



"Beautiful and haunting. Every page tore me apart—and I loved it."
—Lauren Kate, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Fallen*

COULD KISSES

AMY GARVEY

COLD KISS

AMY GARVEY

HARPER TEEN
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DEDICATION

FOR STEPHEN, AS ALWAYS.
KEEP THE TEA AND CUPCAKES COMING, BABE.

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PROLOGUE

I WASN'T THINKING ABOUT FALLING IN LOVE the day I met Danny Greer. I wasn't thinking about anything beyond the paper on the Industrial Revolution I hadn't yet started, and the cool pewter sky above me was lying on the top row of the bleachers facing the practice field, watching the clouds skid past, and absently wondering if I could lift myself off the cold metal. Just a few inches. Nothing anyone would notice.

There wasn't much chance of that anyway. A few people were hanging out on the lower row of bleachers, seniors mostly, passing around a Red Bull and wandering off to smoke in one of their cars. Out on the practice field Ms. Singer's fifth-period PE class was choosing up sides for soccer. No one was paying any attention to me, which suited me just fine.

Jess and Darcia had drawn sixth-period lunch, and I had lunch alone. I didn't mind being out here on the bleachers by myself, which was where I'd be every lunch period until it got too cold. By late November I'd probably hole up in the library, hiding a yogurt from Mrs. Gaffney at the table way out at the back, behind Technology and Applied Sciences. Until then I was happy to read the clouds and watch them make the leaves dance in scuffling, twisting funnels along the curb.

Or lift myself off the bleachers, even though it hadn't worked so far.

I closed my eyes, concentrating, the ridges of the metal bench digging into my spine through my jacket. The wind had picked up, spreading the familiar scent of earth and dead leaves, but something else, too. Something heavier, thick, almost electric, like a storm in the distance.

I opened my eyes to find someone staring down at me, and almost toppled over.

"I thought you were asleep," the boy said, and straightened up.

"And you thought staring was a good idea?"

"You could have been dead," he offered with a shrug. "You were doing a good imitation of a statue. Or, you know, a dead thing."

I blinked. With the weak autumn light behind him, I couldn't see much more than a rough outline of an angular face, and shaggy hair that fell into eyes deep in shadow.

I could just make out his mouth, though. It was wide, full, and right then it was twisted into a smile.

"Thank you," I said without thinking, and watched him bite his bottom lip. The electric thrill vibrating in the air was in my blood now, tingling, and for a moment I felt my spine hover over the metal. A breeze whistled between my back and the bench in the afterthought of space there.

"You're kind of weird," the boy said, but he was still smiling when he pushed my legs aside and sat down next to me.

That was Danny.

It wasn't love right away, because nothing ever is, no matter what the songs say, but it was the start of it. A beginning in one way, and the end in another. I think that might always be true of love.

We were completely different. Danny was tall, sweet, graceful despite legs that went on forever. I was little, moody, uncoordinated. We didn't like the same music or the same movies. He put onion and mushrooms on his pizza and never wore socks and could sleep through a pipe bomb. I survived on bananas and yogurt and always wore hats and got carsick unless I chewed gum with my headphones on.

It didn't matter. I loved him. I loved him so much that I couldn't see anything else for a while. ~~Danny filled the cracks inside me, blotted out the cold, empty places in the world. It didn't take long before Danny was the only thing that mattered.~~

Love like that is what they make movies about. It's the thing you're supposed to want, the answer to every question, the song that you're supposed to sing.

But love like that can be too big, too. It can be something you shouldn't be trusted to hold when you're the kind of person who drops the eggs and breaks the remote control.

Love doesn't break easily, I found. But people do.

CHAPTER ONE

DANNY WAITS FOR ME IN THE LOFT ABOVE Mrs. Petrelli's garage. We've made a kind of nest there again, the wall away from the broken window. Two ancient, sour mattresses are stacked in the corner, covered with an old striped sheet I took from my basement. There's a blanket, too, mostly for me, a wooden crate full of books and paper and colored pencils, a couple of pillows, and a box of fat white candles.

We don't see much of each other in the daylight.

Mrs. Petrelli's house is behind mine, and I cut through the ragged hedge that borders our yard to make my way to the garage. Mrs. Petrelli is that indeterminate kind of old—too ancient to worry about anymore, not that she ever did, as far as I know, but not frail enough to be carted off to a nursing home yet. When Mr. Petrelli died two years ago, she sort of deflated, curling in on herself like a yellowed piece of paper. She doesn't drive anymore, so she never bothers with her garage.

Danny's lying on the mattresses when I climb the wobbly pull-down stairs, but he sits up right away. In the darkness, it's startling to watch him, the slow, graceful rise of his upper body, his head turning so he can smile at me.

"You came." He sounds surprised, grateful, and the words twist in my chest, a tight little knot of guilt.

"I always do." I curl up beside him, laying my head on his shoulder. "I always will."

I shiver a little, pressing my cheek into his collarbone. It's getting harder to remember the way Danny used to be. That Danny wouldn't have waited so patiently for me. He would have called, snuggled up behind me in the hall at school, and buried his face against my neck. That Danny had ideas, crazy late-night fantasies strung together like a paper-clip chain. He was going to teach me to sing so I could join his band, and then we would go on the road. Ryan was going to be the one to finance our road Odyssey, even though Becker was the one with money, because Danny said Ryan was the one with the brains. Danny's charm got under your skin the way a good song got stuck in your head, and after a while you couldn't help humming it.

Then there was the comic strip idea. Danny had pages of drawings of me, and one day I found him redrawing them with broader strokes, bolder outlines, exaggerating my pointed chin and the way my hair spiked up in the front. I thought I looked like a sullen baby chick, but he just shook his head and pulled me onto his lap. "You're going to be a superhero. It'll be awesome. Trust me."

And I did, even though I growled at the picture of me climbing onto a table to shoot actual daggers out of my eyes at a vampire that looked a lot like one of the PE teachers at school. I was short, yeah, but it didn't need to be emphasized. I elbowed him in the side for that. He just laughed.

I trusted Danny with everything, even when he was pulling me up a fire escape in the middle of the night to get to the roof above the movie theater, where you could follow the dark, lazy curves of the train tracks as they headed toward the city. I let him feed me spicy curry for the first time and kiss the heat out of my mouth. I watched in the mirror when he cut my hair one long, sultry afternoon, holding up the fuzzy ends and shaking his head.

