

SCUFFING THROUGH THE DEAD LEAVES AND PINE NEEDLES at the side of the road, I head back to Walden Pond the next morning. I'm drawn there, like maybe this is the place where I can find some answers. Which is tough, considering I'm not even sure of the questions.

Last night I slept like a dead person on the stage platform at the school, and woke up in the same position I went to sleep in, my back stiff and no dreams to remember. With Sophie's keys giving me free reign of the school, I took a shower in the boys' locker room and picked out a change of clothes from the lost and found—faded jeans and a long-sleeved black T-shirt. In the cafeteria fridge, I found some ham and cheese sandwiches, milk, and an apple.

My side hurt and was bleeding again, so I let myself into the nurse's office to get antiseptic and bandages. The cut should be better by now, but it's still red around the edges and hurts to touch it. Worst of all, it reminds me of Simon.

In my imagination Simon is a zombie, withered hands reaching, eyes glazed, blood streaking down his forehead, nubby teeth grinning. Will he be looking for me too, like Magpie and those guys who work for him? But no, none of them can find me here. There's no way.

*Don't think about it.*

Walden Pond is a mirror, reflecting gray-blue skies, the pines, and oak trees with new leaves pushing out of fat buds. Some people are out hiking, but the deeper I go into the woods, the more alone I am. Walking faster, I break into this little trot, a comfortable jogging pace that just feels good. Maybe I really did run track in my former life, because running feels as natural as walking, as playing guitar, as breathing. Somehow I'm even able to set aside the pain in my side to focus on the running. My legs and breaths settle into a rhythm that calms every cell in my body like meditation, like some kind of drug. Even though my body is moving, my mind is relaxed.

A collage of images floats into my consciousness, snapshot memories of Jack and Nessa, of Magpie and

Simon. Thomas. There's Hailey smiling at me and Cameron glaring. Ms. Coleman. Sophie and Billy. In such a short time, my weird disjointed life has put me in contact with a lot of people. Some I'm glad to have etched on my brain. Others I'd erase in a nanosecond if I could figure out how.

Leaves and pebbles and pine needles crunch in cadence under my sneakers, lulling me into a comfortable trance, and in this frame of mind, I try to access the memories that lie just out of reach.

Gently pressing my memory to the edge of places that don't feel safe, I think: *Dad*. Then I think: *Mom*. The beast inside twitches in its sleep, but I refuse to surrender, focusing instead on my pumping arms and legs, my breaths. Inhale. Exhale.

*Dad. Mom.*

Like a camera taking a picture, an image of my dad flashes behind my eyeballs. Tall man, dark hair, wire rimmed glasses, gray eyes like mine, a kind smile. We are outside, Dad and me. We're in the woods, building a fire. We have sleeping bags and backpacks and compasses. This is something we do together, something that belongs to us.

Now I see Dad clutching a suitcase, waving good-bye. There are no words, but I know he is going, leaving

again. My heart clenches like a fist. Don't go, Dad.

I almost trip over a fallen branch on the trail, but as I regain my footing, another image floats into my consciousness. Mom. Hair blond and wavy, face anxious and thin, a half-empty glass of red wine clutched in her hand as she stares out a window. Doesn't look at me, doesn't see me. I yell something at her, then turn and charge out a blue door with a half-circle window. I slam it shut, the window shatters, and glass skitters on the floor, but she doesn't even turn around.

My breath hitches in my chest, but I press my memory even further, contemplate another word: *sister*.

The beast roars awake as if I poked it with a stick and I completely lose the rhythm of running and breathing. Stumble off the path into a small inlet next to the pond, hidden from the path by a hill and a cluster of evergreens. Leaning against a tree branch, wheezing, I peer into the green-brown water of Walden Pond.

Searing pain blinds me and I grab my head to keep it from exploding, forcing myself to go there again. *Sister*. The thing inside expands, rips at the lining of my stomach, squeezes my lungs. *Sister*. It's trying to kill me, wants me dead. Better dead than to remember.

