wouldn't have to type that command. You'd just hit the MapOut button, hovering somewhere in your phone over the Florence's Flowers page, and you'd get everything you'd need about a potentially better place to buy flowers.

"You need coffee first."

I glanced up from the screen. Conner was already walking away with a grin, waving me down a narrow corridor. I sighed and followed.

Unlike my cubicle, the kitchen was bright and airy. The sun felt warm through the window panes. A cappuccino maker and French press filled with newly made coffee sat on the counter. Conner poured me a cup. I added cream and stirred until it was a rich caramel color. A few scruffy programmer types shuffled in and out. Conner made a point to introduce me: "*This is Tanya, Michael's daughter.*"

Everyone was beyond friendly (what else could they be?), and I didn't remember a single name. Still, for the first time since I'd agreed to work here, I thought my summer might turn out okay.

After Conner walked me back to my cubicle, I sat down at the computer, momentarily disoriented, trying to figure out exactly where I was in the building—the way I remembered it—but everything was blocked off. Makeshift drywalls blocked hallways; heavy sheets of dark plastic covered exits and entrances. The door to the upstairs stairway was sealed shut.

Conner pulled up a chair beside me, pestering me with questions, and offered to help with logging into the system. I shooed him away, not even realizing how rude I was being. I felt bad an instant later, but I couldn't explain to him how I was feeling, the overwhelming necessity to locate myself in a place that had once been so familiar. I needed to figure out where I was. Like the arrow on a map: you are here. *Here* is something I always have to know.

But there was something else I wanted to find out. Had my father's old office been destroyed in the renovation? If it hadn't, was his desktop computer still inside? Beth had asked for his computer to be returned, but Harrison's hands were tied. His lawyers couldn't allow it. Dad's computer was property of the company and contained company information and data. If we took possession of it, we'd set "a dangerous precedent." Beth had agreed, of course. Once Harrison had even been forced to come to the house (I'd never seen him look less suave and confident), apologizing over and over and asking if either Beth or I knew a password Dad might have used for emails. Beth, always eager to please, took a small brown notebook from Dad's desk drawer and handed it over to Harrison. I don't think Dad would have minded, but still, it felt like a violation.

I sat in the cubicle for a few more minutes, sipping my coffee, staring blankly at the monitor filled with data tracking lists from MapOut. But I couldn't focus on the work. The screen was a pale, grey blur of symbols and codes. The college student at the cubicle beside me was signing along softly to the music playing in his headphones. I pushed my chair out behind me, quietly. I would use my usual excuse: *Oh I was just looking for the bathroom?* Or if that was too obvious I would just pretend I was on my way back to the kitchen to refill to my coffee.

I picked up the nearly empty coffee cup. I put my earphones in so I could act distracted. From where I stood, I could see north twenty-five feet down the hall to what I knew was once the stairwell. The banister and doorway were smothered in heavy plastic and blocked with piles of construction sheetrock, making access beyond that point impossible. But how were the workmen bringing the materials up?

I needed to get to the freight elevator and follow the construction crew from there. I walked out of the cubicle area, heading to the back of the building. I lingered by the side of the freight elevator and stared down at my phone, pretending to be distracted just in case one of workmen asked me what I was doing. I pretended I was caught in a web of texts—oblivious to where I was and who was around me.

*It's so easy to play stupid and snoop nowadays. People have lost that instinct for exploration. That's something we mapmakers can use against them.*

I almost started. Dad's words rang as clearly as if he'd spoken out loud. When I was a kid, going out exploring with him—mapping the footpaths through the woods, the trails the Native Americans used centuries ago—he'd encourage me to snoop. Originally it was everyone's land to travel and explore; now the trees were posted with PRIVATE PROPERTY

and NO TRESSPASSING signs. Needless to say, Dad wasn't a lover of private property and didn't respect boundaries, especially if it interfered with his mapmaking. The trails were now mostly overgrown, blending into the woods as though they had never been there. When we came across a grumpy landowner (sometimes with a deer hunting rifle), we just pretended we had gotten lost. Bird watching, blueberry picking, following a fox trail: all excuses I learned to use.

The elevator opened and I stepped inside, pulling the heavy doors closed. There were no buttons to press, only a lever. I turned it the only possible way—to the left—and felt the slow rise of the cables pulling upward. It was dark inside, only a strand of light shone through the seam.

The elevator slammed into the ceiling. The back of my head hit the wall. *Shit.* As steadily as possible, I lowered the lever an inch at a time, gauging from the seam of light until I was certain I'd linked to the fourth floor. Then I pulled open the doors and stepped into a broad, empty space. My eyes zeroed in the emergency staircase: access to the blocked-off area of the third floor. The next thing I knew, I was hurtling down the steps.

This was the old MapOut.

The original sign still hung over the entrance to the shabby suite of rooms. The first thing I recognized was the smell of old wood and clay from the pottery studio that used to be next door. But that studio had long been dismantled. How had Harrison afforded to buy this whole building? Was he lying to us when he said the company was in jeopardy and he was seeking new investors? How many more employees had he hired?

Quietly, I walked toward my father's office.

The floors in the old section were worn and uneven in places. The cubicles were silent, relics from another era

compared to the new, glossy white ones downstairs. The printer was covered with dust. There was a pile of printing paper on desks; pens, paper clips. The last time I had been here, he was alive. I would walk here after school and do my homework while he finished work.

The poster of the Peri Reis map was still tacked into the door.

I reached for the handle and tried to turn it, but it was locked. The map blurred in front of me. I had sworn to myself I wouldn't cry about this anymore. I didn't hear the footsteps coming toward me. I didn't hear anything at all. I was just trying to stop the tears, squeezing my eyes so tightly shut I saw red. That's when I heard the voice.

"Tanya?" Conner hurried toward me down the dusty hallway. "What are you doing here? No one's supposed to be here, it's not safe."

I turned my back to him, trying to wipe my cheeks as quickly as possible. My mind was racing, trying to think of an excuse, but I knew none of them would work. I just told him the truth, or part of the truth.

"I just wanted to see my dad's office," I confessed.

I wasn't sure if he'd heard. I barely heard my own voice. I shut my eyes again and leaned against the wall feeling weak, disappointed in myself for crying again. I wished he would just turn around and leave me alone. Everything was quiet for a moment. Maybe he had gone. Then I heard his voice again, closer this time.

I opened my eyes. He was staring at the Peri Reis map, a faraway look on his face.

"I should have figured you'd come up here. I . . . I'm sorry," he said. "I know you've been through a lot."

*Thanks. You can go away now.*

But he didn't leave. He sat down beside me on the floor,



waiting for me to say something. Neither of us spoke. I could hear him breathing. And he could hear me crying, even as I tried to hold back.

“You know, there was something I wanted to tell you, something I actually thought about writing to you before this summer. But then, I don’t know. It didn’t seem like the right time. There *is* no right time. It’s just . . . your dad was a big inspiration for me. He was the reason I got involved in Habitat for Humanity. I loved how he would just trek off and do his own thing. I loved how you could tell that he hated everything my dad loves, all the apps and technology and bullshit. All he cared about was *experience*.”

I kept silent. If Connor had intended to torture me, he was doing an excellent job. This was my punishment for wandering away from my cubicle. A tear splattered on the dusty floor between us. I sniffed and shook my head.

“Hey,” he said after a while. “I don’t really want to be here today either. It’s summer break. I don’t want to spend it typing in the price of Nike Airs in Westville Ohio, do you?”

I frowned at him. The silly smile on his face made me laugh and cry again at the same time.

“My dad just split for Boston. I really doubt anyone’s going to notice if we take a lunch break now. Come on.” He stood and nudged me lightly with his elbow. “I’m sure if you eat something and get an iced tea—my treat. I mean . . . look. I know nothing I do or say will make you actually feel better about your dad. It is what it is. It sucks. But distractions can help.”

I blinked. He had said something so true. He probably didn’t even realize it, but he was the first person in my life to actually say this. Nothing would make me better. And the relief of someone giving me the hard truth out loud, as painful as it might be, was so much more refreshing than hearing the same old time-heals-all-wounds bullshit.

“You’re the first person who has said something real about my dad dying,” I told him.

Our eyes met before he looked away, as though he were embarrassed about what he might add.

“I . . . Sorry about that,” he stuttered. I could tell he was straining for the right words. “Sometimes stuff pops out of my mouth. When my parents divorced, my mom basically just left me. She only visited me a handful of time at boarding school. I didn’t understand it at all. I kept trying to do things to get her attention like get good grades or play on varsity, even in ninth grade.” His voice caught in his throat.

Of course I had known about the divorce, and that his mother moved to New York City with her boyfriend and his daughters. But I had no idea she had abandoned him. After he left for boarding school (Exeter, I remembered now) I assumed he thought he was better than everyone, and every report that came back was confirmation: straight A’s, amazing athlete, handsome. There was even a rumor going around that he was dating a beautiful heiress. He almost seemed non-human, a machine. And in a way he was. A machine devoted to getting his mother’s attention.

“Did she even come to your graduation?” I hesitated, but I couldn’t help ask.

“Yeah. But I haven’t seen her since and she’s never visited me at college.” He turned abruptly. “Come on,” he said. “Look how sunny and bright it is outside. Let’s go. I’m taking you out to lunch.”

I looked up at him wearily. “Easy for you to say, you’re the boss’s son. As much as I don’t feel like being here, I need this job right now. Of course someone will notice. We have to walk right past the receptionist to get out.”

Conner smiled. “Yeah, but we’re not going out the front door.”

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# I'm Glad I Did

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Cynthia Weil

November 2014

IT'S THE summer of 1963, and sixteen-year-old JJ Green is a girl who knows she is born to write songs, even though the rest of her family—including a pioneering female attorney mother—wants her to think more practically about her future (i.e., law). JJ's Uncle Bernie is a music mogul with whom her family forbids contact. When JJ secretly applies for an internship in the famed Brill Building, she finds herself navigating a secret relationship with Bernie as well as a secret office romance with Luke, a boy she meets in the elevator. Through luck and fate, Luke and JJ find themselves collaborating on a song with an office cleaning woman, Dulcie Brown, who was once a famed nightclub singer. When Dulcie allegedly commits suicide right after they cut their demo, both JJ and Luke suspect foul play—and JJ is plunged into a deadly mystery that exposes the best and worst of the birth of modern music.

CYNTHIA WEIL is a multi-Grammy winning songwriter who has been inducted into both the Songwriters Hall of

Fame and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. She is the lyricist of classic songs like “On Broadway,” “Here You Come Again,” “We Gotta Get Out of This Place,” “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feeling” (the most performed song of the 20th century), and “Somewhere Out There,” which was a double Grammy winner and Oscar nominee. Although she has lived in Southern California for many years with her husband and writing partner, Barry Mann, she still considers herself a New Yorker. *I’m Glad I Did* is her first novel.

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## Prologue

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SOME PEOPLE follow their destiny by accident. Take, for example, Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. I was nine years old when I first saw the movie, and the minute Dorothy sang “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” I knew she’d find a way to get there. True, she didn’t do anything to make it happen. A tornado showed up and took her exactly where she needed to go. But the haunting beauty of that sad song made still made me feel like she earned it.

Knowing my life was not a movie, that there was not much chance of a tornado in New York City, and that the place I needed to go was only across town, I figured I’d have to get there myself. So way back then, before I even hit a double-digit birthday, I made a choice. One day I would fly over my own rainbow and write a song like that one. I’d walk through those big brass doors of the Brill Building, the place where songs are “born.” I’d earn it, too—on my own.

I wasn’t able to figure out exactly how I’d get there until the summer of 1963, seven years later. And although I may have gotten there myself and faced my fear by choice, looking back now, it seems that most of what followed—the joy, the tragedy, the love, and the loss—were meant to be. It was my destiny that summer to find out who my family was, who my friends were, and eventually, who I was.

The only part that didn't feel like destiny, that never will, was the cost.

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## Chapter One

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There are three unbreakable rules in my family.

The Greens always have breakfast together.

The Greens always negotiate instead of arguing, and

The Greens always become lawyers.

Even though I'm hardly ever hungry at breakfast and I really love a good screaming argument (I believe it clears the air), I've managed to live with rules one and two. It's rule number three that scares me, crushes my dream, and destroys my soul. The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, is that I do not now nor have I ever wanted to be an attorney.

Unlike my big brother Jeffrey, I have not inherited the legal gene. Jeff—who at the age of seven suggested a contractual relationship between us regarding use of the bathroom—is clearly a Green. I was four at the time, so I accepted, proof only that I seem to have been born to the wrong family. If I didn't look so much like my mother, I'd suspect I'd been adopted, but we have the same face (heart shaped), same hair (ridiculously straight, medium brown with red highlights), and the same big feet (don't even ask what size).

That morning in June, however, I had a bigger secret than my shoe size.

What I was keeping under wraps: a plan to break sacred rule number three by getting a summer job in the music business. A job that would no doubt lead to a total family flip-out. I had no intention of telling them anything about it

unless I got it, and today was just an interview. I was painfully aware that if anyone in my family of legal eagles thought I was hiding something, I was going to be cross examined, so I tried to look relaxed and extremely normal as I ambled into the dining room and slid into my chair.

“Good morning, Irving,” Jeff greeted me, munching on cornflakes “You look a little more uptight than usual. What’s up?”

So much for my acting ability. My brother has called me Irving, as in Irving Berlin, ever since I was idiot enough to tell him that I wanted to write songs.

“Stop calling your sister, Irving,” my mother instructed. She was cutting off the top of her egg with my grandmother’s silver egg cutter, reading the *Herald Tribune* and monitoring our conversation at the same time. She was one of the few people in the world who could do three things at once and do all of them perfectly.

My mother, Janice Green—Janny—is a criminal attorney. My dad, Julius Green—Jules—is a judge. Jeff, the bathroom negotiator, is prelaw at Columbia. He’s also working at Janny’s office for the summer. Could he be more perfect? J is the family letter for alliteration given the happy coincidence of my parent’s first names. But J can also stand for lots of other things, like Judgment. Or Joy. Or Joylessness. Or Joke.

Janny and Jules named me Justice, and if that’s not making a point and giving a kid vocational guidance, I don’t know what is. My middle name is Jeanette after Jeanette Rankin, who was the first woman to serve in the United States Congress. Try living up to that. The only saving grace is that everyone calls me JJ and I hardly ever tell anyone my real name. I graduated from high school at Dalton last week, class of 1963. I’m sixteen, two years younger than most of my friends because I skipped a grade in elementary school

and made one up in middle school rapid advance. I mention this as proof that I am not too dumb to be a lawyer; I simply don't want to be one. I've known what I wanted to be ever since I was three years old and crawled up on the piano bench in my family's living room. Ever since I touched the keys and realized I could make my own sound. Ever since I heard the Latin music that our housekeeper Juana (another cruel letter J coincidence) played on her radio, I've wanted to be a music maker, a spinner of dreams, the creator of some kind of new and beautiful noise, a poet to give words to what others feel but can't express. In short: a songwriter.

The problem is that in the Green family, it's the equivalent of saying you want to be an axe murderer or even worse, a music business lowlife who rips people off, like my Uncle Bernie.

"*Buenos días, carina,*" Juana whispered, sensing I was daydreaming. She placed my usual toasted bran muffin in front of me.

"Justice, I think you're going a little heavy on the mascara," Janny observed, "It makes you look unhappy."

"It's not mascara, Mom, they're false eyelashes. Everyone's wearing them."

"You are not everyone." Jules reminded me from behind *The New York Times*. He peered over the headline JFK SIGNS EQUAL PAY ACT. "Your mother's right. You look unhappy."

"It's her guilty look," Jeff chimed in, "I remember it from when Irving and I shared a bathroom and she used it during my time."

"Why are you talking about me as if I'm not here, Jeffrey?" I asked calmly. Whenever he did that I wanted to rip his vocal chords out, but letting him know that would mean he'd won, so I smoothed the skirt of my seersucker



shirtwaist dress and smiled. "Don't you think that type of behavior is rude, Mom?"

"JJ has a point, Jeffrey," she agreed, as I knew she would. "You two could debate it, but it's getting late and I have to get to the office."

Janny stood up and slipped into her raspberry linen suit jacket. It matched her pillbox hat perfectly. My mom looked like Jackie Kennedy before Jackie looked like Jackie Kennedy. Impossibly chic. So chic that people often took her for a model. She was also brilliant, charming, well read, successful—and one of only two women in her class at Columbia law. You might say she was a tough act to follow, or you might say it was better not to try. You might also say that trying to slip into the music business on her watch was a death wish.

Jules shrugged into his jacket, folded the *New York Post*, which he always finished before breakfast, and handed it to Janny.

"Check Earl Wilson's column," he told her. "It appears Bernie is being called to testify in some payola scheme again."

"What else is new?" Janny grumbled. "I say a prayer every night that no one will figure out that 'the godfather of the music business' is my no goodnik brother. It's all I can do."

She dropped her keys into her handbag and the newspaper into her attaché. Then she turned her attention to something she could actually control: those at the kitchen table.

"Justice, you have this week to find a summer job doing something useful or I'll expect you to begin filing down at my office next Monday. I've been thinking that being around a law office might awaken your legal instincts. Jeff, there's a package you need to pick up at Malken, Malken

and Strobe. Please get it to me before 10:30 and then Susan will tell you what to do today. Jules, I'd like to share a cab with you if you're ready to leave."

And with that everyone jumped to do Janny's bidding as everyone usually did. I hightailed it out of her sight before she could figure out that Jeff was right on the money. I was guilty as charged. Today I was taking that giant step toward my not-so-secret dream and my parent's worst nightmare. Today I was sticking my toe into what Janny called "a cess-pool," the music business." Defying her was scary enough. But even more terrifying was learning if I was right for my dream. Today I'd be finding out if I had any songwriting talent.

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## Chapter Two

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I stood at the corner of W. 49 and Broadway, clutching my purse and staring up at the Brill Building, praying that I wouldn't run into my Uncle Bernie. On the plus side, I wasn't sure we'd even recognize each other. This was it, the Mecca of songwriting. The brass doors were flanked by black marble pillars. Above them, set into a brass niche, was the bust of a young guy. You might think it was George Gershwin or some other famous song writer, but it was the developer's son. The poor guy died at seventeen. His name wasn't even Brill. The Brill Brothers owned the land and they leased it to a developer. The Brills actually had a clothing store on the main floor.

How do I know all this? I know it because I did a report on New York architecture for my art class just so I could do research on the Brill Building. I can also tell you more than you want to know about the New York Public Library. Like

the lions out front were named Patience and Fortitude by Mayor LaGuardia in the 1930s.

A steady stream of people poured in and out. Fumbling in my purse, I reread the scrap I'd torn from last week's *Cashbox*:

WANTED: Good Music Publishing seeks smart assistant/talented aspiring songwriter. Exchange office work for feedback on songs from hot publisher. Call Rona at Ju5-5253 for audition appointment.

I took a deep breath. I belonged here. This job fit me like a glove and I could emphasize the office experience to Janny and Jules. Shoving the scrap back in my bag, I checked my watch, then strode through the entrance. I wanted to be early but not so early I looked desperate.

Inside everything was gleaming brass and mirrors. I double-checked the Good Music suite number and strolled as casually as I could to the elevator at the end of the lobby. A whole bunch of people, mostly men, stood waiting. The only person close to my age was a really cute guy. He looked like he might be Italian, olive skin and black hair. He was studying papers in a manila folder and when he looked up at the elevator dial, I saw that his eyes were green. Not blue/green or grey/green, but almost emerald green. I'd never seen anything like them before. I had to look away to get my mind back on my own business—reviewing the song I was going to play for my audition in my head.

The elevator arrived and the waiting crowd, including Green Eyes, swarmed into it.

Everyone yelled out their floors to the operator, a short cheery guy in a uniform. I chirped out "eight," hoping I'd

been heard. Conversations swirled around me as the doors opened and closed.

“Hey, Nick, when you take a break, bring me up the trades.”

“Sure thing, Mr. Bienstock.” The elevator guy answered.

“Where are you this week, Aaron?”

“Five with a bullet, Cashbox. Seven with a bullet, Billboard.”

“Enjoy it now, my friend, Goodman’s got the follow-up.”

“Is there anything he doesn’t have the follow-up to?”

“I’ve heard he’s asking for a guarantee of the B-side these days and he’s getting it.”

“Yeah, it’s that and your firstborn child.”

There were some chuckles. I wondered what was so funny. They were talking “music biz,” and the only person I knew who could translate was Uncle Bernie. But soon I told myself, I wouldn’t need an interpreter. I’d learn how to speak fluent “music biz” on my own.

When we hit eight, I elbowed my way out of the elevator. Good Music was way down at the end of the hall. As I made my way there I could hear muffled music coming from behind the doors of the offices I passed: pianos pounding out riffs, voices struggling to find melodies hidden in their subconscious, and records being played—no, not played, *blasted*. All of it was punctuated by some very bad language. I quickened my pace with a secret smile. It was raw and real and it was exactly how I imagined it and exactly where I wanted to be, a million light years away from the world of the Green family.

At Good Music I opened the door, entering a small waiting room with built-in seating. Two guys a little older than me had settled in, probably to wait for their auditions. One was tall and skinny, all elbows, knees, and acne. The other was a chubby little guy with an already receding hairline, wearing a suit and a tie with musical notes on it. At the

far end, a switchboard operator was busy chewing gum and frantically answering continuous incoming calls.

“Good Music. Hi, Nancy. Bobby said to tell Mr. Wexler he’ll call him back after lunch. Good Music. Sorry, Mr. Goodman is booked all week. Just drop off the demo, and I’ll get it to his secretary. Good Music. Please hold. Good Music. We’re not seeing any more applicants until Friday so call back on Thursday to see if the job’s still open. Good Music. Sorry . . .” She looked up at me. “Lost the hold. So, what can I do for ya?”

