

A woman with long, wavy hair is shown from the waist up, wearing a long, flowing white dress with lace detailing at the hem. Her arms are raised, and her head is tilted back, as if she is dancing or reaching towards the sky. The background is a dark, dramatic sky filled with heavy, grey clouds, suggesting a storm or a night scene. The overall mood is mysterious and ethereal.

WHERE  
SILENCE  
GATHERS

kelsey sutton

A Companion Novel to *Some Quiet Place*

## Copyright Information

*Where Silence Gathers* © 2014 by Kelsey Sutton.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any matter whatsoever, including Internet usage, without written permission from Flux, except in the form of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

As the purchaser of this ebook, you are granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this ebook on screen. The text may not be otherwise reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, or recorded on any other storage device in any form or by any means.

Any unauthorized usage of the text without express written permission of the publisher is a violation of the author's copyright and is illegal and punishable by law.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental. Cover models used for illustrative purposes only and may not endorse or represent the book's subject.

First e-book edition ©2014

E-book ISBN: 9780738742373

Book design by Bob Gaul

Cover design by Ellen Lawson

Cover image: "Reaching for Clouds"/©Brooke Shaden Photography

Flux is an imprint of Llewellyn Worldwide Ltd.

Flux does not participate in, endorse, or have any authority or responsibility concerning private business arrangements between our authors and the public.

Any Internet references contained in this work are current at publication time, but the publisher cannot guarantee that a specific reference will continue or be maintained. Please refer to the publisher's website for links to current author websites.

Flux  
Llewellyn Worldwide Ltd.  
2143 Wooddale Drive  
Woodbury, MN 55125  
[www.fluxnow.com](http://www.fluxnow.com)

Manufactured in the United States of America

# ONE

Revenge finds me on the bridge.

He sits down just as I finish my uncle's bottle of rum. His legs dangle off the edge. I don't look at him, and for a few minutes neither of us says a word. Plumes of air leave my mouth with every breath. It's still too cold for crickets, so the night is utterly silent. If I listen hard enough, I can almost hear the stars whispering to each other. Cruel, biting whispers.

"Saul's not going to be happy with me," I finally slur, watching moonlight quiver over the creek. "He didn't even try to hide this, because he trusts me. But you know, if he *had* hidden it, I can find anything! Anything, I tell you!" I lift my finger in the air and almost topple over. Revenge doesn't reach to steady me. That's one of his rules, after all: no touching. I giggle, reaching for the bottle again. Oh, right. Empty.

There's a pause, and then Revenge turns his head to look at me. "I like the eyebrow ring."

I touch the silver loop, almost surprised. I'd completely forgotten about it. Now I notice the pain. "Georgie did it for me earlier."

My friend studies it for a moment, then faces the water again. "There are better ways to deal with this, you know," he tells me. His usual grin is missing, which means that something is wrong. Swaying, I give him a questioning look. He shrugs. "We can talk about it tomorrow."

"Screw that. Tell me."

A few more seconds pass, and I start to think he's ignoring me. He doesn't take his attention off the water. Then, suddenly, his gaze meets mine. Revenge's eyes always manage to make me feel things, no matter how much I try to pretend otherwise. Some days they're hazel, some days they're green. Once in a while, like now, they're a mesmeric emerald. Tonight, though, it's his words that are the most powerful.

"They let him out today, Alex," Revenge says.

Instantly I open my mouth to ask who he means. Then comprehension slams into me with all the force of a hangover and my spine goes rigid. “No. No. He’s not supposed to be out for another—”

“He was released on good behavior. He’s already home.”

I lurch to my feet without hesitation, scraping my palms in the process. My car is parked just a few feet away. Revenge doesn’t protest, doesn’t help, doesn’t encourage me. He just follows.

“That’s where you were today, wasn’t it?” I mutter, struggling to open the door. “I bet you’re loving this.”

There it is, the thorn that’s always made our friendship bleed. Once again Revenge doesn’t answer, so I get in. After a moment he follows, tucking his body inside and somehow managing to make it look graceful. His hair glints, the color of spilled blood.

The keys are in the ignition. Revenge knows better than to offer to drive, so as I struggle with the gear—forgetting that I haven’t started the car yet—he just settles into the passenger seat and waits. Usually I can’t get him to shut up. His voice is a constant sound in my ears, at school, at home, with my friends. Everything is different now; the dynamic has shifted.

He’s excited.

There’s an animation to his expression that’s never been there before. His time has come. My jaw clenches as I finally start the car. *I’m not ready for this, I’m not ready for this.* The engine whines into the stillness, but I don’t move. Seconds pass and I think of another night, another drunken mistake. “You have to drive,” I finally mutter.

The Emotion—it’s not quite what he is, but I don’t know what else to call him—grins. As I climb back out and circle the car, he slides behind the wheel. Before my door has even shut completely, Revenge slams onto the gas. The tires squeal. He can’t hold back a loud whoop.

Resentment appears in the backseat, a bald Emotion who talks almost as much as Revenge. Yet now he just touches my shoulder, sending his essence burning through me, and vanishes. They know, they all know, that something is happening.

I’m clenching my fists so hard it hurts. Nails. I haven’t clipped my nails lately. “It’s too hot,” I say through my teeth. As a response, Revenge leans over me to

hit the window button. His familiar scent teases my senses: chocolate. I adore-despise it. “Get off me.”

