

**YOU  
WON'T  
SEE  
ME  
COMING**

KRISTEN ORLANDO

*Swoon* READS

Swoon Reads | NEW YORK

A SWOON READS BOOK  
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*To Dad:*

*Thank you for reading every single  
word I've ever written. I'm so grateful.*

# ONE

I'VE COME TO HATE MY HANDS. I USED TO JUST THINK they were ugly. My palms, too big. My fingers, too short. My skin, too wrinkly. Freak hands, I used to joke. I don't make jokes about my hands now. When I stare down at them, I still see his blood. Blazing red ovals with tiny tails on my fingernails, knuckles, and wrists. The rational side of me knows it's gone. Washed away in a tiny bathroom sink at thirty thousand feet, Santino Torres's DNA circling the drain somewhere over the Indian Ocean. Still, if the light is right, I see it, freckling my skin.

The bell at the front door of the bookshop jingles, breaking my zombie-like trance. I shake my head, clearing my mind, and my hands begin to move again, searching for a book Bird Lady asked us to order. She has a name: Dorothy. But she has one singular passion in life: birds. She loves birds so much that she wears broaches with pictures of her pet birds on them. Her purse is covered in colorfully stitched birds. Her winter scarf, again: birds. I've been living here for only a few weeks, but in a town as small as Manchester,

Vermont, you get to know the locals pretty fast. I'm told Manchester is packed with New Yorkers and Bostonians with vacation houses in the summer and tourists for the leaves in the autumn. But come winter, as the temperatures dip and snow begins to fall, the volume of visitors fades and we're left alone with the bitter cold and the townsfolk.

"Olivia, did you find it yet?" Bird Lady's coarse voice asks from behind me. My shoulders tense, still uneasy with the sound of my new name.

I've been a dozen different Reagans. Reagan Bailey. Reagan Schultz. Reagan MacMillan. But with Fernando searching for me, eager to put a bullet in my skull, the Black Angels said keeping my first name was no longer an option. Staying any version of my former self was far too dangerous. Before, I would have kicked and screamed over losing my name. But now, I just don't care. With each new identity and cover story, I used to keep pieces of Reagan Elizabeth Hillis behind the pretender mask. I weaved my true self into the girl I was instructed to become. But not now. The girl I was before is disappearing. And I doubt she's ever coming back.

"Just about," I answer and clear my throat. I lift the lid of one more box and flip through all our recent orders. Finally, I find it. I pull out the latest edition of the *Field Guide to North American Birds* and turn back around to face Bird Lady.

"I certainly hope the shop didn't give my copy away," Bird Lady says playfully, her wrinkles deepening around her mouth.

"Of course not, Dorothy," I reply with a small smile and hand

her the book. "We didn't even put it out on the shelves. We saved it especially for you."

"Well, it's not really for me," she answers and pulls open her wallet. It has birds all over it. Of course. "It's for my youngest granddaughter for Christmas. She's ten. I hope she'll like it."

"I'm sure she'll just love it," I reply as sweetly as possible and plaster a fake smile on my face (my cheeks ache at the end of a shift from all the forced glee) as I scan the book and begin to ring her up. "That will be twenty-three dollars and forty-nine cents."

"Here you go, dear." Bird Lady hands me her credit card, which I swipe and hand back to her. The printer whines and spits out a receipt.

"I hope you have a great evening," I say and hand her a plastic green-and-white Manchester Book Loft bag with the present for her granddaughter tucked inside.

"You too," Bird Lady replies and wags her bony finger at me. "Now don't work too hard."

"I'll try," I answer with an artificial laugh and watch as Bird Lady slowly walks across the store, out the front door, and into the snowy, dark night.

I glance down at my mother's watch ticking away on my wrist: 9:57. Nearly closing time. I scan the lower floor of the bookstore. It's empty. "O Tannenbaum" from *A Charlie Brown Christmas* plays over the speakers; each cheerful strike of the piano keys makes my heart heavier, my mood darker. Christmas used to be my favorite time of year. Not just because of the carols and presents and lights, the general merriness that comes with the holiday season. I used to

love Christmas because it meant my parents were home. With their seniority, they were able to request the days around Christmas off and, unless it was a true emergency, they were almost never called away.

We had our little traditions for that week. We'd make Christmas cookies using twenty-year-old cookie cutters, and Dad would make fun of the crooked candy canes and the blobs that were supposed to be Santa Claus. Then Mom would yell at him for licking red and green dyed icing off of his fingers before touching other cookies, spreading his germs everywhere. Aunt Sam would come over to try to put together gingerbread houses, but they were always disasters, falling down or having the candy picked off of cookie rooftops within the first twenty-four hours of construction. Mom would make us string popcorn for the Christmas tree and I'd always whine and say we should just buy strings of little gold beads and call it a day. "You'll miss these moments when you're grown up," my mother used to say. I'd roll my eyes when she'd turn her back and think *yeah right*. But I'd do just about anything to have those moments back. This will be my second Christmas without my mother. My first without Dad. He's still so angry with me, I doubt I'll even get a phone call. Even if he wasn't so irate with me, the Black Angels would never allow him to visit me for the holiday. I must stay hidden. I must remain a ghost.

I clear my throat, lost memories stinging at my eyes. I try to push back the sorrow that's crept out of its little box, flooding my bloodstream and leaving my layered body cold. I shove my hands into the pockets of my jeans and dig my fingers into my hipbones, redirecting the ache. The threatening gloom retreats, tucking itself back where it belongs. I don't deserve to feel sad.

I did this myself.

"Olivia, you ready to go?" my manager, Adam, calls to me as he emerges from behind a row of cookbooks. He's twenty-six with a law degree from Columbia but opted out of taking the bar exam. He gave up an almost guaranteed partnership at his dad's prestigious Manhattan law firm to move to Vermont and start a very different life. I feel like there's a lot of that up here. People who leave behind lives of privilege to make cheese or blow glass or something. Smaller paychecks but a simpler, happy life. And with its sweeping mountain views and postcard-worthy quaintness, I can see why so many give up everything for peace in the Green Mountain State.

"Yeah, let me just close out," I say and punch a few buttons into the register, locking it with a key for the night.

"Ben's waiting for you," Adam says, and my shoulders flinch beneath my thick sweater once again. I'll never get used to his new name either.

"Okay. Your key, good sir," I say and hand over the key to the downstairs register. For being in a small town, the Manchester Book Loft is quite expansive, with two floors, a large café that serves delicious goodies, and lots of quirky nooks where customers can hide out and get lost in a good book.

"Let's get out of here before the snow really starts coming down," Adam says, flipping off the light behind me. With a curly mop of blond hair and an easy smile, Adam looks like a cherub. I'm kind of surprised he doesn't have wings coming out of his flannel button-down shirts. That baby face is the current catch of Manchester that every single girl (and divorced cougar) has her eye on.

