THE GREAT DYING

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by

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CHAPTER ONE

Lucy Sullivan first noticed she was disappearing on Monday morning as she prepared to return to work at the Field Museum.

This was two weeks after Sean had died, at the peak of Chicago’s worst heat wave in history, and two weeks after she had asked, politely, for time and space alone. The apartment smelled of the worn-out sympathies of friends. Baskets of shriveled oranges and pears and wilting lilies and roses moldered on the coffee table and mantle above the fireplace in the living room and anywhere else Lucy had found room to place them. She was certain there were even more baskets waiting for her outside the door of the apartment. She hadn’t opened the door during her seclusion, hadn’t touched the fruit or watered the plants. The idea that a dozen oranges or a clichéd peace plant would alleviate her grief brought on such an unreasonable rage that she’d decided it was best to ignore the whole lot.

Outside it was pitch black, except for the sickly yellow-white pools of light illuminating the empty, elevated train tracks above North Sedgwick Avenue. Lucy stood at the French doors of the apartment, hands pressed against the glass, waiting for the first morning train to pass. The glass vibrating against her fingers was as important to her now as breathing. The buzz and quiver that shook the whole building was her only indication that she had survived another day
Standing there at the window as the headlights of the four-thirty a.m. train flickered in the distance, Lucy convinced herself anew that this was all a terrible mistake, that soon she would escape from this nightmare and there Sean would be stepping off the Brown Line train, jogging down the metal steps, walking across the street, opening the door to the apartment. He’d drink chocolate milk from the carton as she read aloud to him the headlines from the *Tribune*, the shocking number of deaths from the heat wave, the increase in crime on the South Side, triple-digit temperatures in the extended forecast. She’d tell him she’d had this terrible vision while he was out.

You’ll never believe it, she’d say, you were lying in the grass alongside the running path when I found you. There was a crowd of people, an ambulance called, emergency CPR, then a funeral.

You even made the nightly news, she’d laugh, another victim of the heat wave.

Sean would laugh too, as he always did, at her overactive imagination and her habit of creating personal tragedy out of the headlines.

You shouldn’t read the paper so much, he’d tell her. You should put your imagination to better use, he’d say as he tousled her hair. She knew this was code for Sean’s desire that she return to sculpting instead of wasting her talents cleaning and preparing dinosaur fossils at the museum. She’d ignore that tired argument, repeated at least annually over the twelve years they’d been married, but admit to him that she’d let her imagination roll crazily downhill.

She’d promise not to do it again.
Lucy watched the doors of the train slide open. She imagined hearing Sean’s key in the lock, the door knob turning, the soles of his running shoes squeaking against the hardwood floor. When the train doors shut again, she blew against the window and placed her index finger on the cloud of her breath. As she began to draw a circle, her finger faded and blurred, then dissolved into the glass. She brought her hand toward her face, and just that quickly, her finger reappeared. Her fingers weren’t numb, she felt no pain, yet her hand appeared to cast off a filmy shadow beside it, in the exact shape of her fingers, her palm. She curled her hand into a fist and then flexed her fingers. The shadow mimicked her movements and then vanished. Something had distorted her vision. Maybe the passing train had caused the disturbance or maybe the street lights had momentarily lost power. Brownouts had been common during the heat wave but, as Lucy looked around the apartment, the lights seemed fine.

She huffed on the window again, then again. She pressed her left hand against the small, foggy island. Her skin loosened, pooled like melted wax, and then began to fade. For an instant, a spectral glow – in the exact shape of her hand again – appeared against the glass next to what she believed was her real hand, her true hand. Lucy drew back from the window. She shook her hand wildly, as if she’d touched something hot. Her fingers returned to their shape and the shadow disappeared. Lucy rubbed the top of her hand and inspected her skin. It was as pale and freckled as ever but, she thought, more luminous, as if a faint veil of light pulsed beneath her skin and wished to escape. She placed the tip of her finger on her tongue. It tasted silver. She bit down gently, increasing the pressure until she felt a magnificent pain radiate through her.
Lucy pressed her palm against the window again. This time, nothing happened. A hand couldn’t disappear like that, she thought. It was a hallucination; the grief. A person couldn’t vanish into nothing more than a shadow. No matter how much she might have wanted to, Lucy knew she could not escape herself that easily.

She stepped away from the French doors and walked to the center of the room where crouched down to the floor. She folded into her body, curling up fetal, the bottoms of her feet cradling her buttocks, arms at her sides with palms upturned, forehead pressed against the hardwood. She shut her eyes and allowed memories to rise up within her. The unfathomable moment when the casket was lowered into the ground. The horrible, hot funeral, people stuffed into overcrowded pews at St. Michael’s, fanning themselves with missalettes. Sean’s dark, exhausted expression as they argued that morning. Sean lying lifeless on the grass near the lakeshore as she pounded on his chest. The woman in the pink running shorts who borrowed her her cellphone to call 911. If the ambulance had arrived sooner, if they hadn’t argued and he had stayed home that morning. If. If. If. Lucy rocked, shook away the memory, and tried to call up better images. Sean laddering up the ranks of the ad agency. Their first year together – such electric newness then. The sculptures she made for him before they married. She pictured the fierce intensity and pride in his gaze. There had been a time when he not only loved her, but admired her. When had he stopped? She inhaled deeply and tried to feel his vigorous embrace, his hands pressing against the small of her back. Her body warmed at the thought of his touch and she wished she could stay here, cocooned in this memory, forever. The sound
of the train whistle pulled her back into the apartment. Her bereavement time ended today. Work awaited at the museum.

Lucy slowly uncurled her body and stood. She looked at the untouched bottle of Xanax on the corner of the end table. She twisted off the cap, stared at the cluster of dull blue ovals, and then closed the bottle again. No pill would help her, she knew. She had to learn to be – to live – this new thing she was: a Widow. Unexpectedly. At age thirty-five.

Up until Sean’s death, her life had been moving along according to plan, and she was nothing if not a planner. It was why she had been a good sculptor, back before she gave it up entirely, and why she had become the lead preparator at the museum. In twelve years, she had never ruined a specimen, never once allowed her tools to slip and damage even the most fragile dinosaur bones. She mapped out every decision with a scientific precision that left no margin for error. Some would call it boring, Lucy knew, but she preferred to think of herself as prepared. What she hadn’t prepared for was the heat wave and the way Sean left that morning – slamming the door – and the moment she saw him lying on the grass. It had never occurred to her that Sean’s life could end without warning.

All this time, she had prepared for all the wrong things.

Fuck prepared, Lucy thought.

Fuck romance.

Fuck the sun and the heat.

Fuck the dormant hypertrophic cardiomyopathy congenital heart defect that killed Sean.
Fuck you, she whispered.

Move now, Lucy thought, move now or you never will.

Five-thirty a.m. She’d have to get ready soon to make her train. She walked toward the desk and shook the mouse, waking the computer screen. Her hands seemed fine now. That odd luminescence that seemed to come from within her was gone. She moved the cursor and double-clicked, opening her email. A step forward, she thought. Row after row of bold, black subject lines scrolled across the screen.

Thinking of You.

With Sympathy. Sean’s boss.

Are You Okay?

Copies of Death Certificates Ready. This one from the funeral home, she dreaded.

Just Checking In.

Sorry For Your Loss.

For Monday. Dr. Marcella Burton, her boss, preparing her, Lucy supposed, for today’s re-entry.

Our Sympathy.

Don’t Forget To Call Dad. That one, courtesy of her older sister, Eleanor.

Sean Was The Best.

Pleeeeeease Call Me. Charlotte, of course.

Widow’s Support Group. Char again, Lucy thought.
In between emails meant for her, she read the spam-laden subject lines, all touting cures for impotency, skin tags, insomnia. By the looks of her Inbox, every retailer in the world was having a sale. Lucy reached behind the desk and unplugged the computer, hoping that would erase them all.

As the dim light of the rising sun began to brighten the apartment, she went to the kitchen to make coffee and saw Sean’s unwashed bowl of oatmeal sitting on the table like some relic from the museum. She reached for it but, in the half-light, her hands became nothing more than shadows as they wrapped around the base of the bowl. Lucy let go of the bowl, unsure she was actually holding it. The bowl bounced from table to floor and cracked into jagged, blue petals.

“Dammit,” she said, surprised by the weakened pitch of her voice. She hadn’t spoken to anyone for days. She moved her hands closer to her face. Her skin was nothing more than a veil. It was happening again. Lucy placed her hands over the table. Her fingers were outlined by dim halos that hovered above the wood. She stumbled toward the sofa and reached for her cellphone on the coffee table. She slid her hand – at least what she thought was her hand – along the edge of the table. A shadow in the exact shape of her hand, dull and colorless, followed it. She felt the phone against the edge of her thumb, then cupped the phone in her hand. The phone remained cold, unchanged by her body temperature, even as she tightened her grip. As soon as she attempted to peck out Charlotte’s number with her other hand, shrouded in the same hazy outline, it stopped.

Both shadows disappeared.
She flexed her fingers, watching them bend into a fist and then expand into a wave.

She’d been alone too long. That was it. She needed to get out of the apartment, be with people, hear their voices, touch their hands with hers. She wasn’t going to allow herself to go crazy. She’d heard the stories on the news, some widow dying of heartbreak a week or two after their spouse. What had the funeral director told her? Stay busy, don’t be idle. She’d ignored his advice then, but now she knew every second she spent by herself was a risk to her sanity.

Lucy picked up her cellphone again to check voicemail. Two messages from her father, the first asking if she needed anything, the second asking when he could expect to see her and Sean. The porch steps needed fixing, he said.

Lucy leaned back against the sofa. Already, he’d forgotten the funeral.

The next message from her sister Eleanor was indecipherable. Dogs barked and howled in the background. All Lucy could make out was that she was expected to call soon. There were too many messages from Charlotte to count, her friend’s voice shifting from worried to pissed to defeated – just checking in, are you okay, please call me, really, Lucy, don’t make me come over there and drag you out, I’ll see you whenever you decide you’re ready. The final message was from the bank. She needed to call them about the savings account and –

She pushed the “off” button before the message finished.

In the bedroom, she avoided Sean’s pile of dirty clothes in the corner. She opened the closet door, careful not to look at Sean’s clothing, all pressed and waiting for him.
Without turning on the light, she groped for a camp shirt and pulled a pair of khakis off the hanger. She slipped into her clothes, and pushed her bare feet into her red Chuck Taylor’s, so worn down and faded they were almost pink.

Before she shut the door, she drew close to the full-length mirror and stared at her face for the first time in two weeks, relieved to see that her eyes and nose and mouth appeared in the right places. She puckered her lips and wrinkled her nose. All seemed in working order. Regardless, she looked like hell. She tugged at the skin beneath her eyes, then pushed the puffed pockets across her cheekbones, toward her ears. She repeated this several times but no amount of pushing and no concealer – as a rule, she resisted makeup – would hide these bags. She ran her fingers through her cropped black hair, drew a crooked side part along her scalp and tucked the longer strands behind her ears. Lucy studied the final product in the mirror. Her wrinkled shirt and pants sagged around her boyish, small frame. She’d lost weight and, at only five-feet tall, she looked like a bedraggled doll that some child had discarded. She rolled the baggy sleeves of her shirt up to her elbows and inspected her arms. Her skin was viscous and albino, as if it had been bandaged up for too long. At least the ghostly shadow hadn’t returned.

Lucy pushed her sleeves back down. She grabbed her lab coat from the hook near the front door and double-checked the pockets for her CTA pass. She shut the door behind her and pushed the key in the deadbolt lock. The heavy noise of the bolt thumping into place startled her. It had been the last sound she’d heard Sean make that morning, the last sound after he slammed the door, after she had called after him that she was sorry.
Lucy froze. The walls of the building tilted toward her. She placed her head against the door to steady herself. It hurt to breathe. She closed her eyes and wished, as she had so often since Sean’s death, that she wasn’t alive. She tightened her grip on the key.

You can do this, she said to herself. You can be out in the world. Pull the key from the lock, then walk down the steps.

She heard an L train pass, its wheels guzzling up track as it approached. Her train would arrive in less than ten minutes. She hated chasing the train, hated being late for anything. She ripped the key from the lock and ran down the steps and across the foyer without allowing herself to think about what she was doing.

If she had looked back before she stepped outside, she might have seen her shadowy silhouette still leaning against the door.
CHAPTER TWO

As Lucy jogged toward the L stop, the humidity seized her breath. She slowed her pace. Her only exposure to the heat wave after Sean’s funeral had been through the news. On television, meteorologists had exhausted every cliche. Chicago sizzled. It scorched. It burned. It baked. When the temperature had reached 106, it was an oven; an inferno when the heat index peaked at 120 degrees. Roads buckled. Train rails warped. Fights erupted over the last window fans on sale at Walgreen’s. Some slept on water-soaked blankets or in front of open refrigerator doors. Others prepared for the apocalypse. On the South Side, the elderly, too afraid to open their doors and windows, melted into their recliners. Fire trucks substituted as ambulances, shuttling thousands of the nearly-dead to the hospital, including Sean. Refrigerated trucks from a meat packing plant held the excess bodies the morgue couldn’t handle. At the visitation, Lucy learned from Sean’s best friend, Todd, that more than three hundred and sixty-five people had died the same day as Sean had and, by the time the heat wave broke, the city had reported more than seven hundred deaths. Lucy vaguely remembered the emergency room doctor explaining the criteria for heat-related deaths, something about a body temperature above 105 degrees. As she stood to leave, the doctor added that if it weren’t for Sean’s undiagnosed heart condition – hypotrophic cardiomyopathy – he might have survived. The criteria didn’t matter; his hidden condition didn’t matter either. Lucy placed all of the blame on Sean’s
stubborn resolve to go for a run that morning. She had to blame it on the heat, on him; the only other alternative – that she had driven him outside that morning – was still too terrible to consider.

She pushed the thought aside as she neared Zukowski’s, the tiny bodega by the L stop. When she saw old Mr. Zukowski appear on the stoop with a crate of oranges, she stepped behind a parked van and peered around it. She wasn’t ready to talk to anyone so early in the morning. Mr. Zukowski bent down and set the crate on the steps. He placed his hands on his lower back and straightened up slowly. He was a bear of a man, short and sturdy. White spikes of hair sprouted from his head, face, nostrils, even his ears, and his chest and arms were blankets of white, coarse wool. Mr. Zukowski looked toward the van and spotted her hiding.

He held out his arms and walked toward her. “My wróżka – how are you? I have been so worried.”

Mr. Zukowski had called her wróżka – pixie – since she and Sean had first moved to the apartment in Old Town. She hugged him quickly and he begged her to come inside for coffee and one of Mrs. Zukowski’s homemade paczkis. The yeasty odor of the homemade pastries threatened to rouse deeper aspects of her memory of that last morning with Sean. Holding a half-eaten paczki, she had pleaded with Sean to skip his run. She wanted to spend the morning with him, like the old days, she’d said, when they’d lie in bed for hours doing nothing. They could go out for ice cream after, maybe sit under the shady canopy of trees by the lily pool in the park, secluded from the oppressive heat. He’d exploded, accused her of being too needy, and left before finishing his bowl of
oatmeal. The argument materialized out of nowhere, at least nowhere that she could pinpoint, and the intensity of his anger had surprised her so much that she attempted to take her words back, tell him it was the heat she was worried about – it was nearly ninety degrees already and so terribly humid – but he was on his way out the door as she said it. After he left, she stared into the darkness of the kitchen, feeling like she was teetering on the precipice of something far more dangerous than the heat. It was then that she had decided to run after him to tell him that there was something else, something she hadn’t had the courage to put words to, shape into a question to ask him.

Now that he was dead, she never would.

A powerful gloom moved through her. Lucy forced that morning back into an unreachable place in her mind. She would never speak of it to anyone, not even Char.

Mr. Zukowski waved his hands in front of her eyes. “Halo! Anyone home in there?”

“I’m sorry,” Lucy said. “I was daydreaming.”

“Ah. About your Sean, I am sure. Bienda dziewczyna, Bienda dziewczyna,” he repeated.

Lucy looked at him blankly. Her understanding of Polish was limited to the phrases her mother said when she was a child and those she had learned from the women who shared the train with her most mornings.

“Poor girl,” Mr. Zukowski translated. “Come in for a paczkis. You are disappearing into nothing.”

“What?” Lucy inspected her arms. “What do you mean?”
Mr. Zukowski laughed heartily. “No, no wróżka. Not disappearing like a ghost. I mean you are too thin. Your sadness has stolen your hunger. You must eat.”

Lucy looked at her watch. The train would be pulling to a stop any minute. “I’ll miss my train. I can’t be late my first day back.”

He squeezed her hand and she felt her stomach tighten with grief. She wanted to run back to the apartment and lock the door forever.

“Come by after work. I will save a paczkis especially for you.”

She forced a smile. Mr. Zukowski stooped down and picked up an orange from the crate.

“Take this,” he said.

More sympathy fruit, Lucy thought. Everyone saw citrus as the cure for grief. She’d never eat another orange again. Lucy took the fruit and whispered a lame thank you.

He placed a hand on her shoulder. “It takes time, wróżka. I have lost many and the sorrow,” he pounded his chest, “it hurts inside here. But in the old country, we say ‘do not push the river, it will flow by itself.’ It will be better in time.”

Lucy nodded. She hadn’t expected Mr. Zukowski to be the first person she spoke to after nearly two weeks of silence, but now she was glad it had been him. She zigzagged through the crowd of people jogging up the steps to the platform where the train waited. She entered one of the cars just as the doors closed. Sweat drizzled between her breasts. The car reeked of body odor, animalistic and fecund. It reminded her of the
preparation lab at the museum after a new fossil arrived, how the fossil held the earthy scent of both the living and the dead.

The packed train made Lucy feel more alone than she’d ever been in her life. This was different from loneliness. This was a swallowing singularity. No matter where she went or what she did now, she would be doing it alone. No one on the train knew that she was boarding it for the first time as a Widow. Even the word sounded lonely. She looked back through the smudged window toward the old brownstone, so stately and comforting with the ivy blanketing the side of the building up to the second floor windows where she had been in hiding. She winced as her stomach clenched and her eyes filled with the terrible, hot tears she had held at bay at the bodega. She thought of all of the people she knew, all the people who knew her – Char, of course, her boss Dr. Burton, the museum staff, the volunteers, Sean’s co-workers even if she didn’t care for some of them, her sister Eleanor, her father. Lucy wiped her face on the sleeve of her lab coat. She looked at her hands. They were fine. Getting outside had at least cleared up her hallucinations.

As the train picked up speed, Lucy let the wooshing sound and rocking movements envelope her. Her mind emptied until she felt as if she was being carried up and away in a strong rushing wind. It lasted only an instant, until the train began to slow, but it felt wonderful. In that moment, she was no one. Not a Widow, not Char’s best friend, not her father’s youngest daughter, or a preparator at the museum. She was oblivion. She thought maybe she could disappear altogether and no one would notice. The train pulled to a stop at Merchandise Mart where the tracks snaked between tall office buildings already bustling with employees in dark suits and dresses. Each window
of the building contained its own story, maybe someone just like her who was lost and alone in such an overgrown, overcrowded and over-hot city. While the train filled with commuters, Lucy scanned the windows and stopped when she came to an older man, red-faced and jowls bouncing against his too-tight collar as he yelled into the phone. Behind his mahogany desk, a vintage jukebox blinked red and green. These were Sean’s people, wealthy bankers and executives in need of advertising for the companies they owned. Whenever they’d take the train through the city, past Merchandise Mart or over Wacker Drive, he’d point to the brightly-lit squares of glass and tell her that, someday, she would see him sitting behind the big desks. She tried to imagine Sean, twenty years from now, his muscles softened with age, behind that mahogany desk where the old man sat. She thought of all the things Sean had wanted to do. Climb Mount Rainier, see the Cubs finally win a World Series, qualify for the Boston Marathon, learn to play the piano. All of it, in the oblivion now.

Lucy examined her hands and arms again. Normal. The train was filled to capacity. She looked to her left. A mother fed her child animal crackers from a plastic baggie. The mother’s oversized t-shirt was splotched with sweat and, though she appeared to be younger than Lucy, her face drooped with exhaustion. The baby, a little boy of an indeterminate toddler type of age – Lucy could never guess the age of children under the age of three – was also wet-faced. Clumps of cracker crumbs clung to his chin. He’d smeared wet trails of cracker across his cheeks like war paint. To her right, a man in khaki work overalls stared at the floor of the car. Lucy understood this stare and employed it whenever she sensed another commuter wanted to engage in banal
conversation about the weather, the Cubs’ losing streak, the poor condition of the L.
Across from her, a plump woman in a floral dress with a dingy lace collar hugged her purse to her chest, her fleshy arms jiggling as the train picked up speed. By the dress alone, Lucy knew the old woman was a Polish immigrant who lived, probably, in Irving Park, and traveled to the Gold Coast to care for and clean up after the children of wealthy traders and bankers. She often saw these women at the museum with their young charges. They watched her work when the museum allowed tours of the lab. Probably, the women thought her work cleaning fossils was no different than their own, dusting and wiping away unwanted dirt.

The woman regarded Lucy and smiled in a knowing way that unsettled her, as if she’d guessed her situation. Lucy shifted in her seat. When Lucy met her gaze again, the woman’s bulbous nose and drooping eyes flickered, then blurred. The bulk of her became malleable and faded as her figure doubled so that Lucy glimpsed a luminous shadow, arms crossed and clasping its purse in the same manner as the woman. The phantom looked exactly like the woman and nodded its filmy head as the woman nodded at Lucy until Lucy wasn’t sure which figure was apparition and which was real.

Lucy shut her eyes quickly. This wasn’t happening. Running for the train in this insufferable heat had made her dizzy. She was hallucinating again, as she had been in the apartment. She felt weak, hot on the inside. When she opened her eyes again, the image was gone but the woman was standing before her.

The old woman pressed her lips together and frowned, then clucked her tongue.

“Dziecka,” the woman said, her voice tipped with shock.
Child.

Lucy understood only a few words of Polish, gleaned from her commutes and from the snippets of conversation she remembered her mother having with ancient relatives she’d never met.

The woman patted Lucy’s shoulder with her piggish hand and whispered, “Moja droga.”

My dear.

Stunned, Lucy watched the woman step off the train and vanish into the crowd on the platform. Had the woman been there at all?

Dr. Burton, Lucy thought suddenly.

*Call me,* Dr. Burton had said to her at the funeral. *Don’t let it go on too long.*

At the time, Lucy had blown off the comment. Dr. Marcella Burton, the lead paleontologist on the museum’s latest acquisition, was famously quirky. She wore nothing but coarse brown dresses made of boiled wool, even at the height of summer. She was tall and androgynous, an imposing woman with a long neck and fiercely skeptical eyes. Dr. Burton rarely spoke to the preparators like Lucy and, in fact, hadn’t spoken directly to her other than a brusque hello for the past five years. But Dr. Burton had been the first to arrive and the last to leave the Sean’s funeral. Despite the dangerous heat index that day, Dr. Burton appeared at Sean’s funeral in her standard brown dress and, surprisingly, followed Lucy, Char, her sister Eleanor, her father, and a group of Sean’s friends from the agency to the cemetery. Dr. Burton stood separate from the others, far enough away that it struck Lucy as odd, stalker-ish almost. The others left Lucy at the
gravesite alone, telling her they’d wait until she was ready to leave. It was then that Dr. Burton swooped in. She scoured Lucy’s face intensely.

“How do you feel?” she asked, her voice taking the dry, authoritative tone of a doctor.

Lucy hadn’t answered. What could she have said that she hadn’t said a thousand times already? Of course she felt awful. Of course she felt alone, sad, despondent, exhausted, empty, weak, horrified, confused, overwhelmed. In record time, she’d come to hate the string of empty responses she gave to the sympathetic platitudes.

“Call me. Don’t let it go on too long.”

Lucy nodded, assuming Dr. Burton was talking about a widow’s grief, the overwhelming sadness Lucy felt each time she realized anew that she would never see or talk to or feel Sean’s body against hers again.

And then she had touched Lucy’s face, placed her bony fingers under Lucy’s chin and turned her face side to side. It was such a strange gesture that Lucy allowed it to happen, unable to find the strength to tell the woman to stop.

“When it starts, call me,” Dr. Burton said.

Looking at her hands again, Lucy wondered if Dr. Burton knew something that could help her through this – hallucinatory grief or whatever this was – that was happening to her.
CHAPTER THREE

The sound of children laughing and shrieking greeted Lucy as she entered the main hall of The Field Museum. For awhile she stood there, absorbing the cool air and the hustle and flow of people. This was much better. She had been alone too many days. She needed to be among people and to be with her work. She gazed at the massive marble pillars and the museum’s prized possession, a resin casting of the Brachiosaurus that stood just inside the front doors. She had helped cast the molds of the original fossils for display and walked underneath its rib cage each morning. Lucy loved its giraffe-like neck and how its skull, nearly forty feet above the ground, peered into the second floor of the museum as if searching for leafy foliage, its jaw opened in a curious smile. She’d handled a few of the original bones, discovered by Elmer Riggs in 1900. The fossils had been preserved in the museum’s archives all this time and considered too fragile and heavy to display until Dr. Burton, frustrated that Hollywood was getting more attention for its Jurassic Park dinosaurs than the museum, suggested creating a steel substructure to hold the molds in place. Lucy worked overtime on the molds. Time became irrelevant, the same way it did when she used to sculpt, and she felt the heady, obsessive urge to create return full-force. Sean had argued with her then, pushed her to consider starting a sculpture of her own. Why don’t you want to be great, Lucy, he’d asked her, why don’t you want to do this when you know you can? She’d waved him off, told him she didn’t
have the time or space it took to create from scratch; he knew that. Standing by the
*Brachiosaurus* now, she wondered why Sean had had more faith in her skills than she
ever had. Certainly she missed it sometimes but her life had taken a different course –
that was all. And she’d filled it with other things – Sean, mostly. If she hadn’t given it up
when she did, they might not have married at all and then what?

Already, clusters of young children gathered around their teachers and museum
volunteers, ready to start the tours. Lucy imagined joining one of the groups, grasping the
thin red ribbon the younger children held as they marched through the museum. She’d
never let go of that ribbon if it would help her feel their kind of enthusiasm and joy again.

“Lucy!”

She turned toward the sound of her name, coming from the other end of the hall.

Char waved both arms in the air. She was surrounded by a group of high
schoolers. She held up one finger in Lucy’s direction, indicating that she would be just
another minute, and then turned her focus back to the group. Everything about Char was
oversized – her body, her ruby red lips, her red hair pulled into a thick ponytail, her
billowing vintage skirt purchased at one of the boutiques in Wicker Park and the
turquoise cat-eye glasses that had once belonged to someone’s grandmother. If she hadn’t
been so dedicated to the style, it would have come off cartoonish but Char was Char and
she wore it all so well. They had been best friends since their freshman year of college
where they met in an Art History class. Sean was in the class too but Lucy didn’t know
until later, after her disastrous presentation. They were studying the works of the great
sculptors, particularly Constantin Brancusi, whom the professor seemed unusually fond
of. One day, he showed them images of Brancusi’s “Bird in Space,” a thin, slanted reed of marble with no wings or feathers or anything that could be described as birdlike. The professor ensured the class that the figure’s upward thrust symbolized unfettered flight. Char, who sat behind Lucy, whispered it was all bullshit.

“That sculpture is more phallic than pheasant,” she said.

Lucy laughed but told Char it had given her an idea for their final class project. Brancusi had inspired her. Lucy asked her father, who dabbled in sculpting, if she could use his tools and the shed where he worked to create something for her class. She carved a block of limestone into an abstract bird, one wing outstretched and the other folded onto its breast but jutting outward as if ready to unfold and take flight. When Lucy presented her work to the class, she explained its meaning. At the time, she felt she had one foot stuck at her parents’ farm north of Chicago, and the other desperately wanting to stay in the city. The folded wing represented her wavering feelings about being away from home. She turned the sculpture so the class could view it in profile. A chorus of chuckles came from the back of the auditorium. She heard a whisper from a few of the male students in the front of the room. That bird’s got one hell of an erection. She looked at the sculpture again. They had a point. How hadn’t she seen the way the wing was too low on the figure, how it hadn’t been shaped properly.

Char stood up. “I love it. I think I’d love it even more if you chopped off that wing.” She turned and glared at the boys who had been snickering and they stopped. Lucy took Char’s advice and chopped off the wing at the end of the semester. She gave Char the sculpture, which Char displayed proudly on her desk at the museum.
Miraculously, they had ended up working at the same place; Char in the public relations department and Lucy, even though her degree had been in fine arts, with the other scientists who helped clean and repair fossils. Only once had their friendship faltered, just before the wedding when Char confessed to her that she thought Lucy was too absorbed with Sean and had been ignoring her. Even though it was against Char’s nature to experience any negative or dark emotions, Lucy had blown it off as jealousy. Char didn’t have a boyfriend then and, eventually, after a couple of years where they avoided each other, their friendship evened out. Working for the same museum helped.

“You’re back,” Char said as she locked her arms around Lucy.

Lucy had been wrong to think she should avoid Char’s ebullience. It was exactly what she needed to pull her through her first day back. She began to cry openly, astonished at how easily the tears came, not for Sean this time. It occurred to Lucy that she’d taken Char’s friendship for granted all these years. She always expected Char to be there for her but realized Char couldn’t expect the same of her. She was less than reliable in that regard. How many times over the years had she canceled on Char because Sean had made other plans? Starting today, Lucy thought, she resolved to be a better friend.

The museum’s visitors were watching them. Lucy raised her hand behind Char’s back, signaling that there was no danger of being suffocated by this excitable woman.

Char released Lucy and took her by the hand, leading her through the grand hall of the museum. “Let’s go to the cafeteria, get you out of the crowd.”

“Won’t we miss Monday staff meeting?” Lucy asked.
Char’s ponytail swished wildly as she shook her head. Char’s hair was an untamable, overgrown force of nature that could, Lucy thought, at any moment, remove itself from Char and destroy Chicago, if not the planet.

“Who cares,” Char said, lunging through the door to the cafeteria. “I haven’t seen you in days. Besides, I need coffee and I can fill you in on what you’ve missed. All we talk about anymore is getting the T Rex. Sue is her name.”

“I remember,” Lucy said. The *Tyrannosaurus Rex* discovery in North Dakota occurred just before Sean’s death. By now, it would be all the staff gossiped about.

Char pointed to an empty table and Lucy sat down. She wiped her face dry. Lucy watched Char move about the cafeteria. She was a honeybee collecting gossip like pollen and carrying it to the next person. She waved hello to other staff members, chatted up one of the older volunteers, people Lucy barely remembered by name.

Two steaming mugs of coffee and two glazed doughnuts in hand, Char returned to the table. “I don’t know why I drink this when it’s so hot out,” Char said. She wiped her forehead with a napkin. “And don’t ask about the doughnuts. You know how I manage stress.”

Char offered one of the doughnuts to her. Lucy shook her head.

“Are you eating?” Char asked, chewing furiously.

“I’m eating,” Lucy said, lying.

“What about the prescription from the doctor? Did you fill it?”

Lucy shook her head.

“They’re meant to help you. And it can be temporary. Just to get you through.”
“Getting me through could be a very long time.”

Char wiped her hands on the napkin and pulled the elastic band from her ponytail. Her hair spilled around her shoulders. Lucy envied its healthy glow, the lack of split ends. And Char’s freckle-free skin. Her face was that of an antique porcelain doll, sparkling green eyes, upturned nose and full lips with a prominent cupid’s bow. She had the wide and hopeful face of an optimist.

Char gathered her hair back and wrapped the elastic band around it again. She squinted and moved closer to Lucy. “Are you sure you’re fine? You don’t look fine to me.”

Lucy looked at her hands, her arms. Was it happening again?

“I know. I look awful.” Lucy bit her lip, pushing back the strong urge to confide in Char, tell her about the crazy way her hands had suddenly disappeared and the strange woman on the train, how much she needed to live outside her own thoughts and not get sucked into the spiral of thinking about Sean.

“I don’t want to be here, Char. I don’t want to be anywhere, other than with Sean. Is that so wrong? Am I weak?”

“Of course, you’re not weak. You’ll get through this. You’ve always been stronger than you give yourself credit for.”

“I’m tired of being strong,” Lucy said. “It seems like everyone wants to think I’m strong but I’m not.”
Char pushed what remained of the doughnut toward Lucy. “Look, no one expects you to be anything other than sad. And shocked. I can barely imagine you without Sean. You were like one person to me.”

Lucy felt physically sick and the sweet smell of the doughnut wasn’t helping. “I can’t do this now.”

Char placed her hands palms up on the table. “I’m so sorry Lucy. What can I do? I feel so helpless. Divorce, layoffs, bad press, those I can handle. But this? I don’t know how to help you.”

“There’s isn’t anything you can do for me,” Lucy said. The words pressed against the back of her throat. *I’m on my own. I’m alone now.*

“I hate this, Luce, I really do. I’m your friend. If anyone can help you, it should be me.”

Lucy nodded, swallowing her rage. The surge had come on suddenly, a gale force of anger. She imagined beating her fists against Char’s chest, tearing at her hair. This isn’t about you or how you feel, she wanted to scream. It’s about me. The strength of her rage frightened her. When she had come into the cafeteria, she had felt wretched. Now she felt her body overtaken with such anger that she began shaking. The room quivered and the walls bent toward her. She felt encased in cement. An image from her childhood came suddenly to her mind: it was morning and the ground was soaked through from a storm the night before. She was walking with her father to fish in the creek that ran behind their farm. He was ahead of her, his fishing pole waving to her as it bounced on his shoulder. She remembered the wind blowing back the flaps of his red and black
flannel shirt, how they fluttered like two butterfly wings as the earth began to cave in beneath her and how, as she fell, she reached out for the tails of his shirt just in time so that only her left arm remained free of the sinkhole. She was trapped her up to her chest. The more she struggled the more the dirt and clay turned to concrete. She spent several terrifying minutes trapped, until her father was able to dig her out. This was the second time in as many weeks that this memory had surfaced. At the visitation, when the priest began to lower the lid of Sean’s coffin, she grabbed the priest’s arm. The priest thought she was just another grieving widow and told her that Sean’s soul had departed from his body. Lucy knew this, of course, but knowledge didn’t help. It was her father who had pulled her aside, assured her that Sean wouldn’t feel he was trapped underground. He’d remembered that long-ago incident and the very real fear of being swallowed by the earth that, under certain circumstances, crept into Lucy’s consciousness. She mouthed the words *almost there, almost there, almost there* under her breath, her only weapon against a full-blown attack of claustrophobia. These had been the very words her father had said over and over again as he’d tried to extract her from the sinkhole. Even after all these years, they still calmed her.

