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Fallen

Written by Lauren Kate

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FALLEN



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CORGI BOOKS

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But paradise is locked and bolted. . . .
We must make a journey around the world
to see if a back door has perhaps been left open.



—Heinrich von Kleist, *"On the Puppet Theater"*

IN THE BEGINNING



HELSTON, ENGLAND

SEPTEMBER 1854

Around midnight, her eyes at last took shape. The look in them was feline, half determined and half tentative—all trouble. Yes, they were just right, those eyes. Rising up to her fine, elegant brow, inches from the dark cascade of her hair.

He held the paper at arm's length to assess his progress. It was hard, working without her in front of him, but then, he never could sketch in her presence. Since he had arrived from London—no, since he had

first seen her—he'd had to be careful always to keep her at a distance.

Every day now she approached him, and every day was more difficult than the one before. It was why he was leaving in the morning—for India, for the Americas, he didn't know or care. Wherever he ended up, it would be easier than being here.

He leaned over the drawing again, sighing as he used his thumb to perfect the smudged charcoal pout of her full bottom lip. This lifeless paper, cruel imposter, was the only way to take her with him.

Then, straightening up in the leather library chair, he felt it. That brush of warmth on the back of his neck.

Her.

Her mere proximity gave him the most peculiar sensation, like the kind of heat sent out when a log shatters to ash in a fire. He knew without turning around: She was there. He covered her likeness on the bound papers in his lap, but he could not escape her.

His eyes fell on the ivory-upholstered settee across the parlor, where only hours earlier she'd turned up unexpectedly, later than the rest of her party, in a rose silk gown, to applaud the eldest daughter of their host after a fine turn at the harpsichord. He glanced across the room, out the window to the veranda, where the day before she'd crept up on him, a fistful of wild white

peonies in her hand. She still thought the pull she felt toward him was innocent, that their frequent rendezvous in the gazebo were merely . . . happy coincidences. To be so naïve! He would never tell her otherwise—the secret was his to bear.

He stood and turned, the sketches left behind on the leather chair. And there she was, pressed against the ruby velvet curtain in her plain white dressing gown. Her black hair had fallen from its braid. The look on her face was the same as the one he'd sketched so many times. There was the fire, rising in her cheeks. Was she angry? Embarrassed? He longed to know, but could not allow himself to ask.

"What are you doing here?" He could hear the snarl in his voice, and regretted its sharpness, knowing she would never understand.

"I—I couldn't sleep," she stammered, moving toward the fire and his chair. "I saw the light in your room and then"—she paused, looking down at her hands—"your trunk outside the door. Are you going somewhere?"

"I was going to tell you—" He broke off. He shouldn't lie. He had never intended to let her know his plans. Telling her would only make things worse. Already, he had let things go too far, hoping this time would be different.

She drew nearer, and her eyes fell on his sketchbook. "You were drawing me?"

Her startled tone reminded him how great the gap was in their understanding. Even after all the time they'd spent together these past few weeks, she had not yet begun to glimpse the truth that lay behind their attraction.

This was good—or at least, it was for the better. For the past several days, since he'd made the choice to leave, he'd been struggling to pull away from her. The effort took so much out of him that, as soon as he was alone, he had to give in to his pent-up desire to draw her. He had filled up his book with pages of her arched neck, her marble collarbone, the black abyss of her hair.

Now, he looked back at the sketch, not ashamed at being caught drawing her, but worse. A cold chill spread through him as he realized that her discovery—the exposure of his feelings—would destroy her. He should have been more careful. It always began like this.

"Warm milk with a spoonful of treacle," he murmured, his back still to her. Then he added sadly, "It helps you sleep."

"How did you know? Why, that's exactly what my mother used to—"

"I know," he said, turning to face her. The astonishment in her voice did not surprise him, yet he could not explain to her how he knew, or tell her how many times he had administered this very drink to her in the past

when the shadows came, how he had held her until she fell asleep.