Those green eyes gleam in response. “It could all be over tonight,” he murmurs, leaning closer than he ever has before. The car swerves, nearly hitting a tree. It doesn’t even faze him; he just corrects us. “I’ll help you, Alex.”

“I don’t need your help,” I hiss. The road lines keep flying past, white blurs, and it’s so disorienting.

“Come on. Who are you talking to?”

“I *thought* I was talking to my best friend. But I keep forgetting what you are.” I laugh bitterly. “Ironic, right? Forgetting something like that?”

At this, Revenge’s expression darkens and he leans away. Which is exactly what I wanted: him to feel as unsettled as me. Still smiling tightly, I focus on the signs, knowing that the turn is coming up. The house we’re looking for is two towns over from Franklin, an hour away if we drive fast. And we are. So fast that it almost feels like I’m leaving everything behind. Almost.

That’s what I like about Revenge most, I think. He doesn’t feel the need to slow down; he thrives on the speed just as much as I do. With the taste of rum in my mouth and the sting of remembrance in my heart, I set my sights on the man who killed my family.

I lose track of how much time passes. The glowing numbers on the dashboard don’t exist; there’s just what’s coming. I can’t stop myself from picturing the moment, the instant Nate Foster sees me.

“What was he like?” I ask. My voice is quieter now. Like that hushed moment just before everything implodes.

The trees continue to rush past as we drive down the mountain. A line deepens between his eyebrows as Revenge considers. Again, uncharacteristic. Revenge is impulsive and wild.

“Tired,” he decides. “He looked tired.” I don’t say anything to this, and I feel him watching me. “What are you thinking about?” he asks.

I’m thinking that I can’t hear the whispers of the stars anymore, but Revenge wouldn’t understand that. Instead I answer, “The day we met.”

He grins again. His grip is relaxed on the steering wheel. “You were so chubby back then. I’m glad you turned out nice.”

How can he sound normal? Apprehension materializes and reaches for me. I resist the urge to recoil. He pokes my shoulder rather than resting his hand on it, like the others do. He's one of the odder Emotions, with tangled hair and clothes that are baggy from him tugging at them so much. He's nearly identical to Worry, as if they were born as twins. Creatures from the other plane aren't born, though, and Apprehension smells worse.

Revenge notices our guest, but he wisely chooses not to comment. As always, I pretend not to see him. I do this with all the Emotions, even though they must know about my Sight. It's an instinct born from habit and a deeply rooted hatred.

Hatred for all of them—except him.

Apprehension disappears. I hardly notice; I'm remembering that day for real now. I was twelve. There was a newspaper on the coffee table, and the headline caught my eye. Saul must have forgotten to hide it. *Drunk Driver Kills Family*. I was young, but even then I was capable of darkness. The sight of those words caused it to spread through my chest.

That's when Revenge came into my life.

"You're small," he said to me that afternoon. He was dressed in a simple long-sleeved shirt and jeans—a tame choice for him, I'd learn—yet I still knew he wasn't like me. By then I'd learned how to discern them from humans.

I glanced at my aunt, who was busy in the kitchen. Dishes clattered in the sink. "Who are you?" I asked, turning back to the stranger in our living room.

Revenge smiled, and the breath caught in my throat even then. "I'm your new best friend."

"You're one of them," I said, frowning.

He shrugged. "So? You're a fat little human. You don't hear me complaining. That's what friendship is, right?"

I thought about this. "Why would I be friends with you?"

"Because I'll be here when you need me, and I'll help you get what you want."

"And what do I want?" I asked suspiciously.

Revenge wasn't smiling anymore. He straightened, looking down at me with an intense expression. "That's the question, isn't it, Alexandra Tate? What do you want?"

*What do you want?*

The question still echoes through my head six years later. I find myself looking away from the twists and curves of the road to study Revenge's profile. He's not beautiful in the traditional sense, but he is striking. Sometimes I have trouble tearing my eyes away. His coppery hair is cropped short, and his features are sharp and flawless. Every time he grins, dimples deepen in his cheeks.

Feeling my stare, Revenge turns his head. I quickly look at the road, biting my lip.

Has he stayed with me all these years because he wanted this moment so badly? Or did he stay because ... he just wanted to? I've never let myself ask. I didn't want to ruin it, ruin us. My entire life I've chased after the things that scare me most—maybe because it feels like a punishment, or maybe because I can. But Revenge is one of my greatest weaknesses. As things are, he feels safe. Dependable. If I change this, there won't be any going back.

It's my fault, really, for falling in love with my best friend.

A love that's unorthodox, impossible, and worst of all unrequited.

To escape the black hole of my thoughts, I turn on the radio. Revenge glances at me with an indiscernible expression. We don't get reception up here, though, so all that will come through is Joe's local station. And he only plays Elvis. A song I've listened to a thousand times drifts through the thick silence of the cab.

"My dad hated this," I say suddenly. "He grew up here, you know. Joe refused to play anything else back then, too, so the entire town has always been stuck driving around with Elvis in our cars. It's either that or tapes. No one exactly has a car made in this century. But where are you going to find tapes?" I smile.

"You don't talk about him much," Revenge comments.

He's playing with me. I'm aware that it's what he does, but it still hurts. Revenge knows everything about me. What happened the night I lost everything, what's happened since then, why I don't talk about it. He wants me to remember, and he wants me to get angry. For the first time, I wish Revenge wasn't here. But there's no point in telling him to leave; the only thing creatures from the other plane listen to are their summons.