Lucy tried to reach for Char, find some way to break through, but as she reached out, her hands became a confusion of flashing light.

She inhaled, exhaled.

*Almost there, almost there.*

“What’s happening?” Lucy shouted. “Do you see this?”

“See what?” Char asked.
“Look at my hands. Do you see?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” Char said.

“Take my hand,” Lucy said.

Lucy couldn’t feel Char’s grip around her wrist but she could see Char holding another hand, that phantom shadow again.

“Jesus, you’re shaking.”

The room swirled momentarily. Lucy’s hands stopped flickering.

“Are you okay?”

Lucy stood up and steadied herself against the table. She couldn’t look at Char’s face, her ever-hopeful, bright eyes. She’d wanted to hurt Char, truly hurt her. She had no idea where that sort of violent anger had come from. She wasn’t to be trusted. Lucy moved hurriedly toward the door, Char trailing behind her. They made it down the hallway, down another set of stairs, and near the archives without a word between them when Lucy finally stopped, leaned against the wall and sank to the floor.

This is what it feels like to die, she thought. She wanted to be anything – the wall, the floor, the wind – but herself.

When she looked up, she saw her own image in front of her, as if reflected in a mirror. The image was blurry and transparent but was dressed exactly like her, khakis, shirt, even her red Converse shoes. Lucy drew her legs up to her chest and held them tightly. The hallway was a kaleidoscope of blues and oranges. Lucy heard her name over and over as her vision cleared and the rhinestone buttons on Char’s blue silk blouse became bright stars. She sobbed, gently first and then in great howling waves.
“We have to call someone,” Char said. She embraced Lucy and rocked with her as if the steady motion would restore her.

“No,” Lucy heard herself whisper.

“No?” Char asked, surprise in her voice.

“Please don’t. Do you see what’s happening to me? Can you see it, Char?”

“See what? You collapsed on the floor. Like you always do when you have a fit of claustrophobia.”

“It’s not a fit, Char. This isn’t claustrophobia.”

“I know,” said Char. “You miss him so much. I can only imagine. We should call someone.”

Lucy looked at her hands, then her feet, for what felt like a long time. When she was convinced that her skin was restored to its normal color, she found the courage to look in front of her where she swore she had seen a ghostly mirror image of herself. Nothing was there. Nothing but the great long hallway that she had walked down every day for the past twelve years.

She raised her hands to Char and Char helped her up from the floor. “Have you seen Dr. Burton?”

“Dr. Burton?” Char asked, unable to hide the surprise and hurt in her voice. “Why do you want to see Ms. Medieval? I think you need a real doctor.”

Lucy smiled at the nickname she’d forgotten. When Marcella had arrived at the museum, Char joked that Lucy’s new boss gave the term Middle Aged a whole new
meaning. Char probably didn’t remember Dr. Burton hanging around at Sean’s funeral; she’d been too busy chatting up some of Sean’s co-workers.

“I need to talk to her about something,” Lucy said, then seeing Char’s raised, inquisitive eyebrow added, “about the T. rex.”

Char shrugged. “She’s probably out of the staff meeting by now.”

Lucy pointed toward the double doors behind her. Inside the room were thousands of specimens, some cleaned and prepared, others waiting to be worked on. Lucy leaned toward Char and they hugged gently.

“Will you find her for me? Tell her I’ll be in the archives.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive,” she whispered, and then turned to open the door.
CHAPTER FOUR

The cavernous room that housed the museum’s archives resembled a morgue. Long steel shelves lined the left and right walls and held molds of the fossils on display upstairs. Semi-exposed fossils, some still skirted in their heavy sandstone matrix, rested in thickly-padded cradles. The jagged half-open plaster jackets reminded Lucy of huge, cracked eggshells protecting their precious fossilized yolk. The center of the room contained rows and rows of white metal cabinets with even more rows of drawers that contained smaller specimens. Birds, leaves, clusters of fossilized eggs and feathers, sturgeon, trilobites. And then, at the back of the room, the shelves of plaster jackets waiting to be sawed open. Anyone who believed that everything about the Earth’s past had already been discovered needed to visit this room, Lucy thought, as she weaved through the maze of massive cabinets and shelves. There were so many plaster jackets, a lifetime of matrix to chisel and scrape away. She paced between the cabinets marked with Dr. Marcella Burton’s name and opened a drawer labeled Microraptor. Inside was a slab of stone with an impression of a winged bird with a diamond-shaped fan at the end of its long tail feather. This was the mold of the original fossils then. The bones had probably been in too poor of condition to study and Dr. Burton had requested the mold. Lucy looked at the index card. A small four-winged dinosaur. Early Cretaceous. Found in China in 1985. She’d never known Dr. Burton to have any interest in something so small. 
The bigger the better for Dr. Burton. The museum’s potential acquisition of the \textit{T. rex} would feed Dr. Burton’s ego for a long time. Even if she hadn’t discovered it, \textit{her} \textit{museum}, as she referred to it, would have one of the world’s greatest and largest paleontological discoveries of the twentieth century. The story of the fossil’s discovery had filtered through the museum staff prior to Sean’s death, and had quickly grown into legend. Lucy had heard the group was closing out their work after a long summer of digging in the hot, dry hills of South Dakota. A tire went flat on one of the trucks, and the group went into town to fix it, yet an amateur fossil hunter named Susan Hendrickson stayed behind. She’d been captivated by a row of jagged sandstone bluffs across the valley, the only place the group hadn’t explored. She hiked seven miles to reach the base of the bluffs. As she walked along the base of the cliff looking for stray fossils, she spotted dark brown pieces of bone. She scanned the cliffs above her to find where the fragments had fallen and saw more bone peeking out of the cliff walls. There, buried beneath thirty feet of rock and dirt, was the largest and most complete \textit{T. rex} skeleton ever discovered. The bones had lain undisturbed for 67 million years. The team named the fossil after Sue, and, if the museum acquired her, they didn’t plan to change its name.

Lucy placed the index card next to the \textit{Microraptor} and closed the drawer. She leaned against the cool metal cabinet doors and let a new spasm of sadness rush through her. It rose quickly and stole her breath just like the rage had when she was with Char. She let the tears come, and then she doubled over and released ugly, black sobs, each one pushing through the narrow door of her throat, then exploding with great relief. She felt removed and outside of herself, as if it wasn’t really her having this breakdown but
another woman entirely. When the crying subsided, she pressed her fists against her raw, scalded eyes. It hurt to see. She tried to recall what had set off the sadness. The *Microraptor* had no connection to Sean or to her past. She thought about her mother. A few times when Lucy was a child her mother’s nerves gave out and she’d take to her bed. When it was Lucy’s turn to sit with her after school, her mother, propped up on a thick stack of pillows, would swing from uncontrollable sobbing to sudden laughter. Then she’d speak rapidly in Polish, most of which Lucy didn’t understand except for “*Trzymaj za mnie kciuki.*” Hold your thumbs for me, her mother repeated, a saying Lucy knew well. Lucy made two fists, thumbs hidden under her fingers, and held them up to her mother, showing her that she was, in the Polish way, crossing her fingers, wishing her luck. It had frightened Lucy but her father told her not to worry, that her mother would come around once she’d had some rest.

Lucy turned her hands palms up and wiggled her fingers. Whatever had happened earlier this morning had passed again. She was fine. She was not nervous or anxious, at least not as her mother had been. She was here, in the archives. She was not standing on the threshold of another reality. She had lost control of herself and had let her grief get the better of her. Sean would have been disappointed in her. Get over yourself, she thought as she walked to the back of the room where the newest discoveries awaited categorizing and labeling. There, in a padded, wooden cradle was the largest and most intact dinosaur skull Lucy had ever seen. The plaster jacket had been removed from the top. The skull must have been five feet long. She had no idea how much it weighed or how they would stabilize it in the lab when it was time to prepare it. A skull of this size
had to be a *T. rex* but Char would have told her if Sue had arrived. Lucy imagined climbing atop the skull and settling down into the huge slope of its nose as if she were on top of a large horse. She bent closer to the fossil, smelling the fecund remnants of soil, sixty-seven million years of ancient earth trapped in the stubborn matrix of sandstone and ironstone that had cemented the *Tyrannosaur*’s jaws into a faint, reticent smile.

Like Mona Lisa, she thought.

A specimen like this called up her urge to sculpt. She imagined reshaping the skull into something abstract and exotic, a centerpiece for an art museum instead of a science museum. This was where she differed from the preparators who approached their work as scientists. Where they knew more about the origin of the fossil, Lucy knew how to steady her tools and make no mistakes. Her fine motor skills were pitch-perfect and sought after over the years by the paleontologists who uncovered the rarest of finds in the field.

She ran her finger along the hatch marks beneath its eye sockets. Every scar would be worthy of a research paper, she knew. She wondered if this was a specimen of Dr. Burton’s, perhaps one of the fossils from the dig where Dr. Burton had lost her husband. Lucy knew through Char, which meant only half of it could be believed, that Dr. Burton had a reputation as the grim reaper on digs. Not only had she lost her husband, she had also lost other women on her field teams. The details on the women were sketchy at best; the rumor about her husband had taken full shape. There was a rainstorm, some bones exposed along a steep downslope of a ravine, a flash flood, and her husband’s lack of experience in treacherous conditions. They’d found him downstream, snagged between
two rocks. That all seemed plausible. It was the skeleton of the animal – some of the gossipers conjectured it was more than 35 million years old – that turned the story from fact to fantasy. It was also here that the story placed Dr. Burton in a sour light. As the rumor went, she tried to retrieve the bones before retrieving her husband, but the skeleton had slipped into the rushing water before she could reach it, burying the fossil once again.

As she looked at the label for the fossil she heard the door open and then shut with a heavy thud. In the dim light, Dr. Burton’s dark figure, sheathed in her trademark brown wool dress, moved slowly down the aisle, stopping to inspect a few specimens on the shelves as she made her way toward Lucy.

“Amazing isn’t it,” Dr. Burton said as she stood beside Lucy.

Dr. Burton had the angular, lithe body of a ballerina with none of the grace, Lucy thought. There was a heaviness that surrounded her body and her movements, an ancient, archaic aura. Dr. Burton might have been attractive when she had been younger but Lucy had a hard time imagining it. The cap of stern, cropped grey hair didn’t help, nor did the brown dress.

“I’ve never seen such a huge skull,” Lucy said quickly, realizing she’d been studying Dr. Burton.

“A T. rex juvenile,” Dr. Burton said flatly. “Discovered in the vicinity of Sue but not nearly as valuable. Ninety percent of Sue’s bones were uncovered and the team recovered little else but the skull from this youngster.”
Everything Dr. Burton said was conveyed with the neutrality of a robot, Lucy thought. There was no way of knowing whether she was impressed with the find or jealous it hadn’t been her.

“You should be getting upstairs to the lab, Lucy,” Dr. Burton said. “We’ve been short-handed without you. I had to rely on two of the interns to assist me the other day.”

A hot, white flash zipped through Lucy. She had the most tenure out of the preparators. If it hadn’t been for Sean, she wouldn’t have missed a day of work on any of the specimens, Dr. Burton’s or otherwise.

“I haven’t missed a day in twelve years,” she said.

Dr. Burton smiled. “And a preparator the whole time. That’s unusual, you know. Most preparators I know move on after a few years.”

Less than an hour ago she’d begged Char to find Dr. Burton; now she regretted it. She was a fool to think that Dr. Burton would be sympathetic or knew something that could help her. She was the same cold, arrogant scientist she had been since the day she joined the museum. It was clear Dr. Burton had no regard for Lucy’s reputation as the most careful, the most precise of the preparators. The fine motor skills she’d developed as an artist and sculptor served her well in her position, and the other paleontologists on staff relied on Lucy to clean the rarest and most delicate specimens. To Dr. Burton, she was just another staff member to push around.

Lucy walked between two cradles. To her left was the fibula of a sauropod, completely free of its sandstone matrix. On Lucy’s right was a scapula. The long, narrow shoulder blade formed an “L”, the cup-shape at the end of the fossil larger than a shovel
and still covered in a thin layer of rock. She had to get to the lab before she lost what little nerve she had knitted together on the train. She turned and walked back toward the skull, her back to Dr. Burton, and studied her hands. Her skin looked good, had more color than it had this morning.

“Will you be giving me the skull,” Lucy said.

Lucy felt Dr. Burton standing close behind her, so close that the textured wool of Dr. Burton’s dress made Lucy itch all over.

“Absolutely not,” Dr. Burton said sharply. “Your hands aren’t stable enough after your time off.”

Dr. Burton bent toward the specimen and squinted. “This skull might not be Sue but I can’t risk any damage,” she said. “Look here. There’s a nick already. It will need repairing.”

Lucy stepped around the cradle, hoping to defend a fellow preparator, but what Dr. Burton noticed was true. A chisel must have slipped when they were excavating the specimen and had left a hairline scratch. It would be invisible to most, but Dr. Burton missed nothing.

“That happened in the field,” Lucy said, her voice tightening. “I’m sure you know a bone is most fragile when it’s first exposed.”

Dr. Burton nodded in agreement. “Possible. The field work was done by amateurs. It’s possible they were careless.”
Lucy pressed her lips together. The arguments between academics and amateur fossil hunters were as tedious and petty as the arguments between preparators with artistic backgrounds and those with science pedigrees.

Dr. Burton straightened and placed her hands on her hips. She looked powerful, like a bronzed statue guarding the entrance of an old castle. Lucy’s father would have found Dr. Burton an interesting model for a sculpture.

_**Dad,**_ she thought. She made a mental note to call her father tonight after work. He would be worried about her by now, if he remembered that she hadn’t called in several days.

“So you weren’t on the field team that discovered the juvenile,” Lucy said finally.

“I was not. But I had been asked. They told me there had been other good finds nearby, the bones of a duck-billed _Edmontosaurus_ for one. The group had uncovered bone shards too, and, as I’m sure you know, given all your time here, where there are shards, there are usually skeletal remains. However, you should know I don’t dig for profit,” she said, then paused. “I am a paleontologist.”

“And what about Sue? Were you asked to attend that dig as well?” Lucy knew she was being cruel. The paleontologists competed fiercely and the fact that amateurs discovered both the juvenile and Sue would have them not only pitted against the amateurs but also against each other. She imagined the world was crawling with paleontologists – academic and amateur – looking for a bigger and better _T. rex_ already.

“As I said, I wouldn’t have gone with that team. Their practices border on illegal which is precisely why Sue is locked up in a warehouse waiting for the lawyers to decide
who she belongs to. One side says she belongs to science and she was lying on BLM land, the other side says she was found on private property. I imagine, if she is released to us, we will pay dearly for her. But enough about Sue. There are two other specimens from the juvenile that are of great interest to me. The furcula and the gastralia. Are you familiar with these?"

Lucy bit her bottom lip. What she wanted to say was that after fifteen years as a preparator, she’d prepared so many specimens that she believed she knew the theropods like the T. rex more intimately than any of the paleontologists. What she said instead was: “The furcula, better known as the wishbone. The gastralia look similar to ribs and forms an interlocking basket of bone. No paleontologist has confirmed its function.”

Dr. Burton smiled, nodded approvingly. “Some think the gastralia protected internal organs. Others think it aided in breathing.”

“What do you think?” Lucy asked.

“What I think is that it’s all speculation. Either statement cannot be falsified. We don’t know enough. The gastralia is the least understood part of a T. rex. I intend to study how it fits with the skeleton, but first the specimen needs to be prepared. By you. Perfectly. There is no margin for error here. So much can be learned from these specimens and I intend to learn everything I can. Bones hold a body’s history. Cracks, scars, disease, age, weaknesses. They are the last remaining evidence of one’s existence, you know. This is important work, Lucy. I can only give this to someone I trust. Can I trust you?”
“I don’t understand. You’ll give me this but not the skull. I thought skulls were always the most important of any finds.”

“Such fascination with the skull. The interns nearly squealed like school children on a field trip when they saw it. The skull can wait. My priority is the gastralia. This is an important acquisition for us.”

“Of course,” Lucy said. The long, thin rods of the gastralia would be fragile. She imagined weeks of work ahead of her. She looked at her hands. They flickered in the light. It was nothing more than exhaustion, she told herself. Once her mind had cleared, once she got in the lab, got back in the groove, she’d be fine.

“You don’t sound entirely confident,” Dr. Burton said. “There’s so much we don’t know about this aspect of the Tyrannosaur. This may be my only chance – I mean, of course, paleontology’s only chance – to understand the function of the gastralia and develop a sound theory. The furcula I’m not so concerned with, though I know your friend Char will enjoy writing the press release that announces that we have the wishbone of a T. rex. It’s good fun for the children and the museum will benefit greatly from it.”

“I’ll start on the gastralia today then and get the interns working on the furcula,” Lucy said.

“Good plan. The specimens are already in the lab. Is there anything we need to discuss before you get to work?”

Lucy shook her head.
“Before the gastralia, I suggest you practice on something easier. Make sure your hands remember the work. Muscle memory is quick to return but, in your condition, I’m not sure you should count on it.”

“In my condition?”

Dr. Burton raised an eyebrow, just the left one. They stared at each other for what felt like a century to Lucy. Finally, Dr. Burton lowered her arched eyebrow.

“You can make this more difficult than it needs to be, if you’d like,” Dr. Burton said. “I tend to like stubborn people. It’s an admirable quality, especially in your line of work. In mine, too. But not this time and not in your case.”

Lucy looked at the dirt-crusted skull in its cradle. She understood that Dr. Burton was giving her an opening. She could tell her what she’d noticed in the apartment, about the woman on the train, the flickering of her hands when she was with Char. It all sounded pathetic, unstable. Her grief was getting the better of her. That was the explanation that – how did Dr. Burton put it – could not be falsified.

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

“I believe you do,” Dr. Burton said as she looked behind her.

Dr. Burton covered Lucy’s hand with her own. Her grip was firm. “I didn’t come here to help you. I came here to further science for the museum and, if all goes well, be a part of one of the greatest paleontological discoveries that will ever occur in my lifetime and probably yours. But I can help you if you choose.”

She released Lucy’s hand and began walking away, then stopped and turned back toward Lucy.
“One more thing. A young woman named Jada will stop by the lab to observe you today.”

Lucy scanned her mind for a Jada among the volunteers and interns.

“Is she a new intern?” Lucy asked.

“She is William’s daughter. You know William, I presume. The night guard.”

Lucy nodded. She remembered his wife’s funeral and his daughter smoldering beside her mother’s casket, looking as if she might combust. She and Char had talked about it after, how surprised they were that William, so easy-going, had such a tough-looking daughter. Lucy wanted nothing to do with Jada or her fierce attitude; it would be too distracting.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Lucy said. “She might get in the way.”

“You’d best get comfortable with people watching you work. The museum is opening a lab on the second floor. You and the others will continue preparing the specimens there, in front of visitors. You missed that news in this morning’s staff meeting, which I assume won’t happen again. You should be happy, Lucy. People may finally recognize that preparators are more than glorified housekeepers cleaning up old bones.”

Lucy steadied herself against the table as the room began to swirl again, as if she’d spun in circles and suddenly stopped. “I can’t have people watching me work.”

Dr. Burton turned to leave. “In that matter, you have no choice.”

Lucy watched Dr. Burton’s figure, walking with the purpose of royalty, grow distant as she crossed through the cavernous room. She wanted to rewind the entire
morning. Take back the gastralia assignment, take back Jada, take back the news – worst of all – that the museum’s visitors would soon be pressing their faces against glass to watch her work.

“I can’t,” Lucy whispered as the echo of the door closing shut reached her.
CHAPTER FIVE

The lab was a disaster. The work tables were littered with dental picks and needles, mini sanders and saws. Rubber suction hoses dangled from the ceiling like giant snakes, ready to suck up the dust and debris as the preparators sawed through the plaster jackets of each bone. Dirt encrusted lab coats were draped over chairs. Boxes of latex gloves were stacked near the door along with tubs of baking soda and jugs of water used to spray through the more stubborn layers of rock. The cabinet where they stored the solvents and glues was wide open. There was no sign of Colleen and Marty, the two interns that had passed the preparator test earlier this summer. The other full-time preparator, Kim, was out of the country on a dig in Argentina. She would be gone the rest of the summer.

The un-opened jackets for the furcula and gastralia sat on the long table in the center of the lab. Lucy guessed Marty and Colleen were too afraid to begin without her; too afraid of Dr. Burton, more likely. Lucy found the field notes on her desk. She flipped through them quickly. The amateurs Dr. Burton spoke of at least knew the proper way to construct a plaster jacket. According to the notes, they’d wrapped the specimens in two layers of wet toilet paper, followed by a layer of aluminum foil, before applying the plaster.
Lucy checked her hands. No flickering or flashing. She unlocked the drawer that held her tools. At least the interns hadn’t been able to destroy her carbine needles. She plugged in a mini-saw and drove a small V-cut into the top-most layer of plaster. She peeled the crusty paper back. It appeared to be no more than an inch thick. Perfect. She worked at the plaster, cutting and peeling slowly. She heard Marty and Colleen enter the lab as she worked to open the jacket but didn’t turn to greet them; they knew by now it was verboten to startle a preparator with a tool in her hand. One misstep or miscalculation, one lapse in concentration, could ruin an entire specimen. This is what Dr. Burton and the museum didn’t understand, Lucy thought as she carefully peeled back more white, chalky tissue. The researchers like Dr. Burton, so caught up in their own work and egos, sometimes disregarded the painstaking efforts of the preparators they so desperately relied on for their academic success. What had Dr. Burton called her? A glorified housekeeper?

Lucy stopped. Her attention was drifting. She raised her arms above her head and stretched. The room hummed with the sound of air abrasers and mini-saws. Dust fogged the air. Someone had turned up the boombox and Lucy heard the DJ for 97XRT finish out the traffic report. The Dan Ryan was backed up due to an accident. The high temperature for the day would be ninety-three, the coolest it had been in two weeks. This was followed by a song she didn’t recognize. Sean would’ve known it. She imagined going home, asking him about the song, then telling Sean about all the work she had to do. She imagined them sitting at the small kitchen table, the one Char had helped her buy at the antique store in Wicker Park. She loved the old cane chairs, even though Sean
complained they were uncomfortable. Sean would bring a pizza home. He’d ask her what happened at the museum, like he always did, and she’d launch into a rambling complaint about Dr. Burton. After spending so many hours in silence, so focused on her work, talking to Sean was a relief she looked forward to. She loved this part of every evening, craved it, in fact.

Lucy shook her head. That was gone now. What was she to do? Talk to the empty chair? She couldn’t picture herself at home, eating dinner alone after a day at work. As much as she had thought about him, it hadn’t occurred to her until now how much she relied on his presence, their routine. Had she been too needy? Maybe if she hadn’t been so needy he wouldn’t have run that morning.

Maybe he’d been running away from her.

She closed her eyes, squeezing back tears. When she opened them again, she reached for the mini-saw to finish opening the jacket. The air was thick with dust. Her hands shook. She put the saw down. Everything – the plaster jackets, the tables, the hoses dangling from the ceiling – became ultra-bright and magnified as if she was shrinking. The humming of the saws intensified to screams and then the room disappeared, engulfed in brightness. Inside the light, she saw a shadow figure, her mirror image. But the shadow was rolling a ball of clay in her hands. Then the figure vanished into the brightness.

When the room returned, Lucy was on the floor for the second time that day. Two blurred faces appeared above her. She blinked until the faces took shape. It was Marty and Colleen.
“You need some air,” Colleen said. They pulled her upright and Marty wrapped his arm around her waist. Colleen grasped Lucy’s elbow and they guided her out of the lab. When they opened the restroom door, Lucy thanked them, waving off additional help. She cupped her hands under the running water and brought them to her face. The cold water shocked her. She did it again. Feeling her strength return, she stepped over to the full-length mirror. Her body flickered, like a camera flashing. There it was again, the girl, the clay, and then, Lucy realized, the girl was her. Much younger. She reached out to touch the mirror, the girl in it, and she thought her hand would go right through the glass but as she pressed her hand against the cool surface, the image disappeared. She searched the mirror and saw nothing but herself. Her face was gaunt, her clothes saggy and sad. If she saw herself walking on the street, she’d think flu or cancer.

She needed more time. She had tried to return to her life too soon. Dr. Burton – the museum – would have to understand that. She would go visit her father, spend a few months with him on the farm. She needed the space of the country. Taking care of her father would keep her mind off her own grief. All she had to do was make it through the rest of the day and then find Dr. Burton before she left.

When she returned to the lab, Marty and Colleen were hunched over the furcula. They hadn’t noticed her come in and so Lucy stopped near the lab door and watched them. Colleen was the quintessential granola chick, Lucy thought. Pencil-thin and straight hair pulled into a long ponytail that reached the middle of her back. No makeup, a hemp necklace, and a diamond stud in her left nostril. Colleen was in her early twenties, newly graduated with no immediate prospects for full-time employment or so she had said.
during the interview. She’d passed the preparator test easily. She had potential as a preparator but Lucy knew she’d quickly move on to something that allowed her to be out in the field making discoveries. Her calm, stoned demeanor belied her drive to make a name for herself. Marty was older, nearer to Lucy’s age. He’d run his own music studio for years but the work was beginning to dry up. He’d joined the museum as a volunteer and had been coming to the museum most Fridays and Saturdays for the past couple of months. His fascination with dinosaurs dated back to his childhood, he’d told her. He’d been on a few digs. Dr. Burton would have categorized him as one of the dreaded amateurs, but Lucy liked his careful approach to the prep test and his easygoing nature. He was a harmless, friendly sort with small, round glasses and gentle, downturned eyes the color of tarnished pennies.

Colleen rubbed Marty’s shoulders and kissed his check. Lucy hadn’t noticed any sexual electricity between Marty and Colleen when they first joined the museum. It must have been a new development that had blossomed over the two weeks she’d been gone. As she watched Colleen massage Marty’s shoulders, Lucy’s stomach clenched. She hadn’t been touched like that since Sean died. She realized she might never be touched like that again. The morning he left to run, he had been too angry with her to give her his customary hug. She didn’t even have that to comfort her; instead she had his cold words and the sound of the door shutting. If he had known it would be the last time he’d see her, would he have stepped back into the apartment to embrace her?

She must have made a sound because now Colleen was approaching her.
“Are you feeling better?” Colleen asked. She frowned and pushed her lips into a pity-filled pout.

“I forgot to eat this morning,” Lucy said. “I got light-headed.”

“I’m sorry for your loss,” Colleen said.

Lucy hated her a little for the pat expression of sympathy.

“Thank you,” Lucy said. “Thank you for helping me. We should get back to work.”

Colleen and Marty nodded in unison. Lucy tried to picture the two of them together, making dinner or shopping for groceries, all of the mundane things that made up a relationship. She couldn’t picture it. They were still too infatuated with each other. Colleen probably still closed the bathroom door when she peed.

“It’s good you’re back. We were just talking about our latest assignment,” Marty said.

“The jacket should be easy to open if it was anything like mine. They knew what they were doing in the field,” Lucy said.

Marty turned toward the table but Colleen continued to gaze at Lucy, her head cocked and her lips screwed to the side as if Lucy were a puzzle to solve. Colleen leaned toward Lucy. “You’re so lucky to be working on the gastralia with Dr. Burton.”

Lucy stepped back, then around Colleen. “She has quite the reputation.”

“She’s made some major discoveries –”

Marty interrupted Colleen. “I don’t think that’s what Lucy meant.”
Colleen shook her head and fiddled with the green ceramic bead in the center of her hemp necklace. “If you’re talking about the rumors about her husband’s death, I don’t believe them. Dr. Burton is too careful to make a mistake or put anyone in harm’s way, especially her husband.”

Lucy nodded, unwilling to engage with either side of the rumor. She motioned to Marty to help her lift off a portion of the jacket. The tips of three bones, as thin as walking sticks were embedded in a thick sandstone matrix. The specimen appeared to be in better shape than she’d anticipated, at least this part of it. She’d know more once she got the rest of the jacket off.

“I hear you used to be a sculptor,” Colleen blurted out.

Lucy looked up from the fossil. Who had told her that – Char? Impossible. She must have been the subject of museum gossip after the funeral. Colleen had only been at the museum a few weeks before Sean died and Lucy never mentioned sculpting to anyone.

“I have an art degree, yes,” Lucy said.

Colleen leaned forward, opened her mouth to ask another question or say something else inappropriate but the slamming door startled them all. Lucy turned to see William and Jada standing in the lab.

A hood of gray-flecked dreadlocks framed William’s round face. He wore thick-rimmed black glasses and his broad, toothy smile appeared too gentle for managing security duty and the lanky girl standing next to him. Jada had deep onyx skin like her father’s and her hair was a perfect bulb of teased out curls, 70s Afro style. Behind her
striking features was a fierce, impenetrable anger that burned so hot Lucy backed away as they approached her. William placed his hand on Jada’s shoulder and the way his long fingers splayed against Jada’s pink t-shirt reminded Lucy of a raven’s rich, shining wing. William nudged Jada forward and she took one step.

“Go on now,” William said, his velvety voice warming the silent room.

Jada didn’t budge.

Lucy turned toward her table. She pretended to rearrange her tools.

“Ms. Sullivan?”

The words tore through Lucy. It was the first time someone had spoken her last name since she had buried Sean. She swallowed.

“This is Jada, Ms. Sullivan.”

“Please call me Lucy,” she said, her voice low.

“Dr. Burton told me it’d be okay to bring Jada here to watch for awhile.”

Lucy shrugged. She had no energy for kindness today. It was all she could do to stay upright.

“Goggles and coats are by the door,” she said.

William made his way back to the door as Jada stood before Lucy. Jada glared at the floor as if she hoped she could rip a hole through it and disappear. Lucy watched the floor, waiting for it to open; the girl seemed to have that kind of power. When William returned, he held the coat out to Jada. She crossed her arms.

“You can’t be in here without the coat or the goggles,” Lucy said.
Jada snatched the coat from her father and draped it over her shoulders. Then she pulled on the safety glasses. Her face hardened into a scowl. Lucy thought of her father’s favorite saying when she was younger and in a foul mood. Your face is going to freeze that way, he would say. By the looks of Jada, the freezing had already occurred.

“I’ll be back around five. Need to catch some sleep before my real shift starts up again.”

Lucy looked at her watch. It was past noon and she hadn’t eaten. Only now did she realize that William was out of synch. He should have been asleep hours ago.

Jada leaned against the table and traced her finger around the edge of the jacket.

“Don’t touch anything,” Lucy said coldly.

“It’s just paper and dirt,” Jada said.

“That’s more than dirt in there. It’s called matrix. And it might contain fossils so small that you can only see them under a microscope. Pretend you’re in a hospital, okay?”

Lucy heard Jada whisper “bitch” under her breath but she didn’t care. Dr. Burton had no right to saddle her with a problem child on her first day back. This wasn’t summer camp for at-risk youth. She thought again of her father, the practical way he’d dealt with her moods when her mother had been sick. He’d crack jokes and tease her until she broke into laughter. She had to call him tonight. She hadn’t spoken to him since the funeral.

“You can either be miserable or try to enjoy this, it’s your choice,” Lucy said.

“Wasn’t my choice to come here,” Jada said. She sat on one of the stools near the table and pulled a cellphone from her pocket. She pressed a few keys.
“Wasn’t my choice to have you here,” Lucy said. “So we’re even.”

Colleen and Marty looked up from their work, but offered no help, only matching sympathetic smiles.

Lucy worked as Jada texted. Friends, she guessed. William wasn’t winning any points with his daughter, keeping her locked up in here. When Lucy looked up, they had passed the hour in silence.

“Are you interested in dinosaurs?”

Jada bent over and laughed. “I don’t give a shit about dinosaurs.”

“Right,” Lucy said.

“My dad thinks this will keep me out of trouble.”

“Will it?”

Jada shrugged. Her cellphone chirped. She flipped the cover open, smiled, shook her head. Looking at Jada’s smooth skin, her thin wrists and legs. Jada was exploding with life; it made Lucy feel older than she had ever felt before.

“How old are you?” Lucy asked.

“Fourteen. How old are you?”

“Ancient,” Lucy said.

Jada didn’t argue the point.

“I was at your mom’s funeral. I remember seeing you there.”

Jada shrugged again, fiddled with her cellphone.

“Grab this edge, will you?” Lucy asked.

“You told me not to touch anything.”
“And now I’m asking you to touch something. This is a tough layer. Someone got plaster-happy.”

The plaster wasn’t tough at all. It tore as easy as wet toilet paper but Lucy wanted Jada to feel useful. She remembered what it was like in the weeks and months after her mother died. Lucy had been a few years younger than Jada, not yet a teenager. She wandered around the house anchorless and unsure how to help her father who retreated to his work shed and stayed there for hours. When he’d been out there a long time, her sister Eleanor, who was sixteen and driving, would tell Lucy to fill a glass and take it to him. Lucy knocked on the door of the shed and waited to hear her father call her in, terrified that he, too, might be dead. Opening that door was a struggle every time, even after she had heard his voice, because then she’d see him sitting at his workbench staring at a block of marble he intended to sculpt to mark her mother’s grave. Lined up on a shelf near his workbench were small clay models of angels, some with wings raised, some with arms outstretched, others so distorted that Lucy could barely look at them. Her father, a talkative, friendly man, had gone as silent as the untouched stone on his workbench. Lucy tried to set the water down quietly and leave before her father said a word. One day, he called to her as she began to shut the door. Sit, he said. And she did. He gazed at her for what felt like an eternity but his gaze was blank, as if he wasn’t seeing her at all. Finally, he rubbed his face and thanked her but she had no idea for what. To this day, she still didn’t know but suspected that he had been replaying memories of Lucy with her mother, maybe from a time when she was a baby or her mother helping her with her homework at the kitchen table or sewing the dress Lucy wore to prom. Lucy thought it must have been
the same for William, seeing Jada and thinking of her with his wife. Lucy hadn’t understood the depth of her father’s grief until now and how much he’d hidden it from her and Eleanor back then. She hadn’t understood the drowning, tidal force of emotions. She hadn’t understood, until now, that she would prefer death over living with her grief. There was no reason why she shouldn’t have died along with Sean or why William and Jada hadn’t died along with their mother. No one should be left in the wake of death, no one.

Jada’s long nails, painted robin’s egg blue, were a stark contrast to the dirt and dust surrounding the table. She didn’t ask Jada to put on gloves. Lucy watched Jada peel away a thin layer of plaster. She had a careful but determined touch.

“Good,” Lucy said. “Your fingers are strong.”

When Lucy looked at Jada’s hands again then edges of her fingers blurred and melted against the plaster. Lucy closed her eyes, opened them. Again, Jada’s hands shimmered, her black skin fading to the sandy color of the matrix. Lucy reached for the spot where Jada’s hands should have been.