He felt her touch as though it were burning through his shirt, her hand laid gently on his shoulder, causing him to gasp. They had not yet touched in this life, and the first contact always left him breathless.

"Answer me," she whispered. "Are you leaving?"

"Yes."

"Then take me with you," she blurted out. Right on cue, he watched her suck in her breath, wishing to take back her plea. He could see the progression of her emotions settle in the crease between her eyes: She would feel impetuous, then bewildered, then ashamed by her own forwardness. She always did this, and too many times before, he had made the mistake of comforting her at this exact moment.

"No," he whispered, remembering . . . always remembering. . . . "I sail tomorrow. If you care for me at all, you won't say another word."

"*If* I care for you," she repeated, almost as if she were speaking to herself. "I—I *love*—"

"Don't."

"I have to say it. I—I love you, I'm quite sure, and if you leave—"

"If I leave, I save your life." He spoke slowly, trying to reach a part of her that might remember. Was it there at all, buried somewhere? "Some things are more important

than love. You won't understand, but you have to trust me."

Her eyes drilled into him. She stepped back and crossed her arms over her chest. This was his fault, too—he always brought out her contemptuous side when he spoke down to her.

"You mean to say there are things more important than this?" she challenged, taking his hands and drawing them to her heart.

Oh, to be her and not know what was coming! Or at least to be stronger than he was and be able to stop her. If he didn't stop her, she would never learn, and the past would only repeat itself, torturing them both again and again.

The familiar warmth of her skin under his hands made him tilt his head back and moan. He was trying to ignore how close she was, how well he knew the feel of her lips on his, how bitter he felt that all of this had to end. But her fingers traced his so lightly. He could feel her heart racing through her thin cotton gown.

She was right. There was nothing more than this. There never was. He was about to give in and take her in his arms when he caught the look in her eyes. As if she'd seen a ghost.

She was the one to pull away, a hand to her forehead.

"I'm having the strangest sensation," she whispered.

No—was it already too late?

Her eyes narrowed into the shape in his sketch and she came back to him, her hands on his chest, her lips parted expectantly. "Tell me I'm mad, but I swear I've been right here before. . . ."

So it *was* too late. He looked up, shivering, and could feel the dark descending. He took one last chance to seize her, to hold her as tightly as he'd been yearning to for weeks.

As soon as her lips melted into his, both of them were powerless. The honeysuckle taste of her mouth made him dizzy. The closer she pressed against him, the more his stomach churned with the thrill and the agony of it all. Her tongue traced his, and the fire between them burned brighter, hotter, more powerful with every new touch, every new exploration. Yet none of it was new.

The room quaked. An aura around them started to glow.

She noticed nothing, was aware of nothing, understood nothing besides their kiss.

He alone knew what was about to happen, what dark companions were prepared to fall on their reunion. Even though he was unable to alter the course of their lives yet again, he knew.

The shadows swirled directly overhead. So close, he might have touched them. So close, he wondered

whether she could hear what they were whispering. He watched as the cloud passed over her face. For a moment he saw a spark of recognition growing in her eyes.

Then there was nothing, nothing at all.

ONE



PERFECT STRANGERS

Luce barged into the fluorescent-lit lobby of the Sword & Cross School ten minutes later than she should have. A barrel-chested attendant with ruddy cheeks and a clipboard clamped under an iron bicep was already giving orders—which meant Luce was already behind.

"So remember, it's meds, beds, and reds," the attendant barked at a cluster of three other students all standing with their backs to Luce. "Remember the basics and no one gets hurt."

Luce hurried to slip in behind the group. She was still trying to figure out whether she'd filled out the giant stack of paperwork correctly, whether this shaven-headed guide standing before them was a man or a woman, whether there was anyone to help her with this enormous duffel bag, whether her parents were going to get rid of her beloved Plymouth Fury the minute they arrived home from dropping her off here. They'd been threatening to sell the car all summer, and now they had a reason even Luce couldn't argue with: No one was allowed to have a car at Luce's new school. Her new *reform* school, to be precise.

She was still getting used to the term.

