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KATHLEEN GLASGOW

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*To all the Emmys and Joeys:
Love remains*

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WE ARE FLYING IN the blue-black night, rain slashing the car. Trees become hands, become fingers, become teeth reaching out for us. I don't know if we make sounds, because my heart is in my ears, drowning me. The car is weightless and heavy at the same time as it smacks against the earth, bounces, rolls and rolls, and Luther Leonard is half in, half out of the splintered windshield in front of me, his sneakered feet dangling at strange angles.

I say my brother's name, but there isn't any answer.

My hands feel around the seat for the belt lock, but they quiver so badly they can't settle down. There is something I feel, but I can't tell what it is. Something in my body that is not right. Something out of place.

In the lopsided rearview mirror, my brother, Joey, is a useless thing in the backseat, splayed over Candy MontClair, blood in his hair.

I say her name.

The sounds that come from her are not words. They're raspy and wet, full and thin all at once.

I have to get out of this car. I have to tell someone. I have to get help. I have to leave this place of shattered glass and

crunched metal and Luther Leonard's dangling feet, but I can't move. I can't get out.

Through the broken window comes a howling in Wolf Creek Woods. There's howling, and maybe it's me, and then I realize it isn't. It's the howl of sirens, and beams begin to fill our broken car with light.

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ONE

Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?

—MARY OLIVER

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MY SISTER, MADDIE, IS crying, her pretty face damp and frightened. One of my legs is heavier than the other and I don't understand and I want to ask her why, but I can't form words, because there's an ocean inside me, warm and sweet, and I'm bobbing along the waves, just like the ones that carried me and Joey all those years ago in San Diego, when everything was perfect or as close to it as we could get. That was a nice time, when I was twelve and Joey was thirteen, letting the waves carry us, Maddie stretched out on the beach in her purple bikini and floppy-brimmed hat. Far away from Mill Haven, we were in a different world, where no one knew who we were.

I try to ask Maddie where Joey is, but she can't understand me. She thinks I'm saying something else, because she leans forward and says, "Do you need more? Do you need me to press the button?"

And her finger presses a button on the side of the bed and the largest wave I've ever known billows over me, like the parachute game we played in the gymnasium in kindergarten, all of us laughing as the fabric gently overtook us and blocked out the world.

My mother's voice is trembling. "This is not normal. This is not something that happens to people like us."

My father sounds weary. He has been weary for years now. Joey makes people weary.

He says, "There is no normal, Abigail. Nothing has ever been normal. Why can't you see that? He has a problem."

My finger stretches out for the button to make the waves come again. My parents make me tired, years and years of fighting about Joey.

My mother's hand touches my head. Like a kitten, I respond, leaning into it. I can't remember the last time she touched me, stroked my hair. Everything has always been about Joey.

"There was *heroin* in his system, Abigail. How did we miss that?"

The word floats in the air before me, something eerie and frightening.

There was vomit spattered on his hoodie at the party. When we found him in the bedroom. He was woozy and floppy and strange and made no sense and I thought . . .

I thought he was just drunk. Stoned, maybe.

"I will fix this," she says to my father. "He'll go to rehab, he'll get better, he'll come home."

She says rehab in a clipped way, like it hurts to have the word in her mouth.

"That's not a magic wand you can wave and make it all go away, Abigail. He could have died. Emory could have died. A girl *did* die."

The ocean inside me, the one that was warm and wavy, freezes.

"What did you say?" I whisper. My voice feels thick. Can they understand me? I speak louder. "What did you just say?"

"Emory," my father says. "Oh, Emory."

My mother's eyes are wet blue pools. She curls her fingers in my hair.

"You're alive," she tells me. "I'm so grateful you're alive."

Her face is blurry from the waves carrying me. I'm struggling inside them, struggling to understand.

"But she just had a headache," I say. "Candy just had a headache. She can't be dead."

My father frowns. "You aren't making any sense, Emmy."