I follow Adam through the store, turning out lights one by one.



When I reach the Young Adult section, I catch my distorted reflection, the light inside creating an imperfect mirror against the dark window. It takes all my energy to repress the shiver crawling up my vertebrae. I barely recognize myself. My long dark hair has been chopped into a bob and dyed honey blond. I'm a horrible-looking blond, and I hate maintaining this modern Barbie hairstyle. The worst part is bleaching my dark eyebrows, trying to make this new me look somewhat natural. I avoid mirrors. The acid in my stomach roils every time I see myself. Just another reminder of why I'm here. What I've lost.

What I've done.

"Liv," Adam's voice calls out to me from the last dark room.

"Coming," I say and flip off the light. My ghostly reflection disappears.

I walk past the magazine display, past a pair of comfy, worn couches, and up three small steps that lead into the café.

"Hello, love," a voice says once I reach the top. I look up to see the new version of Luke smiling at me. His beautiful blond hair has been trimmed short and dyed a dark brown (lots of hair dye under our bathroom sink). He's even started wearing colored contacts, turning his two pools of cornflower blue a muddy brown. The only pieces that remain of the Ohio boy I fell for are his dimples.

"Hi, babe," I reply and lean in for a quick kiss, the scruff of his threatening five o'clock shadow (which he has to shave daily since it's so much lighter than his hair) scratching my face. "You make out okay?"

"Sold out of all my apple crumb bars," he responds sweetly and pulls my body in for a side hug. I wrap my arms around his waist

and take in his scent. He smells like coffee and powdered sugar from a twelve-hour shift working in the bakery and café section of the bookstore. I never learned to cook. I thought I'd never need to. I was supposed to be a Black Angel: my days spent rescuing hostages, taking down terrorists, and arresting drug kingpins. But Luke is a master in the kitchen. His mother is an amazing baker. He spent hours with her, melting chocolate for triple-chocolate-chip cookies and kneading dough for pies. So when it came to finding a real job, he was easy. But I didn't have much to offer the real world. I mean, if someone needs a swift kick to the face or a quick and clean execution, I'm your girl. But starting a hit man business while trying to hide out is probably not the best-laid plan in the world.

"Here, let me help you with your coat," Luke says as I slip my arms through my camel-colored peacoat.

"Ben, you guys working tomorrow?" asks Imogene as she throws on her blue puffy winter jacket. She pulls her long, dark hair out of the neck of her coat and zips it up over her petite frame. She's one of the baristas in the Book Loft café and makes one hell of a cappuccino, complete with decorative foam hearts or leaves or flowers.

"Yeah, we're both on for tomorrow," Luke responds and pulls me into his body again, giving me a kiss on the forehead as the four of us walk out of the warm bookstore and into a chilly December night.

"You two have a great evening," Adam says as he locks the front door of the now dark Manchester Book Loft. "Shit, I forgot to turn off the Christmas music."

"That's okay. The books love *A Charlie Brown Christmas*," Imogene says with a throaty laugh.

"Screw it," Adam says and puts the key in his pocket. "See you guys tomorrow."

"Have a good one," Luke says cheerfully as he takes my gloved hand into his own. We walk in silence to our car, parked two blocks away, and I relish these quiet minutes. Fat snowflakes cascade down from a black sky, like falling stars, filling the dark trees and carpeting the sidewalk with their brightness. The spruce trees near the bookstore are wrapped in old-fashioned Christmas lights. Bright bulbs blink red, yellow, green, and blue. Garland is wrapped around store windows and a wreath hangs on nearly every door. Twinkle lights hug thin parkway trees and thick felt red ribbons are tied into perfect bows on every light post. It's like walking onto the set of a Hallmark Christmas movie, but without the hollow buildings and paper snow.

We approach Charlie's, a popular bar with the locals, and my stomach begins to knot with what's next. Our turn is coming up. In ten seconds, we'll be out of sight of Imogene and Adam.

In ten seconds, the show's over.

I breathe in the cold night air and it stings against the delicate flesh of my lungs like a warning. We pass by Charlie's front door. It opens and the sound of clinking glasses and AC/DC's "Thunderstruck" fills the quiet. We turn the corner, off the main street, and like clockwork, Luke drops my hand. No, doesn't drop. More like heaves it back to me. The boy from the bookstore disappears, his smile replaced by a scowl. His eyes angry, lips tight, and dimples gone until the next day when he has to throw a phony smile my way while we work. Pretend we're a couple. Make believe that we're happy.

I look up at him with wounded eyes, missing his hand in mine. Even if it's all for show. He can feel my eyes on him. I know it. He shoves his hands into the pockets of his heavy coat and stares straight ahead, his face far icier than Vermont's below freezing temperatures. I thread my rejected fingers through my other hand, filling the space where his palm used to be. I take in a bottomless breath, preparing myself for another evening of tense silence. And I deserve it. I deserve his anger, his borderline-hatred. Because I didn't ruin just one life. I've ruined two. Without consideration. And without his permission.

I lie in bed at night, trying to come up with things to say to him. I run through apologies, scenarios where I beg for his forgiveness. But I have yet to say those words out loud. I'm too afraid of what he'll say. Because I know what I've done is unforgivable.

The Reagan I was before may be fading, evaporating into the air, piece by broken piece. But the beautiful boy I fell for is truly gone.

For good.

# TWO

THE LIGHTS OF OUR SUV POINT DOWN THE TWISTING road that leads to our small house in the woods. Luke doesn't speak to me during our fifteen-minute drive from downtown Manchester to our two-bedroom cottage in Rupert, a city that makes Manchester look like a thriving metropolis. The only true "businesses" in Rupert are a general store, a one-room post office, and a dairy farm with an honor system payment policy for its milk, homemade ice cream, and fresh cheese. More people are probably buried in the cemetery, a five-minute walk from our driveway, than living in the blink-and-you'll-miss-it village. But it's safe. Or at least safer than being back in DC with the Black Angels. Not that we had much choice in the matter.

After our frantic escape from Indonesia, we were flown to a top secret Black Angels base just outside of Portland, Maine, where we were ordered to change our appearance while senior leaders back at CORE figured out what to do with their two rebel trainees. I pleaded with the leaders over a video conference call not to punish

Luke. Told them he didn't want to go rogue. That he was just trying to keep me alive. I begged them to let him back into Qualifiers. To give him a chance at making the training academy and becoming a Black Angel. But it was too late. His face was captured on the security camera in Torres's SUV at the warehouse. His name was already burned into Fernando's brain. He didn't execute one of the drug world's most vicious leaders. I did. But it didn't matter. Luke was standing beside me while I pulled the trigger. And now he was just as wanted, just as hunted, as me.