"Could you, uh, could you repeat that?" she asked the attendant. "What was it, meds—?"

"Well, look what the storm blew in," the attendant said loudly, then continued, enunciating slowly: "*Meds.* If you're one of the medicated students, this is where you go to keep yourself doped up, sane, breathing, whatever." *Woman,* Luce decided, studying the attendant. No man would be catty enough to say all that in such a saccharine tone of voice.

"Got it." Luce felt her stomach heave. "Meds."

She'd been off meds for years now. After the accident this past summer, Dr. Sanford, her specialist in Hopkinton—and the reason her parents had sent her to boarding school all the way in New Hampshire—had

wanted to consider medicating her again. Though she'd finally convinced him of her quasi-stability, it had taken an extra month of analysis on her part just to stay off those awful antipsychotics.

Which was why she was enrolling in her senior year at Sword & Cross a full month after the academic year had begun. Being a new student was bad enough, and Luce had been really nervous about having to jump into classes where everyone else was already settled. But from the looks of this tour, she wasn't the only new kid arriving today.

She sneaked a peek at the three other students standing in a half circle around her. At her last school, Dover Prep, the campus tour on the first day was where she'd met her best friend, Callie. On a campus where all the other students had practically been weaned together, it would have been enough that Luce and Callie were the only non-legacy kids. But it didn't take long for the two girls to realize they also had the exact same obsession with the exact same old movies—especially where Albert Finney was concerned. After their discovery freshman year while watching *Two for the Road* that neither one of them could make a bag of popcorn without setting off the fire alarm, Callie and Luce hadn't left each other's sides. Until . . . until they'd had to.

At Luce's sides today were two boys and a girl. The girl seemed easy enough to figure out, blond and

Neutrogena-commercial pretty, with pastel pink manicured nails that matched her plastic binder.

"I'm Gabbe," she drawled, flashing Luce a big smile that disappeared as quickly as it had surfaced, before Luce could even offer her own name. The girl's waning interest reminded her more of a southern version of the girls at Dover than someone she'd expect at Sword & Cross. Luce couldn't decide whether this was comforting or not, any more than she could imagine what a girl who looked like this would be doing at reform school.

To Luce's right was a guy with short brown hair, brown eyes, and a smattering of freckles across his nose. But the way he wouldn't even meet her eyes, just kept picking at a hangnail on his thumb, gave Luce the impression that, like her, he was probably still stunned and embarrassed to find himself here.

The guy to her left, on the other hand, fit Luce's image of this place a little bit too perfectly. He was tall and thin, with a DJ bag slung over his shoulder, shaggy black hair, and large, deep-set green eyes. His lips were full and a natural rose color most girls would kill for. At the back of his neck, a black tattoo in the shape of a sunburst seemed almost to glow on his light skin, rising up from the edge of his black T-shirt.

Unlike the other two, when this guy turned to meet her gaze, he held it and didn't let go. His mouth was set in a straight line, but his eyes were warm and alive. He

gazed at her, standing as still as a sculpture, which made Luce feel rooted to her spot, too. She sucked in her breath. Those eyes were intense, and alluring, and, well, a little bit disarming.

With some loud throat-clearing noises, the attendant interrupted the boy's trancelike stare. Luce blushed and pretended to be very busy scratching her head.

"Those of you who've learned the ropes are free to go after you dump your hazards." The attendant gestured at a large cardboard box under a sign that said in big black letters PROHIBITED MATERIALS. "And when I say *free*, Todd"—she clamped a hand down on the freckled kid's shoulder, making him jump—"I mean gymnasium-bound to meet your preassigned student guides. You"—she pointed at Luce—"dump your hazards and stay with me."

The four of them shuffled toward the box and Luce watched, baffled, as the other students began to empty their pockets. The girl pulled out a three-inch pink Swiss Army knife. The green-eyed guy reluctantly dumped a can of spray paint and a box cutter. Even the hapless Todd let loose several books of matches and a small container of lighter fluid. Luce felt almost stupid that she wasn't concealing a hazard of her own—but when she saw the other kids reach into their pockets and chuck their cell phones into the box, she gulped.