“I’m JJ Green. I have an eleven o’clock appointment to see Mr. Goodman about the assistant job.”

She nodded. “Take a load off. You’re after these guys.”

As I sat down, she called out: “Paul Keller, go on in.”

The suit with the musical tie got up and gulped audibly. All the color drained from his pudgy face. He looked so terrified that my heart went out to him even though we were competing for the same job.

“Good luck,” I whispered to him.

He looked at me, his eyes glazed with fear, and then wiped his hands on his pants and entered the inner office. He looked as if he were going to his execution.

“You’re not here for the assistant job are you?” the skinny one asked.

“Yeah, I am.”

“I didn’t know girls wrote songs,” he announced, as if his ignorance was something to be proud of.

“We learn something every day, don’t we?” I responded politely. “Did you ever hear of Alberta Hunter?”

His face was blank.

“Great blues songwriter, female. Wrote a song called ‘Downhearted Blues’ that sold two million in 1923. How about Kay Swift?”

He smirked. "I know about Bob Swift. He was a catcher for the Detroit Tigers way back."

"Kay Swift was the first woman to write the whole score to a Broadway musical: *Fine and Dandy* in 1930. Did you ever . . ."

"Hey, you a music teacher or something?"

Before I could answer, Paul Keller of the musical tie emerged from the inner office. He stood facing us for a minute in a daze.

"He hated my song," he announced in a bewildered voice. "Bobby hated the best song I ever wrote. My mother loved it. It made her cry." He stared at us blinking. "He's mean, really, really mean." And with that he blew his nose loudly into a crumpled Kleenex and exited.

The receptionist nodded our way. "Artie Lorber."

Tall and skinny got up and stood there for a moment, his eyes wide with the same panic. You could almost hear the wheels in his brain turning. He hesitated for what seemed like an eternity, then turned and followed Paul Keller's route out of the office.

"Wrong door," the receptionist called out.

But Artie Lorber paid no attention.

"We lose a few of the thin-skinned ones," she muttered. "Go on in . . ." she checked her list. "JJ Green."

I stood up, took a deep breath, and moved toward the door that Artie couldn't open.

*Here goes, I thought. Be brave, be strong, and be ready to hear the truth.*

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## Chapter Three

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The room I walked into was five times larger than the room I'd come from. At the far end, guarding a red lacquered

door emblazoned with BOBBY GOODMAN in gold letters, was a cute girl. She wasn't much older than me—wearing a beige polka dot Anne Fogarty dress that I'd been saving my birthday money to buy. On her desk was a brass nameplate: RONA CALUCCI: DON'T TRY TO GET PAST ME. She was talking on the phone, rummaging through a huge stack of music paper on her desk, and trying to wipe up spilled coffee at the same time. From behind all the doors leading off of this main room, I could hear the sound of pianos in different keys hammering out clashing melodic phrases.

I took out my handkerchief, (Janny always insisted I carry a real handkerchief and not a Kleenex), and tried to help with the mopping operation. Rona looked up gratefully.

"Thanks," she said. "You JJ?"

"That's me," I answered.

"First female applicant." She smiled, took my soggy handkerchief, squeezed it into the wastepaper basket, and handed it back to me. "Go on in."

Shoving my wet handkerchief back into my purse, I marched through the final door. There was a baby grand piano and a huge desk strewn with records and tapes. Behind it sat Bobby Goodman. He was a big guy. Not fat, just big. I would have guessed him to be early thirties but I had read in *Cashbox* he was only twenty-four. His face was wide and open, with a high forehead and thinning hair. He was wearing a short-sleeved shirt and you never would have guessed by looking at him that he was a big deal music publisher. He looked more like a coach for a suburban Little League baseball team.

Taking my application from a stack on his desk, he leaned back in his chair.

"So, JJ, what makes you want to learn about the music business?" he asked, without making eye contact.

I sat down in the chair facing him and tried not to sound as nervous as I was.

“Well, I want to be a songwriter. I’m sixteen and I’ve been playing the piano since I was about four. I took a semester of lessons in school but I’m mostly self-taught. I started writing songs when I was ten but you definitely don’t want to hear any of those.”

Bobby didn’t even pretend to smile. A sympathetic sense of humor was obviously not one of his character traits.

“What made you start writing? Anyone in your family musical?”

“Oh no, nobody, not a soul. Everyone’s a lawyer.” An image of Uncle Bernie popped up in my mind, but I ignored it. I was determined to get this job on my own. No Bernie bias would influence anyone’s decision.

“So are you the black sheep or the shining star?”

I almost smiled. “Definitely the black sheep.”

“You’re in high school, right?”

“I graduated last week.”

“You must be smart,” Bobby observed, still not looking up. “You going to college?”

“Yeah, I got into Columbia, but I could work part time after school in the fall if you wanted me to.”

“I got it,” He dropped my resume on the desk, then leaned back and closed his eyes. “Now play me something you wrote. Play me a song you’ve written that you think could be recorded.”

I had never thought about getting my songs recorded. I just wrote what I liked. My heart was pounding like a bass drum as I stood and slid onto the piano bench, but once I settled in and my fingers touched the keys, I was home. The song was called “A Beautiful Thing.” I had written it only last week, so it was fresh in my mind and my fingers. I



tried not to let my nerves make me speed up and I played the intro until I found just the right tempo. Then I made-believe I was playing just for me—losing myself in the music. I thought it sounded pretty good.

When I finished there was dead silence. I looked at Bobby and his eyes were still closed.

“What else do you have that you think I could pitch?” he asked, without opening his eyes.

This shook me up. I'd only rehearsed one song. My mind went blank. I had no idea what “pitching” was, but I knew he wanted to hear something else. Then I remembered a four chord song I'd written a long time ago called “Where Would I Be.” I had to concentrate hard to remember the words and my hands got kind of clammy, but I made it through without a major screw-up. Then I sat there listening to the loudest silence of all time until Bobby sighed, opened his eyes, and looked straight at me.

“You don't listen to the radio, do you?” It was a statement in the form of a question. He didn't wait for an answer. “You go to Broadway musicals, right? The second song was better for me than the first, but neither one was a home run. You need help lyrically. Forget those inner rhymes and write words that come from your heart and can touch the hearts of other girls your age. Do your homework. Listen to the radio. Listen to Cousin Brucie and Murray the K. Learn the top ten songs well enough to play them backward and forward. Study grooves, chord progressions, and ideas. You need to remember three things: simple, simple, simple. Thanks for coming in.” He stood up and held out his hand.

I shook it, fighting back tears.

“Thanks for your time,” I mumbled and sprinted for the door.

“How’d it go?” asked Rona as I raced past her.

I shook my head and bolted through the inner sanctum and reception area. Out in the hall, I lost it, wracked by silent sobs as I leaned on the elevator button. Fortunately, when the doors opened, it was empty except for Nick, the elevator operator. I sniffed. My nose was leaking along with my eyes, and my handkerchief was a soggy coffee-stained mess—so when Nick handed me a Kleenex, I took it gratefully.

“Hey, who did what to make a cute kid like you cry those big tears?” he asked sympathetically. The doors shut and the elevator lurched down toward the lobby.

“Bobby Goodman,” I choked out. “I was applying for a job and he turned me down. He made me feel like an untalented idiot.”

“Not a good feeling.”

“No, my mother’ll be happy, though. She doesn’t want me to be a songwriter. She hates the music business.”

“Most mothers do. What does she know?”

“A lot. Her brother is ‘The Godfather of the music business.’”

“Bernie Rubin?”

“That’s him.”

We’d reached the ground floor. Nick hesitated, his gloved hand on the lever.

“I don’t want to open up until you’re okay,” he said.

“I’m as okay as I’m gonna be. I won’t have to tell my family anything about not getting the job now. I’ll just have to go to work for my mother this summer. Good for me.” The thought sent more tears rolling down my cheeks.

“Listen, kid, there’s one thing I know for sure: Ya never know what’s gonna happen, so save the tears for when you really need ’em. You may be wasting them today.”

It was such a sweet thing to say and he was such an unlikely guy to say it, that I dried my eyes and almost smiled.

“Good for you, kiddo,” Nick said as he pulled the door open.

I wandered the streets for a few hours. I knew Juana would be the only one in the apartment when I got home at two o'clock. I strolled past her nonchalantly and headed for my bedroom, but she took one look at my face and in less than a minute she was knocking on my door.

“Go away, please,” I pleaded, but the floodgates opened again.

She sat down beside me on the bed as I sobbed. She didn't even ask what was wrong, just patted my back and, when I sat up, she pulled me close. The smell of her cologne and the softness of her pale coffee skin had comforted me for as long as I could remember. It still did. Whenever I was upset, she always spoke to me in English, even though I spoke Spanish fluently. It was her way of reaching out.

“Tell me, *cariña*,” she whispered.

I swallowed. “I thought I had talent but I don't. Someone who really knows told me my songs aren't simple enough and my words aren't any good.”

“I don't know anything about talent, *mi niña*,” she said softly, “but I know this is not the only time you will be disappointed. It hurts not to get what you want, but sometimes you learn from it.”

“You don't understand,” I told her, pulling away and looking her in the eye. “I write too complicated. I don't know a hit and my lyrics aren't—”

The phone rang.

I groaned, rolling my eyes. My shoulders sagged. Juana's

eyes met mine, wondering if she should answer. I shook my head and marched out into the foyer.

“Hello?” I sniffled.

“May I speak to JJ, please.

“This is JJ.”

“Hi, this is Rona at Good Music.” She paused. “Are you okay?”

It was such a loaded question that when I opened my mouth, nothing came out.

“Congratulations. You got the job.”

Time seemed to freeze. I blinked several times. “I got the what?”

“The assistant gig. We’re sending over a three-month contract for the songwriting part. Your parents have to sign since you’re under twenty one. Bobby wants you to start Monday at ten, so bring the signed contract with you when you come in.”

“But . . . but . . . I don’t understand . . .”

“Just be here Monday. Ten o’clock. See ya.” Before she slammed the phone down, I heard her yelling to someone: “Bobby’s in a meeting! Don’t touch that door, Steve—”  
*Click!*

I was grinning through my tears. I must have looked insane. Juana came up softly behind me. “This is crazy,” I breathed. “I got the job.”

“See, you learned something from this,” Juana whispered as she hugged me. “You learned not to cry too soon.”

“You’re the second person who’s told me that today.”

I was happier than I thought possible, but I couldn’t help wondering what could have made Bobby change his mind. Were the other applicants so bad that my songs had begun to sound good in comparison? Was it worth trying to figure out? Couldn’t I just accept it and be happy? Of

course not. I would never take “yes” for an answer without knowing why it had changed from a “no.” I was, after all, a Green.

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## Chapter Four

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I brought out the contract after dinner when Janny and Jules were relaxing in the living room. They had finished their coffee and were sloshing brandy around in snifters. I waited until I thought the liquor had taken effect and Jules was smoking a Marlboro. Then I sat down, papers in hand.

“I have a summer job,” I announced. Best to start with the good news.

“JJ dear, that’s wonderful,” Janny enthused. “Truthfully, I was hoping you’d end up working for me, but congratulations. Isn’t that wonderful, Jules?”

“Wonderful,” echoed my dad, exhaling a cloud of smoke. “Tell us all about it.”

“Before I do, I want to ask you something. Mom, did you have any idea where I was going today?”

She laughed. “I’m an attorney, Justice, not a detective. You never did tell me where you were going, did you?”

“So you never said anything to Bernie?”

“Bernie?” Her tone abruptly changed. She sat up straight and placed her brandy on its coaster. “This is not headed in a good direction.” After a sour glance at Jules, she zeroed in on me. “You know I haven’t spoken to him in six years, not since—”

“Not since he showed up uninvited to Jeff’s bar mitzvah,” I finished. I wish I’d kept my mouth shut. But I wasn’t in the mood for a lecture. I wanted to know the truth.

“Exactly,” Janny said. “Your uncle is a gambler, a thief,

and a music business low-life. Why would I want to speak to him about anything?”

“Now don’t get worked up, Janny,” my dad cautioned. “You’re not telling us you got a job in the music business, are you, Justice?”

“Yes.” I said, trying not to get defensive. “And I wanted to be sure that Uncle Bernie wasn’t involved, because I want to make my own way on my own talent. But it seemed like didn’t get the job, and then I got it, and I can’t figure out why, and I just thought maybe . . .” I ran out of breath and stopped.

“There is no way Bernie heard about this from us,” Janny snapped. “This is the first we’ve heard of it. And now I want to know who you saw and everything about them.”

Of course, Jeff chose this moment to saunter quietly into the room. He sat down out of the range of fire, but close enough so he could observe my agony.

“The company is called Good Music,” I told them. “And they publish songs and produce records.”

“There was an article about them in last week’s *Wall Street Journal*,” Jules remarked. “They’ve only been in business three years, but they’re doing very well.”

I nodded, hoping this was a sign of encouragement. “They’re really hot—I mean successful—and I’ll be doing office work, but I’ll also have the chance to listen to the writers who are getting records and play songs for Bobby Goodman, the head of the company. There’s a chance I could even get a song recorded.”

“So, JJ,” Janny said sharply. “Knowing how I feel about the music business, you went behind my back and applied for a job.” She might as well have not heard a word.

“Not exactly. If you had asked I would have told you, but you didn’t ask.” I protested weakly.

"Well, what's done is done." Jules stubbed out his cigarette. He looked at my mother and then back at me. "Justice, your obsession with songwriting has always bewildered us. It's frankly a waste of time, a meaningless occupation. But with that in mind, I would like to see you get it out of your system. This job may be the way to do it."

"I don't agree, Jules," Janny protested. "I'm inclined to say no to the whole thing. It's not just the job, it's the deception on JJ's part."

My heart stopped. I felt completely out of control, which I was. After all, they were already talking about me in the third person, (which they knew I hated)—as if I were a criminal, waiting to be sentenced.

"And what is that in your hand, JJ?" Janny demanded.

I took a deep breath, knowing the worst was yet to come. "It's a contract for three months. It pretty much says that Good Music publishes any songs of mine that I write during that time whether they get recorded or not."

"Think you'll get a record, Irving?" Jeff asked. There was the hint of a smirk in his voice.

I turned to him, my gaze steely. "I don't know," I told him truthfully, wondering why he was sticking his nose into this at all.

"Let me take a look," ordered Janny.

I handed her the papers. As she flipped through it, we all waited, barely breathing. The clock on the wall boomed in synch with my heart. When she finally looked up she shook her head.

"This is a terrible contract. It's very one-sided in the publisher's favor. I would advise against this deal for anyone, let alone my own daughter."

"Mom," I said, trying to keep my voice from shaking. "I'm going to be honest with you. I don't really care if the

contract's good or bad. I can learn so much there. It's where I want to be this summer. Please, just sign it."

Janny didn't answer. I could see the cogs turning in her brain. She was mentally reviewing arguments for and against. Then she and Jules locked eyes. My future hung in the air like the last cloud of Jules's cigarette smoke. After what felt like forever, Jeff broke the silence.

"I have a solution," he announced. The smirk was gone. "It's only for three months, right? So let Irving do it. But, if she doesn't get one of her songs recorded by the time it's over, she has to give up this crazy songwriting thing and never mention it again."

I couldn't figure out if he was trying to help me or hurt me. My brother has always had a weird instinctive ability to understand our parents in a way I never have. The three of them were on some strange wavelength I could never quite tune into. The worst was when he and I fought as kids—as in actual kicking and punching. He somehow always knew that they would never intervene. Even when he pinned me to the floor and I was fighting for my breath and it was clear he'd won, they still insisted we work out our disagreements ourselves. Finally when I was ten, I begged Janny to sign me up for Brazilian jujitsu classes because it was all about ground fighting. She was happy to do it, but I was such a klutz that after all my classes I only mastered one move: the upward lift escape. But by then Jeff had stopped attacking me physically and had moved on to verbal assaults.

"Hmm," Janny mused, rolling Jeff's proposition around in her meticulous mind. I had to hand it to Jeff: I could tell that the thought of never having to hear me talk about songwriting again had made an impact on her. Her lips actually curved up in a little smile. "Would you agree to that, JJ?" she



asked. "I might actually let you do this if you promised that it could be a way to put an end to your songwriting fixation."

I shot Jeff a dirty look and turned back to my mother. "Why are you all so sure I won't get a record?"

"Because you're a Green," Jules proclaimed in his courtroom voice. "You were born for the law."

That's how simple it was for them. They honestly believed that music was a decision I had made, like wanting to learn Brazilian jujitsu. They had no clue that it was like my laugh and big feet, a part of me—like arguing was for them. I didn't know if I had talent. I didn't know if I would ever write a song worthy of being recorded. But I knew I had to have the chance to try. Bobby himself had told me I didn't know what I was doing but a door had opened, and I had to walk through it. I'd never been much of a gambler, but I had to be one now. It was all or nothing. Maybe Jeff's deal was fair. If I couldn't get a song recorded this summer maybe it would be a sign that I was on the wrong track. I didn't know how I'd go on living after that, but I'd worry about it if it happened.

"I'll do it," I said. "If a song of mine isn't recorded by the time I start school, I'll give up songwriting."

"Agreed," Janny and Jules announced, almost in unison.

*Court adjourned*, I thought with a mix of terror and relief.

I turned to Jeff.

"Good luck, Irving," he said with a wicked grin. "I'll be rooting for you."



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# The Girl With the Wrong Name

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Barnabas Miller

December 2014

SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD THEO Lane has been hiding half of her face from the public ever since “The Night In Question,” a night that left her with a long, disfiguring scar down her cheek, an unquiet mind, and no memory of what happened. An aspiring docu-journalist, she uses her camera to keep the world at a safe distance, shooting hours of secret footage with a hidden button cam on her jacket collar. But when a forlorn and mysterious “Lost Boy” wanders into her frame—Andy Reese, a beautiful blond—he becomes the unknowing star of her latest project. Her unhealthy obsession with him tears her from that sheltered life behind the camera, pulling her into a perilous, mind-bending journey through Andy’s world. But is it really Andy’s world she’s investigating? Or is it her own?

BARNABAS MILLER has written many books for children and young adults. He is the co-author of *7 Souls* (an Edgar

BARNABAS MILLER

Award Nominee) and author of *Rock God: The Legend of B.J. Levine*. He also composes and produces music for film and television. He lives in New York City with his wife, Heidi; their cat, Ted; and their dog, Zooney.

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## Chapter One

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### 1

*Notes for My New Documentary Project, Tuesday, September 3rd  
[Putting the Wedding Project on hold]*

*Possible working titles for new project:*

*THE LOST BOY  
BEAUTIFUL STRANGER  
STRANGER AT THE WINDOW  
THE BOY AT THE WINDOW  
WINDOW BOY*

*Window Boy?*

*Jesus, Theo, you are in serious need of sleep. Just stick with “The Lost Boy” for now—at least you’ve finally given him a name. And the title’s not important. You know that. The only important thing is that you stay still and quiet and calm. You’re an impartial documentarian—a neutral observer trying to make sense of your new subject. A DECENT CINEMATOGRAPHER SHOULD AT LEAST BE ABLE TO KEEP HER SUBJECT IN FRAME.*

*AND STOP YELLING AT YOURSELF IN ALL CAPS.*

*Just stick to sentence case. Stop writing now, because he’s at the*

*window again. You need to FOCUS, Theo. Brain and lens. Brain and lens . . .*

It's the third time I've seen the Lost Boy at The Harbor Café and my hidden button cam is sewn into my jacket collar, tracking his every move. I wonder if he knows that the monstrous freak in the corner secretly films him, scrutinizing his image on her iPhone under the table, straining every dendrite in her brain to figure out what he has lost. Why does he come here every day at exactly 11:45, and how could anyone be so shamelessly beautiful but so palpably sad?

When I first saw him on Sunday, I was transfixed for a solid three minutes. Then he saw me. So I was embarrassed for the next twenty—the kind of embarrassment that fills your cheeks with sweltering heat. I swear I could actually feel my scar burning every time I looked at him after our initial eye contact. So instead I just stared down at the tabletop and kept picturing that morning's *New York Times*, Weddings and Celebrations section, Page ST15:

*Emma J. Renaux, 31, daughter of James and Sally Renaux of Charleston, SC, will marry Lester A. Wyatt, 31, son of George and Leona Wyatt of Dallas, TX, on Sunday. The couple officially met as fifteen-year-old sophomores at New Hampshire's Phillips Exeter Academy, but unknown to Mr. Wyatt, they had in fact met a year earlier.*

*"We'd shared a dance to R. Kelly's 'I Believe I Can Fly' at the freshman Winter Formal," Ms. Renaux confessed sheepishly, "but my hair was so different that he didn't recognize me. It took me ten years to admit that I'd watched him across a crowded room for hours before we ever spoke.*

*I knew before I'd even asked him to dance. I knew I was going to marry him."*

Yes, I have a near photographic memory when it comes to *New York Times* wedding announcements. And no, I have no explanation or defense for it. I only know that each and every blurb tends to prove some inevitable fact of life, and my inevitable fact is this:

When a beautiful girl watches a beautiful boy across a crowded room, it's a delightful anecdote in the *Sunday Times*. It's an enchanting scene of timeless romance from an Italian Foreign Language Oscar Nominee. When an ugly girl watches a beautiful boy across a crowded room, it's a disturbing German indie on the Sundance channel about a budding young female serial killer.

To be clear, I am not a budding young female serial killer. I just look like one ever since *The Night In Question*—but I could still feel every woman in the room watching me watching him. I could hear them thinking, "Oh, that poor little teenage demi-troll, all dressed in black. She doesn't know that she's a hideous creature with toilet-paper skin and an involuntary perma-frown. She can't see that he is a Glorious Golden God-Prince, whose babies will grow up to be congressmen and Fox News anchorwomen and teenage country music divas."

