

JODI PICOULT

# Picture Perfect



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*L*ONG ago on the shores of the Atlantic there lived a great Indian warrior called Strong Wind. He had a magical power—he could make himself invisible—which enabled him to walk around in the camps of his enemies and steal their secrets. His home was a tent that stood beside the sea in a calm, calling breeze, and he lived there with his sister.

His skill as a fighter carried his reputation far, and many maidens wanted to marry him. But Strong Wind would have none of their silly, simpering smiles, their false boasts of being the perfect match. He said that he would marry the first maiden who could see him coming home at night.

It was a test he'd conceived to reveal a maiden's truthfulness. Many came to walk down the beach with his sister as the sun hissed into the sea, wishing to capture his heart. Strong Wind's sister could always see him, even when he was invisible to the rest of the world. So when her brother approached, she would turn to the current girl who peered over the horizon. "Do you see him?" And every waiting maiden would quickly lie: Yes, yes, there he was. Strong Wind's sister would ask, "With what does he draw his sled?" The answers were many: With the hide of a caribou. With a long, knotted stick. With a length of strong hemp. His sister would know the lies for what they were, simple guesses, and she knew that Strong Wind would not choose this girl whose footsteps mirrored hers in the wet sand.

In the village lived a mighty chief, a widower with three daughters. One was years younger than the others. Her face was as lovely as the first rain of summer; her heart could hold gently the pain of the world. Her older sisters, gnarled with their own jealousy, took advantage of her nature. They tried to detract from her beauty by leaving her clothes in rags, cutting off her shining

*black hair, burning the smooth skin of her cheeks and throat with glowing coals. They told their father the girl had done these things to herself.*

*Like the other maidens in the village, the two older sisters tried to see Strong Wind coming through the twilight. They stood on the beach with his sister, feeling the water run over their legs, and waited. As always, Strong Wind's sister asked if they saw him, and, lying, they said yes. She asked how he drew his sled, and, lying, they guessed rawhide. When they entered his tent, the flaps shuddered in the wind. They hoped to see Strong Wind bent over his dinner, but they saw nothing at all. Strong Wind, knowing their deception, remained invisible.*

*The day the chief's youngest daughter went to seek Strong Wind, she rubbed her burned face with earth to cover her scars and patched her skirt with bark from the trees. She passed other maidens on the way to the beach, who laughed to see her go and labeled her a fool.*

*But Strong Wind's sister was waiting, and when the sun slipped heavy in the sky she took the girl to the beach. As Strong Wind drew his sled closer, his sister asked, "Do you see him?" The girl replied, "No," and Strong Wind's sister shivered at the sound of the truth. "Do you see him now?" she asked again.*

*At first the girl did not speak, but her face was turned to the sky and her eyes were as bright as fire. "Oh yes," she finally breathed, "and he is wonderful. He dances on the clouds and he walks with the moon on his shoulder."*

*Strong Wind's sister turned toward her. "With what does he draw his sled?" she asked.*

*"With the rainbow."*

*She too stared at the sky. "And what is his bowstring made of?"*

*The girl smiled, and the night washed over her face. "Of the Milky Way," she said. "And his arrows are tipped with the brightest of stars."*

*Strong Wind's sister knew that because the girl had admitted she hadn't seen him at first, her brother had shown himself to her. She took the girl home and bathed her, running her palms over the pitted skin until all the scars disappeared from her body. She sang while the girl's hair grew thick and black down her back. She gave her her own rich clothes to wear and showed her into Strong Wind's tent.*

*The next day Strong Wind married her, and she walked with him across the sky and looked down on her People. The girl's two sisters were livid and shook their fists at the spirits, demanding to know what had transpired. Strong Wind resolved to punish them for the hurt they had caused his bride. He changed them into aspen trees and dug their roots deep into the earth. Since that day,*

*the leaves of the aspen tremble in fear of the coming of Strong Wind. No matter how quietly he approaches, they shiver, because they cannot put out of their minds his great power, and his rage.*

—Algonquin Indian legend

## CHAPTER ONE

THE first thing the groundskeeper saw when he went to tend to the small cemetery behind St. Sebastian's was the body that someone had forgotten to bury.

She was lying on top of a grave, her head pressed close to the headstone, her arms crossed over her stomach. She was almost as white as the seven faded granite markers that surrounded her. The groundskeeper took a deep breath, dropped his trowel, and crossed himself. He inched toward the body and leaned over, casting a shadow.

Somewhere overhead a gull screamed, and as the woman's eyes flew open, the groundskeeper turned and ran through the iron gate into the dizzying streets of Los Angeles.

The woman looked into the sky. She did not know where she was, but it was quiet; and since her head was pounding, she was grateful. She tried to remember how she had gotten there in the first place.

Sitting up, she touched the gravestone and squinted as the letters dipped and blurred before her eyes. She pulled herself to her feet and balanced against the stone for support. Then she leaned over and retched, clutching her stomach and blinking back tears at the pain shooting through her temples.

"A church," she said aloud, jumping at the pitch of her own voice. "This is a church."

She walked to the gate and stared at the cars and buses going by. She had taken three steps away from the church before she realized she did not know where she was supposed to go. "Think," she commanded herself. She put a hand to her forehead and felt the slip of her own blood.

“Jesus,” she said. Her hand was trembling. She felt for a tissue in the pocket of her jacket, a worn bomber jacket she couldn’t remember buying, and came up instead with a tube of Blistex and \$2.24 in change. She stepped back toward the graveyard and looked behind the headstones for a pocketbook, a knapsack, a clue.

“I was mugged,” she said, wiping her brow with her sleeve. “I must have been mugged.” She ran to the door of the rectory and banged, but it was locked. She moved to the gate again, planning to go to the closest police station and tell them what had happened. She would give her address and she would call . . .

Who *would* she call?

She stared at a bus sighing at the corner stop. She didn’t know where she was. She didn’t know the closest police station.

She didn’t even know her own name.

Chewing on a fingernail, she stepped back inside the gate, where she felt safer. She knelt beside the grave she’d been lying upon and rested her forehead against the cool headstone. Maybe the priest would be back soon, she thought. Maybe someone would come by and offer to help her. Maybe she’d just stay right there.

Her head began to throb, a drumbeat that threatened to split her in two. She sank to the ground and lay back against the gravestone again, pulling her jacket close to ward off the chill of the earth.

She would wait.

She opened her eyes, hoping for answers, but all she could see were clouds that covered the sky like a bruise.

THERE WASN’T ENOUGH LAND IN CALIFORNIA.

He could *feel* it, beating like a hammer at the base of his throat, this claustrophobia born of the hissing asphalt under his tires and the condos pressed so close they left no room to breathe. So he kept driving west to find the ocean, hopefully before it got dark. He had never seen it. There had only been pictures, and accounts from his mother and his father.

He remembered stories his father had told him, stories he hadn’t believed at the time, of Indians jailed in the 1800s who died overnight because they couldn’t stand the confinement.

He thought of the statistics from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which said that sixty-six percent of Indians who left the reservations returned,

unable to live in the cities. Of course, he was not entirely Sioux. But he was not entirely white, either.

He smelled it before he saw it. The wind carried him the salt from the waves. He parked the rusted secondhand pickup on the shoulder of the road and ran down the sloping dune. He did not stop running until his sneakers were submerged, until water stained the thighs of his jeans like tears.

A gull screamed.

William Flying Horse stood with his arms outstretched, his eyes fixed on the Pacific Ocean but seeing, instead, the brindled plains and rolling Dakota hills that he would not call home.

ON THE PINE RIDGE RESERVATION IN SOUTH DAKOTA, ROUTE 18 took you into town, and if you wanted to get anywhere else you navigated by natural landmarks or long-abandoned vehicles, since there weren't many other roads. But it had been three days since he'd moved to Los Angeles and Will had yet to get his bearings.

He was renting a little row house in Reseda, which was close enough to the LAPD to eliminate the need for a long commute, and far enough away for him to feel like he wasn't attached to his job. He didn't have to report to work until tomorrow—the paperwork for the position had been done through the mail—and he had planned to use this time to find his way around L.A.

Will slammed his fist onto the steering wheel. Where the hell was he? He groped along the front seat, looking for the map he'd tossed away minutes before. He squinted at the tiny red roads, but the overhead light in the pickup had been one of the first things to go, so he pulled to the curb underneath a streetlight. He peered at the map in the soft glow. "Shit," he said. "Beverly Hills. I was here an hour ago."

For the first time in decades, he wished he was more of an Indian.

He blamed his faulty sense of direction on his *wasicum* blood. All his life he'd heard stories of his grandfather's father, who tracked the god-damned buffalo by the slightest rising of the wind. And when the woman his father loved had left without a word, hadn't he ridden for miles using only his intuition to find her? Compared to that, how difficult could it be to find the San Diego Freeway?

Once, when Will was little, he'd followed his grandmother into the woods to collect roots and leaves for her medicines. He'd picked the

ones she pointed to, cedar and sweet flag and wild licorice. He'd turned his back only for a moment, and his grandmother had disappeared. For a while Will had wandered in circles, trying to remember his father's lessons about footprints left on broken leaves, snapped branches, the sense of movement in the heavy air. It was hours before his grandmother found him again, cold and curled beneath the burl of an oak. Wordlessly she pulled him by the hand in the direction of home. When the small log house came into view, she turned and cupped Will's chin in her hand. "You," she sighed. "So white."

He had only been ten, but that was the moment he knew he would never be like his grandparents. To them, to everyone who lived around him, he would always be *iyeska*, a mixed-blood. He had spent the next twenty-five years acting as white as he could, figuring if he could not be like his father's people, he would be like his mother's. He threw himself into his schoolwork so that he'd be able to go to college. He spoke only English, even at his grandparents' home where Lakota was the primary language. He nodded when his white bosses described the Sioux as lazy alcoholics and when the words ran cold through his blood; he wrapped his indifference around him like a cloak.

Well, he was white now. He was off the reservation and he was planning to stay, and as for finding his way out of Beverly Hills, he'd do what every other white man would do: he'd find a gas station and get directions.

Shifting gears, Will eased the truck away from the curb and started down the street again. The opulence of Beverly Hills amazed him—the wrought-iron gates and the pink marble fountains, the lights that winked from great Palladian windows. There was a party going on at one of the houses. Will slowed down to glimpse the silent ballet of waiters and guests and it took a moment for him to notice the flashing lights of the police cruiser pulling up behind him.

*Co-workers*, he thought, as he stepped out of the pickup to ask directions. There were two officers. One was blond, and that was all Will had time to notice before the man slammed his head against the cab of his truck, pinning his arm behind him.

"Look what we got here, Joe," he said. "Another fucking spic."

"Listen," Will heard himself rasp, and the cop brought his free hand down between Will's shoulder blades.

"Don't talk back to me, Pedro," he said. "We've been following you

for ten minutes. What the hell business do you have in a neighborhood like this?"

"I'm a cop." Will's words fell heavy to the pavement.

The man released his wrist, and Will pushed away from the truck and faced him. "Let's see your badge."

Will swallowed and looked him in the eye. "I don't have it yet. I don't have my piece, either. I just got here; I start work tomorrow."

The officer's eyes narrowed. "Yeah, well, if I don't see no badge, I don't see no cop." He nodded to his partner, who started to walk back to the cruiser. "Get the fuck out of here."

Will clenched and unclenched his fists as he watched the cop's re-treating back. "I'm one of you," he shouted, and behind the thick plate glass of the police cruiser's windshield, he saw the officer laugh. Walking back to his truck, he stared at the people at the party on the hill, laughing and drinking like nothing at all had happened.

The moon slid behind a cloud as if it were embarrassed, and at that moment two truths struck Will: He did not like L.A. And he was not white.