Jada recoiled. “What’s wrong? You told me to do this.”

Lucy saw Jada’s hands now, folded into fists against her chest.

Colleen rushed over and studied the specimen on the table.

“She didn’t damage it, did she?”

“No. Everything is fine. I thought maybe.” Lucy stopped, recovered. “I thought maybe Jada’s nails would be a problem. I forgot to give her gloves.”
“Thank goodness,” Colleen said. She stared at Jada like a suspicious parent, and then turned to Lucy. “We can’t afford any mistakes.”

When Colleen was safely out of earshot and repositioned next to Marty, Lucy rolled up the sleeves of her lab coat.

“Really, I am sorry. I’ve been having some issues. With my vision.”

“I only did what you told me,” Jada repeated.

“True,” Lucy said. She continued working at the plaster while Jada punched at the keypad on her phone; certainly she was texting her friends, complaining about the bitchy woman she’d been stuck with today.

A long time passed before they spoke again.

“What’s wrong with your eyes?” Jada said finally. “You going blind or something?”

Lucy shook her head. “I’m not sure. It’s a recent thing.”

“I get that too,” Jada said quietly.

Lucy stopped pulling at the plaster. “You get that, too?”

Jada nodded and stretched her twiggy legs in front of her.

_Gallimimus_, Lucy thought. The name meant chicken or rooster and the theropod had long, thin legs. It was ostrich-like with a small head and large eyes, a long neck. Jada probably wouldn’t appreciate the comparison, so Lucy kept it to herself.

“Maybe you should go to the doctor.”

“No way. Not after they did my mama like that.”
Why in the hell had Dr. Burton done this to her? Lucy thought carefully before she spoke.

“She was very sick, your mom. Your dad told us that.”

“They made her worse,” Jada said, anger flashing through her voice.

“I thought the same thing when my mom died. But it wasn’t true.”

“Uh-hmm.”

Lucy removed her lab coat. She’d had enough for the day, even if it wasn’t yet 5 p.m. “My mom had cancer. No one told me until she was very sick and there was nothing I could do to help her. For the longest time, I was told that my mom was taking trips to all of these exotic places. Europe. Spain. China. She never brought any souvenirs back. That should’ve tipped me off. When she lost her hair, she told me it was an ancient custom in Poland, where her family was from. Women cut off their hair sometimes, she said. To cleanse their spirit. I was stupid enough to believe her and my dad. Or maybe I just wanted to believe them.”

When Lucy looked up, Jada was tracing her finger around one of the long bones. Jada pointed to the rim of the exposed bone. “Will she look like that someday?”

Lucy looked toward Colleen and Marty who were pretending not to listen. Jada was too old and smart for stories about heaven and her mother sitting in clouds watching her.

“Yes,” Lucy said. “It will take a very long time but eventually it will happen.”

“Disgusting,” Jada said.
A sharp clanking followed by a string of oh-no-fuck-oh-no came from the direction of Marty and Colleen. Lucy and Jada turned toward the sound.

“Runaway air abrasor,” Lucy said as she and Jada watched Marty wrestle with the cord dangling from the ceiling. Colleen finally had the sense to unplug the tool.

“Everything alright?” Lucy asked.

Colleen waved, and Lucy turned back to the gastralia.

Jada was gone.

Lucy looked around the lab and saw no trace of her, could not hear the chirp of her cellphone. She looked under a few of the tables and then walked quickly toward the door. She checked the bathroom, then the cafeteria. Nowhere. She checked William’s office. It was empty, too. Jada could be anywhere in the museum or maybe she had simply gone home to be with her father. Surely she hadn’t vanished. That couldn’t have been what she meant about her vision problems.

When Lucy returned to the lab, Colleen met her at the door.

“We have a problem,” Colleen said. Marty stood behind her, hands on hips, nodding authoritatively.

Lucy wanted to say that, yes, she knew they had a problem and that problem was this whole fucking situation. Instead, she waited for Colleen to explain.

“There’s a specimen missing,” Colleen said. “The front claw of an *Allosaurus*. It’s one of Dr. Burton’s. Marty worked on it. Yesterday, wasn’t it Marty?”

Marty nodded. Lucy wanted to grab him by his lab coat lapels and beg him to talk for himself.
“I’m sure it’s here,” Lucy said. She had bigger problems – a missing teenager, strange visions, an entire gastralia to prepare, a dead husband. “The lab is a wreck. It has to be around here somewhere.”

“I think someone stole it,” Colleen said quickly.

Lucy followed Colleen and Marty to a crate that was near where she and Jada had been working. “It was right here yesterday and now it’s gone.” Colleen looked at the empty stool where Jada had been. “Speaking of gone, where’s your little friend?”

“Her name is Jada. She left, I guess.”

“Hmm,” Colleen said. She peered into the empty crate. “Are you sure your little helper didn’t help herself to something?”

“What are you implying?”

“All I’m saying is that the specimen was here and now it’s gone. Like she is.”

“She was with me the whole time,” Lucy said. She stared at the empty space in the crate. She didn’t want to believe that Jada would take a specimen. Lucy remembered what Dr. Burton had said earlier this morning about speculation. Saying Jada had stolen a specimen, at this point, could not be falsified. Nor could it be proven true.

“It’ll turn up. I need to go.”

“Where are you going?”

“To talk to Dr. Burton.”

Colleen pulled Lucy to the side, leaving Marty staring down into the empty crate as if he’d just lost a cherished pet.
“Dr. Burton doesn’t have the best opinion of Marty. If she thinks he lost a specimen, she’ll pull him from the project. You have to get it back from that girl before she finds out.”

“I need to talk to her about other things, Colleen.”

She didn’t wait for Colleen to respond. Lucy walked out of the lab and through the double doors at the back of the museum near the loading dock. The air outside was dense with humidity. It hadn’t rained since the heat wave ended. The grass on the museum campus was brittle and dry and the city buildings in the distance, gleaming in the setting sun, looked like burning bundles of kindling. No amount of water would restore what the heat wave had destroyed this summer.

Lucy watched the lazy waves lap against the retaining wall. Jada was missing, a specimen was missing, she’d had strange visions. Her first day back was a record-breaking disaster. A slight, fishy breeze off Lake Michigan tickled Lucy’s skin. It felt wonderful, the air on her arms; the fact that she could feel her arms.

Inside, she had felt she was losing herself, her existence. She wanted to find Char and ask her if she was still Lucy Sullivan, if she still appeared to be five-foot nothing and had mousy hair, if freckles still dotted her cheeks. The question seemed absurd. Of course she was herself but she couldn’t shake the feeling that she was somehow less so than she had ever been, her identity a balloon tied to an unraveling string, floating up and away from her.
She scanned the other side of the loading dock and there, among a group of men, stood Jada. She was smoking and, if Lucy, read her body language right, flirting with one of the younger dock workers.

When Jada spotted her, she waved. Lucy waved back, a signal that she wouldn’t tell William about it. Or at least that’s how she hoped Jada read it. This secret connection with Jada grounded her again. Maybe she didn’t need to talk to Dr. Burton. Maybe she had the strength to return tomorrow.
CHAPTER SIX

Friday.

Lucy had, somehow, made it through the week, a full five days of commuting, working, interacting with others. When she was alone each night after work, she collapsed on the sofa, physically and emotionally drained, yet unable to sleep. She spent hours staring at her body in the mirror and inspecting her skin, wondering if the signs of her disappearance were visible to others. Some nights her skin seemed illuminated; on others, her reflection dissolved in the mirror leaving a dark hole in its place. She had checked her temperature and it was normal, no fever to speak of. The hallucinations were psychosomatic, she was convinced of it. Char hadn’t detected any change in her, nor had anyone else at the museum except Dr. Burton whom Lucy didn’t trust.

Each morning, still exhausted, she reassembled herself – or what she thought of as herself now, a numbed, wooden entity, a body with no spirit or soul.

*This is all in your head,* she told herself as she prepared for work.

It was Lucy’s turn in the fishbowl today. The museum was testing its concept of allowing visitors to watch the preparation work. Last night, she, William, and Jada had moved the gastralia upstairs to the lab on the second floor. If there was good news about working in the fishbowl it was this: William was off on Fridays so Jada would not be with her. Also, Colleen and Marty were taking time off to tour Chicago. They’d
mentioned Navy Pier and Lucy had tried to dissuade them but Colleen seemed to think it would be romantic to ride the Ferris wheel in ninety-degree heat. Also, Dr. Burton had a press conference with Char about the juvenile *T. rex* skull still awaiting preparation. Also, the lab could only hold one preparator and one large specimen at a time so Lucy had the room to herself, not counting the hundreds of visitors who would pass by the windows.

She looked at her watch. The museum opened in an hour. The chart on the back wall of the lab explained that Lucy was working on the gastralia. She plugged in the boombox she’d pulled from the storage room downstairs and tuned it to XRT.

Lucy removed one of the long, thin bones of the gastralia from the table at the back of the lab. She adjusted the chair, massaged her neck, and arranged a set of carbide needles on a pad. The preparation of the gastralia was nowhere near complete, even after four solid days of work. Despite the distraction of Jada and, sometimes, Colleen and Marty, Lucy maintained the focus of a surgeon. She regarded the fossil as a worn-down sculpture in need of restoration. The only way she could survive the day was if she immersed herself in her work, forgot about everything that surrounded her. If she thought only of the bone before her and the constant, gentle scraping, she felt less conscious of her own existence. She could float like a ghost, another entity entirely, through the day, not thinking of Sean, not thinking of the past, not thinking about her hallucinations, or the empty apartment that awaited her later. As each day passed, she considered herself a lost soul, as if the center of her very being had been scooped out and tossed away. It was like being dead, she thought, and in this, she found some relief. She did not believe she should still be alive; it seemed wrong, criminal even, to be in the world without Sean, going
about her day, eating, gossiping with Char, moving forward. None of that seemed right.
Work was the only thing disassociated from Sean, the only thing she could do without guilt.

She held the needle loosely in her fingers and inhaled, relaxing her neck, then shoulders, then hands with each breath. She placed the needle on a soft spot in the matrix, avoiding touching the specimen, and began to gently tease the old, dried earth away from the bone.

Yesterday, she’d given Jada a lesson on fossilization, telling her it took a series of accidents to create a fossil. First, the dinosaur had to die. Then mud or sand entombed the creature for hundreds of years as the sediment turned the former body to stone. And then, after eons and eons after some of the rock had eroded, if someone was lucky, they’d find the exposed tip of a fossil poking out from the side of a hill or butte.

Jada shrugged. Nothing seemed to faze her. Lucy could have disappeared before Jada and the girl would have sat motionless, unimpressed.

Lucy looked up from the bone to stretch. A young boy with shiny blond hair pressed his hand against the glass and smiled. He was probably six or seven, his two front teeth missing and the collar of his shirt stained with dirt. Lucy returned the smile. She longed to be that young again, the world still a place full of wonder and fun. She raised her arm to wave and it floated slowly into view, like a curtain blowing in a breeze, and then disappeared.

She shut her eyes quickly and then opened them. Her arm was there. She stretched it to the side and flexed her fingers, making a small fist.
The boy matched her movements. He curled his fingers and waved at Lucy as his mother pulled him away from the window.

_He saw me_, she thought. _I am here._

She bent forward to stretch her back. Her spine ached to the marrow. When she straightened up, Dr. Burton was at the window, watching.

“It only gets worse,” she said as she entered the lab.

“What’s that?”

“The arthritis. Some are lucky and it never develops, but I’m not one of them. It appears our _T. rex_ wasn’t lucky either. Dr. Smith noted signs of arthritis in her metatarsals. And possibly gout. Most likely she was in pain before her death.”

Lucy turned back to the specimen, her mood darkening. Dr. Burton’s appearance could only mean one thing: more work. Or maybe another surly teenager to babysit.

“The micro work is worse,” Lucy said.

“From the looks of it, you’re a long way from worrying about that. I appreciate your,” Dr. Burton paused and paced the length of the lab, “attention to detail. You’re very careful. More careful than the others. And slower, too.”

“I was trained as a sculptor,” Lucy blurted out before she could stop herself.

“And this makes you slow?”

“I like to think of it as patience.”

“Would I know your work? Your sculpting work, that is.”

Lucy’s face burned with heat. She shook her head.
Dr. Burton traced her thin fingers around the scooped collar of her brown dress. There couldn’t be a more depressing color to wear every day, Lucy thought. At least black was sophisticated. Brown just felt, well, like her grief.

“I hear you lost your charge earlier this week.”

“She slipped out. She was bored.”

“So you aren’t as careful as you’d like to believe you are?”

“I’m not sure the arrangement is working,” Lucy said.

“For her or for you?”

Lucy picked up a carbide needle and turned back to the specimen. “For both of us.”

“And what’s the reason?”

Lucy wanted to say there was no reason, no fact. She wanted to tell Dr. Burton to speculate on the reason, figure it out for herself, isn’t that what scientists like her were trained to do?

“I don’t have time and she doesn’t have the interest.”

Dr. Burton pulled a stool from the table behind Lucy and sat next to her. Lucy kept Dr. Burton in her peripheral vision, refusing to face her. “You underestimate how fascinating your work can be. You’re uncovering buried secrets. Have you forgotten how alluring secrets can be to a young girl? To an old girl, too, I might add.”

Lucy looked at the gastralia. Under any other circumstances, she would have been thrilled to take on this project but she felt none of her old energy for it. What did it matter if Dr. Burton finally discovered the function of the gastralia? It was unimportant to
everyday existence, nothing but academic wanking. She was tired, exhausted really, of living in a world of secrets. Sean’s heart condition had been a secret. Secrets were her worst enemies. Her job was a sham. Jada had a cellphone and video games. No one cared about dinosaur fossils anymore. She set down the needle and rested her chin on her chest. Her head was an anvil.

Dr. Burton leaned in close, so close that Lucy smelled stale coffee on her breath. “You’re not going to make this easy for me, are you? I should have known from the moment I saw you at the funeral.”

Lucy reddened at the close inspection. Her head ached. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’ve done what you’ve told me. Jada has been with me all week. I’m sure watching me scrape away matrix isn’t on the top of her list of interesting ways to spend her summer.”

“Not yet. It will come with time. I sense it in her. Speaking of sensing, did you notice anything odd about Jada? Anything off?”

“She’s a typical teenager if that’s what you mean.”

Lucy felt Dr. Burton’s hand on her thigh. Her touch was firm, confident, the touch of someone unaccustomed to losing or giving up.

“You are running out of time.”

“What?” Lucy asked.

“You heard me.”

Lucy’s body became a hive of bees, every nerve buzzed and zinged.
“There’s a lot you don’t know about me, Lucy. One of those things is that I know what’s happening to you, and it is very serious. And real. Others cannot see it, unless they have been through something similar. My research is very limited right now but I’d categorize it as an intrapersonal event.”

“A hallucination then,” Lucy said.

“Not at all. If my suspicions are correct, you’ve been feeling as if you’re leaving your body, correct?”

Lucy nodded.

“That you could, if you wanted, leave yourself behind and disappear into the universe?”

“Yes,” Lucy whispered.

“Some think it’s bullocks – like spotting Bigfoot – but I have more than enough reason to believe that a woman can disappear entirely. If you’re not careful. You’ve not heard about this, I presume?”

Lucy thought back. She recalled a few bizarre cases in the news of women who suddenly vanished. Most had been attributed to the women running away or being very good at concealing their whereabouts. Certainly these cases couldn’t be attributed to physical disappearance. It was like dying of a broken heart; a myth. Lucy’s heart was broken to bits and she hadn’t died yet. Unfortunately, she thought.

“I lost my husband several years ago on a dig in Wyoming,” Dr. Burton continued. “I’m sure the gossip preceded my arrival and I’m not interested in disputing it. People believe what they want to believe and most of the time they want to believe the
most outrageous story because it makes for a better story to tell. After Jerry died, there was a period of time where I didn’t know how I would continue. I felt incomplete, like parts of me were missing. Very much like you must feel now. Everything was foreign. I couldn’t pay bills properly. I didn’t eat. I most definitely couldn’t laugh. And then I noticed that I seemed to be fading away. That was only the beginning. I began to see other women, see through them to some turning point in their past. It’s all very strange and vivid. And it doesn’t happen with all women.” Dr. Burton stopped, peered at the specimen on the table. “It was as if I was in danger of extinction and so were these women, too. At first, I didn’t know what to do about these … these visions. I tried to ignore them. I knew a physician would send me to a psychiatrist. They would call me delusional. I was certain of it. But, the more I resisted, the more I disappeared. I was nearly a ghost before I turned myself around.”

“Are you saying you almost vanished?” Lucy said. Her body was cold and she was shivering.

“Close. You’ve probably heard I was sent away after what happened to Jerry. That wasn’t the case at all. I sent myself into exile and gradually found my way back. Some are not so fortunate. The process is inexact. There’s so much we still don’t know. Some vanish before I – or someone like me, there are others – reach them. No pattern, at least not one based on empirical evidence, has emerged.”

Lucy crossed her arms against her chest to warm herself. For the moment, her arms appeared clear and sharp, no blurred edges.
“The thing is, your,” Dr. Burton paused and looked up to the ceiling, “your predicament and condition interferes with my real work. I told you the first day you were back that I didn’t come here to help you. Far from it. And if you weren’t so useful to me, I might not have mentioned any of this to you at all. But I need you as much as you need me. It’s your choice. You should also know my success rate is questionable. I’ve always said there are no guarantees in life and that’s most certainly the case here.”

Lucy stared at the fossil. “What about Jada?”

“Her condition is as tenuous as yours. You have to understand there is only so much I can do, and there’s only so much I’m willing to do. My life’s work is paleontology, not this other phenomenon.”

“But if you can help?”

“I suspect my help has little effect on the outcome. That is up to you and Jada.”

“Do you see anything with me? A turning point, you called it?” Lucy stopped herself from telling Dr. Burton what she had seen in the bathroom mirror, an image of herself as a child. If Dr. Burton had the powers she claimed, then she would have seen it too.

“Not yet. And that’s what concerns me. Jada is much more clear. She’s young, there’s been less time to lose herself to other things.”

Just then, the door of the lab opened and Char stepped inside, breathless.

“Dr. Burton, I’ve been looking all over the museum for you,” Char said. “You’re late for our press conference.

Dr. Burton stood. “Think about what I’ve said, Lucy.”
Dr. Burton walked out of the lab without waiting for Char to follow. Char turned.

“Think about what?” Char whispered. “What are you supposed to think about?”

“Nothing,” Lucy said.

“Nothing? Dr. Burton doesn’t ask people to think about anything. She does all of the thinking for us.”

“Don’t you have a press conference to get to?”

Char looked at her watch. “Yes. But you’re coming to Museum beers tonight. Promise?”

“No,” Lucy said. “I can’t. I can’t face everyone yet.”

“Everyone or just Frick and Frack?”

Lucy smiled. “Colleen and Marty are annoying but that’s not why I don’t want to go?”

“Ms. Medieval?”

“I just can’t do it yet, Char,” Lucy said. She cupped her hands around her neck.

“Is that okay?”

“Sheffield’s then? It’ll be better than going home.”

Lucy’s head nodded yes, as her mind nodded no.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Lucy picked the dirt from beneath her nails as she waited for Char to arrive at Sheffield’s. The dust in the lab was insidious. At home each night, she’d shake out her shoes, excavate the dirt from the cuffs of her khakis, beat at her lab coat like it was an old rug. No matter how much she washed, the dust reappeared, as if it emerged from beneath her skin. And Sheffield’s wasn’t the kind of bar that accommodated dirt. The warm lights encased the room in an amber glow, and Lucy felt as if she were viewing a moment preserved in time. It could have been the 1930s or 50s, women draped over men, men draped over their gin and tonics and olive martinis. Time didn’t change mating rituals, she supposed. The long mahogany bar that spanned the main room was filled with Chicago’s finery, young lawyers and marketing reps and women whom Lucy thought must have been born tan and manicured. Even now they were still competing, still attempting to out-do each other. These were Sean’s people. His network was a sprawling thing, its tendrils reaching across the city. I was Sean’s car mechanic, I was his dry cleaner, I worked the Wrigley account with him. They were all someone to him, and all she had been able to say in return was “I am his wife,” emphasizing the present tense. She looked around for familiar faces, someone from Sean’s agency, but she recognized no one. The funeral had been a torrent of strange faces and limp handshakes, people who didn’t know her and were there to soothe their own loss more than to support her. She
disliked most of his agency friends, though she had never revealed that to him. Mostly, she tried to avoid them. They were shallow and disinterested in her work, the agency’s owner telling her once he found it cute that she worked with dinosaurs. There were times she fantasized about having a corporate job like Sean’s. Sitting at a desk in a cubicle, surrounded by friends, by living things. Going to meetings where no one complained about the dust from the plaster jackets or was passionate about dead things. Her fantasies and threats never materialized. The museum needed her, she would tell Sean when he tired of her complaints and told her she should quit if she were that miserable. Sean, always ready with the quick fix. Leave, quit, ignore it, walk away.

Lucy pulled off her wedding ring and examined it. A thin gold band with a single emerald cut diamond. Sean had surprised her, proposed before they had even talked of marriage. She’d loved his impulsiveness, his restlessness to get on with their lives together, and she’d said yes, of course. She had felt so wanted then. Sean had been full of surprises – he sent her flowers at work, put notes in the pocket of her lab coat, made her mixed tapes with their favorite songs, surprised her with plane tickets for a weekend in a state they hadn’t yet explored together. Sometimes, after an argument over something silly, he’d take her hand and tap the ring with his finger. Remember, he’d tease, this was supposed to be my RV. When they’d first met, he talked endlessly of buying a silver Airstream and traveling the country but, instead, he’d spent his RV savings on her ring. She stared at the small square diamond. Lucy let her eyes go soft and suddenly the image of Sean that she had tried so hard to suppress appeared. Sean’s distorted, pained face. His
drooping mouth. His flushed, dry skin. There was no sweat, only a rim of sandy salt around his lips and hairline. She’d tasted that salt when she tried to resuscitate him before the ambulance arrived. Even now, her mouth watered as she thought about the salty taste of his dried sweat. She had tasted his death.

Lucy pushed the ring back on her finger and took a long drink from her pint glass to wash away the sour memory. Where was Char? She’d never known her to be punctual but she wasn’t normally this late. When Lucy left the museum, Char had been trapped in her cubicle, Dr. Burton peering over one shoulder and one of the other paleontologists they’d called in from China sitting on the edge of Char’s desk, kicking the drawer in a nervous, fast rhythm. There was nothing worse than being alone in a bar at the height of happy hour. Lucy felt her body shift and she steadied herself with her arm. Someone had knocked into her.

“Whoa,” she said sharply.

The man turned, looked.

“Oh,” he said. “Weird. I didn’t see you sitting there.”

Lucy half-smiled, unsure whether this was a pick-up line or the man had truly not noticed her.

“Is someone joining you?”

“Yes,” Lucy said. She looked at her watch. “She’ll be here soon.”

The man backed away, apologized, and returned to the overcrowded bar where he whispered to a friend and pointed in Lucy’s direction. Lucy raised her pint glass, the universal gesture of no harm done. The men huddled together and continued talking.
Great. She’d become the topic of the evening for them, how he nearly sat on top of a sad-looking, dust-covered woman in the booth.

Out the front window, Lucy watched Char push through the small line that had formed at the front door and negotiate with the bouncer. She waved in Lucy’s direction and pointed at her until Lucy waved back and the bouncer let her through.

“Those people have no sense of humor,” she said as she slid into the other side of the half-moon shaped booth.

“You butted in front of them. What do you expect?”

“Obviously I was meeting a friend. I was waving like mad at you. I’ll get this round.”

Char motioned to the server, the one with the perfect straight hair, flawless unfreckled skin, and standout breasts. Anger swelled instantly. Lucy wanted to shake the bartender, scream, “None of it matters. Anything could happen to you.”

“What are you frowning? It’s happy hour and I’m buying,” Char downed the remaining beer in Lucy’s glass and drummed on the table. “Let’s get drunk.”

No good would come of this. Char drank more than most men, had outlasted Sean on some epic nights.

“I have some scoop about Ms. Medieval,” Char said.

Lucy sipped the fresh beer the perfect server had swiftly set down. She held the cold liquid in her mouth and swallowed slowly as Char relayed that Dr. Burton was possibly in love with the night-guard William, possibly crazy, and possibly murdered her husband.
“Jealous rage,” Char said definitively. “Colleen and Marty said that she pushed her husband off a cliff ledge because he had discovered a huge fossil, even bigger than Sue. But it was raining hard and she blamed his death on that, said he had slipped off the ledge before she could reach him. Apparently, the museum sent him away and no one heard from her for months. I’m glad she wasn’t working here when it happened. What a public relations nightmare.”

“You believe Colleen and Marty?”

“Colleen said that Marty said that he has a friend of a friend who was on the field team. The friend told them the whole story during another dig. He even said he’d heard them arguing the night before he died. And it happened in Utah. Where Colleen is from.”

Lucy tightened her grip around the sweaty pint glass. “Married people argue all the time. It means nothing.”

“Come on Lucy. You’ve worked with her for a week now. That woman’s heart is as hard as the fossils she studies.”

“All I’m saying is arguments don’t lead to murdering your husband. Sean and I argued all the time and I never killed him.”

Char cocked her head. “What’s the matter, Lucy? I thought a little gossip about Ms. Medieval would cheer you up.”

“You shouldn’t believe everything you hear.” Lucy looked around the bar, buying time. If she spoke, she would fall into wild sobs. She glanced at the television above the bar. According to the six-o-clock weather report, it was below ninety degrees for the first
time in three weeks. Chicago could breathe again, she thought. Everyone in Chicago but Sean.

“What is it, Lucy? You look like you’re going to vomit.”

Lucy opened her mouth. The memory of their argument tumbled through her. She’d been cranky with him, she’d been manipulative thinking an offer of sex would make him skip his run. What could she tell Char, that her greatest fear was that Sean wasn’t running to stay in shape, that he had been running away from her? Her stomach churned.

“We had an argument. Before he died.”

“Oh, honey.” Char reached for Lucy’s hands and cupped them gently in hers. Tears leaked from Lucy’s eyes as she faced her friend. “It wasn’t a bad argument. I didn’t want him to run. It was so hot. But there was something else too, something weird between us.”

Char straightened up and sat back in the booth. Her eyes grew wide, owl-like in her round face. “What do you mean?”

“I don’t know. I couldn’t put my finger on it. It was just a feeling I’d been having. That things weren’t good between us. Was there something wrong, Char? Did you notice anything?”

“Notice what? What would I notice? You two were inseparable.”

“I think that was part of the problem, Char. I think he’d grown tired of me always being around.”

Lucy examined Char. A red flush blossomed on her friend’s neck.
“Do you want another drink?”

“Why are you changing the subject?”

“I’m not changing the subject. I just noticed your glass is dry.”

“Char, this is important. I’m telling you I feel responsible for Sean’s death and you’re asking me if I want a drink. Do you understand what I’m telling you? Maybe if I’d been different, he’d still be here.”

Char looked at her blankly. The sounds of muffled conversations and music filled the silence between them. Finally, Char picked up her pint glass and swigged the last drops of beer. She stood up.

“You didn’t kill him, Lucy. None of this is your fault. He had a heart condition you didn’t know about.”

Lucy’s eyes filled with terrible tears. “He didn’t hug or kiss me, Char. Before he left.”

“I’m sorry, Lu. I’m so sorry. Why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

Lucy looked up and stared into the light to stop the tears. “You want to know the worst, Char? He’s never coming back. I keep thinking that maybe, when I go home tonight, he’ll be there, and I can get that hug. But I’ll never see him again. All I hear is that door shutting. Over and over again. Every time I hear a door shut, I feel it.” Lucy pointed to her chest. “I feel the sound and it hurts like hell. This is so hard, Char. I can’t take it,” she said and fled the booth. Lucy pushed through the crowd on people standing between her and the bathroom door. She leaned over the toilet and prepared to vomit. After a few minutes, she produced nothing more than two meager, acidy spits into the
bowl. She avoided the mirror above the sink as she washed her hands, too afraid her reflection would flicker or twitch or fade entirely. Char was holding something back from her. She’d flushed, something she only did when she was lying. Lucy felt is as strongly as she felt Sean had been hiding something, too.

Lucy weaved through the crowd and returned to the booth where Char had set up another round. Char was surrounded by a group of men, including the man who had nearly sat on top of Lucy earlier in the night. Their shirt collars were unbuttoned and the knots of their ties hung loosely at the middle of their chests. The booth was too crowded. Lucy’s body seized. She rested her hand on Char’s arm, inhaling deeply to gain what little air seemed left in the room.

“I should go,” she said.

“One more,” Char said, then mouthed “please.”

Char pushed a full pint closer to Lucy and the beer sloshed over the edge of the glass onto the table.

“So you work at the museum?” the man asked.

Lucy’s heart beat like a hummingbird’s. She looked for an escape route but the crowd was shoulder to shoulder.

“Char here says you work on bones,” said one of the man’s friends. He held his pint glass at a dangerous, sloppy angle. “I got a bone you can work on.”

The men roared with laughter and Char raised her pint glass to toast the funny man. She wanted to tell him he wasn’t the first man to come up with the joke. Sean had used it on her when they’d first dated.
“Actually, I prepare them.”

The man bent toward her. His breath burned with whisky and cigarettes. “Prepare them,” the man said, pausing. “Is that like foreplay or something?”

Lucy looked toward the door. It was miles away, the crowd an impenetrable wall.

“I should go,” she said.

“Don’t let him get to you,” the man who had nearly sat on her earlier said. “He makes everything about sex. Your job sounds interesting. More interesting than mine.”

He was attempting to be kind, at least. Somewhere under the layers of gin and bravado, there was the acknowledgement that his friend was an ass. She wanted to tell this man that she still felt married. She was married to a dead man and always would be. She couldn’t see any other way of living that made sense. Char was sandwiched between the funny man and another new friend. She heard Char’s scratchy voice but the words were muffled in the crowd. Char hadn’t smoked a cigarette in a year but her voice had retained its low, smoker’s depth, as if she was always dehydrated. Lucy felt so small, so insignificant in this group, the same way she felt with Sean’s agency friends.

“How long have you been at the museum?” he said.

“You don’t have to do this. Be the wingman,” Lucy said.

The man smiled and she watched relief wash over his face. He looked to his friends who were battling over Char, one attempting to be funnier than the other. Char drank in the attention, and had, for the moment, forgotten about Lucy. A fresh beer appeared.
“You’re far too cute to be wingman material. I always thought freckles were sexy.”

“I should be going,” Lucy said again. She picked up the pint and drank most of it before setting it down. “My husband probably wonders where I am.”

“Hmm?” the first man said, leaning toward her.

“My husband,” she lied, tapping her ring. “I should be going.”

He cocked his head. “But your friend. She said? Isn’t he?”

“It’s late,” Lucy interrupted before the man had time to say it. “He’ll worry.”

Lucy squeezed through a slim opening of elbows and shoulders, pushed against the backs of the crowd that stood between her and the beveled glass door. Outside, she inhaled deeply, calming herself. Dusk hugged the city with low, ashen clouds that threatened rain. How long had it been since the last rain, she wondered. It seemed the heat was as permanent as Sean’s death. Lucy, legs wobbling from drinking the pint so fast, sidestepped people, dogs, strollers. She stopped and steadied herself against the rod iron gate in front of a brownstone. She was beyond buzzed. She was drunk. She wanted to be alone, at home with no sounds, no friends, just blank nothingness where she could sink into memories of Sean, pretend he was still alive and working late, he would be home any minute, crawling into bed and wrapping his body against hers. She could feel the heaviness of his thigh against hers, the scratch of his shadowy beard against her back, his hand running down her arm, his fingers folding into hers. He would whisper “I missed you, Lu, I missed you so much,” and she would purr as she rolled onto her back, ready
for him. In the gray, humid-soaked distance, she caught a glimpse of a tall man walking toward her.

Oh thank god, Lucy thought, there’s Sean to get me out of here. She was so sure of it for an instant that she expected him to stop, give her the hug she’d been waiting for. As he passed her, their eyes met and he nodded. Lucy smiled sheepishly. She’d been caught staring, she knew.

Lucy turned to apologize but the man was already crossing the street. She stood at the center of the sidewalk as others detoured around her. Her stomach twisted into her throat and her mouth watered. She watched the man until she lost sight of him and then she bent forward and brought forth what she hadn’t been able to call up earlier in the restroom.

Lucy woke to the smell of eggs frying. She stumbled blindly to the bathroom and threw up. She couldn’t remember the last time she’d been this hungover. Snapshots of the end of the night came to her – the conversation with Char, tears, mistaking that man for Sean. She swallowed two aspirin without water, afraid the water would dredge up whatever remained in her system. She pulled on Sean’s dress shirt, the one she’d converted into a robe. Most likely it was Char cooking the eggs. She didn’t remember bringing the man home. She hoped to god she hadn’t done anything as stupid and cliché as bringing home that strange man in a weak moment; she hoped she hadn’t shared the bottomless pit that was her grief. Had she cried to him or Char? Nothing was clear. The night was fuzzy, like looking through a window slick with rain.
Char was at the stove, worrying over a smoking pan that Lucy assumed, because of the odor, once held hashbrown potatoes. Char was still in her clothes from the day before, a vintage navy blue dress with a full skirt and a peter pan collar. The whole scene reminded Lucy of a *Lucille Ball* episode, which would have pleased Char.

“What are you still doing here?” Lucy asked. She held her nose against the stench of burned, greasy food.

“You don’t remember a thing, do you?”

Lucy shook her head.

“You ran out of the bar. I ran after you. By the time I caught up with you, you’d puked on the sidewalk. We took a cab. You told the cab driver you thought you saw Sean. You went on and on about ghosts and hallucinations.”

“What did I say?”

“You weren’t making any sense. Something about seeing shadows and disappearing. It was all gibberish. The driver didn’t charge us for the ride. I think he felt sorry for you.”

“That smell is killing me,” Lucy said.

“You need grease. You’re lucky you don’t have any vodka for Bloody Mary’s. You could use a little hair of the dog.”

Lucy rested her hands against her stomach. “Please Char. No more talk of drinks.”

Char looked Lucy up and down, hands on hips. “You needed last night,” she said sharply. “You needed to get out of this place and out of your funk.” Char shouldered past Lucy and placed a plate with two over-hard, browned eggs and a lump of blackened


potatoes on the table. Lucy pressed her lips together and swallowed the bitter saliva that precipitated vomiting.

“It’s not good for you,” Char continued. “All of this wallowing in your memories of Sean. I know grief takes time and I know I have no idea what it’s like to lose a husband but you have to start living your own life again.” Char paused, spatula poised above the skillet. She flipped another egg. “Sean wouldn’t have wanted you to be this way.”