Well, to them I say, Lower Manhattan Yoga Elites: I know. I know I'm deformed. I also know my attempts to hide it are futile—that a pile of concealer and foundation and Olay Régénériser under a pile of peekaboo black hair only draws more attention to what I'm hiding. I've known it since the early morning of June 18th when I woke up feeling bruised and battered on every inch of my body. When I limped my way to the bathroom and found a

four-inch gash running down the side of my jaw that left me ice-cold with terror.

What I *don't* know, you gawking little scone-eaters, is what happened to me on the night of the 17th.

A horrific accident? A violent assault? Or maybe the boogeyman in my closet just finally lost his cool after years of menacing me silently from behind the laundry hamper? All I can remember is going to sleep that night in the safety of my own bed. Apparently, the “trauma was so acute” that I’ve “repressed the entire blah blah blah . . .”

Dr. Silver keeps encouraging me to talk about it. Too bad for him, the damage has already been done. It was done long before *The Night In Question*. It was done on the day I was born when my parents made the inexplicable decision to name their one and only daughter Theodore.

I’ve imagined the post-birth conversation so many times:

“*Congratulations, Mrs. Lane, it’s a girl! What are you going to name her?*”

“*Well, we’d like her to grow up as socially maladjusted as possible. We’d like little boys to look at her disdainfully and say, ‘You’ve got a boy’s name’ from nursery all the way through sixth grade. That way she can get a solid jumpstart on her existential alienation.*”

It serves Mom and Dad and Dr. Silver and everyone else right that they have never understood: I am not Theodore. I am another lighter, airier, prettier girl. I have another lighter, airier, prettier name like Rachel or Hope or Samantha. They are just too blind to see it. “*Theodore will be your name,*” I can hear my cold-blooded mother cooing at the baby version of me. “*And if all goes according to plan, you’ll be spending your entire seventeenth summer huddled in the corner of your bedroom, hiding your ravaged face from humanity, shutting out the world with a pair of scuffed-up Beats headphones, blasting Pink Floyd’s Dark Side of the Moon and The Beatles’*



Revolution 9 *on endless repeat until your ears begin to chafe and not-so-metaphorically bleed . . . —Number nine . . . number nine . . . number nine . . . number—*”

I shake my head. *Focus, Theo. FOCUS.*

My thoughts tend to attack without warning now. They riddle my head like machine-gun fire and zoom off in a trail of smoke before I can make sense of them. That’s why I try to capture as much as I can on video, so I can actually experience my life at some later date when my mind has stopped racing and snacks are more readily available. I can’t lose sight of the Lost Boy—can’t, won’t—because I’m going to save his troubled ass whether he knows it or not.

To be clear, however: I’m not here to save anyone. I’m a cool, collected observer. I’m a cinematic scientist. I’m blending invisibly into his natural café habitat so I can observe his natural café habits and behaviors, untainted by—

*Shit, he’s on the move!*

I crane my neck so my button cam can keep him in frame. He drifts past my table. The camera picks up the flecks of blond in his brown stubble and the light sprinkle of freckles on his ski-slope nose. Speed Stick deodorant is slipping from the mesh side-pocket of his overstuffed backpack. There are tiny rips and tears at the bottom of his worn out, white v-neck T-shirt. I know those jagged little holes are telling me a story, but the only one I can think of is the story of what his chest looks like underneath that shirt.

*This has nothing to do with sex!* I want to yell at the tittering scone-eaters. *Vulgar Walmart romance is not the fascination here, and if you people knew anything about me, you would know that.*

But for the split-second that he and I are in the same orbit, something happens. I feel like a lit cigarette and I don’t even smoke. The feeling is so intense; I can’t even tell if it’s a good sensation or a bad one. I’ve heard about the

“fine line between pleasure and pain,” but this is the first time I have the slightest clue what it means.

Then he’s past me and it fades. I take a few deep breaths and swipe my clammy palms across my jeans, swiveling in my seat to get him back on camera. I need to stay perfectly still.

He grabs the last wrinkled copy of *The New York Times* and settles into his seat at the marble café table closest to the door. Of course he chooses *The Times*—it’s just one of the twenty-three things we have in common.

Thing Number Nine: he has to be obsessive like me, because he has repeated this noontime routine with near-clinical precision every single day since Sunday.

It always starts on the café’s front lawn. He shows up at the window and plants his black Chuck Taylors firmly in the manicured grass. There he stands, the Hudson River stretching out behind him. He looks out across the water at the Statue of Liberty. Then, he turns to Ellis Island. It’s like he’s triangulating himself with those two monuments, orienting himself in a specific geographical position on the earth’s grid, but I have no idea why. This is *killing* me.

Once he comes inside, he never orders anything. He just grabs *The Times*, drops down at his table, and begins what I call his “forlorn gazing.” Every time the door swings open, his head darts up from his paper. He scans each new patron like an abandoned puppy tied to a hydrant, hopelessly spot-checking every pair of shoes and eyes for signs of his master.

What are you looking for, Lost Boy?

I need to know. Who are you waiting for in that big grey cloud of weary confusion? Did you miss your rendezvous with the mother ship? Are you part of some nomadic species of J. Crew model, wandering helplessly through

Battery Park City in search of your Nantucket beach house? Is there a kilo of weed in that overstuffed backpack, and you're waiting to make the drop? Or maybe you spent your last dime on a bus ticket to New York with dreams of becoming a hip-hop dancer, only to find yourself in an underground dance-crew battle where you got viciously and irreparably "served"?

I wish it could be that. I wish it could be something laughable and absurd, but I know it's not. I know something terrible has happened to him. I know it because we both have that same look in our tired eyes. Like some vital piece of code in our hearts has been deleted.

I turn away for just a moment and scrawl these notes in my production book:

*What really happened to him? What kind of tragedy? What can I do to save*

I give myself three swift baps to the head, hoping no one has noticed.

*IMPARTIAL, I scrawl, breaking my all-caps rule again. You are here to observe and report. You're here to document the truth. You're not a part of his story; you're not even going to tell his story. You're going to let him tell his own story. That's the movie.*

## 2

I would have shot him for another hour if it hadn't been for Max's fifth text:

MAXCELL: WTF? Please tell me you didn't decide to drop out of school on the first day of senior year. We discussed this in last night's session. It's 12:30 in the afternoon. Where ARE you? Lou and I are at the Trout talking about you. If you want to know what we're saying, you'll have to come back to school like the rest of the senior class did.

It was a brilliant play on Max's part (I mean, relatively brilliant for a basketball stool). He knows I seek the truth above all else. He knows I don't just want to know what they're saying about me; I *need* to know what they're saying about me at that exact moment. No one at Sherman Prep has seen me since *The Night In Question*—not even Max and Lou. I've spent the last two and a half months trying to pray my face back to non-*Phantom-of-the-Opera*-status, but a thousand phone sessions with Max won't tell me what I need to know.

If you truly want to know whether you've changed over the summer, you need to see yourself reflected in their eyes. You can try to see the pretty version in the mirror, but their eyes will tell you the whole truth—their eyes are the only mirrors that count. Yes, I hate mirrors more than anything in the world now, but I'm no different than any other girl: I still need to look.

That being said, the second I walked into the Trout, I knew coming back was a huge mistake.

### 3

The diner two blocks from school is actually called Le Burger Place, but when you open the door, you're immediately bitch-slapped by an odor. Think of a trout who ate a whole roasted garlic clove for breakfast, played four hours of racquet ball, and then skipped his shower to meet up with his trout coworkers for a Coors Light. That's why Max, Lou, and I renamed Le Burger Place "The Sweaty Trout," which we quickly shortened to just "The Trout."

I only made it halfway through the door when the first wave of nausea attacked. It wasn't the stink; five years at the Trout had left me immune. I thought it might have been

aftershocks from the Lost Boy. But as I looked around at the throngs of upperclassmen climbing all over each other at the lunch counter, I knew exactly what it was.

Once or twice, I've heard Lou accuse Max of "smelling like sex," and I've thought to myself: That's disgusting. Not to mention impossible. "What could sex possibly smell like?" I'd ask. "Cigarettes and cheap vodka? Latex and Axe body spray? Prom corsages and shame?" But now I swear I could actually smell it. Like sarin gas, permeating the entire room. Toxic and sticky. Acrid and humid. Warm, pubescent bodies in a can. I can sum it up in just one image:

Louise Cho was sitting in Mike DeMonaco's lap.

Let me repeat that. *Lousie Cho*—my best female friend in the world; fellow A/V aficionado; violin virtuoso; she of the early acceptance to the Oberlin Conservatory—was superglued via the ass to the crotch of Mike "*Me Like*" DeMonaco, linebacker for the Sherman Sharks, future secretary of The Date Rapists of America, President and CEO of all things stool.

"*What in god's name is happening here?*" I should have howled but didn't

Was that an *orchid* in her bizarrely well-conditioned hair? And was that a mini-dress and *girl shoes*? And could her sun-kissed mocha skin have been any more freaking luminescent? Was this what happened to you when you spent a summer abroad playing chamber music in Florence? I seemed to be the only one who remembered Lou's Mike-induced crying jags in the back of the Sherman News studio, because here she was, nested comfortably between his tree-trunk thighs, laughing wildly at all his jokes, which might have been quasi-plausible had I not heard one of his actual jokes.

Thank God I'd doubled up on my Lexapro. The earth

was clearly spinning in the wrong direction. I'd somehow traveled through a wormhole to an alternate universe where football stools flirted with flat-chested concertmasters, and flat-chested concertmasters flirted back like drooling badgers in heat. Had I ever seen a more ludicrous pairing? Yes, maybe I had, in *The New York Times*, "Weddings and Celebrations" section, Sunday, October 10th, 2010, Page ST12:

*Sylvie Rifka Birnbaum, daughter of Saul and Ruthie Birnbaum, was married Saturday to Aidan O'Flaherty, son of Seamus and Molly O'Flaherty. Miss Birnbaum, 56, is a professional matchmaker for widowed Jewish seniors. Mr. O'Flaherty, 23, is a "ghost hunter" and Irish step-dancer at Walt Disney World's EPCOT Center. The ceremony was held at Disney's Tiki Room amidst the tropical serenades of mechanical parrots and seabirds. Ordained Universal Life Minister and Def Poet "Da' T.R.U.T.H." officiated, with Rabbi Gunter Hirschberg taking part.*

Lou would have razed me for remembering the wedding announcement verbatim, but Lou was nowhere to be found. She'd been replaced by that sparkle-faced doppelganger sitting in Mike's lap.

"Theo!"

Max's voice rang out. Every muscle in my chest relaxed when I heard him. But then I remembered. We hadn't seen each other since *The Night In Question*. My fingertips instinctively jumped to my cheek, making sure my gel-hardened hair curtain was pasted to my chin. I wobbled to his booth in the corner and ducked in across from him.

"Okay, what the hell is going on with Lou?" I whispered, digging into the last of his soggy fries, trying to ignore the amount of time that had passed between us, deflecting. Max

had grown. The kid had at least three days of stubble going. Shrouded in his grey hoodie, dark curls sneaking out on all sides, his eyes popping like neon-blue saucers . . . I think he was going for *Game of Thrones* chic, but it was coming across more Jewish android.

He leaned in closer and began his mortifying *Get Theo to Look Me in the Eye* game. “Um . . . where the hell have you been since eight this morning?” he asked.

The strange thing was this: I knew that was going to be his first question, but when he actually asked it, I found myself fighting back tears. It was a few more seconds before I even understood. They were tears of relief.

This was Max’s first opportunity to make an official statement about my face. There were a thousand gut-wrenching lies he could have told in that moment—lies like “Oh, you look fine, Thee,” or “God, you made it sound so much worse than it is,” or the absolute deadliest, worst of the worst: “You look *beautiful*, Theo!” But God bless Max Fenton, he didn’t say a word of it. He didn’t even flinch for that (almost) imperceptible second like so many who’d come before him—my doorman Emilio or Todd, my complete simp of a Step-Stool. No, Max just said what he would have said if there been no scar, if I had not hidden myself away for two months. I’d never been more thankful that a towering basketball stool named Maximus had so desperately needed an algebra tutor in the eighth grade.

Plot-wise, my and Max’s friendship had gone down almost exactly like the standard teen flick. Step 1) Cool Jock needs to pass Algebra II to stay on the team. Step 2) Teacher forces Geek Girl to tutor Cool Jock even though they’re from vastly different social circles. Step 3) Cool Jock and Geek Girl discover all their hidden commonalities and become unexpectedly close, etc.

But there were a few key differences between our story and the cliché. For one thing, Cool Jock actually got tutored by *two* Geek Girls (me and Louise). Secondly, and most importantly, nobody fell in love in any way, shape, or form, so that thirdly, there were no shocking last-minute betrayals at “the big dance” or “the big game,” requiring any grand gestures like running through the rain or having surprise gospel choruses sing “our song.” Instead, we all just stayed friends, reasonably drama-free.

Point being: I don’t know where I’d be without Max and our late-night phone sessions. A girl can only play *Dark Side of the Moon* so many times without wanting to kill herself or go on a funnel cake bender. I am more grateful for Maximus than I could have possibly expressed, so, of course, I didn’t. I just turned down to his plate and sopped up an inhuman glob of ketchup with his uneaten pickle.

“You answer my question, and I’ll answer yours.” I chewed.

“What was your question?” he asked.

“What the hell is going on with Lou?”

“Oh that.” Max nodded with a knowing laugh. “Yeah, that is some classic A.B.O. right there.”

“Classic what?”

“A.B.O. You know, all bets are off.”

“What bets? Who’s betting?”

“Oh, come on, Thee, this is a well-documented senior year phenomenon.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Dude.” He leaned closer and lowered his voice. “Okay, here’s how it works. We’ve all been slaves to the same social structure since at least junior high, right? Mike could never hook up with a girl like Lou, because the Sharks would have



given him shit about it for years. Same for Lou. Imagine what the entire first violin section would have done to her—imagine what *you* would have done to her if she'd ever confessed her scorching pelvic desire for a dude who endorses butt chugging.”

“Okay, ew.”

Max laughed. “All I’m saying is, none of it matters now. We don’t have to pay the price for our secret, interspecific crushes anymore, because we’re never coming back here again. We’re in uncharted territory. Black is white and white is black. All bets are off. A.B.O.”

When he said it again, I was struck by a vivid sequence: *A bite-sized version of me is sledding down the Lost Boy’s freckly, ski-slope nose. I’ve somehow gotten caught in a snowstorm on his face. I shut my eyes and brace for death, but his gigantic thumb and forefinger snatch me from certain doom. I slowly morph into Snuggle the Bear. He cups me in his hands and scratches my furry brown head and under-chin like a treasured pet—like Lennie from Of Mice and Men.*

How sick is that? What did it even mean? “*Theo*,” Max was snapping his fingers in my face. “Come on. Please don’t make me say ‘Earth to Theo,’ we’re better than that.”

“What?”

“I said it’s your turn.”

“For what?”

“I answered your question, now you have to answer mine. *Where* the hell have you been since eight o’clock this morning?”

“Asleep,” I said. “I just overslept. What’s the big?”

Max smiled. “You know your lying has not even slightly improved in five years.”

I smiled back. “That’s why you trust me.”

## Chapter Two

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### 1

*Lost Boy Project Notes, Wednesday, September 4th*

*He's BACK. Fourth day in a row.*

*What am I doing? Why am I scribbling project notes when I should be . . .*

There's nothing but pixels and jitter on the screen as my shaky button cam warms to life. I can't get myself still today. I'm a mess—everything's off. The second the lunch bell rang, I raced down to my Trek 7500 hybrid and pedaled my ass off to make it here by 11:45, but some mall-haired Real Housewife of New Jersey tried to run me over on Water Street. “Hey, *Dragon Tattoo!* Get a frikkin' haircut!” (That part, I heard.) Now I'm fifteen minutes late and covered in a sticky coat of bike sweat, and I've missed his first act at the window. He's already grabbed his *Times* and started his forlorn gazing. Some yoga mom with a stroller the size of the space shuttle has taken my spot. She leaves me no choice but to grab a seat much closer to him than I want to be. I don't even know how to position my collar for a shot from this table. I keep shifting around in my seat, leaning my head left and right, looking like an ADHD ten-year-old on her first day of Chicken McNugget detox. I'm drawing too much attention.

When I finally get him in frame, all I can see is a blurry mess of a man. Boy? Man? It's one of the most compelling things about him: he's one of those boys who looks like a man from one angle and a boy from another—it really depends on how you shoot him. I don't think he could be much older than nineteen, but I can't say for sure.

I finally find a Zen enough headspace to keep steady, but his face is still a blur, like it's been rendered by a French Impressionist or a toddler with a tray of runny watercolors. The door swings open and his head darts up. Two dudes with thick-rimmed glasses and "interesting" mustaches walk into the café, deep in conversation. Disappointment scuttles across his face as he buries his head back in the paper. He reads and reads and reads. But at 12:32 P.M., everything changes.

A girl's voice shouts from somewhere off camera. "Oh my god, it's *you!*"

The paper falls from his hands. He lifts his head. It's like someone has finally found the loose cable that powers the light behind his eyes. It's the first time I've seen his veil of sadness drop away. Now I can see what his face really looks like—what it's supposed to look like. Now he's the boy and not the man.

He peers at the mystery girl. I tilt my chair back on its heels to get her into frame, feeling my heart rate spike.

*Steady, Theo, steady . . .*

I finally get her in the shot. She's skinny and blonde with huge boobs. Of course she is. She's the perfect vessel for his golden angel babies. She's dime-a-dozen beautiful, and she is so freaking chipper that I have to squint to look at her. Okay, "cringe" would be a better word—I have to cringe to look at her.

"I'm at the Harbor Café," she squeaks. "Where the hell have *you* been, girl?"

*Why is she calling him "girl?" Oh, please don't let him be a wandering hermaphrodite. Not that there's anything wrong with wandering hermaphrodites.*

I think he and I realize it at the exact same moment. She's not talking to him. She has dragged us into a little game

that Lou and I like to call “Bluetooth or Psycho?” You have three seconds to decide if the annoying dude yammering to himself on the street is a raving lunatic or just an asshole talking hands-free on his phone. It’s actually pretty hard to tell the difference given the uncommon number of raving lunatics and hands-free assholes in New York—and the fact that they both tend to wear huge, flowy scarves.

But the scone eaters have no problem ignoring Chirpy Girl’s Bluetooth babble. Half of them are on calls of their own. I watch him turn back to his paper as a sunbeam sails across the window.

*Wait.*

Did I see a tear on his cheek?

I tell myself that I can’t be sure. I even consider rewinding and looking back through the footage to confirm, but I’ve learned the hard way that I can never look back through the raw footage until it is time to edit. I just end up all-capping the crap out of myself for the shots I’ve missed and the scenes I’ve lost forever. I don’t need to see the footage. Not really. I know what I saw; I just don’t want to face it. The problem is this:

I suffer from a disease I call “Self-Mutilating Empathy.” That is to say, when I see a man crying, I literally want to marry him. At least for the next fifteen to twenty minutes—sometimes more. Usually, I can overcome it, but the Lost Boy is different. He makes me sting and burn. Watching him hurt makes *me* hurt, and it has since the moment I laid eyes on him. He ducks his head down to wipe the tear away with his shoulder. He’s trying to pass it off as an itch. He doesn’t want anyone to see it. He doesn’t want them to see his face. I know that feeling so well that it turns my throat bone dry—I can’t make myself swallow. I flip open my notebook and start scrawling rapidly.

*IMPARTIAL IMPARTIAL IMPARTIAL IMPARTIAL*

But it's useless. It's a fight I can't win. Despite everything I know and everything I am, the pen falls from my hand, and I stand up out of my chair, stashing the phone in my jacket pocket. My fingers rise to my face, checking to be sure my hair is a curtain over my scarred cheek, and I begin what feels like the longest walk anyone has ever taken in an eight-hundred-square-foot café.

*Just go to the left and out the door, I keep telling myself. You have to leave. Left, and out the door. Left, and out the door.*

2

“Are you okay?”

I've startled him half to death. That was not the plan—I didn't even have a plan. The plan was to leave, I just . . . didn't. Now he looks confounded and maybe embarrassed, I'm not sure. Either way, he is staring at me, not answering, and I've run out of things to say. Mostly because, God help me, he's even more remarkable up close. The camera is still recording in my pocket, but a camera can't do what my eyes can do. How can I explain it? He has no idea that he's the star of my movie, and this is the first time I've truly seen the star up close. It's like that thing where you see a famous person on the street and you realize why they call them “stars.” They actually do shine a little brighter than normal people. It's the shift from two-dimensional to three. Everything is crisper—his golds are golder; his angles are more angular; his skin is that much more . . . I don't know . . . succulent? *Ew*, no, that is *not* what I mean.

And then there's that tear. I can still see the faintest trace of that tear on his cheek. Glistening in the sunlight through

the window. My scar starts to feel like it's roasting. I'm dying to scratch it. It's as if I'm sitting too close to a campfire. I panic about my concealer and foundation—they're going to melt away and he'll see me in all my repulsive glory. What have I done? This is New York. People don't just walk up to you and ask if you're okay. Eight out of ten New Yorkers don't even ask if you're okay when you're sprawled out on the sidewalk, semiconscious. They just stand on the curb, craning their necks curiously, waiting to see if someone *else* will ask if you're okay.

"I am so . . ." I drop my head and stare at the faux-wood floor. Then I take a deep breath. "I am so sorry. I didn't mean to . . . I'm going to go now." I whirl around.

"No, don't," he says.