And I'd given all of myself in return. Almost, anyway. The one thing I'd kept secret was the one reason he was here now.

"I brought you some more paper." I hand him the drawing tablets I'd bought at the dollar store after

school. They're cheap, flimsy, intended for little kids to use with fat crayons and finger paint, but I know he won't care. I could bring him used candy wrappers and wrinkled pieces of the Sunday paper and he would beam at me.

"I needed some." He doesn't look at them, though, just lays them behind him on the bed, and leans in, resting his forehead against mine, the way he has so many times, both then and now. "Thank you."

I know what he wants, and it wasn't so long ago that he wouldn't have had to ask, when I would have climbed into his lap instead of just sitting beside him. Back then, we were attached at the mouth whenever possible.

It's different now. I didn't expect it to be. My mom says I was always that kid, the one who learned the hard way about the glowing red burner on the stove and just how high the monkey bars are when you're falling from them into the damp wood chips on the playground.

I tilt my head up, my mouth brushing his lightly, and he pulls me closer. "Missed you," he murmurs, lips against my cheek after a second. "Always miss you."

When he finally kisses me, really kisses me, his lips are cool and dry and his arms are tight around me, fingers of one hand tangled in my hair. He tastes like smoke and ashes, the bitter weight of the world on earth, but I kiss him back, my palm resting on his cheek.

"Always want you." The words are breathed against my mouth, and I relax into the circle of his arms as he pulls me closer. He'll stop when I tell him to—he'll do anything I tell him to now—but I never say no to kissing.

I have so little to give him. I hadn't considered that—I thought I was giving him everything I could ever want that July night, candlelight hot beneath my palms as I chanted. For once, I didn't think I was being selfish.

I'm wrong a lot. Anyone will tell you.

Anyway, I miss it, the kissing, the comfortable weight of his arm around my shoulders as we walked home from school, the clean smell of his sweat after he'd been playing guitar with Becker and Ryan in Becker's basement, all warm, musky boy. I miss him, too, when I'm away from him all day.

"You remember the first time?" he says. He's laying me down, and the sheet is cold through my sweater, slightly damp in the October night air. His hands are even cooler, smooth and solid as marble, and I shiver when he runs a finger over my cheekbone. "Remember when you kissed me?"

He asks me things like this all the time now. The first movie we went to (a terrible horror movie that made me laugh so hard, I choked on a piece of popcorn), the first time I met his parents (a Friday in late December, in the close, overheated crush of the drugstore, where everyone was buying bows and foil-wrapped chocolate Santas), the song that was playing on my iPod the first time he called me (the Brobecks' "Visitation of the Ghost").

He likes it when I tell him the stories out loud, and goes still as he listens—too still, silent. His eyes are the only things that move, watching my face, my mouth, as if he's trying to picture what happened so he can hold on to the memories.

I worry that he's trying to remember what those moments felt like, what *he* felt like then. One day he's going to understand that he's not that boy anymore.

"It was three weeks after we met," I tell him, whispering even though no one can hear us way up here. I twine my fingers in his, holding tight. Even now, his hand is familiar, huge around mine, the long bones of his fingers sturdy. "We were outside the library, and it was almost dark and really cold. You put your algebra book down on the ledge so you could wrap your scarf around my neck, and you grabbed your hands and pulled you down and kissed you. Right in front of Tommy Gellar and the

freak cheerleader he was sleeping with.”

It’s not romantic the way I tell it, but Danny smiles anyway, and the hard focus in his eyes softens. “You tasted like Juicy Fruit,” he says, and rests his forehead against mine. “I remember that.”

I do, too. I remember so much more than I tell him, because it makes me hot and uncomfortable to say some things out loud, even now. There was the way I could feel the length of his thigh against mine while we went over his tragic attempt at explaining the symbolism in *The Glass Menagerie*. The warm, sort of spicy smell of him in his layered T-shirts. The electric hum beneath my skin when he leaned close to ask me a question and his breath whispered over my cheek.

If I’d wanted to, I could have lifted right out of my chair and touched the ceiling that night, just sitting beside him in the library. And when I kissed him, opened my mouth to taste him, I shut my eyes to find the darkness melted into old gold.

I still have that scarf, tucked away in a torn cardboard box under my bed.

“I would have kissed you, you know,” he says, and slides his palm along my ribs, ticking off each one with his thumb. “If you hadn’t kissed me first.”

I believe him. But in the end, it doesn’t really matter. I’ve always been a step ahead of him, even when I don’t know where I’m going, or where I might take him.

The house is dark when I let myself in the back door. It’s almost eleven, a school night, and Robin is probably up in her room talking on the phone. I cross through the kitchen and glance into the living room, where my mom is curled on the sofa, lights out and the blue glare of the TV flickering over her face. I freeze for a second—she’s usually asleep by now these days, at least since she broke up with Tom.

Her boyfriends never last long. I wonder if they get discouraged when they see the picture of my dad on the mantel. Even though he’s been gone for ten years, that picture never moves. Mom says it’s there for Robin and me, but I see her looking at it, too.

Memories of Dad are what I couldn’t bear to have Danny become—a faded, flickering impression of a stubbled cheek scratching my face when he hugged me, the pine scent of aftershave, the low rumble of his laugh.

“Wren?”

I turn around before she can lift her head, pretending to be heading for the kitchen instead of away from it. I skin off my jacket and toss it toward the tiny stairwell leading down to the basement as she sits up.

“Just getting something to drink,” I say, and head into the kitchen without waiting to see if she’ll follow. I’m taking a diet soda out of the fridge when she pads in, yawning and pushing her hair out of her face.

She kisses the back of my head, and I close my eyes, waiting for her to say something. I can still feel the night chill on my clothes, on my skin, but as far as my mother knows I’ve been up in my room all night.

She pulls away, though, and fills the teakettle with water. I lean against the fridge with my soda, hoping she won’t notice if I don’t open it.

My mom is good at seeing only what she wants to see. About men, about the hair salon she owns which only crosses the line into profitable once in a while, about the condition of our house, which she’s decided “has character,” since that sounds better than “falling down.” Right now I’m pretty sure she doesn’t want to think about why I might have been out of the house tonight, although I know she

can tell I have been. She doesn't always like to examine things too closely, but she's not stupid.