WHEN SHE AWAKENED THE SUN HAD SET. SHE SAT UP AND LEANED against the familiar gravestone. Somewhere to the east, a searchlight was cutting across the sky, and she wondered if some awards show was scheduled for that night—they were a dime a dozen in L.A.

She pulled herself to her feet and began to walk toward the gate. With each footstep, she spoke aloud a different female name, hoping that one might jar her memory. "Alice," she said. "Barbara. Cicely." She had gotten to Marta by the time she reached the street—Sunset Boulevard, she knew it right away and she realized she was making progress, since she hadn't remembered that earlier. She sat at the curb, in front of the sign that listed the name of St. Sebastian's priest and the hours of confession and masses.

She knew she wasn't a member of the congregation—that she wasn't even Catholic—but she felt she'd been there before. She felt she'd *hidden* there, really, or taken refuge. What would she possibly have been running from?

Shrugging, she dismissed the thought and peered into the distance. Across the street and down the block was a billboard for a movie. "*Taboo*," she read aloud, wondering if she'd seen it, since the title seemed

so familiar. The poster showed a man half in silhouette, but even with the shaded features it was easy to tell that the actor was Alex Rivers, America's sweetheart. He'd successfully starred in everything from action thrillers to Shakespeare, and she remembered reading somewhere that his Q-rating for recognition ranked above the President's. He was smiling at her. "At theaters everywhere," she read, hearing the catch in her own voice.

LATER ON, WHEN WILL THOUGHT BACK TO THE MOMENT, HE REALIZED it was the owl's fault. If he hadn't braked at the sound of that screech owl, he never would have stopped; and if he had never stopped, he wouldn't have made all the wrong decisions.

By some stroke of luck he'd found Sunset Boulevard, and although he knew Sunset Boulevard ran into the freeway, he wasn't sure if he was going in the right direction. The two gas stations he'd passed had been closed, and by now his right eye had nearly swollen shut and all he wanted to do was crawl into his bed and try to forget what had made him move to California in the first place.

He had just passed a McDonald's when he heard the call, sharp and piercing, like the cry of a child. Will had certainly heard owls before, but not since he'd left South Dakota. His grandparents, like many people on the reservation, believed strongly in the omens of birds. Since birds took flight, they were closer to the spirit world than man was, so ignoring a message from a bird might mean missing some warning or promise from powers greater than oneself. Will, in keeping with his rejection of the Sioux culture, had shrugged off the significance of hawks and eagles and ravens, although he couldn't bring himself to completely disregard owls, which his grandmother said were signs of death.

"Maybe it's the car," he said aloud, and almost simultaneously he heard it again, a shrill scream that pulled at his insides.

He braked. Behind him, a van swerved, its driver cursing through the open window. Will pulled over in front of a Catholic church and parked in a towaway zone.

He got out of the truck and stepped onto the sidewalk, lifting his face to the sky. "Okay," he said sarcastically. "Now what?"

The woman who came through the gate at the side of the church was faintly outlined in white, like a ghost. She saw Will and started to walk a little faster, a smile breaking across her face. Stunned, Will stared

at her. She reached just as high as his shoulder and she had dried blood at the edge of her scalp. She came closer, until she stood just inches away, looking at the bruise above his eye. She reached out, this woman Will did not know, and brushed her fingers over the skin. He had never felt anything like it: a touch more quiet than a breath. "Not you too," she whispered, and then her eyes rolled back and she started to fall to the ground.

Will caught her and settled her in the passenger seat of his truck. When she started to stir, he sat as far back against the driver's-side door as he could, certain she'd scream when she found herself in a stranger's car. But her eyes blinked open and she smiled so easily that Will found himself smiling back.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

She swallowed and ran her hand over her hair, smoothing it away from her face. "I think so," she said. "Have you been waiting long?"

She spoke as if she had known him all her life, which made Will grin. "No," he said. "I just happened to be passing by." He stared at her for a moment. "Listen," he said, "if you're waiting for someone, I can wait with you until they get here."

The woman froze. "You don't know me?" Will shook his head. "Oh God." She rubbed her eyes. "God." She looked up at him through tears. "Well, that makes two of us."

Will wondered what he had gotten himself into, sitting in his own truck with a woman who was crazy, or so high she couldn't think clearly. He smiled hesitantly, waiting for her to fall back to reality. "You mean you don't know me either."

"I mean I don't know *me*," the woman whispered.

Will looked carefully at her clear eyes, at the clotted cut on her temple. *Amnesia*, he thought. "You don't know your name?" He switched automatically into the questioning he'd learned as a tribal police officer in South Dakota. "Do you remember what happened to you? What brought you to the church?"

The woman glanced away. "I don't remember any of that," she said flatly. "I suppose I should turn myself in to the police."

The way she said it, like she'd committed a capital crime, made Will smile. He thought of driving her downtown to the Academy, the headquarters of the LAPD. Even if he wasn't officially on the roster, he surely could pull some strings and check the APBs, see if in fact anyone had

been looking for her. He shifted slightly, wincing at the pain that shot over his eye. He remembered the blond cop in Beverly Hills, and he wondered if they all would be like that come Monday.

"I'm the police," he said quietly, and even as the words were forming Will knew he would not take this woman to the LAPD, not after what had happened to him, not right away.

Her eyes narrowed. "Do you have a badge?"

Will shook his head slowly. "I just moved here. I live in Reseda. I start work tomorrow." He caught her eye. "I'll take care of you," he said. "Do you trust me?"

She looked at the sharp angles of his face, at the light shifting over his black hair. Nobody else had come. Yet when he had appeared, she'd run to him without any hesitation. Surely for someone who was not thinking with reason, but only with gut instinct, that had to count for something. She nodded.

He held out his hand. "I'm William Flying Horse. Will."

She smiled. "Jane Doe." She placed her fingertips against his palm, and with her touch this strange city fell into place. Will thought about the song of the owl, and this gift that had literally dropped into his arms, and as he glanced at her he knew that in some way she was now his.

## CHAPTER TWO

SHE kept skipping October. She was supposed to be reciting the names of the months in reverse order, as per instructions of the emergency room doctor, but she kept jumping from November to September. Her face flushed, and she looked up at the man who had been examining her. "I'm sorry," she said. "Let me try that again."

From across the room where he'd been watching for ten minutes, Will exploded. "Jesus," he said, moving closer. "I'm perfectly fine, and I wouldn't be able to do that without messing up." He glared at the doctor. He'd brought the woman to the emergency room because it was correct police procedure, at least in South Dakota, but now he was having second thoughts. As far as Will could tell, these stupid exercises had done nothing but make her more frazzled.

"She's lost consciousness at least twice in the past few hours," the doctor said dispassionately. He held up a pen, inches from her face. "What is this?"

She rolled her eyes. Already she'd answered questions about where she was, what day it was, who the President was. She'd counted forward and backward by threes and memorized a short list of fruits and vegetables. "It's a pen."

"And this?"

"A pen cap." She glanced at Will and grinned. "Or is it a cow?" As the doctor's eyes snapped up to hers, she laughed. "I'm *kidding*," she said. "Just a little joke."

"See?" Will said. "She can make jokes. She's fine." He crossed his arms, uneasy. Hospitals made him nervous; they had ever since he was nine years old and had watched his father die in one. Three days after

the car accident, his mother already buried, Will had sat with his grandfather waiting for his father to regain consciousness. He had stared for hours at his father's lax brown hand contrasting against the white sheets, the white lights, and the white walls, and he knew it was only a matter of time before his father left to go somewhere he belonged.

"All right." At the sound of the doctor's voice, both Jane and Will stood straighter. "You appear to have a mild concussion, but you seem to be on the mend. Chances are you'll recover your more distant memories before you recover the recent ones. There may be a few minutes surrounding the actual blow to the head that you never recall." He turned to Will. "And you are . . . ?"

"Officer William Flying Horse, LAPD."

The doctor nodded. "Tell whoever comes to get her that she should be observed overnight. They need to wake her every few hours and just check her level of alertness; you know, ask her who she is, and how she's feeling, things like that."

"Wait," Jane said. "How long until I remember who I am?"

The doctor smiled for the first time in the hour he'd been with her. "I can't say. It could be hours; it could be weeks. But I'm sure your husband will be waiting for you downtown." He slipped his pen into his jacket pocket and patted her shoulder. "He'll be filling you in on the details in no time."

The doctor swung open the door of the examination room and left, his white coat flying behind him.

"Husband?" she said. She stared down at her left hand, watching the diamonds on the simple band catch the fluorescent light. She glanced up at Will. "How could I have missed this?"

Will shrugged. He had not noticed it himself. "Can you remember him?"

Jane closed her eyes and tried to conjure a face, a gesture, even the pitch of a voice. She shook her head. "I don't *feel* married."

Will laughed. "Well, then half the wives in America would probably kill for your kind of blow to the head." He walked to the door and held it open for her. "Come on."

He could feel her one step behind him the entire way to the parking lot. When they reached the truck, he unlocked her door first and helped her into the seat. He turned the ignition and fastened his seat belt before he spoke. "Look," he said. "If your husband's looking for you, he

can't file a missing persons report until twenty-four hours go by. We can go down to the station now if you want, or we can go first thing in the morning."

She stared at him. "Why don't you want to take me there?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You're hedging," Jane said. "I can hear it in your voice."

Will faced straight ahead and put the truck into reverse. "Well, then you're not listening too well." A muscle jumped along the side of his jaw. "It's up to you."

She stared at his profile, a chiseled silhouette. She wondered what she had said to make him so angry. For right now, at least, he was her only friend. "Maybe if I get some rest," she said carefully, "I'll remember everything when I wake up. Maybe everything will look different."

Will turned to her, taking in the tremor of her voice and the hope she was holding out to him. This woman he knew nothing about, this woman who knew nothing about *him*, was putting herself in his hands. It was the most he'd ever been given. "Maybe," he said.

JANE WAS ASLEEP BY THE TIME THEY REACHED THE HOUSE IN RESEDA. Will carried her back to the bedroom, settling her on the naked mattress and covering her with the only blanket he'd unpacked. He took off her shoes, but that was as far as he'd go. She was another man's wife.

At Oglala Community College, in some culture class he'd been forced to take to graduate, Will had learned the punishment the Sioux meted out for a woman's adultery in the days of the buffalo. It had completely shocked him: If his wife had run away with another man, the husband had the right to cut off the tip of her nose, so she'd be marked for life. To Will, it seemed to contradict everything else he knew about the Sioux. After all, they did not understand ownership of the land. They believed in giving away money, food, and clothing to friends down on their luck, even if it meant that they'd become poor as well. Yet they branded a wife as property, a husband as an owner.

He watched Jane sleep. In a way, he envied her. She'd managed to discard her past so easily, when Will had to work so hard to put his own history out of his mind.

Will touched the edge of Jane's collar where blood had dried. He would get some cold water and soak that. He brushed her hair away

from her forehead and looked over her features. She had ordinary brown hair, a small nose, a stubborn chin. Freckles. She was not the blond bombshell of his adolescent dreams, but she was pretty in a simple way. Someone must have been frantic to find her missing.

He lifted his palm from her neck, planning to get a washcloth, but was stopped when her hand shot up from her side, her fingers closing around his wrist with lightning speed. *Jesus*, he thought, *the reflexes of a cougar*. Her eyes opened, and she glanced around wildly as if she'd been trapped. "Shh," Will soothed, and as he gently tugged to free himself, Jane let go, frowning as if she wasn't really sure why she'd grabbed him at all.

"Who *are* you?" she asked.

Will walked to the door and turned off the light. He looked away so that she would not be able to see his face.

"You don't want to know," he said.

WILL'S FIRST MEMORY INVOLVED BAILING HIS FATHER OUT FROM JAIL.