She had a headache. That's why she was in the car. She had a headache at the party, and she wanted a ride home and it can't be right that a person has a headache and gets in a car and dies and everyone else lives. It can't be right.

"Joey," I say, crying now, the tears warm and salty on my face. "I want Joey. Please, get me Joey."

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WHEN I OPEN MY eyes, he's there.

I've seen my brother cry only once before, the afternoon he and Luther Leonard decided to dive from the roof of our house into the pool. Luther made it; Joey didn't, and the sound of his sobs as he writhed on the brick patio echoed in my head for days.

But his crying is quieter now.

"I'm so sorry," he says. His voice is croaky, and he looks sick, pale and shaky. There are stitches above his left eye. His right arm is in a sling.

"I thought you were drunk," I say. "I thought you were just drunk."

Joey's dark eyes search my face.

"I messed up. I messed up so bad, Emmy."

Girls swoon over those dark eyes. Or they did. Before he became trouble.

Joey Ward used to be cool, a girl said in the bathroom at Heywood High last year. She didn't know I was in the stall. Sometimes I stayed in there longer than I needed to, just for some peace. It's hard all the time. Pretending.

Not anymore, another girl answered. *Just another druggie loser.*

I cried in the stall, because I knew Joey was more than that. Joey was the one who taught me to ride a bike, because our parents worked all the time. Joey was the one who let me read

aloud to him for hours in a bedsheet fort in my father's den, long after he probably should have been ignoring me in favor of his friends, like most older siblings do. He taught me how to make scrambled eggs and let me stay with him in his attic bedroom while he drew.

Until he didn't. Until the day I knocked and he told me to go away.

He stands up, wiping his face with his good hand. His beautiful dark hair is in tangles, hanging over his eyes.

"I have to go," he says. "Mom's waiting."

Rehab. It floats back to me from when Mom said it. Was that yesterday? Or this morning? It's hard to tell. I don't know how long I've been here. Things are bleeding together.

"Joey, why did you do . . . it?"

I wish I could get out of this bed. I wish my leg wasn't hanging from some damn pulley in the air and that my body wasn't heavy with the ocean of drugs inside me.

At the door to my hospital room, Joey turns back, but he doesn't look at me. He looks at the floor.

"I love you, Emmy, but you have no idea what it's like to be me."

And then he's gone.

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I'M IN THE DOWNSTAIRS bedroom off the kitchen that my mother remodeled for Nana, hoping she'd come live with us, but Nana is stubborn and says she wants to stay in her own house until the day she dies.

The walls are painted pale gray. The sheets and blankets are white and crisp and perfect and I'm imagining how the sweat dripping off my forehead is going to stain the pillowcases. My mother doesn't like messes.

At my feet, my dog Fuzzy nuzzles closer to my good leg, whines softly. I rub her with my toe. Her fur is coarse; no one's been brushing her. Westies need brushing.

My bad leg is in a blue brace, propped on more white pillows. My knee is throbbing, sparks of white heat that make me breathe hard. Make me sweat.

I can hear them in the kitchen, my sister Maddie and my mother, arguing.

"Mom, she's in pain," Maddie's saying. "Just let her have a pill."

"She can have ibuprofen. She was on so much medication in the hospital. I don't want her . . ."

My mom's voice trails off.

"Mom," Maddie says forcefully. "She fractured her *kneecap*. And she's not *Joey*."

"That's right," my mother answers, in a suddenly hard voice that makes me shiver. "And I want it to stay that way."

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MADDIE SLEEPS NEXT TO me in the gray room, her eyelids growing heavy as she clicks the television remote from one show to another: *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, *My Lottery Dream Home*, *Friends*. When the remote finally slips from her fingers, I turn the television off and just listen, Fuzzy tucked next to me, soft and sleeping.

Maddie snuck me a pill after my mother went to bed, fed me crackers and juice, and I'm not sweating anymore.