*SANDERSON ROAD.*

The sign appears suddenly, a flash of color in the blend of black and brown. Revenge slams on the brakes so hard the smell of burnt rubber permeates the

darkness. My nostrils flare as I take in the illuminated words. Every road on and around the mountain is named after some old miner from the very first crew.

Revenge's smile is back. He's forgotten to hide it, or maybe he doesn't care. Deliberately, he turns onto the street Nate Foster lives on. Elvis keeps singing, oblivious to everything that's unfolding. We're slowing down now, and I reach to flip the headlights off. I don't want him to know I'm coming. I want the moment we meet to be devastatingly unexpected.

Gravel crunches beneath the tires and moonlight guides us around the curves. There are only three houses down here, and they're miles apart. No witnesses.

Nate Foster's driveway is marked by a single mailbox. Plastic, beige, the number 36 stickered on the side. I've stared at it so much that the image is embedded into my brain. There's a *FOR SALE* sign next to it, which has been there for months.

Now I hesitate.

Sensing this, Revenge stops the car.

The only sounds in the entire world are Elvis, my breathing, and the rumbles of the engine beneath us. For a few minutes I concentrate on that, on the air flowing through my lungs. In. Out. In. Out. Then, as if I'm moving through an ocean of syrup, I lean forward, open the glove box, and take out the gun. It's cool in my hand.

Revenge says nothing.

"It's Saul's," I whisper. He knows this, of course, but I feel an overwhelming need to speak, to say something. "He keeps it in his nightstand drawer. It was tucked under a Bible, shoved in the back, but I can—"

"Find anything," Revenge finishes. The sound of his voice is jarring.

"Go," I say.

He hits the gas and spins into the driveway, abandoning subtlety. Emotions flood the car and reach for me. Their hands brush my cheek, my hair, my shoulder, my back as Revenge parks and I jump out. The spring air tries to soothe me, but all I'm aware of is the wide window to the left of the front door. Yellow light spills from a chandelier and over the ground outside. The dining room. Two people sit in chairs, eating and drinking. Wine quivers in their glasses. Somehow they haven't seen me. I dart to the side and edge closer, using the shadows of the trees to hide me. Closer. I still have the gun.



And there he is.

Over all these years, I'd built him up. He became this monster, this thing made of thorns and red eyes and hisses. But all I see now is a man. An ordinary, weary-looking man. He takes a bite of his food and chews like a cow, his jaw going around and around. There are bags under his eyes, and he's lost hair since I saw his picture in the paper. Nate Foster.

"Alex," Revenge breathes from his place beside me.

He must feel the way my insides go still. "So that's who killed them, huh?" I ask, barely recognizing my own voice. It's flat, empty. My grip loosens on the gun. "I almost wish he was a monster."

"Just because he looks like an accountant doesn't mean he isn't capable of murder." Revenge is standing so close I can feel the heat rolling off his skin. That scent of chocolate coaxes me. *So good, so easy.*

For some reason, I choose this moment to imagine that empty bottle I left on the bridge. It rolls across the gritty surface, clinking over the rocks and dirt. Then it falls. It makes the smallest of sounds when it hits the water, and all its pain and toil is behind it. The water carries the bottle down the mountain, to new and different places. I could do that, couldn't I? Float away and never look back? Just ... move on?

Something flickers out of the corner of my eye.

No, not something. Someone. The newcomer stands in the shadow of a pine tree, too far away for me to make out the details of his face. All I see is a white T-shirt.

"Who is that?" I ask Revenge, not taking my eyes off the newcomer.

Oddly enough, Revenge's jaw is clenched. "No one," he growls. "Alex—"

"Don't." I'm still staring at the stranger. He stays where he is. Somehow, as always, I know he's one of them. It's the way they move, I think.

Eventually, I tear my gaze away from the stranger and focus on the gun. It's so light, so small. Strange that something this insignificant could cause such damage. I glance at Nate Foster again. He's listening to the woman speak. His wife.

I could do it. I could walk up to that window and shatter their lives the same way he shattered mine. I could.

Instead, I walk away.

“That’s it?” Revenge calls after me. He doesn’t follow this time, and I see that the stranger is gone. Feeling as if my soul is made of the heaviest iron, I head for the car. I’m not drunk anymore. No, I’m more sober than I’ve ever been in my entire life.

“For tonight, yeah.”

Just as I reach the driver’s side, I hear, “Hey, Alex.” I turn to face him, and Revenge musters one more smile. If I didn’t know any better, I’d think he looks sad for me. “Happy birthday.”

# TWO

Saul is waiting for me when I walk through the front door.

He sits at the tiny kitchen table. It's round, placed right in the center of the room. One lone light bulb dangles from the ceiling and casts a soft glow over him. I pause in the doorway, flattening one palm against the wall to pull my boots off. They leave dirt on the floor.

Uncle Saul watches for a moment. "Are you drunk?" he asks calmly. He looks at me with my father's eyes, rich and brown and knowing. They flick to my eyebrow ring, but he doesn't comment on it.

I hesitate before going to stand behind the chair opposite his. My finger trails the wiry path of some blue river on the wall; every room in the apartment is decorated with the contours of a continent. "Not anymore."

"There's cake in the fridge."