Leaning forward to read the PROHIBITED MATERIALS

sign a little more closely, she saw that cell phones, pagers, and all two-way radio devices were strictly forbidden. It was bad enough that she couldn't have her car! Luce clamped a sweaty hand around the cell phone in her pocket, her only connection to the outside world. When the attendant saw the look on her face, Luce received a few quick slaps on the cheek. "Don't swoon on me, kid, they don't pay me enough to resuscitate. Besides, you get one phone call once a week in the main lobby."

One phone call . . . once a week? But—

She looked down at her phone one last time and saw that she'd received two new text messages. It didn't seem possible that these would be her two *last* text messages. The first one was from Callie.

> *Call immediately! Will be waiting by the phone all nite so be ready to dish. And remember the mantra I assigned you. You'll survive! BTW, for what it's worth, I think everyone's totally forgotten about . . .*

In typical Callie fashion, she'd gone on so long that Luce's crap cell phone cut the message off four lines in. In a way, Luce was almost relieved. She didn't want to read about how everyone from her old school had already forgotten what had happened to her, what she'd done to land herself in *this* place.

She sighed and scrolled down to her second message. It was from her mom, who'd only just gotten the hang of texting a few weeks ago, and who surely had not known about this one-call-once-a-week thing or she would never have abandoned her daughter here. Right?

Kiddo, we are always thinking of you. Be good and try to eat enough protein. We'll talk when we can. Love, M&D

With a sigh, Luce realized her parents must have known. How else to explain their drawn faces when she'd waved goodbye at the school gates this morning, duffel bag in hand? At breakfast, she'd tried to joke about finally losing that appalling New England accent she'd picked up at Dover, but her parents hadn't even cracked a smile. She'd thought they were still mad at her. They never did the whole raising-their-voice thing, which meant that when Luce really messed up, they just gave her the old silent treatment. Now she understood this morning's strange demeanor: Her parents were already mourning the loss of contact with their only daughter.

"We're still waiting on one person," the attendant sang. "I wonder who it is." Luce's attention snapped back to the Hazard Box, which was now brimming with contraband she didn't even recognize. She could feel the

dark-haired boy's green eyes staring at her. She looked up and noticed that *everyone* was staring. Her turn. She closed her eyes and slowly opened her fingers, letting her phone slip from her grasp and land with a sad *thunk* on top of the heap. The sound of being all alone.

Todd and the fembot Gabbe headed for the door without so much as a look in Luce's direction, but the third boy turned to the attendant.

"I can fill her in," he said, nodding at Luce.

"Not part of our deal," the attendant replied automatically, as if she'd been expecting this dialogue. "You're a new student again—that means new-student restrictions. Back to square one. You don't like it, you should have thought twice before breaking parole."

The boy stood motionless, expressionless, as the attendant tugged Luce—who'd stiffened at the word "parole"—toward the end of a yellowed hall.

"Moving on," she said, as if nothing had just happened. "Beds." She pointed out the west-facing window to a distant cinder-block building. Luce could see Gabbe and Todd shuffling slowly toward them, with the third boy walking slowly, as if catching up to them were the last thing on his list of things to do.

The dorm was formidable and square, a solid gray block of a building whose thick double doors gave away nothing about the possibility of life inside them. A large stone plaque stood planted in the middle of the dead

lawn, and Luce remembered from the Web site the words PAULINE DORMITORY chiseled into it. It looked even uglier in the hazy morning sun than it had looked in the flat black-and-white photograph.

Even from this distance, Luce could see black mold covering the face of the dorm. All the windows were obstructed by rows of thick steel bars. She squinted. Was that barbed wire topping the fence around the building?

The attendant looked down at a chart, flipping through Luce's file. "Room sixty-three. Throw your bag in my office with the rest of them for now. You can unpack this afternoon."