I'm listening to the quiet of the house.

Some things haven't changed since I came home. My dad still gets back late from his shifts at the hospital, peeking into the room at us to say hello and ask about my knee before he eats whatever Goldie has left for him in the refrigerator before going to the den and settling down with his drink to watch his own shows. He'll fall asleep in the recliner, glasses slipping down his nose, while my mother is asleep upstairs. That's the way they've been for what seems like years now, my mother up, my father down. I thought that might change, with everything that's happened. That they'd get closer, somehow, after the accident.

I thought they might stay home with me, too, at least for the first few days, but they didn't. They went right back to work. Maybe because Maddie is here now and can take care of me. And Goldie, too, if it's one of her days with us.

Sometimes I feel like I don't exist in this house because I'm not beautiful and loud, like Maddie, or a problem, like Joey. I'm just me. The good one.

The one thing that's changed is the sound of our house.

It's quiet.

It was never quiet with Joey, especially last year, when things got bad. So much yelling and fighting with my mom about his grades. His attitude. Slammed doors. Joey burying himself deep into his hoodie when my dad would try to talk to him. I did whatever I could to make things better. Woke him up for school, even if I had to pour cold water on his face to do it. Did his homework, just enough to get his grades up, make it look like he was trying, but not enough to raise suspicion. I just wanted the noise to stop.

Next to me, Maddie rolls over, her knee knocking into mine. Little flares heat my knee, but not too much, because of the pill. I bite back a little gasp. Maybe I need another one? But I don't want to wake her up. I don't want any more fights about taking pills. I don't want noise anymore.

Because this quiet? Even though I love Joey, he's my brother, how could I not love him?—this quiet is *peaceful*.

It's finally peaceful now that my wild and troubled brother is gone.

And I feel guilty about loving this peace.

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IT'S A MESS UP there," Maddie says. "But I think I got most of it cleaned up." She drops a milk crate on the living room floor and flops down on the couch next to me. Her hair is in a ponytail and her neck gleams with sweat. The stairs to the attic are steep.

Even sweaty and with no makeup, my sister is beautiful. I shouldn't feel jealous, but I do.

"Mom really tore Joey's room apart. I don't know if I told you. Maybe you don't remember. You were so out of it in the hospital. But we came back here a couple of days after the accident to shower and change clothes and went up there. You know? To see what he'd been hiding, and she just . . . kind of lost it."

She leans forward and shuffles through the milk crate. "I don't think she found much. Maybe a bong and some weed. But look what *I* found."

She hands me a stack of papers. Joey's art. Gold-winged dragons with orange fire spilling from their jaws. Hulking creatures with sharp talons and red eyes. A whole world he created in the attic when our parents let him move up there when he was thirteen. He could sit for hours at his drafting table, immersed. My mother turned his old bedroom into her exercise space.

"I don't think he draws anymore," I tell her. "Maybe he will now. When he comes back. When he's better."

Maddie looks at me carefully. "Emmy, I'm not sure there's going to be a 'better.' He took *heroin*. That's some serious stuff. That's not something you can just . . . brush off. I mean, I had no idea. Did *you*?"

I arrange the papers into a neat pile on my lap, avoiding her eyes. "I thought . . . I don't know. It was hard. I was just trying to take care of him. I thought it was just . . . being stoned and stuff. You don't know what it was like, last year. You were *gone*."

I start to cry, tears spilling onto my T-shirt. I haven't taken a shower in days and I'm wearing the same clothes I came home from the hospital in, the crutches are giving me sores under my arms, and I feel awful and rank sitting next to my beautiful sister with her hair up in a messily perfect ponytail.

And I feel guilty about Joey, like part of this is my fault, for keeping his secrets for so long.

And then there's Candy.

It's too much, everything bubbling inside me at once.

"Oh, Emmy," Maddie says, wrapping her arms around me. "It's okay. Don't cry. It's not your fault. I swear, it's not your fault."