"Want some tea?" she says so suddenly that I jump. She's looking right at me now, and my heart is beating too loud, a steady bass-drum *thump* beneath my T-shirt and black hoodie. She sets the kettle on the burner, and it flares to life before she can even reach the knob, which is bad news. Mom doesn't usually let me see her do things like that.

"No, thanks," I say, trying to keep my voice steady. Tea means sitting at the kitchen table together in the dark, talking, and I can't do that tonight. I can't do that at all anymore, not with Mom, because when she wants to, the one thing she can see right into, down to bone and blood, is me. "I'm going to go to bed, I guess. I have a chemistry test tomorrow."

There's nothing more than weak moonlight filtered through the window over the sink, and the faint yellow glow of a night-light in the baseboard on the wall behind me, but even so I can see the betrayal in Mom's eyes. She knows I'm lying, not about the test or the tea, but about something.

The blue flame licks higher at the scorched bottom of the kettle, just for a second, hungry and hot, and then she looks away to take a mug down from the cupboard. "All right, babe. Sleep well."

I'm careful not to slam the door to my room, but when I get inside, I let the harsh buzz gathered just beneath my skin flicker out, a quick electric jolt that knocks the pile of books off my desk. *Basics of Principles of Chemistry* falls hardest, pages crushed under its open spine, and I stare at it for a minute. I'm panting, my heart still tripping crazily, and instead of picking it up, I step around it to flop on my bed, a tangle of sheets and blue-striped comforter and clothes.

Across the room, Danny smiles down at me from a framed picture on my dresser. He was being extra goofy that day, making faces at Ryan's camera as we all hung out on Becker's front porch, stealing Ryan's baseball cap and crossing his eyes as he pushed the porch swing into motion with one long bare foot.

"Point that thing at Wren, you loser," he'd said, throwing a pretzel across the porch at Ryan to get his attention. "She's the only one worth looking at."

In that picture, which Ryan printed out for me a week later, Danny's mouth is tilted up on one side in the little smile that was just for me. His whole face softened when he smiled that way, like he'd just remembered this incredible secret.

Some days now I can't look at it. The frame spends a lot of time buried in the bottom drawer with my jeans, because it's the same smile Danny gives me whenever I climb into the loft. Like nothing has changed. Like I'm *his* secret, and there's nothing he'd rather see than my face.

Sometimes when he sits up to look at me, or when I walk into my room and catch a glimpse of the picture, it's all I can do not to scream. Scream and scream until my throat is shredded and even the window shatters and the room goes up in flames.

I've only set something on fire once. It was one of Danny's T-shirts, actually, an ancient gray Clatsop shirt his sister scored on eBay for his birthday. I'd found it on my bedroom floor right before Ryan called, and I was twisting it in one fist by the time he told me Becker was in the hospital and Danny was dead.

It hissed and sputtered for a second before a hot, angry tongue licked out and burned my wrist. I dropped it on the floor, and the phone with it. Ryan was still talking, a tiny, distant voice.

I don't remember a lot of what happened after that, but the scorch mark is still there, a sooty black circle against the faded oak. Mom's not sure it will ever come out completely, but she never once asked me how it got there.

CHAPTER TWO

I WASN'T EVEN THIRTEEN YET THE FIRST TIME. It reminded me of a sneeze coming on, that tingling tension when you know it's going to happen and you can't stop it. But this feeling was bigger than that, a vibrating hum just beneath my skin that made me squirm all over.

I was mad at my mother, which was pretty much a daily thing back then. She'd said no to a sleepover at Darcia's because I hadn't finished my social studies project, and in her words, "There's no way I'm going to listen to you whine about it all day tomorrow, when you're rushing to get it done."

Robin stuck her tongue out at me from across the kitchen table, and I made a face at her before she stood up. "Clear your place, Wren," my mother said, not bothering to glance over her shoulder as she rinsed dishes in the sink.

I didn't even have a chance to mutter, "Do I ever forget?" because the humming was louder now, a hot, angry itch just beneath my skin, and then the lightbulb in the fixture over the kitchen table hissed and exploded in a white arc.

Robin screamed and waved her arms, batting at her hair, brittle pieces of glass skittering over the table, until my mother cut through the noise. "Stop it! Just sit still."

I had frozen in place, my plate still in my hands, my mouth hanging open. The weird buzz had subsided, leaving behind a kind of dull sting, like the last day of a bad sunburn, but the kitchen was still crackling with electricity.

This, I was pretty sure, was one of those Things We Didn't Talk About. Like where our dad was or why Mom didn't invite Aunt Mari to the house anymore.

Or why, sometimes, even when the electric got shut off because Mom was behind on the bills, she could disappear into the basement and the lights would flare to life. Mom had broken her share of lightbulbs, and once the mirror over the bathroom sink, which cut us all in half diagonally for months before she replaced it.

She could make other things happen, too, better things. Balloons that stayed afloat for days after Robin's birthday party. Daffodils that budded long before anyone else's. A fire in the fireplace that burned for hours on just a handful of newspaper and a stray twig.

When I was really little, six or seven, and Dad had just left, I woke up crying almost every night, shrugging off nightmares like a tangled net. Mom would get into bed with me and sing, low, nonsensical tunes that she said Gram had sung to her when she was a kid. And above me, the ceiling would swirl with gently sparkling lights, like summer fireflies, flickering in and out with the tune.

Those moments were gifts, offered freely, as surprising and wonderful as unexpected gifts always are, unlike the broken mirror and, once, the smoking ruin of the backyard. But even the fairy lights and the balloons weren't something Robin or I could ask about. The warning was always there in Mom's eyes, a monster in the closet of a brightly lit room.

Mom had never once mentioned it would happen to me, too, even though I knew Aunt Mari and Gram could do the same things. It seemed like one of those grown-up privileges, I guess, and not one Mom approved of anymore. But when Robin and I were little, she was totally free about it, and so were Gram and Aunt Mari.

I remember one Christmas when Robin was really little, not even two, and Gram had taken me in

the backyard with Dad. It was snowing, fat, lacy flakes swirling out of the sky, and the trees were dripping with icicles from the night before. Gram stood there wrapped in her big red coat as Dad and I caught snowflakes on our tongues, and she lit up all the icicles like Christmas lights with just a few whispered words.