Luce dragged her red duffel bag toward three other nondescript black trunks. Then she reached reflexively for her cell phone, where she usually keyed in things she needed to remember. But as her hand searched her empty pocket, she sighed and committed the room number to memory instead.

She still didn't see why she couldn't just stay with her parents; their house in Thunderbolt was less than a half hour from Sword & Cross. It had felt so good to be back home in Savannah, where, as her mom always said, even the wind blew lazily. Georgia's softer, slower pace suited Luce way more than New England ever had.

But Sword & Cross didn't feel like Savannah. It hardly felt like anywhere at all, except the lifeless, colorless place where the court had mandated she board.

She'd overheard her dad on the phone with the headmaster the other day, nodding in his befuddled biology-professor way and saying, "Yes, yes, maybe it would be best for her to be supervised all the time. No, no, we wouldn't want to interfere with your system."

Clearly her father had not seen the conditions of his only daughter's supervision. This place looked like a maximum-security prison.

"And what about, what did you say—the reds?" Luce asked the attendant, ready to be released from the tour.

"Reds," the attendant said, pointing toward a small wired device hanging from the ceiling: a lens with a flashing red light. Luce hadn't seen it before, but as soon as the attendant pointed the first one out, she realized they were everywhere.

"Cameras?"

"Very good," the attendant said, voice dripping condescension. "We make them obvious in order to remind you. All the time, everywhere, we're watching you. So don't screw up—that is, if you can help yourself."

Every time someone talked to Luce like she was a total psychopath, she came that much closer to believing it was true.

All summer, the memories had haunted her, in her dreams and in the rare moments her parents left her alone. *Something* had happened in that cabin, and everyone (including Luce) was dying to know exactly what.

The police, the judge, the social worker had all tried to pry the truth out of her, but she was as clueless about it all as they were. She and Trevor had been joking around the whole evening, chasing each other down to the row of cabins on the lake, away from the rest of the party. She'd tried to explain that it had been one of the best nights of her life, until it turned into the worst.

She'd spent so much time replaying that night in her head, hearing Trevor's laugh, feeling his hands close around her waist, and trying to reconcile her gut instinct that she really was innocent.

But now, every rule and regulation at Sword & Cross seemed to work against that notion, seemed to suggest that she was, in fact, dangerous and needed to be controlled.

Luce felt a firm hand on her shoulder.

"Look," the attendant said. "If it makes you feel any better, you're far from the worst case here."

It was the first humane gesture the attendant had made toward Luce, and she believed that it *was* intended to make her feel better. But. She'd been sent here because of the suspicious death of the guy she'd been crazy about, and *still* she was "far from the worst case here"? Luce wondered what else exactly they were dealing with at Sword & Cross.

"Okay, orientation's over," the attendant said. "You're on your own now. Here's a map if you need to

find anything else." She gave Luce a photocopy of a crude hand-drawn map, then glanced at her watch. "You've got an hour before your first class, but my soaps come on in five, so"—she waved her hand at Luce—"make yourself scarce. And don't forget," she said, pointing up at the cameras one last time. "The reds are watching you."

Before Luce could reply, a skinny, dark-haired girl appeared in front of her, wagging her long fingers in Luce's face.

"Oooooh," the girl taunted in a ghost-story-telling voice, dancing around Luce in a circle. "The reds are watching youuuu."

"Get out of here, Arriane, before I have you lobotomized," the attendant said, though it was clear from her first brief but genuine smile that she had some coarse affection for the crazy girl.

It was also clear that Arriane did not reciprocate the love. She mimed a jerking-off motion at the attendant, then stared at Luce, daring her to be offended.

"And just for that," the attendant said, jotting a furious note in her book, "you've earned yourself the task of showing Little Miss Sunshine around today."

She pointed at Luce, who looked anything but sunny in her black jeans, black boots, and black top. Under the "Dress Code" section, the Sword & Cross Web site had cheerily maintained that as long as the students were on good behavior, they were free to dress as they pleased,

with just two small stipulations: style must be modest and color must be black. Some freedom.