But somewhere, deep down, I think it is.

Because if I hadn't tried to hide Joey's secrets, maybe Candy MontClair wouldn't have died.

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WHEN I LIMP INTO the kitchen, my mother flips over the newspaper she was reading and sets her coffee cup on it.

“Well, hello,” she says brightly, turning to the stove. She slides scrambled eggs onto a plate for me. “It’s a big day. You need to eat. You haven’t been eating much. I’m getting a bit worried.”

She sniffs the air delicately. “Did you shower?” She pulls her hair back and weaves it into a stylish, casual bun. She’s wearing a lovely cream blouse, dark gray jacket, pants that flare elegantly over her crisp black shoes. Her work clothes.

“You’re going to work?” I ask, my heart sinking. I thought she’d want to come with me when I finally got my leg brace off. It’s been five weeks. I don’t know why I got my hopes up.

She frowns. “Of course. I can’t miss today. We’ve got a deposition. Maddie’s here. She’ll take you to your appointment.”

I take a few bites of egg and then push the rest around on the plate while she busies herself with wallet, keys, purse. My mother is a lawyer and my dad is a doctor in the ER, which means they’re both always pretty much working, but I thought at least one of them would want to be there the day I got my leg brace off.

“Don’t pout, Emory. Blue Spruce isn’t covered by insurance and Daddy and I can’t take the time away.” Blue Spruce is the place in Colorado where they sent Joey.

I look back at my plate. Once in the third grade when my mother dropped me and Joey at school, one of the mothers on the sidewalk whispered, “That family is richer than sin, I’m surprised they don’t have a chauffeur for their precious babies.”

When she realized I’d heard what she said, she gave me a big, fake smile and waved to my mother as she drove away. I was eight, but I understood her just fine.

My mother’s family money could pay for Joey’s rehab a million times over and we’d still be fine. She doesn’t have to work, but she does.

Maddie wanders into the kitchen, holding Fuzzy. “Where’s my breakfast?” she says sleepily.

“You’re in college,” my mother answers. “You can make your own breakfast. And get a move on. Emmy’s appointment is at ten.”

I push my plate in Maddie’s direction. “You can have the rest of mine.”

“I almost forgot,” my mother says. “Here.”

She hands me a pink phone.

“The other one,” she says softly, her eyebrows creasing ever so slightly. “It was . . . smashed.”

I bite my lip. Smashed. In the accident. I was holding it tightly, in my lap, as Luther Leonard laughed and drove faster and faster.

“Same number,” she says quietly, taking a sip of coffee. “They transferred everything over.” She puts her cup down and turns, taking the egg pan off the stove and rinsing it in the sink.

“Ha,” Maddie says, setting Fuzzy down and popping some of my scrambled eggs into her mouth with her fingers. “They always say that, but I never believe them. Stuff is always missing.”

She reaches for the newspaper my mother was reading. “Is this today’s?”

My mother whirls around. “No!” She tries to snatch the paper from Maddie’s hand.

“Mom!” Maddie arches away, opening the paper. Her face drains of color and she quickly folds the paper up, tucking it under her arm.

“What?” I say. “What is the big deal?”

My mother and Maddie look at each other. I pull the paper away from Maddie.

There, on the front page of the *Mill Haven Ledger*, is a photograph of Candy MontClair. Even in black-and-white, you can see the freckles dusting her face. Her hair is strawberry blond, curling over her shoulders. One hand tucked under her chin. Junior year photo.

Community Mourns Local Girl

“Put it down,” my mother says gently. “You don’t need to read that, Emory.”

Summer belongs to teenagers in Mill Haven. Swim parties and bonfires. Friday night drives up and down Main Street. Candy MontClair was headed to theater camp in upstate New York, just as she had every summer since she was twelve. Tragically . . .