My legs are rubber, give out, and I collapse on a big rock, doubled over to cradle my seizing stomach. My

God. My entire body drifts toward unconsciousness, and I'm falling. No. Can't let myself pass out. Have to remember.

*Sister*.

Too close to the edge of the rock, I slip on a sludge-coated corner and tumble forward into the water, shatter the smooth surface, and go under. Cold water seeps into my hair, my clothes and shocks me to my core. I float, stunned and weightless under the green water, at the edge of unconsciousness. The cold seeps into my skin, legs, arms, ears, internal organs, the roots of my hair. But still I float, serene, not even trying to kick my feet or pull toward the surface.

The water is shallow, no danger, not really. And yet. Deep enough. A calm feeling spreads through my veins like water warmed by a secret hot spring. Drowning would be so easy, so sweet.

Then a strange image flashes behind my eyeballs. Open music box, tinny music playing, plastic ballerina twirling. And then I see her. My sister. Big blue eyes, long eyelashes. Yellow-white hair, pink shirt, one pink sneaker. The music box grinds to a halt, ballerina twisted to one side, broken. And there is blood. My sister's screams fill my head, jar me from my peaceful drifting.

*Save her.*

Jamming my feet down, I find the pond's spongy bottom and push myself to the surface, where I fill my lungs with cool fresh air and cough and cough.



I take the long way back to the high school, through the woods, away from the streets. My teeth are chattering and my body is shivering so hard it hurts. Icy pond water squishes in my sneakers with every step and my cold, drenched clothes weigh about fifty pounds, or at least it seems like it. By the time I get there, it's afternoon and the school is already growing dark and silent under clouds threatening rain.

Opening the back door of the school with Sophie's keys, I'm thinking of warm, dry clothes from the lost and found and a hot shower in the boys' locker room. But then I'm stopped short by a shrill beeping sound. It's coming from the keypad on the wall near the door, which flashes the words *enter code* in a small gray screen.

Oh crap. Even though I opened the outside door with the key, there's some kind of backup security system that needs a code. Just a few numbers punched in, that's all. In a panic, I pound a few keys, as if somehow randomly I'll hit the right combination. Stupid. After about thirty

seconds, it's all over. The burglar alarm starts screaming, a continuous, pulsing wail. The police are probably on their way.

I run down the hall, toward the auditorium to my hiding place above the stage. Just in time, I realize I'm leaving wet footprints behind me. The pond water is squishing out of my sneakers leaving a trail. I duck into the boys' room, where I take off my wet sneakers, my wet clothes, and quickly dry off with paper towels. Then I wad up more paper towels, rush back into the hallway and do my best to dry the footprints, pushing the towels around with my feet. I run back to my hiding place, dressed only in my underwear, clothes bunched in my arms.

Just as I'm scrambling up to the platform above the stage, the sound of a door forced open echoes down a long hallway. There are low murmurs, voices I can't make out. Abruptly, the alarm is silenced, leaving my ears ringing as I huddle in a ball, shivering. I'm terrified that I left footprints leading to my hiding place; sure they'll hear my heavy breathing and the jack-hammer of my heart.

Disembodied voices and footsteps echo through the school. Approaching, closer. Too afraid to peer down into the auditorium space, I try to slow my breaths. Two men are here. I hear their voices.

"Just a false alarm, Terry. Second time this month. Everything seems secure."

"Well, hold on," says the cop named Terry. In moments, his footsteps echo on the wooden stage. I can see the beam of a flashlight, sweeping the stage. Can he hear me breathing? I cringe, motionless. Then I hear the drip.

The wet pile of clothes next to me is dripping through the spaces between the platform boards. Water plops gently to the floor below.

Eyes shut tight, I wait for the officer to shout orders at me, or climb up to get me, handcuffs ready to snap on my wrists.

"Terry, come on, there's nothing here."

"There's a little water here on the floor," the cop says. I imagine the flashlight examining the puddle, then sense its beam sweeping up to my hiding place above his head. I hold my breath.