I freeze and turn back. There's a slight quaver in his voice. His accent is southern or western—maybe both. Texan? I think of *The New York Times*, Weddings and Celebrations section, Sunday, June 3rd, 2012, Page ST14:

*Elana T. Silverman, a daughter of John and Miriam Silverman of New Brunswick, NJ, was married Saturday to Brick Colton, the son of Ford and Louanne Colton of Temple, TX. The Rev. Rudy B. Pickins (known fondly to parishioners as "Rev. Rudy") officiated. Mrs. Colton, 22, was a graduate student in Political Science at New York University, but has opted to forego her academic career and join Mr. Colton, 27, on his sustainable sheep farm in Texas.*

*"Ever since I met Brick, all I really care about is sheep," Mrs. Colton said.*

*"Yeah, I call her my little sheep," Mr. Colton added.*

*“To be honest,” Mrs. Colton said, “I was so in love with him, I would have raised Tibetan yaks with him.”*

“Now I’m the one who’s sorry,” the Lost Boy says, snapping me back to the present tense. “If you’re going, you should go.”

“No, I wasn’t . . .” I cross my arms tightly over my chest. “I mean, I was just asking if you’re okay. Just cause you looked a little . . . I mean, it’s totally none of my—”

“Oh, man.” He shuts his eyes and wriggles his head like a golden retriever trying to dry himself off after a swim in the ocean. I can’t tell if he’s embarrassed, or trying to shake off some awful thought, or trying to wake himself up from his weary haze. “You just saw a grown man crying, didn’t you?”

“What? No, I didn’t see any—”

“It’s okay. You saw what you saw,” he says. “And I’m not. I’m not okay.”

*“Well then I’ll marry you,” I barely manage not to say. “I’ll marry you, and we can fly back to Texas and raise a host of farm animals—pigs, cows, sheep, whatever—and slowly but surely, I’ll help you recover from whatever has happened to you. I already have the dress, which is vintage and kind of funky. My mom has this string of tiny, little pearls she hides from me, but I know they’re in the back of her underwear drawer, so those will be, you know, “borrowed.” And the blue thing, I don’t know, a garter or whatever. I never really bought into the whole blue thing anyway. And no, contrary to what my friend Lou would tell you, the fact that I already have a wedding dress is not at all weird.”*

I say none of that. All I actually say is, “I’m sorry.” The two emptiest, most meaningless words in history.

“Don’t be,” he says. “I don’t even know how long I’ve been sitting here, and you’re the first person who’s talked to me.”

“New Yorkers,” I say with a pathetic excuse for a laugh. “I mean, I assume you’re not from New—”

“Oh, *hell* no,” he laughs. His laugh is warm and real. Not like my uncomfortable mouth farts. “I’m from Austin, Texas.”

*Texas. I knew it.*

“I’m Andrew,” he says, putting out his hand. “Andrew Reese.”

I look at his outstretched hand and go numb. The last thing I want to do is hurt Andrew any more than he’s hurting, but I can’t bring myself to shake. I have only two memories of my father detailed enough to recount. One is of him wrapping a blanket around my shoulders in the middle of some grey, snowy campsite, whispering, “Don’t be afraid, darlin’. Don’t you ever, ever be afraid.” The other is of him gripping the lapels of my navy pea coat, shaking me too roughly, saying, “Don’t talk to strangers, darlin’. Don’t you ever, *ever* talk to strangers.”

Yeah, thanks for the super-consistent advice, Pops. Not like you’ll turn me into a walking manic-depressive contradiction for the rest of my life or anything.

The point is, while Andrew Reese waits five seconds too long for a simple handshake, I’m forced to face the harsh reality: Andrew Reese is a complete and total stranger. My inner five-year-old squeals at me to shut my mouth and run. But I slide down cautiously into the seat across from him, keeping my arms tightly crossed.

“Theo,” I say. “Theo Lane.”

### 3

*WHY did you just give him your full name?* I’ve given him the only Google tool he needs to find my address and plan my murder. Then again, sixty seconds ago, I was prepared to offer him my hand in marriage. Things change.

He realizes I’m not going to shake his hand, so he awkwardly pulls it back under the table. “Theo,” he says. “That’s a cool name.”



“No, it’s not. It’s not even a name, it’s an address.”

“What?” More than ever, he looks capital “L” Lost.

“As in, ‘Driver, take me to Nine Theo Lane.’”

“Oh, right,” he nods. “Right.” His eyes drift back toward the window and my heart sinks. This isn’t the first conversation I wanted with him. Not even close.

“Andrew, I’m sorry. I really just wanted to make sure you were—”

“Andy,” he says. “All my friends call me Andy.”

“Oh. Well, Andy . . . not that I saw you crying, but . . . why were you crying?”

His smile disappears. The silence lasts long enough to make me regret having asked, and then it goes on much longer than that.

“I’m waiting for someone,” he finally says.

“Who?”

“A girl.”

Of course it’s a girl. Didn’t I know it was a girl? Deep down, didn’t I know that already? Hadn’t I put it all together? And what’s to put together? He’s a boy and he’s sad. Why is he sad? Because of a girl.

“Her name’s Sarah,” he says.

Of course her name is Sarah.

“Well, where is she?” I ask. I wish I hadn’t. The look on his face . . .

“I don’t know. I don’t know where she is. She was supposed to meet me here at eleven forty-five.”

“Well, come on, she’s not even an hour late. I’m assuming she’s a Pretty Girl?”

“She is.”

“An hour late is nothing in Pretty Girl time. That’s like ten minutes in human years.”

He almost smiles. “It’s been longer than an hour,” he

says. “She was supposed to meet me at eleven forty-five on Sunday.”

This is the part where I feign surprise. “You’ve been waiting here for four days?”

“Oh man, has it been four days? What day is this?”

“It’s Wednesday,” I say.

“It is?” He presses his thumb deep into his eye socket. “Wednesday?”

I bite my lip, feeling a little bewildered. “I don’t understand. Is Sarah your girlfriend or . . . ?”

He breathes out a sad laugh, like he’s laughing at himself. “I guess not. I don’t know. What do you think, Theo? Can someone be your girlfriend if you’ve only known her for a day?”

I’m not qualified to answer that question, so I don’t.

“I was just bumming around New York before school,” he says. “I was supposed to head back to Austin on Saturday morning to start at U.T. I met her as I was walking out the door. I met her right here at this table. She’d just come from helping her friend plan a wedding at some place near here where they do weddings. Battery Green or Battery . . .”

“Battery Gardens,” I say. “Yeah, I know it.” This didn’t seem like the best time to tell him I’d been coming here all summer to shoot footage of the newlyweds walking in and out of Battery Gardens’ forbidding, ivy gates. That is, before he became my new documentary subject.

“Yeah, that’s it!” He points at me. “Battery Gardens. Anyway, we just hit it off, you know—it was just one of those things. We talked, and we talked some more, and then we walked, and we walked some more till we were up in, like, Harlem or something, and we just ended up spending the whole day together. And Theo, believe me, I *know* how corny this sounds, I do, but we just . . . we fell in love, we just did.

And she asked me to stay in town another week and be her date to her friend's wedding next Sunday, and I was like, *hell* yeah. Then we went out that night till whenever, and she told me to meet her back here for brunch the next day at eleven forty-five. I got here at exactly eleven forty-five and she just . . . didn't. She never showed. And being the total fool I am, I never got her number—I never even got her *last name*." He clamps his hands over his eyes and runs them slowly down his face. "So I just keep coming back. Hoping she'll be here this time. All I know is, this is her favorite café."

"It's a good place," I say, not even sure what I mean.

"She said she liked to watch all the newlyweds coming out of that Battery Gardens—you know, just starting the rest of their lives together, just beginning like we were. Like I thought we were. No, like I *know* we were. I know we were, Theo, I know it. And I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, 'It's called a one night stand, Andy, ever heard of it?' But you want to know what I think?"

"I do," I say.

"I think something happened to her. Something really bad. Something . . . you know . . . unthinkable. And I can't tell you why I think that. I got nothing to prove it—I got nothing to tell it's so, I just know it. If she could have been here by eleven forty-five, then she would have been here no matter what."

I nod.

He suddenly stops waxing rhapsodic about Sarah and locks his eyes with mine. "Do you believe me?"

I'm not ready for the question. What do I believe? Did I just sit down next to a total stalker who's entirely unfamiliar with the phrase "she's just not that into you"? My head and my heart start beating the crap out of each other as he stares

at me, waiting for my answer. What do I believe? I don't know what I believe, but I know what I feel: Jealous. Jealous that a guy could fall so deeply in love with a girl in just one day that he'd be willing to look for her each and every day after.

"You don't believe me," he says. "You think I'm the biggest loser in New York City. You think I'm Midnight Cowboy."

"I didn't say that."

"No, you didn't say anything. Your silence speaks volumes."

"I do," I say. "I do believe you."

"You do?"

"I do."

"So . . . ?"

"So what?"

"So, will you help?"

"Help?"

He bows his head. "I'm sorry. Forget that. Forget I said that. It was just, when you walked over here, I thought—"

"No, it's not . . . I mean, I don't even know what I could do to . . ." *Don't talk to strangers, darlin'.*

"Oh *shit*," I say. I glance at the clock. The time doesn't register. "God, is it . . . ? I'm supposed to be back at school. I didn't even realize what time it was."

He nods his head and looks down at his hands. "I didn't mean to keep you."

"No, you didn't keep me, it's not . . ."

*Don't you ever, ever talk to strangers.*

"You should go," he says. He ekes out a smile and flips to the next page of his paper.

"Yeah," I murmur. "I probably should." I stand up slowly out of my seat. "Well . . ."

I can't think of anything else to say. I only know that I hate myself. I also know that I'll be back tomorrow morning.

Chapter Three

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## 1

“Can you please pass the peas, Theo?”

I didn’t answer my simpering Step-Stool. How could I have left Andy Reese there? How could I have just abandoned him at the Harbor after Sarah had done the very same thing to him only four days ago? After I’d seen his tears up close? No, it wasn’t even about Andy; it was about the raw footage. How could I have walked out in the middle of such a pivotal scene? I’d just started getting all the good stuff. I’d just started getting—

“Theo . . . ? The peas . . . ?” Todd was still gazing at me expectantly.

*Oh, Todd. You are a middle-aged man but you’re one evolutionary step away from Sock Puppet. And the Mozart hair doesn’t make you look cool; it makes you look like Betty White’s younger transgender brother. No, I take that back. It just makes you look like Betty White.*

“Theodore!” Mom’s fist came crashing down like a gavel.

My fork fell from my hand as I turned to her, slack-jawed. How could she have possibly heard my internal Todd monologue? Had she developed telepathic powers since breakfast?

“What?” I asked, sounding more like a little girl than I’d planned. But I was shocked. So was Todd. My mother does not emote. At least not toward me. Our mid-dinner ritual usually consisted of five minutes of silence (unless you counted chewing, cutting, and swallowing), followed by three uninterested questions about my day, followed by the Late Dinner Ritual. This is when Mom and Todd discuss their students’ inability to “grasp the postmodern underpinnings of Thomas Pynchon.” (Yes, Mom and Todd are both

NYU Lit professors, and no, I have not read any Thomas Pynchon. I try to tune them out with Patsy Cline songs in my head, but their conversations still seep through like National Public Radio playing two rooms away.)

“What’d I do?” I asked.

“Todd asked you for the peas,” Mom said. “He asked nicely and he asked twice. Will you please pass your father the peas?”

I almost crushed my water glass between my rigid fingers.

I’d retired the “he’s not my father” retort by age twelve. It was too Lifetime movie. By fifteen, I’d moved past “why did you even have a kid if you were just going to name her Theodore and treat her with the cordial but distant reserve of a weekend guest at your bed-and-breakfast?” But for some reason, on this particular night, it stung. “Did my father like peas?” I asked politely, passing Todd the pea bowl.

“Excuse me?” Mom said.

“My father,” I said. “Was he a pea lover like Todd? Or was he more of a zucchini man?”

Mom shot eye daggers at me. “Don’t go there, Theodore. Not tonight.”

“Let’s go easy on your mother tonight,” Todd whispered. “You know it’s September, Theo. Let’s try to keep it light.”

I’d forgotten about Mom’s “Fall Semester Stress.” It was the one time a year when you could actually see glimpses of her anxiety behind the stoic façade. Todd said the prospect of teaching *Gravity’s Rainbow* to another batch of untrained minds was enough to give any lit professor night terrors—even the unflappable Margaret Lane.

“Sorry, Mom,” I said. “I didn’t mean to probe so deep on the vegetable thing.”

“It’s all right,” she said, starting work on a new slice of turkey meatloaf.

Todd smiled. “No harm done.” I scooped up a few peas of my own and shoveled them into my mouth. “So Mom . . . ?”

“Yes, dear?”

“Tell me again why you despise my actual father?”

Mom threw her knife down on the plate.

“O-kay!” Todd barked a nervous laugh and clapped his hands, rubbing them together like he was trying to make fire. “What’s for dessert tonight, Meg?”

My mom didn’t answer me. She didn’t have to. I hadn’t seen my father since I was five years old, but her stare told me the same thing I’d heard since I was old enough to start asking questions. *“Stop treating a divorce like it’s some crippling mystery. The answers do not change with time. They will always be the same answers. Your father and I could not see eye-to-eye. We were from two different worlds. He was much too young for me, and he was completely unprepared for any kind of real . . . He just wasn’t a good man.”*

The shrill ring of our doorbell cut through the silent room.

Mom started, grabbing hold of the edges of the dining table. The only thing that bothered my mother more than a new class of ignorant freshmen was an unannounced visitor at the door. She once spent twenty minutes chewing out our doorman Emilio for letting a Chinese food delivery guy upstairs without calling first.

Of course she assumed I was the culprit.

“Who is it?” she mouthed, like I was Anne Frank and the Nazis had just discovered our secret annex.

“I don’t know,” I mouthed back.

“Did you invite someone over?” she mouthed.

“I did not.”

“Well, then, who is it?” she yelled.

The bell pierced the silence again.

“You know, there’s a way to solve this baffling mystery,”

I whispered, jumping up from my chair and tossing my napkin on the table. I trotted toward the living room.

“Ask who it is first,” Mom insisted.

“Mom, can you chill, please?”

The thought of finding him behind that door didn’t even occur to me till I was reaching for the doorknob. It sailed across my mind like a gust of wind, somewhere between the shave-and-a-haircut knock and the drawn-out, steady knocks that seemed to imitate the sound of a slowing heartbeat.

I’d only gotten the door halfway open when the blur of white lunged across the threshold, straight for my face.

## 2

White daisies. Wrapped in white floral deli paper. Not the murderous white hand of Andy Reese. Not the dirty white trash bag I’d suddenly pictured him throwing over my head, pulling it taut around my neck till my hooded mouth could only suck in moldy plastic with every failed attempt at breath. No, just my best friend, Louise Cho, dropping by with some flowers. I guess I needed a few more months of therapy. And another Lexapro to manage the sudden burst of anxiety.

## 3

Here’s a quick tip: when your junior year is winding down and your mother asks a general question like “have you started your college applications yet?” don’t give her a vaguely existential answer like “I can’t even picture my life past the age of eighteen.” It will set off an ultrasonic suicide alert that only parents and school counselors can hear, and the next thing you know you’ll be sitting across from Dr. Harold Silver in an office full of Gustav Klimt posters and



African folk art, trying to clarify your answer as he writes you a prescription for Lexapro. You'll try to explain that you're not the least bit suicidal; you've just always pictured a big empty frame after your eighteenth birthday, but he'll already be listing off potential side effects and you'll realize those potential side effects are "everything."

In my case, it was world-class insomnia.

So you'll tell Dr. Silver that you're struggling with insomnia and he'll prescribe Ambien. While on Ambien, you will bake and eat an entire pan of Pillsbury crescent rolls in your sleep and have a terrible nightmare about the Pillsbury Doughboy, staring at you with this really judgy look in his eyes. After enough of those bad dreams, you'll stop the Ambien, but you won't tell your mother or Dr. Silver because you don't want to try the next thing he has to offer.

At least, I didn't.

So now it's just me and my dear frenemy Lexapro. Sometime I just call him "Lex." He half-heartedly wards off my anxiety and depression all day, then keeps me awake all night so I can dream up more depressing and anxious scenarios for him to ward off the next day. It's the neurotic Circle of Life!

Dr. Silver told me that as long as I never missed a pill and continued to "stick with the program," the side effects would wear off after the first few weeks. On the other hand, I need Lex's side effects more than ever. Lex saves me every night. I can't possibly have another Night In Question if I'm only asleep two to three hours at a time.

#### 4

"What's wrong?" Lou asked, holding out the flowers, disappointed. "They're daisies. Your wedding flower . . . ? Your all

time favorite . . . ?” She shook them a little to make them more enticing. “They match the Dream Ring. No . . . ?”

“Yeah, thanks,” I said. I took them from her and took a long whiff of their earthy sweetness.

“Um. So, hi?” Lou said.

“Whatup,” I mumbled. Awkward silence.

“I really like your hair,” she said, cautiously. She reached out to touch it, but I couldn’t help jerking my head back. (Again.) I turned to the floor and smoothed it flat against my cheek again. I knew what she was trying to say; I just wish she hadn’t said it. Max had known better.

“Thanks,” I said. Without noticing, I’d begun to tap my foot impatiently.

“Okay, what?” Lou threw up her hands, letting one of them land on her bony hip.

“Whut-whut?” I replied reflexively, imitating some long-dead MC.

“*Why so gangsta?*” She laughed insecurely. “What is your thing today? You didn’t answer any of my texts this morning, you avoided me at the Trout, you didn’t find me after school. We were totally fine on the phone last night. What changed?”

“*You did,*” I didn’t say. “*You drank the girly-girl Kool-Aid in Florence, and now you’re hunting meat-brained linebackers as sexual prey.*”

“Who is it, dear?” Mom stood at the opposite end of the living room, gripping one of our deteriorating French doors.

Lou peeked over my shoulder and announced herself with a smile. “It’s Louise, Mrs. Lane.”

“Sort of,” I muttered, scanning down her tight red dress and strappy sandals.

Lou laughed. “Is that what this is about? My dress?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Come on, Thee. My mom made me get this dress for the final concert in Florence. I thought it would be a funny outfit for the first day back.”

“Why did she want you to go to the concert as Lola from *Damn Yankees?*”

“Theo, it’s *me*. It’s Lou, I swear to god, just ignore the dress.”

“It’s not the dress.”

“Well then what?”

“Aren’t you coming in, Louise?” Mom called from across the room.

“I’m trying, Mrs. Lane.” Lou dug her hand into her new suede saddlebag. “Okay, look, I can prove it’s me. Look.” She pulled her familiar tortoise-rimmed glasses from the bag and slipped them up the bridge of her nose. Then, she pulled her silken hair back into its familiar face-paralyzing ponytail. “Mr. Schaffler, this editing bay was built in the late *nineties*.” She added just a hint of nasal buzz to her voice. “We need to upgrade *all* the A/V equipment in this room. I *cannot* produce the Sherman News in these third-world conditions!”

I lowered my head so she couldn’t see me smile. Louise Cho was doing Louise Cho, and it was a damn good impression.

“*Admit* it, Ms. Rinaldi,” she went on. “The Tchaikovsky concerto was invented to mangle the slender fingers of Asian teens!”

“*Okay*.” I covered my mouth to mask the increasing laughter. “*Okay*, it’s you.”

She grabbed my shoulder. “Thee, you have to let me in. I need your brilliance. I need a Cyrano letter.”

I stepped aside and let her in.

## 5

The “Cyrano Letters” had started in seventh grade. Lou would fall in love with some sensitive young geek in the viola section, or a fellow techie in the Middle School Production of *Godspell*, but she wouldn’t have the guts to approach him. Instead she’d come to me, begging me to help her compose a “Declaration of Romantic Intent.” (Not to be confused with a “Love Letter.” Lou felt that, much like the word “genius,” the word “love” was tossed around far too prematurely and far too often.)

I’d developed an early obsession with *Cyrano de Bergerac*, based on the film version with Gerard Depardieu, and a little on Steve Martin’s modern adaptation *Roxanne*. I guess the idea of pining for an unattainable love just hit home with a dour seventh-grader who was always planning her wedding day when she should have been planning her bat mitzvah. But now, as we sped down the hall to avoid one of Mom’s painfully generic Lou interviews, a dark irony was dawning. Lou probably hadn’t even realized it yet, but substitute a hideous scar for an impossibly huge schnoz, and I *was* Cyrano de Bergerac now. Too physically grotesque for any boy to—

“I have some ideas for the first paragraph,” Lou said, breathlessly. She knew exactly where to find the blank composition notebooks on my desk, even buried under a heap of Mountain Dew cans, Chinese food tins, and flash memory cards. “But this has to be all you, Thee. You’re the wordsmith here.”

“Yeah, and I have two words for you already,” I said, tossing the daisies onto my bed. “*Hell no*. Not this time, Lulu. No way.”

I shut my bedroom door, dropped down on the bed, and lie on my side, but I quickly realized my hair was hanging

off my face, so I slid back against the wall, holding a pillow between my knees and chin.

“Why not?” Lou scowled and cleared one of the piles of dusty Sunday *Times* from my formerly white couch and carved out a seat for herself. “I need this one *bad*, Thee. Like *really* bad.” Then she shoved a stack of *Martha Stewart Weddings* aside so she could rest her feet on my makeshift coffee table. (This consisted of two pre-historic Dell PC towers for legs, and a black, lacquered folding shutter with a painted Japanese landscape for a tabletop. I’d found it abandoned on East 9th Street. The East Village doubled as a dumping ground for all kinds of “garbage with potential.”)

“Who’s it for?” I asked. I knew, but I wanted to hear it from her.

Her lips parted to speak, but she sealed them shut and averted her eyes. “I can’t tell you. It’s too embarrassing.”

“See, that’s a red flag right there. You can’t write a love letter to someone you’re too embarrassed to love.”

“It’s not a love letter, it’s a Declaration of Romantic—”

“Romantic Intent, yeah. Would now be a good time to remind you you’ve never actually given one of these ‘declarations’ to any of the boys we’ve written them for?”

“Well, this time I will. I have to. It’s my last chance.”

“Oh, right, because ‘all bets are off.’” I’d shamefully used air quotes. We’d sworn a blood oath in sixth grade never to use air quotes. I was angrier than I thought.