I feel like I’ve been punched in the stomach. Sentences swim before my eyes. *How could this have happened in Mill Haven . . . failing our teenagers . . . prevalence of drug and alcohol use in our community . . . who is to blame . . .*

“Emmy,” Maddie says, drawing the paper from my fingers. “Emmy, breathe.”

Tragically.

The way her breath sounded in the backseat of the car, pinned under Joey. Like she was drowning.

Dying.

I close my eyes, the sound of her broken breath swirling in my head.

“Mom,” Maddie says sharply. “How about getting her one of those pills now, or I don’t think she’s going to make it to her damn appointment.”

“It’s no one’s fault,” my sister says as she drives. “They did a tox screen on Luther. He had no drugs or alcohol in his system. It was pouring rain. He lost control of the car.”

Candy was crying and Joey was passed out and I was shouting at Luther, rain smearing the windshield, because he wanted to turn left off Wolf Creek Road, not right, which was the way home. Luther was laughing. *Just one little stop. Five minutes. You girls are such babies. I’m doing you a favor.*

I just want Maddie to shut up. I just want this pill to start working. I haven’t had one since my first week home.

“Shit happens,” Maddie says. “People die for no reason. I know that sounds callous, but this was an accident in the purest form. Jesus, what’s going on at Frost Bridge? How many people are *down* there?”

I look out the window. Frost Bridge is the exit from town, right by the ever-cheery Mill Haven sign: LEAVING SO SOON? IF YOU LIVED HERE, YOU’D BE HOME NOW! Down on the rocky river

beach, there are tents and tarps, ratty blankets and sleeping bags. People are in tiny clusters. Sitting, smoking.

“The city,” I say. “The city started doing that stuff. You know, uncomfortable benches. Fines. To drive them out. I think they’re coming here instead. To be safe.”

Please kick in, pill. Kick in, kick in.

Is this how Joey felt? Desperate to feel better, get numb, lose himself?

Maddie says, “Huh. I can’t see our esteemed town council, of which our esteemed mother is a member, taking this well.”

I feel the warmth then, spreading through me, loosening everything. Milder than the ocean that poured through my veins in the hospital, but still soothing.

I look out the window, Mill Haven passing by in a humid, blurry haze. Red, white, and blue banners hang across Main Street. In the distance, the Mill looms at the edge of the town. Our family’s legacy, the thing that built this town long, long ago.

The Fourth of July is in a few days. If Joey was here, we’d be in Kingston Park, giggling while Simon Stanley led the Mill Haven Gleefulers in a spirited rendition of “R.O.C.K. in the USA” and then watching the fireworks explode across the sky. Sucking the juice from cold lemons through peppermint sticks. Making fun of the parade.

No, that’s not right. I shake my head. My brain is getting fuzzy from the pill. Joey stopped going to the fireworks with me a few years ago. He hung out with his friends instead. Came home late and drowsy, sneaking in quietly after my parents had gone to bed. I watched the fireworks split the sky by myself in the backyard. I always waited up for him, even though I was tired.

Maddie is still talking, her words dissolving as soon as they leave her mouth.

Maybe that's what Joey liked about drugs. The way they re-arranged things, shifted memories, erased what he didn't want to deal with. Make uncomfortable things fade away.

"Emmy."

Maddie's sharp voice shatters my thoughts.

"What's the matter with you? Is it the Vicodin? You have to eat before you take it. Jesus."

Dr. Cooper's office is cold. Even though my insides are warm from the pill, I shiver.

"It's like an icebox in here," Maddie murmurs, wrapping her arms around herself.

The door opens. "Ah, the famous Ward girls, gracing me with their presence!" Dr. Cooper closes the door to the exam room and grins at us, exposing expensively whitened teeth.

Maddie side-eyes me and I try to hide my smile. I know she's thinking of what Mom calls him. *Doctor Vampire*. "You can see those teeth from miles away," our mom said once.

He busies himself washing his hands. "Madeline, your studies are going well? Dartmouth, is it?"