The too-big mock turtleneck Luce's mom had forced on her this morning did nothing for her curves, and even her best feature was gone: Her thick black hair, which used to hang down to her waist, had been almost completely shorn off. The cabin fire had left her scalp singed and her hairline patchy, so after the long, silent ride home from Dover, Mom had planted Luce in the bathtub, brought out Dad's electric razor, and wordlessly shaved her head. Over the summer, her hair had grown out a little, just enough so that her once-enviable waves now hovered in awkward twists just below her ears.

Arriane sized her up, tapping one finger against her pale lips. "Perfect," she said, stepping forward to loop her arm through Luce's. "I was just thinking I could really use a new slave."

The door to the lobby swung open and in walked the tall kid with green eyes. He shook his head and said to Luce, "This place isn't afraid to do a strip search. So if you're packing any other *hazards*"—he raised an eyebrow and dumped a handful of unrecognizables in the box—"save yourself the trouble."

Behind Luce, Arriane laughed under her breath. The boy's head shot up, and when his eyes registered Arriane, he opened his mouth, then closed it, like he was unsure how to proceed.

"Arriane," he said evenly.

"Cam," she returned.

"You know him?" Luce whispered, wondering whether there were the same kinds of cliques in reform schools as there were in prep schools like Dover.

"Don't remind me," Arriane said, dragging Luce out the door into the gray and swampy morning.

The back of the main building let out onto a chipped sidewalk bordering a messy field. The grass was so overgrown, it looked more like a vacant lot than a school commons, but a faded scoreboard and a small stack of wooden bleachers argued otherwise.

Beyond the commons lay four severe-looking buildings: the cinder-block dormitory on the far left, a huge old ugly church on the far right, and two other expansive structures in between that Luce imagined were the classrooms.

This was it. Her whole world was reduced to the sorry sight before her eyes.

Arriane immediately veered right off the path and led Luce to the field, sitting her down on top of one of the waterlogged wooden bleachers.

The corresponding setup at Dover had screamed Ivy League jock-in-training, so Luce had always avoided hanging out there. But this empty field, with its rusted, warped goals, told a very different story. One that wasn't as easy for Luce to figure out. Three turkey vultures swooped overhead, and a dismal wind whipped through

the bare branches of the oak trees. Luce ducked her chin down into her mock turtleneck.

"Soooo," Arriane said. "Now you've met Randy."

"I thought his name was Cam."

"We're not talking about him," Arriane said quickly. "I mean she-man in there." Arriane jerked her head toward the office where they'd left the attendant in front of the TV. "Whaddya think—dude or chick?"

"Uh, chick?" Luce said tentatively. "Is this a test?"

Arriane cracked a smile. "The first of many. And you passed. At least, I think you passed. The gender of most of the faculty here is an ongoing, schoolwide debate. Don't worry, you'll get into it."

Luce thought Arriane was making a joke—in which case, cool. But this was all such a huge change from Dover. At her old school, the green-tie-wearing, pomaded future senators had practically oozed through the halls in the genteel hush that money seemed to lay over everything.

More often than not, the other Dover kids gave Luce a don't-smudge-the-white-walls-with-*your*-fingerprints sideways glance. She tried to imagine Arriane there: lazing on the bleachers, making a loud, crude joke in her peppery voice. Luce tried to imagine what Callie might think of Arriane. There'd been no one like her at Dover.

"Okay, spill it," Arriane ordered. Plopping down on

the top bleacher and motioning for Luce to join her, she said, "What'd ya do to get in here?"

Arriane's tone was playful, but suddenly Luce had to sit down. It was ridiculous, but she'd half expected to get through her first day of school without the past creeping up and robbing her of her thin façade of calm. Of course people here were going to want to know.

She could feel the blood thrumming at her temples. It happened whenever she tried to think back—really think back—to that night. She'd never stop feeling guilty about what had happened to Trevor, but she also tried really hard not to get mired down in the shadows, which by now were the only things she could remember about the accident. Those dark, indefinable things that she could never tell anyone about.