“I’m doing the best I can,” Lucy said. “I don’t think Sean would have wanted me to forget about him so quickly.”

Char brought her plate of eggs and potatoes to the table and sat in the chair across from Lucy – Sean’s chair, Lucy wanted to remind her. The charred pile on her plate looked like something Char had scraped off the stove burners. Lucy pushed her plate away. Char moved it back toward her.

“God you’re stubborn. Eat.” Char drove her fork through the rubbish.

“I can’t.” Lucy thought of all the times she and Sean had sat here, before and after work, talking about their day ahead or what had happened at work. That is what Sean would have wanted, to be sitting here with his coffee and bowl of oatmeal, the bowl she had dropped and broken earlier in the week.

Char pointed a fork-full of potatoes at her. “Sometimes the things you resist the most are the things that are the very best for you.”

“You sound like one of those self-help books you read.”

Char eyed her, smirked. “Bathroom graffiti, actually. At Sheffields.”
Lucy nodded. Her head jackhammered with each small movement.

“I didn’t do anything else stupid last night, did I?” Lucy’s grief was such that anything seemed possible to her, including fucking someone she didn’t know or lying on the elevated train tracks waiting for the next train to pass.

“Would I let you do anything stupid?”

“That wasn’t my question,” Lucy said.

“No. Although you ruined my chances with the nice architect.”

“They were assholes, Char.”

“Just the one.”

Char tapped her fork on table rhythmically. Lucy reached out and touched Char’s hand.

“Sorry,” Char said. “Hangover still that bad?”

Lucy nodded. “I’d like to cut my head off and donate it to science.” What she wanted more than anything was to be left alone.

“Let’s take a walk. We can head toward the lake. You can sweat out your hangover.”

“God no,” Lucy said, suddenly furious with Char again. “I’m not going to lake. Ever.”

She glared at Char, waiting for recognition to wash over her friend’s face. She never wanted to see that portion of the lake, with all the runners – the alive runners – jogging past them. She didn’t want to see couples holding hands or cuddling on beach towels.
Char closed her eyes. “Sorry.”

Lucy stood and walked to the French doors in the living room. She leaned against the glass, the coolness of it soothed her pounding head. Outside, an El train glided along the tracks. Beneath the trestle, two punky-looking kids in black jeans and studded belts. The girl had blue spiky hair. She laughed and punched the boy in the shoulder and then he locked his arms around her. They were in love. At least they thought they were. She watched them share a cigarette. The smoke clouded their faces as they exhaled. Lucy wondered if that’s how she would appear soon, nothing more than a gray, smoky shadow.

“I thought I saw him last night,” she said to herself more than to Char. “There was a man on the street who looked exactly like him. I swear it was him Char, I swear it.” She stared at the street below, letting her eyes go soft until the trees blurred into the brick rowhouses. “I miss him so much.”

“I know you do,” Char said, her voice soft. “We all miss Sean. I’m so sorry, Lucy. I wish I knew what to do for you.”

Lucy wanted to push her head through the glass, to break open her skin. Perhaps it would release the pain, the burning she felt inside her. It seemed there was nowhere for her feelings to go, no one who truly understood her loss. Others missed Sean. Who cared if others missed him? Others weren’t his wife of fifteen years.

“Look,” she said, turning back to Char. “I have a lot to do. You don’t have to stay with me. I have bills to pay, I need to visit my father. I have to figure out what to do with...”

She couldn’t say it.
“With Sean’s things?”

Lucy nodded. “I can’t even look in his drawers.”

The doorbell rang. Lucy wasn’t expecting any visitors. It couldn’t be her father; he refused to drive into the city. She winced at the thought of Dr. Burton appearing in the doorway. Or even her sister. Probably just a neighbor. Lucy looked at Char and her friend walked to the door to buzz in whoever it was. Fed Ex delivery, Lucy heard a voice say. Char told the voice she’d be right down. Lucy, thankful for the brief moment alone, lifted up the hem of her khakis. Her legs were visible, her skin more clear – more alive – than it had seemed all week. This would all pass. Maybe Dr. Burton was crazier than she’d thought. Lucy pretended to be checking the hem of her pants when Char dropped the box on the living room floor.

“From the agency,” Char said. “It’s heavy.”

“Probably another useless sympathy gift.”

Char turned to her and pouted.

“Not that all of the gifts were useless. A person can only eat so many pears and oranges.”

“You ate the popcorn I gave you?”

“I did,” Lucy said, lying. Char had sent her a tin of Garrett’s Popcorn, a mix of cheese and caramel. It was her favorite comfort food. Lucy vaguely recalled opening the lid of the blue tin and shutting it immediately, the smell filled with too many memories of the nights Sean would stop on the way home from the agency and surprise her with a greasy-soaked bag of warm kernels, the orange cheese thick as paint. She’d devour the
bag and then hold up her stained fingers. Early on, he’d licked them clean and then they’d make love wherever they happened to be sitting. She couldn’t remember the last time that had happened or when, exactly, that ritual had stopped. It was like other things in their relationship that she’d been missing before he died but had been too busy – or maybe too afraid – to ask about. She had rationalized that relationships changed, people settled down. Now that Sean was gone, she wished she’d had the courage to talk to him more. She wished she hadn’t ignored things so much. She wished Sean was still there to bring her popcorn.

“The label has Todd’s name on it.”

Lucy remembered now. Todd, Sean’s best friend at the agency, had sent an email asking what to do with Sean’s things at work. Lucy hadn’t replied to him. She supposed he’d grown impatient and sent them on. Sean’s desk was probably needed for his replacement. Life goes on, she thought. Everyone was getting on with it except for her.

Char punctured the tape with her long, red-painted fingernail and paused.

“Go ahead,” Lucy said.

Char lifted the flaps of the box and removed a layer of newspaper. Char handed a manila envelope to Lucy and backed away from the box. Lucy set the envelope on the floor and looked in the box. She pulled out Sean’s Chicago Cubs coffee mug, wrapped in bubble wrap. Then a framed picture of herself and Sean, their faces tanned, their smiles wide with laughter like the two punky kids she’d seen outside. It wasn’t the best photo of either of them but Lucy knew it had been one of Sean’s favorite vacations. Angel’s Landing in Zion National Park. They were at the summit of one of the most strenuous all-
day hikes they’d taken together, and had stopped to eat a celebratory lunch of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches that had been moldering away in their backpacks. In the photo, streaks of peanut butter feathered out from Sean’s upper lip. Lucy ran her finger over his mouth. If she inhaled hard enough, she could smell the peanut butter, feel the rough stubble above his lip.

Lucy felt Char’s hand on her shoulder and she leaned into her. Char’s arms encircled her and she melted into the softness. “The bastards,” Char whispered. “They could’ve warned you they were sending his stuff.”

“I knew it was coming,” Lucy said, trying to keep the teary warble out of her voice. “Todd emailed me but I didn’t respond. I guess he couldn’t wait any longer.”

“Poor girl,” Char whispered as she pulled away. “Why don’t we leave the box for another day?”

Lucy shook her head. “I already feel like shit.Probably best to get it over with.” She paused. “I’m glad you’re here with me.”

Char smiled. “You don’t want me to leave then?”

“Not now.”

Lucy reached back into the box and pulled out Sean’s datebook. That, she couldn’t begin to open. She set it beside the coffee mug. She opened the envelope as Char looked over her shoulder. A couple of certificates recognizing Sean for his work on ad campaigns. A letter from his boss to Lucy saying how sorry he was, the team sends their sympathy blah blah blah.

“I could’ve written a better letter for him,” Char said.
Lucy studied a yellow legal pad. Notes about projects, she guessed. She traced over Sean’s nearly illegible handwriting. He had the penmanship of a surgeon. Lucy handed Char the pad. She approached the box robotically now, making herself a void, pretending these weren’t Sean’s things and she wasn’t who she was. She pulled out a box of clients’ business cards, an old rolodex, a cup of pens and pencils bumpy with Sean’s teeth marks, running socks, running shorts, running shirt for impromptu lunch runs with Todd. Char set a tin of Burt’s Bees lip balm and a few packs of Wrigley’s Spearmint gum next to the pile of running gear. Lucy opened the lid of the lip balm and brought it to her nose, the sharp mint so very much the smell of Sean in the morning when he left and in the evening when he came home. She rubbed some of the balm on her bottom lip, tasted Sean in it. She didn’t want to forget this. She was terrified that she would forget the little things about him; and the big things, too. She wished Char hadn’t stayed. If Char were gone, she could sit on the floor, have a blazing cry, and eat her way through the balm.

“Look,” Char said, pulling her back to the box.

In Char’s cupped palms were the fossils Lucy had given Sean on their first date, the crinoids.

He’d kept them.

Char poured the round, fossilized beads into Lucy’s hand. The first time Lucy had been to the lake with Sean just after they married, it was October and the cold wind sliced at their cheeks as they walked along the shoreline. They were under-dressed – Sean in a worn-down jean jacket, she in a thin cardigan sweater. He had just started his job as an account rep at the ad agency and she’d reluctantly accepted the full-time position at The
Field Museum. She’d had a chance to work as a sculptor’s apprentice in New York City but they agreed Sean’s position at the agency took precedence. She remembered telling him he needed to do this, that the museum wasn’t so bad. At least she’d still be working with her hands at the museum, Sean had said. They had gone to the beach to seal their pact – Sean would focus on his career first and then she’d have her chance. Lucy had scooped up a handful of sand. Sean watched her, curious. She sifted and sifted, plucking out tiny grey disks and setting them aside before scooping up more sand. To others, they looked like garbage but Lucy knew from her volunteer time at the museum that the disks were fragments of crinoids. The sea lilies covered the Midwest a half a billion years ago when it was nothing more than sea floor, the long stalks and crown-like flowers undulating with the tide. The buildings on Michigan Avenue and all of the skyscrapers in Chicago – including the one where Sean worked – were built on a layer of crinoid-rich limestone. Lucy brushed the sand from a half dozen disks and placed them in Sean’s palm.

“You’re holding a hundred million years or more in your hands,” she had said.

Lucy choked on the thought that, after all this time, he’d considered them important. “Those are from the first time we went to the lake together,” Lucy said to Char. “I found them on the beach for him.”

Char sighed and wiped at her cheeks.

Good, Lucy thought. Let her cry, let her feel the pain I feel. Lucy set the crinoids on the table near the sofa and began lining up other things Char handed to her, as if preparing for a yard sale. There was a wind-up figurine, some Godzilla-esque monster,
along with a running trophy from a 5k the agency had sponsored. Sean had taken first in his age group. And there, at the very bottom of the box, was the armature of a sculpture she had started long ago. Two heavy aluminum wires, one silver, the other black. The wires twisted and spiraled upward on the small wooden pedestal, uniting in a circle at the top, her attempt at symbolizing their life as husband and wife. She’d abandoned the idea for the sculpture – like so many others – but couldn’t recall why. She’d probably second-guessed her approach or thought the shape was too derivative of one of the greats. She’d always worried that her work was too imitative, even though her professors had encouraged her to imitate, to model herself after the greats as she developed her own style. She thought about how frustrated Sean became with her when she second-guessed herself and, later, when she gave up sculpting all together. Lucy imagined people at the agency asking about the armature and Sean explaining that his wife was a sculptor, an artist. In his opinion, her art came first and her job at the museum came second even though Lucy hadn’t created anything for nearly a decade. Now she wondered if he had been too embarrassed to tell people she was a preparator, if her career wasn’t sexy enough for his friends.

“Is that one of yours?” Char asked.

Lucy nodded. “I never finished it. I have no idea why he kept it. It’s not very good”

“He kept it because you made it, Luce. Don’t be so hard on yourself.”

Lucy set the armature down. There was potential in it, she thought. It wasn’t terrible. “You’re right. This is hard enough as it is.”
At the bottom of the box were some loose papers. Lucy stacked them together and pulled them out. A small photo escaped the pile and floated to the floor, landing face down. Lucy set the other papers down. She squatted. The writing was unfamiliar. There were two words – NEVER FORGET – in clear, black print. She picked up the photo, turned it over, and gazed at the small log cabin, surrounded by pine trees, trying to trip her memory into focus. A wooden sign nailed to one of the posts on the cabin told her this was cabin number 46. Lucy didn’t recognize the cabin or the woods. It could have been anywhere; they’d stayed in so many little cabins like this over the years. The yellow date in the corner of the photo was 05-13-95, two months ago. They’d gone to Florida in March, right around spring break when the museum emptied out of graduate students and volunteers. There hadn’t been a weekend cabin trip in May.

Char leaned over her. “What’s that?”

“I don’t know. It’s a cabin. I don’t recognize it.”

Char grabbed the photo. Her eyes widened.

“What?” Lucy asked. “Do you know it?”

Char coughed, shook her head. “No,” she said, turning away from Lucy. “Not at all. It’s probably not even Sean’s. It probably got mixed in with some of his things. I’m sure it’s nothing. Should I throw it out? Here,” she said, holding out her hands. “I’ll put it in the garbage for you.”

Lucy’s skin tingled. She pulled the photo to her chest. She studied Char’s face. Char always rambled but she rambled the most when she was lying.

“What is this, Char?”
“I have no idea.

Sweat dotted Char’s forehead. Lucy smelled the tangy odor of Char’s lying.

“We should stop,” Char said. “You look exhausted. Let’s put all this stuff back and get some fresh air. No good will come of worrying about a photo that probably isn’t even his.”

“Probably?”

“Definitely. Definitely isn’t.”

Lucy’s whole body quaked. “Char, it was earlier this year. We went to Florida on vacation, not a cabin. It says ‘never forget.’ What does that mean?”

Char threw her arms up above her head. “How would I know? He’s your husband.”

Heat flooded Lucy’s body. “Was. He was my husband.” Lucy stared at Char for what felt like hours until Char puffed out her cheeks.

“Listen,” Char said finally. “He loved you. Luce. I don’t know what you’re thinking that picture means, but Sean loved you more than you ever realized. You have to believe that.” Char hugged Lucy. “Don’t let your imagination go somewhere it shouldn’t. I know how you can be, especially now when everything feels so uncertain. I’m sure it’s nothing. Not even Sean’s. Right?”

“Sure,” Lucy said, her voice flat.

“Do you need my help putting this stuff away?”

Lucy shook her head.
When Char left, Lucy shut the door and listened to the fading tap-tap of Char’s high heels quickly making their way down the marble steps. Lucy picked up Sean’s date planner and lied on the sofa. She flipped to May 13. A Tuesday. There were three stars in black ink on the top corner of the page. After the stars was a shape that looked like the letter “A” or another unfinished star. The space below the date, for tasks, was blank. May 14 and 15 were blank, too. She flipped to the next week. Each day was filled with the language of Sean – conference calls, meetings, creative briefs due, storyboards and concepts to review, follow ups with clients, dinner meeting, miles ran. There was a trip to New York in June. That, she remembered. His flight had been delayed and he’d been exhausted after a long delay at the airport. They’d bickered when he returned home. He had accused Lucy of relying on him too much, monitoring his every move. She was always in the same spot on the sofa when he came home at night; couldn’t she find something to do with Char or her other friends at the museum instead of waiting around for him?

But Wisconsin? Lucy had no memory of a trip to Wisconsin or Sean being out of town in May. She worked through his list of clients in her mind. He had a couple of accounts in Milwaukee but nothing to do with log cabins or campgrounds. And, if she trusted her memory, the Milwaukee accounts usually came to Sean; not the other way around.

Lucy picked up the photo and studied it again. The dates matched. By the look of the trees, it could be Wisconsin. The sky was clear, a vast, alive blue. It was then that Lucy noticed the tip of a shadow cast upon the corner of the steps leading up to the cabin,
just the silhouette of a head and a thin, narrow shoulder. Oh god, Lucy thought. Was it
Sean’s shadow at an odd angle? No. It was far too thin to be Sean. Was it a woman? He
had been distant lately. And quick to anger. Lucy began to shake again, her whole body
convulsing until she felt she would shatter into pieces. She looked down. Her legs were
translucent, a shadow. She tried to slap her legs but her hands and arms had vanished.
The sofa buckled and cracked open beneath her. She was sinking, going under.

Lucy heard voices calling her name, a chorus of Lu, Lu, Lu.

She moved through a maze of towering sandstone rock spires. The setting sun
striped the landscape in bright pinks and reds and oranges. Lucy hopped over rocks. A
river ran between the spires. Far off, in the distance she saw the shadow of a man,
running. He turned, jogging backwards and waved to her. As she approached him her
body grew as tall as the craggy pinnacles she passed. She was a giant dancing with the
whimsical hoodoos and sandstone towers, the columns of rock tilting and shooting
upward, piercing the tangerine sky. The sound of her name bounced against the peaks and
arches, growing louder and more distressed. Boulders tumbled and avalanched around
her and she ran; she ran toward the chorus of voices, toward the thinning shadow of her
husband. She weaved around a cluster of hoodoos and turned toward a square of bright
light.
CHAPTER EIGHT

When Lucy opened her eyes, she had no memory of how she had come to be lying on the floor. Rain pelted the windows and the sky was so dark that it could have been evening or early morning. She was groggy and sore, as if she had traveled a great distance. Her shirt was soaked through with sweat and her hair was knotted and damp. The last she remembered she had been chasing someone through a beautiful canyon with rust-colored spires and arches. Someone had been calling her name but the light in the canyon blinded and blocked her, and she couldn’t penetrate it. She had the distinct feeling that, if she hadn’t woken up when she did, she would still be in the canyon, searching for the source of the voice that had called out to her. She wanted to fall back asleep – if she had been sleeping at all – and return to that place. Lucy was unsure it had only been a dream. Never before had any of her dreams knocked her to the floor or made her whole body ache. The place had reminded her of Bryce Canyon, one of Sean’s favorite hiking spots. As she was waking up, she almost believed that Sean was in his version of heaven and had tried to reach out to her from there. She saw the crumpled photo of the cabin on the floor. She picked it up and attempted to straighten it out.

Lucy checked her watch. Sunday morning. An entire day lost. She stood and stretched. She examined her skin, pale and freckled but, thankfully, visible. She had never believed in the supernatural. The idea that she was disappearing or that Sean had
visited her from alternate reality was the stuff of hallucinations or, worse, mental illness.
If only she could run away from herself like she’d been running in that dream. Because it
had been a dream. Yes, that was all that it had been. Brought on by a hangover and that
damned photograph. Surely there was a simple explanation for it. She couldn’t ask Sean
about it but she could ask Todd, and she intended to. Maybe the “never forget” was a
headline for an advertisement, some slick campaign Sean and Todd had created.
Worrying over it would do no good. The apartment was no good for her either, stuffed
with memories and all of Sean’s things. She needed a change of scenery.

Lucy checked her phone. Two voicemails from Char. She dialed Char and got her
voicemail in return.

“Going to visit my Dad for the day,” is all she said into the receiver before
hanging up.

She picked up the phone again and began to dial her sister’s number. She’d ask
Eleanor to meet her at the house. They could cook dinner, clean the place for Dad. She
put the receiver back in the cradle. She needed to do this on her own. Her sister’s
practicality and cold approach to tragedy annoyed her. When their mother had died, the
loss barely seemed to register with Eleanor. She woke Lucy up for school the day after
the funeral, sat with her on the bus. Eleanor would talk about Sean as if he existed in the
distant past and treat her is if she should be over her grief. It was almost a month to the
day he died.

In Eleanor’s estimation, that would have been plenty of time, too much time
probably.
Next she dialed Todd’s work number and asked if he’d meet her at the Lily Pond at Lincoln Park Zoo after work on Monday. The spot was on his and Sean’s running route toward Fullerton Beach which Lucy couldn’t bear to see yet, and it would do her some good to do nothing but watch the lilies drift lazily across the pond. It was the one place in that soothed her when she’d had her fill of the mess and noise of the city.

Lucy showered and dressed, and packed a small bag. She placed the photograph in a side pocket and zipped it. She unzipped the pocket and pulled the photograph out, hesitating before placing it back inside. She would spend Sunday at her father’s and then take the Metra back to the city on Monday morning in time for work. What she needed was a sense of purpose, to keep moving, and not think about the dream or Sean or the photo or the stars in his datebook or the letter “A” if it was a letter at all. Visiting her father would give her that.

Outside, the rain had subsided and left behind a thick mantle of humidity. Lucy longed for the cool winds coming off the lake. A woman on the other side of the street was walking two white terriers and even they were drooping and dragging behind her. The heat wave, Lucy thought, might have changed Chicago’s weather and everyone who survived it forever. When she reached the corner, she stopped at the bodega where Mrs. Zukowski, the owner’s wife, lifted a white bucket filled with bright wildflowers from their old pick-up truck parked in the narrow alley. Mr. and Mrs. Zukowski always had a kind word to say to Lucy. They called her the Doctor because of her lab coat and she’d never bothered to correct them, secretly enjoying the prestige of the title. She waited for Mrs. Zukowski to notice her, knowing she could lift her spirits with a compliment, but
when Mrs. Zukowski looked in Lucy’s direction, it was as if she looked right through her. She placed the crate on the stoop and then bent to spread the cluster of blooms apart before walking inside without acknowledging her.

Lucy was no stranger to being overlooked, but this? Mrs. Zukowski never passed up the chance to talk to one of their regular customers. She looked at her arms and traced the freckles from wrist to elbow with her fingernail, pressing hard against her skin. A pinkish trail appeared as Lucy heard the chugging of the El train in the distance. There was no time to stop in the deli. If she didn’t catch this train, she would miss her Metra connection that ran north to Antioch.

Lucy sat in a window seat in the last car of the Metra train and placed her backpack on the empty seat next to her so no one would sit beside her. She watched the city fade from view, followed by small towns and parched prairie grass. The land was scorched, the cornstalks dried skeletons. Old dairy barns and silos that once served as visual markers on this trip had been replaced recently with stadium-sized Wal-Marts and look-alike houses in subdivisions with country-sounding names like Bluegrass Knoll and Goldenrod Meadows.

Sean would’ve called this progress but Lucy missed the rural landscape north of Chicago where she’d grown up. There seemed to be no escape from the suburban sprawl and the sameness of everything she saw through the train window. No wonder her father couldn’t stomach the ride to the city anymore. Dad hated progress more than anything. Progress had cost him his job at the Pickard China Factory, at least that was what he told
her when they forced him into retirement after fifty years there. Progress had cost him the little farm he’d maintained until recently. Unable to make enough money off the corn and soybeans he grew, he’d sold off the parcel of land and now the tiny farmhouse Lucy and Eleanor had grown up in was surrounded by a subdivision, her father one of the last to refuse to sell the barn where he kept up with his sculpting hobby and the acreage around the house.

It was noon when the train neared the outskirts of Antioch, the sun a white blister in the cloudless sky. The train pulled into the station. Lucy stepped off the platform. The sun warmed her instantly. She realized she had no way to get to her father’s house. It was too far to walk and, in her haste to avoid Eleanor, she hadn’t thought about needing her sister for transportation. The center of town was a mile away, an easy walk, and her father, if he still maintained his routine, would be eating a post-Sunday Mass butter burger at Drifters. Even though her father was losing his memory, Lucy counted on him to keep to this ritual. She walked quickly until she reached Main Street. The village, as it was called now, looked mostly unchanged. Some would call Antioch quaint; Lucy viewed it as a town stuck in its past. Antique shops competed for what few tourists stopped here on their travels between Chicago and Milwaukee. Lucy noted a few new, upscale boutiques and a cycling shop.

She scanned the front window of Drifters where her father normally ate lunch on Sundays. The restaurant was a mainstay for the town and had been there since Lucy was a child. Their family had come here on Sundays after church and she’d had a few birthday dinners here, too. She had smoked pot for the first time behind the restaurant one
night after a high school football game, sitting among the dumpsters and the sour smell of
garbage and old cooking grease. According to Eleanor, the restaurant had changed hands
several times recently but the name remained on the faded green canvas awning above
the door and their father remained a loyal Sunday customer.

She spotted her father in a booth – his booth – near the back of the restaurant. She
studied him, thinking how this was her life now, too. Eating alone. Staring at his
breakfast as if it was his only friend in the world. The thought of looking so lonely made
her want to run back to the train. Or under it. She entered the diner, the pungent smell of
fried hashbrowns, burned toast and coffee greeting her for the second morning in a row.
When she slipped into the other side of the vinyl booth her father looked up from his
yolk-stained plate of eggs, and stopped chewing. He wiped the corner of his mouth with
the napkin he had tucked under the collar of his white undershirt and then set down his
fork. He seemed to be trying to place her, as if she were someone familiar to him but
somehow out of context.

“Dad,” Lucy said. “It’s me. Lucy.”

“I’ll be damned,” he said.

He steadied himself to stand up, his knees, two wrinkled, knobby prunes under the
rim of his Bermuda shorts. His small, pointed face reminded Lucy of a mole with a wisp
of gray hair slicked sideways. She stood to kiss his cheek and he hugged her lightly,
patting her back. His touch felt uncertain. Lucy wondered if he fully recognized her.
“I thought I’d stay with you a couple of days,” Lucy said. She felt like a child again, as if she was asking for an extended curfew or waiting for him to dole out her punishment.

“Fine, Fine. Sit,” he commanded.

Lucy waited for him to ask about Sean, but her father resumed eating his eggs.

Dad looked at his watch.

“You waiting for someone?” Lucy asked.

He looked at Lucy blankly, and then shook his head. “Not that I know of,” he said between bites of his toast.

The waitress brought a pot of coffee to the table.

“I see you have company today, Mr. Ferguson,” she said, holding out the coffee pot. “Whoa, is that you, Lucy?”

Lucy looked at the woman. She recognized her face – it was someone from high school – but couldn’t place her name. She glanced at the woman’s nametag – Joyce. Joyce had triple-pierced ears. The edge of a tattoo was visible beneath her soiled, short-sleeved uniform blouse. She looked as worn-out, aged from hard work.

Joyce Flynn, Lucy remembered suddenly. They sat near each other in high school, when she was Lucy Ferguson, not Lucy Sullivan. Joyce hadn’t been much of a student, hung out with the stoners, but Lucy remembered she had a beautiful singing voice. The nuns forced them to sit alphabetically at weekly Mass, too and Lucy remembered Joyce’s deep, earthy alto harmonizing with the warbling, high-pitched nuns and the rest of the girls. Sadly, Joyce was like most everyone Lucy knew from high school. After
graduation, they applied at the factory, got married, stayed in Antioch. Only Lucy and a handful of others had gone on to college.

“Joyce Flynn. Wow. How are you?”

Joyce turned over the coffee mug in front of Lucy and poured her a cup.

“I’m good, I guess. Lost my job at the china factory in the last layoff so here I am. Your sister is still there,” she said and Lucy thought she detected a note of bitterness.

Lucy stared into her coffee. She wanted very much to get up from the booth and leave.

“It’s okay, really,” Joyce continued. “I can’t complain. Your dad told me about your husband. Sorry for your loss.”

Lucy glanced at her father. He was engrossed in his eggs.

“How are you getting on?”

Lucy hated this kind of question. No one wanted the truth. That she feared she was going mad. That she’d rather be dead. That she was hallucinating and thought she might be disappearing. “I’m doing okay. As good as can be expected.”

“You know what they say. It takes time.”

Lucy wrapped her hands around her mug and let the heat scald her hands. “That’s what they say.”

Her father interrupted. “You know my –” he paused and looked at Lucy. “You know my youngest here, Lu-Lu?”
Lucy smiled, relieved that her father had, at some point as she sat there, recognized who she was.

“Sure do,” Joyce said. “Me and Lucy sat next to each other all through high school. Lu-Lu, huh. I don’t think I ever knew that was your nickname.”

Lucy nodded, too destroyed to look at Joyce. Only two people in the world called her Lu-Lu, her father and Sean.

“Tell Dilly he’s overcooking the eggs again,” Dad continued, glaring at Joyce.

“Dilly? Dilly hasn’t owned this place in forever. Since me and Joyce were in high school,” Joyce said as she filled Lucy’s mug.

“He’s been coming here so long he’s forgotten,” Lucy said quickly. “May I get some pancakes, just a short stack.” Joyce took the hint and scribbled down the order, frowning at her pad of green guest checks.

When she returned with the pancakes and more coffee, her father covered the top of his mug with his calloused hands. Lucy noticed bits of dried clay on his knuckles.

“Where are you working these days?” Joyce asked. “All your dad ever tells me is that you live in the big city.”

“I’m at the Field Museum. I prepare fossils for display.”

“Really? I always thought you’d do something with art like your dad. You were always making stuff in high school. I remember how your uniform skirt had paint splotches all over it.”

“Just a hobby for me,” her father corrected Joyce between bites of toast.
“It’s more than a hobby, dad” Lucy said, “You have sculptures in the town square and at the factory. Which is more than I’ve ever done.”

“I’d forgotten that was your dad,” Joyce said. “I used to pass that sculpture every day on my way into the factory.”

“I remember you had a pretty singing voice,” Lucy said. “Do you sing anymore?”

“Only to my daughter. And sometimes at karaoke down at Mister G’s, the bar over off Lake Street. You should come some night. You’d know a lot of people there from high school. You doing any sculpting?”

Lucy swirled a forkful of pancake around in the maple syrup. “I haven’t done anything since right after college. I guess I sort of set it aside for awhile. After I got married and got the job at the museum.”

“You should get back to it,” Joyce said. “I always thought you’d make something of yourself. More than I can say for most St. Bede’s grads. Good to see you, Lucy. Don’t be such a stranger. It might be good for you to see some old familiar faces.”

Lucy smiled. She’d had no idea she’d ever made any sort of impression on Joyce at all. They’d barely spoken in high school except to complain about homework and use each other to pass notes back and forth to their friends who sat elsewhere in class.

“Thank you,” Lucy said as Joyce turned to take an order at another booth. For once, the sympathetic advice didn’t anger her. Maybe Joyce was right. Maybe she could hide for awhile in Antioch.

Lucy’s father set his napkin on his cleaned plate, the yolk smears swiped up with the toast he’d been nibbling on. “Shall we?”
“We have to pay, Dad,” Lucy reminded him. “And I still have my breakfast.”

She ate a few more bites of her pancakes and dug through her backpack for her wallet. She left enough cash on the table to pay the bill along with a generous tip for Joyce, hoping her generosity didn’t come across as condescending in any way. She wanted to stay and talk with Joyce more – reminisce a little more; it was so refreshing that someone remembered her as an artist – but Dad was already out the front door, making his way to his old pick-up truck.

The black wrought iron gates at the bottom of the gravel driveway were open. That gate, Lucy thought, gave passers-by a more idyllic impression of the farm than it deserved.

Her father parked the truck beside the house. Barn cats scattered like marbles, rolling off the porch in every direction until they realized it was her father walking toward them. They backtracked and began circling his ankles.

“Buggers,” he growled. “Damn near trip me every time they see me.”

The house looked more run-down than Lucy remembered from her last visit with Sean a few months ago. She remembered Sean telling her father that he would be back later in the summer, when things settled down at the agency – there had been several restructures – to do some work around the house. Her father had waved him off, said it was fine for a man who lived alone and he didn’t give two hoots about appearances.

The black shutters that flanked each window and the white columns supporting the porch badly needed painting. Lucy ran her hand along the porch railing, following it
from end to end like she had done so many times as a child until she reached the corner where she had secretly carved her initials into the last column. The brittle white paint had chipped away long ago but the deep grooves of her markings remained. She wondered if her memories of Sean and what he looked like would be like these markings. Would they fade and weather with time like the memories of her own mother had?

Lucy smelled the greasy aroma of fried chicken as she stepped into the house.

“The older one must be here,” he said.

“Eleanor?” Lucy asked.

“Go on now,” he said, waving her off. “Go talk to her.”

Lucy found her sister Eleanor peeling potatoes, brown skin flipping through the air and into the sink. El embraced her and pulled away quickly. Eleanor fostered dogs for extra income and always about her was the musky odor of wet dogs. The smell spoke of loneliness to Lucy, of someone who didn’t care about themselves anymore. Eleanor hadn’t been in a relationship since she’d taken on the role of caretaker for their father. Her face had grown fuller over the past few years and her body had softened and pillowed. She’d let her hair go completely gray and it hung loosely to her shoulders. Yet, she was still striking. Her buttery skin and permanently flushed cheeks made her appear more welcoming and friendly than Lucy cared to believe she had been when they were children.

“Do you want some lunch?” Eleanor asked.

Lucy shook her head. “I just had lunch with Dad.”
"I come on Sundays now to clean and fix him dinners for the week. Sometimes he forgets to eat. I find things rotting in the fridge days later."

"Is he doing okay?"

"What do you think?"

Lucy remained silent.

"He’s getting worse," El said. "The other night, he called to tell me that someone was messing with the furnace. I came over and the house was an oven. I guess he’d turned the heat on. Can you imagine? We need to move him out of here. For his own safety."

"We’ll never get him to move, El."

"He won’t have a choice," she said coldly, adding, "And I’m not going to spend all my time taking care of him. I have four dogs right now. And the factory. I can’t do it all, you know."

Lucy smiled at the jab. She deserved it.

"I’ll spend the night with him and leave in the morning. You can go now if you want, get some time back."

Eleanor studied her. She placed her hands on Lucy’s shoulders. "You don’t look good."

Lucy lowered her head. "I’m just tired."

"Have you taken care of everything? The bank accounts, the car? Is everything out of his name?"

She wanted to remind Eleanor that he had a name. It was Sean.
“Almost.”

“What’s left?”

“His things around the apartment, some things they sent me from work.” Lucy placed her hand on the pocket of her bag and felt the outline of the photograph. “I still need to sort through some things.”

“Do it sooner rather than later. You don’t need that stuff hanging around as a reminder.”

Lucy stiffened and turned away. She watched the wind blowing the leaves of the old hickory tree near the barn. Another storm was coming, the clouds a dark pewter. Somewhere, far in the distance, was the hole she’d fallen into as a child.

“You forget I went through this with Dad. And I was much younger than you.”

“You forget Sean was my husband,” Lucy said, her voice dark.

Eleanor released a long sigh. “I’m not being insensitive, Lucy. I’m just telling you that you don’t have to keep every shirt he wore, every sock. Keep the pictures, the things that matter and get rid of the rest. You need to move on with your life.”

“It’s not that easy,” she said, her voice shaking. “I’m not like one of your dogs who needs to be rehabilitated or housebroken.”

“I didn’t say you were.” Eleanor pushed a tray of biscuits into the oven and shut the door with extra force. “You don’t have to take my advice. You never did when we were kids anyway so I’m not sure why you’d take it now. I’m just trying to help.”