Dad had grinned, his teeth as white as the blanket of snow on the grass. "Nicely done, Rowan," he said, and kissed her cheek. It was too cold to stay out much longer, but I held on to that moment after Dad was gone and later, when Gram died, what I couldn't understand was what could be bad about something like that, something that was pure beauty, and why Mom never wanted to talk about it.

Even that night when I shattered the lightbulb, and she was picking sheer slivers of glass out of Robin's hair, she didn't say a word. Just tightened her mouth into a hard line and told me to get the broom.

Instead, I set my plate down on the table with a hollow *thud* and ran upstairs to my room.

It's different now. Aunt Mari has told me some of it, even though Mom would probably kill us both if she knew. But once I was old enough to walk downtown on my own, I figured nothing was stopping me from going to Aunt Mari's apartment or meeting her at Bliss, the coffee shop where I work now. Whatever happened to change things after Dad was gone was the one thing Aunt Mari wouldn't talk to me about, but she was happy to share what she knew about the power inside of us.

Practice makes a big difference, too, even if I still can't levitate on my own. But once, when Danny and I were tangled on his bed making out, I had to pull away before he noticed I was hovering over him, a half-inch of space between us everywhere but our mouths.

Being with Danny focused whatever it was inside me, somehow. When we were together, holding hands or kissing or even just curled on the couch, that hum was much stronger, a constant pulse I could feel hot in my blood. But I never showed him what I could do. I never once hinted at it. Even without Aunt Mari's warnings and a lifetime of my mother's example, I knew the things I could make happen were just for me.

Even now, Danny doesn't know what I am, or what I can do. But then, there are a lot of things Danny doesn't understand now.

The fact that I go to school without him is the worst, for him anyway. He doesn't miss classes, he just hates the fact that I can't stay with him all day, curled up in the loft. Last week, I stopped climbing up to see him on my way to school because I couldn't face having the same conversation over and over again.

"Why can't I come?" he would say, crowding me against the wall, as tall as ever, his cold hands cradling my face. "I miss you when you're not here. I'd just sit with you, Wren, I swear. I wouldn't get in the way. Quiet as a mouse, promise."

It's so hard to say no to that voice. Danny's always been pretty persuasive, and when he drops his voice like that, low and soft as he whispers against my cheek, I have to fight not to melt into a sloppy puddle.

What's worse is how much he sometimes sounds like the old Danny, the one who could make me laugh at all the wrong times, the one who could do dead-on impressions of Mrs. DiFranco intoning the morning announcements over the loudspeaker or ramble movie dialogue off the top of his head. Mom, Danny, the one who died three months ago, is still in there, buried underneath the new one.

The one who doesn't want or think about anything but me.

CHAPTER THREE

I SHOULD MY BACKPACK AND GO OUT THE front door when I leave the house this morning, the way I always do, but I can't help sinking down into the collar of my jacket. There's no way Danny can see me from the one window in the garage loft, but I'm always worried that he's watching anyway.

I look over my shoulder a dozen times as I walk to school. As far as I know, he has to do what I tell him to do, and even when he argues about it, which isn't often, he's never once actually ignored me. I'm not sure he can, but the last thing I need is to find him shambling along behind me, pale and squinting in the sharp October sun, calling my name.

Once I'm at school, lockers slamming and kids laughing and shouting at one another down the hallway, I can relax. I slide into my seat in homeroom and nod at Meg D'Angelo, who still has her iPod earbuds in. She nods back, same way she does every morning—we've known each other since third grade, and she's one of those sort-of friends, someone I hang out with at school when Jess and Darcia aren't around.

Of course, I haven't seen them much since Danny died in July, and while Jess has gotten angrier and more vocal about it over the last few weeks, Darcia just stares at me sadly across the row that separates me from her in World Lit and sends me cryptic texts about new songs she likes or her little brother's soccer game.

At least Meg doesn't look at me like I've disappointed her.

I slouch down to get my French notebook out of my backpack while Mr. Rokozny calls roll. Madame Hobart is quizzing us on the imperfect tense today, and I fell asleep watching a rerun of some reality show before I even thought about studying.

I raise my hand silently when Mr. Rokozny calls my name, and it's only when he pauses after Cleo Darnell's name to say, "Gabriel DeMarnes?" that I look up.

Twenty-two pairs of eyes are trained on the kid in the very back of the room. Even Rokozny is squinting at him from above the morning's roll. This far into October, it's weird to find a new kid in homeroom.

"That's me," the boy says, and Audrey Diehl sits up a little straighter, head tilted in appreciation.

He's tall—I can tell even though he's hunched over his desk, because his long legs stick out into the faded linoleum of the aisle. His hair is the color of clean sand, and even short it's sort of messy. He's looking at all angles, planes, a geometry proof of a boy in a wrinkled yellow button-down and faded jeans, and when I drag my gaze away from the long, slender fingers splayed loose over his thigh, I blink in surprise.

Because even with everyone in the room checking him out, he's staring right at me.

Gabriel DeMarnes is everywhere that day, like a bad smell. Gabriel DeMarnes and his odd gray-blue eyes, which are focused on me way too often.

He takes the empty seat beside me in trig, dropping the battered textbook Ms. Nardini gives him on the desk with a *thud*. He has a notebook and a single pencil, but he doesn't touch either one of them. Whenever he's not pretending to listen to Ms. Nardini ramble on about ratio identity, he's looking at me out of the corner of his eye.

It makes me itchy in all the wrong ways, heart beating too fast and too hard, like a rabbit, and a dangerous electric tension humming under my skin. He's making me nervous, which is making me

angry, because he's just a *boy*, a stupid new boy who doesn't know anyone and is probably fascinated by something equally stupid, like my beat-up purple Chucks or the fading black heart Danny drew Sharpie on the back of my left hand two days ago.

But the sixth time I manage to turn my head and actually catch him staring, it's obvious that he's not looking at any of that. He's looking at *me*, and somehow he's seeing past what I've got on, past my hair and the trio of silver hoops in my right ear.

Except it's more than that. Even though I haven't said a word to him, he looks like he's *listening* to me. His head is tilted to one side, and he's concentrating, squinting a little bit, like he's trying to catch something he can't quite hear, and the loose end of that coiled electricity snaps rough over my nerves.

"What?" I hiss, and the globe at the front of the room falls off its stand with a crash.

I swallow hard and fix my eyes on my desk as Ms. Nardini gasps in surprise. "Okay, well, that was weird," she says with a nervous laugh. She's pretty much fresh out of college, where she was a sorority girl if the rumors are true, and she always follows her lesson plan like she's got a gun to her head.