Some of the senior leaders voted to kick us out completely. Give us new identities and let us fend for ourselves. They argued I'd been given chance after chance, yet continually spit in the face of their Directives and procedures. Some said I didn't deserve protective custody. But at the end of the day, I'm still Jonathan Hillis's daughter. And as pissed as my father was (and still very much is), he pulled every string he could to keep us safe, to get us into the Shadow Program, the Black Angels' version of Witness Protection.

After cutting and dyeing our hair, putting in our colored contacts, and changing our appearance as much as possible, we boarded one more Black Angels jet and were handed two manila envelopes with our new lives sealed inside. Olivia Cooperman. Benjamin Zeligs. High school sweethearts from Philadelphia who decided to take a gap year before attending college. Take a breath in Vermont before life really began. They gave us new driver's licenses, birth certificates, social security numbers, passports, and detailed cover stories that they told us to memorize. We were shuffled off the jet and into a blacked-out van at a private airport near Manchester. A Black Angel watcher I'd never met before escorted us to our safe house in Rupert.

It was stocked with food and money and weapons. Untraceable satellite phones and firewalled computers. A small panic room in the old stone cellar.

"Call Sam for further orders," the Black Angel watcher instructed, handing me a burner cell phone. "Good luck."

And he was gone. We were left alone in the shadow of the Vermont mountains without watchers or the security team I'd grown accustomed to. We'd lost the privilege of round-the-clock protection. I never thought I'd ever describe armed men stalking my every move as a privilege. But as I wait to feel the blade of a knife on my neck or the barrel of a gun at my back, I realize they were exactly that.

Sam instructed us to get jobs in town. Make a couple of friends but to not be overly friendly. To keep up our new appearances. Call CORE only during emergencies. And watch our backs.

"So, we can't even talk anymore?" I said into the burner cell phone on our first night in Rupert, tears tightening my vocal cords as I sat in the kitchen, a gun on the table and snow falling outside.

"No," she answered with a sigh. "At least not often. You should have thought about all this, Reagan."

"I know," I whispered. They were the only words I could force out before hanging up. I couldn't bring myself to say *thank you* or *I'm sorry* or even *good-bye*. I haven't spoken to Sam since.

Luke turns the SUV into our driveway, the gravel crunching beneath its tires, filling the car with its first sounds during our ride. I look over at him as he eases the car into our garage. I glance at him often on these drives, during our forced togetherness, because I know I'll lose him once we get into the house.

My eyes are always desperate, pleading for him to speak to me about something. Anything. Luke only talks to me out of necessity. *We're almost out of toilet paper. Pick up bananas at the store if they look good. Adam said he needs you to close tonight.* These are the little gems I cling to. I answer him eagerly, hungry for more words. But he gives me only what he needs to. Instructions, never conversation.

As he turns off the car, I tear my eyes away from him and reach for the door handle.

"Wait," he reminds me, his hand grabbing at my arm. I look down, staring at his fingers, realizing it's the first time he's touched me when it's not an act. But as he pulls his hand away, I know it's not out of love but rather an unconscious protective habit.

Luke lowers the garage door and watches it close behind us in the rearview mirror before grabbing his gun out of its hiding spot beneath the driver's seat.

"Okay," he instructs and hops out of his side of the car. I do the same. "I think you have a false sense of security living in the middle of nowhere, Reagan. But Fernando could still find us up here. No thanks to you."

His last declaration is wrapped in barbed wire and hurled over his shoulder, catching and tearing at my skin as I follow him into our dimly lit house. It's probably the closest we've come to true dialogue since Indonesia.

And even if every word is painful, I don't want this to stop.

"I know," I answer as I throw my purse on the kitchen table.

"And please stop putting your stuff wherever you feel like it," Luke says, pointing at my purse. "This house is a mess."



"Who are you, my father?" I ask, the words escaping my mouth before my tongue can wrangle them in.

"I'm being far kinder to you than your father would be if he was here right now," Luke answers curtly, walking around the counter and to the fridge in the corner of our small kitchen. He pushes aside cans of Dr Pepper and juice before grabbing a bottle of water.

"I get it. I get how angry you are," I say as he turns around. "But is this how it's going to be for the rest of our lives? I mean, who knows how long we have to hide out up here."

"Not long, I hope," Luke says and takes a swig of water, droplets falling down his chin. He wipes them away with the collar of his navy long-sleeved T-shirt.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means I can't wait to get away from here."

"You mean away from me?"

"I didn't say that," Luke offers unconvincingly.

"You don't have to. It's written all over your face," I say, my chin nodding in his direction. "Look, I can't go back and undo what I've done."

"I don't think you would if you could," Luke responds, brushing past me and walking down the hall. I follow him into our tiny living room.

"You don't think I'd take back killing Torres?" I say, my fingers digging into the center of my chest. "After seeing what it's done to you? Done to us?"

"No, I really don't think you would," Luke answers, shaking his head as he turns on the lamp next to our lumpy gray couch, the

luxurious furnishings of Black Angel—sanctioned safe houses long gone. “I think you’d make the exact same choice.”

“Luke, how can you say that?”

“How can I not?” Luke says, his eyes narrowed. He looks me up and down, shaking his head. “I begged you to stay in that camp in Indonesia. I pleaded with you on that car ride to apprehend him. I did everything I could to get you to see reason and not to kill Torres. I *knew* what would happen if you shot him and so did you. But you did it anyway. You didn’t give a crap about the consequences. Your mission was singular and selfish: kill Torres. That’s what it was for a year. You had time to think about it and change your mind. But you *chose* this. You chose to kill him. So don’t tell me that you’d take it back if you could. Because I know you. You wouldn’t change it. Not for me. Not for anyone.”

Luke’s words suck out every trace of air in my chest. His words aren’t just mean. They’re true. I am selfish. It’s the unfortunate adjective used to describe me the most. Not brave. Not loyal. Not fearless. Selfish. I only see what’s in front of me. What I want. What I need. What I think is right. I ignore everyone trying to turn my head from side to side. I push away their anxious attempts to get me to see the bigger picture, the wide and expansive world beyond my narrow one. It’s easy to blame Torres or my mother’s death on my selfish behavior. But as I finally suck oxygen into my aching chest I realize, I’ve always been this way. Even when I thought I was doing good, the end always somehow benefited me.

“I don’t know what you want me to say,” I reply quietly, holding out my hands in surrender.

"It'd be nice to start with I'm sorry," Luke answers, running his fingers through his dark hair, his muscle memory forgetting just how short he was forced to cut it.

"I'm sure I've said I'm sorry," I say and chew at the inside of my lip.

"No. Not really," Luke says and shakes his head. "I've been waiting for it. But three weeks later and still no sorry."