Lou widened her eyes. “*Air quotes?* It’s that bad? And what bets? Who’s betting?”

“I am just stating for the record that I absolutely refuse to play any part in this disgusting A.B.O. senior year cross-breeding. It’s unnatural.”

“A.B. *what?* I feel like we’re not communicating.”

“I *know* who it is,” I declared. “I already know.”

“You do?”

“Jesus, I was at the Trout this afternoon, remember? I saw the whole thing.”

Her face flushed. She giggled. “Oh god, was I that obvious?”

“Obvious doesn’t really do it justice. I have no choice but to call it ‘stripper pole’ obvious.”

She glued her palms to her face, but I could see the flush of pink climbing up her cheeks.

“So you hate me now. You want to kill me now.”

“I wouldn’t call it hate.”

“What would you call it?”

“It’s more a mix of shock and dismay, and maybe the first few seeds of disrespect. Funnel cake . . . ?” I offered her the last stale piece from last night’s bender.

“No, thanks,” she said, crinkling her nose and pushing the plate back in my face.

“Oh right, I forgot, you’re a woman of the world now—funnel cake is for wide-bottomed innocents like me. Sorry, I don’t have any low-fat scones or dried kale chips.”

Her hands dropped to her lap. “Thee, you’re not wide-bottomed. Why are you being like this?”

“Like what? I thought you loved my dry wit. I thought I gave the Sherman News its bite.”

She was looking at me seriously now. “Yes, you have a dry wit, but you’re not mean. Who are you today?”

“Who am *I*? Are you kidding me right now? Who are *you*? It’s like you showed up at school a completely different person.”

“No, I have a different outfit and different hair. But *you’re* actually a different person. You’re meaner and, I

don't know, faster, and—Where were you this morning? Whatever happened to you this morning, you're different.”

“Oh, you think it was this morning? You don't think something might have happened to me, say, two and a half months ago that might have changed me a little bit? Maybe just a *little bit*?”

Lou blinked. Her lips trembled. I couldn't believe those words had come from my mouth. I never, under any circumstances, brought up The Night In Question on purpose.

My outburst left a cloud of black silence between us. The kind of silence that had physical mass and weight. She stood up almost involuntarily, like an invisible hand had yanked on her marionette strings.

“I am so sorry,” she whispered. “I don't know what I was thinking. I mean, I wasn't thinking, I wasn't. I think I should just go. I'll go.”

I grabbed hold of her hand before she got to the door.

“No, that was totally my fault,” I apologized. “I don't know why I said that, I really don't. Stay. I'll help you with the letter. I'll totally help you. I mean, *duh*, of *course* I'll help you, girl.”

“You don't have to.”

“No, I want to,” I lied. “I really want to.”

## 6

### *A Declaration of Romantic Intent*

*Dear M-*

*I really, really, really, really want to have vigorous sexual intercourse with you, preferably in the back of a smelly taxi, or perhaps in*

*one of those pee-stained bathroom stalls in the boy's locker room (or the girls locker room, if you think that is hotter. I'm cool either . . .*

"Theo, come on," Lou groaned. "I thought you were going to help."

"What? I'm helping. Good writing is all about conservation of words. Actually, you're right, we don't need that many 'really's.'"

"Okay, if you're going to be mean, then I'll—"

"No, okay." I crossed out everything past the third 'really' with a sweeping X. I tried to stop smiling. "What do you want it to say?"

"Well, I'd prefer if it didn't say anything about 'vigorous sexual intercourse' or urine. I want it to be romantic. I want to find a way to tell him."

"Tell him what?"

"To really *tell* him this time. You know, to tell him that I'm . . ." I watched her struggle for the words. How any girl could search her heart so valiantly and sincerely for Mike DeMonaco was *beyond* beyond me. "To tell him that I'm the one who sees it."

"Sees what?"

"That he's not just, you know, that *dude* that everybody else sees—that . . ."

*I believe "stool" is the term you're looking for?*

"That 'guy,'" she said. "He's not just 'that guy' in a jock jersey, cracking jokes."

"I'm pretty sure he is that guy."

Lou's face soured. "Well, you're wrong. Because, I've watched him for years. I mean, I watch him when he doesn't even know I'm watching him . . ."

"Yeah, maybe we don't tell him that part."

"And I can *see*," she went on, determined to ignore my



snarky comments, “that there’s this whole other side to him. A romantic side. A heroic side that he’s too embarrassed to show anyone. You can’t see it, Thee, but I can. And I think that’s when you know that you’re meant to be with someone. When you can see the part of him that no one else sees. Does that make any sense?”

I opened my mouth to spew out the joke about the part of Mike DeMonaco no one else should see, but I was tongue-tied.

“And once you’ve seen it,” Lou continued, “once you know how you feel, you *have* to let him know, like, in no uncertain terms—you have to just tell him flat out. Because you think it’s the most obvious thing in the world. You think, ‘how could he not know how I feel? Every single person in this room is staring at me and they all know exactly how I feel.’ I mean, you said I was stripper pole obvious at the Trout, right?”

“Yeah,” I said, but my voice was barely audible. “Like hooker obvious.” I wanted to hug Lou right then, despite her new tragic taste in men. Lou rolled her eyes. “Right. Hooker obvious. Well, you know what? I don’t think he noticed at all. I don’t think he has a single solitary clue how I feel. That’s why I need you to put it all in the letter. So there is no way he could possibly miss it.”

I nodded. The epiphany came very slowly at first, just as Lou finished her monologue. It snaked its way through the shoddy plumbing in my head as my eyes drifted up to my bedroom ceiling—up to a grimy, pencil-thin, half-woman/half-fish-shaped outline that had once been a sticker of Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*. I began projecting blurry images onto the blank white space where Ariel’s face used to be: half-baked guesses at Sarah’s facial features—dimpled chin, rounded chin; high cheekbones, rounded cheeks . . . every

version with those oversized, lifeless eyes that stare back at you from a police composite sketch taped to a subway teller's Plexiglas window.

"What's wrong?" Lou asked.

The words finally leaked from the corner of my mouth. "She doesn't know."

Lou looked confused. "Who doesn't know what?"

"Sarah. She doesn't know that he loves her. "

"Sarah who? Sarah Bingham? Sarah Pratt? Crop Top Sarah? There's like a billion Sarahs."

"No, nothing," I said. "Nothing, never mind."

"Are you kidding? Now you have to tell me. Who's Sarah?"

"I'll tell you later, but I'm feeling inspired here."

"Oh, then go go go." She jumped next to me on the bed.

I dropped pen to paper and began to scribble furiously, reciting to Lou as I wrote. "*I really, really, really need to talk to you. Please don't be alarmed by the heading of this letter, but our time is running out here at Sherman, and I couldn't forgive myself if I didn't tell you how I really feel . . .*"

"Oh, that's good," Lou purred. "That's really good."

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## Boundary: The Books of Eva #2

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Heather Terrell

January 2015

EVA IS now Archon: a New North leader whose sacred role is to unearth the wrongs of the past to justify the glorious present. Until now, this role was exclusive to men like her father. Eva is also newly betrothed to Jasper, her old friend and a fellow scion of the Triad, the all-male ruling class. But the secret time she spent in the Boundary land with her former servant, Lukas, nags at her as she playsacts her life. Even more unsettling is Lukas's sudden belief that she is the "Angakkuq," a mystical figure of ancient Inuit prophecy, destined to destroy her society and usher in the "true Healing."

When her Archon training begins, Eva decides that she can't keep any more secrets. Nor can she maintain the boundary between her ex-servant and herself. Eschewing everything she believed in, she discovers not only the impossible reality of the New North's founding, but also the identity of her brother's murderer—tragically upending what she thought she knew about both Jasper and Lukas. Torn between them, Eva must face a battle to determine the

HEATHER TERRELL

fate of the New North and those beyond it—for the sake of the truth.

HEATHER TERRELL worked as a commercial litigator in New York City for over ten years, but she has always been obsessed with myth, lore, and the gap between history and the truth. This preoccupation has led to several loosely factual historical novels (*The Chrysalis*, *The Map Thief*, *Brigid of Kildare*) and the pure-lore Fallen Angel series. *Boundary* is the second installment in The Books of Eva series. She lives in Pittsburgh with her family. Visit her at [www.heatherterrell.com](http://www.heatherterrell.com).

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## Prologue

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LUKAS STANDS on the highest point of the Ring. He knows the position is too exposed, too risky in the light of day, but he has no choice. Not if he wants to see Eva. He strains for a glimpse through a small crack in the ice-roof of the Basilika. If he angles himself just right, he may catch something of the ceremony proceeding behind the colorful stained ice-windows. Perhaps the swoop of a Gallant's silvery cloak. Maybe even the trailing hem of Eva's white gown.

Bracing himself against the bitter wind, he draws toward the edge, over the top of the snow cornice. In his eagerness, he sends *qetrar* flying down the side of the Ring. The chunks of ice-crust crash into one another as they fall, making a noise that no Ring-Guard could ignore. Even the laziest of them.

Ducking behind one of the mounds behind him, Lukas slows his breath and stills his body. He leans into a depression, willing his inky sealskin coat and black hair to blend into its shadows. The *unalaak* picks up, and his coat flaps in its wind. He grabs the coat and pulls it close to his body. To the eyes of the Ring-Guards—poorly trained in the Boundary ways of parsing the ice and snow—he will look like nothing more than a shadow. Which is all he is to them anyway.

The thud of clumsy footsteps grows louder. After all these thousands of *siniks* on the ice, the Aerie people should be

more nimble, yet still they walk as heavily as bears, even on such an important day as this. But it's just another example of their dependence on the Boundary people. The Aerie would starve if there was no one to hunt for them; they'd scare even a deaf rabbit away.

The footsteps stop close to his hiding place. Lukas slides his bow out of his pack and turns it toward the ground to notch his arrow. In one single, silent movement, he draws the weapon—holding it close to his face as he listens to the Ring-Guards.

“Looks like the ice fell from here.”

“The cornice seems weak. Probably just couldn't hold.”

“So some pieces broke off and slid down on their own?”

“That's what I'm guessing.”

“It's possible. Still, the Triad issued strict orders about today—”

“Come on. We don't want to miss the festivities, do we?”

The voices trail off and the footsteps fade. Lukas exhales and lowers his bow, watching his breath form frozen clouds. He dares to step out onto the Ring again and peers down onto the Aerie. The open spaces at the Ring's center—usually bustling with all manner of the self-proclaimed “chosen”—are empty. All the Aerie folk are within the Basilika's walls. A stark reminder that this ceremony is not for the Boundary. The Boundary are always *ellami*, outside. Unless they're serving at the Feast afterward, that is.

Lukas waits, watching through his soldered-together metal tubes. Without warning, the light intensifies. The bright rays afford him a quick glimpse through the rift in the Basilika's roof. The procession of Gallants, Maidens, Lords and Ladies has begun: the ceremonial walk down the Basilika's nave. It reminds him of the slow journey of an iceberg across the Frozen Sea. Cold and inhuman. Lukas can

only make out their white and silver-grey finery, not their faces. He can barely hear their chanting. It's the purr of insects. He's not certain how he'll identify Eva.

Blame and anger course through him. He alone is at fault for this. The guilt is his to shoulder; it doesn't matter that his acts were *ajurnama*, that they could not be helped. Their lies gave him no choice. He'd like to send one of his arrows down into the icy parade to stop her ceremony with that tedious Gallant, but he knows he must only bear witness. He's already sacrificed his *arninik* to the void to bring Eva to this moment.

Just then, he sees it. A flash of her long auburn hair cascading down the back of her white gown. Eva. His Eva.

No, she is more. He must remind himself of that, always. She does not belong to him alone. She is the *Angakkuq*. The only one who can spark the true Healing, the one who will melt the frozen sea of lies and destroy the Aerie forever.

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## I. Junius 20—Year 242, A.H.

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I stand at the back of the nave of the Basilika, waiting. I watch as every friend I've ever had, every highborn Aerie I've ever known, promenades down the nave first, a resplendent sea of white and silver. The men's elaborate cloaks of animal hides are bleached white from Mother Sun, and the women's sumptuous gowns of undyed fabrics, scrubbed ivory, embroidered with rare silver thread, shine as if fresh from the dressmaker. Of course, these robes may only be worn on this particular occasion.

A Betrothal is the only time the Lex permits us Aerie to deviate from our usual somber blacks and browns . . . not counting the whites a Maiden and her Gallant wear on their

Union day. Only on this occasion does the Lex allow us to focus on the future—Unions and children—rather than our terrible past. On this special day, we Aerie band together in a swath of the purest snow, a plea to give mankind another chance. We stand before the Gods in the Basilika, the rays of Her Sun pouring through the ice-windows, illuminating the symbols of the Father, Mother, and the Healing. The day is unseasonably warm, even for spring. The walls weep, as if the Sun Herself is crying colored tears.

I draw a Maidenly smile for the Aerie people to see—I know they’re all watching—but really I feel like crying along with Her. Here I am at the center of it all, some kind of offering to the Gods. The trussed-up, milky-white emblem of mankind’s hope for a continued second chance. But I am a fraud.

Not because my Betrothed is Jasper. He is the best kind of Gallant, and I believe he’s in love with me. I’m lucky in this, because love isn’t a prerequisite for Unions in the Aerie. In fact, it’s a rarity, and that just fuels my guilt over this ruse.

No, the tears I don’t dare shed are for the loss of my old self. Not long ago, I lived without guilt or fear. I was a child, playing with my twin Eamon before he fell from the Ring. I was a trusting Maiden in search of Testing glory in her dead brother’s name. I was an Aerie. I stood within these sacred walls and worshipped the Gods with my whole spirit.

No more. One night with Lukas in the Boundary lands melted that innocence.

A shift in the music awakens me from my dark thoughts. The deep chanting of the Basilikons becomes more layered, more intense. Their polyphonic pleas for the Gods to bless this Union—voices only, no instruments in the Basilika—escalate. I look over at the Chief Basilikon, who nods in my direction.

This is my signal.



I muster my courage, gather the folds of my white gown heavy with embroidery and beadwork, and take the first step down the long nave. Silver and gold orbs—symbols of Father Earth and Mother Sun—stare down at me from the chancel. I suddenly feel that the Gods Themselves see through my artifice. A shiver passes through me at the thought of Their judgment, and then the doubt creeps in. The fear vanishes and in its wake is something I cannot name. This new feeling I have, that I cannot shed, is like a sickness. Do the Gods even exist? I believed in the Father and Mother for so long, but now I wonder.

As I continue down the nave, I absorb the smiles of my friends and neighbors, even some Aerie I only recognize by sight. Hundreds of faces, beaming at me. I am the cornerstone of their hopes. Not only I am about to become a newly Betrothed Maiden, I am already their newest Archon. I am something special: a gift from the Gods.

With a steady pace, I am careful to keep my gaze downcast in Maidenly modesty. In truth, I dare not look any one of them in the eyes. I fear that my eyes will reveal my true purpose, the whole reason I continue with this subterfuge. I am alone. Because I am the only one who knows my true mission: I must uncover who among them killed my brother.

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## II. Junius 24—Year 242, A.H.

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One by one, the tight stays of my gown loosen. As my Companion Katja slowly undoes the bindings of my corset, I sigh in relief. I've been laced up in my most somber Basilika gown since the first bell of morning—suffering through the last in an endless number of services blessing me as Archon. At long last I can breathe.

The heather-grey gown drops to the floor, and I reach for my black sealskin Archon uniform. The tunic, pants, and cloak look almost exactly as they did during the Testing—except they're now a lot cleaner and fresher-smelling. And they've been embroidered with the Triad symbol.

I finger the red stitching; it looks like my mother's fine handiwork. She got the Archon for which she's longed. Just not the one she expected.

What would this day have held if Eamon hadn't died? Would I be helping him prepare for his first day of Archon training? Would I be betrothed to Jasper and ready to enter a life like my mother's? Even though I've never wanted to be anything like her, I'd choose that path if it would bring my brother back.

Watching me pause, Katja hurries to my side. Shaking out the uniform, she holds out the pants so that I can step into them. I take them back from her instead.

"It's all right, Katja. I can manage this on my own."

"Oh no, Lady Margret would never forgive me."

"Are you Lady Margret's Companion or mine, Katja?"

Her body stiffens. "Yours—"

"If you don't tell Lady Margret that I got dressed on my own, then I won't either," I interrupt. But I am smiling.

Katja hesitates. My request is certainly outside the bounds of the Lex; secrets are never, ever permitted. But I am an Archon now, and my rule is law, too.

Nodding in acquiescence, she starts to curtsy, and says, "Good day, Maid—" Then she stops herself. She isn't quite sure how to address me. No one is.

She tries again. "Good day . . . Archon."

Now I force a laugh. "Just call me Eva. It's a lot easier."

Backing out of the room, head down, she mutters, "I couldn't do that."

And she's right. Such familiarity between Boundary and Aerie is forbidden by the Lex. Never mind that Lukas and I more than bridged that gap.

Careful not to call me anything at all, Katja closes the door behind her.

Alone for a few ticks, I kneel on the floor next to my bed. I slide my hand under it until I reach a loose floorboard. Lifting the splintery pine up, I walk my fingers into the crevice below, until I feel my treasure: Elizabet's amulet. Lukas taught me the real name for the pendant—a "flash drive"—but I will always think of it as an amulet, because Elizabet wore it around her neck as such the night she died. She'd put her hopes and dreams into it and by doing so, she had made it magic.

I slip the amulet around my neck. No matter the risk, I want Elizabet with me on my first day as Archon. She's the one who got me into this, after all. Pulling the black tunic over my head, I arrange the neckline to cover my secret. Then I pull on the sealskin pants and cloak. They feel so light and comfortable after all these long *siniks* in gowns. I remember how peculiar the uniform had felt when I first wore it for the Testing. Now I prefer it.

Just this once, I wish I had a mirror to see my reflection. I feel so different than when I set out on this path. I'm certain my face must show it. But after the Testing, I returned the only proper mirror in the Aerie to my father. And it's telling that Father removed it from the mantel in our home and locked it in his private treasury. His precious Relic ultimately won him the Sacred Role of Chief Archon. Though we've never discussed it, Father and I both know it served me well during my own Testing, and that we both owe a debt of gratitude to Lukas. Mirrors are not forbidden in the Boundary lands. Lukas insisted I take it, knowing it could

be a tool as well as a Testament to Vanity. Father agreed, in violation of everything we believe.

I take a deep breath at the top of the stairs. My parents will be waiting at the bottom, eager to send me off with blessings for my first day of training at the Hall of Archons. Striding down the steps with a confidence I don't really feel, I'm surprised when I reach the last step and find that Jasper is waiting too.

"Your Betrothed wanted to say his farewells," my mother announces on Jasper's behalf, as if he concocted this meeting. Of course she arranged this; any chance she gets to tether me to my role as Betrothed instead of Archon, she takes.

I glance over at Jasper, so handsomely Gallant and Nordic blond. He gives me a small, knowing smile—he understands my mother almost as well as I do—and takes my hand in his. Now that we are Betrothed, we are permitted to touch.

"I'm glad that you came," I say. Truly, I am. It's a relief to be with someone who understands something of the truth. Not about my mission to find Eamon's killer, but he alone knows the circumstances of our Betrothal—forged under the shining light of the Ring-Guards' threats instead of in an impassioned moment on the turret, as we told our parents. And our parents believed us, or pretended to anyway. It was relief or delight or both. And we felt it, too. After that, Jasper and I embarked on a whirlwind of Feasts and Basilika services, culminating in the lavish Betrothal ceremony. The actual Union festivities may feel anticlimactic.

I squeeze his hand. Jasper also understands that no matter how hard I fought for the Archon Laurels in the Testing in Eamon's name, I have mixed feelings about this day. He believes my discomfiture stems from grief. Like everyone else, he thinks I mourn the brother who died tragically and

accidentally. Nobody suspects foul play. And I do mourn. But even Jasper knows nothing about the fear I feel as the so-called Angakkuq.

During my secret trip to the Boundary lands, I met Lukas's grandmother, who may or not be crazy—an old crone who has never known the inside of the Aerie. She claimed that I was the Angakkuq, a shaman mediator between the Earth and the spirit world. She spoke in grave tones about how the Boundary has been waiting for me—the seeker of the truth—for over a generation.

Normally, I don't disagree with elders. The Lex is very clear on respect. Yet while I accept the duty to unearth the truth and change things if I must, I cannot accept her words. If the Aerie's religious beliefs are false—as I'm starting to wonder—then doesn't that mean the Boundary's beliefs could be false too? But far more terrifying is that my belief or skepticism may not matter. If the Boundary people have faith that I am the *Angakkuq*, I might not be able to convince them otherwise. I feel their expectations on my shoulders as much as my own.

"May the Gods travel with you," Jasper says.

At first, I'm surprised by his words; they constitute the ritual blessing for those few permitted to journey beyond the Ring. I'm only heading to the Hall of Archons. I realize, however, that his words are fitting. This is the start of a pilgrimage, and it may well indeed take me beyond the Ring.

"May the Gods travel with you also," I answer.

His own journey begins today too. He will commence training for the Forge, the competition for the position of Lexor. If he wins, he'll join one of the other three ruling groups in the Triad, the one charged with enforcing the Lex. We'll be quite a pair in our Union, a powerful first for the Aerie. The eyes of the New North are on us both.

We stand together for a long tick.

My father clears his throat. When we don't move apart, he says, "Eva, we must go. Your fellow Archons will be awaiting you. And me."

My mother chimes in, "Your brother would not have been late on his first day as Archon."

She certainly knows how to reach me. At the mention of Eamon, I try to release Jasper's hand, but his fingers are still wrapped around mine. He doesn't want to let go. "Be careful, Eva," he whispers.

I smile at him in reassurance. "You'll probably see me later this week," I whisper back. There are no guarantees, however. I could spend months training in the Hall of Archons by day and dining at home by night, or I could be sent on a Frozen Shore dig by the midday bell.