He was three, and he remembered the way his mother looked standing in front of the sheriff. She was tall and proud and even in the dim lighting she looked very, very pale. "There's been a mistake," she said. "Mr. Flying Horse is one of my employees."

Will did not understand why his mother would say his father worked for her, when she knew that he worked for Mr. Lundt on the ranch. He did not understand the word "assault" although he thought "battery" had something to do with making Christmas toys work. The sheriff, a man with a florid cauliflower face, stared closely at Will and then spat not an inch away from his foot. "Ain't no mistake, ma'am," the sheriff said. "You know these goddamned Indians."

His mother's face had pinched closed, and she pulled out her wallet to pay the fines his father had been charged. "Release him," she hissed, and the sheriff turned to walk down a corridor. Will watched him grow smaller and smaller, the pistol at his hip winking each time he passed a window.

Will's mother knelt down beside him. "Don't you believe a word he says," she told him. "Your father was trying to help."

What he learned, years later, was that Zachary Flying Horse had been in a bar when there was an incident. A woman was being hassled

by two rednecks, and when he'd stepped in to intervene, a fight had broken out. The woman had run out of the bar, so when the police came it was Zack's word against that of two white locals.

Zachary stepped out of the corridor in the jail behind the sheriff. He did not touch his wife. "Missus," he said solemnly. "Will." He lifted his boy up onto his shoulders and carried him into the hot Dakota sun.

They walked halfway down the block before Will's father swung him off his shoulders and caught his wife up in a tight embrace. "Oh, Anne," he sighed against her hair. "I'm sorry to put you through that."

Will pulled on the edge of his father's plaid shirt. "What did you do, Pa?"

Zack grabbed Will's hand and started down the street again. "I was born," he said.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE FOR HER TO MISS THE NOTE WILL had left her, sitting as it was on the toilet lid with a fresh towel, toothpaste, a twenty-dollar bill, and a key. *Jane*, Will had written, *I've gone to work. I'll ask around about your husband, and I'll try to call later today with some answers. I don't have anything in the refrigerator so if you get hungry, go down to the market (3 blocks east). Hope you're feeling better. Will.*

She brushed her teeth with her finger and looked at the note again. He hadn't said anything about what she should do if she awakened with a perfect understanding of her name and address—not that it really mattered, since she still couldn't remember. At least she was lucky. Her chances of running into a drug addict or a pimp on Sunset Boulevard had been much greater than running into someone from out of town, someone who'd leave a perfect stranger his house key and twenty dollars without asking any questions or expecting something in return.

A light came into her eyes. She *could* do something in return; she could unpack for him. Her taste in decorating might not be like his—in fact, she had no idea what her own taste was like—but surely having the pots and pans in the cabinets and the towels in the linen closet would be a nice thing to come home to.

Jane threw herself into the task of putting Will's house in order. She organized the kitchen and the bathroom and the broom closet, but she didn't really have to get creative until she got to the living room. There, in two boxes, carefully layered in newspaper, was a series of Native American relics. She unwrapped beautiful quilled moccasins and a long

tanned hide painted with the image of a hunt. There was an intricate quilt and a fan made of feathers and a circular beaded medallion. At the bottom of the box was a small leather pouch trimmed with beads and bright feathers, on which was drawn a running horse. It was closed tight with a sinew thong, and although she tried, she could not open the bag to see its contents.

She did not know what most of these objects were but she handled them as gently as she could, and she began to piece together more about Will. She looked around the bare walls and thought, *If I were in a strange place, I'd want something that reminds me of home.*

NO ONE HAD COME BY THE ACADEMY LOOKING FOR A MISSING woman. Will spent the day being introduced by the captain to other people in the LAPD, getting his badge and his assignment. When he registered for his gun, the officer who took down the information asked if he'd rather have a tomahawk; his new partner got a great kick out of calling him Crazy Horse. But these were things he'd faced before. He did not see the officer who'd blackened his eye; however, Beverly Hills was a separate precinct. When giggling secretaries asked about the bruise, he shrugged and said someone had gotten in his way.

It was after four o'clock before he got up the nerve to knock on his new captain's door and tell him about Jane. "Come over here," Watkins said, waving Will inside. "You think you got the hang of things yet?"

Will shook his head. "It's different."

Watkins grinned. "South Dakota it's not," he said. "A couple of celebrity traffic violations, a drug bust, and it'll be old hat."

Will shifted in his seat. "I wanted to speak to you about a missing persons case," he said. "Actually, I want to know if—" He stopped, and smoothed his palms against his thighs to gain his composure. There was no right way to go about saying he'd skirted procedure; Jane should have been brought into the precinct and photographed by now. "I found a woman last night who's got amnesia. We went to the hospital, but since it was late, I didn't bring her in right away." Will looked up at the captain. "Have you heard anything?"

The older man shook his head slowly. "Since you weren't on duty yet," he said, "I'm not going to count this against you. But she needs to be brought in for questioning." Watkins looked up at Will, and at that moment Will knew that in spite of the captain's absolution, he

would start out with a strike against him. "Could be her memory loss is related to a crime." Watkins fixed Will with a sharp glance. "I assume you still know her whereabouts. I'd suggest you bring her down as soon as possible," he said.

Will nodded, and started toward the door. "And Officer," Watkins called after him, "from here on, you play by the rules."

WILL PULLED ON THE COLLAR OF HIS UNIFORM THE WHOLE DRIVE back to Reseda. The goddamn shirt was choking him. He wouldn't last a week wearing it. He turned the corner of his block wondering if Jane had remembered her name. He wondered if she'd still be there.

She met him at the door wearing one of his good white shirts, knotted at the waist, and a pair of his running shorts. "Is someone looking for me?" she asked.

Will shook his head and stepped over the threshold of his house. He stood perfectly still in the entrance, surveying the neatly stacked, empty boxes and the proof of his history hanging over the walls where anyone could see.

The fury came so quickly he forgot to hide it away. "Who the hell gave you the right to go through my things?" he yelled, stomping across the carpet into the middle of the living room. He whirled to pin his gaze on Jane and found her crouched against the wall, her hands overhead as if to ward off a blow.

The anger ran out of him. He stood quietly, waiting for the rage to clear out of his vision. He did not say anything.

Jane lowered her arms and stiffly got to her feet, but she wouldn't look Will in the eye. "I thought I'd be helping you," she said. "I wanted to thank you for everything, and this seemed to be the best way." Her eyes raked the wall where the little leather pouch hung beside the painted hunting scene. "I could always change things if you don't like them hanging this way."

"I don't like them hanging at all," Will said, lifting the moccasins from their spot on the fireplace mantel. He grabbed an empty carton and began tossing the items back inside.

Jane knelt beside the box and tried to organize the fragile pieces so they wouldn't be crushed. She had to do it carefully; she had to make it right. She ran her fingers over the feathers of the small leather pouch. "What is this?"

Will barely glanced at what she was holding. "A medicine bundle," he said.

"What's in it?"

Will shrugged. "The only people who know are my great-great-grandfather and his shaman, and both of them are dead."

"It's beautiful," Jane said.

"It's worthless," Will tossed back. "It's supposed to keep you safe, but my great-great-grandfather was gored by a buffalo." He turned to see Jane fingering the bundle, and his face softened as she looked up at him. "I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to go off like that. I just don't like these things hanging where I can see them all the time."

"I thought you'd want something to remind you of where you came from," Jane said.

Will sank to the floor. "That's exactly what I ran *away* from," he said. He sighed and ran a hand through his hair, looking to change the subject. "How're you feeling?"

She blinked at him, noticing for the first time that he was wearing the blue shirt of a police officer, the LAPD patch over his upper arm. "You're wearing a uniform," she blurted out.

Will smirked. "You were expecting a headdress?"

Jane stood up and offered her hand to Will, pulling him to his feet. "I remembered how to cook," she said. "You want dinner?"

She had fried chicken, steamed beans, and baked potatoes. Will carried the platter to the center of the living room floor and chose a breast for each of them, placing the meat onto two plates. He told her about his first day of work, and she told him how she'd gotten lost on her way to the market. The sun bled through the windows and cast Jane and Will into silhouette as they fell into an easy silence.

Will picked at the pieces of the chicken, sucked the meat from the bones. Suddenly, he felt Jane's hand close over his. "Oh, let's do this," she said, her eyes bright, and he realized he was holding the wishbone.

He pulled and she pulled, the white bones slipping through their greasy fingers, and finally he came away with the bigger piece. Disappointed, Jane leaned back against a stack of boxes. "What did you wish for?"

He had wished for her memory, but he wouldn't tell her. "If you say it, it won't come true," he said, surprising himself. He smiled at Jane.

“My mother used to say that. In fact, she was the last person who pulled a wishbone with me.”

Jane hugged her knees to her chest. “Does she live in South Dakota?”

He almost didn’t hear her question, as he was thinking about the fine curve of his mother’s jaw and the spark of her copper hair. He pictured her hand and his own curled over the edges of the forked chicken bone, and he wondered if her wishes had ever come true. Will looked up. “My mother died when I was nine, in a car accident with my father.”

“Oh, how awful,” Jane said, and Will was amazed that her voice could hold so much pain for a stranger.

“She was white,” he heard himself saying. “After the accident, I lived with my father’s parents on the rez.”

As he started to speak, Jane reached onto the platter and pulled out a pile of bones Will had left. She settled them onto her plate and moved them around with her hands, seemingly unaware of what she was doing. She glanced up at him and smiled. “Go on,” she said. “Tell me how they met.”

Will had told this story many times before, because it tended to wrap itself around a woman’s heart so neatly she’d tumble into his bed. “My mother was a schoolteacher in Pine Ridge town, and my father saw her one day when he was getting some feed for his boss at the ranch. And her being white, and him being Lakota, he didn’t really understand his attraction, much less what he was going to do about it.” Mesmerized, he watched Jane’s hands wrap a strip of sinew from one bone around a second one. “Anyway, they went out a couple of times, and then it came to summer vacation and she decided things were moving along too fast, so she just up and left without telling my father where she was going.”

Jane neatly laid five bones in parallel lines against the edge of her plate. “I’m listening,” she said.

“Well, it sounds stupid, but my father said he was riding fence and he just *knew*. So he left in the middle of the day, on this borrowed horse, and he set out sort of north-northwest without any idea where he was headed.”

Jane looked up, her hands stalling. “Did he find her?”

Will nodded. “About thirty-five miles away at a diner, where she was waiting for a friend to pick her up and drive her home to Seattle.

My father pulled her in front of him on the horse and wrapped an extra saddle blanket around them.”

Will had listened to this story so many times as a child that even now, he imagined the words in his mother’s voice instead of his own. *“Years ago, this is how my people fell in love,” your father told me, and he wrapped that blanket so close we were sharing one heartbeat. “I would have come to you at night, and we would sit outside in this cocoon, and with all the stars as witnesses I would tell you that I loved you.”*

“My God,” Jane sighed. “That is the most *romantic* thing I’ve ever heard.” She pulled a new handful of bones from the tray between them. “Did your mother go back with him?”

Will laughed. “No, she went to Seattle. But she wrote him letters all summer and they got married a year later.”

Jane smiled and wiped her hands on a napkin. “How come people don’t do things like that nowadays? You grope around in the back of a sedan in high school and you think you’re in love. Nobody gets swept off their feet anymore.” Shaking her head, she stood up to clear the plates. She picked up the near-empty serving platter and then dropped it, hearing its ring and the splatter of grease.

On her plate she’d re-created the skeleton of the chicken.

The bones were carefully structured, in some cases even bound together at the joints. The wings were folded neatly against the rib cage; the powerful legs were bent as if running.