"Brown," Maddie answers.

He dries his hands and gazes at her. "And what will be your field, eh? You're a Ward, the world is your oyster."

"I'm joining the circus," Maddie says.

Dr. Cooper chuckles. "Is that so?"

"Seriously. I'm headed back next week to take a summer circus course. My life's dream is to be shot from a cannon."

“Always so spirited, Madeline,” he murmurs, turning to me. “And this one.”

His smile wobbles as he struggles for something to say.

Because he and I both know that I’m not spirited, or exceptional, or anything much. Dr. Cooper literally has no small talk to offer me.

I’m just “this one.”

“Emory,” he says finally. “Let’s take a look at that knee, shall we?”

He hooks a hand under my armpit and hoists me onto the table. The tissue paper rips underneath me as I slide back.

He pats the blue brace gently.

“Are we ready?” he asks. His breath smells minty and there are little hairs springing from his ears. I feel like someone who takes such good care of their teeth might also want to trim their ear hair, but what do I know?

I look at the ceiling. “Sure,” I say.

He starts unsnapping the buckles on the brace, moving slowly. “Tell me at any time if you feel pain, Emory.”

“I can’t feel anything. I took a pill before I came in.”

He eases his hand beneath the brace and slides it out from under my leg.

It feels weird without the brace on. My leg feels lighter than it has in weeks.

“Yikes.” Maddie prods my thigh. “You lost a lot of muscle tone. Well, you can build that back up before dance team in the fall.”

Dr. Cooper presses his fingers all around my knee. “Oh, she won’t be dancing for quite some time.”

“Wait,” I say, trying to keep the excitement out of my voice. “I can’t be on dance team?”

“Oh, goodness, no,” Dr. Cooper says. “You’ve got a good bit of physical therapy ahead of you before you can even attempt that.”

“Mom is going to freak. Dance team is Mom’s jam,” Maddie says. “Maybe you can still dress, Emmy, but just sit out.”

“I don’t care,” I say. I’m pretty sure I only made the team because Mom made a call, to be honest. “I never liked dance team anyway. That was just Mom trying to make me Maddie 2.0.”

I don’t know if I would have said that if Vicodin wasn’t buzzing through my body.

“Emmy,” Maddie says, but not harshly, because she knows it’s true.

“I’m an alternate, Maddie. I suck. I sit out most of the time anyway and when I am in, I’m in the back.”

I’ll have to act disappointed when I tell my mom, but really, I’m relieved. No more pulling and tugging at the itchy royal-blue skirted shorts and gluing sparkles on my eyelids. Pasting a fake smile on my face.

Dr. Cooper is looking at me.

“What?” I say. “Are we done?”

“There’s a bit of swelling,” he says, “but it all looks good. It’s healing nicely. I just need you to bend it. Very slowly, just a bit at first.”

Suddenly I’m panicked. I look down at my pale, thin leg, the skin wrinkled from the brace. I think of the car, the accident, how I felt sitting in the passenger seat, feeling like something was missing from my body, that something wasn’t right. My kneecap had smashed against the dashboard as we flew through the air and then again when we landed. I think I remember it, some sort of cracking sound maybe. The sound of something splintering.

I don't want to hear that sound again.

I feel sick.

"No," I say. "I don't want to."

"Very common," Dr. Cooper says. "You're afraid it will break again? Very understandable. But I assure you, it won't."

"You can do it, Emmy," Maddie says softly. She puts her hand on my shoulder. "You can."

"I can't," I say. "I'm too afraid. I'm . . ."

Dr. Cooper slides his hand under the back of my knee. "A very awful thing happened to you, Emory, something much larger than you can possibly articulate right now. But the first step for you to move forward and heal is bending this knee. Making yourself healthy."

I close my eyes.