She's still examining the globe for cracks when I sneak a glance at Gabriel.

He's smiling.

By the time he walks into history during seventh period, I'm seething. That makes three classes we have together, not counting homeroom. Three hours of him watching me, head tilted, hair flopping over his forehead and hiding his cool eyes when I glance at him.

I prop my head in my hand, doing my best to keep the furious simmer of energy inside me under control. So far the only other casualty has been a lightbulb in Madame Hobart's French classroom, but it's getting harder to ignore that hum. My free hand twitches into a fist on my lap, nails digging into my palm, and the sting slices through the urge to let that current roll up out of me and explode.

If Mr. Dorsey gives homework, I have no idea what it is. I'm the first one out of the room when the bell rings.

Darcia's waiting when I walk into World Lit, chewing on a hank of her dark hair, her feet propped on her seat and one arm wrapped around her knees.

"Did you finish the reading?"

"I skimmed," I say, and drop into my chair. If Gabriel walks into this class, I'm going to have to throw myself on Darcia to make sure she's not hit by the shrapnel.

She doesn't say anything until I've dug my notebook out of my backpack. When I look up, she's curling the ends of her hair around one finger. "Want to come over after school? We could work on the paper together."

For a minute, I let myself imagine it. Me and Darcia, the way we used to be, maybe Jess, too, scuffling through the leaves on the way to Darcia's house, Jess smoking her Marlboros and Darcia readjusting her stuffed backpack every few steps. The comfortable mess of Darcia's room, cans of diet Coke cracked open, and a half-empty bag of pretzels passed among us as Darcia organizes her homework and Jess sprawls on the bed, flipping through a magazine.

I want it so much, my heart thuds painfully. It's been too long since we just hung out the way we used to, and I know Darcia doesn't understand it—even when Danny was alive, I didn't abandon them not completely, the way some girls do as soon as they have a boyfriend.

But then I see Danny in my head, sitting at the top of the stairs to the loft, restless, pale, jiggling one knee, and I swallow hard. "The paper's not due for a week," I tell her, and turn back to my

notebook just as Mrs. Garcia walks in.

~~When the bell rings and Gabriel is a no-show, I'm so relieved I pretend I don't notice Darcia's disappointment.~~

CHAPTER FOUR

JESS IS WAITING BY MY LOCKER AFTER SCHOOL, arms folded over her chest. Her dark blond hair is twisted up in a clip behind her head, and her jaw is set in a hard line. I thought I'd waited long enough to avoid her and Darcia both, but Jess is a little scary when she sets her mind to something. She pushed Billy Lanigan her first day at school when he knocked my lunch bag out of my hands, and that was third grade. Billy was twice her size.

"Are you going through, like, some hermit phase I didn't know about?" she says without even a simple hello. "Because it's getting really old."

I twist the dial on my lock, staring straight ahead. What am I supposed to say? I'm sorry? Again?

"I don't remember asking what you thought of it," I say instead. It sounds even worse out loud than it did in the millisecond before it fell out of my mouth, and Jess blinks at me.

"What the hell is wrong with you, Wren? What did we do to you? Actually, fuck that, what did we do to Darcia do? Because I know *I* never did anything to deserve getting blown off like this."

When I look up at her, I swallow hard. She's furious, cheeks bright pink, eyes silvered with tears. That's wrong on every level. Jess doesn't cry. Jess just gets *mad*.

I drop my French book in surprise, and it thuds to the floor between her sleek black boots and my purple Chucks. For a second I just stare at it—the hum is back, a confused, buzzing swarm just under my skin, and if I move, if I speak, I'm afraid of what will happen.

"Fine," Jess says into the silence a moment later, and huffs out something that's too rough and ugly to be a laugh. "Whatever, Wren. Just ... say something to Darcia, okay? She misses you."

She walks off, heels clicking angrily on the old linoleum, and for a second I'm frozen in place, staring at my French book, listening to the sound of her footsteps.

I could follow her. I could drop my backpack on the floor and pound down the hall to catch up. I could tell her I'm sorry. I could tell her I miss her and Darcia, too. I could tell her I'm stupid and awful and I suck.

It's all true.

But I can't tell her that my dead boyfriend is living in the neighbor's garage. I can't tell her I'm the one who brought him back. I can't tell her that I'm starting to wonder what's going to happen to him and to me. He can't live there forever. He's not *living* in the first place.

That's all true, too, and I feel sick suddenly, my stomach tightening up like a fist. I grabbed Danny back because I couldn't stand to lose anything else, not when Dad was gone, and Gram was dead, and Aunt Mari was someone I had to see in secret. And now I'm losing Jess and Darcia, too.

I slide to the floor and sit with my back up against the lockers. The floor smells like old lemon wax and dust and feet, but I sit there until Mrs. Griffith wanders by and stops to ask me what's wrong.

By then, Jess is long gone.

It's already four when I finally leave, and even though I can imagine Danny pacing back and forth—even scarier, sitting completely still at the top of the stairs, eyes fixed on the bottom, waiting for me—I walk through town to the library.

It's cold and gray out, and dead leaves swirl in rusty little clouds at my feet as I scuff up the sidewalk to the building. A couple of cheerleaders, seniors, are perched on the banister that lines the

steps, blowing smoke rings and laughing. They ignore me, as usual, which has always been fine.

For the first time, though, it's tempting to turn around and focus, to pull whatever it is that's inside me into a tight glowing ball, and blow a nasty little kiss that would knock them over. Instead, I simply step on the hot pink strap of one of their backpacks as I run up the steps.

Inside, I head right to the 130s in the stacks. No one's ever in this particular aisle—I guess no one really cares about metaphysics or Western philosophy anymore, if they ever did in this town. I'm still not sure who decided the paranormal should be sandwiched between them, but whatever. That's what I need—information on the paranormal, emphasis on “para.” I always knew I wasn't totally normal, but it's a little weird to see it right there in print, you know?

It always makes me wonder which part of me would pass if they gave a test.

There's nothing new on the shelves, and for a minute I just stand there, my backpack heavy on one shoulder and the dusty, unused smell of the books in their plastic covers strong in my nose. Across the aisle, three middle-school boys are spread out at a table, flipping through old copies of *Maxim*, and story time is starting in the children's section—I can hear Mrs. Hodge shushing the kids. It's mostly quiet and a little too warm, and so overwhelmingly ordinary I want to scream.