She put her hand to her forehead as a wealth of terms and images flooded her mind: the slender arm bone of a ramapithecus, a string of molars and cranial fragments, green tents in Ethiopia that covered tables laden with hundreds of catalogued bones. Physical anthropology. She’d spent entire months in Kenya and Budapest and Greece on excavations, tracking the history of man. It had been such a tremendous part of her life, she was shocked even a blow to the head could make her forget it.

She lightly touched the femur of the reconstructed chicken. “Will,” she said, and when she lifted her face her eyes were shining. “I know what I do.”

## CHAPTER THREE

WILL liked Jane better before she remembered she was an anthropologist. She kept trying to explain her science to him. Anthropology, she said, was the study of how people fit into their world. That much he understood, but most of the other things she said sounded like a foreign language. On the drive to the police station Monday evening, she'd outlined the best methods for skeletal excavation. When Watkins questioned her for a notice he'd insert in the *Times*, she'd told him that until someone came to claim her, she'd be happy to help in forensics. And now, the following morning, while Will was working his way through a bowl of Cheerios, she was trying to explain the evolution of man.

She was drawing lines across her napkin, labeling each branch with names. Will was beginning to see why her husband hadn't shown up. "I can't follow this," he said. "I can't even do math this early."

Jane ignored him. When she finished, she sighed and leaned back in her chair. "God, it feels so good to *know* something."

Will thought there were probably other things more worth knowing, but he didn't say this. He pointed to a spot on the napkin. "Why'd they become extinct?"

Jane frowned. "They weren't able to adapt to the world," she said.

Will snorted. "Yeah, well, half the time neither can I," he said. He picked up his hat, getting ready to leave.

Jane's eyes brightened as she turned to him. "I wonder if I've discovered something really important, like the Lucy skeleton, or that Stone Age man in the Tyrolean Alps."

Will smiled. He thought of her crouched over a site in the red sand

of a desert, doing what made her happy. "Feel free to dig in the backyard," he said.

THAT TUESDAY MORNING, THE LAPD RAN JANE'S PICTURE IN THE *L.A. Times* with a small blurb requesting information about her, and Jane remembered discovering the hand.

After Will had left, Jane took herself to the local public library. It was a small branch library, but it did have a neat little section of textbooks on anthropology and archaeology. She found the most recent book, hunched over the polished table, and began to read.

Familiar words jarred images in her mind. She saw herself in the British countryside, kneeling beside an open pit in which lay the tangled remains of an ancient Iron Age battle. She could remember brushing earth from the bones; feeling for the pits on a sternum made by lances and arrowheads, or the cleanly severed vertebrae that cried decapitation. She had been someone's assistant then, she remembered, labeling specimens with India ink, carrying trays of bones to dry in the sun.

Jane flipped the page and that's when she saw the hand. It was exactly as it had been when she'd found it in Tanzania, fossilized into a stratum of sedimentary rock, tightly grasping a chisel made of stone. Hundreds of anthropologists had combed Tanzania looking for evidence of the stone-tool industry they thought primitive man had the level of intellect to conceive. Following the lead of her colleagues, she had gone down one year to reopen a forgotten excavation site.

She hadn't been looking when she found the hand. She'd just sort of turned around, and there it was, shoulder level, as if it had been reaching for her. It was an extraordinary find; delicate bones were rarely preserved. For fossilization to occur, skeletons had to remain undisturbed by animals and swirling waters and shifts of the earth, and if any pieces of a skeleton were lost, they tended to be the extremities.

Even as she was working, she had known this would be her break into the field. She had found what everyone had been searching for. She had carefully labeled the chisel, the hundreds of digits of bone, had cleaned them and preserved them with a synthetic resin.

Jane turned back to the book and read the caption beside the photograph of the hand. *Dated to over 2.8 million years, this hominid hand and chisel are the oldest known proof of stone-tool industry (Barrett et al., 1990).*

Barrett. Was that her last name? Or had she only been someone's assistant, someone who had taken the credit for her own discovery? She skimmed through the index of the book, but there was no other reference to Barrett. None of the other books even carried a picture of the hand; it was too recent a find.

Shaking slightly, she walked to the reference desk and waited for the librarian to look up from her computer. "Hello," she said, flashing her most winning smile. "I was wondering if you could help me."

SHE FOUND WILL BENT OVER A DESK THAT SEEMED TOO SMALL FOR him, sorting through paperwork. "Police reports," he said. "I hate this shit." He swept them to the side of the desk with his arm and gestured to a chair nearby. "You see your picture yet?" Will held up the newspaper.

Jane grabbed the paper out of his hands and scanned the copy. "God," she muttered. "They make me sound like a foundling." She threw the newspaper back onto Will's desk. "And have you been swamped with calls?"

Will shook his head. "Be patient," he said. "It's not even lunchtime yet." He wheeled his chair back and crossed his ankles on his desk. "Besides," he added, "I'm getting used to having you as a housekeeper."

"Well, you'd better start looking for a replacement." She tossed him the Xerox copy of the page in the book she'd read that morning. "That's my hand."

Will peered at the blurry picture and whistled. "You look damn good for your age."

Jane snatched the paper back and smoothed it on the edge of the desk. "I discovered that hand in Africa," she said. "I might very well be 'Barrett.'"

Will raised his eyebrows. "*You* discovered *this*?" He shook his head in disbelief. "Barrett, huh?"

She shrugged. "I'm not really sure, yet. That could just be the lead scientist who was excavating the site." She pointed to the reference. "I could be 'et al.' I bullied a librarian into getting me more information," she said, beaming. "I should know who I am by tomorrow afternoon."

Will smiled at her. He wondered what he would do when she left him to go back to her life. He wondered how empty his house would

feel with just one person in it, whether she'd call him from time to time. "Well," he said, "I guess I should start calling you Barrett."

She stopped and turned her face up to his. "To tell you the truth," she said, "I've gotten used to Jane."

AN EARLY RISER, HERB SILVER HAD TAKEN HIS BREAKFAST POOLSIDE at six a.m.: tomato juice, grapefruit, and a Cuban cigar. Squinting up at the sun, he had opened the Tuesday *Times* and stared at the picture of the woman on page 3 until his cigar fell, unnoticed, from the corner of his mouth into the shallow end. "Holy shit," he said, reaching for the cellular phone in his bathrobe pocket. "Holy fucking shit."

THEY WOULDN'T HAVE STOPPED FILMING FOR ANY OF THE OTHER actors on the film, but he was one of the executive producers as well as the leading man, and any money wasted would come out of his own pocket. He wiped his arm across his forehead, grimacing as a streak of makeup came off on the sleeve of the velvet doublet. It was twenty fucking degrees in Scotland, but the set designer had ordered a hundred torches to line the great hall of the castle where they were filming *Macbeth*. Consequently, he couldn't make it through a single take before his own sweat blinded him.

Jennifer, his mousy little assistant, was standing with the portable phone next to a spare suit of armor. Taking the phone, he walked a discreet distance away from her and the *People* reporter who was covering the filming. "Herb," he said, still in accent, "this better be damn good."

He knew his agent wouldn't call him on location unless it was a dire emergency, an Academy Award nomination, or a part that would boost his career even higher. But he'd already received an Oscar nomination this year and he'd been choosing his own roles for ages. His fingers gripped the receiver a little tighter, waiting for the transatlantic static to clear.

"—newspaper this morning, and there she—" he heard.

"What?" he shouted, forgetting the cast and crew around him. "I can't hear a thing you're saying!"

Herb's voice came clearly into his ear. "Your wife's picture was on page three of the *L.A. Times*. She was picked up by the police and she doesn't remember her name."

"Oh Jesus," he said, his pulse racing. "What happened to her? Is she all right?"

"I just read this two minutes ago," Herb said. "She looks okay in the picture. I called you right away."

He sighed into the telephone. "Don't do anything. I'll be home by"—he checked his watch—"six tomorrow morning, your time." When he spoke again his voice broke. "I've got to be the first one she sees," he said.

He hung up on his agent without saying goodbye and started barking instructions to Jennifer. He called over her shoulder to his co-producer. "Joe, we've got to stop filming for at least a week."

"But—"

"Fuck the budget." He started toward his trailer, but then turned and touched Jennifer's shoulder. She was already bent over the telephone making plane reservations, her hair falling around her like a curtain. When she looked up he held her gaze, and she saw something in his striking eyes that very few people ever had: a quiet desperation. "Please," he murmured. "If you have to, move heaven and earth."

It took Jennifer a moment to shake herself back to reality, and even after he'd been gone for several seconds she could still feel the heat where his hand had held her shoulder; the weight of his plea. She picked up the phone again and began to dial. What Alex Rivers needed, Alex Rivers would get.

AT SEVEN A.M. ON WEDNESDAY, THE TELEPHONE BEGAN TO RING. Will ran from the bathroom into the kitchen, wrapping a towel around his waist. "Yeah?"

"It's Watkins. I just got a call from the station. Three guesses who's showed up."

Will sank down to the kitchen floor and let the bottom drop out of his world. "We'll be there in a half hour," he said.

"Will?" He heard Watkins's voice as if from a long distance. "You really know how to pick 'em."

He knew he had to wake Jane and tell her that her husband had come to claim her; he knew he had to say the reassuring things that she'd expect him to say during the ride to the Academy, but he didn't think he could do it. The feelings Jane brought out in him went deeper than a matter of a fateful coincidence. He liked knowing that she tried

to cover her freckles with baby powder. He liked the way she had of talking with her hands. He loved seeing her in his bed. He told himself that he would simply put on the mask of indifference he'd worn for the past twenty years, and that within a week his life would be back to normal. He told himself that this was what was meant to be all along. And at the same time, he saw Jane running from the cemetery gate beneath the owl's cry, and he knew that even when she was gone she would be his responsibility.

She was sleeping on her side, her arm curled over her stomach. "Jane," he said, touching her shoulder. He leaned closer and shook her lightly, shocked to notice that the pillow and blanket no longer smelled like him, but like her. "Jane, get up."

She blinked at him and rolled over. "Is it time?" she asked, and he nodded.

He made coffee while she was showering, in case she wanted something in her stomach before they left, but she wanted to go right away. He sat beside her in the pickup and drove in silence, letting all the words he should have been saying clutter the space around him. *I'll miss you*, he had planned to tell her. *Call if you get a chance. If anything happens, well, you know where I am.*

Jane stared glassy-eyed at the freeway, her hands clenched in her lap. She did not speak until they turned into the parking lot of the police station. At first, her voice was so quiet that Will thought he had heard her incorrectly. "Do you think he'll like me?"

Will had expected her to wonder aloud about whether she'd remember her husband the minute she laid eyes on him, or to speculate about where her home was. He had not expected this.

He didn't have a chance to answer. A flock of reporters pushed their way toward the truck, snapping flash cameras and calling out questions that tangled with each other in a knot of noise. Jane shrank back against the seat. "Come on," Will said, sliding his arm around her shoulders. He pulled her toward the driver's-side door. "Just stick close to me."

Who the hell was she? Even if she was this Barrett person, this anthropologist, and even if she'd discovered that hand, this kind of press coverage seemed to be a little overboard. Will guided Jane up the steps and into the main lobby of the station, feeling her warm breath make a circle against his collarbone.

Standing beside Captain Watkins was Alex Rivers.

Will dropped his arm from Jane's shoulders. Alex *goddamn* Rivers. All these reporters, all these cameras had nothing to do with Jane at all.

The corner of Will's mouth tipped up. Jane was married to the number-one movie star in America. And she'd completely forgotten.

THE FIRST THING SHE NOTICED WAS THAT WILL HAD STEPPED AWAY from her. For a moment she was certain she wouldn't be able to stand on her own. She was afraid to look up and face all those people, but something was keeping her on her feet and she needed to see what it was.