It's so stupid. Joey is somewhere in the wilds of Colorado hiking and talking and doing god knows what so he comes back better, Joey 2.0, and Candy is never coming back again and here I am, afraid to bend my damn knee. The simplest thing in the world.

"Just a little bit. You may feel some discomfort."

Dr. Cooper's fingers press the underside of my knee, pushing up gently. His hands feel overly cold and creepy.

"Emmy," Maddie whispers.

My leg is everything that happened in that car and I will carry it around forever, literally and figuratively. I should feel lucky to be alive. I didn't overdose, like Joey. Or go through the windshield, like Luther.

Or die, like Candy.

I jerk my knee up. My knee feels like fire and I groan.

"You did it!" Maddie claps her hands.

"Pain level," Dr. Cooper says. "A scale of one to ten."

"I don't know," I say, breathing hard. The pill is tapering off. "Maybe five. I don't know."

"All right. I'll write you a prescription for more Vic—"

Maddie shakes her head, cutting him off. "Thanks, Dr. Cooper, but our mom wouldn't like that."

"I'm sorry?"

Maddie sighs. "You know, our *brother*. He's in rehab. She's already guarding the prescription from the hospital with a tight fist."

I watch Dr. Cooper's face shift from confusion to understanding. Mill Haven is small. Of course he's heard.

"Yes, that's right. Well, I'm glad he's getting the help he needs, but Emory's pain is her own. Certainly, her medication usage can be monitored, but she shouldn't go without just because—"

"You don't know our mother," Maddie says. "Or maybe you do."

They stare at each other.

"Well." Dr. Cooper clears his throat. "Let's try again, Emory. A few more times before you go. I see from your chart that your mother's arranged for in-home physical therapy starting next week, and I'll give you some instructions on knee care and strength exercises. And if you change your mind, I'll send you home with a scrip, just in case."

I watch from a chaise lounge in the backyard as Maddie does somersaults off the diving board, bouncing into the air and then curling into a tight ball, barely splashing as she enters the water. It's sticky outside and I flap my T-shirt to get some air on my body.

As Maddie slithers and sidles through the pool like an eel, I sneak a look over the brick wall separating our yard from the Galt's yard. Let my eyes travel up the ivy snaking the siding to the corner window, the one that's right across from my own bedroom window, a room I haven't been in for weeks, because of my knee. Sixteen stairs from the first floor to the second.

The blind is still drawn. He's not home from pitching camp yet.

I thought he might visit me in the hospital. Break our rule. Just that once. But he didn't.

I check my new pink phone. I start to open my texts and then, before I can stop myself, I'm switching to Instagram to check his feed. I can't help it. I want to see his face. He's like my drug.

There he is, smiling, in sunglasses and his ball cap, the picture of glossy, perfect health.

Feelin great, he posted.

And then, beneath that, a tornado of messages from girls. Triple hearts, smiley faces, fire. *Ur so hot, Gage. Gage you're the best. Miss you. You are fire. DM meeee.*

My body fills with heat.

I wonder what those girls would say if they knew I'd kissed that perfect mouth. A lot. Not very far from this chaise lounge, in fact. Just over there in our pool house.

You are perfect, CuteCathy commented.

Scrumptious, said PristTine.

I look at Gage's plump mouth again.

It's nice this way, he said the last time, his fingers tracing my neck. *Just you and me, this way. Private. Our own thing.*

An ache runs through me.

"You are bright red. Whatcha looking at there?"

Maddie's voice startles me. She's standing above me,

squeezing water from her thick hair, the droplets landing on my bare legs.

“Nothing.” I press the phone against my thigh.

“Ah, secrets.” She winks. “I get it. Well, you deserve some fun. But I’ll get it out of you. I have my ways.” She starts tickling me and the pink phone slides off my thigh and onto the damp patio. She snatches it up and starts tapping.

“Maddie!” I make a swipe to take the phone back, but I’m not quick enough.

“Oh,” she says quietly. Her smiles dies. “Oh.”