I stare down at the floor and know he's right. I haven't said it out loud. Only to the Luke in my head. Because sorry has never felt close to good enough. So I've said nothing.

I clear my throat, keep my eyes on the ground, and say, "Of course I'm sorry. But how do you say you're sorry for something like this?"

I feel Luke staring at me. I glance up, still half expecting to be met with his kind blue eyes. But they're just as dark as his mood. My Luke is not in this room. He hasn't changed. I've changed him.

"Listen to other people, Reagan," Luke finally replies softly and turns his back on me. "Then you'll never have to say you're sorry."

"Luke, please don't walk out on me," I call out to him as he climbs up the steep stairs that lead to our two small bedrooms. "Please, stay and talk to me. Let's try to work on this."

"There's nothing to work on," he throws over his shoulder. "I'll pretend to be your boyfriend when we're out in the world for our cover. I'll keep you safe. That's all I can do."

"But Luke . . ." I call after him but he answers me by slamming his bedroom door.

*You did this to yourself, Reagan. You did this to yourself.*

I lower my body onto our couch, still fully dressed in my coat,

hat, and gloves. My body begins to shake even though my blood is burgeoning on searing. The floorboards of our old house creak above my head. I look up and listen as he opens and closes his dresser drawers, changes into his pajamas, the old bed whining beneath him as he climbs under the covers.

“Oh God,” I whisper, grasping at my knees, rocking my body back and forth. “What have I done?”

# THREE

"LIV, I THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE A SNACK," LUKE SAYS, placing a white dish on the counter next to a stack of books I'm supposed to put away. I carefully move the plate closer to me, trying not to elbow the wobbly tower of discarded holiday gifts customers decide not to purchase once they made it to the register.

"Thank you," I reply and look up at him. He smiles at me for the first time in twenty-four hours. But it's only because Adam is standing a few feet away sorting through store receipts and inventory slips.

"I made extra. I know they're your favorite," Luke adds as I look down at the oversized triple-chocolate-chip cookie. He's right. They are my favorite. I can tell the cookie is still warm without even touching it, its semisweet chocolate chips glistening and melting onto the plate. Perhaps this is more than a cookie. Maybe it's an *I'm sorry*.

"Thanks, babe," I say with a hopeful smile and lean across the countertop to give him a kiss. The moment his cold lips meet mine,

my optimism evaporates. It's still a stage kiss. Without feelings or heat or emotion. Purely for show. So I guess the cookie is too. Just another prop in our little play.

"You guys are so cute, I want to puke," Adam jokes beside me, inciting a forced laugh from this show's leading man and leading lady.

"Better get back," Luke says, dusting the flour and powdered sugar off of his green-and-white-striped apron. "Enjoy the cookie."

"I will," I answer with a stage smile and take a bite, the warm chocolate coating my tongue. I watch Luke as he walks away from me. He doesn't look back. He never looks back.

"You guys are obnoxiously adorable," Adam says, eyeing my fake smile as I watch Luke leave. It's early afternoon and the Book Loft is momentarily slow. But soon school will let out and students will fill up the café in search of snacks, hot chocolate, and coffee. The day's gossip will bounce off the walls, ruining the quiet for the retirees who come here to relax and read. "How'd you two meet?"

"Biology class," I answer, sticking to the carefully scripted cover we were told to memorize on the plane. "We were assigned to be lab partners."

"Fell in love while dissecting frogs?" Adam asks, raising an eyebrow.

"Yes," I answer with a genuine laugh. "Nothing says 'let's make out' like the smell of formaldehyde."

Adam chuckles and turns back to his stack of invoices, marking each one with his signature. "You guys are really lucky to have found each other."

"Oh, what are you talking about?" I say and take another bite of my cookie. "You're like Manchester's most eligible bachelor. I bet if we raffled off dates with you we could raise some serious money."

"Ha, maybe," Adam says, looking up from his stack of paperwork, his easy smile sinking. He opens his mouth to say something then closes it.

"What?"

"It's just hard to find something that lasts past Saturday night."

"Those are words to a song from the forties, you know," I say, licking chocolate off of my thumb. "Ever hear of 'Sunday Kind of Love'?"

"I don't think so," Adam says. "Sing it."

"You don't want to hear me sing," I answer awkwardly, a large chunk of cookie in my mouth. I cover my lips with my hand as I swallow it down. "My grandma used to sing it when I was a kid. It's an old jazz standard tune. It goes 'I want a Sunday kind of love / A love to last past Saturday night.'"

"Exactly," Adam says, pointing a finger at me. "The newness is exciting but it'd be nice to have something that's . . . you know . . . comfortable."

"Sweatpants kind of love?" I ask.

"Sweatpants, holey T-shirt, and morning breath kind of love," Adam answers. "They should really add that into the lyrics."

"I don't think 'Morning Breath Kind of Love' would have sold as many records."

"Yeah. Maybe you're right."

Adam smiles at me before looking back down at his paperwork, his grin quickly fading, and his face suddenly sullen and serious.

I study him, lean my elbows against the countertop, and say, "I had you all wrong."

"What do you mean?" Adam asks.

"I don't know," I answer with a shrug. "I guess I thought you'd be more interested in having fun and dating every girl in town than having a girlfriend."

"I'm an old soul, I guess," Adam answers, still shuffling through papers, busying his hands with staples and signatures. "Besides, if I wanted to hook up every weekend, I'd have taken the bar, bought a bunch of two-thousand-dollar suits, and stayed in New York. Believe me, Liv. I'll take what you two have any day."

Adam closes his folder and walks toward his cramped office in the back of the store, leaving me alone with my lies. But for me, I'm not acting. I'm not faking my feelings for Luke. Sometimes, I lose myself in the illusion of our manufactured bliss. I scold myself for forgetting that he's really pretending. He's just trying to stay alive.

The irony is not lost on me. This is exactly the life I dreamed of back in Ohio. The quiet, white picket-fence life my mother told me I wasn't supposed to have. She said I wasn't meant to be happy. I was meant to change the world. Over a year after that last fight in our New Albany living room, I'm so very far from either one.

I catch Luke across the store in the café, pulling out a tray of cookies, getting ready for the afternoon rush. His hand moves across his face, pushing away hair that's no longer there, cut off onto a bathroom floor in Maine. Some tics just don't die.

I miss him. I miss his blond hair and blue eyes. I miss his dimples. The way his cheeks folded almost in half when I made him laugh. I miss the sound of my name on his tongue. My real name.



The way he used to touch me on the small of my back. Like I was something precious. Something to care for. Something to love.

Luke turns around, smiling at Imogene, and my blood chills, my heart slows. My body returns to its default state of numb.