How am I supposed to figure out what to do about Danny here? The books on the shelves lean more toward histories of the Salem witch trials than anything practical, except for a few books on Wicca which have more to do with worshipping the Goddess than how to keep from shattering lightbulbs. At any rate, I have books at home that are more specific about spells and the craft, even if they don't tell me why I can do what I do, or how to control it better.

Or not to do certain things at all, even if the spell is right there.

I don't even know if there's a word for what I am, what the women in my family are. I asked Aunt Mari about it once, about a year ago.

“You know how electricity is just out there?” she'd said. She was lying on her back, staring at the ceiling as if the answers were written up there in the dingy off-white paint. “But to use it, you have to know how to harness it? That's what this is like. What we are. What we can do. Just like some musical prodigy can play Mozart at age three or whatever, we can tap into a kind of energy that other people can't. That's all.”

That's all. Like it's no big deal that my mother can make flowers grow, and Mari can change the color of her hair at will, and I can (almost) lift myself off the ground and set things on fire. And, you know, raise my boyfriend from the dead.

Mari practically jumped up and down the first time she saw me make my old stuffed penguin dance like it was this huge achievement. But I never told her when I started seriously experimenting with magic power on my own. The whole subject was so off-limits, it felt like the one thing I had to hide from everyone. And I was trying things a little more complicated than making a pencil spin on my desk, or making the pale yellow daffodils hot pink.

Once I made it rain in Robin's bedroom, right over a pile of her dirty sweatshirts and socks. Another time I folded a piece of white lined paper into the shape of a bird and brought it to life. I was so terrified, I opened the window and let it go, once it had stopped flapping around my room in panic.

You'd think I would have learned my lesson.

I can't tell Aunt Mari about Danny. I can't tell anyone.

Standing in the library now, I can see him in my head, setting his jaw, starting down the stairs, and my pulse kicks so hard, a loose book on the edge of the shelf hits the floor. The kids across the aisle look up at me, and I glare until they shrink down into their sweatshirts and hold up their magazines.

again.

I'm not going to find anything here. I'm not even sure what I'm looking for anymore, and suddenly it's so hot, so close, I'm starting to sweat. I stumble past the kids and the ancient reference librarian who frowns at me from behind his thick black plastic glasses, and out the door into the shocking cool air.

Where I walk right into the one person I really don't want to see.

"Whoa, sorry," Gabriel says, catching me with both hands on my upper arms. "I didn't see you coming."

I'm positive he's lying. "Yeah, well." I shrug him off and start walking, but I can hear him following me, feet heavy on the sidewalk. I scan the quiet street and run across it, toward home.

"You don't like me," he says as he falls into step beside me, dry leaves and grass crackling underfoot. It's not a question.

"I don't know you." It's true, even if what he said is true, too.

"Gabriel," he says, and turns around to walk backward, holding out his hand. "Nice to meet you."

"God, what is your problem?" I'm trying for casual, dismissive, but my face is already hot, and I know he can see it. "Go find some other girl to bother. Believe me, they'll all be thrilled to have fresh meat to chew on."

"Not interested," he says, and steps easily over a dead twig, still walking backward, eyes fixed on my face.

"Not my problem," I tell him, and try to ignore the way my heart is pounding again. I can control myself, I *can*, I just have to concentrate. I walk faster, trying to pass him, but he matches me step for step.

"I can feel it, you know," he says, and suddenly stops dead, grabbing my arm so I stumble to a halt beside him. "What's inside you."

My blood is racing so hot through my veins, my skin is tight, tingling. He can't *know*, no one knows, it's not something you can see.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I manage, even though my tongue feels too thick in my mouth, huge and clumsy.

I break into a run before I'm even conscious that my feet are moving, and all I can hear over my thudding footsteps is him calling, "Yes, you do."

I run right past my house, through the overgrown yard to Mrs. Petrelli's garage. I'm sweating, panting completely out of breath, my backpack banging against one hip, but I don't care. I scramble up the stairs, and all I can think about is Danny holding me.

He's waiting, tense and blinking, standing at the edge of the makeshift bed. "Wren."

I don't—can't—say anything, I just drop my backpack with a thud on the dusty floor and walk into his arms, burying my head against his chest.

His arms tighten around me, fingers tangling in my hair. "I heard you coming. I missed you," he whispers, and sits down, pulling me into his lap.

He leans his cheek on my head, runs his hands down my spine and then back up, underneath my hoodie, and it's just like the million other times we've sat together like this.

It's what I wanted, but it's all wrong. He's cold and white as a bone, too hard, and when I lay my cheek against his chest, the silence is awful. I used to lie with him on the sofa in Becker's basement

or upstairs in my bed when Mom wasn't home, and count his heartbeats, a sturdy *thump-thump* I could feel beneath my palm, even through his T-shirt.

"What's wrong?" he says. "You're shaking."

There's no way to answer him. Not honestly, anyway. *You're wrong*, I want to say. *This is wrong*. *It was so, so wrong to think I could do this. Or hide it.*

Instead, I simply whisper, "Cold."

He holds me tighter, strokes my back. It doesn't make me any warmer, but I sit there anyway until it's dark, because he likes me there. He always seems more centered as soon as I come up to the loft. Whenever I manage to get up the stairs without him hearing me coming, he's sprawled so loosely on the bed that he looks a little bit like a marionette whose puppeteer has tossed him aside.

I can't run from this. I can't hide from him. Not in the library, not anywhere.

What's just as scary is that I guess I can't hide from Gabriel, either.

CHAPTER FIVE

PEOPLE ALWAYS SAY THEY FEEL NUMB AND empty when they lose someone.

I feel that way now sometimes, when Danny and I are curled together on his bed in the loft. But what about the days right after he died? At his funeral? I felt like I'd been stuck under a glass, so that everything inside me—rage, grief, terror—resonated louder, harder, clanging together until I could feel it in my bones.

As we stood there beside his grave, the only sound other than the minister talking about eternal peace was Danny's mother, sobbing. Danny's dad had his arm around her, holding her up, but his jaw was clenched so tightly, I was pretty sure he was going to lose it any minute.

We all just stood there, our heads bowed and hands folded, listening, waiting for it to be over. Nothing was right—instead of gray and rainy, the way it was supposed to be, the way it always is in the movies, it was a bright, hot July day. The sun poured through the leaves of the giant maple beside the plot.