His tone is still even, but the implication is clear: they had plans for tonight. They wanted to celebrate the day that I dread most.

"Is Missy asleep?" I ask, trying to sound as controlled as him. We're both frozen lakes, everything hidden beneath a layer of ice.

Saul finally cracks. He rubs his eye with the heel of his hand, revealing just how worried he was. Even if the Emotion has left, their essence always lingers. But all he says is, "I told her there wasn't a point to both of us waiting up."

"Look, I'm—"

"Give me your keys." I toss them onto the table and open my mouth to try apologizing again. "Just go to bed, Alex. We'll talk in the morning." Saul heaves himself up, wincing. He must have been sitting there for hours. Guilt appears and puts her heavy hand on me. That's how they come, almost every time; one moment there's nothing, and the next they're reaching for you with too-hot or too-cold hands and forcing you to feel everything.

Without another word, Saul lumbers down the hallway and disappears into their room. The door clicks shut. I stay there for a few seconds, wishing I'd done

everything differently tonight. Regret joins Guilt and both of them torment me with their existences. I slip out of their grasps, giving them no time to enjoy it.

We live above Saul's piano tuning shop, in one of the three apartments. The one to our left is empty; it's where I used to live with my family. I haven't been inside since the day of the accident. The one to our right is occupied by a little boy and his parents. Angus. The moment I enter my room and sit down on my bed, the springs squeal and Angus knocks on the wall our rooms share. It's a language we invented a couple years ago, something to connect our uncertain worlds. I listen and decipher. *You okay?* he's asking.

I smile and knock back: *Fine. Sleep.*

His reply takes a few minutes. *Happy birthday.*

The simple statement pierces me even more than when Revenge said it. Angus reminds me of my little brother. Or at least, what my little brother might have grown to be.

Exhausted, I don't bother with pajamas or brushing my teeth or even the mascara caking my eyes. I just crawl beneath the covers and curl up. The sheets are cold. Light from the hallway spills toward me, reaching. I stay in the shadows. Still, it's comforting. That light never stops trying, never fades.

*Alexandra.*

My name is so faint I wonder if I imagined it. Frowning, I sit up and listen. The fridge hums in the kitchen and the wind blows against the window next to my nightstand. I don't hear the voice again. "Uncle Saul?" I shout-whisper.

No answer.

Glancing warily around the darkened room, I lie back down and close my eyes. Eventually I fall asleep and dream of the figure in the white T-shirt.

Voices drift down the hallway. I open my eyes a slit and hover in that place between full awareness and the straggling images of my dreams. They were all about the accident,

of course. There are spaces of white in my memory, but every night I see a doctor's droopy eyes, a ceiling rushing past. Blood. Always blood.

As I wake, those images slowly fade. Gray light pours through the window and rain splatters against the glass. Another day.

I can hear the giant clock on Main Street marking the hour. *Dong. Dong. Dong.*

“ ... just think we need to nip this in the bud. If we give her any leniency, it'll only get worse.”

Uncle Saul. I sit up, rubbing my eyes. The hangover isn't as bad as I thought it would be; my head aches rather than pounds. Mascara smears my hands. I'm still wearing the clothes from yesterday. After sniffing everything else lying around, I just leave them on. Then I leave the comfort of my bed and tiptoe toward the kitchen, trying to ignore how cold the floor is. I get close enough in time to hear Missy reply, “You don't know that, honey. She's never done anything like this before.”

There's a *thud*. “You may not see it, but Alex is exactly like William. I won't let her go down the same path he did.”

My aunt takes her time in answering. She must be frying something, because there's the distinct smell of grease in the air and the sound of sizzling. “She might be like Will in some ways, but she does have her mother's qualities too, Saul.”

“Maybe.” He sighs. That single release of air contains the weight of all our sorrow. “But if we come down hard on her now, maybe she'll think twice next time she wants to steal our rum and come home drunk.”

“When you put it like that ... ”

I don't want to hear any more. Pretending to yawn, I shuffle into the room. Both of them instantly stop talking. Missy stands at the stove, attempting to make scrambled eggs from the looks of it. She can't cook anything without burning it—she always gets distracted by other tasks or her own thoughts—but that doesn't stop her from trying.

“Want some?” she asks, glancing briefly in my direction. She must have been warned about the eyebrow ring, because she doesn't look surprised.

Saul is at the table again, this time with a paper and a cup of coffee. Steam rises from the black surface. He doesn't look any less severe than he did last night. I smile at my aunt and shake my head, going to sit down across from him. He doesn't look up, and my keys glint in front of my seat, along with a wrapped gift.

“It's cold today” is all Saul says. Meaning, I have permission to drive. The present gleams and beckons, and I know they expect me to open it, but I can't bring myself to touch it.

Not when I don't deserve to.

Another apology sticks in my throat, but Revenge decides to show up just as I'm about to speak. The sight of him makes my mouth go dry. He's chosen to dress in modern clothes again—today it's a brown leather jacket, form-fitting jeans, his typical glinting hair, and that cocky grin—yet I can't control the way my entire body ignites.

Another Emotion comes up behind my chair and leans down, putting hands on my shoulders and a mouth by my ear to whisper, "You don't know what you're getting into, girl." I don't turn around or acknowledge the words, but her scent overwhelms me.

