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THE
LEGACY
OF EDEN

NELLE DAVY



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Published in Great Britain 2012
MIRA Books, an imprint of Harlequin (UK) Limited,
Eton House, 18-24 Paradise Road,
Richmond, Surrey, TW9 1SR

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ISBN 978 1 848 45093 6

59-0212

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Printed and bound
by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

PROLOGUE



I WAS CALLING FOR HER.

I pointed the flashlight into the darkness, puncturing the purple haze of the evening with circles of white. The air was full of the smell of azaleas and the sound of crickets, and I began to think of how much I would miss my home. For a moment, I was truly scared of leaving the farm, and I was stricken with both the fear of the unknown, and my desire for it. I gave up a shudder.

And then I heard it.

The sharp snap of twigs being twisted into the earth. I swung around and moved off the path, down to the rose garden. I heard them before I saw them. His voice was low, half in a whisper, but in the stillness of the night, it carried.

“Say it,” he urged, and then more forcefully repeated, “Say it!”

And then another noise. At first, I didn’t even know it was her. It was a sound I had never heard from her before.

I have relived that night so many times. Once, I had dared to believe that I was different from my family, that I was the one who did not fit. But as my grandmother Lavinia, the catalyst for my family's mottled history, once said, "Blood will out."

Perhaps you would have made a different choice that night. If so, your heart would not be heavy with such deep regret. But knowing who I am, who my family was, how could anyone have expected anything else?

MEREDITH



The Path to Remembrance



1



TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANT TO BE A Hathaway you'd first have to see our farm, Aurelia.

If my family's name is familiar to you, it may be that you have either already seen it, or at least know something of its reputation. In its day our farm was notorious for being one of the most prosperous estates in our county in Iowa. An infamy only surpassed in time by that of the family who owned it.

I have spent the past seventeen years trying to forget it, forget my family and forget my past. For seventeen years I was given a reprieve, but after that length of time, you stop looking over your shoulder and you forget how precarious your peace is. You take it for granted; you learn to bury your guilt and then you convince yourself that it will never find you.

And then he died.

My cousin Caledon Hathaway Jr. left this earth in late October at the age of forty-five. The cause of death was cirrhosis of the liver. As seemed to be the curse of all Hathaway men after my grandfather, he would die young and alone and how he was found I do not know: he lived with no one and by then Aurelia had ceased to be a business and had become merely a vast space of withering land. Though a notice was placed in the local newspaper, his death was mourned by no one and his funeral attended only by the priest and an appointed lawyer from the firm who handled our family's assets. His body rested in the ground, at last unable to hurt or harm anyone else, and that should have been the end of it.

But then eight months later, at ten to three on a Thursday afternoon, I received a letter. I settled into my armchair next to the window, my hands still stained with streaks of clay from the morning's work in my studio. Ever since I left art school I have dedicated myself to sculpture, though it has only been in the past five years that I have made a decent enough living from it in order to do it full-time. Before that I was like any artist-cum-waitress, come every and any menial job you could find. I don't earn much but I get by and as I fingered through the array of bills and fliers, the stains of my morning's endeavors trailed across the envelopes until I came across a stark white one, different from the others in its weight and the crispness of its paper. It bore the mark of an eminent law firm whose name seemed familiar to me, but

I thought nothing of it and slit open the mouth of the letter with my finger. Why wouldn't I? I had forgotten so much—or at least I had pretended to.

By the time I had finished reading it, the damage had been done. I looked up from the typescript to find my apartment an alien place. Sunlight was streaming through the windows and reflecting off of the counter surfaces and wood floors. I could feel a prickle of sweat on the back of my neck and my mouth tasted hot and sweet with what I realized was panic.

I rushed to the bathroom and was violently sick.

Pushing myself upright I brought my hands to my face and then ran my fingers through my hair, clawing the strands back from my forehead. I caught sight of my phone and even though my stomach was filled with dread, I had to know, I had to know if they have been told. The letter said that they had tried to contact other members of the family. Who else, who else? I closed and reopened my eyes but it was no use. As soon as I began the thought, they swam across my vision, the living and the dead, diluting the reality of my kitchen with memories I had striven to bury for nearly two decades: my grandmother in her caramel-colored gardening gloves pruning her roses; my father throwing water over his head to cool himself off so that his great mop of blond hair slicked back, grazing the top of his shirt; Claudia in a white two-piece with her red sunglasses; my uncle Ethan shaking a cigarette out onto his palm from a pack of Lucky Strikes.