Scratch that—she'd *started* to tell Trevor about the peculiar presence she'd felt that night, about the twisting shapes hanging over their heads, threatening to mar their perfect evening. Of course, by then it was already too late. Trevor was gone, his body burned beyond recognition, and Luce was . . . was she . . . guilty?

No one knew about the murky shapes she sometimes saw in the darkness. They'd always come to her. They'd come and gone for so long that Luce couldn't even remember the first time she'd seen them. But she could remember the first time she realized that the shadows didn't come for everyone—or actually, *anyone* but her.

When she was seven, her family had been on vacation in Hilton Head and her parents had taken her on a boat trip. It was just about sunset when the shadows started rolling in over the water, and she'd turned to her father and said, "What do you do when they come, Dad? Why aren't you afraid of the monsters?"

There were no monsters, her parents assured her, but Luce's repeated insistence on the presence of *something* wobbly and dark had gotten her several appointments with the family eye doctor, and then glasses, and then appointments with the ear doctor after she made the mistake of describing the hoarse whooshing noise that the shadows sometimes made—and then therapy, and then more therapy, and finally the prescription for anti-psychotic medication.

But nothing ever made them go away.

By the time she was fourteen, Luce refused to take her meds. That was when they found Dr. Sanford, and the Dover School nearby. They flew to New Hampshire, and her father drove their rental car up a long, curved driveway to a hilltop mansion called Shady Hollows. They planted Luce in front of a man in a lab coat and asked her if she still saw her "visions." Her parents' palms were sweating as they gripped her hands, brows furrowed with the fear that there was something terribly wrong with their daughter.

No one came out and said that if she didn't tell Dr.

Sanford what they all wanted her to say, she might be seeing a whole lot more of Shady Hollows. When she lied and acted normal, she was allowed to enroll at Dover, and only had to visit Dr. Sanford twice a month.

Luce had been permitted to stop taking the horrible pills as soon as she started pretending she didn't see the shadows anymore. But she still had no control over when they might appear. All she knew was that the mental catalog of places where they'd come for her in the past—dense forests, murky waters—became the places she avoided at all costs. All she knew was that when the shadows came, they were usually accompanied by a cold chill under her skin, a sickening feeling unlike anything else.

Luce straddled one of the bleachers and gripped her temples between her thumbs and middle fingers. If she was going to make it through today, she had to push her past to the recesses of her mind. She couldn't stand probing the memory of that night by herself, so there was no way she could air all the gruesome details to some weird, maniacal stranger.

Instead of answering, she watched Arriane, who was lying back on the bleachers, sporting a pair of enormous black sunglasses that covered the better part of her face. It was hard to tell, but she must have been staring at Luce, too, because after a second, she shot up from the bleachers and grinned.

"Cut my hair like yours," she said.

"What?" Luce gasped. "Your hair is beautiful."

It was true: Arriane had the long, thick locks that Luce so desperately missed. Her loose black curls sparkled in the sunlight, giving off just a tinge of red. Luce tucked her hair behind her ears, even though it still wasn't long enough to do anything but flop back down in front of them.

"Beautiful schmootiful," Arriane said. "Yours is sexy, edgy. And I want it."

"Oh, um, okay," Luce said. Was that a compliment? She didn't know if she was supposed to be flattered or unnerved by the way Arriane assumed she could have whatever she wanted, even if what she wanted belonged to someone else. "Where are we going to get—"

"Ta-da!" Arriane reached into her bag and pulled out the pink Swiss Army knife Gabbe had tossed into the Hazard Box. "What?" she said, seeing Luce's reaction. "I always bring my sticky fingers on new-student drop-off days. The idea alone gets me through the dog days of Sword & Cross internment . . . er . . . summer camp."

"You spent the whole summer . . . here?" Luce winced.

"Ha! Spoken like a true newbie. You're probably expecting a spring break." She tossed Luce the Swiss Army knife. "We don't get to leave this hellhole. Ever. Now cut."