She lifted her head and was bound by Alex Rivers's eyes.

*Taboo.*

"Cassie?" He took a step forward, and then another one, and she unconsciously stepped closer to Will. "Do you know who I am?"

Of course she knew him; *everyone* knew him, he was *Alex Rivers*, for God's sake. She nodded, and that's when she noticed how faulty her perception had become. Alex Rivers's face kept shimmering in and out, the way the heat rising off asphalt in the summer sometimes makes you see double. One moment, Cassie saw him glossy and larger than life; in the next, he seemed to be nothing more than a man.

An instant before he reached for her, all of Cassie's senses seemed to converge upon one another. She could feel the warmth coming from his skin, see the light reflecting off his hair, hear the whispers that wrapped them closer together. She smelled the clean sandalwood of his shaving cream and the light starch of his shirt. Tentatively, she stretched her arms around him, knowing exactly where her fingers would meet the muscles of his back. *Anthropology*, she thought, *the study of how people fit into their world*. She closed her eyes and fell into the familiar.

"God, Cassie, I didn't know what happened. Herb called me in Scotland." His breath fell just over her ear. "I love you, *picoulette*."

It was that word that made her pull away. She looked up at him, at this man every woman in America dreamed about, and she took a step back. "Do you have a picture?" she asked softly. "Something that shows, you know, you and me, somewhere?"

She did not question why, days ago, when she wasn't thinking clearly, she had so easily trusted Will; yet here she was asking for proof before she'd let Alex Rivers take her away. Alex frowned for a moment,

and then pulled his wallet out of his back pocket. He handed her a laminated picture, a wedding photo.

It was certainly him, and it was certainly her, and she looked happy and cherished and sure. She gave it back to Alex. He put away his wallet and held out his hand.

She stared at it.

Somewhere behind her, she heard a desk clerk snicker. "Shit," the woman said, "if she got her doubts, I'll go with him."

She laced her fingers through Alex's and watched as his expression completely changed. The vertical line of worry between his brows smoothed, the thin line of his lips softened into a smile, and his eyes began to shine. He lit up the room, and Cassie felt her breath catch. *Me*, she thought, *he wants me*.

Alex Rivers let go of her hand and put his arm around her waist. "If you don't get your memory back," he whispered, "I'll just make you fall in love with me all over again. I'll take you back to Tanzania and I'll mix up all your bone samples and you can throw a shovel at me—"

"I'm an anthropologist?" she cried.

Alex nodded. "It's how we met," he said.

She bubbled at the thought of that. Her hand. It was her hand, after all; and through some miracle of God Alex Rivers seemed to be in love with her, and—

*Will*. She turned to see him standing a few feet away and shrugged out of the circle of Alex's arm. "I *am* an anthropologist," she said, smiling.

"I heard," he said. "So did most of L.A."

She grinned at him. "Well. Thank you." She raised her eyebrows. "I wasn't really expecting it to end this way." She stuck out her hand, and then impulsively threw her arms around his neck. Over her shoulder, Will did not miss the flicker that iced Alex Rivers's eyes for a fraction of a second.

He loosened Jane's—Cassie's—arms and held them down at her sides, furtively slipping into her palm the piece of paper he'd marked with his address and phone numbers. He leaned forward to kiss her cheek. "If you ever need anything," he whispered, and then he stepped back.

Cassie stuffed the paper into the pocket of her jacket and thanked

him again. She apparently led a storybook life. What would she possibly need?

Alex was waiting patiently at the door of the station. He framed Cassie's face in his palms. "You don't know—" he said, his voice faltering. "You don't know what it was like to lose you."

Cassie stared at him, absorbing the fear in his tone. She was frightened too, but that seemed secondary all of a sudden. Acting on instinct, she smiled up at Alex. "It wasn't for very long," she said softly, reassuringly. "And I wasn't very far away."

Cassie watched Alex's shoulders relax. Amazing—when he seemed to be calmer, she felt better too.

Alex glanced out at the swarming media. "This isn't going to be pleasant," he said apologetically, as he anchored her close to his side and opened the heavy front door.

He held one hand in front of his eyes and pushed a path for them through the growing throng of paparazzi and cameramen. Cassie looked up, dazed, only to see a looming face and then the explosion of a flashbulb. The early air closed in around her throat and, blinded, she had no choice but to turn her face into Alex's chest. She felt him squeeze her arm, felt his heartbeat against her shoulder, and she willingly sacrificed herself to the strength of this strange husband.

## CHAPTER FOUR

THE Malibu apartment was known for its natural spotlights. It had been built with ninety-two plate-glass windows, strategically located for eastern, western, and overhead exposure so that no matter where you were, the sun placed you center stage. Alex stood in front of a wall of glass, beautifully backlit, running his thumb over the edge of an oval inlaid maple box. “You got this in Lyons, I think,” he said to Cassie. She was sitting in a love seat the color of a blush, and when he sank to the floor in front of her, grasping her hand, she couldn’t help but gasp. It was like having the character spring off the movie screen, suddenly flesh and blood.

It was an odd feeling, seeing a stranger a few feet in front of you and knowing that you had shared his bowl of cereal, warmed your feet against his calves, traded him your whispers in a soft, mused bed. Cassie wished she could throw herself into the charade, but she could not. Alex was the actor, not her, and she was painfully aware of the shifting zone that moved with her, blue and magnetic, forcing a distance between them even when they touched.

Alex sighed. “You’re not going to start acting like I’m larger than life, are you?” he said. “You never did before.”

Cassie gave him a half-smile. She had been quiet on purpose, figuring the less she said, the less of a fool she’d make of herself. “This takes a little getting used to,” she said. She glanced at the white alençon curtains, the pickled-wood coffee table, the pink marble sink of the wet bar.

Alex leaned close to brush a kiss against her forehead, and she couldn’t help it, she stiffened. Since Alex had claimed her at the station,

he hadn't hesitated to touch her. It was ridiculous, really, to feel as skittish as she would on a blind date, since Alex had said they'd been married for three whole years. Still, she couldn't seem to see herself in the day-to-day routine of a marriage. Instead her mind kept flashing through images she knew she'd been fed by the media: Alex Rivers at a black-tie benefit for AIDS research, Alex Rivers accepting a Golden Globe award, Alex Rivers juggling coconuts during a break on the set of *Robinson Crusoe*.

Suddenly he stood up, bathed in sunlight, and Cassie lost track of her thoughts. She did not remember Alex, she did not feel comfortable around him, but she was fascinated by him. The silver shine of his eyes, the proud line of his jaw, the muscles corded in his neck, all called to her. She studied him as she would Michelangelo's David: fluid, beautiful, but far too steeped in his own perfection to be singled out for her.

"It's a good thing we came here," Alex said. "If you're overwhelmed by the apartment, I can't imagine what you'd think of the house."

On the way to the Malibu Colony, Alex had tried to jar Cassie's memory with descriptions of their three homes: the house in Bel-Air, the apartment in Malibu, and the ranch just outside of Aspen, Colorado. He said that they spent most of their time at the house, but that Cassie had always preferred the apartment because when they were married she'd redecorated it.

"What's it like?" she had pressed, eager for some detail that would shake free her past.

Alex had just shrugged. "It's little," he said.

But when the Range Rover pulled up to the towering whitewashed building, Cassie had stared at the rounded edges, the princess's turrets, the tiers and tiers. The last thing it was was *little*. "It looks like a castle," she had breathed, and Alex had thrown his arms around her. "That's what you said the first time you saw it," he'd said.

"Cassie?" She jumped now at the sound of her name. She hadn't even heard the telephone ring, but Alex was holding the receiver, mouthpiece covered. "Herb says he won't sleep until he sees that you're all right." He took a step closer to her and laid his palm against her cheek, his eyes darkening. "Well, I don't give a damn," he said. "You've got to rest."

He lifted the telephone to his ear. "No, Herb," he said. "Five minutes is too long. No—"

Cassie stood up and put her hand on his arm. It was the first time she had actually reached out to touch Alex, instead of him touching her. He turned to her, the telephone forgotten, his eyes locked onto her own. "It's okay," she said quietly. "Tell him to come over. I'll be fine. I don't want to rest."

He murmured something into the telephone and she watched the way his lips formed the words. She waited for him to hang up, but he didn't. He cupped his hand over the receiver again and moved closer, until they were separated by the space of a breath.

Cassie did not close her eyes as Alex kissed her. Her hand fell away from his arm to hang at her side, and she tasted faint traces of coffee and vanilla. When he pulled away, she was still leaning toward him, her eyes wide and waiting for the flood of memories she was certain would come.

But before that could happen, Alex gestured helplessly at the phone. "I have to talk to him. I left *Macbeth* mid-scene, you know, to get you. Poor Herb has to clean up the mess I made." He ran his hand over her hair. "Why don't you poke around a little? I promise, no more than five minutes."

As Alex turned away and started rattling questions into the telephone, Cassie moved downstairs to the middle level of the apartment. She wondered if she should change her clothes before Herb arrived. She wondered who Herb was.

She started toward the master bedroom, where Alex had showed her, earlier, a closet full of silks and rainbow cottons that belonged to her. She reached the arched hallway Alex had pulled her through before. This time, she stopped to look at the pictures that hung against the stark white walls. There was one of Alex on the beach outside the apartment, buried up to his chest in sand. Of Cassie herself, grinning, her arm thrown casually around the shoulders of a skeleton. There was a picture of a dog she did not recognize, and one of Alex on a rearing horse. Finally came a photo of Cassie in bed, white sheets pulled just up to her breasts, a lazy smile across her flushed face.

She thought of the pressure of Alex's kiss. She tried to imagine his hands tracing their way down her spine.

She looked at the picture again, and she wondered if Alex had taken it.

HERB SILVER WAS FIVE FEET TALL, BALD, WITH A HANDLEBAR MUSTACHE and pointed ears that made Cassie think of a Munchkin. He met Alex at the door of the apartment and shoved a greasy brown paper bag into his arms. "So, I figure it's lunch and what's a *goy* like you going to have in his kitchen?" His eyes darted behind Alex's substantial height, searching for Cassie, pushing Alex aside as he began to rummage in the bag. "There's pastrami on rye with sauerkraut for you, and three knishes and for God's sake, don't eat all the *forshpeis* by yourself this time. Ah!" He held out his arms to Cassie. "You were trying to give me my third heart attack?"

Herb Silver was Alex's agent at CAA. He had moved to L.A. over twenty years earlier, but he told everyone that even though you could take Herb Silver out of Brooklyn, you couldn't take Brooklyn out of Herb Silver. Cassie reached out and hugged him, his head coming under her chin.

Herb kissed her on the mouth. He ran his hands lightly down her arms as if he were checking for broken bones. "So, you're fine?"

Cassie nodded, and Alex stepped forward, offering her half of a paper-wrapped knish. "She's perfect," he said with a full mouth.

Herb raised an eyebrow. "Does the girl have a voice of her own?"

"I'm fine," Cassie said. "Really." She looked from Alex to Herb and then back at Alex again, silently thanking the little man for forcing his entry this afternoon. With Herb added to the mix of her mind, Alex couldn't help but seem more familiar.

Alex clapped an arm around Herb's shoulders and led him upstairs to the dining room. "Cassie—can you get the plates? All right, Herb, tell me what Joe's doing in Scotland."

Cassie wandered into the kitchen, grateful for something to do. Somehow the ordinary things, like finding plates, or cooking, or watching the shower steam up the bathroom, made her feel at home. Alex had seemed so much less threatening that morning when they were doing things together—him pouring juice and her finding the ice, standing side by side and chopping peppers for an omelette, picking up a stack of papers the wind had scattered to the floor. There was an intimacy to simple tasks, things everyone knew and everyone did, that formed a floor of false comfort and security beneath even two strangers.