“It’s not anything,” I say quickly. “It’s stupid, really—”

Maddie looks at me and she doesn’t look mad, like I thought she might. Instead, she looks sad. But why would she look sad about Gage Galt and his Instagram feed?

I grab the phone from her.

My heart drops.

She wasn’t looking at Gage Galt. She was reading my messages.

Tasha. I blink, scrolling down.

The first texts were just a day after the accident.

OMG are u ok? Please call me

What happened???

I can’t believe this

Call me

And then a few days later.

Hey Emory, call me if you get a chance

There’s a lot happening, rumors and stuff

**Why were you in a car with Luther Leonard
I can't believe Candy's dead God I'm so sad
I went by your house and no one's there**

I take a deep breath. There are others, from the girls on the dance team. Mary, Madison, Jesse. Candy was on the dance team with us freshman year. She was nice, bubbly and friendly and laughed at herself when she'd mess up a move. Then she moved on to Drama Club.

Everyone loved Candy MontClair.

Listen I'm really sorry, Tasha texted a week ago.

**Leaving for dance camp tomorrow sorry we can't talk
But there's a lot going on
I'm really sorry, Emory. I hate this but
I think maybe in the fall
When school starts
You should lay low, ok? Some of the girls
Well, they're just, I mean, we're all sad
And there's just so much to deal with
Did you know that Luther guy had drugs in the car?
I mean, that's awful and kind of scary and we all talked
I mean, they just feel really uncomfortable with all this
So it's better I think if you kind of back off a little bit
Until everybody is feeling more comfortable**

My heart's thudding. I can't look at my sister.

"You've been dropped," Maddie says. "I was worried that might happen. Kind of wondered why no one's come around to see you since you've been home."

**I heard about your knee, that really sucks
You probably can't do dance team anyway
And let's be honest, you didn't really like it
I'm really sorry**

"Emmy," Maddie says, touching my shoulder.

I turn the phone facedown on my stomach. Shake my head. "Doesn't matter," I say. "No big deal. We weren't friend-friends, really, anyway. I was just on the team."

And it's the truth. I wasn't close with any of them, but I was on the team, and that meant built-ins like eating lunch together, hanging out when I wasn't worrying about Joey. Being on the team meant a kind of protection at school. People to be *with*, so you didn't appear to be completely alone. Some kind of social umbrella, by proxy, since I am not like Maddie, outgoing, beautiful, chatty, popular. All the things I should be, according to the family I come from, the house I live in. My mother.

And now I don't have even that.

And the person I most want to talk to about it, who would list each and every thing wrong with each and every one of those girls, even if he didn't really believe it, would be Joey. *Screw them*, he'd say. *Snooty bunch of hags. Who needs that? You're better off.*

But he's not here. And I can't even call him, because Blue Spruce doesn't allow phone calls. Something in the family handbook they sent us about *building a base of inner strength before reentering the outside world*.

"Let's get you inside," Maddie says gently. "Take a shower, maybe eat something. We can talk about this. I can help you."

I nudge her hand off my shoulder and stand up, wobbly on my weak leg. My knee is starting to hurt again, more than I admitted at the doctor's office, and I'll have to ask Maddie for a

pill, and my mother will wonder why I need it, and my brother is an addict, and now I don't even have what little friends I thought I had, and I just want to disappear.

"Hey, be careful, Em, what are you doing?"

Just . . . disappear.

I hobble away from Maddie and her concerned face, ignoring the pain vibrating in my knee, and stand at the edge of our ridiculously large, too blue, achingly beautiful pool in our achingly beautiful and carefully landscaped backyard.

Then I let myself fall in.

My shirt and shorts billow out across me and I swim beneath the surface, with just my arms and one good leg, encasing myself in silence, away from an accident, a dead girl, and my broken brother, and I decide, then and there, my lungs bursting, that I will spend the rest of the summer underwater, weightless and unharmed and silent and safe.