"Eva," my father says again. This time, his voice brooks no delay.

Jasper releases me. My father and I move toward the door. I glance back, and the unprecedented nature of this moment hits me. This is the first time in Aerie history that a Maiden leaves her Gallant at home as she heads off to her calling.

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### III. Junius 24—Year 242, A.H.

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My father and I step out of our home and into the bustling Aerie. Even though the Prime Bell has not yet started to ring, the streets are crowded. Boundary stewards from the Grain Keep rush past us, delivering steaming loaves of bread to Triad homes. Maidens and Ladies line up outside the Basilika for a special service on their sacred role in New North. But there is one new constant among all the people—Aerie and Boundary—when they see us, they pause and bow. A

sighting of the Chief Archon and his daughter, Eva, will provide the people with excellent gossip for their evening meals. The first female Archon in history, on her very first day of Archon service!

I feel a new pride in spite of my misgivings. I mean, I've always felt proud walking by my father's side or standing alongside him during ceremonies. But this is different. The respect is no longer for him alone. But that feels wrong, too. This should be Eamon's moment. No matter how hard I worked to win the Laurels in his memory, Eamon will never have a chance to live his dreams, whatever they might have been. He was cheated out of his life. How dare I try to fulfill his destiny for him?

I push away my dark thoughts and work hard to match my father's stride through the warren of narrow streets. Our sealskin coats trail behind us like ravens' wings, and we are moving so fast I almost feel like we are flying. Almost like I felt coursing over the snow on my sled during the Testing. Maidens must always move with careful grace—let no inelégance overtake your movements, instead keep the slow passage of Her Sun ever in your mind—so this is all new to me. But now I'm an Archon. It is liberating in ways I hadn't expected. And that is valuable knowledge if I am to find my brother's killer.

My father doesn't mention it, but I know my long moment with Jasper is the reason we must hurry. The Lex requires that we pass through the front doors of the Hall of Archons before the Prime Bell sounds its final, sixth chime. Otherwise, the Archon-Guards will lock it for the day, even though my father is the Chief. It would not only embarrass me, but it would bring shame on my father as well.

I imagine there are those Aerie who would like to see that happen, my own mother among them.

Just as I spy the ice-spires of the Hall of Archons over the top of the Raiments Keep, the first bell of Prime sounds. My father grabs my hand. Panic must show on my face, because he smiles. “We can’t have you late on your first day, can we?”

I shake my head. “We won’t be late.”

Hand in hand, we sprint down the final street before we reach the small plaza in front of the Hall of Archons. The usually stone-faced Archon-Guards look shocked to see their stoic leader breathless and ruddy. I empathize. This day is indeed unlike any other. The sacrifices that have been made—chief among them, Eamon’s life—so that I can enter this sacred place where only Archons are allowed. . . . As the Ring-Guards heave open the thick metal doors, I recompose myself.

It is dark, save for the torchlight. No cheery welcome awaits us, only a fearsome line of black-uniformed Archons, gazing stone-faced at me from the back of the Hall. The doors screech and clang shut behind us.

Many of these men are very familiar. I’ve Feasted with them, prayed to the Gods alongside them, played with their children—but their expressions bear no hint of recognition or Gallantry. I glance over at my father. No evidence of his kindly reassurance remains, either. The hand that helped me along a few ticks ago has passed me off to his underlings. I am no longer Eva—daughter, Maiden, fellow Founding family member, and Schoolmate. I am simply the newest Archon.

During the long days before the Testing and the even longer *siniks* of the Testing itself, I had envisioned so much about the glory of becoming an Archon. But I didn’t envision the reality. I never foresaw this moment. I wonder if the Testing is such an ordeal to mask what is truly terrifying: Archon service itself.



I try to mimic those cold faces on mine and square my shoulders. I nod when one of the more senior Archons directs me to far side of the line. As I march past the dark, watchful eyes of the other Gallants, I remind myself that I won the Laurels without any help. I deserve to be here too. I must be strong. If I allow even a tiny chink in my armor, the others might glimpse my true purpose. I am the youngest and the shortest, without question. I silently repeat to myself: *You are an Archon, here to do your sacred duty. Nothing more, nothing less.*

My father starts a prayer, and we join our voices with his. “Oh Father and Mother, who art in the Heavens, Hallowed be thy names. Thy Kingdom has come, thy wills have been done . . .” The prayer reminds us that the Aerie is the fulfillment of the Gods’ prophecy, that we of the New North are Their wishes, realized.

My eyes drift as my lips chant the words I’ve spoken so many times. The symbol of the Triad cover the walls and ceiling of the Hall. A few windows dot the thick ice-walls, lined with shelves, arrayed with Relics from past Testings.

My gaze comes to rest on a curious group of bowls, boxes with small handles in many colors, and metal cans. There are delicate bags imprinted with nonsensical word pairings—Happy Meal and Quarter Pounder—and a tall pitcher-like item emblazoned with a double golden arch. Squinting, I notice that the image of the arch is on all the artifacts, as well as the word McDonald’s. What or who is a McDonald’s? What are these things? What was their purpose in the pre-Healing world, not the purpose assigned to them by their respective Chronicles? I’m fairly certain my father would tell me that McDonald’s is some sort of evil vassal of Apple, but Lukas taught me to not believe such stories anymore.

Elizabeth Laine would know.

Are these the sorts of artifacts Lukas wants me to investigate? I've never heard of a McDonald's mentioned in the Chronicles of past Testors that I know—and I know most of them—but then the Archons often undertake excavations about which the people of New North hear nothing.

I hear my name. Reluctantly, I shift my gaze from the Relics to my father.

“The Lex mandates that each Neophyte Archon be assigned a Mentor Archon. Thanks to the Gods, these Elders train the newly-Laureled members of the Triad. This selection is undertaken with great care by the senior Archons. The Neophyte-Mentor relationship is the first key to the Neophyte's understanding of the Gods' will. For our newest Archon Eva, we have chosen Archon Laurence as Mentor.”

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#### IV. Junius 24—Year 242, A.H.

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Archon Laurence?

At first I think there's been a mistake. Laurence is the second-in-charge under my father, far too busy to serve as Mentor. Usually a seasoned but relatively junior Archon would be chosen.

My heart thumps. What should I think of this? Maybe I should view the selection of such a senior Archon as a compliment, but right now I'm worried that the other Archons will see it as favoritism. Or maybe I should see it as my father protecting me, as a female in a male's world? Then there's the common knowledge that Archon Laurence is vying hard for the Chief position when my father steps down from his ten-year term. He can't be thrilled about this appointment,

either. Not only am I the first Maiden Archon, I'm possible competition: the Chief is selected solely on the strength of his or her Chronicle, not his years of service.

Before I realize it, my father has finished his speech, and the Archons disperse.

No one tells me where to go. Only my father and Laurence remain, engaged in deep conversation. Could their exchange be about the Mentor appointment? For an endless tick, I'm standing in my queue spot in the Hall, awkwardly awaiting their command.

"Archon Eva," my father calls to me.

Marching over to his side, I answer, "Yes, Chief." Calling him "Chief" feels artificial, like we are playing a Schoolchild game. But it must be done.

"You know Archon Laurence, of course." My father gestures to him.

Out of long habit, I start to curtsy. Stopping myself, I bow to my senior like any other Archon, and wait for Archon Laurence to speak.

He doesn't. He merely lowers his grey eyes and silvery-blond head, not a bow in return—and so it is an insult. Such deviance from polite rituals of greeting, whether directed at Archon or Maiden, is tantamount to a challenge.

"I'm certain that Archon Laurence will serve as a dutiful Mentor to you, Archon Eva," my father says loudly, his tone flat. He fixes his unblinking eyes on my Mentor. "The Lex is pane-clear on the issue of obedience. Triad members must obey the authority of their leaders, above all else. Isn't that right, Archon Laurence?"

Archon Laurence waits a long tick before answering. "The Lex is indeed pane-clear on that, Chief."

My father's eyes smolder at him in a way that only I can see, in the same way they smolder when I've misbehaved at

home. “And as an obedient member of the Triad, you will comply with the Lex in the matter of Archon Eva, correct?” he asks. It is a command. There can be no other answer but yes.

“Of course, my Chief.” Archon Laurence then bows deeply, hiding his steely eyes. I’m certain they would not display any meaning beyond submission.

I think of words my father whispered when I first returned from the Testing in triumph, after we’d shared the first and only embrace in the privacy of our home. “*I am Lex-bound not to tell you about your duties as Archon. But as part of the Triad, I can tell you this: keep your enemies close.*”

For a split-tick, I wonder whether Archon Laurence is the killer that I’ve been seeking. But he’s too self-protective—and too self-serving—to take such risks . . . even if he viewed Eamon as a threat, which I’m guessing he did.

“You and Archon Eva may be dismissed to begin her instruction,” my father concludes. He whirls and strides toward the doors.

Archon Laurence and I bow to him. Again, the ritual salute feels strange and inauthentic—this is my father. But I cannot let that show. I turn and follow Archon Laurence to the shadowy vestibule at the end of the Hall.

When he abruptly stops, I do as well.

Another Archon stands nearby in the darkness, a stooped Elder. At first, I don’t recognize him, especially after the relative brightness of the Hall. But after my eyes adjust, I see that it’s Archon Theo. I know him from Feast Days in our family homes and various Town Square gatherings. He won his Testing year nearly forty years ago, making him the oldest Archon still serving.

Why is he here?

Archon Laurence finally deigns to speak to me. “Archon

Eva, I will see you in two weeks, at which time we will leave for an excavation on the Frozen Shores. Until then, Archon Theo will instruct you.”

I detect a sneer, one that he surely wants me to see. Before I can ask any questions, he slips off into one of the many hallways that extend from this spot like a squid. So this is how Archon Laurence follows explicit orders from the Chief Archon, from the words of the Lex itself: he’s palming off his mentoring responsibilities to the very oldest Archon.

My father would be furious.

Should I tell him? If I do, there is no doubt he will inflict that fury on Archon Laurence. As my fists clench at my side, I come to a realization: this is another test.

Archon Laurence wants to prove that I’m just another Maiden who will run weeping to her family. Archon Laurence wants me to tell my father.

In that case, I’ll answer his defiance through defiance of my own. I won’t utter a word. My father will find out soon enough. The fury Archon Laurence is expecting wouldn’t be about the mistreatment of the Chief Archon’s daughter, anyway—though everyone in the Aerie would see it that way and consider it another example of favoritism. No, when my father discovers on his own how Archon Laurence abdicated his Mentor responsibility, my father will foresee that same reaction from the Aerie. He will know why I kept quiet. So I am also certain that he will remain quiet, too, so as not to give Archon Laurence the satisfaction of even a minor victory.

Besides, I can’t draw any more attention to myself if I’m to do my true work. In a way, I am grateful to Archon Laurence. His petty test served a valuable purpose. I can no longer name my true work—even to myself—if I am to

succeed. Quiet is what I shall become. A quiet little mouse scurrying in and out of all the Archons' secret places.

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V. Junius 24—Year 242, A.H.

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“You can’t be happy about this re-assignment of your education, Archon Eva,” Archon Theo says as he leads me away. “I know how feeble I must appear.”

Is he baiting me? I think about how Eamon would respond.

“I follow the authority and commands of my superiors,” I reply. “It is a blessing to learn from an Elder. Happy doesn’t factor into my thoughts, Archon Theo.” I’m thankful that I’m walking behind the wizened old man; it allows me to keep my eyes hidden while I utter a complete untruth.

“The perfect response. Very nice, Archon Eva. Such stoicism and obedience will serve you well in this Hall.” He turns around abruptly. His rheumy eyes look me up and down. “Just like they did your father.”

Turning back around, he signals me to follow him down a sharp turn off the corridor. He moves surprisingly quickly for a man of his years. “The Lex does not permit diagrams of the Hall of Archons,” he continues. “We must protect our Relics and our study of them by every means. You must rely on instinct and memory to guide you through this sacred labyrinth.” He chuckles to himself. “But I’m guessing that if you won the Laurels, you’ve got a pretty well-developed sense of direction.”

“Yes, Archon Theo.”

“Good. You’ll need it. You will have much to learn in a short time, and you can’t waste a tick by getting lost. Understood?”

“Understood, Archon Theo.”

As he leads me down the passageway of ice, he points out a bright room, full of long tables strewn with objects: the Conservation Chamber. Two unfamiliar Archons hover over the strange artifacts, examining them with a tool I've never seen before. It is black and c-shaped with a tube at the top. The Archons slide the artifacts under the tube and then peer down the other end. It looks like a Relic itself, as if it should be studied rather than doing the studying. But Archon Theo's pace is fast, and I don't have the chance to linger and watch.

The moment I commit the location of that chamber to memory, Archon Theo points out another, than another. We twist and turn down endless hallways, passing the Receiving Chamber, the Chamber of Equipment, the Examination Chamber, the Chamber of Records, the Map Chamber, on and on . . . all places I've heard my father mention in passing over the years, all places he's Lex-bound not to describe, so that I had no clear sense of them. I am overwhelmed, but I feel a tingle of excitement. His world is becoming mine.

The connecting corridors are cut with at least one arched hole in the walls, like ice-windows without the panes. Each opens onto an interior courtyard. Their placement helps me organize the layout in my mind. As we turn again, there's a roar from one of the archways, and I strain for a glimpse inside the space.

Archon Theo pauses as well. "That's the Yard. It's used is for the teaching of advanced ice climbing and excavation techniques. You will have the chance to train there later this afternoon, after the Sixth Bell."

I nod, and he hurries on toward a stairwell, the only one I've encountered so far. Two Archon-Guards—carrying bows, arrows, and knives—stand at its base. No other place in the Hall or its corridors is similarly protected.

Archon Theo stops. Gesturing with a grand wave, he says, “The Offices of the Chief and the Vault of Archons are located up there.”

My face is blank, but I’m suspicious. Why are we making a special stop here?

“Most Archons—especially our most junior—have no need to mount these stairs. The Offices of the Chief are no place for them. But you must remember this spot, as you will be making use of the Vault.”

Now my heart thumps. This is the exact sort of place Lukas told me to try and locate. But I hadn’t dreamed that I’d find it on my first day, or that I’d be granted access to it. Trying not to sound particularly interested, I ask, “What sort of work would you like me to perform in the Vault?”

He smiles a little. “Ah, I hear the disappointment in your voice, Archon Eva. You’d rather train in the Yard than spend your ticks poring over dusty archives?”

“No, Archon Theo. I didn’t mean—”

“You don’t have to apologize,” he interrupts. “I know the Yard is where most young Archons want to be.”

I can’t help but think of Eamon’s long bells in the Library, researching past Testings for his own preparations. Of all the wealth of information it yielded him—and me. “I thought the records of past excavations were kept in the Library,” I manage.

“Some Testing documents are indeed collected there. Other Testing records are kept in the Vault, as well the Archons’ private excavations.”

“Of course.” I fall silent, fighting to betray no excitement.

He pauses. “Aren’t your curious what you’ll be doing up there in the Vault?”

I try to smile but I’m almost too frightened. “Yes, Archon Theo.”



“The Site to which you’ll be traveling with Archon Laurence has been excavated once before,” he goes on, not noticing how I’m squirming inside. “Many years ago. But then the ice shifted, and for the safety of the Archons, the Site was closed. Only now have the Gods opened the crevasse again. So you will be researching that earlier excavation. I might as well warn you that it will likely be dull. But we must make certain that we don’t retread the ground of those earlier Archons. Or miss any areas that they deemed promising.”

“I’m honored to be doing such important work, Archon Theo.”

“When you’re coughing on the dust of the past, you won’t feel so honored,” he says with a gruff laugh.

I wonder why he’s trying to make me feel badly about this assignment. Is this his subtle way of telling me what he really thinks about a Maiden as Archon? Or is some other message at work? Is he trying to tell me that he’s on my side, and what he really thinks of Archon Laurence? It doesn’t matter. All that matters is that I’m going to be granted access to the Vault.

“When was the Site last excavated? The one to which I’ll be traveling?” I ask in a controlled voice.

“In Year 102, after the Healing,” he says as he leads me up the stairs.

Interesting, I know that Testing year. It was the year that one of only two other females besides me Tested. It was the year of Madeline.

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## VI. Junius 24—Year 242, A.H.

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I excuse myself before the Attendants serve the final course of sweets, which I used to adore. I haven’t craved sweets since the Testing; like so much else in my life, their taste

rings false. Even though my parents and Jasper offer their understanding when I say I am exhausted, I know they are disappointed. They hunger for details about my first day as Archon, what little I can reveal that's not forbidden by the Lex. But I can't stand another tick of the contrivance. It's exhausting.

My parents stand by the arched doorway to the dining hall as Jasper and I part, chaperoning as always. We are not to be alone until our Union.

"I'm just happy that you'll be in the Aerie for at least two more weeks," he whispers as he bows and kisses my outstretched hand.

"Me too," I whisper back.

"Our Union cannot happen soon enough."

He looks into my eyes. I see such longing in them that I blush, and he releases my hand. As the Attendant heaves open the weighty wooden door, Jasper turns back and waves. I raise the palm of my hand in farewell. A mixture of sadness and guilt rises within me. I lower my eyes.

The stairs feel as though they've multiplied since this morning. The Basilika services seem so long ago. As I drag my feet up step by step, I tell myself that I'm just tired from the early rising and the newness of everything I've experienced. Today truly was a day unlike any other I've ever had. It isn't the heaviness of my real burden weighing me down. I can handle it. Just like Lukas wants.

The tick I reach the last step, I overhear my father mutter, "It was hard, Margret. Seeing her in the Hall."

"I'm sure it was, Jon. To see your Maidenly daughter among all those male faces." My mother's soothing voice is a Lady-whisper. I can almost picture her leaning across the wide Feasting table to touch my father's hand in a gentle show of reassurance and solidarity. Her defining feature is

her fierce loyalty to our family—or rather, her vision of what our family should be. But it is born of genuine love for my father. That is her saving grace.

“That’s not the reason, Margret.”

“No?”

“No.” The word quavers. “I kept looking at Eva’s face and seeing Eamon there instead. I know he’s gone, but I’ve imagined his face in the Hall for so many years, it—”

His voice breaks off, and I freeze. He’s crying. I’ve only ever heard my father cry once before. The day the Ring-Guards brought my brother’s body home.

Katja sees me frozen on the top stair. She rushes over to my side. “Come—” She pauses, still unsure what to call me. “Eva, you are exhausted. Let me draw a bath for you.”

“No, Katja. I’ll be fine.” I wave her off and hurry into my bedroom alone. Shutting the door behind me, I slide down to sit my haunches. And I sob in silence.

I’m not the only one playacting. My father—seemingly the essence of pride and support today—suffers, too. The loss of Eamon haunts us all.

I try to calm myself. I must put aside my own worries about straddling two worlds, and about past, present, and future. Maiden and Testor. Betrothed and Archon. Aerie leader and . . . whatever I am to become. The role-shifting must become instinctive and hidden. If I am to uncover the truth of Eamon’s death and the truth about New North—two knots I know are tangled—I must compartmentalize. Silence, even within my own head, is best for the quiet little mouse.

But the sobbing will not stop. I try to stifle the emotion—I don’t want my poor parents to hear me—but I can’t breathe unless I let it out. All the grief that I’ve kept trapped inside me since Eamon died bursts forth in convulsive gasps. For

months now, I've stuffed my sorrow into the darkest reaches of my spirit—thinking only of winning the Archon Laurels in his name. Avenging his death has kept me from acknowledging that the victory was empty. It will never bring my dead brother back to life.

Before I even realize it, I am on my knees. Not in front of the diptych where I used to pray to the Gods, but in the middle of my bedroom. I'm not sure to whom I'm praying anymore—what Gods exist, if any. But I must try. "Whatever you are, whoever you are, please help me," I whisper.

The praying just make me cry harder. The enormity and futility of my tasks overwhelm me, and my chest heaves. Why did I ever think I could do this? I sink into the floor and allow my head to rest upon my knees. I am a cocoon of sadness.

I feel a hand on my shoulder. Blood rushes to my face. No matter how hard I tried to keep quiet, Katja heard my sobs. Or worse, my parents.

I look up to see near-black eyes staring into mine. It's Lukas.

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## VII. Junius 24—Year 242, A.H.

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For a long tick, I am paralyzed. He would be put to death if discovered here. But somehow that is the farthest thought from my mind.

In his eyes, I see that he understands; he's straddling two worlds, too. His entire Aerie life is an act for the people who believe that Tech is evil and Apple a False God. He can only be himself in the Boundary, where the people know Tech is only as evil as the hand that wields it and that Apple is only a symbol of something long forgotten. Lukas has

been wrestling with self-imposed silence his whole life. All at once, I am ashamed. Who am I to complain or doubt what I must do?

He wipes a tear from my cheek. The gentle gesture makes me cry harder; he isn't known for his softness. Then he wraps his arms around me, and whatever stones left standing in my interior wall crumble. But the tears stop flowing. For the briefest of ticks, I feel safe.

"I've missed you, Eva," he whispers into the top of my head.

"And I, you." The words almost lodge in my throat. I wonder if we'd make these confessions if we were looking each other in the eye. Our relationship was built more on action than anything we professed to each other.

"I wanted to see you to . . . to make sure you were okay," he stammers. "I know this is hard."

"Being an Archon?" I ask, my head still buried in his shoulder, my eyes closed.

"That, and all that is being asked of you. As *Angakkuq*."

I laugh a little. In the midst of all this grief and helplessness, the thought of me as some sort of shaman leader strikes me as so absurd to be funny. "I'm no *Angakkuq*," I breathe.

"Yes, you are." His words are firm, humorless.

I pull back a little, but we are still seated, sort of tangled in one another. I try to meet those black eyes. "No, Lukas. I'm just a Maiden searching for answers—about my brother and about New North. An ill-equipped Maiden, at that."