Oblivious, or maybe choosing to ignore her too, my friend settles into one of the other chairs. It doesn't creak or even move. "Better eat something," he drawls. "You've got a test in American Lit, right?"

I freeze, forgetting to be disappointed that he doesn't seem as affected by my presence as I am by his. "Shit."

Saul and Missy stare at me now. Recovering, I clear my throat. "Uh, sorry. I just meant ... I just realized that I have to be at school early today. I'll see you guys tonight, okay? I'll open your gift then." Standing, I scrape my hair into a ponytail and use the hair binder around my wrist to secure it. The gathered strands brush my lower back.

A line deepens between Saul's eyes as he begins to stand, too. Worry twitches into reality behind him, a frizzy-haired Emotion who avoids eye contact. "Alex—" my uncle begins.

But I'm quicker. I snatch a piece of toast from the plate on the counter, grab my keys, and dart back down the hallway. Missy says something I don't catch. My teeth sink into the burnt bread as I yank my boots on—no socks—and I'm out the door before my left heel slides into it completely. The keys jangle in my hand, and once I've hurried down the stairs and reached the car I spare a moment to look up and wave at Angus, who's watching me from their front window.

Revenge materializes in his spot in the passenger seat. "Smooth," he says, eyes light with amusement.

I roll my own eyes in response and start the car, an ancient Saturn that Saul fixed up for me. "Shut up."

But my heart doesn't feel like a hot coal while I say it, as it did a few hours ago. Everything feels normal again, like all the shifting and changing that happened yesterday was just another dream. Nate Foster is still in his tiny jail cell, Revenge is here because there's nothing for him to do but wait, and the gun in my glove box hasn't been touched. There are no decisions, no uncertainties, no memories slamming at the inside of my skull.

Then Revenge has to ruin it.

"Are you going tonight?" he asks.

I could pretend confusion. I could act like I didn't hear him. Yet his simple question destroys any pretenses of normality I've managed to achieve. Elvis mourns into the sudden stillness. I turn the radio off, gritting my teeth. The clouds have relented just a little, but the light drizzle makes the world the darkest of greens.

The few businesses in Franklin crawl by on our right. The gas station, the diner, the general store. Everything else has *OUT OF BUSINESS* signs propped up in the windows. Ever since the mines closed, we've been fading away. The only people left have nowhere else to go. Most have lost hope. A group of kids play on the street, their faces dirty and their clothes ragged. They should be in school. But they aren't. It makes me think of futures and families ... or the lack of them.

Naturally, this leads to thoughts of Nate Foster.

"Will you come?" I ask Revenge, even though I already know the answer.

"There's nowhere else I'd rather be."

He's looking at me. I can feel it. I focus on the road, unable to ask my own questions. *But why? For me? Or for you?*

Fear—an Emotion I meet more often than I'd like to admit—wraps his arms around both me and the seat. His skin is so cold, and his smell is sickeningly sweet. "Five seconds," he whispers in my ear. "That's all it would take to face your fear. Maybe less, if you can talk fast."

My eyes meet his in the review mirror, and the blond creature flashes me a quick grin. Revenge watches him with obvious dislike. Hopefully he thinks Fear's summons stem from the idea of facing Nate Foster tonight.

Then I blink and we're alone again—nothing to prove that Fear was even here other than his lingering scent. Revenge visibly relaxes. "So, why are we going in

early today?”

The school rises up against the horizon. Back in the 1800s, it was a huge courthouse. Despite the conversion, it still has the gold plaque next to the door. The town clock towers beside it. I guide my old car into a parking space next to the curb and still avoid looking at Revenge. I'm afraid he'll see the truth in my eyes. "I had to get out of there" is all I say.

Rather than climbing out like a normal person, Revenge vanishes and reappears at my side. "I understand that," he says, shrugging. "There isn't a species more annoying than humans."

"No, it's not that." I study the cracks in the sidewalk as we make our way to the front steps. There isn't anyone around to notice me talking to the air. "I just hate making them worry. My father wasn't the most well-behaved kid, I guess. The sheriff was always arresting him and Dad didn't get to graduate, which is why he went to work in the mines. Saul and Missy probably think I'm going to end up the same way." And I probably will, in most ways.

Revenge looks speculative. "You made him out to be so perfect."

I picture my dad. I was twelve when he died, and already it's hard to remember the exact details of his face. We had the same thick eyebrows, the same clear skin and wide eyes. I got his hair, too, a caramel-like shade of brown that has a slight wave to it. Maybe the similarity is why I haven't cut it in years, and now it's become a thick, unmanageable curtain. What does Missy think I inherited from my mother, exactly? When I look in the mirror, all I see is Dad.

Realizing I still haven't answered Revenge, I shoulder my bag and start to climb the steps. "To me, he *was* perfect. I never saw that side of him."

"Wrong," Revenge says, startling me. "Don't you remember what—"

A familiar perfume—sweet pea—surrounds me just before someone slams their shoulder into mine. "Can someone please tell me why I have to stick around here for another year? Is a diploma really that important? I mean, I have a plan. Move to L.A. and become a star. Who needs high school for that?" My friend eyes me and tosses her curls over one shoulder. "You look like shit, by the way," she adds. "That birthday dinner with Missy and Saul must have been exhausting. Did you get in trouble for the eyebrow? I have to say, I did a great job."



“Hey, Georgie,” I say dryly. Revenge wrinkles his nose in distaste. He’s never liked her. Probably because they’re so alike. “Why are you here early?”