"Just a leak," he murmurs. Then louder he says, "Okay, Jim, let's go. Everything checks out."

I'm still holding my breath as I follow the sound of their footsteps on the hollow stage and then disappearing down the hall. Finally, I let the air out of my lungs with a low hiss, but I'm still too terrified to move. I stay there for a long time to reassure myself they're

really gone, until my trembling knees and elbows make knocking sounds on the wood.

Still dressed only in my underwear, I go into the boys' locker room and start a shower, let the room fill with steam and stand motionless under the hot water until the cold leaches out of my body.

I pull on dry clothes from the lost and found—a striped shirt missing a button, baggy jeans, and sneakers about a half-size too big. I focus on these tasks, even though my entire body hums with restlessness.

All I can think about now is my sister in danger, blond hair, pink sneaker, and too much blood. Big eyes so scared. If I thought it would help, I'd be sprinting down the streets of Concord now to get to her. But that would accomplish nothing. First, I don't know how to find her. Second, my body is weak, exhausted, depleted. I can hardly even think.

Only one true, clear thought slices through my exhaustion: I have to find out who I am, so I can figure out how to get to her. This is not about me anymore. Even the beast can't keep me from her or prevent me from remembering more. I won't let it.

For now though, my mind and body are numb. Just need to get warm. Just need to rest. Build up my strength so I can focus on finding her.



Using Sophie's keys, I let myself in the nurse's office to put fresh bandages on my side. It hurts more than before, and now there's yellow pus oozing out of the cut. The red skin around the cut is hot, and my face feels hot too. At the same time, there's this chunk of ice inside me. So cold. I find blankets on a cupboard shelf, lie shivering on one of the cots, and the tide of sleep takes me under in a heartbeat.



"Time to wake up, son."

A voice jolts me from a dream, and my eyes fly open to see a woman sitting in a chair like she's been there a while, watching me sleep. Gray-streaked, curly hair. Young-old face with sad brown eyes. It takes a moment to recognize the janitor.

"You're not supposed to be in here, you know." Her voice is firm, but also kind.

"I'm sorry," I say politely, as if I've taken a wrong turn and wandered by accident into her fancy rose garden. "I'll go." My temples pound when I sit up.

But she just sits there, head cocked to one side like she's in no hurry for me to leave. "It really is amazing how much you look like Michael."

"Michael is...your son?"

Sophie nods, focusing dry eyes on the medicine cabinet over my shoulder. "He died a few years ago, when he was thirteen. Leukemia. But I bet he'd look a lot like you now. What are you, seventeen? Eighteen?"

"Um, yeah."

"By the way, I also know you're not a student here."

She frowns at me, but she doesn't actually seem angry.

"You're lucky Billy isn't good at remembering faces like I am. You're trespassing on town property."

"I'm sorry," I say again. For some reason, I can't lie to this woman who watched me sleep and called me by her son's name.

"So, tell me. What are you doing in the nurse's office at six in the morning when nobody but the janitors are supposed to be here?"

"I'm here, because—" A hundred lies pass through my head and I discard them all. "I'm here because I ran away from home and there's no place else to go."

Her face is soft and sad as she reaches out to touch my cheek. Her fingers are ice cold against my skin, and I flinch. "You're feverish," she says with such deep concern that all I want is to lie on this cot and let this nice lady take care of me so I can feel better and find my sister.

The distant sound of a man whistling off-key echoes

down the hallway. "There's Billy," says Sophie. She rises to her feet and peers down at me. "You need to go. Even if I wanted to let you stay, I can't. I'd lose my job." "I understand," I say.

Reaching out a finger, she brushes hair out of my eyes. "What's your name?" she asks me.

"Hank."

"Hank, call your mother," she whispers, like she knows something about me that I don't. "I guarantee she would sacrifice her own life just to have you back home. Understand?"

I nod, my eyes burning. She turns toward the door, clears her throat, and asks, "By the way, you didn't come across a set of keys the other night, did you?"