At the end of every shift, fifteen minutes before closing time, my stomach predictably tightens into an uneasy knot. There's an old clock with a bell tower at the Presbyterian church down the street. Its bells sing out the Westminster Chimes at the top of each hour, and clang once, twice, and three times to mark each quarter hour.

At 9:44, my skin begins to ache, like I know the three bells and a night of icy silence are coming. But tonight, my skin pricks ten minutes earlier than normal. Those imaginary pins penetrate my spine, an unconscious warning. At first, I wait to hear the clangs. But when the bells don't come, I slowly turn around and see a pair of dark eyes watching me from across the store. When my eyes lock with his, I expect him to look away. He doesn't. He's standing near the magazines, a copy of *GQ* open in his hands. But he's still staring. I examine his face, categorizing each feature. A paranoid twitch from my Black Angel upbringing. Five foot ten. Dark hair. Dark eyes. Fair skin. Strong jaw. Mid-twenties. Even as I look him up and down, his eyes don't leave mine.

*One Mississippi. Two Mississippi. Three Mississippi.*

"Liv," a voice says from behind me, startling me to the point that I nearly drop the biographies I'm re-shelving. I turn around. Luke.

"Jesus," I whisper and pull a quivering hand to my chest.

"What's wrong with you?" Luke asks, cocking his head.

"Nothing, I just . . ." I turn back around but the stranger is gone. I crane my neck, looking for him in the rows of books or up in the café. But he's disappeared.

"Liv," Luke says again.

"Sorry," I answer, turning around and shaking my head. "You just scared me. That's all."

"I'm going out with Imogene and Adam after closing," he says, tossing me the keys to the SUV.

"You're not coming home with me?" I ask, staring down at the keys in my hand, each word slow to escape my throat.

"No," he says and puts his hands into the pocket of his jeans. "I'll get a ride from Adam later."

"Oh . . . o . . . kay," I stammer and look down at the keys, my fingers pressing hard into the metal.

"What is it?" Luke asks, narrowing his color-corrected dark eyes at me.

I close my fist around the silver heart key chain I bought at a knick-knacky store a couple blocks away and consider asking him to walk me to the car after our shift. But I don't want to alarm him. Or make him angry. Or remind him of the danger we're in. The danger I put him in.

*It was nothing. It was nothing.*

"Nothing," I answer quietly and turn toward the bookshelf. Luke stands there, studying me for a second longer, and I wait for him to push. He's the one person in my life who always knows when something is wrong and never lets me get away with hiding it. I shelve a biography on George Washington and another on David Foster

Wallace. I pretend to concentrate and hold in an anxious breath, anticipating his questioning. But he says nothing. He just stares at me for one long beat before turning on his heel and disappearing beyond the high shelves.



By the time I get home, my lungs ache from holding my breath on and off during the drive. I had to force myself every two minutes to take in new air. On the walk alone to the car, I had my hand in the pocket of my oversized tote, my finger wrapped around the trigger of my loaded Glock 22. I could feel my heart beating faster with each step, blood rushing to every muscle. A vital physical side effect of fear. Fight or flight. Ready to kill. Ready to run.

My body was blazing beneath my peacoat in spite of it being barely twenty degrees outside. The combination of extreme temperatures caused my skin to burn and the bottom of my feet to itch in my leather boots.

As I turned the corner past Charlie's, my legs picked up the pace. I waited to hear the crunch of someone's feet behind me in the snow. I could almost feel the pressure of a gun barrel at my back and taste a dirty hand on my freezing mouth. The daymares played out behind my eyes. But the footsteps and gun barrel and the silencing hand never came. As I sat in the car with the doors locked, my breath still visible despite the blast of manufactured hot air, I leaned forward, resting my forehead against the top of the steering wheel, the stitches in the cold leather digging into my skin. Perhaps I'm just

paranoid, looking for monsters in the shadows. Imagining things that aren't really there.

Without Luke at home, the stillness of our house freaks me out. We live in near silence, but I find comfort in hearing the floor creak or the water run while he brushes his teeth. There's life in this house. Even if that life wants very little to do with me.

I sit at our crappy, plastic kitchen table, still dressed in my winter coat. I don't even have the energy to untie my scarf. It's wool. I hate wool. It itches the skin on my neck, but I leave it be. I stare at my ghostly reflection in our dark window, my heart pounding anxious beats against my breastbone, still waiting for the stranger's face to appear, pressed up against the glass.

*No one is safe.* Torres's voice rattles against my brain. I see him, tied up to a metal pipe with the belts of his dead guards, promising to kill the people I loved. I've tried to forget about those final words. Excuse them away as the last desperate lie of a manipulative man. But there's a wariness that has been growing in my gut. And after seeing the stranger, it's inflated, pressing against my organs and making me sick.

There's a mole in the Black Angels.

I'm sure of it. How would Santino Torres know about Harper? How could he name all of the people I was close to at CORE? And until I can figure out who has been feeding the Torres syndicate information, we will never ever be safe.

The skin around my neck flares and I finally force my hands to move and unwrap my scarf. I take off my coat too, throwing it over the extra chair. I grab my computer off the kitchen countertop and

begin my nightly check on Harper. After years of not being allowed to be on social media, I've created several fake accounts to keep tabs on her.

I log onto Twitter first and read through her latest tweets.

*Whose idea was it to schedule 9am classes on Fridays? I want to strangle pre-college Harper.*

*Sick of all the tourists who have invaded NYC for Christmas. If I have to walk around one more person taking a selfie in the park...*

My lips crinkle at the typical Harper snark. But a third tweet catches my eye.

*Smitten* is all it says. If it had a heart-eyes emoji next to those words, I'd seriously think someone had hacked into her account. I click into the replies to get more info. There are only two replies.

*With a face like that, who wouldn't be?*

*New boy? Drinks tonight. Time to spill.*

New boy? I caught up on all her posts from the last year a couple of weeks ago. She rarely mentions guys or relationships. Most of our evenings at the Dead End Diner revolved around fries, milkshakes, and her disdain for relationships and boyfriend/girlfriend oversharers. Just... doesn't seem like Harper.

*Pictures. Pictures. I need pictures.*

I switch over to Instagram. Since my last check, Harper has posted three new photos. I flip through them. A picture of Harper and her roommate eating big slices of pepperoni pizza. A photo of Harper on the street wearing a Yankees cap and a leather jacket; her wavy hair flying and her tongue sticking out playfully for the camera. The last photo is a screenshot from a FaceTime call. Harper is

smiling in a tiny square in the corner. A guy with dark hair and high cheekbones smiles back at her. His long eyelashes outline his almond-shaped eyes, and a five o'clock shadow makes him even sexier. I see what has Harper so smitten. But as I stare into his face, acid begins to sear my stomach lining.