“I told you, it’s Georgiana now. Georgie is just ... amateur.”

“Oh, excuse me. Georgiana.” We reach the front doors and I open one of them for her.

She sweeps past. “Make fun of me while you can. You won’t be laughing in a year.”

The air in our school smells like mold and disinfectant. Though her locker is on the other side of the building, Georgie walks with me toward mine. “A year is all it will take to rise to fame, huh?” I ask her, trying not to smile.

“Again, I’ve got a plan.” She sniffs. “Don’t you ever listen to me when I tell you things? First, I’m going to—”

“We listen to you, Georgie. There’s no need to go through it all again.” The third member of our little group appears beside us, holding her books and fixing her gentle smile on Georgie. Briana Brinkman, who’s been a part of my life for as long as I can remember, shifts her clear gaze to me and her smile grows. “Hey, Alex. We came early to work on Georgie’s essay. It’s due first hour, and all she’s written is her name.”

“Essay ... ” I repeat with a sinking sensation in my stomach. “I completely forgot.”

Georgie eyes me. “What’s going on with you lately?” Her expression changes and she grabs my arm. “Oh my God, I can’t believe I forgot to tell you!”

Grateful to avoid explanations, I indulge her. “What?” We all start to walk toward the library.

“Billy and his friends were down by the mines the other night and they heard *moans* coming from the tunnels. Pretty freaky, right? Maybe the ghost of Sammy Thorn really does exist.” Georgie doesn’t try to hide how thrilling she finds this.

Briana responds, her tone solemn, but I don’t hear what she says. I’m thinking of the Sammy Thorn legend, a bedtime tale for wayward children. Decades ago, little kids were disappearing from their beds. It became a national issue, and Franklin turned into a place of closed curtains and locked doors. Somehow it was discovered that a miner called Sammy Thorn was the culprit, but only one of the children was found when they searched his house. Thorn was chased into

the mines and never seen again. Things went back to normal in our town, and so many years passed that people began to feel safe again. Thorn became a story.

Mid-sentence, Georgie turns to me again. “Don’t think you’re off the hook, by the way,” she adds.

They’re both staring at me, waiting, and I falter. “There’s nothing to tell. Personally, I’m more interested in finding out if Briana finally asked Rachel Porter out.”

At this, Georgie scoffs. She doesn’t give Briana a chance to respond. “Of course not. She’s too much a chicken. Now, spill. How did the birthday dinner go? Were they mad about the piercing?”

Damn it. “Uh, well, I—”

*Alexandra.*

I freeze, forgetting how to breathe. All the nerve endings in my body flare to life. This isn’t like it was last night, some faint whisper in the distance. It sounds close, right in my ear. I lean against a locker to steady myself. What’s happening to me?

My friends are staring. Even Revenge. “Did you hear anything?” I demand, still breathless.

Briana puts her hand on my arm, and an Emotion presses close to her. I don’t let myself look up; her concern only makes things worse. Am I going crazy?

“I have to go,” I say, taking a step back. Then another. My glance flicks to Revenge. He’s frowning. For the first time, he doesn’t understand me.

Something has started, and I’m a leaf in a current, helpless against it. I turn away from them and face the light pouring through the front doors. I think of Nate Foster and empty rum bottles and mysterious strangers wearing white.

Georgie swears. “Is she high or something? Alex? Alex!”

I run.

# THREE

“Shouldn’t you be in class?”

I turn away from the bookshelf and meet Andrew’s concerned gaze. In case there was any doubt about what he’s feeling, Worry stands beside him. I’m sick to death of this particular Emotion. He ignores me, and I ignore him as I say to Andrew, “They cancelled school today. A meteor fell and destroyed all the classrooms.”

What I don’t say is, *Oh, I think I might be losing my mind, and I can’t be in Franklin right now.*

My godfather, who was my father’s best friend, sighs and lowers himself into the chair behind the desk. His glasses flash in the weak lamplight. “You need a diploma, young lady. Life will be much more difficult without it.”

Despite knowing how much he hates it when I touch his things—I’ve never been to his office before, but I’ve been to his house a hundred times—I pick up a plaque in front of him and read the engraved words: *PROFESSOR ANDREW LOMENTA*. I drove over an hour to get to Green River Community College.

“Life, difficult? How so?” I ask flatly, putting the plaque down.

Worry’s body gives a particularly odd twitch. It draws my attention to him, and as I watch he flickers again, like a channel with bad reception. I frown. It takes me a moment to remember what’s happening and how Revenge once explained it: Beings from the other plane are able to be in multiple places at once. In order to address each and every summons, they do what Worry is doing right now—create another copy of themselves to send.

After another moment, Worry vanishes completely, his summons from me answered. Yet his effect lives on.

Andrew purses his lips and leans forward, imploring me with both his expression and his words. He can’t resist readjusting the plaque so that it’s exactly where it was before. His fingers are long and elegant. “Well, what about college? You want to go to college, right?”

I swing away and stroll along the edge of his office, feigning interest in the wall of books again. “Is that a trick question?”

“Missy asked me if I gave you a recommendation. She thinks you applied.”

Anger appears and lays a heavy hand on my shoulder. I resist the urge to shake him off. His touch burns, right through my skin and into my bones. Just when I think I can’t take another second, he vanishes.