I don't even try to sidestep the question. Instead, I reach into my pocket and give her an apologetic smile as the keys chink into her open hand.

"Good boy," she says, and she leaves the room. The words float in her wake, and something inside me longs to follow after her. But I just lie there and listen as her footsteps echo down the hallway and disappear.

# 8

IT'S EARLY MORNING IN DOWNTOWN CONCORD, BUT already the entire town seems wide awake. Sitting near the window inside the doughnut shop, I watch normal citizens go about their normal lives. Just the start of another day. A line of people snakes out the door, waiting to order their large coffees, doughnuts, and breakfast sandwiches. My coffee is black and I nibble on a double chocolate doughnut. Chocolate for breakfast. I thought it would cheer me up; make things look a little better. It doesn't.

Once again, I'm in search of shelter. It's hard to focus on moving forward in my completely unsettled life when I don't even know where I'm going to sleep tonight.

Plus, I'm running dangerously low on money. Something's got to change soon. A part of me actually considers going back to New York to find Jack and Nessa. At least that way, I wouldn't be so alone. And lonely.

With my teeth I rip open a packet of Advil that I bought at the convenience store across the street, and wash them down with bitter coffee. Maybe if I can get rid of this headache and stop feeling so dizzy, I'll be able to think straight. Like some wounded animal, I want to curl up and hide until I feel better. Even animals can find a cave or a hole in a tree where they can rest. Where can I go?

When the workers behind the counter in their goofy paper hats start giving me funny looks and whispering to each other, I figure I've overstayed my welcome. I hit the streets and just walk. One foot and then the other foot, getting me somewhere. Anywhere. As if they know where they're going, they take me down the street to the Concord Free Public Library. They take me up the stairs and through the front door. Public building. Warmth. Shelter. I'm in.

At first I'm kind of surprised that it's not the Henry David Thoreau Memorial Library. I mean, isn't everything in Concord named after Thoreau? And when I wander into the lobby, I'm sure at first that the life-size

white marble statue of a guy sitting on a throne-like chair is Thoreau too. I almost expect him to get up off his marble throne and start yelling at me for being such a failure. But the base of the statue says he's Ralph Waldo Emerson. That name again. Guess he was pretty famous in Concord. One of Thoreau's buddies, maybe. Whatever. Damn, my head hurts.

"Hank?"

At first I think I've imagined someone saying my name. But when I hear it again, I whirl around and see a big man in black horn-rimmed glasses standing behind me in the library lobby, smiling like he's happy to see me.

I look at him blankly.

"Hank, it's me." When I still don't respond, he pulls off the glasses.

"Thomas?"

He laughs at my stunned expression. "In the flesh. Good to see you, Hank." He reaches out a huge hand to give me a cheerful smack on the shoulder that actually hurts.

"Good to see you," I echo weakly.

"So what brings you to the library in the middle of the morning?"

"I want to take out books," I say. Duh, I sound like a moron.



"Isn't this a school day? Shouldn't you be in school?"

"Well." My mind races, and I remember what I said to Hailey two days ago. "I'm home-schooled, so I do a lot of projects on my own. Today I'm here to do some research for a paper I'm working on."

"Well then, today's your lucky day," Thomas says, flashing straight white teeth. "In addition to being a historian, I'm the research librarian here." He pulls up the right sleeve of his green T-shirt to show me the tattoo of a cobra, coiled and ready to strike. Except that it's wearing a pair of black-rimmed glasses just like Thomas's, and above the snake is one word in fancy Gothic lettering: "Bookworm."

"I can hook you up with any research materials you might need." He settles his black glasses on the end of his nose and sits down at his desk, fingers poised over his computer keyboard. He smiles up at me expectantly. "So."

"So?"

"What's the subject you're researching today?"

My mind chokes, just when I need it to be creative. "Well, I'm working on a paper about..."

My glance drifts around the room, searching for something, anything that might inspire a potential research paper project. Nothing comes to me. Can't

think straight. Must be this stupid headache, the heat gathering under my skin, so distracting.