I read the caption of the photo. *My favorite time of day.* The photo has over one hundred likes and a few comments.

*Damn, Harper.*

*Lucky boy. Lucky girl.*

*Mateo! Wow.*

*Your prince! I hope you get to meet him soon.*

Shit. She hasn't met him in person yet?

The bile spins, the tenuous tissue at my core burning. A physical reaction to the uneasy words on repeat in my mind: *Something's not right. Something's not right.*

My hands move quickly as I open up my email and shoot a note to Cam. Our electronics are completely untraceable and secure. Even so, I'm not really supposed to be talking to Cam. But we've been secretly touching base with the occasional email or late-night phone call.

*Hey. Can you call me tonight? Need your help.*

I hit send and close out the email. I stare back at Harper's photo of Mateo. She looks so happy. I bite down hard on my lip, hoping the panic ballooning inside of me is misguided.

The satellite phone rings on the kitchen counter, making me jump. I stand up and rush to it.

"Hello?"

"Everything okay?" Cam's strained voice asks on the other end.

"Yeah, I'm fine," I answer and sit back down at the kitchen table.

"That was fast. You didn't need to call right away."

"I worry about you," Cam replies quietly into the phone. "I saw your email, grabbed my phone, and ran down to one of the conference rooms."

"We're okay," I say and rest my forehead in my open palm. "I mean we're safe. We're not okay, of course."

"He still not really talking to you?" Cam asks with a sigh.

"Only when he has to," I say, tapping my fingers on the table. "We got into it last night. Everything just kind of came out. I knew he was angry. I don't think I realized just how much he hated me."

"He doesn't hate you," Cam says.

"He does," I interrupt. "I mean, who can blame him? If I had this amazing life in front of me and someone just threw a grenade on it, I'd hate them too."

"He's just upset," Cam replies. "He'll come around. He loves you, Reagan."

"Not anymore," I say quietly.

"So what's going on?" Cam asks on the other end, rescuing me from falling into a sinkhole of self-pity.

"I told you about the threats Torres made before he died. That he'd still come after the people in my life. So I've been checking in on Harper's social media and all has seemed okay but . . . she's talking to this guy now. And they haven't met yet in person and the timing just feels weird and fishy. I guess I'm just worried about her."

"You worried it's one of Torres's guys?" Cam asks.

"Maybe," I answer slowly. "I don't want to be so paranoid but something is just . . . off."

"Let me look into it," Cam answers. "Just email me all of her social media handles and I'll do some digging."

"Okay, I will," I say. "And Cam . . . just . . . don't tell anyone."

"Of course," Cam answers. "I'm not supposed to be talking to you anyway."

"Right," I say. But that's not why I want him to stay silent.

I've been running through my list of mole suspects for the last couple weeks. Lex. Anusha. The senior leaders. Even Sam has been someone I've considered. But for me, Cam is out. His mother and father were nearly killed a couple months ago at the hand of Torres's men. There's no way he could be involved. My circle of trust is getting smaller and smaller.

Cam clears his throat. "I better run. It's almost lights out."

I glance over at the clock on the oven: 11:56.

"I kind of miss having a bedtime," I reply.

My throat thickens with the sentiment I hate the most. Regret. The phone falls silent as I try to push the growing lump in my throat back down.

"Thanks for checking on her," I finally say, my throat clear from emotional obstructions.

"Of course," Cam answers. "We miss you, Reagan. A lot."

And with that, Cam hangs up. I keep the phone pressed to my ear, listening to the hollowness of a dead line.

"Miss you more," I whisper into the receiver. To no one. To nothing.



# FOUR

CONDENSATION ENCIRCLES MY GLASS, FOGGING IT with dew. I watch as water droplets run down its elegant curve, creating clear rivers that allow me to peer inside. My eyes are stuck staring at one droplet high on the glass, getting ready to run. Finally, it breaks free, picking up other droplets, greedily growing in size as it makes its way down to the circular base. It joins the other fallen droplets, soaking into a thick Bud Light coaster.

“Olivia, you sure you don’t want anything besides a Coke?” Adam asks and touches my hand, finally pulling me out of my stare. “The bartender never checks IDs.”

“You would know,” Imogene replies, reaching for a fry in the plastic red basket at the center of our table.

“What does that mean?” Adam says, dipping his own fry into ketchup.

“Oh, don’t pretend like you didn’t take every college girl with a summer house to Charlie’s this July,” Imogene replies, her thin lips parting into a playful smile.

Adam shrugs, a sheepish grin tickling the corners of his lips. "Lots of hot girls up here over break. What am I supposed to do?"

"Control yourself," Imogene replies and rolls her eyes. "This kid caused so much drama this summer. There was literally a catfight that broke out in the Book Loft over him. Like scratching, hair pulling, the works."

"Are you serious?" Luke says with a laugh, dunking his fries into a cup of ranch, giving away his midwesternness.

"Yeah, it was a kind of a cluster," Adam answers, taking a long sip of beer. "How was I supposed to know they were sisters?"

"They had the same last name, you idiot," Imogene replies, her eyes narrowing into slits.

"I didn't know their last names," Adam counters, draining his last gulp of beer. "And on that note, time for another round. You guys want anything?"

"No, I'm good," I answer.

"Get an order of pickle chips," Luke replies as he shoves the last of the French fries into his mouth.

"I'll come with you," Imogene says, grabbing her wallet off the table and hopping off her high-back bar stool.

The two of them weave their way around the tables, half of them occupied by local couples, friends and co-workers I recognize from the downtown shops, restaurants, and cafés. Charlie's has been around for fifty-five years and it has both the wear and character to prove it. The dark-wood bar top is chipped and scuffed, with people's names and initials carved everywhere. Dollar bills have been pinned to the low ceilings, a tradition that lives on for first-time patrons. High-end liquor bottles (the expensive stuff is for the tourists; they

keep the cheap stuff out of view for the locals in the know) line the back of the bar, glowing from the bottom and reflected in the large mirror, calling out to drinkers to have just one more round.

The old-fashioned jukebox in the corner blares a new song. I recognize the first few measures of the piano before Michael McDonald's voice picks up the lyrics.

"You don't know me but I'm your brother. I was raised here in this living hell," his deep voice sings to me. The Doobie Brothers' "Takin' It to the Streets."

The last time I heard this song, I was with Luke in the Weixels' bonus room, singing along with the record player, feeling happier than I ever had in my entire life. It was the night before my Templeton visit. Less than twenty-four hours before my first kiss with Luke. That was the night Luke told me to stop trying to live my life for someone else. It was the first and last time I allowed myself to think that my life could actually belong to me and not the Black Angels.

"I know what you're thinking about," Luke says, his eyes fixed on the empty basket of fries. His fingers pick at the checkered paper, damp with grease.