But at Danny's grave that day I thought the crowd of football players and the stoners from his art class were probably glad they had a legitimate reason for their sunglasses, even though everyone knew they would have worn them anyway. It was hard not to choke up when you heard Danny's mom and his little sister, Molly, sobbing, when you saw his older brother, Adam, choking back tears as their dad patted his back. None of us were supposed to die. Life was supposed to be what we were waiting for, not something already over.

When someone's cell went off a few feet behind us, my head went up so fast, I nearly lost my balance. My mother put a hand on my shoulder. I wanted to shrug it off, but I couldn't—any minute that glass around me was going to shatter, and all that furious energy was going to explode out of me. I had to shut my eyes for a second, trying not to imagine the carefully manicured lawn around the plot of Danny's grave going up in flames, or a sudden wind ripping through the cemetery, hurling the mourners against the headstones.

I couldn't let that happen, not to Danny's parents, and Ryan, and Danny's other real friends. Not even to Danny, although I knew that the boy I loved wasn't really in that casket. Not the part that mattered, anyway.

At home later, I went down to the basement. I figured I could do the least damage there—or maybe the most, without consequences anyway. Getting through the reception at Danny's house had taken more self-control than I thought it would, even though I hadn't managed to do much more than stare against the wall in the living room with a paper cup of punch in one hand, nodding at the people who came over to hug me.

I didn't even change my clothes before I ran down the basement steps, and I had fistfuls of my black shirt in each hand as I stared at the accumulated junk that we had let pile up over the years.

I had no idea what I expected to do. What I wanted was to blow a hole in the sky, explode a star, let the burning embers scorch me and everything they touched.

I jumped when my mother's hand landed on my shoulder again, warm and firm. She rested her palm against my cheek and handed me a chipped dish from a pile on a shelf. "Go on," she said. "It works just as well."

I stared at her, not understanding, every vein throbbing with the need to let all that energy out. But

that wasn't what she meant. She picked up another—a cracked bowl from a set of green-striped dishes we used when I was really little—and smashed it against the dull gray cement floor.

I jumped again as the sound of it echoed inside me, and then I let the dish in my hand drop. It crashed among the broken shards of the bowl, pale blue pieces as sharp as the noise.

“Harder,” Mom said, and handed me a mug without a handle. FIRST NATIONAL SAVINGS BANK was printed neatly around it in bright red letters. I hurled it at the bare spot on the wall beside the dryer and it shattered so violently, pieces of it bounced over the floor to land between our feet.

In fifteen minutes we managed to break every old piece of dishware down there, until the floor was a jagged carpet of smashed pottery. When there was nothing left to throw, I sank to my knees and started to cry, the kind of huge, gulping, embarrassing sobs that make you blotchy and shaky. Mom settled down beside me, pulling me into her body until my face was pressed against her shoulder, and I had to wonder if she'd thrown things when Dad left, if she'd felt this alone and helpless.

I felt better afterward. Not right, not good, but not tied up in so many emotions I couldn't untangle them all.

There was a lesson there, I realized later. I didn't learn it, though.

“What are you thinking about?”

It's almost eleven, and Danny and I are lying on his bed, legs tangled together under an old blanket. I had to wait till Mom was asleep to sneak back to the loft tonight. I didn't stay long the first time after I let Danny smooth all the rough edges from running into Gabriel. This time Mom was in bed, the little TV on her dresser flickering softly in the dark. Robin was snoring in her room, one hand on Mr. Purrfect, her orange tiger cat. He blinked at me in the dark when I peeked through the crack in her door, yellow eyes cold and uninterested.

I never know what to tell Danny when he asks questions like that. Your funeral? The fact that Becker still hasn't come back to school because one of his legs doesn't work right, and he's flying on painkillers most of the time anyway? The way Ryan can barely look at me anymore? How much I really hate running into your mom in town, and how often she still looks like she just finished crying?

“Wren?” Anxious, almost pleading. Needy. His fingers tighten around my arm.

“French,” I whisper, letting my lips brush the cool smoothness of his cheek. “Madame Hobart has been on the warpath lately. And I still fuck up pluperfect conjugations.”

“I told you, you should've taken Spanish,” he says, and he almost sounds like the old Danny when he laughs. “I think Mr. Hill is stoned most of the time.”

I can't help but smile at that, because he's right. Mr. Hill wears the same tie for days at a time, and he blinks like a startled owl when anyone asks him a question. Danny was always talking about him, back when he was ... well, still in school.

And still alive, a voice in my head whispers. A nasty, accusing voice, even though I wasn't the reason he died. That was his fault, his and Becker's, for being assholes and taking Becker's car out of the park way on the west edge of town after they'd been drinking. The roads there, a giant spiderweb through the walking trails and trees, are narrow and twisty enough when you're sober and it's daylight.

After I saw a photo of the crash site, Becker's hand-me-down Celica accordioned into the broom closet base of a chestnut tree, I realized how likely it was that I could have been in the car with them. Given me a beer and I don't make the greatest decisions either.

What was scarier, though, was realizing that, for a minute, I wished I *had* been in the car. That I was gone, too, wherever you go after you die, with Danny.

That's when it started. Knowing that I couldn't turn back time and climb into the backseat the way I had so many other nights, but wanting Danny with me again so much that I started to give serious thought to whether or not I could make that happen.

When I remembered that fluttering white paper bird, I was convinced.

I look at Danny now, just as pale, just as delicate somehow, and he smiles at me. Reaches out to stroke my cheek, tucking hair behind my ear. Snugs his hips closer, all lean, hard bone beneath the jeans I convinced his mom to give me. "He wrote my name on them," I'd told her, pointing to where he'd written it in Sharpie on the inside of one calf, and she'd swallowed tears before she kissed my forehead.

He'd been buried in a dark gray suit and a white shirt with an ice blue tie knotted at his throat. I burned it all the day I brought the jeans home. I'd picked up a couple of shirts at the thrift store downtown. The suit smelled like the graveyard, dark and sour, and in it he looked nothing like the Danny I knew.

He brushes his mouth against my hair now, and strokes along my hip, fingers curling in my belt loops, pulling me closer still. I swallow hard, trying not to shudder.