But then, I see them. Perched high on the ends of several bookshelves in the lobby, there's a row of four statues. They're carved in white marble like the Emerson one, except these are just the heads and shoulders of people, like the tops of their bodies were hacked off and set on pedestals.

"...famous people who lived in Concord. Since I'm new to the town and all, I thought it would be an interesting and educational subject for me to pursue."

Lame, lame, lame. There's no way Thomas is going to buy that. But I don't seem capable of coming up with anything better. Thomas looks skeptical as he peers at me over his glasses, which I totally deserve, but then his glance follows mine, up to the statues.

"You mean, like those dudes up there?"

I offer a non committal nod-shrug combo.

"Actually, that's a really good place to start." Thomas is such a huge history geek that he warms up to the subject immediately and starts telling me who each of the people are, but I'm having trouble concentrating. The guy who looks like he's sitting on a throne is Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was a big-shot writer in his day. One of the statue heads is Ephraim somebody, and he

created the Concord grape. That's his claim to fame. Another head is Louisa May Alcott who mostly wrote books for girls. Then there's Ebenezer who was a judge and whose last name is Hoar. I bet he got teased a lot in high school for that. When Thomas starts rambling on about the statue of Bronson Alcott, who was Louisa May's dad and started some fancy progressive school or something, my eyes start to glaze over. I hope Thomas doesn't notice. "And, of course, over here, is our friend Henry Thoreau."

Thomas points to another pedestal off to his right, away from the other statues. On it is another one of those head-and-shoulder deals, but this time it's Thoreau. I take a closer look, stare into those empty white statue eyes. I don't remember him having such a huge nose.

"They all knew each other in Concord in the mid-nineteenth century and moved around in the same circles. I'll look for one book of biographies that deals with all of them if you want," Thomas says.

"Yeah, sure. That would be great."

He leans over his computer screen, starts tapping away at the keyboard, and then jogs over to a nearby shelf to grab a book. Sitting back down at his desk, he leafs through it and attaches a yellow sticky note to each

page that corresponds to one of the statue people. Then he hands the book to me like it's the fucking Holy Grail.

"Thanks, man," I say.

Thomas nods at me, all pleased with himself, but then takes a good long look at me and yanks off his glasses. "You feeling okay, Hank?" he asks me. "Your eyes look a little glassy."

"Nah, I'm okay," I tell him. "Just not getting enough sleep, I guess."

"You're not still sleeping at Walden, are you?" he asks in a low voice.

I force a laugh. "Of course not. That was just one of those things. Just that one crazy night."

Thomas nods thoughtfully. "The night you fell out of the sky?"

"Yeah." I clear my throat, shuffle a bit, and pick up the book. "Thanks for this," I tell him. "I'll go read it right now."

I duck into the next room, where there are tables and chairs for studying. I sit at a round table near the window, and scan the biographies of all the statue people in the book, including Emerson and Thoreau, just in case Thomas decides to grill me about them. But my head hurts so badly, it's hard to focus. So when I'm done, I get up, cram all my stuff, including the library book,

into my lost-and-found backpack, and do some exploring.

Down the hall, I find the men's room. Pulling up my shirt in the stall, I can see the pus from my cut oozing through the bandage, even though I just changed it. The damn thing is throbbing and hurts like hell. So I change the bandage again, using fresh supplies I took from the nurse's office before I left the school.

Continuing my scouting mission, I discover the library has three floors of books, plus a basement level with a boardroom and a candy machine. There are a lot of places where a guy seeking shelter could hide for a day or two. I buy myself a package of peanut butter crackers from the machine and eat them for lunch.

Back on the first floor, I sit on the big couch in the lobby next to the statue of Emerson in his chair, and under the watchful eyes of the other statues. Sinking into the comfort of the couch, I pretend to continue reading the library book Thomas gave me, so I won't look like some random homeless person who just wandered into the library to take a nap. Even though that's exactly what I am and exactly what I feel like doing, I close my eyes against the throbbing pain in my head.