"You do?" I ask, wondering if he recognizes the song. If he's reliving the moment, wishing he could go back in time, like I am.

"Yes," he answers and finally looks up at me. "The song. The records."

"I wasn't sure if you'd remember," I reply, cradling my glass in my hands, condensation wetting my chapped skin.

"I remember everything," Luke answers before turning his attention back to the empty basket. And from his monotone voice, I can't tell if that's a good or bad thing.

"Okay, pickle chips are coming," Adam says, setting down a fresh beer, its frothy head spilling over the glass's edge as he climbs onto the chair next to me.

I scan the room for Imogene, and that's when I see him. The muscles in my neck compress as my eyes lock with the stranger in the corner. He's cradling a tumbler full of ice and a dark brown liquor. He stares at me for a moment, then knocks back his drink, stands up, and puts on his leather jacket. Dread swells at my center, pushing down on my lungs, as I watch him place a bill on the counter and hurry toward the front door.

*Where is he going? What is he doing?*

He pushes past a couple making their way into the bar, knocking the girl's shoulder before slipping into the darkness.

Without thinking, I jump up, yanking my peacoat off the chair. The chair wobbles and nearly tips over.

"Liv, what is it?" Luke asks next to me, his eyes wide and suddenly concerned.

"Nothing," I reply, shaking my head and thinking fast. "I just have a headache and think I left some Tylenol in the car. I'll be right back."

My legs carry me through the dark bar before Luke can ask me another question. I swing open the door, a gust of wind biting at my skin, warm with synthetic heat. I throw on my coat as I scan the sidewalk, searching for his dark jacket in the white snow.

I spot him a block away, heading back toward the Book Loft. My body moves slowly up the sidewalk. I reach inside my bag, searching for my gun.

*Where is it? Where is it?*

It's not in its usual spot. I look down at the bag and dig a little deeper. Finally, I feel the weight of the pistol in my hand. The cool steel against my exposed hands makes my stomach twist, fear tingling up my fingertips like razor blades until it reaches my arms, my shoulders, my neck. I cling to the shadow of the buildings, trying to stay out of the glare of the streetlights wrapped in evergreen and red ribbons. Even in the darkness, he'd spot me.

The man pauses, looking down at something in his hand. His phone? A gun? My legs freeze midstep and my breath vacates my body.

*Don't turn around. Don't turn around.*

He doesn't. My legs pick up speed as he reaches the parking lot and unlocks a blue car. My Black Angel mind immediately takes in its features, memorizing every characteristic I can see.

*Blue. Four-door. Toyota. Massachusetts license plate.*

I sneak up closer, trying to read the plate's letters and numbers.

*G-D-B...*

"What are you doing?" a voice asks behind me and I spin around. Luke.

"Jesus Christ, Luke," I hiss, my hand pulled over my frantic heartbeat.

"You know, for a trained spy," Luke begins. "You don't really know how to exit a room with a graceful excuse."

I turn back around toward the parking lot, my neck craning, eyes searching for the car to get the rest of the license plate. But it's gone. He's gone. Again.

"Why did you follow me?" I ask, spinning back toward Luke.

"Because I knew something was wrong and I wanted to make

sure you were okay," he answers, shoving his ungloved hands into the pockets of his thick black coat.

"I didn't think you'd care if I was," I say, crossing my arms over my chest for warmth.

"Don't be dramatic," Luke answers, rolling his dark eyes. "Of course I care. And don't pout and act like I don't have a right to be mad at you."

"I know," I answer quietly and take a breath. "You do."

I need to give him that. I shouldn't sulk and think *that* will magically get him to forgive me. I did this. And while we'll never get things back to the way they used to be, maybe if I give him enough space and time, one day we'll be okay. Not great, but okay. Friends again. That, I know, is the best I can hope for.

"So what's going on?" Luke says, his neck turning from side to side, searching the empty sidewalk for the reason I bolted out of the bar.

"There was just a guy in the bar staring at me weird," I answer and look down, my boots kicking at the fresh layer of snow. "I saw him in the bookstore yesterday too. I haven't seen him in town before. He's not a local. He just . . . has me worried. That's all."

"Not every person who looks at you for a second too long is out to get you," Luke says and we turn to walk back toward the bar.

*But someone wants to kill us. Someone will always be after us,* my mind screams, the silent declaration, like a needle at the center of my chest.

"I know," I lie, staring at each new footprint in the white. I don't want to freak Luke out. Poison him with my own anxiety and fears.

"We're supposed to be safe here," Luke says quietly. "The Black Angels wouldn't put us somewhere they didn't think was safe."

"But what about the mole?" I reply, looking back up into Luke's eyes. "We don't know who it is and they might know where we are."

"I'm not entirely convinced there is a mole," Luke says, leaning against the brick wall outside of Charlie's. The door swings open and Fleetwood Mac's "The Chain" pours out into the snow.

"Running in the shadows. Damn your love. Damn your lies."

The drumbeat in the song is nearly in sync with my heart.

"What?" my exasperated voice pushes out, my eyebrows cinching together. "There has to be a mole. How would Santino know about Cam or Anusha? About Harper?"

"Look," Luke says with a sigh, his hands up in the air in half protest and half surrender. "Let's just go back inside and conspiracy theory this later. This is a very long time to search for Tylenol. They're going to wonder what happened to us."

"Fine," I answer, my voice defeated.

"We're safe here, Reagan," Luke says, touching me on the left shoulder and staring into my eyes. After a moment of holding my body and my gaze, he lets go and opens the door for me. As I walk into the dark bar, I wonder if Luke even believes his own declaration. And if those words will ever be true.



A basket of pickle chips later, we're back at the house. Luke is asleep upstairs while I check my email, hoping for a follow-up report from Cam. I click into my inbox. Empty.

*Perhaps it's nothing*, my mind whispers as I close my eyes and take in a clearing breath, hoping fresh oxygen will push out the anxiety that clings to each organ, like barnacles taking over the bottom of a boat. I put my fingers up to my temples, rubbing them counterclockwise as I repeat over and over again, *It's nothing. It's nothing. It's nothing.*

I open my eyes again and stare at the empty inbox. I hit refresh every few seconds and finally give up, opening a new window and logging onto Twitter to read Harper's latest tweets.

*Last exam taken! Last paper in! So this is what freedom feels like?*

*In a post-all-nighter haze. Could someone come to my dorm and just pour coffee into my mouth?*

*Tomorrow, please come. I can't wait another day.*

What does that mean? I click into the replies.

*Finally!! I cannot wait to hear about him.*

*Mateo Day! I demand a full report over lunch.*

"Shit, shit, shit," I whisper to no one, my heart straining, unable to get out a full beat. I open up my email, my hands furiously typing out a note to Cam.