He's so cold now. Always so cold, skin icy smooth. And his body is so quiet—the distant bump of a heartbeat, the thrum of blood flowing through veins, never seemed noticeable until it was gone. I wriggle around to tilt my head up and kiss him, hoping it will be enough.

It never is anymore. For a little while he'll relax, kiss me slowly, lingering and tasting, but it doesn't last.

It's hard to go backward, after all. Even for me, because I can remember what it felt like to let our kisses wander away from our mouths, to peel off clothes to reveal new places to touch, to taste.

I remember the way I could feel his heartbeat in the pulse at his throat, racing and stuttering. How warm he was, his cheeks fevered, his hands hot and firm.

But it's not like that anymore. Not for me, anyway, and every time I have to pull away I'm aware of how strong he is, how much he wants something I can't give him. I can't believe he can't sense the way I tense up, stiff and panicked, or the jackrabbit thump of my own pulse, poised for flight.

Gabriel would. The thought hits me out of nowhere, so unwelcome that I blink and push Danny away too roughly as I struggle to sit up.

Gabriel has no place in my head, and definitely not here in the loft. It's hard not to glance around the dark room, as if, wherever he is, Gabriel can hear what I'm thinking even now.

"Wren," Danny starts, sitting up with me and sliding his arm around my waist. "Don't. Don't . . . stop. You always stop now."

Every word is weighted, heavy with confusion and frustration, and I give in a little and lay my head on his shoulder. It's all my fault, every bit of this. It's like one of those hedge mazes. Once you're in, you're turned around without any landmarks, there's nothing to do but keep going until you find your way out.

I have a long way to go, I know. Until then, I can only do this: gently push him onto his back, kiss his cheeks, his forehead, his jaw, and whisper, "Sleep now, Danny. Sleep. I want you to sleep."

He can't fight it, even though I can tell he wants to. He doesn't even have to sleep anymore, just because he doesn't need to eat or breathe. But when I tell him something like this, when I give him a direct command, he can't help himself.

I didn't know the spell would work like this, but I'm glad it does. Danny would never hurt me, he would never really push himself on me, but there are too many things I can't explain to him now.

When he backs me into a corner, this is the easiest way to get around him.

He's frowning, just a little, his brows drawn up in an unhappy question mark, but he doesn't move after a moment. His body relaxes inch by inch, his shoulders softening as they slump against the mattress, his head listing to one side. The hand that had tightened into a fist on his thigh loosens, and he touches the bare, knobby knuckles with one fingertip.

He doesn't stir.

Commands don't last forever. At some point, when I've been away from him too long, I think, he'll wake up.

If I close my eyes, I can see the look on his face in that moment, disappointment and resignation setting his jaw tight. I know because I've seen it when I leave him awake, and it never stops hurting.

This is easier. For me, anyway. This way, I can pretend it's months ago, the first few days after school had ended for the year, and we were curled together in his bed while his mom was at work. It was early summer, the air soft and warm and slightly damp, and he had fallen asleep after ... we'd been together after.

It was one of the first times I got to watch him sleep, and it was so strange, having him right there but somehow not. The way he sort of melted into the sheets, boneless and completely comfortable, his hair stuck to his forehead in two places, and a thin sheen of sweat on his collarbone. After a while his eyes had started to move beneath his lids as he dreamed, and he suddenly smiled, a startling flare of happiness before his mouth softened again.

That never happens now, no matter how long I watch him. And like everything else, I know that it's my fault, too.

CHAPTER SIX

I MANAGE TO AVOID TALKING TO GABRIEL, OR pretty much anyone, until lunch the next day. I walk in the cafeteria starved, since I forgot my lunch this morning, knowing Jess is here somewhere. We only have lunch and gym together this year.

It smells like sauerkraut and dust and sweat, and I grab a yogurt and a PB&J from the end of the line. If I eat quickly, I can probably manage to sneak off to the library without seeing her, not that I imagine she's looking for me. When Jess gets her mad on, it usually stays put for a while.

But it's not Jess I bump into when I turn around, the pitted plastic tray wobbling in my hands. It's Gabriel, taking a bite of an apple with his head tilted sideways, as if I'm some science experiment he's not sure he executed right.

"God, *what?*" The words are out of my mouth before I can think twice, and he just gives me that amused smile.

"Thought you might want some company," he says with a shrug.

"You thought wrong," I tell him, and head for the tables at the far end of the room. It's the size of the gym, and just as noisy, and the mostly empty table I'm aiming for seems miles away.

Especially since Gabriel follows right behind me, as if I haven't spoken at all, as if I haven't been shooting him "keep away" vibes all day. I think *Stalker* at him, really loud, but when I glance over my shoulder, he only looks sort of confused.

"God, go away," I hiss at him as I set my tray down. The two freshmen at the other end of the table look up, startled, and I roll my eyes. "Not you."

Gabriel pulls out the chair across from mine and sits down, but before I can say anything else, he holds a hand up. "Look, I get it. I shouldn't have ... I didn't mean to make this weird. But I wanted to say sorry. Okay? It's no big deal. I mean, it is, but ... I'm not going to say anything."

My heart is pounding again, and I'm so tired of it. It's exhausting, all that adrenaline and whatever it is that makes me the way I am, tingling in my veins like some biological red alert.

I stare at Gabriel for a second, and his cool gray eyes are serious. I know he's not teasing me, even though that would probably be easier to deal with. I flick my gaze to the two girls at the other end of the table. They've stopped eating, mom-made sandwiches still clutched in their hands, and I glance at them. They grab their paper bags and half-eaten carrot sticks and take off.

"That wasn't nice," Gabriel says, but he's grinning. Slouched across from me in faded navy corduroy and a plain gray pullover, he actually looks a little too comfortable.

"Freshman girls are the only people I can actually push around, so I have to take advantage of them sometimes." I fold my arms across my chest and sit back. "What exactly is no big deal? You know that you're so generously not going to tell everyone."

It's a dangerous move—I don't actually want him to spell it out, especially not here in the cafeteria, but I have to know what he knows.

It's like the first rule of *Fight Club*. Whatever it is that the women in my family can do, you don't talk about it. Not even with each other, if my mom's anyone to go by.

I know we're not the only people with something to hide. Everyone keeps secrets—I'm not stupid. No one is, not really. I mean, it only took two weeks in seventh grade for everyone to figure out that when Kayla Schmidt said she was having dinner with her dad once a week, she was really going to

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