"Hank, wake up. The library closes in ten minutes."

"What? Oh. Okay."

Garbled thoughts, twisted and confused, sinking in quicksand, can't think. All I want is to sleep and sleep. I close my eyes again; drift back under.

"Look at me, Hank." This time, Thomas has a hand on my shoulder and is gently shaking me. "You definitely don't look well, my friend."

I force myself to open my eyes wide, though it hurts. Everything hurts, especially my side, where the knife wound is throbbing. "I'm fine," I lie. "Really." Feeling like a drunk person, I peer around at my surroundings, not fully recognizing where I am, not caring. I pick up the library book and hand it back to Thomas. "Thanks. I'll be going now."

I get up, grab my backpack, and sway just a bit on my feet as I take a step toward the door.

"Hank, wait. At least let me make sure you get home."

"No, it's okay." Not looking at him, I adjust the strap of the pack on my shoulder. "My parents should be outside right now to pick me up."

Wanting to believe me, he nods, relief in his dark eyes, like maybe he actually cares what happens to me. A woman enters the lobby and I register dark hair and a blue sweater, but the rest of her is a blur.

"Thomas, I can't get the main computer to shut down," she says. "Something weird keeps popping up on the screen. Can you come take a look?"

"Sure, Annie. I'll be right there." He turns to me and says in a firm voice, "Well, you go home and get some rest now, okay, Hank?"

With a little wave, I pretend to head toward the front door as Thomas leaves the room. But as soon as he's out of sight, I struggle to make my mind work, try to decide where to go, where to hide. What kind of security system would a library have, anyway? Cameras and alarms? Motion detectors?

There's no time to think this through. Next to the couch in the lobby, there's a grand piano, covered with a woven brown cloth that almost reaches the floor. When I hear Thomas's voice rise in the other room, I dive under the piano. By accident, I hit the pedals and the piano makes a muffled, musical bang. I freeze. My heart thumps so loud I imagine it can be heard echoing through the entire library. Cowering, I wait for Thomas to come in and discover my hiding place.

"Come on, let's go already," I hear the woman librarian say to Thomas. "This place gives me the creeps after dark." I hear their footsteps approach the front door. "It's all your fault, you know. All that talk about the

library being haunted. I'm going to have nightmares."

Thomas laughs, apparently having forgotten all about me. "Sometimes I swear they're here, especially late at night, trying to communicate with me."

"You *would* think that."

The library goes dark, and I hear the door click shut, locked from the outside, and then all is silent. More silent even than the high school, if that's possible. Silent as a tomb.

I wait a long time, to make sure they're really gone. When I start to get a cramp in my leg, I crawl out from under the piano. I don't need to go far. The couch is right there, inviting me to lie down and sleep. It's too short for my lanky body, but I don't care. I collapse into it, feet trailing over the edge. Just need a good night's rest, and tomorrow will be better. Tomorrow, I'll figure out what to do, how to find my sister. It'll all be better after I sleep.



Just as I start to drift off, there's this strange shushing sound, like the sizzle of the surf. But it gets louder and I recognize what it is. Someone is in this room with me, whispering. What the hell? I open my eyes to see who's here, except that nobody is. I'm alone. Well, almost.

It's the statues. Their lips aren't moving in their frozen marble faces, but I can hear their voices. And after a moment, I can even make out what they're saying.

That guy Ephraim Bull is whispering something like, "Look at me, I'm the Father of the Concord Grape," and Louisa May Alcott is saying, "I wrote *Little Women*, a book beloved by girls all over the world." It reminds me of a boring museum exhibit, or a maybe a video about prominent citizens of nineteenth century Concord, Massachusetts, they'd show kids in middle school. The statues are stiff and without emotion, as if the people they represent were statues too, who never laughed or cried, never got hungry or cold or sick.

"I am Bronson Alcott," whispers the statue with huge eyebrows that look like fuzzy white caterpillars. He mumbles something about this place called Fruitlands he started, which sounds to me kind of like a 1960s commune that didn't work out so well.