Herb and Alex were talking in the dining room, a running river of syllables she caught from time to time. Cassie looked from one cabinet

door to the next, wondering where the dishes were. She opened the door closest to her. Tablecloths, and a breadbasket. The door beside it revealed wineglasses.

“Joe’s filmed the six lousy scenes that don’t revolve around you—the witches, and something or other with Banquo. He says Melanie did a tour de force with the hand-washing bit.” Herb watched Cassie open a third and fourth cabinet, bite her lip, and then check beneath the sink. “What’s with her head?” he whispered to Alex. “She’s still a little *mesbugge*?”

Alex shrugged. “The doctor told her it’s going to take some time for her to remember who she is, and what the hell knocked her out.” His eyes followed Cassie as she finally opened the cabinet that held the dishes. “In the meantime, I figure I’ll just keep her near me. Safe.” He grinned at his agent. “Shit. If *I* can’t bring back her memory, I don’t know what *can*.”

Cassie brought back three plates and a stack of paper napkins. She hovered at the edge of the table, the outsider. “I could only find wineglasses,” she said.

Herb waved toward her chair. “Just sit. We can drink out of the bottles.” He unwrapped a sandwich with a colossal amount of meat jammed between the slices of bread, and Cassie watched his mouth contort to seal around the bulk of it. “I hope you’ve thanked your lovely wife, Alex, for the free PR.” Herb pinched Cassie’s cheek. “Nationwide coverage of the heartbroken Alex Rivers shielding his wife is *exactly* the kind of pre-Oscar coverage we need.” He held his sandwich inches from his mouth. “It can’t hurt all your buddies at AMPAS to see you being a family man before they cast their Best Actor and Best Director votes. You know, I’m going to call Michaela this afternoon and see if we can’t milk this on *Oprah*. You can plug *Taboo*, maybe we can get Cassie on for the last five minutes—”

“No.” At that last word, Cassie jumped. Alex hadn’t spoken particularly loudly, but he’d slammed his fist on the table so forcefully that he had cracked one of the hand-painted tiles that made up its surface. Cassie watched a tiny line of blood trickle down Alex’s wrist, but he did not bother to wipe it away. His eyes narrowed, and he leaned across the table toward Herb, upsetting a bottle of soda. “You will not exploit my wife on television to stack my odds for the Oscars.”

Herb blotted his mouth with a napkin, as if he were used to this kind of outburst every day. "Okay, okay," he said.

Stunned, Cassie sat motionless, watching the clear stream of Sprite puddle onto the carpet. She looked up at Alex. "I don't mind," she said. "If you think it will help you—"

"I said *no*," Alex bellowed. His fingers, clenched white around the edge of the table, suddenly relaxed. "Cassie," he said more softly. "The *soda*."

Cassie pushed back her chair and flew into the kitchen. A dishcloth. She spun around, intuitively opening the cabinet that housed a stack of simple folded cloths. She efficiently mopped up the tiles on the table and then, kneeling between Herb and Alex, she pressed the cloth to the carpet. She scrubbed for a full minute. In fact, she was so intent on cleaning the mess, she didn't notice the breaking weight of the silence that settled on her shoulders, forcing her to bow her head, preventing her from looking up at Alex.

"There," Cassie said to herself, breathless. She rocked back to her heels.

Alex pulled her up to sit on his lap. "Sorry, Herb," he said sheepishly. "You know how I get about her."

"Who wouldn't?" Herb picked up the second half of his sandwich and began methodically sifting through the corned beef, eliminating every other slice. "Goddamn cholesterol."

Cassie watched him pile the meat on the side of his plate. She shifted uncomfortably, feeling Alex's thighs beneath hers. She realized she was shaking, and almost as quickly, Alex banded his arms around her. "Cold?" he whispered against the curve of her ear, and before she could answer, he tightened his embrace.

"I'm going to fly back to Scotland on Friday," he said. "I'm taking Cassie with me."

"You are?" Cassie said, turning in his arms to stare at him.

Herb nodded. "UCLA's giving her a sabbatical?"

*UCLA?* Cassie struggled off Alex's lap. "What does UCLA have to do with it?"

Herb smiled indulgently. "Alex probably didn't get around to telling you yet. You teach there."

"I thought I was an anthropologist."

"You are," Alex said. "You teach anthropology there." He grinned

at her. "Let me see if I've got it right this semester—you're teaching Archaeological Field Training, The Australopithecines, and you're heading a tutorial for Golden's course on biology, society, and culture."

Cassie rounded on him, furious, her anger eating away at the distance between them and making her forget her quiet role as an observer. How could he have neglected to mention this? She'd told him about the hand she'd found in the library the day before, the first clue to her identity. And at the police station, when he'd confirmed her profession, she'd practically crowed. For someone so concerned with his own career, Alex should have understood. "Why didn't you tell me this before? I've got to call someone there. I might have missed a class. They might have seen the paper—"

"Cassie," Alex said, "calm down. I had Jennifer call to let them know you're all right and to tell them you'd be taking off sick for a couple of weeks."

"And who the hell is *Jennifer*?" Cassie yelled.

"My *assistant*," Alex said. His voice, low and soothing, ran over her shoulders and her back. He came to stand in front of her, grasping her upper arms and forcing her to look into his eyes. "Take it easy," he said. "I only want you to get better."

"I'm *fine*," Cassie exploded. "I'm perfectly *fine*. I may not be able to remember who I am, Alex, but that doesn't make me an invalid. I'd probably remember a lot more if you weren't so intent on making all my decisions for me and—" Suddenly, her words dropped off. Alex's voice had been soft as rain, and his arms were offered for comfort, but his fingers bit into her skin. Cassie looked down to a spot where a small smear of blood from the side of his injured hand had marked her shirt.

He was staring at her so intently he didn't even know he was hurting her. Cassie felt her cheeks burn. She was accusing him, although she only knew half the facts. She had yelled at him, when all he'd done was try to help. She turned away from Alex, mortified that she had screamed like a banshee in front of him, in front of his agent. What had she been thinking? Of course she'd go to Scotland. She had the rest of her life to teach at UCLA.

Alex brushed her hair back from her forehead. He seemed to be waiting for her to come to her senses. "I'm sorry," Cassie murmured. "I just wish you'd said something." She pulled away from him, letting that uneasy shadow fall back into place between them. She smiled

through her embarrassment at Herb, then walked onto the patio that led to the beach.

"Whew," Herb said, standing and stretching his arms overhead. "I don't think I've ever seen Cassie act like that."

Alex watched his wife walk over the bright sand, the wind covering her footsteps almost as quickly as she made them. He saw her pick up a stone and throw it as far as she could, aiming to shatter the sun. "No," he said quietly. "Neither have I."

IT WAS THE SUMMER OF 1975 AND SHE AND CONNOR LAY ON THEIR backs on the floating dock, rubbing their toes against the rough wood, challenging each other to see who could stare longest at the burning sun. "You're cheating," she said. "I can see you squinting when you think I'm not looking."

"Am not," Connor said indignantly. "You just can't think of any other way to win."

She was twelve and she was with her best friend, and it was one of those absolutely perfect days on Moosehead Lake, one that moved so slowly you were sure you were stuck in a photograph until, wham, just like that, it was over too soon. "God," she said. "I'm totally blind."

"Me too," said Connor. "All I see is black."

"Truce?"

"Truce." Cassie sat up, groping along the dock past her fishing pole and Connor's to find the skinny bones of his wrist. She pulled until she knew he was sitting up too.

She had known Connor for as long as she could remember. He lived next door and his father worked at the bait and tackle shop in town. They had stolen still-hot elephant-ear cookies from her parents' bakery; they had been in the same class since second grade; they had learned to sail together on a battered old Sunfish bought with their pooled paper route money. They had both forsworn marriage, each thinking that with the exception of the other, the opposite sex was a miserable lot; they talked constantly of running away to the Canadian border, just to see if they could actually do it. Their parents said they were each other's flip side, inseparable, two halves of a whole. Cassie liked that idea a lot. It made her think of a picture in their biology textbook of a hermit crab that lived with a sea anemone on its back. The sea anemone, carried by the crab, had a better chance of finding food, and the crab was better

protected by the sea anemone's sting and camouflage. Separate, they had to take their chances. Together, they had a whole new chance at survival.

Connor jumped to his feet. "Want to fish?"

"Again?" said Cassie. "No."

"Want to race back?" He gestured toward the sliver of shore.

"What about our poles?"

Connor dropped to a crouch. "I could teach you to do a backward dive."

For a second Cassie's eyes gleamed—Connor could do anything when it came to diving. He'd tried to show her once or twice, but she hadn't been a very good student. Still, a *back* dive.

"Okay," she said. "What do I do?"

Connor positioned her beside him on the floating dock so that they stood with their backs to the water, their toes balanced right on the edge. Then he bent at the knees and executed a perfect dive, slicing the water with his hands before his body followed like the silver slip of a knife. He surfaced beside the dock and wiped mucus from his nose. "You do it."

Cassie sucked in her breath. She bent a little, hopped, and slipped on the wet dock. The only thing she remembered for a long while after that was the horrible sound her skull made as it cracked against something hard and unforgiving.

Connor was already in the water when she blacked out, and he slung an arm across her chest and scissor-kicked his way back to the shore. He dragged her across the sand, Cassie's heels cutting dark wet furrows in their wake.

When her eyes blinked open, something was blocking her view of the sun, something black and looming. *Cassie*. She rubbed her hand against the back of her head.

Connor was staring at her as if she'd come back from the dead, instead of just passed out for a minute or two. "You okay?" he said. "You know who I am?"

Cassie snorted; she couldn't help it. As if she could ever forget Connor. "Yeah," she said. "You're my other half."

Connor stared down at her, his face so white she knew she had given him a good scare. For a moment neither of them said a word. Connor found his voice first. "Come on," he said. "Let's get some ice for you."

They swung open the screen door of Cassie's house, leaving damp footprints and a shadow of sand on their way into the kitchen. "It would have been a perfect dive," Cassie tossed over her shoulder. "Next time, I think—" She stopped at the doorway so abruptly Connor slammed against her back, and unconsciously, she leaned toward him. Her mother was slumped across the kitchen floor, soaked in a pile of her own vomit.

Setting her lips in a tight line, Cassie knelt beside her mother with a wet dishrag, wiping her cheek and her mouth and the collar of her shirt. From the corner of her eye, she saw Connor silently retrieve the bottle of gin that had rolled underneath the radiator. Her mother was supposed to be at the bakery, since it was only three o'clock. There must have been another fight. Which meant she didn't know when, or whether, to expect her father home.

"Ma?" Cassie whispered. "Ma, come on. Get up." She looped her mother's arm around her neck and hefted the dead weight in a dragging fireman's carry. With Connor watching from the doorway, she draped her mother across the living room couch and covered her with a light quilt.

"Cass?" Her mother's voice was soft and breathy, a dead ringer for Marilyn Monroe's. She reached blindly to find her daughter's hand. "My good girl."

Cassie tucked her mother's hand under the quilt and wandered back into the kitchen, wondering what she could scrounge up for dinner. If she had a meal set when—if—her father got home, then he wouldn't get angry, and if he didn't get angry her mother would be less likely to drink herself out cold again. She could make everything okay.

Connor stood in the kitchen packing ice into a plastic baggie. "Get over here," he said. "The last thing *you* need is for your head to swell some more."

She sat down on a chair and let Connor hold the pack to the curve of her neck. It wasn't like Connor hadn't seen this before—he knew *everything* about her—but even the first time, he had just offered his help and kept quiet. He hadn't looked at her with those moon eyes that she knew meant pity.

