

CHAPTER ONE

The Birds

Destiny can be defined as a series of events that will necessarily happen to us. As inevitable as it is unpredictable, it's a journey we're all thrown into. Along the way it defines us, and shows us what we're made of. And when we reach the end, we often find that it's taken us in a direction we never could have imagined. This is one girl's journey.

It started on a crisp spring day in the foothills of Los Angeles. The Westwood High Panthers' girls soccer team took the field to a small audience of students and family members scattered throughout the wooden bleachers.

In the back row, as far away as possible from the other spectators, sat Paige O'Connor and Shelby Johnson. To anyone watching them, it was pretty obvious they weren't there for the game. It was just an excuse to get out of their houses, soak up some sunshine, and get drunk on the rum Paige was pouring into a giant Big Gulp cup.

Paige had just turned sixteen, the legal driving age in California, but at the rate she got into trouble, it would be a long time before her parents let her get her license. Riding a bike everywhere sucked, but then so did listening to parents and teachers.

She was strikingly pretty and petite, and hated that things were expected of her because of that. She was going to hang out with who she wanted, dress the way she wanted, and look the way she wanted. So midway through her freshman year, she had chopped her long brunette hair down to shoulder length, and painted several blue streaks through it. Her mom nearly fainted, and of course it got her grounded, but then what else was new.

As for clothes, don't even get her started. It was usually cargo pants, and a t-shirt, or sweatshirt on those rare cold days. And the more people complained, or rolled their eyes at her, the more dingy were the clothes she sought out.

Shelby had been her BFF since they were kids, and they shared everything together. Movies, gossip, sleepovers, secrets, clothes... you name it, and they shared it. And that's what they were doing today.

Paige steadied her hand, as she emptied the rest of the rum into the cup. Shelby kept watch, while going on about her favorite topic - boys. And at the moment, that boy happened to be Paige's older brother.

"I'm just saying, pretend for a minute Brad's not your brother," Shelby went on.

"We're not having this conversation, Shelbs," Paige replied, trying not to spill the rum.

“But he’s cute.”

“He’s my brother,” Paige grumbled back, capping the cup. “No hitting on him.” She took a deep swig through the straw, shuddering at the taste.

“That good?” Shelby smiled.

Paige nodded, passing her the cup.

“So who do you think is cute?” Shelby asked, ready to get the conversation back on track.

“Nobody.”

“Oh, come on,” nagged Shelby. “If you had to pick someone.”

“Okay, fine. Liam Hemsworth.”

“Someone you could actually meet,” Shelby clarified.

“Then we’re back to nobody,” Paige grinned, taking back the cup.

“Seriously?”

“Yup.”

“You, Paige O’Connor, are going to make such a pretty little spinster,” Shelby teased.

“I’m sixteen, Shelbs,” Paige laughed. “I don’t think they let you become a spinster till you’re at least like sixty.”

Shelby just shook her head. “Better start practicing those knitting skills, girl.”

Paige had to laugh. She loved Shelby to death, but man that girl could get annoying at times.

“Okay, new topic,” Paige jumped in. “What would you rather have during a zombie apocalypse? A gun, or a cross bow?” The topic of zombie apocalypse planning was always a favorite with the two girls.

Several rows down, a group of five girls glanced back at Paige and Shelby. Paige caught them staring. The girls turned back to each other, giggling in that way where they want you to know they’re giggling.

“Hands down, a gun,” Shelby replied, ignoring the girls.

“So you want every zombie in the area to hear you?”

“I wanna make sure they’re dead. Plus, it doesn’t take forever to reload,” Shelby responded.

“But a cross bow just looks so bad ass,” Paige countered, catching the group of girls staring again. This was getting old.

“You just wanna look like Jennifer Lawrence,” Shelby continued.

“I wanna look like Norman Reedus,” Paige grinned back.

Then that group of mean girls was at it again. Glancing back, then turning to each other in annoying giggles. Paige had had it.

“You got a problem?” Paige hollered at them.

Cindy Willis was the tallest of the girls. Captain of the girl’s volleyball team, and at least seven inches taller than Paige, she shot Paige a glare. “Yeah. You, O’Connor,” Cindy snorted.

“Screw you!” Paige shot back.

“What was that?” Cindy was on her feet, stalking up the steps towards Paige and Shelby. Cindy’s minions followed behind.

Paige rose to her feet, followed by Shelby. Both stood their ground. “You heard me,” Paige responded.

“Yeah,” said Cindy, “I heard you trying to be tough in front of your girlfriend here.”

“Fuck off,” Paige snorted.

Cindy shoved Paige in the chest, knocking her back on the row behind her. Paige hopped to her feet, and lunged at the tall volleyball player, tackling her onto the bench, and pummeling her. Cindy squirmed and struggled beneath the blows, but Paige was just too quick.

“Break it up!” came a shout from the field. It was an all too familiar voice for Paige. She backed off of Cindy, and looked towards the field. The school’s principal was storming their way. Several of the girls grumbled beneath their breaths.

“What the hell’s going on?” demanded the principal as he reached the girls.

“This freak attacked me for no reason!” Said Cindy, wiping a trickle of blood from beneath her nose.

“She did not! You pushed her first,” Shelby jumped in.

“Is that alcohol on your breath?” asked the principal. Shelby and Paige both closed their mouths, looking more than a bit suspicious.

“Check their cup,” said Cindy’s minion, Stacy.

“You five, get back to your seats,” said the principal, turning to Cindy and her friends. “I’ll see you all on Monday.” The mean girls grumbled beneath their breaths, but knew better than to argue. They stomped back to their seats. The principal turned back to Paige and Shelby.

“What the hell’s your problem, O’Connor,” he asked, more out of disappointment than anger.

Paige just shrugged. “Nothing.”

But he wasn’t going to let it rest. “No, I’m serious,” he continued. “How is it that your brother’s an honor student, class president, and actually has a future. And here you are, this... mess?”

“Maybe I just don’t feel like sucking up to people,” she replied.

“Or maybe you’re too scared to even try. Afraid you might not cut it.” He knew he was hitting a nerve with this one, but he also knew he had to go there.

“Go to hell!” she shot back.

“You’re coming with me. Both of you,” he demanded, motioning to Shelby as well.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Paige replied, folding her arms across her chest.

“Oh, yes you are,” he insisted. “We’re calling your parents.”

“They’re not home.”

“Then I’ll call their cells.”

That’s when a loud groan filled the air. Like an enormous metal object bending under stress. The principal and girls barely had time to look around, when suddenly the ground shook with a violent jolt. The principal stumbled, trying to maintain his balance. Down on the soccer field everyone had stopped, waiting to see if more jolts would follow.

“What was that?” asked Shelby, a startled look on her face.

“Look!” Paige shouted, pointing to a transformer mounted to a nearby telephone pole. Sparks showered from the side of it down onto the dirt track circling the field.

Then a static charge filled the air, causing their skin to tingle. The girls brushed their hands down their arms.

Suddenly something large and black dropped to the bleachers beside them. The girls leaped back with a startled yelp. A dead raven lay there, its feathers sizzling with smoke.

“Look out!” the principal shouted, seconds before another bird crashed down. This one also sizzled with smoke. Then came another, and another. They were raining down on the bleachers and field.

Then came a loud crack! The transformer broke off the telephone pole, and crashed down onto the dirt track in a shower of sparks.

“Keith! Get everyone in the locker room!” shouted the principal, as he hurried down the bleachers towards the sidelines.

Paige turned to Shelby. “Let’s go!” she said, hopping to her feet. The girls raced down the bleachers, and over to their bikes parked along the track.