Some distant corner of my brain knows this is nothing but a crazy dream, inspired by the book Thomas gave me and brought on by the fever deep-frying my brain-cells. But some other part of me is trying to convince me this is real, that the statues really do whisper to themselves in the Concord library at night after everybody goes home.

Ebenezer Hoar's voice grows slightly louder as he states his reason for being memorialized in marble. "I was a judge and a congressman," he says in a bland voice. Big deal. "And if you had appeared in my court, young man, I would have thrown you in prison for the rest of your natural life."

Startled, I glance up at the statue. He is looking straight at me with those spooky white marble eyes without pupils. "And I wager no one would miss you."

The others hiss in agreement, whispers that become threats and I realize there is nothing of the real Alcotts, Judge Hoar, Ephraim Bull, or Ralph Waldo Emerson in these statues at all. And somehow, they seem to know all the dark things about me that I can't remember.

The floor under me starts to shake, and I don't know if the eruption started inside the foundation of the building or someplace deep inside me. The whole library shudders with it, and the statues are silenced as their marble bodies tremble, then quiver toward the edge of their pedestals. Edging closer, closer, then with terrible silent screams, the statues fall one at a time and crash onto the library floor. Not solid marble at all, but with thin exteriors like eggshells that crack open and spew their true contents. Rotting meat crawling with maggots. Fat nightcrawlers and green garter snakes and horned



lizards. Broken shards of glass and twisted metal. Razor blades and knives and meat cleavers and spikes. The snakes slither toward me and I can smell rancid flesh.

Henry's statue sits frozen on its pedestal, still intact, watching me with a detached kind of sympathy.

I try to say, *do something*, Henry, but can't make any sound.

Bad spirits rise from the ruins of the statues then, curl toward me and lean over to stare into my face like they can extract information from me or maybe tap into my life force, jealous that their lives are over forever and I'm screwing up mine. They touch my hair and pull at my shirt.

*Stop it.* I try to swat at their fingers, turn away from their cold breath on my face, but I can't move. *Go away.* Still can't move, can't speak, can't shout, until at last, I can.



"Get away from me!" Hear my own voice at last, feel my body writhe.

"Shh. Hank, it's okay, you're all right." Somehow, Thomas is here. Thank God. Thomas. Is here.

"Thomas, make them stop, make them go away."

"There's nobody here, Hank, you're just imagining it. You're burning up with fever, buddy." He has a cell phone in his hand and puts it to his ear. "Help will be here before you know it."

I grab the phone, jab blindly at the Off button, throw it across the room, and scream at Thomas, begging him not to call anyone.

"Jesus, Hank. Calm down. You need help."

But I'm begging, shouting at him like a mental patient.

"Don't call, please don't call anybody, you don't understand. Can't let them find me."

"Hank, look at me, open your eyes. Why can't I call someone to help you?"

"My sister."

"Your sister, Hank?"

"My sister needs me, I need to go to her. And I can't help her if I'm in jail."

Thomas rears back. "Jail? What are you talking about, Hank?"

"If you call somebody, they're going to lock me up. Please. I beg you, please, Thomas. Please."

My body heaves with sobs but I'm aware of this from a distance, like I see myself from the ceiling, or maybe I'm one of the statue heads back up on its pedestal, intact and hiding the ugliness inside, looking down and



seeing the truth. I'm just a lost boy who has done something too terrible to remember, a trespasser into a world where I don't belong.

Thomas goes quiet, but finally says, "Look, Hank, you can't stay here. The library is opening soon. I'll take you to my house and we'll figure this out. Okay?"

I thank Thomas over and over and he helps me to my feet, wraps one of my arms around his neck and helps me walk outside to his motorcycle. He asks if I'm strong enough to hold on and I say yes, just don't call the cops. We get on the bike and I lean against his wide back trying so hard not to pass out or fall off. And we ride for five minutes or fifty minutes or maybe it's five hours and finally we're at his house and he helps me to his couch and that's all I know.