Lucy heard footsteps and turned to see Dad enter the kitchen. He rubbed his head roughly, as if trying to push the scene of his two daughters together into focus.
“I’ll be in the barn,” he said. “Got some work to do.”

Lucy turned to El and raised her eyebrows.

“Sculpting,” El whispered.

Lucy nodded. She watched her father from the window as he shuffled slowly to
the barn, his back hooked and bent like a question mark. He looked so old. The thought
of losing him frightened her. She took a seat at the kitchen table and El joined her.

“Is he making something new?” Lucy asked.

“I guess. I leave him be when he’s out there. That was never my spot like it was
yours.”

El wiped her hands across her face, massaging her cheeks. “You have to be
careful with him now. His temper flares sometimes and he forgets who is who. The other
day he seemed to think mom was still alive. I just let him think it.”

“How could you do that?” Lucy asked. “Mom is no more alive than Sean.”

She paused. “You aren’t here all the time watching him, listening to him. You’d
think differently if you were here.”

Lucy stood and walked to the living room. She felt as if she was losing everyone
and everything. She turned on the TV hoping Eleanor wouldn’t follow her and continue
the lecture. She flipped through the channels. Golf, the Cajun Chef on PBS that her father
enjoyed watching, more golf, a local cable show with employees from the Antioch
Library. On WGN the banner beneath the anchorman said “deadly heat wave.” It was a
month to the day the heat wave had started and almost a month to the day of Sean’s
death. Lucy turned up the volume.
“Forty-one forgotten and unclaimed victims of Chicago’s killer heat wave were given a pauper’s funeral this morning at Homewood Cemetery, laid to rest side by side in maple plywood coffins in a mass grave that will be unmarked. Most of those buried here today were elderly, poor and alone, leaving so small a mark on the world that it was days before anyone noticed they were gone and their bodies were finally discovered. For Chicago, the astonishingly high toll was a lesson in how easy it is to disappear while still alive, a stunning realization of how isolated and fearful many old people here are. Few were at the ceremony to shed tears for the dead.”

The camera cut to a reporter at the cemetery. “No plaque or stone is planned for this grave in Homewood Cemetery where forty-one victims of the heat wave will be buried. Plain yellow name tags on the coffins were the only clues to the identities of the dead, giving names and dates of the death. Earl Lewis, a lay minister conducted the service.” Lucy watched as the camera cut again to a close-up of the minister. “It’s important to have this service because to live and die alone is a human tragedy, but not to be remembered and mourned after human life is an ugly blemish on human dignity. It seemed as though no one was around. No one was there to care. We need to pray for these people and remember their lives had worth.” The reporter returned on screen. “The mass burial is the largest in Cook County history and the temperature today is still above-normal, befitting for this ceremony in one of the hottest summers on record in Chicago that killed more than seven hundred people. Reporting live from Homewood, WGN news.”
Lucy stood, transfixed. She wondered, again, what Sean had felt when he died. Did his heart explode with pain or was it more gradual? Did he cry out? How long had he been lying on the grass when the woman found him? How long had he been lying there before Lucy arrived, chasing after him to say she was sorry they had argued, sorry that she had sounded suspicious of his need to run. He had been alone, like those people buried in Homewood. Alone as he was dying. If only she had stopped him from running. If only she hadn’t made him angry. She would never accept that she hadn’t played a part in his death.

She walked to the fireplace and looked at her face in the mirror above the mantle. It was a dizzying confusion of silver shadow and light. She felt as if her body was filling with something strange, as if her face no longer belonged to her. Lucy reached up to touch her face but could not feel her fingertips on her cheeks. She grasped for her skin, pulling and tugging but felt nothing. She shook her head waiting to feel the sensation of her hair brushing across her face. Her cries must have reached El because soon she felt her sister’s arms around her.

“Lucy! What in god’s name?”

She sank into her sister. “Do you see me, El? Do you?”

“I do, Lucy. I see you. Now sit down and let me get you some water. You scared the hell out of me the way you were screaming. Did something bite you? The bugs have been awful this summer.”

“My face, El. Is it okay?”

“You’ve got a nice scratch on your cheek. What the hell happened?”
“I –”

Lucy stopped. “I’m not sure. I felt faint.”

El searched Lucy’s face. “Should I call a doctor.”

“No,” Lucy said. She brushed her cheek. It stung where she had scratched it. “No doctors. I’ll be fine. It’s just – it’s just that I’m probably tired.”

El reached for Lucy’s hands and cupped them in hers. “You know, for what it’s worth, I’m not trying to be hard on you. I can’t imagine what it must be like for you right now, being on your own. I’m used to it. I prefer it actually but I know you don’t. I just don’t want you – I don’t know – bottoming out. Like mom did those few times when we were kids. Remember?”

Lucy nodded.

“Let me get you some water.”

“I think I’ll go see Dad in the barn,” Lucy said.

“You sure?”

Lucy closed the door behind her. As she walked to the barn, she inspected her cheek with her finger. The scratch felt long and was puffed. She hadn’t felt any pain when she tore at her cheeks, hadn’t felt any sensation at all. She’d tell Char and the others that one of the barn cats her father kept had scratched her when she tried to pet it.

Lucy shoved the barn door to the side, just wide enough for her to squeeze through, and shut it. The room smelled metallic. Dusty stripes of sunlight seeped through the windows and the spaces between the wood panels. All around Dad, the dust glittered and danced, clouding him in a fuzzy haze. Here, as he blasted away at a slab of alabaster
with an electric chisel, he was his giant self, tall and lanky, the graceful man Lucy remembered as her father. The barn was his own special, isolated world; she had always felt he enjoyed this world more than the one outside the barn door. His carving tools were lined up neatly on the workbench behind him. Even though his work at the china factory had given him some outlet for his art, he’d always been more interested in sculpting. He’d helped Lucy make her first clay sculpture, a disastrous bunny – three balls of clay stuck together with two triangle ears. Her father drew the bunny’s eyes, nose and mouth with a tiny pick and then handed it to Lucy so she could carve her name on the underside of the bunny’s body, the largest of the three balls of clay. Somewhere in the apartment, Lucy had the sculpture stored away in a shoebox of childhood mementos.

The shape of her father’s sculpture was unclear; it was too early to see exactly what he had in mind. The rounded curve at the top of the sculpture could have been a head but her father worked in abstraction more than reality, so the shape could mean anything. Lucy leaned against the wall of the barn and watched him slide the chisel across the stone for a long time. She didn’t want to disturb him, afraid he’d lose his spot on the stone and make a mistake. She thought of the mass grave at Homewood, how awful it was that those people would lay there forgotten and unmarked. Maybe she could convince her father to create something for them.

The marble slab was at least as tall as her. Watching him work, she remembered how much she had learned from him. He’d taught her the values of patience and discipline, the union between hand and eye. It had been so long since she’d shaped a block of marble or wood into something else entirely. As much as she used her sculpting
skills at work, cleaning fossils was nothing like what her father was doing. She missed it. She thought about the last agency party Sean had dragged her to, how upset Sean had been with her for not admitting to his colleagues that she had an art degree when they asked her what she did for a living.

“You’re an artist, Lucy,” he’d said as they waited for the last Red Line train of the evening. “Why is it so hard for you to admit that?”

She’d argued that she wasn’t an artist anymore, she hadn’t created anything in years.

“An artist is what you used to be,” he’d said, turning away from her. “It’s what you were when I met you. Now all you care about is me and those bones you clean.”

“I am still an artist,” she said.

“You’re contradicting yourself. I don’t think you know who or what you are anymore, Lucy.”

She hadn’t defended herself. Sean had been right. They had boarded the train in silence, sat next to each other without touching. She had let herself get sucked in to her work at the museum; she’d lost sight of what had once been so important to her. She’d avoided pursuing it, afraid she’d fail. When they’d reached the apartment, she was weeping slightly, not enough for Sean to notice. They avoided turning on the lights. Lucy had touched his shoulder and he’d turned to her, cupping her face.

“I want you to be happy again, Lucy. I want us to be happy,” he whispered.

Her eyes filled with terrible tears as she told him she was happy, she couldn’t understand why he thought otherwise. They fell into each other, Sean backing her toward
the sofa. They laughed when the zipper of her dress caught on the fabric and Sean struggled to free it. They made love, Lucy more wild and daring than usual, desperate to show him she was the woman he’d married. After, they slept curled against each other on the sofa. In the morning, Lucy pulled a few of her art books she had stored in the closet, made a promise to look into classes or find studio space to share. That had been Spring, before the heat wave. Had it been before May, before the photo of the cabin? Lucy thought back. It had been March, she remembered, right after St. Patrick’s Day. The Chicago River had been a sickly green as they walked over the bridge toward the El stop after the party. She scanned her memory for other images of the party and who had been there. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Sean had stranded her with a bore of a man, someone they’d just hired. After an excruciating explanation of the agency’s computer system, Lucy finally excused herself, saying she needed to refresh her drink. She found Sean in the center of a large group that included Char who did work for the agency on the side to support her shopping habit. The others in the circle were blurred in her memory, white shirts and ties, black dresses, the usual agency scene.

The slowing whir of the chisel brought her back to the barn. Her father removed his headphones and goggles. He looked like a tall stick of chalk, his body shrouded in fine, alabaster dust.

Lucy coughed and he looked toward the sound. She stepped into the light pooling from the windows.

“What are you making, Dad?”
He wiped the back of his hand across his forehead. “I’m not sure I should tell you,” he said.

Lucy cut her eyes away from the marble back to her father, waiting. She watched his face slacken, his eyes droop.

“It was going to be for Sean.”

*He remembers,* she thought, flooded with relief that her father remembered Sean had died. She wondered if her and El’s worries were unfounded. Perhaps his forgetfulness was a clever defense against the things he didn’t care to discuss anymore. Lucy saw the advantages to such a ploy; pretending she remembered nothing of being married to Sean would be far easier than the constant slap of memories. The disruption at the office though; that was so out of character for Dad. She was beginning to think she’d lost her ability to decipher what was real.

“I’m sure he would’ve liked it very much,” she said.

Her father brushed the dust off his arms, his shorts. “I have a long way to go. I’m playing around now. This is just a test” He paused and looked at the marble. “I’m close to giving up on it entirely. I can’t seem to get my idea quite the way I see it in my head.”

Lucy wondered if his memory had something to do with it. “What did you always tell me, dad?”

Her father cocked his head.

“About never abandoning a project?”

“Yes,” he laughed. “Never abandon an idea just because you damaged the stone. Everything can be repaired.”
“Right.”

“ Seems like you never took my advice, Lu-Lu.

Lucy stiffened. “That’s different,” she said quickly. “I didn’t abandon my ideas, I abandoned sculpting altogether. The light in the room eclipsed for a moment and Lucy saw herself carving into the marble, its shape morphing into Sean. Then, just as suddenly, cracking open until the shape resembled the figure of a woman before the marble turned into a flock of birds, swooping and cascading upward. She could picture the curve of each wing, the detail on each feather. Lucy moved closer to the marble and touched the base of it. When she’d been in art school, her ideas had come on strong like this, fast-fleeting daydreams and illusions that she’d sketch out quickly on whatever surface was handy.

Her father came to her side. “Maybe you could help?”

“It’s been so long,” Lucy said finally. “I was never as good as you.”

“You were more than good. Think on it tonight.”

She told him she would and hurried toward the barn door.

“Lucy,” he said, calling her back.

She turned to face him.

“The worst thing you can do is cut yourself off from the living,” he said.

“Okay,” she said weakly.

“Do you remember the day you fell in the hole?”

Lucy nodded, surprised he remembered this out of all the other things he seemed to have forgotten.
“I was only there to help you out that day. If you had wanted to get out, you would have. Sometimes you go in one direction to avoid the thing you really need. Don’t underestimate yourself.”
CHAPTER NINE

The Field Museum was empty and closed for the day when Lucy arrived. William unlocked the employee entrance and held it open for her. She smiled weakly and William shrugged, signaling he knew nothing. Dr. Burton’s voicemail calling her to the museum on a Sunday evening had been urgent. She’d barely had time to say goodbye to her father before Eleanor drove her back to the city. El had lectured her every minute of the thirty-mile drive about what she needed to do to get over her grief and how she should care for the scratch on her cheek to avoid infection. Lucy stared out the window. She nodded occasionally, barely absorbing her sister’s advice. When El dropped her off in front the apartment, she offered to stay the night. Lucy refused, told her the apartment was a mess and she didn’t know how long she’d be at the museum anyway. El made Lucy promise that she would call every day to check in; just until the scratch healed, she added. Lucy agreed half-heartedly and her said sister she’d call in the morning instead.

In her twelve years at the museum, Lucy had only been called in a handful of times for urgent matters. She wondered if Dr. Burton had discovered the missing specimen or was being assigned to another project; either would be welcomed news, but not urgent.

Lucy reached the conference room just as Colleen and Marty turned the corner from the opposite corridor. Lucy smiled fakely and the three of them entered together. A
the head of the table, Dr. Burton sat in a high-backed leather chair, her chin resting on her folded hands. Her blank face conveyed neither bad news or crisis, as if she’d reached a weird, calm state of indifference. Her cockatiel, Curvier, was perched on her shoulder, pecking at the lint on Dr. Burton’s brown dress. Lucy took a seat at the opposite end of the table while Colleen and Marty moved closest to Dr. Burton. A few other museum staff, annoyed yet worried, filtered in, along with Char.

“Are we getting fired?” she whispered to Char.

“Worse,” she said.

Char grabbed her arm. “What happened to you?”

Lucy touched her cheek. “I was holding one of the barn cats. It scratched me.”

“You should see a doctor. That might scar.”

“I’ll be fine,” Lucy said.

Dr. Burton coughed and Curvier squawked out a hello.

“Thank you for coming in on your day off,” Dr. Burton said. She held her gaze above the heads of everyone at the table and Lucy thought the news must be dire.

“I was told once to always start with the good news before getting to the bad,” Dr. Burton said.

Lucy looked down the table in time to see Marty and Colleen exchange a quick glance. If this was about Jada and the missing fossil, she’d put them both in plaster jackets and leave them out in the sun to bake.

“First, the good news. I’ve been informed of a site in Utah that may have promise.”
Colleen gasped and clapped her hands together as if Dr. Burton had just announced it was her birthday party and there’d be cake and ice cream. Char had said the news was bad; Lucy waited for Dr. Burton to continue.

“The Geological Survey was completed months ago, and all of the proper forms and permissions with the Bureau of Land Management are signed. I’m told there have already been a few previous finds, some isolated bones, on land nearby where we will be.”

*We.* The word sunk like stone through Lucy. Dr. Burton had placed extra emphasis on that single word. She wouldn’t, Lucy thought. She wouldn’t dare.

“The area where we’ll do our prospecting and, hopefully, excavating, is *T. rex* territory. We could have another Sue on our hands, or maybe something even better.”

Dr. Burton paused. She reached up and caressed Curvier’s chest. Colleen scooted up in her chair. Lucy expected her to jump up and embrace Dr. Burton the moment Colleen heard she’d be going back to Utah for this dig. That had to be it. Colleen and Marty had field experience. There was no way Dr. Burton would pull Lucy off her work on the gastralia. The specimen was nearly cleaned and ready to study.

“I will be taking three preparators with me,” Dr. Burton said. “They will be Lucy, Colleen, and Marty. Lucy will be the chief preparator in the field.”

Lucy heard a snort coming from Colleen’s direction.

Dr. Burton stopped, turned toward the sound.

“Char will also travel with us to report what we find immediately to the press,”
Dr. Burton said. “We’ll also have a couple of volunteers join us. Jada, who’s been
helping Lucy. And her father William.”

A sick feeling blossomed in Lucy’s throat and she swallowed hard. She picked up
the tail of Dr. Burton’s next sentence, something about the site straddling BLM land and
private property so they’d have to been careful.

“The bad news is we leave in two days,” Dr. Burton said. “Colleen, Marty, you’re
in charge of getting all the supplies we’ll need for the next month. If we need to stay two
months, we will.”

The stunned group watched as Dr. Burton lifted the glass of water to her mouth
and proceeded to drink the entire glass as Curvier hopped from her shoulder to chair and
back again to her shoulder.

Dr. Burton peered over the rim of her glass. “I have made arrangements for
Curvier’s care. I’m assuming all of you will be able to make similar arrangements with
friends and family as needed. You may all take tomorrow off to prepare. Now, I’d like a
word with Lucy. In my office, please.”

The others scattered quickly, no one speaking.

Lucy looked out the window of the conference room. The half-moon shined over
Lake Michigan. She imagined opening the window, jumping out and swimming toward
the horizon.

“Coming,” Dr. Burton said to Lucy, more a statement than a question.
Lucy rose. Dr. Burton held the door for her, then stepped in front of her, leading the way. Down the hallway, Char peeked around the corner. Dr. Burton, a dozen steps ahead of Lucy, passed Char and pretended not to notice her. Lucy stopped.

*Oh. My. God,* Char mouthed slowly, dramatically.

“I don’t have all morning Ms. Sullivan,” Dr. Burton called over her shoulder.

*Later,* Lucy whispered.

She quickened her pace, taking four steps to Dr. Burton’s two as they made their way through the main gallery and down the marble steps, to Dr. Burton’s temporary office.

The museum had given Dr. Burton the office of a retired curator, a diminutive old man who wore bow ties and a straw skimmer hat to cover his bald head. Char had nicknamed him The Barber since he looked ready to bust out into barbershop quartet harmonies at any given moment. Other than Curvier’s bird cage, the office hadn’t changed. An old, overstuffed chair sat in the corner near the floor-to-ceiling wall of bookshelves. Not only was the chair ugly – the maroon brocade fabric had faded to a dull pink sunburn – it looked uncomfortable.

The room smelled of garlic and Lucy noticed a half-eaten slice of pizza, ringed with grease, on Dr. Burton’s otherwise pristine desk. She must have worked through dinner. A book straddled the worn-down armrest. *Vertebrate Paleontology and Evolution* by Robert L. Carroll.

Dr. Burton massaged the back of her neck and turned to face Lucy.
“Arthritis is the devil,” Dr. Burton said. “Most evenings, I feel like a walking bruise.”

Lucy said she was sorry.

“There’s nothing for you to be sorry about. We all have our complaints.”

Curvier squawked *Maw-crel-ya, Maw-crel-ya.*

Dr. Burton opened the door of the domed cage and Cuvier hopped onto a gold hoop swing, still cawing his owner’s name.

“How old is he?

Dr. Burton looked up to the ceiling, calculating.

“Twenty, give or take a year. I’m not sure how old he was when my husband bought him. Curvier was a gift. We were on a dig together in Madagascar. Jerry discovered a new species of raptor dinosaur there. We were newly married. Just two years later, he was dead. Curvier has been with me ever since.”

Dr. Burton picked the book up from the chair and paged through it. “I suppose you know the origin of the bird’s name.”

“Georges Cuvier, the founding father of paleontology. The first to establish extinction as a fact,” Lucy said.

Dr. Burton nodded. “Very good.”

“I took other courses beyond art when I was in school.”

“I don’t deny you did,” Dr. Burton said. “But our memories have a way of slipping over time, don’t they?”

*Hello Jada,* the bird called out from the cage. *Hello Jada.*
Lucy looked to the door. Jada wasn’t there.

“Curvier has a good friend in William. He feeds him and takes him on his nightly rounds through the museum. He’s never asked my permission, but I don’t mind.”

Lucy imagined Cuvier perched on William’s broad shoulder. The bird would peck at William’s thunder cloud of dreadlocks, or stretch down to William’s chest, mistaking the silver security badge for a tiny mirror, like the one in his cage.

“Curvier is quick to pick up language, some of it not so great. I suppose William calls Jada when he’s here. I have no idea how William tolerates his job. It must be lonely to be in this museum when it’s empty. I supposed he calls Jada to check up on her and Curvier hears her name quite frequently.”

Lucy thought back to Char’s gossip, the rumor that Dr. Burton was in love with William. It didn’t seem plausible but, perhaps.

Dr. Burton returned the book to an empty spot on the shelves and sat in the chair. She stretched her legs in front of her, kneecaps popping, and slipped out of the cloddy orthopedic loafers she wore. “I’m not very good with small talk. It bores me, actually. And we have important matters to attend to. The dig in Utah is…”

“I’m not made for field work,” Lucy blurted out. “You’ll have to find someone else.”

Dr. Burton rolled her eyes. “Nonsense. Field work is not difficult, it’s just monotonous. And you have a solid eye for detail which is valuable to me. Besides I’m giving you an opportunity to get away from everything that reminds of you of what’s happened. There will be other women at the site. Women like you. I will tell you that my
work is more important than this … this ability or sixth sense I have. Mostly, I try to ignore it but then someone like you comes along – some tragic young thing – and I feel compelled to help.”

Lucy curled her hands into fists. She was tragic? “So this isn’t field work then?”

“It’s very much field work. Perhaps the most important field work of my career. Organized by a few professional fossil hunters I’ve come to trust.”

Lucy’s eyes widened. It was beneath Dr. Burton to work with anyone who wasn’t academically trained and pedigreed.

“I see you’re surprised. These are trustworthy hunters and they believe fossils belong in museums. They believe what we find underground is a part of our shared heritage as humans. I assume you believe the same.”

Dr. Burton stood up and walked toward Lucy. She circled around her slowly.

“You’re worse today than when I saw you last. I don’t know what you’ve discovered but whatever it is, it’s not helping you.”

Lucy thought about her dream in the desert, the vision she had of her father’s unfinished sculpture. The photograph of the cabin flashed before Lucy. The walls of the room creeped toward her, the air thinning. She closed her eyes and tried to erase the image with Char’s words.

_He loved you. He loved you more than you ever knew._

“I would like to understand what’s happening,” Lucy said. “Definitively.”

Dr. Burton smiled, shook her head. “Let me be clear with you. My knowledge is only empirical. There isn’t enough evidence to develop a solid theory but what I can tell
you is that no woman wants to believe she is vanishing. Our minds have a way of protecting us from what we know to be true but refuse to admit. I’m sure you’ve experienced this elsewhere in your life, yes?”

Remnants of her last argument with Sean, the agency party, the photo churned through her mind. She nodded.

“It is our way of survival, Lucy. Being blissfully unaware is much easier than awakening to the truth. Some seem to believe that by disappearing, they will be reunited with the person that they’ve lost, that there is,” she said, pausing. Dr. Burton looked to the ceiling. “That there is a middle ground or field of energy invisible to us until we’ve reached a certain moment in our lives.”

“Is there?” Lucy asked, her nerves tingling. If this were true, she would will herself to disappear now, find Sean, tell him everything she had been unable to tell him when he was alive, apologize for so many things.

“If there is, I was not sent to such a place when it happened to me. And I had slipped quite far. There was a time when I was only visible to other women who had been through something similar. I had nearly lost my hold on the physical world.”

Lucy looked at Dr. Burton. Her presence was so strong, such a force, that Lucy couldn’t imagine her ever going unnoticed.

“You are coming to a moment where you will be forced to make a choice, Lucy. You can place that moment within your control or let it control you. How long we stay in the field will depend on you and Jada and the others.”

_Jada_, Lucy thought.
“Has Colleen mentioned a missing specimen?”

Dr. Burton tilted her head and Curvier imitated the movement. The bird unnerved Lucy; its wild button eyes seemed to look straight through to her soul.

“There’s a specimen missing. We couldn’t find it after Jada left.”

“What’s missing?”

“The left metatarsal. Marty worked on it, then set it aside. Jada came in and now we can’t find it. It’s gone.”

“The bone is about the size of you, Lucy. I doubt Jada would have carried it out without someone noticing.”

“It’s important we find it.”

Dr. Burton waved Lucy off. “I don’t believe for a minute that Jada stole a specimen from the museum. It will turn up.” Dr. Burton opened the cage and Curvier hopped onto her finger. She drew him out from the cage and let him trot around her desk while she filled his food cup with seed. Cuvier investigated the cold pizza with his beak.

“No,” Dr. Burton said.

“Fuck you,” Cuvier squawked. “Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you.”

Dr. Burton cut her eyes to Lucy who stifled a giggle.

“This is Cuvier’s newest phrase, repeated mostly after I say no. I assume one of the summer volunteers taught him this as a joke, or maybe he’s picked it up from William. Or Jada.”

“Jada seems so angry,” Lucy said, more to herself than to Dr. Burton.

“Grief has many faces. Not all of them are sad.”
Dr. Burton whistled the first notes of “You are my sunshine” and held out her arm.

Cuvier curled his talons around her thumb and then laddered up to her shoulder as he mimicked the song, more in-tune and high-pitched than Dr. Burton’s voice. She stroked the tiny patch of orange feathers on his head.

“Do you know why I love this work, Lucy?”

Lucy shook her head, unsure whether Dr. Burton meant the work of finding fossils or the work of helping women who were disappearing.

“I’ve always thought that we – meaning paleontologists – see the preservation of life in death,” Dr. Burton said. “Whenever I hold a fossil for the first time, I feel as though I’m holding a new life in my hands. It is no different with the women I’ve helped. Sometimes a thing must die before it can be reborn. Now, enough philosophizing. You best be getting back home to prepare.”

Dr. Burton pointed to the thick manila folder on the corner of her desk. She nuzzled her cheek against Curvier’s soft dove-grey wing, and then returned him to the cage. “Be sure to review the geological survey and the research before we leave.”

“Bye-Bye Birdie,” Cuvier sang, the sound raspy and strained as Dr. Burton opened the door for Lucy.

“Be a good boy,” Dr. Burton said.

The manila folder was an anvil in her backpack. Lucy shifted the bag from one shoulder to the other as she walked toward the apartment. Ahead, Mr. Zukowski was
hosing off the sidewalk in front of his deli. The handful of café tables outside were already full.

“My wróżka,” Mr. Zukowski shouted heartily when he noticed Lucy approaching. Lucy waved. He pulled her into a tight hug. She smelled dried animal blood on his white apron.

“Come inside,” he said, opening the door for her and bowing a little. “You have been avoiding me and this place. Have a paczki. Tell me how you have been. I will take your backpack. It is as big as you, wróżka.”

“It’s okay,” Lucy said. She grasped the strap that was burrowing into her shoulder and readjusted it. “Important museum documents in here.”

“Of course, of course,” he said, looking concerned.

Mr. Zukowski’s friendliness enveloped her. He always seemed genuinely happy to see her. Her father had been taciturn at best; El had been motherly and patronizing, more concerned about what Lucy wasn’t doing than what she was.

The deli was an icebox, air conditioning and ceiling fans whirring at high speed. The smell of fresh meat overpowered the coffee and paczkis Mr. Zukowski served free on Sundays for the people he knew. Those who didn’t live on the block had to pay for the coffee and his wife’s homemade pastries, or show up often enough to earn Mr. Zukowski’s trust before getting a free pastry. The deli was older than Mr. Zukowski. The warped wooden shelves held dry goods. Fresh produce shared the wall with a deli case filled with meats and cheeses. A couple of years ago, at Sean’s suggestion – or at least that was how Sean liked to play it – Mr. Zukowski added a wine rack and a beer cooler,
followed by coffee to accompany Mary’s ever-present paczis. Lucy imagined Sean beside her. He and Mr. Zukowski would’ve complained about the Chicago Cubs or the Bears; either team, it was always complaints.

He frowned, his caterpillar eyebrows meeting between his nose. “You are far away. You are still missing Sean, yes?” he asked. “Secret Agent Man.”

Mr. Zukowski knew Sean worked at an agency and liked to tease him about being a private detective or secret police even though Sean had explained to him that his work was neither secret or private.

Lucy nodded as Mr. Zukowski handed her a mug of black coffee and another paczki.

“I am missing Sean,” she said.

*We all miss Sean.* Lucy thought of Char’s words in the apartment. Even the owner of the deli missed Sean. If Lucy disappeared, would anyone miss her like this? Would anyone besides Char and her sister and her father even notice?

*“Jakie życie, taka smierć,”* Mr. Zukowski said.

Lucy looked at him blankly.

“As life, so death.”

Lucy bit into the doughnut, this one filled with a sweet plum-flavored jam.

“You look not good. Still feeling sadness.”

“Yes,” she said. “I’m going away for awhile.”

“Away? To where?”

“Utah.”
“You should not go,” he said, his voice low and serious.

“I have no choice.”

“I don’t like this,” he said. “I have a bad feeling.”

“Me too,” said Lucy. “But I have to.”

Customers queued up behind Lucy, shuffling their feet impatiently.

Mr. Zukowski clucked his tongue. “You should be mourning. In the old country, women mourned for a year.”

“I’m only half Polish, Mr. Zukowski.”

“Doesn’t matter.”

“I should go,” she said. “You’re getting ready to close.”

“Wait outside,” he said. “I have something for you in a moment.”

Lucy sat at the only empty café table. The line for the paczki ran through the deli and out the door as everyone waited to get their last freebie before Mr. Zukowski locked the doors. Lucy imagined Mary baked all Sunday in the apartment above the deli. The Zukowskis argued often, loudly and in front of customers, mostly for show. Mary smiled through her own tirades and Mr. Zukowski acted the part of the hen-pecked husband, pushing out his bottom lip whenever Mary scolded him for befriending too many customers who now expected free pastries on Sundays.

Lucy dug through her backpack and pulled out the bulging manila folder. The edges were worn from use. Dr. Burton had written “FIELD NOTES” in all capital letters on the front cover. Her writing was crisp and precise. Lucy lifted the flap and scanned the first page.
Grand Staircase – Utah. (August 1996)
Group 1: Sylvia B., Erin P., Tracey R., Karen H., Rose W.
Condition of Group: PR

Lucy knew PR meant poor; significant damage and/or active deterioration. It was the same nomenclature used in paleontological field notes. Many of the specimens she’d been assigned over the years were PRs.

Sylvia B.: No potential
Erin P.: Undetermined potential
Tracey R.: Low potential
Karen H.: Low potential
Rose W.: No potential

Time in Field: 2 months

Lucy glanced around her and scooted closer to the table, covering the top of the file with her arm. She flipped through the stack of papers. Each page appeared to be in the same standard field notes format Lucy was familiar with. Lucy returned to the first page and continued reading.

Sylvia B. – 55 yrs., Georgia, teaches fourth and fifth grades, plays piano, husband died of leukemia, good sense of humor but quick to cry, disappears intermittently, no pattern established.

Rose W. – 28 yrs., Oregon, husband died in logging accident, potential visual agnosia or heauroscopy, disappeared on 7/24.

Lucy shut the folder. What the fuck was this? She opened the folder again. The notes on Tracey, Karen, and Rose were similar, though not as dire as Colleen’s. She stared at the page, unable to make sense of the words. Her body quivered. She would not go to Utah with Dr. Burton and be the subject of her bizarre studies. She would stay here; with her father, with Eleanor. She would work on the sculpture with her father; they
could place it in the cemetery near Sean’s grave. She would quit her job before she’d go on this dig.

Mr. Zukowski brought her a stuffed brown grocery bag. Beside her stood Mary, who gasped when Lucy looked at her. Mary covered her eyes.

“Mara,” she whispered to her husband, backing away.

Mr. Zukowski laughed. “She says you look like ghost. Mary brings the old country’s superstitions with her.”

“No, no,” Mary said. “No superstition.” Mary pressed her hands to her heart. “I know. I know things. You must go away, you must leave.”

Lucy stood, utterly confused. “Leave?”

“Go,” Mary said, waving her arms in the air. “Iść! Leave, yes.”

Mr. Zukowski shoved the heavy grocery bag toward Lucy. “Here,” he said. “From Mary and I. You are too thin still. That is what you mean Mary, yes?” he asked, looking to his wife.

She shook her head no, still clutching at her chest. “Jest zle, jest zle.”

Lucy knew the word: bad. Mary was saying it was bad.

“Szalona,” Mr. Zukowski shouted. He made a circle with his hands near his head, the universal symbol for looney. “Crazy. She is crazy.”

Mr. Zukowski’s shouting had attracted an audience. The people at the tables stared at Lucy, wondering what she had done to cause such a scene.

Insulted and embarrassed, Lucy handed the groceries back to Mr. Zukowski. She grabbed the folder and stuffed it in her backpack and began walking quickly down the
street. She heard heavy footsteps behind her, someone running. She turned, expecting to see Mr. Zukowski but it was Mary with the brown sack of groceries. Lucy picked up her pace.

“Stop,” Mary yelled, breathless. Lucy neared the steps of her building. Her heart pounded against her chest. She hadn’t felt such embarrassment in … well, she couldn’t remember the last time she’d felt so humiliated in public.

_Proszę_, she heard Mary shout. _Please._

Lucy stopped, fists clenched around the straps of her backpack. She was panting as if she’d been running.

“Darling,” Mary said. _Kochanie, please._

Mary set the bag down and bent over as she tried to catch her breath. “Listen to me. I know. I know what is happening. I am not crazy. I see things. I see many things in my life. Good things. Terrible things. My first husband, in Kraków, he died. I was young, younger than you. You must find help.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Lucy said, her body convulsing.

_“Kochanie, be careful. Some do not return. There are women. Women who can help you.”_

“Dr. Burton?” Lucy asked, testing her.

“I do not know Dr. Burton.”

Lucy smiled. Mary was as superstitious as her mother had been, carrying the folktales and legends and ghosts from the old country. Her mother had predicted her own death. On the day she died, she said she’d heard a tapping on the window and would be
gone within the hour. Neither Lucy nor Eleanor had heard the noise. Her mother told them they wouldn’t. Death had not come for either of them; it had come only for her. She made them promise that day to set a plate for her on the table at Christmas, so she could be with them. Despite El’s complaining and insistence it would scare Lucy, only ten years old at the time, her father had set the table with an extra plate and silverware. No napkin, he had said, trying to make a joke of it. Ghosts were neat eaters.

“I thought so,” Lucy said to Mary.

Mary lifted the bag of groceries. The bottom of the brown sack split open. Oranges and tomatoes and packets of lunchmeat carefully wrapped in white butcher paper spilled onto the sidewalk.

“No thank you,” Lucy said as she walked up the steps to the apartment, legs wobbling. She struggled to push the key into the lock as Mary watched her. Once inside the foyer, she turned and looked out the window in the door. Mary limped down the street back toward the deli, shoulders hunched in defeat. Lucy leaned against the bannister as she walked up the marble steps. She struggled with the key a second time, hands shaking as she opened the door to the apartment. She dropped her keys onto the floor and toppled onto the sofa, her sobs coming in waves. She would never get to acceptance, never. No one could accept loss, especially sudden loss, a freak accident, a secretly faulty heart. It would always be a shock that Sean was no longer alive, even more of a shock that she didn’t stop him from running that day.

It was happening, Lucy thought. It was really happening to her.