Ice water ran down the hollow between Cassie's shoulder blades, and in spite of Connor's first aid, a headache was beginning to kick through

her. She stared out the window at the floating dock, which looked so far away she could hardly believe she had been there minutes before. Cassie sighed. The problem with absolutely perfect summer days was that they were bright bull's-eye targets for something to go outright wrong.

SHE WOKE UP TO THE COOL STING OF ALOE BEING RUBBED ALONG her calves. "You're going to pay for this later," Alex said. "You're so red it hurts me to look at you."

Cassie jerked her leg away and tried to roll over, feeling uncomfortable with the intimate slip of Alex's palms over her own skin. She winced at the pain when she tried to bend her knee. "I didn't mean to fall asleep."

Alex glanced at his watch. "I didn't mean to let you sleep for six hours, either," he said. "After Herb left, I sort of got tied up on the phone."

Cassie sat up and shifted degrees away from Alex. She watched the sun cut a ribbon across the ocean. An older woman came strolling down the beach with two weimariners. "Alex!" she called, waving. "Cassie! Are you feeling all right?"

Alex smiled at her. "She's fine," he yelled. "Have a nice walk, Ella."

"Ella?" Cassie murmured. "Ella Whittaker?" Her eyes widened, trying to catch a glimpse of the statuesque woman who, fifty years back, had been a pinup girl and a screen legend. "The Ella Whittaker who starred in—"

"The Ella Whittaker who lives two doors down," Alex said, grinning. "God, you've got to get your memory back soon, or you're going to scour the Colony asking for autographs."

For several minutes he did not speak, and Cassie could feel the quiet settle around them. She wanted to say something to Alex, anything, but she didn't know what sorts of things they talked about.

As she turned toward the violet line of the horizon, Alex's voice curled over her, light as silk. "I *was* going to tell you about UCLA. God, I never would have *met* you if you weren't working there, so I owe them a lot. I really didn't do it deliberately. I just forgot." He reached for her hand and brought it to his lips. His eyes were the sloe-black of smoke. "Forgive me?"

*He's acting.* The thought rushed through Cassie's mind so violently she pulled her hand free and turned away, shaking. *How do I know when he's acting?*

"Cassie?"

She blinked at him, held in his gaze, and by bits and degrees she softened. She couldn't think about UCLA, about who was wrong and who was right, not just now. He was hypnotizing her; she knew this as well as she knew that she had been made for him, as well as she knew that any doubts she had about Alex would mirror her own faulty judgment.

Cassie began to hear and feel the unexpected: a tangle of sweet Mexican violins, a wet wind from an everglade, the song of one hundred hearts beating. She thought to run, some instinct telling her this was the beginning of the end, but she could no sooner move than turn back time. The world as she knew it was falling away, and the only place left for her to go was toward Alex.

"Forgive me?" he repeated.

Cassie heard the sound of her own voice, heard the words she couldn't remember thinking. "Of course," she said. "Don't I always?"

A wave rolled over Cassie's ankles, frigid and authentic. The magic broke, and then it was just the two of them, she and Alex, and that was starting to seem all right. "I came prepared with a bribe," Alex said. "I made it myself." He was smiling at her, and she smiled back hesitantly, thinking, *He understands. He knows he has me in the palm of his hand.* He pulled up the front of his shirt to reveal a neatly wrapped square package tucked into the waist of his jeans. "Here."

Cassie reached for the tinfoil, trying not to look at the smooth, sculptured muscles of his chest. She unwrapped it. "You made me Rice Krispies Marshmallow Treats? Are they my favorite?"

"No," Alex laughed. "In fact, you hate marshmallows, but it's the only thing I know how to cook and I thought for *sure* you'd remember that and take pity on me." He tugged it out of her hand and took a bite. "I grew up on these," he said, his mouth full.

Cassie turned to him, her eyes gleaming. "Alex," she said. "Where did I grow up?" *Maine.* She knew even before he spoke the word what the answer would be. "And who was Connor?"

Alex's eyes widened, so she could see the ring of gold around the

edge of his irises. "Your best friend. How do you—did you remember all this?"

She grinned, excited. "I was dreaming the whole time I was asleep," she said. "I remembered a lot of things. Moosehead Lake, and Connor, and . . . and my mother. Do we ever go there? Do I talk to my parents a lot?"

Alex swallowed. "Your mom's dead, and, well, when I first met you, you told me the reason you went to college in California was to get as far away from Maine as you possibly could."

Cassie nodded, as if she had expected this. She wondered how much Alex knew about her parents. She wondered if she'd ever been brave enough to tell him. "Where are your parents?"

Alex rolled away from her, turning to face the ocean. She watched his profile set, and she had a sudden memory—this was the way he looked minutes before he filmed a scene, when his own personality drained away and was replaced by the character he was playing. "They're in New Orleans," Alex said. "We don't see much of them, either." He rubbed his palm against the back of his neck and closed his eyes. Cassie wondered what he was seeing, what made him curl into himself. To her surprise, a sharp ache stung her chest, and she knew right away she had felt it so that he wouldn't have to. When Alex looked up at her, old ghosts still shifted in his eyes. "You really don't remember me, do you?" he said quietly.

He was inches away but she could feel the line of heat between them as if they were touching. Cassie put her arms around him, shivering as she took in more of his pain. "No," she said. "I don't."

THEY MADE POPCORN IN THE MICROWAVE FOR DINNER AND watched a Monty Python rerun on TV. They played War with a deck of cards they found buried in the broom closet. With a pillowcase draped on his head for a wimple, Alex performed Lady Macbeth's "Out, damned spot!" speech, curtsying low when Cassie laughed and clapped. Her eyes were shining when he jumped down from the cleared coffee table he'd used as a stage. She did not know Alex, but she liked him. Surely that was more than most marriages survived on.

Alex pulled her to her feet. "Tired?"

Cassie nodded, letting him slip his arm around her waist. As they

walked down the stairs to the bedroom, she wondered what the sleeping arrangements would be. They were married, so he could sleep anywhere he pleased; but she'd really only had one day to get reacquainted with him, and she supposed he might chivalrously offer to stay in a guest bedroom for the night. She wondered if she wanted him to.

At the door to the master bedroom, Alex stopped walking. Cassie stepped away from him, her arms pressed to her sides. She could not bring herself to look at Alex, whose questions, even in the silence, seemed to fill the hallway.

He tipped her chin up and kissed her gently. "Good night," he said, and then he turned toward a guest room a few doors down.

Cassie watched him for a moment, then walked into the bedroom and closed the door. She pulled her shirt over her head and stepped out of her shorts, tossing them on the four-poster bed en route to the bathroom. Stripping off her underwear, she stood in front of the mirrors that lined an entire wall beside the sink. She cupped her hands over her breasts and frowned at the small swell of her stomach. She couldn't imagine what had attracted Alex Rivers.

She picked up the bottles and jars that dotted the countertop—facial creams and exfoliating scrubs and clear astringents that seemed to belong in equal proportion to Alex and herself. She had already brushed her hair and washed her face when she realized there was no toothpaste. There were two toothbrushes—one green, one blue—and she didn't know which one was hers, either.

She checked in the cabinets that were recessed into the walls, but all she could find were pale peach towels and two thick terry cloth bathrobes. She wrapped one around herself, rubbing her hands down the heavy brushed cotton. Maybe Alex had toothpaste in *his* bathroom, and surely he'd want his toothbrush.

She didn't know which room he had gone into, and she was about to knock on random doors when she heard him speaking a little farther down the hall. "Life's but a walking shadow." The door was ajar, and in the reflection of the bathroom mirror she saw Alex standing over the sink, his eyes hollow. "A poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage," he murmured, his voice no louder than a whisper. "And then is heard no more."

Stunned, Cassie clutched the toothbrushes in her hand and leaned against the doorframe to see a little better. This was not Alex. He had

transformed himself into a man beaten, a man who saw his life for what it would become—a flash in someone else’s memory, then something forgotten.

Cassie fought back the urge to push the door open and wrap her own hope tight around him. She did not know this new stranger, she knew him even less than she knew Alex, but she understood that she had come to help.

She thought about what Alex had said at the police station, the terror in his voice: *You don’t know what it was like to lose you.* And she began to see that the famous Alex Rivers came undone just as easily as the next person.

Cassie took one step forward and Alex opened his eyes, seeing her reflection. He was Alex again, and smiling, but in the darker gradients of his eyes she could see the terror and the numbness of Macbeth. She wondered if he had always been like that, if every character became a tiny part of him. She knew that actors, in some part, had to draw and embellish on their own experience, and the thought of so much despair buried somewhere in Alex wrenched her. “Where do you get it? All that pain?”

He stared at her, shaken by her second sight. “From myself.”

She moved first, or maybe he did, but then he was holding her and opening the tie of the robe, running his hands up and down her sides. The toothbrushes fell to the floor and Cassie wound her fingers in his hair, burying her face in the hollow of his shoulder. She inched her hands down his back as if she were feeding a seam, bunching the fabric of his shirt until her hands burned the skin at his waist.

He kissed hungrily, bumping them against walls and doorframes as he pushed his way back toward the master bedroom. Cassie fell against the bed, and he pulled apart the sides of her heavy robe, pinning her arms while the moon danced over her skin. His tongue traced the bend of her jaw, the curves below her breasts, the white lines of her thighs.

Cassie opened her eyes, dazed by the image of his body over hers. Alex pressed his lips to her stomach. “Beautiful,” he said.

*He’s acting.*

As it had earlier that day, the thought came out of nowhere, and when it took root in her mind she began to struggle. But Alex’s weight was on her, pressing. He cradled her face in his hands and kissed her so honestly she thought she would shatter. And then she remembered

the spell he had woven between them that afternoon; the emptiness that had opened like a raw wound in her own stomach when she heard him speak as Macbeth.

The moment they came together, Cassie understood why they belonged to each other. He filled her, and she took away his scars. Cassie wrapped her arms around Alex's neck, surprised by the tears that leaked from the edges of her eyes. She turned her face to the open window, breathing in the sweet mix of herself and Alex and endless ocean.

She was drifting off to sleep when Alex's voice slipped over her. "You don't have to get your memory back, Cass. I know who you are."

"Oh?" she said, smiling. She drew Alex's arm around her. "Who am I?"

She felt Alex's peace curl against her like a benediction. He pulled her back against his front, into the place where she just fit. "You're my other half," he said.

## CHAPTER FIVE

**I**N another time and place, Will Flying Horse would have been a Dreamer.

He was eleven when his eyes opened in the middle of the night, seeing and not seeing at the same time. It was summertime, and outside the cicadas sang in the quiet of the half moon. But Will's head screamed with the thunder, and when his grandparents rushed to the side of his bed, they could see violent blue bolts of lightning reflected in his pupils. Cyrus Flying Horse reached across the glowing blanket of his grandson's bed to grasp his wife's hand. "*Wakan*," he murmured. "Sacred."

Although many things had changed for the Sioux over the years, certain habits died hard. Cyrus was a man who had been born on a reservation, who had seen the development of television and automobiles, and who, a month later, would watch a man walk on the moon. But he also remembered the things his father had told him about the Sioux who had visions. To dream of the thunder was powerful. If the dream was ignored, one could be struck dead by lightning.

Which was why, one morning in 1969, Will Flying Horse's grandfather took him to see the shaman, Joseph Stands in Sun, about becoming a Dreamer.

Joseph Stands in Sun was older than the earth, or so it was rumored. He sat outside with Cyrus and Will on a long, low bench that ran the entire length of his log cabin. As he spoke, he whittled, and Will watched the wood as it first took the shape of a dog, then an eagle, then a beautiful girl, changing with every brush of the shaman's hands. "In the days of my grandfather," Joseph said, "a boy like you would search for a vision when he was ready to be treated like a man. And if he

dreamed of the thunder, he would become a *Heyoka*.” Joseph peered down at Will, and for the first time Will noticed that the man’s eyes were different from any other eyes he’d ever seen. There were no irises at all. Just black, fathomless pupils. “Do you know this, boy?”