Andrew types something on his computer while I struggle to respond, but I’m clenching my jaw so tightly it’s nearly impossible to get anything out. “Can we not talk about my aunt, please?” I say finally.

Another sigh. Andrew always gives in eventually. “Fine, Alex. You can hang out here for a while. But promise me you’ll go back for your afternoon classes, okay?”

I pluck a textbook from its place on the wall—the one I’d been looking at earlier—and plop into the plushy chair by the door. My legs dangle off the armrest. “Of course,” I chirp. I flip through the pages, stroking the ridges with my thumb.

Andrew pauses in his typing. His expression is strange. “What made you pick that book?”

I shrug as if the answer doesn’t matter, as if it’s nothing. “I figured it wouldn’t be boring.” But I can feel the embossed title against my palm—*Creatures of Myth*—and it matters more than he can know. Almost as much as getting the nerve to face Nate Foster matters.

“You didn’t used to be interested in myth,” Andrew says.

His tone is light, conversational, but no one can ever suspect. The other plane wouldn’t like it. So I lift my head and snap, “I don’t see any gossip magazines around here, so ... ”

The professor raises his hands in a gesture of surrender. Behind him there’s a wide window, and the newly grown leaves of an oak tree sway in the breeze. “I didn’t mean anything by it. I just thought it was interesting. Your father read that book too.”

At this, my stomach flutters and I stare at him. “He did?”

“Cover to cover. He used to ask me questions about ... other dimensions. Or planes. I can’t remember the exact way he phrased it.”

“What did you tell him?” I try to sound casual, but my grip is too tight on the book. Excitement and Confusion lean over me.

Andrew picks up a pen and frowns at a paper on the desk. “I’m not really an expert on the subject, since my specialty is economics. But I gave him access to the college’s library, and the number of an old friend who used to dabble in the subject.”

Without thinking, I open my mouth to demand the name and number, and I’m saved when a student fills the doorway and ventures, “Professor Lomenta? Do you have a minute?”

Andrew hesitates, glancing at me.

I stand up, still clutching the book. “I better go, anyway.”

“Can you wait in the hallway for a moment, Jenny? I’ll be right there.”

The girl nods and leaves. Andrew focuses on me again. “Alex ... I know you’re having a difficult time, especially lately, considering ... ” He stops and clears his throat, fidgeting with his pen. *Click. Click. Click.* “But your parents would have wanted you to be happy.”

I force a smile, studying this awkward man that my father loved. Trusted. “I know, Andrew. Thanks.” A hug is a bit too much, so I just move to put the book back.

“You can borrow it, if you want,” he says.

I hesitate, but I already know there isn’t anything in this book that can help me. “No thanks.” The book slides back into its place with a soft sound.

“Alex.” When I turn yet again to meet his gaze, Andrew hesitates. He stuffs his hands in his pockets, and I’m surprised to see Apprehension appear behind him. Andrew’s eyes flick toward the window, toward those quivering leaves, and then he says, “Don’t come to my office again. If you need me, call, and we can meet somewhere. My house or a coffee shop. All right?”

He’s always serious, but there’s something different about his voice, a shadow that clings to the words. So I don’t argue. “No problem. See you around, Lomenta.”

This time he doesn’t stop me from reaching the doorway. I feel him watching me go, and he probably thinks whatever issue I had is resolved with his simple assurances. But it will take more than concern or kindness to make everything right.

*What will make everything right?* a little voice in my head asks me. *Nate Foster's death?*

Maybe.

But that's not what's most important right now. No, what matters most is this new discovery, this burning knowledge that yearns to expand and grow. Something I should have known. It may mean nothing; it might mean everything.

My father saw them too.

Angus sits on the bench outside of Saul's store, holding a jar in his hands.

The town clock is going off again. It does that every single hour, on the dot, no matter how annoying we find it or how much we complain. Just like Joe and his damn radio station, playing all that Elvis. *Dong. Dong. Dong.*

I slam the car door shut and approach my small neighbor. "What are you doing out here? Are your parents fighting again?" Angus just nods. I squat in front of him. "Is that a new jar?"

"Found it," he mumbles, swiping at his nose. His sleeve leaves behind a streak of dirt. I smile a little, watching him use the edge of his shirt to clean the glass. He does so with a painstaking dedication that I've never given anything.

"How many jars does that make, now? Fifty?"

Angus shrugs. It's strange, the fact that he's more talkative through a wall than here, where the sun makes everything bright. Then again, maybe it does make sense. It's easier in the dark, sometimes, with a barrier between you and everything else.

"Have you decided what you're going to do with them yet?" I press.

Nothing.

I stand and let Angus revel in the silence we don't get in the apartments.

The moment I step through the front door I smell dinner. Well, I smell dinner burning. I set my bag on the floor and tug my boots off. With a heavy sensation in my chest, I wander down to the kitchen. The maps look older in the lamplight, and the harsh lines of the world seem softer. Saul has even more in his office, framed maps that are worth more money than anything else we own. They're ancient and yellowed and treasured, and if looking at something could make it fade, Saul would have had lost his maps long ago. I've never asked him what he

finds so fascinating about them; I've just accepted it. Same with Angus and his jars. We all cling to something.

Missy and Saul wait in the kitchen, talking in low voices. Once again Saul is at the table, his silver hair shining in the dusk. Missy is leaning against the edge of the counter with a bowl in one hand and spoon in the other.