Good, she whispered. Now get on with the rest of me.
CHAPTER TEN

As Lucy walked to Fullerton Avenue toward the Lily Pond, she looked behind her to the west. The city was ablaze with the late afternoon sun and the sky looked endless. Soon she would be leaving the noise, the crowds, the train, the heat behind. She watched the faces of the people she passed, waiting for someone – someone like Mrs. Zukowski – to notice that she was disappearing. No one stopped her, no one took notice of her at all.

This morning, her skin and face appeared normal; nothing had changed while she worked. She considered cancelling on Todd earlier in the day but decided he might be the last person she saw who was connected to Sean before she left for Utah, and she couldn’t shake the absurd notion that she might disappear altogether there, that Dr. Burton was taking her there for precisely that reason. It would be a relief if she did, she thought. In fact, the idea of it made her feel less anxious than she had in weeks.

The benches around the pond were nearly vacant when Lucy arrived. Even though it wasn’t as hot as it had been, the heat wave had frightened everyone and taken the fun out of summer. A few nannies pushed strollers along the stonework path and an old couple fed a cluster of ducks who had left the cool water of the pond for the breadcrumbs the couple pitched to them. Lucy watched the lily pads glide gently across the surface of the brackish water. The park district had recently revitalized the pond and the landscape that Alfred Caldwell first developed in the 1900s as a refuge from city living. And it was
a sanctuary, not only for the wildlife that fed from the pond but for Lucy. Here, her mind quieted and time slowed as she sat among the leafy crab apples and the kaleidoscope of perennials. Here, too, she felt Sean’s presence. His running route took him past the pond on his way to Fullerton Beach. His feet crossed the stone path underneath her feet thousands of times. Lucy heard the sound of gravel crunching and looked up. Todd was jogging toward her. When she stood, Todd stretched out his arms. She walked toward him and he embraced her. He was sweating fiercely in the heat and smelled ripe. He wore blue running shorts and a loose-fitting tank top with the Chicago Marathon logo emblazoned on the front. Todd had been a cross-country runner in high school and posted faster times at races than Sean but, despite their competitive natures, the two remained best friends.

“It’s so good to see you, Lucy,” Todd said.

“You too,” she said, biting back tears.

“You look good.”

“You lie,” Lucy said and Todd laughed, shrugged his shoulders.

Todd moved closer and pointed to her cheek. “What happened?”

“Barn cat. At my dad’s.”

He nodded. “Ouch.”

Lucy pressed her fingers against it. “I’ll survive. It’s not so bad.”

“How are you?” Todd asked.
“I have good days and bad,” Lucy said. She smiled weakly at him. “Mostly bad. Sorry I didn’t email you when I received the box of Sean’s things. I went underground for a couple of weeks.”

“Understood. I’m glad you called to meet. We miss Sean at the agency. I still can’t believe he’s not here. I keep expecting him to rush into work, throw his bag on his desk. I miss that sound.”

Lucy smiled. Across the pond the ducks waddled back into the water as the old couple stood to leave. Their quacking was the only sound aside from Todd’s belabored breathing. “You can sit and stay for a few minutes? I don’t want to get in the way of your run.”

“This is my warm up to the beach. I have a few minutes.”

Lucy nodded. “Thanks for sending Sean’s things.”

Todd sighed, head down. “It was the least I could do. You know I’m your friend too, right? I always told Sean you were his better half. If you need anything else, you can –”

“There is one thing,” Lucy interrupted before she lost her nerve. “There was a photograph I didn’t recognize.” She pulled the photograph from her pocket and attempted to straighten out the creases.

Todd looked at the photograph. He frowned, then shrugged. “Was this in with Sean’s things?”

“It was stuck in a stack of papers at the bottom of the box.”
Todd shrugged again. “There were a lot of papers on his desk. I didn’t sort through them. I tossed everything in the box and wrapped up anything that looked fragile.”

“And you think it belongs to someone else?”

“I really have no idea, Lucy,” he said. He stood and bent forward to stretch his calves.

“We didn’t go anywhere in May but his calendar said he was in Wisconsin on the date this was taken. Did he have a client in Wisconsin?”

Todd looked around the pond as if the answer would emerge from the water. He inhaled through his nose, then puffed out his cheeks as he exhaled. “Not that I’m aware of but I didn’t know all of Sean’s clients or projects. It doesn’t look familiar to me. Do you want me to ask around?”

“You wouldn’t mind?”

Todd shrugged again. “If it means something to you, sure.”

“It does. I would like to know. I don’t like the feeling that Sean was keeping a secret from me.”

Todd sat down again and his shoulders slumped forward. “I doubt there’s any secret here. Maybe someone left it on his desk.”

“I wasn’t expecting this when you called,” he continued. “I thought we’d talk about the old days. I know I can’t understand how you’re feeling but why worry about some random photo that might not even be his?”

“You wouldn’t understand. You idolized Sean.”
“Sean was my best friend. And you’re right. I don’t understand. I don’t understand at all.”

Lucy stood and faced him. Her body was suddenly hot. “Because you weren’t married to him. You weren’t making a life with him.”

“You don’t have to yell at me, Lucy.”

Black fury swelled within her and she felt her hands shaking. “But I do have to yell. I’m so angry, Todd. And I’m so tired of everyone not wanting me to be angry. To be the good, sad widow who’s managing all of this so perfectly.”

Todd touched her shoulder. “Lucy, people are staring. I’ve upset you.”

“Jesus, Todd.” Lucy turned away from him. “You didn’t upset me. Sean did. Don’t I have a right to be angry? He didn’t have to run that day. And I didn’t do enough to stop him. If he hadn’t been so stubborn and stupid, he’d be here right now. But he’s never coming back.”

“I know, Lucy. But we have our memories of him.”

“Oh my god, you sound like the priest at Saint Michael’s. Fuck memories. Really.”

“Maybe we should call Char,” Todd said.

“I don’t need Char. What I need is Sean. Don’t you understand? This wasn’t supposed to happen. We were supposed to grow old together, retire, take trips, do everything we wanted to do. And now all of that’s gone.”

Todd grabbed Lucy’s arms and pinned them to her sides. She’d been flailing as she raged on. He shook her a little. Lucy looked at her husband’s best friend, looked at
the distorted, wavering reflection in his sunglasses. She pressed her head into his chest and waited for her breath to slow down. They stood this way, Todd rubbing her back as if she were a child in need of comforting and a long nap. She knew she should feel ashamed for the outburst in public but couldn’t feel anything other than that she was right to be enraged.

After awhile, she pulled away from him and wiped at her face. Todd’s salty sweat on her fingertips stung the scratch on her cheek.

“Are you okay?” Todd asked tentatively.

She nodded. Lucy watched the ducks weave through the lily pads. She wished her life was as easy as the ducks, waiting for someone to toss out the next batch of breadcrumbs.

“Do you think he was happy, Todd? I’d hate to think he died unhappy.”

“Sure he was happy,” Todd said. “As happy as the rest of us. He had his moments sometimes. Like we all do.”

“Did he ever – recently – did he ever talk about us? Our marriage?”

Todd glanced at his watch. “We didn’t talk about things like that. It was all Cubs and running and work mostly.”

Lucy thought Todd sounded wooden, that he didn’t believe the words he was speaking. “But you were his best friend.”

“I’m sorry, Lucy. I wish I had more to tell you. Me and Sean weren’t like you and Char. We used to wonder exactly what it was the two of you talked about so much.”

“You don’t have to be sorry. I thought maybe he confided in you sometimes.”
Todd wiped his face with his shirt and stared at the pond. “He did tell me a few things,” he said, more to the pond than to her. “He wanted you to go back to sculpting. He always said you were better at your craft than he was at his. He couldn’t understand what was holding you back. He didn’t say it outright but I got the feeling he thought you were scared to give it a shot.”

“Ridiculous,” she said quickly. “I’m not scared. I’m practical. I set it aside when we got married. And then I got busy with work. Besides, our apartment isn’t set up for me to do my work. I would’ve needed studio space and we couldn’t afford that. Sean never wanted to believe me but if I had pursued sculpting, then –”

“What?”

What Lucy wanted to say was that her life would have been completely different and Sean might not have been in it. Or Char or Todd. And she wasn’t willing to sacrifice any of that. Had she gone to New York for the apprenticeship when she had the chance, their relationship wouldn’t have survived. She was sure of it.

“Forget it. I’ve leaned on you enough for one day.”

“I hope I haven’t betrayed Sean somehow. I would’ve thought you knew how he felt about this.”

“Believe me, I knew,” Lucy said, her voice tight. “Some couples argue about money or whether they want to have children but this was our thing. We went round and round on it.”

Todd laughed. “I never pictured the two of you arguing. Everything seemed so good between you.”
Lucy glared at him. “It was good.”

Todd backed away.

“I’m sorry I got so crazy, Todd. It’s hard sometimes to keep up a good front.”

“Don’t apologize. I should be going. I’m meeting a couple of others at the beach.”

“Others?” She turned toward him, studied his face. “You have a new group of runners already?”

He looked at her quizzically. “You knew, didn’t you, about the others we’ve been running with the past few months? Sean told you?”

Lucy shook her head.

“Oh,” Todd said, pausing. “I thought you knew. Sean probably didn’t think it was worth mentioning. Just a couple of people from work, Jeff in accounting and Allison; she’s in graphic design. I really need to scoot. They’ll be waiting for me.”

He hugged Lucy but she was too stunned to hug him back. What else had Sean failed to tell her?

“Todd,” she shouted to him suddenly as he was jogging away.

Todd turned and ran in place.

“Why didn’t you run with Sean that morning?”

Todd cupped his hands around his mouth. “He didn’t ask me to,” he shouted back. He began running backwards and waved to her, then put a hand to his face as if he were talking into a phone.

*Call me,* Lucy said to herself as she watched his body grow smaller until he was a blur of white and blue in the distance. She left the pond and began walking home. When
she reached North Avenue, she stopped abruptly. She pulled the photo from her pocket looked at the picture again, now so creased that the film was splitting from the paper. She looked at the bit of shadow and then looked behind her, toward the pond and Fullerton Beach.

Allison. The letter A in Sean’s calendar.

She thought back to that morning, to the frantic woman who had run up to her asking if she had a cellphone she could use. Lucy had squinted at small crowd gathered around the figure on the ground in the distance. She had handed the woman her phone and watched her run toward the crowd. What happened next was a commotion of disbelief and shock. She wasn’t sure what was real and what her panicked mind had imagined as she recognized that the crumpled figure on the ground was Sean. It had been so surreal that she was certain of two things only: how much she hated the bright pink color of the woman’s shorts, and, somewhere behind or above her as she pounded her fists into Sean’s chest, she heard the whisper – a question – of her name.

*Lucy?*

No, she told herself, don’t go there, but it was already too late.

She ran toward the Lily Pond. She knew the running route and would catch the group on their way back. She kept her eyes on the path. Heat waves rose from the pavement and Lucy felt her skin burning even though the sun was beginning to set. In the distance she saw Todd, flanked by a man and a woman. Her shorts were not pink but she had the lanky frame of a runner and long blonde hair held back in a ponytail.
Lucy looked at the photo of the cabin and shadow in the corner. In a moment everything was clear to her and she stepped onto the running path. The group slowed their pace as they approached and Lucy glared at the woman. She had never been more certain that this was the woman who had asked for her cellphone that morning, and that this was the woman whose shadow appeared at the edge of the photograph. This was the A on Sean’s calendar. Lucy’s body quaked with shock that bordered on rage. She felt black and murderous. She charged at the woman and grabbed her by the shoulders.

“How could you? Who the fuck do you think you are?”

The woman screamed and pushed Lucy away. Lucy charged again. As she forced the woman to the ground, she felt heavy hands grip her shoulders. She struggled to be released but someone lifted her off the ground and carried her away from the woman. She kicked her feet but the more she kicked, the tighter she was held until she choked for air. Finally, she relented and was set her down in the grass. She was panting and a soaking sweat chilled her.

“What the fuck, Lucy? Have you lost your mind?”

Lucy squinted at Todd, barely recognizing him. The sky was a scalding orange. The whole city seemed on fire. She laid back in the grass, unsure whether she should laugh or cry.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

It was the morning of departure. Lucy had been putting off packing but there was no putting it off any longer. She had a job to do, a job she had to keep. If she didn’t go to Utah, Dr. Burton would fire her, and then what? She’d lose the apartment, move in with her father, work a dead-end job at the china factory like her sister Eleanor or her high school friend Joyce. What did it matter anyway? Todd told her not to contact him unless it was to apologize for acting so crazy. He hadn’t stayed for her to explain and, even if he had, she had been too shocked still to tell him what she suspected of his best friend. Instead he ran to catch up with Allison and Jeff, leaving her alone on the grass.

Lucy unzipped the large suitcase and tossed t-shirts and khakis and jeans inside without folding them. She retrieved the crinoids from the box in the living room and slipped them into a velvet pouch. She pulled her hiking boots from the closet. She clapped the bottoms together and the sandy remnants of her last hike peppered the hardwood floor. She pressed her bare foot into the dirt, remembering the trip to Bend, Oregon. Sean had picked a trail that sounded easy from the description in the brochure but it turned into a grueling, uphill struggle. What should have been a two-hour walk quickly became seven, with no water and only a granola bar to share between them. At some point, unconvinced they’d reach the summit of the peak they were climbing, Lucy suggested turning back. Sean refused, turned his back to her and walked on. When they
finally reached the summit, Lucy was exhausted and thirsty but Sean was elated, as if enduring such a painful journey had only made him stronger. He had pulled her toward him and kissed her wildly. They made love on the mountaintop and she teased him the whole way down the trail that his saliva was the only thing saving her from dying of thirst.

She remembered their vacations so clearly – eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in the car as they drove and drove across the country, hiking until their blistered feet stopped them, shedding their sweaty clothes and making love just off the trail, excited by their recklessness and freedom. Once, she’d acquired a raging case of poison ivy. Another time, she spent the better half of an evening plucking ticks from Sean’s back and abdomen. Sean bragged about their adventures – Lucy was certain Sean emphasized the big sky sex, as they nicknamed it – to his agency buddies who opted for cushy resorts in the Bahamas or Hawaii. There was something, some magic, about their primitive vacations, about building fires and sleeping on the floor of the earth, about the smell of cedar and pine, spotting an osprey gliding above them, or startling at the nearby crackle and snap of branches and wondering if they were being followed by a bear or mountain lion only to see a herd of innocent deer caper and leap across the trail like a troupe of ballerinas. It felt extreme, rebellious, somehow, all the things Lucy most certainly didn’t allow herself to feel most days.

Lucy brushed the sand from her foot. She wondered how long these memories would stay with her, how often would she be able to call up the smallest of details. The purple jelly stain on the pocket of her chambray shirt, the way he laughed when he
fumbled with the buttons. The high-pitched rattle of the cicadas. Would there ever be a day when she didn’t think of him at all? It seemed impossible. It also seemed impossible that her flight to Utah would leave in four hours. She placed her boots on top of her clothes – to hell with the sand, there’d be plenty more in the Utah desert.

Lucy stripped out of her clothes and studied her naked body in the mirror. Her reflection pulsated, one breath it was clear, the next her body doubled and, beside her stood a filmy, halo form, a shadowy apparition of herself – a phantom that mimicked and shared her movements and postures. Whatever was happening to her, it was accelerating. She felt that this trip would bring her to the edge of life, yet she had to go. She had no idea how Dr. Burton help – if Dr. Burton even could – but it seemed her only option. Perhaps she’d walk into the desert, never to return. Perhaps she would disappear entirely and leave nothing more than her ghost, this luminous outline that she was beginning to grow fond of – for it was a part of her, an easier part of her with no thoughts or memories or grief to carry around. No wonder this figure, this thing, was so light, so nearly invisible.

She pulled on a fresh pair of khakis and a t-shirt. There was no more time for questions or speculation or looking at herself in the mirror. Lucy reached for the phone, hesitated, then dialed. Her father picked up as the answering machine recording began.

“Yello,” he shouted over the recorded message stating he couldn’t get to the phone right now. “Yello. I’m here dammit this machine.”

Lucy pictured lemons every time he said hello. There was a brightness to his voice, a happy anticipation.
“Dad, it’s Lucy. Were you sleeping?”

“I was coming in from the barn.”

The answering machine beeped loudly. Lucy knew the rest of their call would be recorded on the miniature tape. The machine baffled her father; Eleanor deleted the accumulated messages each week.

“Working on the sculpture?”

“Staring at it is more like it. Is something wrong? Seems early for you to be calling.”

Lucy bit her upper lip. Packing had made it real. Telling her father would make it definitive. “I have to go away. On a fossil dig. To Utah.”

“Utah, huh.”

“It may be a couple of weeks. Or longer. We don’t really know.”

“Never been to Utah. In fact, I’ve never been farther west than the Wisconsin Dells that year your mother drug us there for vacation.”

Lucy remembered that trip. They’d taken a boat tour that squeezed through the narrow walls of the gorge. It had been a year or so after she’d fallen into the sinkhole and Lucy spent the entire tour on the floor of the boat, clinging to her father’s legs.

She pressed the phone hard against her ear. “Dad, I was thinking. Maybe you could come along. We need extra help. Dr. Burton is looking for volunteers. You could help me with the little things. It wouldn’t be too strenuous. And you don’t need any experience. I’ll teach you about preparation. It’s easier than sculpting and you’d be good
at it.” It was a long shot, she knew, an absurd and unreasonable request. She would give anything to have him there, so she said it. “I need you there. I can’t do this alone.”

She heard the dull click of the answering machine as the tape ended.

“The landscape in Utah might be inspiration for your sculpture,” she said into the void. “The canyons and rock formations are so odd. When Sean and I went –”

The sound of her voice saying Sean’s name so casually, so easily startled her. Her father coughed, spit. She pictured him in the kitchen, telephone cord stretched across the room so he could reach the sink. “You and Sean went there?”

“It was a few years ago. He said he wanted to retire there some day.”

Lucy wiped the tears from her face. She had no idea how she would manage once she saw the canyons again, flooded with memories of that trip.

“I’m sorry, Lu-Lu,” he said. “I can’t go.”

She looked at her hands. Her skin was normal, a little flush even. The thought of her father helping her through this, had revived her.

“I understand,” she whispered.

“The trip will do you some good. It’ll take your mind off – off of things. Trust someone who knows. What you need right now is a change of scenery.”

“You sound like Eleanor.”

Her father laughed, setting him into a coughing spell. She waited for him to catch his breath.

“You really should quit smoking, Dad.”

“Now who sounds like Eleanor?”
Lucy closed her eyes. She had pictured her father in Utah working beside her. She’d been a fool to think he’d agree to go. He’d saved her life once already, pulling her from the sinkhole. Once was all a person deserved. She imagined walking deep into the canyon, crumbling into dust, her body a cirrus cloud carried off by the wind. She would never see her father again, never see Eleanor. What would it matter if that happened? No one enjoyed being around a widow. Even the word – her new identity – sounded terribly sad.

“Dad, when mom died, did anything happen to you?”

“Did anything happen to me? I was heartbroken if that’s what you mean. You know I loved your mother.”

“Did you feel lost is what I mean. Like you were losing yourself?”

She lifted her pants legs. Her legs were a faint, lighted silver.

“I suppose I did. It was so long ago. I didn’t have much time to feel bad for myself. I had you girls to mind after.”

Lucy felt a surge of rage. What was her father saying, that she wasn’t supposed to grieve, that she had been wallowing?

“Now, you’ll call me and let me know you got there safe,” her father said.

Lucy nodded.

“Lucy?” her father asked.

“Yes, Dad. I’ll call you.”

She hung up the phone.
In the kitchen, she poured a cup of coffee and looked at the calendar hanging on
the side of the refrigerator. It was August now but the calendar remained on July, the
month Sean died. The image for the month was of a man running on a golf course, Lucy
lifted the page and looked at the image for August. Another man, this time running on the
beach. She let go of the page. She would change it when she returned. If she returned.

She walked to the computer and shook the mouse to wake up the screen. She
typed an email to Dr. Burton, telling her that her father wouldn’t be coming with her as
she’d stated earlier. She had miscalculated his interest. She hoped it wouldn’t leave them
short-handed. She clicked the send button and watched her lie to Dr. Burton disappear. A
few days ago, she’d told Dr. Burton her father was interested in going but, the truth was,
she hadn’t gathered up the nerve to ask him. She closed her email program and stared at
the blue screen. It hadn’t occurred to her to check Sean’s inbox for new email. Certainly
no one had emailed him since that morning, everyone knew. His account would be filled
with junk – notices of sales, the penis enlargement and Russian bride spams they used to
laugh about.

She placed the cursor over the email icon and double-clicked the mouse. The
program asked for a password. She tried his birthday, then her birthday, the date of their
wedding. She rubbed her damp palms against her khakis and thought. His best marathon
time. Three hours, thirty-two minutes, sixteen seconds. He’d threatened to get it tattooed
on his calf and she’d encouraged him to wait until he’d qualified for the Boston
Marathon, another goal he’d never achieve. She typed 33216. Unopened emails scrolled
down the screen. Lucy started at the top. She read each ridiculous subject line, growing
more angry. When she returned from Utah, if she returned, she would reply to each email and ask them to please take her dead husband off their email list. She would capitalize the word DEAD.

As she neared the bottom of the list, she saw the subject line:

Meet at the lake.

Sean had opened the email, the subject line wasn’t in bold like the emails before it had been. She looked at the date. July 16. Her body quaked, heat running through her as if all the heat from that terrible morning ignited inside her again. She studied the email address: AJrunner. She didn’t recognize the email address, wasn’t a friend of AJrunner’s. She opened the email. There were no other words, nothing but a blank, blinding white emptiness. Lucy thought back. None of Sean’s runner friends had those initials, not that she could recall. She rubbed her forehead, willing herself to remember, to make a connection. She thought back to that morning, to the lake and everything she had tried so hard to forget, the unrelenting heat. Sean crumpled on the ground, the crowd of people. She remembered the woman, the one who had run toward her and asked for her cellphone. She remembered thinking, before she saw Sean lying there, that the woman was just another crazy runner risking her life in the dangerous heat. She remembered hovering over Sean, pounding on his chest and, vaguely, the sound of her name. She thought it was Sean’s voice – wanted it to be Sean’s voice – but everything was so unclear. It was a smeared memory and always would be. The only shape to it was Sean’s body – his strong body – lying limp on the grass, his arm extended above his head as if he’d been reaching for help.
Lucy ran to the bedroom and grabbed the guest book from Sean’s funeral off the
dresser. This too, she hadn’t opened since. She couldn’t read the long list of friends and
family who had been there; she’d blocked out every conversation, and all the pat words
of sympathy. She ran her finger down the list, frantically searching for the letter A, the
letter she’d noticed on Sean’s calendar and now, the letter in the email address. Lucy’s
blood surged each time she saw the letter, but she recognized all of the names scrawled
across the pages. She thought of the shadow in the photograph, the long hair. She thought
of the woman running toward her, someone saying her name as if it were a question. Did
that woman have long hair?

She did. She was sure of it. A ponytail swinging in front of her as she ran behind
the woman who had snatched her phone from her hands.

My god.

She was bringing together things that didn’t belong together. She didn’t know if
AJ was the man or the woman; AJ could be either and Todd hadn’t mentioned any
names. And why be suspicious of Sean now when she had trusted him implicitly when he
was alive? She rubbed her face with her hands.

Pull yourself together, she said aloud.

She tossed the book on the dresser and the tiny armature of a sculpture she’d
begun years ago fell to the floor, startling her. It had been on the dresser so long that it
had become invisible to her. She picked it up. It was heavier than she remembered. Two
thick aluminum wires – one silver, the other black – twisted and spiraled upward from the
small wooden pedestal, uniting in a circle at the top. How she had loved the process of
creating clay models and armatures before committing to any shape or form, and the
freedom to make mistakes. Her work at the museum required such precision, such
exactness and attention; such a prison sometimes, she thought. She couldn’t toss a sixty-
seven-million-year-old specimen to the side and start over. She remembered it then, her
idea of showing the unity of male and female. She’d been studying the work of the greats,
Constatin Brancusi, Raymond Duchamp-Vilon, the fused bodies of Auguste Rodin’s
Eternal Springtime and Fording the Stream where the male and female figures were so
intertwined that, when viewed from a distance, she couldn’t discern where one body
stopped and the other started. She had found inspiration in Rodin’s The Kiss. Dante’s
lovers, Paolo and Francesca locked in their doomed embrace. In the sculpture, it was
Francesca who had forthrightly initiated the embrace. Her right leg moved over onto
Paolo’s lap while he only, so tentatively, touches her left hip.

Lucy traced her finger along the silver wire, up the spiral to the circle. The
armature was imitative, she recognized that. She had wanted to emulate Rodin, his
contortions of love and desire, the delicate gap between passion and violence. She’d told
Sean of her dream to visit Paris, see Rodin’s master works up close instead of in
photographs. There wasn’t money then to travel; they’d gone camping instead. Now, as
she examined the armature, it held an entirely new meaning. The dependent and
independent, the self-involved and the self-sustaining. The silver wire, she realized, relied
too heavily on the black wire, which was firmly affixed to the base. She had wrapped the
silver wire around the first bend in the black wire. Without the black wire to support it,
the armature itself would collapse. She had completely flipped Rodin’s intention as she,
in her version, was not the confident, aggressive Francesca pursuing her passion. Was this what Sean had tried to tell her? What he had confided in Todd? His words on that morning before he left to run cried out from the twisted object. *I need to do this, Lucy.*

*For myself:*

How dare he leave her with questions. How dare he have secrets. She looked at her face in the mirror as it blurred and overlapped like a double exposure. She made a fist around the armature and squeezed the wires until the metal sliced her palm. She raised her arm and threw the armature at the mirror and watched her body splinter as the glass shattered, then fell to the floor.
CHAPTER TWELVE

Dr. Burton arranged for a van at the Salt Lake City airport and they began the drive three hours east toward Vernal. Sitting on the middle bench with Marty, Colleen acted as tour guide, pointing out landmarks and various geological features. She explained the complex nature of water rights and assured them that negotiations over water were more controversial and corrupt than Chicago politics. Lucy half-listened as Colleen described the location of their dig site near Dinosaur National Monument, that much Lucy picked up as she stared out the back window at the barren desert mountains striped in terra cotta reds, hushed greens and mushroom browns. It was a raw, naked place, as if seeing a giant’s body lying prone and stripped of its flesh. Here were the earth’s muscles, the rough-hewn mountains and dirty veiny rivers cutting deep curves through the valley.

She looked over to William who appeared as transfixed by the landscape as she was. If he was listening to Colleen at all, Lucy assumed he found her incessant chatter intolerable. William was a conservator of words, and when he did choose to speak, Lucy listened. In the passenger seat, Jada sat stiff and alert. Lucy could almost smell Jada’s anxiety; she’d probably never ventured outside of Chicago’s South Side.

“What do you think, William?” Lucy asked once Colleen finished her monologue.
“Never seen anything like it,” he said. “Makes me feel small, all this land and the mountains. And where are the people and cars?”

Colleen turned around and faced William. “Utah’s population isn’t even three million. If you took everyone out of Chicago, that’s about the whole state of Utah. And Vernal, where we’re going, is less than ten thousand.”

“Is there anything you don’t know about Utah, Colleen?” William asked, his voice pleasant.

“I used to live here. I can tell you anything you’d like to know.”

“I believe you’ve told us plenty already.”

“People don’t give Utah the credit it deserves. All anyone thinks about when you say Utah is the Mormons. There’s so much more history here and some of the richest fossil seams in the world. The Morrison Formation where we’re going won’t disappoint us, right Dr. Burton?”

Dr. Burton nodded. When Colleen turned around, satisfied that she’d been heard, William winked at Lucy, then crossed his eyes. Lucy pressed her lips together and stifled a laugh. She could only imagine what the next week or two at the dig site would be like. They would all be together for hours with no escape in the evening. They would be forced to eat meals together and, she cringed as she considered it, possibly share tents.

Dr. Burton raised her head so her eyes were visible to Lucy in the rearview mirror. “If you know everything about Utah, Colleen, then you’ll know exactly who we need to talk to when supplies run low and where we can find extra help if we need it.”
Before Colleen could answer, Jada shouted “Look” and pointed out the window. There, atop a red, denuded hillside, sat a giant pink dinosaur with large, cartoonish eyes and a wide, toothy smile, holding a sign that said “Vernal, Utah’s Dinosaur Land.” The statue would have been better suited to an amusement park than a town known for its bevy of fossils.

“That’s Dinah,” Colleen said as reverently as if she was pointing out Mount Rushmore. Marty leaned forward and placed his hands on the back of Jada’s seat to get a better view. “She used to be at the Motel Din-O-Ville. They moved Dinah after the hotel closed. It’s a little over the top here. Everything is dino this and dino that. You’ll see all kinds of dinosaur statues here, most of them sculpted incorrectly.”

“What do you mean sculpted incorrectly?” Lucy asked.

“I mean the sculptors don’t know all that much about dinosaur anatomy and physiology. We all know an *Apasaurus* couldn’t stand upright on its two hind legs like Dinah does.”

“Sculptors know more about physiology than you think. We studied a great deal of physiology. Besides, if I’m not mistaken the *Apasaurus* used to be called a *Brontosaurus*. Didn’t the paleontologists screw that one up?”

Marty turned to face her. His eyes radiated a soothing happiness. His demeanor rarely wavered. He should have been a therapist or a yoga instructor, Lucy thought.

“You’re right, Lucy. I’m sure Colleen has forgotten about your degree. I think you’ll like it here then. Erosion has done some incredible things to the landscape. I’ve
only been out here twice before but the land amazes me each time. I guess you could say it’s geology’s art form.”

He smiled, holding her gaze, and then turned back around. Lucy felt her face redden. She hadn’t meant to sound so defensive but Colleen’s history lessons and their travel into the unknown had set her on edge. They pulled into the parking lot of The Lamplighter. Outside the van, the air was paralyzing and smelled scorched. The cloudless sky was a painful, piercing blue and gave no protection from the noonday sun. The heat seeped through the soles of her Converse shoes. She’d have to pull out her hiking boots once they were settled.

“I didn’t think it was possible,” William said as he looked around.

“What’s that?” Lucy asked.

“It’s hotter here than it was in Chicago. Maybe Dr. Burton really is taking us all to hell.”

Lucy laughed. “Nothing would surprise me at this point.”

“Lucy, a word with you, please,” Dr. Burton said. William pressed his hand against her shoulder. She took it as a sign that he would rescue her or protect her from Dr. Burton if she needed it. She couldn’t gauge his relationship with Dr. Burton; she sensed a level of intimacy between them minus the sexual undertones. Dr. Burton was the least sexual person she’d ever encountered and William seemed quite the opposite.

Lucy followed Dr. Burton through the hotel lobby, thankful to be in air conditioning again. The week ahead would be brutal without it, possibly dangerous for Jada who was so young and inexperienced. She’d survived Chicago’s heat wave but there
were fans, air conditioners, shade, water, Lake Michigan. In the field, there would be nothing to comfort them, not even the tents that would pre-heat throughout the day like convection ovens, waiting for their return at dinner.

The hotel had maintained its retro style. The lobby’s paneled walls were decorated with tapestries and fake petroglyphs from the Fremont and Ute tribes who’d settled in Northeast Utah. Chairs made out of lumber formed a horseshoe around the fireplace, above which the head of a mountain lion and an eagle were mounted. A miniature *T Rex* statue, made of cheap papier mache and painted army green, held a dish of red-striped mints with its forearms.

Dr. Burton folded her arms and studied Lucy from head to toe. “We have a great deal of work ahead of us, Lucy. The rest of the group will arrive in a few days, including Char. I hope you understand it’s highly unusual for me to allow friends or family to come along on digs such as this. The museum demanded that Char attend for publicity purposes. As for your father, I am sure he would have proved helpful but I am glad he was unable to make it. I hope, for your sake, that you will keep your distance from Char.”

Lucy took in the words but didn’t understand.

Dr. Burton leaned forward. “Your condition is worsening. I fear I may have to take you away from the others – you and possibly Jada. I will have to explain that to Char and the rest.”

“So we aren’t here to hunt for fossils. I’m the subject of one of your crazy studies?”
Dr. Burton laughed. “A study perhaps, but crazy by no means. And it’s for your own good. I’m surprised you don’t believe that by now. You are wrong to assume that we aren’t here to hunt for fossils. We will be in the field doing exactly what I had explained to you and the others at the museum. It’s important work. And very difficult. The heat is only part of our troubles. The dirt, the bugs, the long hours. We will be exhausted, even Colleen, who appears to have eternal energy, will feel depleted. I have seen the sturdiest of people – women and men – crumble after two or three days. But now I see the need to separate you and possibly Jada from the others. I will monitor Jada over the next few days but I can already see that you are losing your drive for preservation. Your disappearance was gradual at first, barely noticeable compared to other cases I’ve seen. But something has hastened your condition. Do you have any idea what that may be?”

Lucy shook her head. She would not reveal anything of her personal life to Dr. Burton, not one thing about Sean or their marriage, or the discovery of the strange email or photograph, nothing.

“Fair enough. This is sensitive business. What I can tell you for certain is that there is always a reaction on the part of the individual to restore or preserve one’s identity. When that drive is lost, the consequences are disastrous. This is the only aspect of my research on this subject that I feel certain is a fact. I may have to station you and Jada at a different site. To give you some time. I hope it won’t come to this, that you will surprise me and pull yourself together, but, at present, I don’t see that particular outcome developing. I want to be clear, Lucy. I may be able to help you in some way, but I cannot save you. You can choose to be a victim to your own ideas and beliefs or you can choose
to use this time to face what’s happening to you, to inquire. You must find your own way, as will Jada, as do other women. You might find that cold, and I wouldn’t disagree with you entirely. I’ve found that any sort of interference with the process doesn’t always produce the best results. Thus my concern about the presence of your friend Char and of William.”

“She’s my best friend,” Lucy said.

“Indeed,” Dr. Burton said flatly. “We’ll work at the same site for the first few days and then I will assess what course of action to take if your situation becomes dire. In the meantime, I’ll be focused on the work at hand.”

“Which is?”

“Looking for fossils, of course. The canyon is filled with mammal fossils from the Eocene era which do not interest me in the least. There have been some finds recently that lead me to believe the area has a rich seam of Cretaceous fossils, maybe a *T Rex* like Sue, but I am after something much smaller.”

“Smaller?” Lucy said. “I thought you told us at the museum that you were convinced there was something much larger out here than Sue.”

“Large doesn’t have to be measured in size. I’m talking about large in the sense of discovering something new. Are you aware of Mary Schweitzer’s recent discovery in the Hells Creek formation in Montana?”