I leapt away from the counter and ran into the studio. I darted around my sculptures to my desk and rooted through the drawers until I found the battered Moleskin address book and flicked through the pages until I found her number.

Where would she be now, I thought as I dialed her number? Is she even home? I knew she had gone part-time at the clinic since she had the girls, but I don't know her shift schedule. But my thoughts were abruptly cut off as she picked up on the fourth ring.

"Hello," she said, slightly breathless.

I opened my mouth to speak.

"Hello?" she said again.

There was a pause. I pictured her hanging up.

"Hel—"

"Hello?"

"Hello?"

Our voices overlapped. She withdrew. In the interim I somehow managed to ask, "Ava?"

She was shocked. I heard a sharp intake of breath. I said her name again.

"Meredith," she said finally and then sighed with impatience. I wound the telephone cord around my finger at that and squeezed.

"Can you talk?" I asked

"Yes."

"I thought you might have been at the clinic. I wasn't sure if you were in."

"I just finished a shift."

"Are the girls around?"

"I'm alone, it's okay."

I closed my eyes and swallowed.

"Good, I—I need to talk to you. It's—"

"Is this about Cal Jr.?" she asked abruptly.

My eyes flew open. I felt winded. My voice, when it came out, was harsh, animal.

"How?"

"The family lawyers called me."

"When?"

"A few days ago."

"Why?"

"Same reason I suppose that they contacted you."

"They did not call me," I said, looking down at the letter, which was crumpled in the fist of my hand. "They wrote instead."

"I told them straight out I didn't care. Not about him dying, not about the farm or how he had driven it so far into the ground it was halfway to hell. They talked about my 'responsibility.' I told them I had done above and beyond more than my duty by that place."

I bit my lip so hard I thought I tasted blood.

"I suppose I was a bit harsh," she said reflectively, "but I got the feeling that they would just keep calling if they thought they could get anywhere. I guess that must have been why they tracked you down." She paused. "Have

you heard from Claudia? Do you know if they contacted her, too?"

I thought about our eldest sister, probably dismissing shop assistants with a bored wave of her hand in some mall in Palm Beach.

"No, but she has a different name now. She's married."

"Did not stop them from getting to me. Or to you, or don't you go by our mother's name anymore?"

I swallowed hard at the reproach. "No, it's still Pincetti."

She snorted. "And there was once a time when Hathaways were crawling out of our ears, now none to be found. I suppose I was the first person you rang when you got the letter, was I? I am so touched. I wonder why that would be?"

I closed my eyes, blocking out the orchestra of sounds from the taxis and crowds on the road below and the various cacophony of voices that rose in a fog from the streets. I forced my mind to blank, to hold my breath in my chest, to keep everything still.

"So you knew then?" I somehow managed. For a moment I thought she had gone, as there was only silence and then, "Yes."

I digested this. "I see," I said and I did, with painful clarity. This was a mistake.

"I told them I didn't want anything to do with it," she volunteered. "They could do what they wanted." She gave a small laugh. "They even asked me about funeral

arrangements. I told them the only way I would help would be if I could make sure he was really dead.”

I winced. I hate this side to her, especially because I am part of the reason why it is there.

“It’s all gone you know? The farm...” she began. “In the end it was riddled with debt. They’re going to sell it, did you know that?” She stopped and when she began again, her voice broke. “It was all for nothing and she’ll never know it.”

There was a pause.

“What will you tell them?” she asked eventually.

“Huh?”

“What will you do?” Her voice was careful, deliberate, and I realized with a small shiver that I was being tested and that she had no expectations that I would pass.

“I suppose I will have to call them.”

There was a silence. There was nothing for a moment; just a blank and then when she next spoke her voice had degenerated into a repressed scream of fury.

“Why?!”

This time I spoke without thinking, so that what I said not only surprised me because of my daring, but also because it was true.

“I guess I’m just not ready to walk away yet.”