"The answers you seek are the exact answers the *Angakkuq* has been foretold to seek. You . . ." He finally returns my gaze. His jaw is tight. "Eva the Maiden and Eva the *Angakkuq* are one and the same."

"No, they're not. Or maybe they are. Anyway, what does

it matter if we're both searching for the same things? Now that I'm an Archon—an insider like you wanted—I can find out the information we need. Whether I'm an Archon or Maiden or *Angakkuq* . . . in the end they're just words." I shrug. "Like Apple," I add for good measure.

"Words?"

Although he's not yelling, I can hear the anger in Lukas' voice. I pull even farther back from him. "Yes." I stay resolute.

"Words matter, Eva. Words built the Aerie. Much has been sacrificed so that you can lead New North to the truth."

I blink several times. "Sacrifice? What do you mean by sacrifice?"

His voice sees my reaction and softens. "Sacrifice . . . okay, that's too *strong* a word. What I meant to say is that we've all been suffering in our ignorance for too long. And you alone—in all of New North's history—have the chance to change that."

"Please, Lukas," I implore, shaking my head. "I just want to find out my brother's killer and have him punished. If that means I have to learn some unpleasant truths about New North in the process—truths that got him killed—then so be it."

His eyes grow darker, sadder. "I wish you could understand how important you are, Eva."

I see myself reflected in his inky eyes, and I realize something. No matter how close I feel to Jasper, the only one who really knows me is Lukas. How can I have real feelings for a Gallant who only knows the public me? Even if his heart is pure? He knows I grieve, yes. But beyond that, he knows the construct I fashion—whether it's Maiden or Archon—whenever I face the world. Only with Lukas am I free not to wear any costume or mask, to assume any role. I act the same way with him that I acted with Eamon.

Although I feel very differently about Lukas than I felt about my brother.

Lukas runs his fingers along my cheek. Now that it's dry of tears, I feel the roughness of his skin. I hold his hand in my own and stare at it, if only to avoid that same piercing gaze I'd just sought. His hand is dry and heavily scarred. But very, very warm. I clasp it tightly.

"When will I see you next?" I ask.

"I'll come to you when I can."

"From the Boundary?"

"I'm sure a new placement will come in soon." He lifts my chin, forcing me to look eyes. He looks so old, so tired. I realize that I have no idea how old Lukas is. I always assumed that he was same age as me because he was Eamon's Companion. Even though he knows me better than anyone else, there's so much about him that I *don't* know. That I never asked.

"I'll try to wait."

"You must. You don't realize how many eyes are upon you. We must keep you safe."

He releases my hand, and without glancing back, climbs out the window and into the night.





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# Stone Cove Island

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Suzanne Myers

February 2015

WHEN A catastrophic hurricane devastates Stone Cove Island, a quaint New England resort community, the locals pull together to rebuild. Seventeen-year-old Eliza, one of the island's most idealistic residents, leads the recovery effort—and stumbles upon a secret in the wreckage: an anonymous confession to the thirty-year-old unsolved murder of a local teen. It was national news in the mid-1980s; it ripped the community apart; many of the rifts are so longstanding that they're an unspoken part of Stone Cove Island life. Eliza's discovery not only opens these old wounds, it uncovers a horrifying and longstanding conspiracy among the community's leaders, and may even implicate her parents.

SUZANNE MYERS was born in Philadelphia and grew up in Toronto, Canada. She is a graduate of Princeton University and USC Film School. Her feature film *Alchemy* won the SXSW film festival. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband, two sons and two dogs. *Stone Cove Island* is her first novel.

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## Prologue: What Happened to Bess

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*IT WAS my fault that she was murdered. The night Bess died, she left the bar at the marina late. She would have had a couple of drinks, not enough to get drunk. She would have danced, maybe with Jimmy, maybe with Nate, maybe with an older guy we didn't know. She would have walked home alone. Unless I was sleeping over, she always went home alone. She was mad at me that night. I knew that, but I couldn't help it. I couldn't go out.*

*I got into bed early but couldn't sleep. My skin was itching and my ears were ringing. I was probably still awake while it was happening. Bess always told me to snap out of it, that it was just one of my moods and I needed to get hold of myself. But when I looked in the mirror, I saw black hollows that should have been my eyes. My skin was puffed and pale. I was so ugly. I couldn't stand the idea of people looking at me. I needed to be alone, where no one could see me. So I couldn't go to The Slip with Bess.*

*The Slip was our diviest bar, and not the atmospheric kind of divey. There were wobbly plastic deck chairs, sticky folding poker tables. The finish on the floor had worn off, replaced with a varnish of years of soaked-in beer. Someone had strung some thick, knotted rope around the walls in a lazy nod to the nautical theme. It was gross, but they didn't card there. In town, the bars had to protect themselves. They had the summer tourist business to worry about. It was way too risky getting busted for letting kids in. But tourists would never make it out to The Slip, so no one ever paid attention.*

*Sometime after midnight, Bess would have left.*

*I went over and over it in my head, realizing I'd never know the real story. It wasn't far to the bungalow she shared with her mom, halfway between the marina and East Beach. She might have had that lame Phil Collins song stuck in her head. We hated that song so much. We used to sing it to each other as a joke, howling into hairbrush handles and making gooney faces like we were in some lame romantic comedy, then collapsing in hysterics on Bess's bed.*

*Or maybe—and I preferred this version—she had been singing that Sinéad O'Connor song she loved. Bess had a nice voice. The song was everywhere that summer. "All the flowers that you planted, mama./In the backyard/All died when you went away." Bess loved the way that "mama" was wedged into the line like an upbeat afterthought. She thought it sounded like a bubble popping. She was good like that at describing things. After she pointed that out, I could never hear the song any other way.*

*Bess had been too good a swimmer to drown. I don't mean too good a swimmer to get caught in a riptide; too good a swimmer to go swimming alone on a moonless night in the remorseless Atlantic Ocean. She was smart and she was sensible, the kind of girl you could count on. Her clothes were found in the lighthouse, covered in blood. Her killer had cut off all her hair. Some people said a huge anchor had been painted across the front door of their house. Others said that was only a rumor. I wouldn't know; I didn't go to her house again after that night. Her body was never found.*

*Her mother, Karen, refused to talk about Bess afterward. She got rid of all her stuff. I wanted to keep something to remember her, but Karen said no. Maybe she knew what I knew.*

*Bess had been scared before she died. She had shown me—just me, she swore—the letter.*

*I only read it once. I didn't copy any of it down. But I can still remember every word. "Uninvited guest," it began and then later, "down came a blackbird and pecked off her nose." The more*

*I tried to push that line from my mind, the more fiercely it returned, and with it her face. I hoped he had not done anything to her face.*

*I should have gone with Bess to The Slip that night. I should have told someone about the letter. But I never did.*

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## Chapter One

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Of course we knew that Hurricane Victor was going to be a big storm. But there hadn't been a storm like this in anyone's living memory, so we weren't prepared for the damage it would do.

I live on a small island a few miles off Cape Ann, an hour or two north of Boston. Our closest mainland towns are Rockport and Pigeon Cove. When you grow up on an unprotected island facing Atlantic storms, you're supposed to know what to do when things get serious. But we'd had so many false alarms, so many calls to evacuate to the mainland, only to return to find no damage or, much worse, that thieves had taken advantage of a day they knew they could work pretty much undisturbed. No one on Stone Cove Island evacuated for a storm warning anymore.

The morning after, I opened the front door to find a fifty-foot oak tree lying across our porch. I squeezed through the narrow gap the tree allowed and stood outside. Its trunk came up to my waist. The island was silent, as though all the sound had been sucked away by the force of the hurricane as it ripped through. There were no birds chirping, no insects. I couldn't even hear the waves, though I could imagine how wild the ocean must be.

I *could* hear my mom, banging pots and dishes inside as she worked herself into a panic, trying to figure out how to make breakfast in a kitchen with no power or water. She was

the oatmeal and eggs type, not the cold cereal type, and definitely not the roll-with-the-changes type. Dad was asleep. He'd been up all night, moving furniture up to the second floor as the water rose, trying to make extra sandbags out of freezer bags and flour, taping and re-taping the windows as the wind sucked the glass in and out.

Who knew glass could bend like that? The porch light lit the pea soup green night and the trees screamed as they blew sideways. No wonder the big oak had come down. It was amazing more trees hadn't. I didn't think I'd be able to sleep, but I'd finally nodded off on the floor in my room, well away from any outside wall. My bed and the rug in my room were soaked. The rain had poured under the closed bottom window forming a waterfall, as if someone was holding a hose to the glass. I was scared, but I knew my dad was busy doing all he could to keep the house together, and my mom would make me more freaked out, not less. So I just lay there, waiting for it to be over. I tried pretending it was tomorrow already, and that all this was behind me.

"Eliza?" I could hear my mom calling me from the kitchen.

"I'm out front, Mom. Just checking things out." I didn't mention the oak. My dad's best at handling bad news with her. "I'm going to walk into town and see how everyone is. Maybe they have power. Do you want me to get coffee or anything if they have it? Or more bottled water?" She was a worrier, so bottled water was one thing I was pretty sure we had plenty of.

"Eliza, no. I don't want you going out there alone," she called back. The clattering in the kitchen was getting more frantic.

"It's fine, Mom. The storm's over."

"What if a branch falls? It's not safe for you to be out there. Nate?"

I heard my father's exhausted voice from the next room. "Let her go. She's fine. Eliza, walk down the middle of the streets, stay out of the park and don't go near the water. Get extra batteries from Harney's if he's not sold out." Then he rolled over and went back to sleep, or so I guessed. It was a familiar pattern: Mom, looking for a reason to freak; Dad, reeling her back in. I hadn't figured out his magic formula. Usually my attempts to calm her down only made things worse.

I turned my attention back to the oak and to how I was going to get off the porch. The trunk was wide and blocked my view of everything beyond it. I was dreading what I would find on the other side, but putting it off would just let my imagination run wild. It was better to face it, however bad things might be, and figure out what to do next.

I threaded my way to the edge of the porch, grabbed a sturdy branch, climbed out, and dropped to the ground. It wasn't that difficult, but coming and going would not work with groceries. The bay window off the kitchen would have to become our temporary entrance, unless Dad wanted to get into it with the back door. Its seized-up lock hadn't worked since I had been in fourth grade. I looked out at the formerly cozy little street, and felt like Dorothy landing in Oz.

Summer is our big season. Growing up on the island, you get used to the time before Fourth of July and the time after. It's like living on two different planets. In the off-season, you can ride your bike across the whole island until your fingers are frozen to the handlebars and not see another person. There is only one school with about fifty kids in each class. We all go there, our parents went there, and mostly their parents did too. The ferry runs once a day

and when the harbor is iced over, there are lots of weeks it doesn't run at all.

In the summer, crowds stream off the ferries hourly. They juggle beach chairs, umbrellas, Radio Flyer wagons packed with groceries for their summer rentals. The inn is full. People pack Water Street, the main drag that curves along the harbor, wearing bathing suits under their T-shirts and sundresses, licking their dripping ice creams cones. By the way, don't let anyone talk you into working in an ice cream parlor as a summer job. It sounds fun, but it's actually grueling, Charlie-horse inducing work. I always go for day camp counselor: sailing, capture the flag, and campfire songs.

You would think summer would be our total focus, that we would be holed up like hibernating bears waiting for beach weather, but it's not like that at all. You get used to the silence and sense of belonging that we few residents have. It's like throwing a party. You're excited before, decorating and getting things ready. It's fun while the party lasts, but after a while you just want the guests to go home so you can put on your pajamas and sit around the kitchen, rehashing highlights.

That morning, Stone Cove Island didn't look like any version of itself I'd ever seen before, summer or winter. Our street was smothered with downed trees and broken branches. It would be a while before any cars could make it through. My dad had said to stick to the middle of the roads, but I had to zigzag around or climb over whatever blocked my way. I couldn't choose the path. I turned down the hill toward Water Street, my breath catching in my throat. It felt like watching a movie about someone else's ruined life. Houses were missing roofs, walls were caved in. In some cases, only the rubble of the brick foundation was left. Furniture, clothes, and belongings were scattered everywhere.



Those personal things tugged at me the most: the stuffed tiger which no doubt some toddler was unable to sleep without; the royal blue leather family photo album, assembled over decades and destroyed in one night. I pulled my sleeves down over my hands and folded my arms across my stomach. It was cold, and I felt the chill in the small of my back. I wished I had not come down to face this alone.

When I reached the harbor, normally the busiest section of town, I kept my eyes on the water. The beach had ugly, deep gashes in it, like a monster had bitten away hunks of flesh and left bleeding mud behind. I tried to put it back together in my mind to the way it was supposed to look, but I couldn't. I felt tears well in my eyes and sting. I felt the destruction, as though I was the one who had been hurt.

Where the ferry comes in—or used to come in—the docks were all but gone. The few weekend people who hadn't made it over in time to prepare for the storm were rewarded by having their sailboats either washed up and overturned on the village green, a hundred yards from the water. Either that or shattered into kindling-sized strips and mixed together with the pilings they'd once been secured to.

The village green was now charred a yellow-brown, the grass burned by the salt water that had flooded it. The shops that were on the bay side of Water Street were either gone or ripped open like dollhouses, their sun hats and saltwater taffy boxes floating in murky, possibly electrified standing water. Businesses on the up-island side of the street fared a little better. At least the water had receded.

The whole island seemed to be without power—except for The Picnic Basket, the sandwich and coffee shop on Laurel Lane. Nancy and Greg appeared to have rigged a

generator. I could smell coffee brewing and theirs were the only lights glowing on the main street. So they'd been lucky, too. I felt a rush of quick relief. If The Picnic Basket were dark, I would have panicked. Nancy and Greg were known to be the source of all news, official and unofficial, on the island. They prided themselves on always being first to know. They were also usually first to gossip. The Picnic Basket was probably the nerve center of Hurricane Victor information by now.

I wiped my tears with the sleeve of my sweater just in time to hear my name.

"Eliza? Is that you?"

When I turned, Charlie Pender was standing behind me.

*What is he doing here?* That was my first thought. Charlie had graduated from Stone Cove High last December, a semester early. I had not seen him since. I remembered that he was taking a year off before college to intern at a newspaper in Boston or Providence and wondered if he might be on some kind of assignment. He seemed taller, or maybe it was just because I felt so beaten down. I saw that same feeling reflected in his blue eyes; they were faraway, cloudy. He looked a lot like I did, in fact—dazed, brown curls unbrushed, dark jeans and a sweatshirt, low-top black Converse. That was funny: we had the same shoes on.

But I could feel the space he'd put between himself and the island. It made him seem like a stranger.

Of course, there had always been distance. While he and I were friendly, our families weren't. That is, my mom and Charlie's mom made clear their lack of interest in being friends. His parents owned the Anchor Inn, one of the oldest and definitely the biggest of the hotels. They lived by the success of the island as a summer destination. My mom thought Cat Pender was manipulative, a "climber," she called her, always sucking up

to the richest guests at the inn. I didn't know what Cat thought of Mom, but I could project my own complaints: too nervous, too shrinking, too fragile. My dad and Charlie's dad were neutral at best. As one of the few local contractors, my dad often worked on projects at the inn, but I don't think they'd ever so much as shared a beer.

"This is crazy, huh? Everyone okay at your house?" He sounded wired and a little scared, just like how I felt.

We hugged hello. I was glad for the company, even if he had almost caught me crying.

"Yeah. Big tree came down on the porch. But everyone's fine. This is unbelievable," I said. "How's the Inn?"

"It has some damage. That's a pretty exposed spot up there on the hill. My parents are trying to make the best of it. They don't want their guests to panic."

The inn sat on the bluff, perched above the harbor. It was repainted a perfect, gleaming white every spring. Next door was the famous Anchor Club, known for its grass tennis courts and the croquet tournaments, where members dressed in white, wearing the traditional clothes from the 1920s, when the club was founded. I pictured the howling winds I'd heard the night before, raking through the white clapboard walls, rattling the slate rooftops—as if fighting to tear apart the years of island history. It gave me another chill. Everything about my life on the island had seemed permanent until last night.

"Are you here to do a story? You're working at a newspaper, right?" I asked.

"The *Boston Globe*. I don't get to write much though. A little for the website but it's mostly research and whatever anyone else doesn't want to do. I was coming back this weekend to see my parents anyway, so I thought I'd stay in case it turned out to be big."

We both took in the mangled shore. It was big.

"I feel bad," he said. "I almost feel like I willed it. Looking for a story."

"Weather's not that mystical," I said, mostly to myself. "It's just weather. This just happened. It's not like we asked for it."

"Huh. You haven't changed. That's nice." I felt a weird flutter as he said it. It was uncomfortable, the compliment amid the destruction.

"Yeah, well, I'm still here," I said quickly. "Things don't change that much. You're the one who left for the big city."

"True," he said. He looked at me a minute, like he was going to say something else. "Should we go see what's going on? Nancy and Greg have probably set up a war room down there."

"Or at least they'll have some coffee." I'd been drinking coffee, black, since I was twelve and hanging around my dad's construction sites. My mom didn't know about it until much later. Of course she disapproved. My feet were wet. My nerves felt raw. I realized right then I was actually dying for some coffee.

"That sounds good," he agreed.

We turned and headed back up the street to The Picnic Basket. Slowly people were starting to come out to take in the damage. On the steps of the Congregational church, Mrs. Walker, the minister's wife, was sweeping uselessly at huge fallen roof tiles and wood fragments from the steeple. Lexy Morgan and her father were bailing water out of his candy and souvenir shop. Charlie and I paused at the surreal lake of floating jawbreakers and Atomic Fireballs and offered to help. Mr. Morgan shook his head, too upset and too focused to talk. Mrs. Hilliard, my English teacher, stood in the middle of the street, staring at her car. It had

been flattened under a giant maple tree, and now was an accordion of red metal and spider-webbed glass. She looked confused, as if she'd just awakened, as if she weren't sure what she was looking at was real. I knew the feeling. I couldn't shake it.

Nobody even noticed when we entered The Picnic Basket. The stove was unlit, but Greg was toasting bagels, and there was a hug pot of coffee plugged into the portable generator. Nancy was at her computer, finding out everything she could about the storm. She called out headlines to the dozen or so people huddled around her.

"No prediction of how long to restore ferry! Freak softball-sized hail across the border in New Hampshire! Coast guard expects delays of supplies and building materials to island residents in region! Lady Gaga plans Martha's Vineyard storm victim fundraiser with Diane Sawyer and Carly Simon."

She snickered. A few others grumbled. Stone Cove Island's rivalry with Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket goes back a long way. Locals insist our island has a more low-key, discrete reputation, but a lot of people feel jealous of the glitzier image of the other two. When the president vacations in Nantucket, islanders here make a big point of saying how thankful they are for the peace and quiet of Stone Cove.

"Nancy, what about the power?" called Jim McNeil, the mechanic in town.

"Thursday at the earliest, they're saying."

That was three days from now. I could see everyone mentally calculating their supplies: water, canned food, batteries, extra blankets. So far the weather was warm for October, but at this time of year, it could be below freezing tomorrow. I'd heard my mother worrying about that just last

night, and wondering if we had enough firewood on hand. Greg looked up from his bagel station and nodded at us.

“Charlie, Eliza, you okay? Everybody good at home?”

“We’re fine, Greg. Thanks,” I said.

“Your dad’s about to be busy, I guess. Lots of work to be done.”

“Yeah, I guess it looks that way.”

Charlie handed me a cup of coffee and gestured to the door. I followed him outside.

“That’s about the worst way I can think of to find out what’s really going on. Local news sites and gossip magazines. Let’s go over to the *Gazette* and see if Jay will let us look at their wire service. Even just their Twitter feed would be better info than this.”

Jay Norsworthy was the editor of our local paper, the *Stone Cove Island Gazette*—an island staple. Charlie had interned for Jay at least one summer, and the relief lit up on Jay’s face the second we walked in the door.

It was chaos in a tiny office. Jay was racing between his computer and the AP wire printout. His only company was his black lab Sparkler. At least he had power, too. Amazing: Jay was still struggling to get the paper out on schedule, despite everything that was going on that morning. The *Gazette* had its own generator, and Jay had gotten their Internet connection half-working, but there were no land lines up anywhere on the island. For a dizzying, manic moment, I felt a flash of relief. Maybe things weren’t as bad as they seemed.

“Charlie, I could really use your help with the Wi-Fi. It’s been on and off, creeping like a snail when it does work. Maybe you can work your magic.”

“I can try.” Charlie pulled the latest printout from the wire and handed it to Jay, then passed me his coffee and stooped down to take a look.

“Jay, is your house okay?” I asked. Jay lived in a cottage near the west bluffs; there was worry about erosion even in an ordinary storm.

“Slept here,” he answered, avoiding my eyes. “I knew I’d have to get the paper out early today once I saw what we were in store for last night. I hope it’s still standing. It might be halfway to Rockport by now though.” He laughed, but I didn’t hear any humor in it. Here he was trying to jury-rig his Internet connection to get the town paper out, and he didn’t know if he still had a place to live.

Unconsciously, my gaze went to Charlie. We exchanged a look. The relief faded, leaving a dark hole in its place. This was bad, and we were only going to uncover how bad by degrees. What if people had died?

“Was anyone . . .” I swallowed. “How soon will we know if anyone is missing?” I wasn’t sure how to put this.

Jay’s expression was grim. “No one has been reported missing yet, as far as I’ve heard. But everyone’s still taking stock. We should know more this afternoon. The churches are setting up check-in stations with hot food and drinks. The ones with propane stoves that can *make* hot food, anyway—and there’s an evacuation center at the high school. They said only about fifteen people stayed there last night, but I’ve heard lots more are moving over this morning, the ones that can’t stay in their homes.”

“Do we know how many?” asked Charlie, his eyes slits, his fingers working to re-screw the haphazard wiring in the block of drives and modems.