Lucy shook her head. She wished, for once, she’d feel intelligent around Dr. Burton.
“I wouldn’t expect you to know. It’s been kept confidential for the most part but you learned years ago that paleontologists are professional gossips. Schweitzer’s large discovery is actually quite small in size. She recovered DNA. Elements of blood from a nearly complete T Rex specimen. This is the first time that blood components have been recovered from dinosaur bones. Her claims have been widely doubted thus far. No one believes that protein and DNA could survive for millions of years, but I believe it. The geological conditions at the Hells Creek formation are similar to those here. This is treacherous terrain, Lucy. Finding DNA takes sensitive analysis. The specimen could be easily contaminated with molecules of human DNA. You are the most careful preparator I’ve ever encountered and I hope you understand by now that I am not prone to doling out compliments, even when they are deserved. Too many compliments makes people dependent on them; they have a weakening effect. But that is a debate for another time. My point is that if I discover something that I believe may contain traces of blood, you will be the only one to work on the specimen. Thus the reason it is important to me that you resolve whatever it is that is causing your rapid decline.”

Lucy had seen Jurassic Park. She imagined Dr. Burton recreating dinosaurs, wreaking havoc on the world. It was absurd to think DNA could be extracted from a fossil. Lucy wasn’t a paleontologist but she had been around the museum staff long enough to know that organic matter was far too delicate to persist for such a vast amount of time. The conditions in which the bones were buried would have to be perfect.

“Why do you want to study the DNA?”
“Probably not why you think. I don’t intend to bring dinosaurs back from extinction. That can only be accomplished in Hollywood. DNA would help us answer questions about how dinosaurs adapted to environmental changes, maybe even tell us definitively why they became extinct. This would open a new world to us. I find that immensely interesting, don’t you?”

Lucy looked around the lobby. William and Jada stood near the front desk, studying the rack of tourist brochures. There would be no lounging by the pool or white water rafting or canyon tours for Jada. She’d be stuck with Dr. Burton and a bunch of strangers, working in the brutal heat and sun. Lucy felt so sorry for her, a young girl without her mother, now carted off on an excursion that would yield nothing. She wanted to help her escape. Lucy wanted to escape, too.

“Will Jada be okay?” Lucy asked, tired of scientific matters, including using her as a pawn in some competitive game of paleontological egos.

“I’m not sure,” Dr. Burton said. “I’m never certain about these things.”

“Do you think she knows what’s happening to her?”

“I am sure she’s frightened. And I’m almost certain she sees you are disappearing. I’ve noticed the way she looks at you.”

“There is a woman I know,” Lucy said. She felt separate from her words, as if she were the haloed outline of herself. “She saw what was happening to me.”

“Was this the first?” Dr. Burton asked.

Lucy shook her head. “There was another woman. On the El. That was a couple of weeks ago. A complete stranger. I saw someone – a shadow – sitting beside her, inside
her almost. She tried to console me. Then she vanished. They both vanished, I mean. It was like they’d never been there. I didn’t want to believe any of this.”

“Who would,” Dr. Burton said. With that, she turned and walked toward William and Jada near the front desk. Lucy needed air, even if was heavy with heat. She walked in the opposite direction and opened the door to a large deck. She lifted her face toward the sun, reminding herself that she was alive, that her body still sensed temperature and wind. She’d welcome a rattlesnake bite if it kept her on the ledge of existence. She heard the tone of a familiar, excited voice and saw Colleen and Marty, sprawled out in deck chairs in the shade. Marty scribbled in a notebook, nodding. She knew that distant, stony look, the look Sean gave her sometimes when she’d gone on too long about a triceratops horn.


“Makes the beer taste all the better at night,” Marty said, glancing up at Lucy. “The only thing better than beer in the desert is a good thunderstorm.”

“They come up fast and they can be scary as hell,” Colleen added.

“Sounds like paradise,” Lucy said.

Lucy heard the sound of hands clapping behind her. Dr. Burton was holding the deck door open with her foot. She cupped her hands around her mouth. “Rooms ready,” she shouted.

“You go,” Lucy said to Colleen and Marty. “I’ll be there in a bit.”

Colleen and Marty retreated into the coolness of the hotel. She looked beyond the deck toward the vermillion-colored canyon walls and the Uinta mountain range. The
cluster of hills looked like the humps of dinosaurs’ backs and the rock looked windswept, as if a fierce storm had grazed the first layer of stone, leaving blood-red finger-groove lines and streaks on the surface. The mountains, she knew, held millions of years of buried history. The fossils would be as plentiful as the dinosaurs had once been. It would have been humid and swampy in their time, the desert floor fecund with green foliage, unlike the dried brush and scrub trees she looked upon now. The enormity of the desert overwhelmed her. In Chicago, she lived among cramped loft apartments, crowded El stops and towering skyscrapers. Here the land was expansive, unending. There was so much open space, she felt dwarfed by it. Small, like William had said. She imagined Sean standing next to her, hand shading his eyes as he surveyed the mountains. He’d loved the red rocks of Utah, how the bright sun bounced off the serrated formations and cast colossal, crooked shadows across the desert floor, the pristine air. She had lived that vacation through him and his childlike wonder. She tried to think of a time when he had lived through her. They’d never gotten to Paris as she’d dreamed. He’d never visited the museum to see the results of her painstaking work on display. Her mind was empty. She missed Sean driving everything. She missed following his lead, but a shame washed over her as she thought of how willingly she trailed him.

Lucy reached into her pocket. She rubbed the velvet pouch with crinoids inside between her fingers as if they could transport her back to Chicago or bring Sean back to life, or, better still, take her to wherever it was he existed. When she turned to go inside, she saw Jada near the door watching her. Her image was grainy, like light filtering through a narrow window, and beside her, a lurking halo figure. Lucy squinted to reduce
the sun’s glare and there was no Jada to be seen. And yet she couldn’t dismiss the
sensation that someone was there, a sensed presence – a shadow person – watching her.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

They woke before sunrise. Lucy was groggy and desperate for grande Starbucks instead of the cheap, bitter coffee and store-bought doughnuts the hotel set out for continental breakfast. Lucy caught Marty rolling a couple of glazed twists into a stack of napkins. He placed them in his backpack. When he saw Lucy watching him, he shrugged, smiled. “They’re free, right?”

Marty had big, white teeth. The two front ones curved toward each other, rabbit-like and goofy, but appealing, Lucy thought. He might have been closer to her age than she’d guessed originally. Tiny lines spidered from the corners of his eyes and mouth when he smiled back at her. His amber eyes seemed to darken as he focused on her; for the very first time she sensed a loneliness behind them or a longing. His hair was the soft, brown color of peanut shells and longish for a man. In the lab, he kept it pushed off his face with a thin headband. This morning, he’d replaced the headband with sunglasses.

“Take all you want,” Lucy said. “There won’t be doughnuts in the desert, especially if you let Colleen buy the supplies. She’s macrobiotic, right?”

“Macro-psychotic, if you ask me,” Marty said, laughing. “I give her credit for the discipline but she won’t be as picky out here. She’ll be eating Cheeto-s and drinking beer at the end of the day just like the rest of us.”
Lucy smiled. Perhaps he wasn’t as in love with Colleen as she’d assumed. “More coffee?”

“I shouldn’t,” he said. “It’s so bad I think it would kill me before the doughnuts would.”

Lucy nodded. “I’m desperate.”

Marty dunked a portion of his doughnut into his remaining coffee. “I’m sorry about my comment yesterday, about sculptors not knowing physiology.”

“Don’t apologize. The long travel got to me. And I’m overly sensitive on that topic. Always have been.”

“Do you sculpt still? Is that the proper term?”

“Yes,” Lucy said. “I mean yes, that is the proper term but no, I don’t sculpt anymore. I haven’t in years.”

“Why not?”

Lucy shrugged. “No time. I’m out of practice. I have all sorts of excuses.”

“Do you miss it?”

She frowned. Marty was beginning to sound like Sean when he needled her for specifics. She picked up a brochure about Dinosaur National Monument from the rack and opened it. *Visitors can once again marvel at the nearly 1,500 dinosaur fossils visible in the cliff face at the world-famous Carnegie Quarry. There are even several places where you can touch real 149 million year old dinosaur fossils!* She thought of Char. This was exactly the kind of drek that Char wrote for the museum.
“I liked what you said about erosion being an art form. From what I know of Utah, which is far less than you and Colleen, that’s an interesting observation.”

Marty’s eyes widened. “Have you been here before?”

“Once. A long time ago. To Bryce Canyon at the southeast edge of the state.”

“Four corners region. I know it well.”

Lucy returned the brochure to the rack for another tourist to read.

“Were you there with –”

Lucy stared at the brochures until the letters and colors blurred. “It’s okay to say. Yes, I was there with Sean. It was his favorite place.”

“Then he had good taste. In many ways, I would say.”

She nodded, glad that she wasn’t facing him. Speaking would bring tears. She couldn’t remember the last time a man other than Sean had paid her a compliment.

“Thank you, Marty.”

Marty finished off his doughnut and excused himself, something about promising to help William and Jada load a few remaining supplies into the van. She refilled her cup half way with coffee and poured in an unhealthy amount of powdered creamer. Outside the heavy air signaled rain. William had the headlights of the van shining on the truck as Colleen strapped bungee cords over the supplies. Lucy reached into her pants pocket and gently rolled the crinoids between her fingers. She’d picked up the relics just before she left the apartment, ignoring the broken mirror in the bedroom. If she were going to disappear in the desert, she wanted something of her life with Sean with her.
She waved to William and Jada as they pulled the truck alongside the van. Colleen and Marty had already commandeered the middle bench and it would have been rude to sit so far in the back with the passenger seat empty. Lucy opened the passenger door and climbed in as Dr. Burton started the van without a word. They pulled out of Vernal and on to UT-40 East, their headlights and a thin crescent moon the only source of light. They rode in silence. Dr. Burton must have instructed Colleen not to speak, or perhaps Colleen wasn’t a morning person. Lucy didn’t ask; instead she let the quiet and dark absorb her as they gained altitude. Along both sides of the highway were dilapidated double-wide trailers and a labyrinth of cattle ranch fences. Some of the ranches were in such poor condition that Lucy assumed they had been abandoned until she noticed a small square of yellow light in one of the trailers or outbuildings. With no trees for shade, she wondered how the ranchers and the cows managed the heat. She tried to imagine the landscape in winter, when the mountains were covered in snow but it was impossible to think that this parched and dry land ever experienced moisture.

The sky brightened to a pale blue above a thin line of orange and the dark outline of the mountains ahead of them. Marty knocked on his window and pointed toward the side of the road. Lucy looked to her left and saw the dead bull elk, its body bloated, lying at the base of a hill. Someone had sawed its antlers off. The animal’s eyes were open and Lucy noticed the two bloodied spots on its head where its antlers once had been.

“Utah’s version of a car jacking,” Marty said. “Someone probably hit it and came back for the antlers after it was dead.”

“Awful,” Lucy said.
“I’ve seen worse,” Colleen said without turning around.

Lucy ignored her. In the early morning light, the silver-leafed sagebrush turned the mountains a strange, dull lavender. They were heading toward the Morrison Formation where Earl Douglass discovered the richest dinosaur quarry of fossils in the world in 1909. The fossils dated back to the Jurassic Period 150 million years and, Lucy knew, Douglass left many of the bones in-situ instead of removing them from the sandstone hill. Now, visitors flocked to the quarry to see the old relics. Lucy couldn’t fathom that there was anything new to discover in the area but, year after year, paleontologists found something new jutting out of the multi-colored layers of rock.

The honking horn and lurching of the van startled them all. Lucy grabbed on to the dashboard to steady herself. William backed up the truck and rolled down the window. Jada slumped in her seat and attempted to be invisible as her father peered around her.

Dr. Burton rolled down her window. “We’ll make camp here,” she shouted over the idling engines.

Lucy saw no indications of a traditional campsite, no water hookups, no electricity. Dr. Burton unfolded a map on the hood of the truck and shined a flashlight above it. She called to Colleen and Marty, who were already helping William unpack supplies. She instructed them to set up camp, then move out to survey an area somewhere in the distance; Lucy and Jada would head in the opposite direction. Lucy couldn’t follow Dr. Burton’s exact instructions for Colleen and Marty. She had no idea how to navigate without the city grid and skyscrapers, and Lake Michigan always to the east. She would
never be able to find her way back to the camp alone. She would make a wrong turn or step into a crevasse. The ground was so parched she expected it to crack open and swallow them all.

Finished with Colleen and Marty, Dr. Burton turned to Lucy. “You and Jada will come with me,” she said. “We’ll walk into the canyon to our site.”

Lucy glanced at Jada. Her eyes were two dark stones. Finally, Jada shrugged and began walking behind Dr. Burton, unphased by the prospect of venturing into the unfamiliar, hot desert without her father. Dr. Burton could be leading them to their deaths for all they knew. And Lucy wouldn’t put it past her. She had no regard for others — everything was a science project to her.

The sun had edged into view and the prospect of rain seemed more distant now that they were higher up in the hills.

Dr. Burton stopped and turned to them.

“This is BLM land, Jada,” she said. “Bureau of Land Management. Some believe they act as preservationists, saving our natural resources and conserving public lands. Others — ranchers and Indian tribes and amateur fossil hunters — believe they maintain too much control over the land that technically belongs to the people.”

“What do you believe?” Jada asked.

Dr. Burton smiled. “I believe they’re a necessary evil.”

Jada twisted her lips, considered the meaning. “Maybe we don’t belong here.”

“On the contrary,” Dr. Burton said. “If we weren’t searching for fossils, others with far less experience would be, and they’d sell what they’d find for a profit. We have
BLM permits and permission. What we’re doing is for science, for the benefit of everyone.”

“Or for the benefit of a select few,” Lucy said quietly.

Dr. Burton lifted the lid of her water bottle and drank slowly. “You will both scout for floaters today.”

“Floaters?” Jada asked.

“Bone fragments that have fallen down from a fossil horizon. Lucy knows the difference between rock and bone. You’ll be walking a lot. It is tedious work, but important work. Go slowly, look carefully, and don’t always look down at the ground. Remember to look up, especially if you see bone shards at the base of these hills. Where there are shards, there are bones farther up.”

Jada interrupted. “Are there wild animals here?”


“They fear us as much as we fear them,” Lucy added encouragingly. She glared at Dr. Burton. “That’s it? Jada has no idea what she’s looking for and, quite frankly, neither do it.”

“Lucy, you’ve seen enough fossils in your time at the museum. You know how to tell the difference between earth and bone.”

Lucy nodded. “I guess so.”

Jada drove the toe of her boot into the ground. “I thought we were going to be digging.”
“Digging comes after we find something. Scouting comes first. Lucy, may I have a word?” Dr. Burton pointed toward a small cluster of mountain junipers that were about as tall as Jada but would provide a small bit of shade in the afternoon.

Dr. Burton rubbed her neck and then looked toward the sky. She appeared more tired and sore than she had been on the drive here.

“Are you feeling alright?” Lucy asked.

“The first week is always difficult for me. I need more time to adjust than most. No matter how much time I’ve spent at higher altitudes, I’m always surprised how much it bears down on me.” Dr. Burton paused and turned to Lucy. “I expect you to keep an eye on Jada, teach her something while she is here.”

Lucy looked to Jada who was bent over, hands on knees, watching the ground. Lucy suspected she was following a lizard.

“I’m still not convinced it’s good for her to be here.”

Dr. Burton continued massaging her neck and then lowered her chin. Lucy heard the pop and crackle of vertebrae and joints as Dr. Burton winced. “The point of you being here is to separate yourself from the security of your regular life. Out here, you may find that you wake up from the limitations you’ve placed on yourself.”

Lucy turned away from Dr. Burton and rolled her eyes. She needed more coffee to absorb Dr. Burton’s philosophical nonsense. “And you suppose this will help Jada too?”

Lucy began to cry. She bit her bottom lip to stop the tears from spilling but it was too late.

“Buck up, Lucy,” Dr. Burton said. “We haven’t even started this expedition.”
“It’s just that I feel sorry for her,” Lucy said. “I know what it’s like to lose your mother at that age.”

“Precisely why I’ve paired you together. You know then how important it is to take your mind off all that has been lost. I suspect trying something new – something that doesn’t involve her mother – will be a good change for her. What I can’t have you doing is breaking down so easily. Harder times will come while we’re out here and you will need to find the strength to face them.”

Dr. Burton set off in the opposite direction, back toward the dig site where Colleen and Marty and William were working. She promised to meet them at three o’clock back at the campsite. Lucy could see the pointed tops of the tents in the distance, which brought some comfort. In another hour or two they’d be low on water.

Harder times, she thought. How could it get any harder than it already was?
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

All week, Lucy and Jada walked in small circles, scanning the ground for floaters. Lucy’s neck ached from looking down. They’d been at it for five days straight, the only sound that of the wind brushing against the canyon walls and their boots crunching against the rocky terrain. The sound of a bird chirping was almost too lovely to believe it was real. Lucy couldn’t stand the silence anymore. She stopped and leaned against a boulder and then backed away from it, holding her arm. The sun-soaked stone had absorbed the afternoon heat and burned the skin on the back of her arm. She watched Jada. She was slapping at her neck. The gnats were immune to insect repellant and getting worse. They buzzed around their ears in search of exposed skin to bite. Lucy scratched the welts on her hands and assumed her face was already a blotchy mess. The gnats seemed immune to insect repellant. Jada walked over to Lucy and began to lean toward the rock. Lucy touched Jada’s shoulder.

“Don’t make the same mistake I just did. These rocks could boil water.”

Jada sat down instead. “The ground isn’t so bad.”

Lucy sat with her, the heat seeping through her khakis.

“Do you think we’ll find anything?”
“I’m not sure,” Lucy said. “We’ve only just begun. This type of prospecting can take weeks from what Dr. Burton told us. I’m sure you could think of better ways to spend the end of your summer.”

“I wish the bones would be above the ground.”

“That would be easier, wouldn’t it? And then we wouldn’t have to deal with the bugs. I hope you’re not allergic. Your neck looks swollen on the one side.”

“I hope I am allergic,” Jada said. “Then maybe I can go home.”

“Good point,” Lucy said.

“You don’t want to be here either, do you?” Jada looked in the direction of the campsite.

“You’re perceptive.”

Jada cocked her head.

“Do you know what that means?” Lucy asked.

“Sort of.”

“It means you see or notice things other people don’t notice.”

Jada stood up quickly. “I don’t see anything you don’t see.”

There it was then, Lucy thought. Jada had noticed what was happening to them both. She must be terrified. She probably thought she was losing her mind. Lucy reached into her backpack for the sunscreen and held the bottle out to Jada. Sunburn on top of those gnat bites would be intolerable. Jada squirted a generous glop of white cream into her hand and rubbed it on her neck.
“Shall we get back to the bones?” Lucy opened her backpack and Jada tossed the bottle of sunblock inside. Jada bent forward and touched her toes, shook out her arms as they dangled freely. None of it made sense to Lucy, how one minute Jada’s body appeared perfectly normal and the next instant, she flashed and blinked. “Speaking of bones. That specimen that went missing still hasn’t turned up.”

“I didn’t take it,” Jada said hotly.

“I believe you. It’s just strange is all.”

“It’s not so strange,” Jada said.

Lucy searched Jada’s face. “What do you mean.”

Jada turned away and walked toward the spot she’d left. “Nothing. I won’t say.”

“Do you know who stole it?”

“No one stole it. Unless you call hiding it stealing.”

Lucy thought back to that day. Colleen and Marty had been in the lab with her, had suspected Jada. She remembered Marty losing control of the air abrasor. She laughed then. Marty had nicked the specimen. Or maybe Colleen had. One of them had taken the moment to hide the evidence of their mistake. Why hadn’t she thought of it before? Colleen had acted so strangely over the whole incident.

“When we get back, maybe you can help me find it again. Even if others would prefer that it stays hidden. I’m sure your dad would be happy to see it turn up.”

“I don’t want any trouble,” Jada said.

“There won’t be any trouble, at least not for you.”
Just then Jada’s body tightened. She ran ahead, waving her arms around her head and looked up to the sky.

“Have you been stung?” Lucy asked, running toward her.

“I felt something. Right over my head, like a bird was attacking me.”

Lucy looked up and turned in a small circle. The formations on either side of their path looked like giant, humped backs of the *Stagasaurus* with jagged rocks jutting upward. “Probably just a weird shadow crossing your path.”

Jada shrugged and returned to searching the ground. “Do you think there are snakes out here?”

Lucy had noticed the warning sign about pygmy rattlesnakes as they’d entered the area but the place was so remote and barren it seemed to her as if nothing could survive out here. “There might be rattlesnakes but we’ll hear them before we see them.”

“Are you sure?”

“Not a fan of snakes?”

Jada shook her head violently. “I think I’d die if I saw one. For real.”

“For me, it’s enclosed places. I’m sort of claustrophobic,” Lucy said.

“Like elevators?”

“Not that bad. I fell in a sinkhole when I was a kid. My dad pulled me out. I don’t feel it all the time, just in certain situations. And then I do think I’d die. For real.”

Jada stopped walking, looked at Lucy quizzically.

“What?” Lucy asked.

“That thing you just did? Repeating what I said. My mom did that all the time.”
Lucy looked at the ground and picked up a few rocks, pretended to study them. She didn’t want Jada to see her smile. “Do you think your mom would’ve liked this place? Did she like to travel?”

Jada snorted. “My mom never left Chicago. She never went anywhere but work.”

“My mom was from another country. Poland. She didn’t like America all that much.”

“Where’s Poland?”

Lucy frowned at Jada. First she had to explain perception and now Poland. She wondered how much school Jada had skipped after her mother died. “Eastern Europe. It was a sad place, my mom said. But she enjoyed sadness. Don’t ask me why. I guess she found it romantic. She liked to worry.”

“My mom, too. She was always worried about something. Usually me.”

“So you’re like your mom then?”

Jada picked up a rock and threw it, scowling. “What does that mean?”

“It’s just that your dad,” Lucy said, pausing to find the right words that wouldn’t piss Jada off, silence her.

“Yeah, I get it. Everyone loves my dad,” she said, rolling her eyes.

“Including you?”

Jada picked up another rock, rubbed the dirt off its surface and held it out to Lucy. She shook her head and Jada tossed it aside. “He tries, I guess.”
Lucy moved closer to her. She wanted to pull Jada to her, let her know she understood her loneliness and how much she missed her mother. She forced herself not to reach out and touch Jada’s shoulder. “But he’s not your mom,” she said finally.

Above them, a gull shrieked and they watched the bird, gliding low, weaving through the outcroppings. Lucy remembered her mother’s fear of birds, her Polish superstition that they were a harbinger of death. When Lucy turned back to Jada, she saw her skin rippling, beginning to melt. Her body took the distorted form of the rocks they had circled all afternoon.

Lucy grabbed Jada’s shoulder. It was loose and silky, as if there were no bones beneath her skin. “No,” Lucy shouted.

Jada opened her mouth but no sound reached Lucy, only the distant cry of the bird above them. Jada was no more than a shadow, her figure a dust mote in the sharp sunlight. It was then that Lucy saw the young girl holding a backpack. She squinted. The girl dropped the pack and knelt, placed her hands on a dark figure. She saw the face of a woman, contorted in pain. The woman turned her face toward the girl, her mouth opened in pained horror. The ground beneath the fading figure of Jada quaked. Lucy reached for the shadow but found nothing to grasp.

The quaking stopped.

Jada was curled up on the ground, holding her knees.

Lucy laid next to Jada and wrapped her arm around her, sheltering her from she knew not what. Her heart was a hummingbird. She searched the hills for a sign,
something that could help her. In the distance, thunder bowled through the canyon, its echo reverberating. Rain, hot, fat drops, began to fall.

Lucy lifted Jada and rocked her slightly as the rain splattered against the dry ground, the drops thick as paint.

“Tell me,” Lucy said. “Tell me you’re okay.”

“I think so,” Jada said meekly.

“You were the one who found your mother,” Lucy said. “I saw you with her.”

Jada burrowed into Lucy’s chest. “Yes,” she whispered.

“It’s not your fault. Don’t think for a minute it’s your fault.”

“But it is,” Jada said. “It is. I should have been there.”

The rain soaked through Lucy’s shirt to her skin. She had no idea how to comfort Jada, pull her out of her grief and guilt. Finally she said the only reasonable thing she could think of.

“I should have been there, too.”

When Lucy and Jada returned to the truck, Dr. Burton eyed them suspiciously.

“I suspect there’s nothing to report from your expedition,” she said.

Jada looked at Lucy, her eyes pleading for secrecy. They’d made a pact not to speak of what had happened.

Lucy shook her head, water dripping down her face. “Nothing.” She watched the windshield wipers move, the repetitive motion calming her. Jada appeared much better. Her figure wasn’t as blurred, yet there was still a shimmery vibration surrounding her.
Perhaps all she had needed to move through her grief was to admit the guilt she felt about not being home when her mother died. If only it were that easy for her, Lucy hoped.

At the campsite, the others were huddled in their tents waiting out the rain. Lucy saw William’s face between the flaps of his tent. He waved and she raised her hand, pointing toward the kitchen tent. The desert floor was a thick gravy of mud that reached up and pulled at Lucy’s ankles. Every step was an effort. She felt the familiar zing of claustrophobia and tried to move faster toward the tent. She lifted the flap and stepped inside.

Char nearly knocked her over, hugging her so tightly, Lucy began to seize up. When Char finally let her go, Lucy bent over. She placed her hands on her knees, panting.

“Don’t ever do that again,” Lucy said.

“I’m just glad to see you alive. This place is like the end of days. I keep waiting for Jesus to walk out of the desert.”

Lucy looked at Char closely. Char’s khakis pulled tight against her hips, the pockets flaring out like wings. Her hair was scraggly underneath a vintage fedora, not necessarily proper dig attire but she wore it well. But for the red lipstick, her face remained unpainted. Her green eyes shined like a cat’s caught in a camera flash. She looked beautiful, Lucy thought, less manufactured.

“They found some bones today,” Char said. “I’d barely been here an hour when they came across it. The others think it’s something big. I even helped dig.”

“I thought you weren’t coming for a few more days,” Lucy said.
“It has been a few more days,” Char said. “I’m actually enjoying myself. Even if we’re in the middle of nowhere.”

Lucy opened the flap of the tent to let the rain-cooled air inside. She watched Dr. Burton make her way toward them along with Colleen and Marty. The sky had cleared and the mud was quickly drying into dusty mounds around their footprints. Char handed Lucy a can of beer. They popped the tops and toasted as Colleen and Marty entered the tent.

“We’re celebrating,” Char said.

Colleen and Marty pulled beers from the small refrigerator that was hooked up to the generator.

“Celebrating what?” Dr. Burton asked as she entered the tent.

“The big find today,” Char said. “And all the hard work.”

“Nothing like a cold beer after a long day in the desert. I’m not sure there’s anything better,” Marty said, searching Lucy’s face.

She turned away, embarrassed by the attention. Lucy looked at the group. Everyone showed signs of sunburn, especially Char, and they were filthy. Even though they’d all been caught in the rain, mud streaked their necks and hands, clung to the cuffs of their pants in thick clumps.

“We may be on to something even bigger than the Allosaurus Earl Douglass discovered around here in the early 1900s,” Colleen said, directing her words at Lucy. “In your world, that would be like —” Colleen paused. “Like discovering a sculpture by someone famous hidden in someone’s garage.”
Lucy smiled. Like Rodin, she wanted to say. Like Brancusi or Donatello or Bernini. “In my world?” Lucy asked.

“You know, as an artist. I assume this fieldwork isn’t all that exciting for you.”

“You know what they say about assuming,” Lucy said flatly. “Do you need me to help tomorrow?” She didn’t want to go back to scouting with Jada.

“You and Jada need to scout at least another day or so,” Dr. Burton said. “The others have formed a good team. No need to disturb their dynamic.”

Lucy stiffened at the implication that she would be a distraction, or worse, a detriment to the team. “I thought I could help with the preparation, help move things along faster.”

“Colleen and Marty have it covered,” Dr. Burton said.

Colleen beamed at Dr. Burton and then turned to Lucy, smiling. “How about you? Any luck today?”

Lucy shook her head and then eyed Dr. Burton. “Not yet. Jada and I scouted out an area but didn’t get very far. Jada wasn’t feeling well.”

Lucy held Dr. Burton’s gaze. “She’s resting now,” Lucy continued.

“Probably dehydration,” Marty said.

“Or maybe this is just too much for someone so young,” Lucy said.

“Who needs another?” Char asked, oblivious.

“Better watch it,” Marty said. “As good as it tastes, the alcohol sneaks up on you out here. You’ll regret it tomorrow.”

Char laughed. “I can hold my own.”
Marty shotgunning his beer and held the empty can out to Char. “We’ll see about that.”

Lucy smiled at Char. She’d made another new friend in record time. Colleen walked to the stove and loudly rearranged the pots and pans. She sensed it too, Lucy thought. She’d felt the same anxiety many times with Sean. He befriended women easily and, sometimes, they misinterpreted his intentions. She always let it play out; she had trusted Sean. Now she wondered if that had been a mistake, the biggest mistake of her life.

Lucy joined Colleen at the stove. “Let me help you with dinner.”

“It’s nothing but boiling pasta and opening a can of sauce,” she said sharply.

Lucy pulled a few cans of sauce from a crate of supplies and searched for the can opener among the jumbled utensils near the stove. Behind her, she heard the pop-woosh of beer cans opening.

“How was it out there today?” Lucy asked.

“Fantastic,” Colleen said, her voice quick and tight. “This could be huge. Bigger than Sue maybe. It’s just a feeling I have.”

“I hope your instincts are correct.”

Colleen dumped the spaghetti into the boiling water and then turned to look at Marty and Char. Lucy followed her gaze. Char and Marty stood near the opening of the tent, laughing. Dr. Burton was sitting at one of the card tables where they’d soon eat dinner. She rubbed her calves and knees.

“My instincts never fail,” Colleen said bitterly.
Lucy backed away, sensing Colleen wanted to be left alone. “I’m going to get a better look at the sunset.”

Char pinched Lucy’s arm as she passed. Lucy ignored the signal, unsure whether it meant “save me from this conversation” or “don’t interrupt me, I’m in love already.” She didn’t bother turning to read Char’s expression. She walked toward the edge of their camp where they’d parked the truck. A nearby arroyo had filled with rushing water. Had the rain continued much longer, their site may have flooded. She would tell Dr. Burton about it at dinner.

She walked along the water’s edge, heading west toward the setting sun. The sky was day-glo orange. She shook off the remnants of the tension she’d absorbed from Colleen. Whatever was going on between Colleen and Marty, she wanted no part of, and would tell Char to steer clear, too. Char enjoyed playing savior. A memory of Sean flooded her. She had stayed at work much later than usual and knew that Sean would be home by the time she arrived. It was late winter, she remembered. There was snow on the ground as she walked from the El stop toward their apartment building. She had wanted to surprise him. She stopped in the diner near their building and went into the restroom. She stripped out of her sweater, her bra, and stuffed them into the pockets of her winter coat. Her pants and shoes were a necessity. When she got home, she would quickly take off her coat, wrap herself around him. She was excited just thinking about his reaction. Something like this was so unlike her but she wanted Sean to see another side of her, someone unpredictable. Things had been dry between them. He’d been teasing her about her uniform, the khakis and t-shirt and Converse shoes she wore to work every day. Hurt,
she argued that her work was messy and meticulous; she couldn’t be bothered with jewelry or dresses or anything that would be easily damaged by dirt and dust.

When she arrived home, he wasn’t there. She called his cell and there was no answer. She’d just talked to him and he’d told her he was at home. And she’d told him—lying—that she’d be at work another hour or so. She waited, growing more frustrated as time passed. She sat on the sofa facing the door for what felt like an impossibly long time. She called his cell again. No answer. She ran through the litany of possibilities. Maybe he was at the bodega and Mr. Zukowski was holding him up with another long story about the old country. Maybe he’d gone for a run. She assured herself there was no reason to suspect he’d lied to her. Before an hour had passed, she took off her coat, removed her shoes and pants, and put on her pajamas. When he came home, she was in the bedroom, lying on the bed. She heard him on the phone, laughing. She tiptoed through the bedroom and, as he neared the door, she jumped into view, startling him so much he dropped the phone and swung at her as if she were an intruder.

She reached for the phone to pick it up but Sean grabbed it first. “What the fuck were you thinking” he yelled as he pocketed his phone.

“Who were you talking to?” she asked.

“No one,” he said. He walked out of the bedroom and she began to follow him.

“Leave me alone,” he said.

She’d been so hurt that he’d ruined her surprise that she hadn’t pressed him about who he was talking to. They’d argued some, Sean telling her bluntly that he felt like she
was spying on him, that she inspected every little thing he did. It was the first time she felt as if she was losing him somehow, as if everything she did or said pushed him away.

As she watched a final flare of sunshine spread across the rocks before it sunk into the horizon, Lucy replayed the scene in her mind. He could have been talking to anyone but it was the way he laughed – so similar to the laughter she’d heard coming from Marty and Char in the tent.

There was a rustling behind her. Lucy jumped and scrambled to her feet, expecting a cougar or coyote. Dr. Burton approached her and slowly crouched into a sitting position on the ground. She stretched out her legs and rubbed her knees. Lucy couldn’t imagine that being in the field like this did much for her arthritis. Without her brown dress, she was less imposing, diminished even. Lucy realized this would be the only time she would see the top of Dr. Burton’s head. Her hair was thinning at the crown, her scalp pink with sunburn.

“Night comes quickly in the desert. We’re miles away from city lights. You’ll experience a whole new level of darkness out here.”

Lucy sat next to Dr. Burton. “I lived on a farm. I know that kind of darkness.”

“Lovely, isn’t it?”

Lucy looked ahead of her. Even though the sun was about to sink behind the rocks, it gave off a powerful, unearthly glow. “Yes. I can’t remember the last time I stopped to watch the sun set.”

“Makes you realize how small we humans are. In the general scheme of things. We could perish and the Earth would continue, as it did after the dinosaurs expired. I’ve
always found that fascinating. We have such hubris, thinking that we can conquer nature. Or forestall death somehow. Whenever I’m in the field, I’m reminded how much the earth doesn’t care if we live or die. It’s something my husband always said. I guess that why he took risks so readily.”

Lucy turned to Dr. Burton. Her body was a shimmering veil of light.

“Dr. Burton –”

“You’ll learn that it doesn’t ever end; that is, if and when you recover. There are things that will trigger it. For me, it is being on a dig without my husband. As much as I love digs, I lost him on one, if you recall. Which reminds me, what happened with Jada today? She won’t come out of her tent for dinner.”