"Hi," I say, going to sit beside my uncle.

In unison, they focus on me and put on their smiles. "Hi, honey," Missy says. She's mashing potatoes.

"About time you showed up." Saul wraps his arm around my shoulders. Guess he's not mad at me anymore, or at least he's doing a better job of hiding it. He smells like cigars and ... garbage. I wrinkle my nose. Saul notices and pulls away, sighing. "Damn animal got in the trash cans again," he says. "Had to clean it up."

My aunt pours a glass of water and slides it in front of me. She picks her spoon back up and starts mashing again. "How was your day?"

"Fine. Yours?" I take a drink so I don't have to come up with anything else to say.

Missy and Saul exchange a glance, probably without meaning to. I see it and clench my fist under the counter. If Saul feels the tension in me, he doesn't comment.

"So are we going to do this or what?" I ask, trying to sound flippant.

Silence. I attempt to interpret their wordless conversation. *Do you want to take this? No, you do it. Are you sure? I'm sure. Okay.* Looks like Missy draws the short stick.

"The school called," she says, brushing a stray hair out of her eyes. Her black hair has gray streaks it didn't used to. When did she stop dyeing it? "You missed class today."

I study the designs in the wooden table, losing myself in the thick and thin lines. They wait patiently for me to respond. But what can I say? What can I tell them? It feels like any words would only cause more damage.

"Do you need help with anything? Dishes? Dinner?" I offer when the silence becomes too long. "Or I could run to Ian's and pick something up." He's the owner of the general store.

As soon as the words leave my mouth, it's not just the three of us in this small room. Worry, the Emotion I seem to bring out the most in people, appears. He touches both Missy and Saul, and the sound of his foot tapping is something only I can hear. I grit my teeth.

Oblivious, Missy sets her spoon down once more, and it clinks against the side of the bowl. Her dark eyes try to find the secrets in my own. "Alex, we need to talk about this. Where did you go today? Do you need to talk about anything? I know that Nate Foster—"

"Don't." I slide off the stool so violently that it scrapes over the floor with an ear-splitting squeal. That name can't exist outside of my head. He can't be anything other than the monster. I head for the door.

"Where are you going, Alex?" Missy calls after me. Then there's the *thud-thud-thud* of her pursuit. "Honey, you can't just—"

"Nowhere, Missy. Just out." Hating myself, hating the pretenses even more, I shut the door on her concern.

She doesn't try to follow me.

Guilt walks beside me as I make my escape into the trees out back. She towers over my head, her greasy hair shining yellow in the twilight. It takes the last of my self-control not to shake her big hand off. The emotion oozes through my veins.

But Guilt doesn't linger, and I stop when I reach the trail. I stand there for a minute, concentrating on the push and pull of air in my lungs. The haze ebbs from my vision enough that I can see the ground, so I make my way down to the ditch and search the long grasses for a flash of color, the glint of an object. Over the years, I've searched miles of the woods that surround the store.

Nothing.

After a few minutes, I climb back to the trail and squint at the horizon. I hear dirt crunching behind me, and then Uncle Saul's voice drifts into the stillness: "It hurt your aunt when you talked to her like that."

At first, I don't respond. Because they deserve better. The thought calms the storm raging within me. Calms it but doesn't stop it. My lungs are clouds and my blood is a torrent of rushing rain.

"I know." I shove my hands in my pockets. "I'm sorry. And I'll tell her that too. I just ..."



Uncle Saul gives me a chance to finish. When I don't, he does it for me. "Being young isn't as easy as everyone makes it out to be, huh? Especially when life has dealt you some rough cards."

My nostrils flare. It's been six years, but I can still taste blood in my mouth, hear the screams, feel the heat of breaking glass and twisting metal. "Is that what you call it? Rough cards?"

He chooses not to respond to this, but I see the way his mouth tightens. Remorse grips my stomach; sometimes I forget that when I lost a father, he lost a brother.

Saul puts his back to the sun and faces me. A tuft of hair sticks up on the back of his head, making him look younger. "What are you doing out here?"

I wasn't expecting that. Part of me was steeling myself for something about Nate Foster, about the unfairness of his release, how it would be best for me—for all of us—to move on. I let out a breath, and the truth comes out along with it. Maybe to make up for last night.

"I'm looking for something," I tell him. "Dad used to talk about it. He said that one Fourth of July, you guys shot off this giant rocket he built and he always wanted to find it. He didn't exactly get the chance, so I'm ..." I swallow.

In the distance, a flock of geese honk as they cross the sky. Winter really is behind us, despite the chill in the air.

Uncle Saul steps closer. "Don't stay out here too long, okay?" He kisses my temple. His lips are dry. "Oh, and you get to clean the attic. As a consequence for taking my rum. We'll give you a pass on school. This time." With that, he leaves.

He doesn't look back. But I do. I watch him return to the apartment, return to Missy, and feel the darkness rise inside me again. The rocket isn't here. It's been years since that summer. Dad couldn't find it. What makes me think I can?

I can find anything that's been hidden ... but I can't find what's been lost.

The sun is nearly gone now. The moon is a faded crescent, struggling to emerge. There's the sound of that damn clock again, unstoppable and unapologetic. *Dong. Dong. Dong.*

Time to go.

**You've Just Finished your Free Sample**

**Enjoyed the preview?**

**Buy: <http://www.ebooks2go.com>**