“Not yet. That’s my next stop.”

“This thing is flaky,” Charlie complained. “Even on a good day.”

“Don’t I know it,” muttered Jay.

Suddenly I felt out of place. Sparkler padded up to me,

eyeing me as if I were going to hand him one of my coffee cups. It seemed crazy that we were inside, reading reports off the AP wire about what was happening to us, right now, right outside. I wanted to get back out and *do* something, anything, so I wouldn't feel so useless.

I peered over Charlie's shoulder at some more papers piled on top of the modem. The info confirmed what Nancy had told us: no power for up to a week, no ferry service for the foreseeable future, possibly until the spring depending on how fast federal emergency money would come in repair the harbor. Someone would have to work with the coast guard to figure out how we would get food shipped in, garbage shipped out, and how people would get on and off the island. There were many more questions than answers, and all of them needed to be solved before winter set in. I was scared, thinking about how bad things could get once the temperatures really dropped. You couldn't survive on Stone Cove without heat, gasoline, or a way to get food.

"If there's no ferry until spring, my dad is going to completely melt down," said Charlie with a grim smile.

*Or starve*, I thought.

He gave up trying to fix the connection and stood, taking his coffee cup back. It was no longer steaming. "Sorry, Jay."

"No worries. Your parents have been down here, you know that? It sounds like the inn did okay. They have power, at least."

Charlie sighed. "The boiler room was flooded. They're dealing with some unhappy folks."

Jay nodded. I could see his newsmen's antenna sussing out a story in this last comment, a piece about those stranded, late-season guests who refused to leave despite dire warnings—the Island dilettantes now stuck here with the rest of us. "I'll bet. I'll swing by later and see if I can find some



way to help with that. Coast guard is holding a press conference at eleven to talk about initial transportation plans. That should be on the agenda.” He finally looked me in the eye. I noticed the dark circles ringing his own. “You two go and be with your families. I’ll manage here.”

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## Chapter Two

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Charlie walked me home. Strange: under any other circumstance, that would have been ripe for Stone Cove gossip. *What is Charlie doing with Eliza?* But today there was no strange. Today everything was strange. Besides, there was no one to whisper or catch us; we were all alone. I kept searching for people. What was everyone doing right now, our friends and neighbors? The ruined streets were eerie, deserted, no signs of life behind the dark windows. I reminded myself there was no power. My own mom was too afraid to go out, trying to stay warm, figuring out how to face the devastation.

Our house sat part of the way up the hill, still within the village. From there it was another ten to fifteen-minute walk up to the inn. Most guests took advantage of the inn’s loaner bicycles to get back and forth to town, or a couple of golf carts the inn made available.

“It’s always weird to be back,” said Charlie out of nowhere.

I almost jumped. “Yeah,” I said.

“This place is so its own world. But today . . .”

“Today is like being on another planet,” I finished. “What’s Jay going to do if his house is gone?”

Charlie shook his head. I pictured Jay and Sparkler moving into the *Gazette* offices permanently, making coffee on the hot plate and eating ramen noodles every night.

“Can we swing by Meredith’s?” I said. “Do you mind? I just want to make sure she’s okay.”

I’d said “we” without thinking. But it did feel like we were in this together, tossed into the same hole that we’d now have to crawl our way out of. I suppose you picture getting through a disaster with your closest friends and family, but instead you’re thrown into random situations with people you would never expect. There was no question of making plans.

“Sure,” said Charlie. He didn’t seem to be in a rush. The problems were too big; you couldn’t go straight at them. Addressing them would mean chipping away over a very long time. It made me itchy though. I wanted to jump in, start, figure out some way to put things back, fix it *now*.

I hurried ahead. Meredith would get it. Meredith, my best friend since we were toddlers, lived nearby in one of the Rose Cottages: a tourist-friendly neighborhood of really old, tiny houses—all adorned with roses trellised up the sides and over the roofs. Stone Cove Island is famous for these. People buy mugs and T-shirts decorated with pictures of her house. That always made us laugh. I wasn’t laughing now.

Trees were scattered over her street like pick-up sticks. But her house had been spared. Still, it looked like a skeleton. Or a punk rock zombie. The beautiful roses, which normally cascaded over the roof, had been torn away and were sticking up wildly, like a thorny mohawk. The last blooms, which had lingered in the warm fall weather, were gone. The trellis was broken and dangling.

“Phew,” I said. I meant it. Her house had survived.

Charlie trudged up behind me and nodded, his eyes far away.

When I ran and knocked, nobody answered, but I could

see through the taped-up windows that the inside looked relatively undisturbed.

“Maybe they’re out getting provisions?” Charlie suggested.

“Or helping out at school.” Meredith’s parents taught music and art. Her mom was my favorite teacher. If they were running a storm shelter there, the whole family was likely pitching in. That antsy feeling came back. If I didn’t join them, do *something*, I’d lose my mind.

Ten minutes later, we stood side-by-side at the end of my pebble drive. Our house, cottage-sized by anyone’s estimation, looked like a dollhouse under the massive oak.

“That is a seriously big tree,” said Charlie. “You guys are lucky it only landed on the porch.”

“I know. I don’t think Salty is ever coming back out of my parents’ closet.” Salty was our ten-year-old schnauzer. He had taken cover at the first bolts of lightning last night and, last I’d checked, was still huddled in the dark with my mom’s shoes.

My dad appeared from behind the trunk, sweaty under his bundled clothing and holding a chainsaw. He waved hello but didn’t come over. I didn’t invite Charlie in.

“You okay?” Charlie asked quietly. He was looking at me now. I couldn’t help but stare back. As if for the first time, I noticed gold-flecked warmth of his brown eyes. Meredith had always harped on how he had such great eyes. Only now, it seemed he could see me sinking into myself.

“Yeah. I’m fine,” I said, trying to rally. But I remembered a time a few years earlier when Salty got lost on the golf course. Charlie had been nice then too, waiting with me on the steps of the inn while my dad walked up and down the links with a flashlight, calling Salty’s name and shaking a bag of treats. Of course Salty eventually trotted out of the

brush, covered in burrs and something stinky, acting like nothing had happened.

“I’ll see you around, okay?” he said. “Stay safe.”

“You, too,” I said.

After one last glance at our house, he hurried away.

I wasn’t anxious to head inside. Just the thought made me a little claustrophobic. I wondered if my dad would let me try the chainsaw. Honestly, it looked kind of fun. I stepped toward him.

“Forget it,” my dad said, following my eyes and pursing his lips. “Go help your mom dry out stuff inside.”

I smirked, and proving I could handle a chainsaw, I showed off my tree trunk climbing technique, landing with a thud near the front door.

“Nice,” he said. “Next time try going through the back. You’re going to take down the porch completely if the tree doesn’t get it done first.”

“What? You fixed the door? Maybe I should check your temperature. You’re clearly delirious.”

“Ha ha. Hilarious, missy.” He reached for the chainsaw cord, then paused. “Wait, tell me about things in town.”

My smile faded. “It’s bad,” I said. “Ferry’s out for at least a couple of months. Plus, no power and no phone lines, obviously.”

“Damn. We knew it could happen, but I guess we never believed it.”

“But we’ll fix it, right?” I suddenly sounded like a little girl, but I couldn’t help myself.

“Of course, kiddo. This island’s seen worse.”

I wasn’t sure that was true, but it made me feel better to hear him say it.

Inside, Mom had stripped the wet sheets off my bed and was hanging them to dry in the bathroom. She had rolled up

the rugs from the first floor and dragged them to the back door. We had a small generator and a small camp stove that ran on sterno, but the generator was not going to power the clothes dryer. She looked up as I came into the bathroom, her forehead lined with stress, her blonde hair in a mess of a bun. Her lips were pinched in a tight smile that wasn't fooling anyone, especially me. It was an expression I'd seen often. I tried to picture her at my age. Her hair was pretty and silky. She was tall and slender, but so much tension and fatigue radiated from her body.

"Oh, good, Eliza, you can help me. Hold this up while I grab the other side."

"Mom, why don't we hang them outside?"

"What if it rains? Or if there's another storm?"

"There is not going to be another storm like this. And hurricane season is almost over. This stuff'll never dry in here. It'll stay damp and the house will stay damp." I could see the new worry of toxic mold fluttering behind her eyes. She had never been seventeen, I decided. It was impossible to imagine her having one beer too many at a beach party, giggling on a bike ride with friends, or daydreaming over a crush, her marriage to my dad notwithstanding. I turned on the sink faucet to wash my hands.

"Don't touch that!" she yelled. I jumped back and hit my head on the medicine cabinet door, which was open.

"Why?"

"It might be contaminated. We don't know if the water is safe. You're supposed to boil it—"

"Mom. I'm just washing my hands. I'm not drinking it. Stop freaking out." I left the room without helping with the sheets. I felt bad, but I just couldn't take it. Wasn't she supposed to be calming me down? *I* was the kid, not her. She was so exhausting.

I lay down on my stripped bed. The edge of the mattress felt wet. I stared at the ceiling, the only part of my room that looked unchanged. My rug was gone. My dresser had been dragged to the middle of the room. The pictures on the wall along the window were ruined. There were brown, rusty stripes running down the walls where the roof had leaked through the ceiling and under the paint. My entire last semester of life drawing had melted into a leaden, gooey, newsprint brick in the corner.

My mom hadn't even asked about my trip to town. The whole place could have washed away and she hadn't given it a second thought. Her self-absorption was insane. I was not going to be like her. I was going to pitch in and do something—in fact, I would organize something. Something big. Our house was fine. We could survive with a little water and having to use the back door. Other people had bigger problems, and I was going to focus on the future of the island, not my mother's petty neuroses. I got back up and headed out the newly operational back door to climb the hill to the Anchor Inn.

Before I had time to head for the veranda, Charlie walked in. He looked surprised but pleased to see me.

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## Chapter Three

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Jay at the *Gazette* came through, thanks to Charlie. On clean-up day, we had twenty-four kids from the high school including me, six from the middle school, a handful of volunteer parents, and Officer Bailey, our town sheriff, who offered to organize transportation and garbage removal.

Granted, there had been some awkward weirdness organizing the whole thing. Colleen Guinness, local lacrosse star

and part-time waitress at the Anchor Inn, wanted to know why I'd come up to see Charlie that morning. She wasn't mean about it, and a part of me was relieved—first, that she had even showed up to work at all, serving coffee. Besides, if she were curious about my motives for seeing Charlie, it meant that Stone Cove Island was still itself: still small, familial, gossipy, tight.

My memory of the conversation blurred over the three days, but it consisted mostly of my rambling: “I want to organize a clean-up day. Kids from the high school. Younger kids, too. The island will be ours eventually, right? Shouldn't we be the ones to help rebuild it? So I was thinking if you talked to Jay, and if Jay put it in the *Gazette*, people would show up. I really feel like it's the only way to get through this: get outside your head and your own problems and help someone else. If we sit around feeling miserable about what's happened to us, we'll just be stuck. We have to all pitch in if we want things to go back to the way they were . . .”

That was when Charlie chose to interrupt.

“Listen. You love it here. I get that. I love it too in certain ways. I just think one way people keep everything so perfect, the same way it's been for two hundred years—”

“Two hundred and fifty years,” I corrected. It was obnoxious. I knew that. It just came out.

“Yes, excuse me, Miss Island History. *For two hundred and forty-seven years*, is by keeping out any new ideas.”

“My clean-up crew is a new idea,” I pointed out.

“Not what I meant. But yes, I'll help. You want some more coffee? I'm going to get a refill. We should drink the good stuff while we can, because I have a feeling we're in for months of FEMA coffee.”

Standing there with Colleen—my not-quite-friend but Stone Cove sister and survivor—I could imagine that soon,

without regular food shipments, coffee would come to stand in for gold. Through the window, I watched guys in white jumpsuits from FEMA unload supplies from the driveway up to the inn kitchen. Fast work. They must have come in by helicopter. Still, I was certain that Charlie was wrong. The reason the island was able to preserve its way of life was because everyone here shared a common vision of how they wanted to live. No one was telling anyone else what to do.

At least I thought so then.

The day itself was not the crisp, sunny autumn day I had pictured. It was humid, weirdly warm, and raining on and off. There was hardly any wind. Harney's hardware had donated work gloves. I put on jeans, rainboots, and a windbreaker and took off on my bike at dawn. For three days I had felt trapped and helpless. But nobody was dead. An older lady from the bluffs was unaccounted for, but it turned out she had evacuated to her sister's house in Salem, just like she was supposed to. Two ten-year-old boys were feared drowned. Really, they had decided to camp out in the lighthouse during the storm, and then were afraid to go home the next day and find out how much trouble they were in.

I met Meredith at the Little Kids' Park. She was already waiting, straddling her bike, dressed from top to bottom in the kind of foul weather gear her family reserved for their sailing expeditions. Ironically, I was the one who ended up loving to sail.

We called Putney Park the Little Kids' Park because it's where our parents used to take us when we were in nursery school. Only a few trees remained standing. The playground, which sat in a low spot in the center, was completely flooded. The baby swings hovered over a deep pool of brown



water that stopped a few inches below the tire rubber seats. The little slide was half-submerged. Crews were working on clearing streets and damaged buildings first, so the parks and beaches had to wait.

Meredith was a dancer. She had started ballet at six and had stayed serious about it ever since. We made friends instantly in that first class our moms had signed us up for. I'd only lasted about six weeks. It was too slow and I was too fidgety. I had thought dancing would mean, well, dancing, not standing still, holding onto a bar and bending your knees.

"Ready?" Meredith asked, her eyes bright. Despite being a devout herbal tea drinker, she always looked way more awake than I felt.

"Storm's over," I joked, giving her outfit a onceover.

Meredith rolled her eyes. "My mom made me change out of my regular raincoat. She didn't want me to get it dirty. It was this or one of her painting smocks."

"Well, we'll probably be inside mostly. We're on lighthouse duty."

The fanciest houses on the island sat along the bluff along the west side, just north of Jay Norsworthy's (luckily still inhabitable) house. Normally it was fairly protected from wind because it faced the mainland, but I had heard some summer people were now rethinking that location. The cliff had been eroding slowly for years, and the hurricane had speeded the process. A few houses would either need to be braced on pilings and tied into the hillside or end up in the ocean.

There were also rambling, huge, old-fashioned summer houses out on East Beach, past the lighthouse. I loved that part of the island. The houses there felt gracious, stretching

out into the surrounding open fields. Some kept horses or cows. Few were occupied by year-rounders though, unless they were caretakers. We tended to live in the central section of town just up the hill from Water Street—my neighborhood—or else up behind the inn, or down in the little row houses along the harbor. A few people lived near the marina off East Beach, but in the winter, you really wanted to be close to town. People further out could get snowed in for days.

As we rode, I tried not to take in the flattened trees, half-collapsed houses, and sad debris washed from people's basements: endless sodden photo albums, ruined toys, lost sports trophies, mud-encrusted toddler snowsuits. On the steep hill down from the harbor, we passed the road sign that said "Do Not Coast." We coasted, letting our bikes fly, no brakes until we neared the bottom and the bikes were rattling so hard our bones shook. The wind pulled at the skin on our faces. I looked over at Meredith. She was grinning like I was. We did this every time, without thinking. We had always done this. When we were kids, we would take our hands off the handlebars.

"What did your mom say about school?" I asked her. They were trying to decide when to open again. The building wasn't damaged, but they were still using the gym as temporary housing and weren't sure if they could operate the whole building off generators alone.

"Next week," she said. "Tuesday. Wednesday at the latest."

I wrinkled my nose, the wind whipping through my hair. I was getting used to having free time and I liked it. Meredith and others, who were more worried than I was about college admission tests and applications, were anxious for the high school to open. Meredith wanted to get into Barnard, which had a really good dance program.

We distracted ourselves talking about the Halloween dance, pretending that the immediate future was predictable. Meredith had a crush on Tim McAllister, a junior. She was obsessed with what people would think about her dating a younger boy. If she ever got around to dating him, that is. So far the whole thing was theoretical.

"Tim's birthday is March twenty-second," she said. "That means I'm really only four months older."

"So you've pointed out at least eight billion times."

She shot a quick smirk at me as we slowed, approaching the beach. "I'm picturing what Lily Kirby and those guys would say, but it's not like I couldn't go with someone in our grade. I could. I just happen to like Tim." Meredith had worked the whole thing into a star-crossed drama in her mind, though I was pretty sure Tim would be thrilled to go to the party with her if he had any clue she even liked him.

"You know what I think," I said. "Just ask him."

"Who are you going to go with?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe Josh again. Or maybe I won't go." Josh and I had had a thing for about a second last year before deciding that we were friends, which we still were. My mind flitted to Charlie for a moment. But Charlie wouldn't be here by then, and could anything be lamer than going to a dance at the school you just graduated from? "We should just go as a group again. Do a theme costume. The seven deadly sins or something."

"That could be fun," she said. But she was still thinking about Tim.

As we dismounted and ditched our bikes, I took in the long expanse of sand. Yes, it was littered with garbage and broken branches, but it was still there, still recognizable as East Beach. I took a big stack of heavy-gauge garbage bags from Officer Bailey. Meredith kept her distance. Most kids

did when it came to our sole local law enforcement official. She was a stocky woman about my mom's age, built very straight up and down. She wore her uniform's belt buckled in tight, but didn't really have a waist. Officer Bailey was the first woman sheriff in the island's history, and the jokes and rumors flew: she was really a man; she was a closet lesbian; she couldn't get a job off the Island on a "real" police force because of her weight. A lot of people made a very big fuss about it, or grumbled about it, but I thought it was cool that she was the first female sheriff on Stone Cove Island, even if she had zero social skills.

Some of the boys were dragging garbage cans onto the beach where kids had started stacking wood and raking up debris.

Colleen was among them. She held up a bright green, high-heeled shoe she'd dug out of the sand.

"It's my size! Maybe I'll find the other one."

I laughed, but was also thinking it would be a good idea to come up with some way to connect people with their lost belongings, maybe start a website where people could post pictures. I could put that together. I would need someone more tech-savvy than I was. Once again, my mind flitted to Charlie. *He's going back to Boston*, I reminded myself. *And you already asked for your favor. Leave the guy alone.*

"Thanks for coming!" I called.

"No worries," Colleen yelled back. "It's a great idea!"

Meredith and I handed out extra work gloves, and then went into the lighthouse carrying rakes and shovels. The tall tower was painted on the inside with wide black and white stripes all the way up to the lantern room. It had been in operation until the early 90s, marking the channel that led back to the marina. Park rangers checked in on their rounds, but mostly it sat empty, open to tourists who

wanted to climb up and take in the view. That wasn't a possibility now.

Standing water and soaked papers and cardboard carpeted the floor. We winced at the odor: dank, stale mildew. Sand had blown inside and formed a mini dune against the far wall. Meredith and I hung garbage bags off the metal stair railing and began to fill them with the rotten paper. We moved shovelful after shovelful of sand back outside where it belonged. The wet sand was heavy. After ten minutes, my T-shirt was dripping. I tied a bandana over my hair, hippie-style, to keep the sweat off my face. After a while Colleen joined us.

"I came in here thinking this job would be easier," she said, struggling with the sand.

"Ha!" I grunted. Meredith just shook her head.

"You got a good turnout, Eliza," Colleen said.

"I'm just happy people actually showed up." It was funny how in the last few days Colleen had come to feel like a friend. Before the storm I couldn't remember more than two times we'd said more than hello. "Hey, did you happen to see Charlie this morning? He's still here on the island, right? Do you know if he's coming out to help?"

It came out before I really thought. She shot me a huge grin.

"Not a joiner. I told you," said Colleen. "Seriously. You two are ridiculous. He's about to leave. What are you wasting time for?"

"You and Charlie?" Meredith piled on. "Why didn't you tell me you hooked up?"

"Because we didn't! He helped me with clean-up day, you know, by getting Jim to put in the *Gazette*. I want to thank him. That's all."

"You should invite him to Halloween," said Meredith.

Colleen rolled her eyes. “You snooze, you lose, Eliza.”

“There’s nothing *to* lose,” I groaned. But I could feel myself blushing. It was true, I had been looking around the beach for Charlie, feeling disappointed—okay, even annoyed—that he hadn’t shown up. But this wasn’t about me. We were doing this for the island. It wasn’t like he hadn’t shown up to my birthday party or something. “I’m going to check the windows upstairs,” I announced, even though I knew they were fine. I could see from outside they weren’t broken. I just wanted a break.

As I climbed the spiral staircase, the air became fresher. I could taste the tang of salt. The view was still as beautiful as ever. The ocean was calm, rolling in leisurely, innocently, as though nothing had happened. On the upper landing, a narrow stairway led to the observation deck. To the left there was a door, normally locked, the former office of the lighthouse keeper. Now it sat halfway open, blown in from the force of the storm. I pushed my way into the office and sighed.

The place looked like that illustration in *Alice in Wonderland*, the one where she’s standing in a mad swirl of playing cards. The papers—seemingly every scrap from the entire lifespan of the place—were plastered across all surfaces. It looked like a bomb had exploded.

“Wow.”

I think I actually said it out loud. There was almost no water damage up here, and I couldn’t figure out how the storm has created a little tornado in here without tearing out the windows in the process. I reached down and picked up something at my feet.

It was a letter.

It had been written on a typewriter, not printed from a computer. The paper was heavy stationery—that formal blue people use for thank-you notes.

It was not a thank-you note.

*Uninvited guest. There's no room here for you. Daddy is waiting at the bottom of the sea. Square peg. Break your mother's back. We make the rules. You had your chance to play.*

*Do not await the last judgment. It takes place every day. To breathe is to judge. Eleven, twelve, dig and delve. Anchor through your throat. Down came a blackbird and pecked off her nose.*

*Goodbye, Bess. Read it out loud so you can hear your name one more time. You didn't have to go but now you will. Don't say no one warned you.*