A small flock of gulls glided above the rocks, their thin silhouettes diving and soaring like kites. She watched the birds, considered how to answer. Telling Dr. Burton would only forward her case study. She clearly had no interest in Jada or anyone for that matter. She’d just admitted that humans didn’t matter in the general scheme of the planet. Humans were objects to be studied, similar to fossils.

“She’s not feeling well,” Lucy said finally. “I’m sure it was the heat. She’s very young, you know.”

“And I’m very old. We all learn to manage out here. If you don’t want to tell me what happened, I understand. I ask you, though, to consider Jada and her condition. It’s getting worse. However, you appear to have gained strength since this morning. Are you finding this helpful?”
“I have no idea what’s helpful. No idea at all. I’m here to work. I’m not here to help you with your case studies.”

“I’m not keeping you here. You may choose to leave at any time.”

Lucy bit her bottom lip. “I have no choice at all. You demanded that I attend the dig and I am here to do my job. A job I have to keep now that I’m on my own.” She couldn’t say it. She could not call herself a widow, that ugly, ugly word.

Lucy said this with such force that her words seemed to echo through the canyon. They fell silent for awhile. There was very little light left in the sky. Lucy stood. “It’s getting dark.”

Dr. Burton gazed at the canyon walls, lost in thought. Lucy was unsure if she had heard her at all. “More than two hundred and fifty million years ago, everything died out,” Dr. Burton said. “The earth’s most severe extinction. We call it the Great Dying, have you heard of it?”

Lucy nodded but Dr. Burton took no notice.

“Nearly every invertebrate and most of the vertebrates completely wiped out. It took the Earth ten million years to recover. And still, we don’t have enough evidence to claim the cause for certain. Too much has been lost over the years. Some believed the main culprit was a massive volcanic eruption. Others argued it was an asteroid impact and some pointed toward more gradual environmental processes. I used to find it impossible to believe that it could have been a gradual process and not a catastrophic, one-time event. I don’t anymore. The Earth is constantly dying and recovering. So are we, wouldn’t you say?”
Lucy nodded. She covered her eyes with both hands. She wanted to tell Dr. Burton she wasn’t that dim, she understood the analogy. She recognized that something inexplicable and catastrophic was happening to her and Jada, too. But she wasn’t sure she cared or had the strength to recover. Perhaps she had lost her drive for preservation as Dr. Burton said. A catastrophic event that would send her into oblivion didn’t sound so bad.

Dr. Burton coughed and then held out her hand. Lucy took it and helped her stand. Dr. Burton’s skin was cold, her face shimmered and blurred until she inhaled deeply, lips pursed together, and let out a deep, growling hmmmmm. If arthritis had a sound, Lucy thought, it was the low groan coming from Dr. Burton. Lucy slowed her pace to match Dr. Burton’s.

“I’m sure you noticed the arroyo when you came out here,” Lucy said.

Dr. Burton nodded. “We’ll monitor it. I believe we’re far enough away from it. This isn’t the rainy season. Besides, you must know by now that I am very careful around water that holds the potential for danger. I learned long ago what it’s capable of.”

Lucy looked at the ground. The story of her husband’s drowning was common knowledge. What remained a question was who or what caused it.

Orange light billowed ahead. Someone had built a campfire. The flames were taller than Lucy. She inhaled the sharp scent of smoke and burning wood, relieved that the fire might keep the biting insects at a distance. The campfire called up so many vacations with Sean, sitting cross-legged outside the ring of logs until the fire had dwindled to white ash. She stopped suddenly, unsure she could face such a happy scene. Char jogged toward them with a stick raised high, white goo dripping to the ground.
“Who wants a marshmallow?” The way Char wobbled toward them told Lucy she’d had a few more beers, possibly shared a joint with Marty and Colleen.

Char held the stick out between Lucy and Dr. Burton. Lucy tested the temperature of the marshmallow before she removed it from the stick and popped it in her mouth. She was famished, having missed dinner with the others.

“Next up, ghost stories,” Char said, giggling. “Marty says he has a few from when he was a Boy Scout that will keep us up all night.”

She was definitely high, Lucy thought. And drunk. William waved as Lucy approached. Next to him sat Jada, sleepy and stone-faced, staring at the fire. Lucy thought William must have forced her out of the tent. Hopefully, he had forced her to eat dinner, too. Marty was stoking the fire with a long, crooked stick. Colleen was, as Lucy expected, rolling a joint. Dr. Burton didn’t notice or didn’t care, which Lucy found odd. Then again, everything about Dr. Burton was odd. Dr. Burton excused herself from the fire, told them she’d had enough for one day and would see them all in the morning.

“Before sun up,” she said, emphasizing the word before. “Try not to blow yourselves out on the first night.”

Char handed Lucy the bag of marshmallows and her stick. William looked up at Lucy as she began to crouch down near Jada.

“Long day, I hear,” he said.

“Very,” Lucy said. She held out the bag to Jada and she reached in for a marshmallow, shoved it in her mouth without roasting it.
“Looks like you’re both eating dessert for dinner,” William said. “Jada didn’t eat either. She just now came out of the tent. Told me she didn’t feel good, that it was a female thing.”

Jada looked up at William and scowled, as if to say she was there, she could hear him talking about her.

Lucy placed a hand on Jada’s arm. “I know all about those things. They can be wicked.”

“Now that you’re here, I think I’ll turn in myself. My sleep is all messed up. Normally I’d be going into work about now.”

William folded Jada into his thick arms, her body disappearing into his bulk. He held her for a moment, then kissed her forehead. “No drinking for her. And no other stuff either,” he said, looking at Colleen across the fire.

Colleen met William’s gaze and held it. “I would never share with minors,” she said seriously.

Satisfied, William stood and made his way to his tent. As the darkness settled around them, with only the campfire and a few lanterns lighting their site, Lucy felt less comfortable. The expansiveness of the landscape she had found comforting earlier in the day began to dissipate as the site shrunk to the small circle of glowing faces around the fire. Marty turned up the CD player that was perched on the top of a stack of firewood. Colleen took a deep drag of the joint and passed it to Marty. She raised her head and blew smoke into the air as she exhaled, sighing. Lucy recognized the band playing. The
Jayhawks. One of Sean’s favorites. She’d heard their songs so many times that she knew most of them by heart, even knew the order of the songs on the album.

Char sat next to her and handed her a beer.

“How many have you had?” Lucy asked.

“I lost track after dinner.”

“No good will come of this, you know. You’re going to feel like shit tomorrow.”

“It’s worth it,” Char said.

“It’s not worth it.” Lucy turned to Jada. “Don’t listen to her. The hangover is never worth it.”

“I know about hangovers,” Jada said. She stood and wiped the dirt from the back of her jeans. “Good night.”

Lucy watched Jada walk to her tent. She wanted to be sure there were no detours.

“What did I do?” Char asked.

“You didn’t do anything. She’s a teenager?”

Lucy looked at Colleen and Marty. Colleen’s head rested on Marty’s shoulder. She was looking up, studying the star-speckled sky. Shadows from the fire’s dwindling flames flickered across their faces. Behind them was nothing but desert darkness. Colleen was blissed out in Marty’s arms.

“You don’t talk about him, you know,” Char said.

“Hmm?”

“About Sean. You don’t talk about him like I thought you would.”
Lucy crossed her arms tightly. The air was cooling quickly. “I want to. I really do. But every time I do, it makes me feel like he’s still here. And then I have to convince myself all over again that he’s not.”

The Jayhawks came on the radio. “Nothing Left to Borrow.” She loved this song, the harmonies. Marty had no idea, she knew, but listening to these songs around the campfire was more painful than lying down on the fire itself. She leaned against Char.

“I’m so tired,” Lucy said. “I have never felt this tired.”

“You’re telling me,” Char said. “I’ve never worked so hard in my life.”

“That’s not what I mean, Char. I mean brain tired. Head and heart tired. I wouldn’t mind going to sleep for a very long time.”

“Don’t say things like that,” Char said.

“Look at them,” Lucy whispered. She raised her hand slightly and pointed to Colleen and Marty. Their eyes were closed; they were either sleeping or very good at pretending. “Jada told me they’re behind the missing fossil. If you ask me, Colleen got careless and nicked the specimen and will pin it on Marty if it comes to it.”

Char raised her eyebrows. “She would do that to Marty?”

Lucy shrugged. “And more, I think. She’s out for herself and no one else. Don’t let the pot fool you.”

Lucy looked at the kitchen tent. “Are you still hungry?”

“Starved, of course,” Char groaned as she struggled to stand up.

As they walked to the kitchen tent, Lucy looked back at the campfire. Colleen and Marty were definitely asleep, their bodies merged for warmth. The air was chilly away
from the fire and Lucy suspected the cold breeze would wake them once the fire went out. Or perhaps they’d sleep under the stars as she and Sean had done a few times. She’d always enjoyed being out in the open and falling asleep as she tried finding and naming the constellations. In school, she’d experimented with a set of sculptures based on the constellations – Orion, Lyra, Taurus, Ursa Major and Minor. She’d abandoned the idea, just as her father warned her not to do. He told her that she needed to let go, stop trying to control the process and the form and shape would come to her. She hadn’t understood him at the time. She thought she needed to be in control of every aspect of the process after the initial idea presented itself in the flash and dreams she experienced. Later, as she watched her father work, she realized how free and loose he remained as his ideas took shape. It wasn’t until he committed to the miniature clay models that he took control of his work. She envied this ability of his to let go so willingly. Sean had been able to do this, too. And Char. Why couldn’t she? She placed controls on everything, including Sean and even Char tonight when she was having such fun.

Lucy grabbed Char’s arm and stopped before she entered the tent. “Look up,” Lucy said. “Have you ever seen so many stars?”


Lucy pointed toward the sky. “That big endless line of stars there. That’s the Milky Way. There’s too much light in the city to see it like this.”

“It’s like a silver rainbow,” Char said.

Lucy laughed. “That might be the marijuana talking.”
“Come on,” Char said. “I’m really hungry now.”

Char pulled the spaghetti, still in its pot, from the refrigerator and placed the pot on the table. She dug through the storage tub and waved two forks in the air. Then she held up a finger to indicate Lucy should wait, there was more to come.

“Should we heat it up?”

Char laughed. “It’s like we’re back in college. Foraging for survival.” She moved behind the stack of supplies and came back brandishing a bag of potato chips. “Secret stash, Marty is the only one who knows about it.”

Lucy laughed now. Char was helping her forget Dr. Burton’s crazy talk and why they were here. She realized, for a moment when they were looking at the stars, she’d completely forgotten about Sean. A surge of guilt passed through her.

“So you seem to be getting along with Ms. Medieval. Are you turning on me?” Char asked.

“She’s not so bad once you get to know her,” Lucy said meekly. “Mostly I’m babysitting Jada.”

Char nodded as she munched. She wiped a few stray crumbs from the corner of her mouth. “Poor Jada. She seems so sad. And angry.”

Lucy placed a forkful of spaghetti in her mouth to keep from confessing how bad off Jada really was. “She’s grieving.”

A brown spider crawled up the side of the pot. Char shrieked, grabbed the pot and threw it, spaghetti splattering on the ground in a tangled clump. They inspected the ground, looking for the spider. There had been no time to identify whether it was a spider
to fear, a poisonous variety. Every part of Lucy’s body itched. She looked under the table and saw nothing. She slowly picked up the pot. No spider. When she turned back to Char, she found her standing on a chair holding her fork.

Lucy scratched at her neck. “I’m sure we frightened him more than he frightened us. He’s probably miles away already.”

Char scraped the spaghetti onto a plate and threw it in the trash can. “I hope the smell doesn’t attract bears.”

“Or mountain lions.”

“It’s all too much wildlife for me. I miss my cubicle and taxi cabs, don’t you?”

Lucy shrugged. “I actually like it here. I hate to admit it but it’s good for me to be away.”

“I’m glad. You deserve to get your mind off your troubles.”

Lucy wiped the crumbs off the table with a wet rag. “Char, would you tell me anything, even if you knew it would hurt me?”

“Sure.” Char paused, then nodded. “If I wouldn’t tell you, who would?”

“Do you know if Sean was hiding anything from me?”

Char raised her eyebrows. “Please tell me this isn’t about that photograph still.”

“I worry I didn’t know everything I was supposed to about him.”

“That’s ridiculous. No one can truly know everything about a person. Even if you’re married. We all keep secrets and tell little white lies.”

“You just told me you’d tell me anything, even if it would hurt me.”

Char smiled. “Touche.”
“The thing is, I can’t forgive him. Not for dying but –”

“For what?”

Lucy drummed on the table. The faint sounds of music from the boombox drifted through the tent with a cool breeze. Her sunburned skin was warm to her touch but she shivered and wished for her parka. “For the things he never told me. What if it turns out I didn’t really know him, Char? After all this time?”

“Oh, Lucy.” Char reached for Lucy’s hands and held them in hers. “You knew him. You knew everything you needed to know about him.”

“I’m not so sure anymore. Not after talking with Todd. Sean had been running with a few other people. He didn’t tell me that. And then the photo. I still don’t know about that. And I found an email.”

“An email?”

“From an AJrunner. Whoever AJ is, Sean ran with him or her that morning. They met at the lake.”

Char looked at the ground. “I don’t know what to say.”

“What do you think, Char? Please. Tell me.”

Char puffed out her cheeks. “Are you sure?”

Lucy nodded.

“Okay. It’s not about Sean. It’s about you.”

“Me?”

Char took off her glasses and rubbed her eyes. When she put them back on, Lucy studied her face. For the first time Lucy could remember, Char looked frightened.
“Sean was worried about you. Worried you were slipping away. We were at Shuba’s one night, I can’t remember when exactly. He was drunk. He told me he thought you’d changed, that you didn’t seem like the woman he’d married. And that you didn’t seem happy.”

Lucy began to shake. “So there was another woman.”

“No, Lucy. Listen to yourself. This has nothing to do with another woman or some photograph. It’s about you. You never used to be suspicious or insecure but lately – well, I saw what Sean was talking about. You haven’t seemed happy in a long time. It’s like you’ve been going through the motions. Even when we were all out together. You were always looking for a way out the door.”

Lucy sat back. Her mind was a hive. “I can’t believe this.”

“Luce, I’m trying to help. He loved you. And so do I. No matter what he thought or what troubles you felt were going on between you, he still loved you. He just wanted you to be happy.”

Lucy opened her mouth to say something but couldn’t form the words. As she left the tent she heard Char calling after her. She didn’t look back. She crawled inside her tent, burrowed into her sleeping bag and willed her body to disappear.
CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Lucy slept sporadically. The rain pinged against the nylon tent like a thousand bird beaks pecking at wood. A thunder clap startled her and she rolled to her side as lightning lit up the tent. In the corner of the tent, near her pile of dirty clothes, she saw a black crow, its eye a glowing topaz bead. The bird lowered its sharp beak toward her head. Lucy opened her mouth to call for Sean but the crow was upon her, its eye glowing, fluttering its wings in her face, then flattening against her chest, pressing her into the ground. It knew something she did not want to know. It had a message she did not want to hear. She couldn’t breathe. She flailed but the bird didn’t move. She was falling into the earth, the weight of the bird forcing her deeper into the dirt. She tried to call for Sean. She could see him standing in the distance, hear him humming. Help, she squeaked, but her words were met with nothing but steady humming.

Help, she cried again.

Help.

She woke, bathed in sweat. She looked around the tent for the crow, its oily black wings, that terrible knowing eye. The tent, save for her pile of clothes, was empty. She rubbed her face. She couldn’t shake the feeling that the bird and Sean had been there, in her tent, next to her. Her mother would have told her death was coming. Crows were the
darkest, most sinister of birds. Lucy imagined her mother drying her hands on a
dish towel, considering the dream as Lucy described it.

_Smierc_, she would have declared. Death.

Her mother thought everything was a sign of death; sometimes, Lucy wondered if
her mother’s early death had been a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Convinced the crow was nothing more than a dream, she laid back down. She
wished for Sean to be next to her. He would have assured her it was nothing, to forget
about it. That she’d inherited too much of her mother’s superstitions and imagination. It
seemed so small, to have him there when she awoke from a nightmare, but the emptiness
and loss struck her hard.

Beneath her, the ground rumbled.

She unzipped the tent and opened the flap. A chilling breeze brushed against her
face as she crawled out through the opening. She inspected her arms. Her skin, for the
moment, radiated pink. She was sunburned from yesterday’s exposure. She was relieved
– grateful even – that her skin had registered the damage and that she could see it clearly.
She reached into her pocket and rolled the crinoids between her fingers. It was then that
the mountains shifted and receded into a tunnel and then exploded into a mosaic of color
that twisted and swirled, flowing in every direction in a brilliant whorl that blinded Lucy.
She squinted and saw a tall figure in the distance walking toward her. Dr. Burton. Lucy
tried to focus but the outline of Dr. Burton appeared blurred and wavy, as if she was
walking through a great, intense heat. Dr. Burton motioned to her. Lucy felt suspended in
time, unable to move forward or back away. Lucy wavered, then stood. She followed Dr.
Burton down the unpaved road toward the craggy, statuesque formations in the distance. Her senses were distorted. She tasted the salty grit of the rocks. She raised her hands to touch the velvety sky, heard music on the wind, a high C buzzing through her. Ahead, Dr. Burton walked slowly and now, Lucy saw next to Dr. Burton, the slight casting of a shadow next to Dr. Burton, not on the ground but upright and mirroring Dr. Burton’s movements. The shadow appeared more agile and less addled with arthritis, younger perhaps.


Dr. Burton stopped and turned, as did her shadow figure.

“Do you see her?” Lucy asked when she caught up to her. She reached out to touch the indistinct figure but felt nothing.

“She is always with me,” Dr. Burton said and turned toward the canyon to continue walking.

Lucy thought she must still be dreaming. She looked at her arms, her legs. She’d been too stunned and absorbed with following Dr. Burton that she hadn’t noticed that she was shimmering, translucent. She shook her arms wildly. They radiated white light that rippled and then faded into the air. Only the faintest outline of her bare feet was visible. She stomped on the ground and the same white light pooled around her feet. She reached to touch her face but she could not feel the bones of her cheeks, the tip of her nose. She knew not the difference between the shape of her body and the air around her. She turned around to look behind her but there was no land, just a thick, impenetrable blackness. Lucy felt amazed more than frightened, comforted almost that there was nothing behind
her to return to. And then, as she turned back to Dr. Burton, back toward the kaleidescooping colors of the canyon, she felt a slow bubbling through her body, a brown confusion of purging until there, standing next to her, Lucy saw her shadow self, an illuminated apparition. Lucy reached her arm out toward the shadow and it mirrored her motion. She reached her hand toward the shadow but it seemed to occupy a space she could not touch. Lucy opened her mouth to shout – as did the shadow figure – but neither she nor the shadow made a sound. She lowered her hand and closed her eyes. When she opened her eyes again, the shadow was still there.

It was happening. She was disappearing and her shadow was overpowering her, yet her only desire now was to become one person again, without the shadow. The apparition drew her farther into the canyon until she was standing next to Dr. Burton.

The giant rocks were oddly-shaped, like distorted Rorschach blots twisting upward with terrifying force. The figures reminded Lucy of her own dream life, the recent vision of the bird she’d had after she’d visited her father, how the shape had crumbled and then broke open. Dim sunlight filtered through the gaping spaces between the rocks. Branches of stone jutted out and upward like outstretched arms. The formations appeared to take on new shapes as if they were moving creatures.

As the light shined through the open spaces between the rocks, it cast off enormous, monstrous shadows. Lucy could never hope to create something so beautifully natural; even Rodin would have been impressed. If these were sculptures, artists and critics would study them for years, drawing meaning and metaphor out of what the wind and rain had created, and why. They would struggle for just the right adjectives to capture
the essence of the artist’s meaning yet, in this case, there was no artist to consult for the answer. Silver-white light brushed in waves over the rocks. The whole area shimmered as if dusted with ice. She gazed deeply, focusing at the shifting shadows. For a moment she thought she saw the figures of women walking within the shadows of the rocks but it was only a trick of light. The rocks were casting off feathery outlines as if they all had companion ghosts, just like her own.

“Amazing, isn’t it,” Dr. Burton said. “It’s called Fantasy Canyon but I can barely call it by its ridiculous name. It sounds like an amusement park ride. This area was entirely under water once. We are standing in the bed of Lake Uinta. These formations you see were created by erosion, millions of years of sediment washing into the lake from the high land above us. There is nothing like this anywhere else in the United States. Geologists have given the formations names based on their shapes. Prairie dog, yawning lady, teapot, screaming man. I am sure you will appreciate the beauty here.”

Lucy opened her mouth to speak. Dr. Burton frowned and put her hand up, stopping her.

“This is also a place of legends and folklore.” Dr. Burton turned back toward the formations before them. “One day, the evil creatures of the nether regions decided to dig up to the surface of the earth and take over everything. The ground trembled as they worked. Two coyotes felt the rumble, and curious, as all coyotes are, couldn’t resist the urge to investigate.”
She listened to Dr. Burton as she watched the rocks change shape as the glitter-light moved over them. She squinted; still, the silvery glimmers swimming over the rocks animated the formations. Lucy picked up Dr. Burton’s voice again.

“The coyotes held a great council with their fellow mortals. They decided to send two eagles for the greatest medicine man they knew. And it was none too soon. The Medicine Chief called on the West Wind and a great hurricane blew, carrying dust, dirt, rocks and trees to fill in the awful hole where the underworld creatures had broken through. But the effort failed. Everything burned as it entered the hole. Then the Rain God was asked for help and he sent water in clouds and torrents, but the water vanished into steam. The North God brought ice and snow and a deep, bitter cold over the land, capturing the creatures just as they were about to spread over the world. The North God turned them all to ice. Then the West Wind blew and as the ice melted, the dust took its place, leaving the Devil Chief, the Great Mother Witch, the Magician and all the rest standing here before you just as they stood at the instant the cold struck long ago. The Indians tell this story as a warning to others to leave the good earth alone.”

Lucy nodded, unable to find her voice. It sounded like a story her mother would have told her as a child, a fable from Poland to scare her into behaving or doing her chores around the farm.

Lucy followed Dr. Burton as she walked deeper into the canyon. Finally, she spoke. “Where have you brought me?”

“What do you mean?”

Lucy turned, looked at her glimmering shadow again.
“Can’t you see,” Lucy blurted out, unable to restrain herself any longer. “I’m disappearing. You and I – ”

A memory of her mother, just before she died, poured through Lucy. Her mother told them that she saw someone beside her. This someone was young, she had told them, neither male or female but silver in color. The someone stroked her hair, lied beside her or behind her. The doctors told them not to believe her, that some people hallucinated before dying. Lucy shook her head.

“I can see someone, Dr. Burton. Someone beside me, exactly like me. But, oddly, I don’t feel afraid.”

Dr. Burton nodded. “Are you familiar with the law of energy that states that energy can never be destroyed?”

Lucy shook her head.

“The law states that energy can never be destroyed; it can only be transformed. There is more to life than we’re currently perceiving. What you are seeing or experiencing, I should say, is that energy. An in-between place. Empirical science takes no account of the self or the soul or who we are as people. We consider the body to be beyond question – it is simply there. This throws all of that into question. If I allow myself to speculate, I think that perhaps the shadows you see represent a past, your past or maybe another’s. The energy is stuck in between reality and where we wish to be. You will have to choose which way to go. And you’re on the brink of it now. It will be up to you whether you enter into that space or not.”

“An in-between place,” Lucy said.
“Whatever this is – whatever phenomenon exists in this canyon or back in Chicago – I do believe it has always existed and will go on existing long after you and I are gone.”

Lucy searched for the shadows among the rocks. “Will I always see this, -- this in-between place as you call it?”

“That will be for you to decide,” Dr. Burton said. “That you are seeing your shadow self so clearly means that you are ready to make your decision. I want to caution you. This in-between place is no easier than the place you’ve just left.”

“Did you go there? To this hidden middle place?”

Dr. Burton nodded. “I lost myself for a time, to be sure. I lost my entire perception of the world I inhabited after my husband died.”

For an instant, a faint glow shivered through the length of Dr. Burton’s shadow, its head then shoulders then arms and legs trembling as if there was a force inside her knocking to be let out. Dr. Burton closed her eyes.

“Everything I’d ever thought I had known about myself dissolved,” she continued. “I dismantled who I thought I was. It was a very dark time. Very dark. The great dying, I call it, I was chasing an image of myself that was no longer true or real. There was a woman – the woman who brought me to this place. She helped me like I am trying to help you”

Dr. Burton’s face hung, her mouth downturned. Lucy studied her. She appeared weighted down with her secrets, not the overtly cocky scientist Lucy had thought her to be.
“You have to help me,” Lucy said. “You have to.”

Dr. Burton glanced at Lucy, frowned. “The work is not for me to do.” Dr. Burton paused.

“Come with me.”

Lucy followed Dr. Burton back into the canyon. She stopped near one of the mounds where the tips of a few new formations were appearing. It reminded Lucy of a sculpture in relief where the form emerged and receded into a common ground.

Dr. Burton ran her hand along the tip of a stone that was emerging through the hill. “This is how I think of grief,” Dr. Burton said. “It is very much like these formations. When you lose someone you love, your identity – the person you were in that relationship, rather – erodes. It must. We have to dismantle ourselves and who we thought we were in order to get to the person we want to be. The process is ugly and you may find you don’t like what you see behind those layers but as soon as you relinquish a particular view of yourself, a view which has you in a fixed dimension, you open up to possibilities you might have never considered. It is an awakening of sorts, realizing not only what you have lost but also what can be gained. That is when the real work begins. I’m going to leave you here now and I do hope you will return. When you are ready.”

As Lucy watched Dr. Burton walk away, a soft silhouette followed her. It was faint but distinctly the same shape and height as Dr. Burton. Far in the distance she heard a rumble of thunder. A thick wall of gray clouds approached from the west. When she turned to follow Dr. Burton out of the canyon, she was nowhere to be seen. The only sight before her was her mirror image.
Lucy opened her mouth to speak, to tell the shadowy figure to leave her alone, but the sound of her voice was gone. She could not speak and feared her voice had been stolen from her. She was truly disappearing; she would extinguish into nothing but the filmy double that stood before her. The Double pulled her deeper into the canyon. In the formations that towered above her, she saw the figures of women. Thin, curved spines, jagged arms reaching upward, heavy bodies on bended knees. She felt as if she was being dragged to her death. Were these the fossils of the disappeared; was this the great dying Dr. Burton spoke of? The grey clouds covered the sun and a strong wind wailed through the canyon. On it, Lucy swore she heard Sean’s voice calling her. Lu-Lu. She reached out for the Double and tried to shake it but it showed no reaction. She was terrified, for, within herself, she felt her own body being shaken with a great force.

“Please,” she cried but, again, her voice had no sound.

The canyon stretched and whirled. The rocks thundered and tumbled as the ground swelled then shook with a mighty force. When she looked up, she saw something standing in the distance. A thin, gray figure beckoned her forward. She was too far away to be sure, but she felt it was Sean, it had to be Sean calling her to be with him. Lucy tried to run but the force of the Double held her in place. If only she could get to him. He could tell her if she was right, tell her what she already thought she knew. She tried to break free but the Double held her and she lost sight of the figure in the distance as it slipped behind one of the spires.

Ahead of her she saw a formation that looked like the wingless bird she had given to Char. Still another looked like the angel on her mother’s grave. Every spire, every rock
seemed to hold the shadows of her life. She looked behind her, expecting to see the canyon close in on her, see the end of her world. Two spires twisted together, like an oversized version of the armature she had thrown against the mirror. The formation seemed to mock her. She had the notion that she could climb atop the spires and pull them apart, dismantle and destroy it until it crumbled into dust. How stupid she had been when she created that sculpture, how in love and how wrapped up in Sean. And all the while, he had wished she hadn’t been. She wondered why she had let it happen. And for what? So he could crush her, in the end, with his secrets? As she studied the formation, she felt a slackening in the Double’s force. Scattered at the base of the formation were dozens of smaller rocks that had fallen off through erosion. She picked up a few of the smallest and smoothest and pocketed them. One, she threw at the Double. The rock sailed through the Double’s chest. This time, Lucy felt nothing. She picked up another rock and threw it. Still, no reaction. She threw another. He’d left her. And he’d ruined her. Worse, she’d allowed herself to become absorbed in him. Over time she had made herself less knowable, less recognizable as an individual. She had disappeared into Sean.

The Double advanced on her. She felt the slow bubbling in her body again, the ugly, brown confusion. Lucy looked at her arms, her legs. Her body was fading and the Double glowed brightly. The clouds descended and drifted through the canyon. The ground shook harder and Lucy grabbed for the nearest rock. Lucy looked at the menacing Double. She did not want this thing, whatever it was, to win. It seemed to her the Double held all of her ugliness and anxiety, all her years of living in fear that, just one wrong move, would blow up the world she had so carefully created.
She felt her blood surge.

No more, she thought.

She charged at the Double and screamed.

Lucy’s voice cut through the air, a high-pitched wail. In every direction there was stillness. The clouds lifted and the Double faded into the rock beside her.

Lucy felt utterly different now, as if she hadn’t existed before and was, just now, born into a strange and unfamiliar world.
SYNOPSIS OF PARTS II AND III

In the remaining chapters, Lucy wants to return to her life; changed, of course. She recognizes that there is plenty she will never know about Sean and that there was plenty he did not know about her, and she comes to terms with this. What matters is that she begins to live her life again, not the life she created through and for Sean. Lucy scoops up a few of the loose, broken rocks and places them in her pockets. She sets off to find Dr. Burton and doesn’t have to go very far for Dr. Burton appears almost immediately. Lucy wonders if Dr. Burton had been with her all along and possibly has the ability disappear into her shadow. They set out for the campsite together.

Upon their return, Lucy and Dr. Burton discover that Marty and Jada have made a discovery – bones in an escarpment in the opposite direction of where they had been scouting. Marty gives all the credit to Jada for noticing the odd spikes poking out of the cliffside. The storm kept them from investigating but they all agree to return to the site the next morning. Jada ignores Lucy and appears angry with her. Lucy blows it off as teenage moodiness but Lucy also notices Jada’s shadow again. It appears stronger than ever. When Lucy mentions it to Dr. Burton, she ignores Lucy’s worries and tells her that Jada’s discovery of the fossils is enough to bolster her confidence and help her move through her grief. When the rest go to bed, Lucy finds Char and apologies to her for her outburst. Through their conversation, Lucy realizes that Dr. Burton has covered for her
and told the others that she had sent Lucy back to Vernal on some business with the Bureau of Land Management. Lucy decides not to tell Char about her experience in the canyon but does let her know that she recognizes she had lost her identity – had become too absorbed in Sean’s life – and was ready to return to sculpting. She shows Char the rocks and tells her she’s going to create a sculpture with them. In the morning, the group discovers that Jada is missing. Lucy worries that Jada has disappeared and that all that remains is her shadow. Dr. Burton admits that she might have made a grave miscalculation by bringing Jada with them. William is frantic. It has rained overnight and the downpour continues as the group searches for Jada. The arroyo near the campsite threatens to flood. Marty, Colleen and Char set off for the area where Marty and Jada had been scouting. Dr. Burton and William head in the opposite direction and Lucy heads toward Fantasy Canyon, convinced that Jada is there and in danger.

Lucy discovers Jada in the canyon. She is trapped in a crevasse and admits that she had followed Dr. Burton to the canyon the evening that Lucy was there. She had watched her and wondered if, when Lucy’s shadow seemed to overpower her, if she had gone to another world, a world where Sean and Jada’s mother would be. Jada also admits she had chased her own shadow self and had fallen into the crevasse as she ran. Lucy, who has touches of claustrophobia from when she fell into the sinkhole as a child (see Chapter 3), is unsure she can help Jada but taking the time to find the others to help could risk Jada’s life. Her breathing is shallow and the formations seem to be closing in on her. One wrong move and Jada would be out of reach. Lucy steps into the crevasse and secures her feet under a mantle of rock. She reaches for Jada and tries to pull her from the
rock but she won’t budge. The rain is stronger now and Lucy almost loses her purchase on the mantle. She hears voices and cries out to them. Dr. Burton and William arrive. William is too large to fit in the small space and his movements could disturb the fragile rocks that surround them. Dr. Burton, who is much taller than Lucy, believes she can reach Jada. Lucy climbs up the slippery wall of jagged rock and Dr. Burton descends. She is able to grasp Jada under her shoulders and pull her free but Jada moves wildly once she’s free and knocks Dr. Burton from the mantle. Jada, Lucy, and William watch Dr. Burton fall deeper into the canyon. She lands well below them on her back and it’s uncertain whether she’s alive.

Part III begins back in Chicago at the museum. Lucy, Marty and Colleen are working on the juvenile *T Rex* that Marty and Jada had discovered. Dr. Burton, who was rescued, is in the hospital recovering. Jada, left arm in a cast, is in the lab with them assisting Lucy. The group works together and talks of their experience in Utah. Lucy discovers the stapes – a rare bone of the ear that has never been discovered in tact – in the skull of the *T Rex*.

A few weeks later, Lucy goes to visit her father and brings the rocks she had gathered in Utah. She agrees to help her father with the sculpture he had been working on for Sean. Her father shapes the stone block into a shape that resembles a bumpy hillside with jagged edges and points. With the rock and other material she begins to recreate the form of a woman reaching out from the stone block. As they are working, her father asks offhandedly if Sean ever gave her the cabin he had been looking at before he died. Lucy is shocked. She retrieves the photo from her bag and asks her father if it is this cabin. Her
father tells her it is, that Sean had taken him to Wisconsin one day to look at it to see if he thought it would be a good place for sculpting. He had wanted to surprise Lucy with it on her birthday. Lucy asks about the shadow figure in the corner and her father shrugs, says he can’t remember the woman who showed them the place.

Lucy returns to the city the next morning and goes to the beach where she knows Todd and the other runners will pass. When Todd and the woman see her running toward them, they nearly turn and run in the other direction but Lucy calls out to them to please wait. When she reaches them, she pulls the photo from her pocket and shows it to the woman. She apologizes for attacking her that day at the Lily Pond (see Chapter 10) and tells her she understands now. She realizes that the cabin must have belonged to her. The woman tells her that the cabin had been in her family and when she mentioned it to Sean as a great place for an artist, she had met Sean and her father there.

In the final chapter, Lucy and her father move the sculpture to the cabin. She has invited Char, Jada, William, Marty, Colleen and Dr. Burton to the cabin for the day as well. Lucy plans to stay at the cabin for a couple of weeks to sculpt but will continue her job as a preparator at the museum. Lucy and Dr. Burton talk privately about what happened at Fantasy Canyon and Lucy apologizes to Dr. Burton for doubting her, and for doubting what was happening to her. The group leaves and Lucy is at the cabin alone, waiting to begin a new sculpture.