*Dude! What did you find out? Harper just posted on Twitter all giddy about meeting Mateo tomorrow. I'm starting to FREAK OUT over here.*

My fingers hit send. My legs bounce up and down involuntarily beneath the table as I stare at my empty inbox, willing for a quick, "I checked. He's real. You have nothing to worry about, you psychopath" response from Cam. Sixty seconds later, the satellite phone rings.

"Please say you have good news," I say.



"I'm sorry," Cam answers, slightly out of breath. "I have no news."

"What?" I say loudly, my free hand slamming down onto the table.

"Reagan, chill. I'm sorry, things are crazy here," he answers with a sigh. "We've been in training all day. I haven't had a moment to check. I've got his details. I'm going to do it right now. Just go to bed, I'm sure you have nothing to worry about."

"How can I go to bed?" I ask, standing up from my seat at the table and pacing around our tiny kitchen.

"It may take me some time," Cam says. "What do you think us hackers do? Just like pound out a little code and boom, we've got a full profile with the headline 'Bad Guy' on it?"

"No," I say. *Yes*, I think.

"Look, give me a couple hours," Cam says and I can hear him tapping away on his keyboard. "I promise you. The second I figure out if this guy's a liar or not, I'll call you, okay?"

"Fine," I answer, and the restlessness that started in my legs climbs up to my torso and down my arms, forcing me to cradle the phone in between my cheek and shoulder to shake out the crippling nerves.

"Get some sleep."

*Highly unlikely*, I think as I hear Cam click off on the other side.



I pick at my chapped lips as I stare at the digital green numbers of my clock. I taste metal on the tip of my tongue, a sure sign that I'm bleeding, as the clock switches from 2:41 to 2:42 a.m. It's been over

two hours since I hung up with Cam and I have yet to fall asleep. Not that I thought I would.

I roll onto my back and stare at the shadows on the ceiling. I close my eyes and force my hands away from my bleeding lips. I fold my hands across my chest and repeat my selfish prayer.

*Please be nothing. Please be nothing. Please God, be nothing.*

More than anything, I want Harper to be safe. But it's more than that. I want her to be happy too. She got so screwed over by the last guy she dated at New Albany. Chad. Ugh. He was a senior when we were juniors. He treated her like a princess. Or so we thought. A few months into their fairy-tale relationship (complete with lovey-dovey texts, sweet romantic dinners, and even the occasional bouquet of flowers), Malika caught wind he was banging half the lacrosse team. Sure enough, Harper showed up unexpectedly at his house and caught him with his pants down (literally) with the team's captain. She cried every day for a week. Malika and I took turns supplying her with cookie dough ice cream and reruns of *Friends*. Ever since, she's been so guarded. She said she'd never be made a fool out of again. Even if Mateo is everything he claims to be, I'll freaking cut him if he hurts my girl.

The high-pitch shrill of the phone fills my room and I lunge for it on the nightstand.

"What did you find out?" I say and sit up straight in the bed.

"You were right," Cam says, his voice breathy with panic. "He's claiming to be a junior at the University of Pennsylvania but he's not. I hacked into school records; he's not listed as a student there. And his IP address isn't in Philadelphia. It's in Colombia."

"Shit," I say and jump out of the bed, sheets and blankets still tangled around my body, causing me to fall forward. My free hand braces me against the cold wood floor. "I knew it. What else do you have? Think it's one of Torres's guys?"

"I think so," Cam answers. "It took me a long time to break through. They have his computer firewalled pretty well. But he's *definitely* not the international studies major he claims to be."

"When are they meeting?" I ask as I flip on my light and start running around my room, furiously tearing off my pajama bottoms, and throwing on a pair of jeans.

"Tomorrow morning at eight thirty for breakfast at some café in Greenwich Village," Cam says. "You've got to figure out a way to warn her before morning."

"I know, but her phone is probably tapped," I reply, cradling the sat phone in my ear as I pull on a pair of mismatched socks, my heart beating so loudly in my ears I can barely make out my own words. "I can't call and warn her. They'll hear the call and then figure out some other way to snatch her earlier."

"And they'll find you too," Cam says, his voice weighty with worry in my ear. "What are you going to do?"

"What choice do I have?" I ask, throwing my sheet and blanket off the floor and back onto my bed as I search for the sweatshirt I had on earlier. "I've got to get down to New York and stop her."

"But your cover," Cam says. "This could expose you."

"Well, I don't have a lot of options here," I snap, opening up a black backpack and sprinting around the room, picking up a pair of jeans, a few T-shirts, underwear, pajama pants, and socks, and throwing them inside. "You're the only one who knows about the Torres

threats. The Black Angels are done with me. There's no way they're going to pull together some type of middle-of-the-night operation for a friend I haven't seen in over a year. Who I'm not supposed to even be in contact with anymore."

"Maybe if I explained—" Cam begins.

"No way. I don't trust them," I cut him off, my shaking hands searching the bottom of my closet for a baseball cap. "Someone on the inside was working with Torres before he died."

"What? How do you know?"

"Because he practically told me before I killed him," I say and take in a sharp breath. "Look, I don't have time to explain. But if the mole finds out, they'll just tip off Fernando, and Harper could get taken *now*. We can't risk it."

"You really think so?"

"Absolutely. There is no one in that bunker I trust except for my father and you. I've got weapons. I've got a car. I've got to do this on my own."

"At least bring Luke with you," Cam insists. "You cannot take on a team of assassins by yourself. Unless you want both you and Harper to die."

He's right. Someone needs to grab Harper while the other stands by as the getaway driver. This is a two-person job. I don't want to force Luke to go rogue again. And I certainly don't want to put him in danger. But I can't do this alone.

"He's going to be pissed," I say quietly.

"Not as pissed as he'd be if he woke up to some note saying you were gone," Cam says.

"Fine," I answer, getting down on my knees and pushing down

on one of the old floorboards in my room. The plank moves with ease, revealing an envelope filled with one hundred twenty-dollar bills. I hope we can make this quick and clean. Grab Harper and get her to safety. But if we're spotted, if Torres's team intercepts us, we might have to run. And we'll need cash. "Will you get me all the details about Harper? Where she lives, where she's staying tonight?"

"On it," Cam says. "You need to get on the road now. If you don't leave soon, you'll never make it."

I pull back my curtain. Shit. It's snowing. Even on a clear day, it's at least a four-hour drive to New York City.

"Okay. Talk to you soon," I say and hang up. I throw the phone on my bed and walk across the hallway. I open Luke's door without knocking and flip on his lights. His eyes, groggy with sleep, squint up at me as I hover over his bed.

"Get dressed," I say, tossing him a sweatshirt off the floor. "We're going to New York."