Will nodded; it was all his grandfather had talked about on the walk over to the shaman’s cabin. A hundred years earlier, the Heyokas had been tribal clowns, men who were expected to behave strangely. Some moved only backward, some spoke in a different tongue. They dressed in rags and slept without blankets in the winter, wrapped themselves in thick buffalo skins in the summer. They would dip their hands in boiling water and pull them out unscarred, proving they were more powerful than other men. Sometimes they received a vision from the spirits, warning of danger or another’s death. As Heyokas, they had the power to prevent it; but because they were Heyokas, they’d receive nothing for themselves in return for their efforts. Will had listened patiently to his grandfather, and the whole time he kept thinking he was damned glad it was 1969.

“Well,” said Joseph Stands in Sun, “you cannot be a Heyoka; this is the twentieth century. But you will have your thunder dream.”

Three nights later, Will sat naked in a sweat lodge across from Joseph Stands in Sun. He had seen the lodges before; sometimes teenagers built them and smoked peyote in the cramped, curved quarters, getting high enough to run bareassed through the fields and dive into freezing streams. But Will himself had never been inside one. From time to time Joseph poked at the glowing stones that were used to create heat. Mostly he sang and chanted, syllables that swelled and burst like bottle rockets inches before Will’s eyes.

As dawn was sneaking across the plain, Joseph took Will to the top of a flat butte. Will would rather have been anywhere else than on a rock ledge, naked, but he knew better than to disgrace his grandfather or Joseph Stands in Sun. Respect your elders: it was the way he’d been taught. Shaking, Will did as he had been told. He faced the sun with his arms outstretched, keeping perfectly still and trying to ignore the grass that whispered around Joseph’s legs as he walked away. He stood for hours until the sun began to sink again, and then his legs gave out beneath him. He curled onto his side and began to cry. He felt the butte tremble, the sky melt.

On the second day, an eagle flew over his head from the east. Will watched it circle, moving so slowly that for entire minutes it seemed to be suspended just an arm's length away. "Help me," he whispered, and the eagle flew through him. "You have chosen a life that is difficult," it cried, and then it disappeared.

It might have been hours that passed; it might have been days. Will was so hungry and faint he had to force air in and out of his lungs. In the moments his mind was clear, he cursed his grandfather for believing in this kind of crap; he cursed himself for being so easily led. He thought of school baseball tryouts that past spring, of the *Playboy* he had hidden under his mattress, of the tingling smell of his mother's Pond's cold cream. He thought of anything that seemed leagues apart from the Sioux way of life.

*We are coming, we are coming.* The words whistled over the plain, wrapping themselves around Will's neck and drawing him to his feet. Directly overhead was a dark, roiling cloud. Exhausted, starving, delirious, he threw back his head and opened his arms, willing a sacrifice.

When the thunder began in his head, he realized he was no longer on the ground. High above, and peering down, Will saw the girl. She was small and thin and she was running in a snowstorm. From time to time the blizzard winds would sweep around her, blocking her from Will's view. He thought she was running away from someone or something, but then he saw her stop. She stood at the heart of the storm, arms outstretched. All the time, she had been trying to find the center.

"Help her," Will said, and he heard the words echoed a hundred times around him. He was standing on the ground again. He knew he would remember none of this. He knew that even as a man, this would be the nightmare that tugged at his consciousness in the heavy minutes after waking.

When the sky shattered and the rain came, Will screamed into the wind. Eyes wide, he watched lightning crack the night in two, splitting his world into equal halves that rocked, broken shells, at his feet.

EVEN THE SUN LOVED ALEX. CASSIE TOUCHED HER FINGERS TO HIS jaw, mesmerized by the fact that the one sliver of morning light in the bedroom had managed to fall directly over his sleeping form. His skin was dark, shadowed by beard, marked just below his chin with a tiny

curved scar. Cassie tried to remember how he had hurt himself. She watched his eyes shift beneath his lids and wondered if he was dreaming of her.

She curled herself out of the bed, careful not to wake him. Smiling, she hugged her arms around herself, thinking that she was quite rightfully the envy of every woman in America. If she had had any doubts about the validity of her marriage to Alex, they were gone now. Two people could not make love like that without a history. Cassie laughed. If her heart stopped beating that very second, she could say she'd lived a fine life.

*It is a good day to die.* The words stopped her, and a shiver ran down her body before she realized they had not been spoken out loud. Recovering, she padded into the bathroom and stared into the mirror, touching her fingers to her swollen lower lip.

A lecture. It had been the opening line to a lecture she'd heard by a colleague at UCLA. Cassie let her hands drop to the marble sink basin, sighing with relief as she realized she was not facing an omen, but a genuine memory. It was a course on Native American culture, and that phrase was part of the ritual prayer spoken by tribal warriors of the plains before riding off to do battle. Cassie remembered telling the professor he sure knew how to draw a crowd.

She wondered what Will was doing now. It was Thursday morning; he'd probably be on his way to work. He had left her his phone numbers. Maybe later she'd call him at the station, tell him she lived in a castle in Malibu, mention she was flying to Scotland.

Cassie brushed her teeth and dragged a comb through her hair, careful to place each item back on the counter quietly so that Alex wouldn't stir. She tiptoed back into the bedroom and sat on a chair in the corner.

Alex was snoring lightly. She watched his chest rise and fall a few times, then stood up and walked to the closet across the room that held all of his clothes. She pulled open the door and drew in her breath.

Alex's closet was twenty times neater than her own. On the floor, on little shoe trees, were lines of sneakers and Italian loafers and black patent leather formal dress shoes. A hanging closet organizer proudly displayed folded sweaters, Shetland and Norwegian on one side and cotton on the other. His shirts stood stiffly on cedar hangers. A lingerie chest tucked into the corner of the walk-in closet was lined with neatly

folded silk boxers and socks—arranged in separate drawers by their uses.

“My God,” Cassie whispered. She ran a fingertip over the line of shirts, listening to the music of the hangers batting each other. Neatness was to be expected, especially if one had a good housekeeper. Something, though, something else made this closet cross the line between fastidious and obsessive.

The sweaters. Not only were they segregated by material and folded neatly, they were arranged in color order. Like a rainbow. Even the patterned sweaters seemed to have been placed by predominant color.

She should have laughed. After all, this was odd to the point of being funny. This was something to joke about.

But instead Cassie felt tears squeeze from the corners of her eyes. She knelt before the rows of shoes, crying in near silence, pulling a sweater from its appropriate spot and holding it to her mouth to muffle the sounds she made. She bent over, her stomach knotting, and she told herself she was losing her mind.

It was the stress of the last few days, she thought as she wiped her cheeks. Cassie walked back to the bathroom and closed the door. She ran the water until it was so cold it numbed her wrists, and then she splashed some onto her face, hoping to start over.

FOR DAYS, THEY HAD BEEN TALKING ABOUT THE BLIZZARD. IT WAS going to hit sometime after three on Friday. It was going to be the storm of the century. Fill your bathtubs with water, the weatherman said. Buy batteries and firewood. Find your flashlights.

The only thing that could have been better, Cassie decided, would be if the blizzard hit on Sunday, so school would be canceled the next day.

Cassie walked into the kitchen. She had been at Connor’s all afternoon but had promised her mother she’d return before the first flakes fell. Cassie’s mother was terrified of snow. She had grown up in Georgia and had never seen snow until she moved to Maine when she got married. Rather than being efficient about a winter storm—like Connor’s mother, who had taken out candles and bought extra gallons of milk to store in the drifts—Aurora Barrett sat at the kitchen table with wide eyes, listening to the weather reports on her transistor radio and waiting to be buried alive.

The one thing Aurora did like about nor'easters was that they provided a chance to accuse her husband of everything that had gone wrong in her life. Cassie had grown up understanding that her mother hated Maine, that she hadn't wanted to move there, that she didn't want to be a baker's wife. She still dreamed of a house with lawns that rolled down to the river, of a latticed bench veiled by cherry trees, of the melting southern sun. While Cassie watched, tucked in the shadows, her mother would rail at Ben and ask just how temporary ten long years in the same godforsaken place could be.

Most of the time her father would just stand there, letting Aurora's anger blow over him. Technically, it *was* his fault: he'd promised Aurora that as soon as it paid to sell the bakery with a tidy profit, they'd move back to her neck of the woods. But the bakery lost money every year, and the truth was, deep down, her father had no intention of leaving New England. Ben had given only one piece of advice to Cassie as she was growing up. *Before you decide what you want to be*, he said, *know where you want to be*.

It did not snow that night until Cassie went to sleep, and when she woke in the morning the world had changed. Outside, a white lawn rolled right up to her bedroom window, and hills and drifts had smoothed the landscape so completely she almost lost her sense of direction. She grabbed an apple and stuffed it in her pocket; then she sat at the kitchen table to pull her boots on.

She heard the argument clearly, although it came from her parents' room upstairs. "Sell the bakery," her mother threatened. "Or I can't tell you what I'll be driven to do."

Cassie's father snorted. "What could you possibly be driven to that you don't do already?" Cassie jumped as a blast of wind whitened the window before her. "Why don't you just go home?"

*Go home*. Cassie's eyes widened. For a long while there was silence, save the shrieks and moans of the storm. Then she heard her mother's exit line. "I'm not feeling well now. Not well at all." And after that came the unmistakable ting of the bourbon decanter Aurora kept on her vanity being opened. The more she drank, the less Cassie's father could tolerate her. It was a vicious cycle.

"Jesus Christ," Cassie's father said tightly, and then he thundered down the stairs. He was dressed as she was, ready to brave the blizzard. He glanced at Cassie and touched her cheek, almost an apology. "Take

care of her, will you, Cass?" he said, but before she could answer, he left.

Cassie finished lacing up her boots and cooked an egg, soft-boiled, just the way her mother liked. She carried it up on a plate with a piece of toast, figuring if her mother had something else in her stomach, it might not be so bad today.

When Cassie cracked the door open, Aurora was lying across the bed, her arm flung over her eyes. "Oh, Cassie," she whispered. "Honey, please. The *light*."

Cassie obediently stepped inside, shutting the door behind her. She smelled the cloying sweetness of the bourbon hovering at the edges of the room, mingling with traces of her father's rage.

Aurora took one look at the breakfast tray Cassie had set down and started to cry. "Did he tell you where he went? He's out there, in this, this *blizzard*—" She jerked her arm toward the window to prove her point. Then she rested her forehead against her hand, rubbing the bridge of her nose. "I don't know why this happens. I just don't know why."

Cassie took one look at her mother's eyes, red-rimmed and raw, and she planted her hands on her hips. "Get up."

Aurora turned toward her daughter and blinked. "Pardon me?"

"I said get up." She was only ten, but she had grown old long ago. Cassie pulled her mother off the bed and started handing her clothes: a turtleneck, a sweater, bulky socks. After a moment of disbelief, Aurora began to follow her, silently accepting what she offered.

When Cassie opened the front door, Aurora took a step back. The chill of winter followed her inside. "Go," Cassie commanded. She jumped into the snow, grinning for a moment as the drifts hollowed up to her thighs. She turned to her mother. "I mean it."

It took fifteen minutes to get Aurora more than five feet away from the front porch. She was shivering and her lips were nearly violet, unaccustomed as she was to being outside in a storm. The wind ripped Cassie's hat off and sent it dancing over the snow. She saw her mother bend down, like a child, and touch the drifts.

Cassie scooped a mittenful of snow and rounded it into a neat ball. "Mom," she yelled, a minute's warning, and then she threw it as hard as she could.