

Chapter 7

After Duncan got a clean bill of health from the hospital, Seth drove us both back home. I had to squish into the tiny back seat of his Porsche to make room for Duncan, who had a bandage around his head and was a bit loopy from the pain killer they gave him. In his state, he thought that his bandage resembled Seth's hipster head wrapping and that the similarity was the best joke he'd ever heard. He kept touching Seth's and his own head at the same time and giggling.

"We're twins, Seth. You were so cool; well, I can be cool too."

Seth didn't seem to appreciate the joke, but he focused on the road. I thought he took it better than most hipsters would if you made fun of their carefully selected outfits.

I was just glad to be done with the whole thing. When I got home I flopped down in bed and told Bastian that some cats saved my life while he sat around doing nothing, but he didn't seem impressed.

I had homework and sleep to catch up on but my brain just wouldn't shut off. There was something about the day that still felt a bit strange. Was it the army of cats that showed up to save my life and then evaporated? No, that

checked out. The grave robbers who showed up, domed Duncan, and called me Princess like they knew me? The fact that as I got older I somehow got even worse at miniature golf while Duncan seemed to improve even while suffering from a traumatic brain injury? No, there was something deeper tying it all together, and Seth was at the center of it.

We couldn't really talk while Duncan was there, so we'd agreed to meet the next day, but I couldn't stop thinking—was he really a normal if above-averagely-hot teenage boy after all?

I opened my laptop and stared at the screen. A funny thing happened. I didn't immediately go to Ancestry.com. I didn't even want to. I couldn't quite make sense of what I'd gotten caught up in, and the only way I was going to straighten any of it out was to Google the shit out of it.

I started tentatively with "hipsters", skimming the results carefully. Soon my fingers were flying over the keys, and I had 30 tabs open with answers to different questions. I clicked around, closing the useless ones, which was most of them. Lots of beard oil and music blogs. Something about cold brew coffee and terroir. Some very well-dressed toddlers. I tried everything I could think of to locate Seth's distinct fashion sense. There were hoodies aplenty but none quite like his. Was he that cutting edge?

The bandaged look seemed to be completely unique to him, which could just mean that he wasn't a poser, but an actual trend setter. I let that sink in. A guy who can single handedly make body wrapping happen was way out of my league.

Still, my first thought could have been right: he could have a horrible disease. I spent a disgusting 5 minutes on

WebMD looking for something that might necessitate so many bandages. I saw things I could not unsee, but nothing that matched my Seth.

I closed everything and started over.

Egypt generated lots of news: politics, riots, and the economy. Intermixed were pages and pages about ancient times. Nothing jumped out at me about boyfriends.

As I typed *grave robbers*, my breathing got heavy. I was close to something, something big. And I wasn't sure if I even wanted to know what.

First thing I learned was that grave robbers weren't really a thing anymore, which made their sudden appearance even more surprising. There were instances of pilfering from the dead, sure, but they were mostly confined to rural areas and 1920's era graves that might hold fancier-than-expected jewelry. There were also meth heads who stole copper grave markers to sell as scrap metal, though I have no idea how they explained themselves when they showed up to a metal recycler carrying a plaque that said "Rest in Peace, Dave".

Nothing I could find suggested that grave robbers were burly, traveled in packs, or attacked teenagers with putters. Creepy thieves with no respect for the deceased, yes. Thugs, no.

A dozen clicks into my grave robber search, I saw something that made my heart drop into my stomach.

It was a black and white photo surrounded by a yellowed border and dotted with imperfections as a result of being scanned into a database at the Library of Congress. It showed an ancient Egyptian tomb shortly after it was discovered, and there were signs that the tomb had been

pillaged by grave robbers. The attached article was about the detrimental effects of grave crimes on archaeological efforts—Duncan would have been furious—but something in the background caught my eye: a painted sarcophagus, presumably resembling the man buried inside. I gasped. The mummy in the painting was wearing the same hoodie Seth that always wore.

Well, on the painted mummy it looked more like a short ceremonial robe, but it was the same. It had the same markings, which I always assumed was the logo for an indie punk band I hadn't heard about yet. And it had the same amber-studded drawstrings. It was Seth's hoodie.

My hands shaking, I went back to the search bar. My next searches were slow, one letter at a time, like my hands didn't want to be any part of what my brain suddenly knew.

M u m m y

A r e m u m m i e s r e a l

H i p s t e r m u m m y

S e x y m u m m y

C a n m u m m i e s h a v e s e x ?

Wait, no. I definitely didn't do that last one. Close window. Clear history. Start over.

Watch yourself, Fingers. We need to present a unified front here.

There were articles, links to various horror movies, and images: images of horrible, gaunt, partially decomposed corpses. Mixed in were adorable cartoon depic-

tions of staggering, toilet-paper-wrapped monsters. And especially with “sexy mummy”, Halloween costumes I wouldn’t be caught dead in.

My dad yelled up at me, and I quickly minimized my browser like a criminal caught in the act.

“The guy you kissed is at the door. I told you that these things work themselves out!”

Mortified at the thought of Seth hearing this, not to mention my dad saying it out loud, I rushed downstairs. I lightly punched Dad on the shoulder as I pushed by him then stepped out the door past a surprised Seth.

“Let’s go for a walk. Somewhere my dad isn’t.”

“Okay,” he said, chuckling. “So you told him?”

“I’m not as withholding of information as you are.”

He sighed. “I deserve that.”

We headed down the block. The sun was just setting, and the air was starting to get that chill of a desert night. It was clear out, but the sliver of moon didn’t add much light. The stucco walls prevented us from seeing into the neighbors’ houses, but there were a few lights on and some flickering TVs. A street light every other block would light up our way for 10 feet, then we’d slowly be engulfed in darkness again. I was glad for the darkness because I was pretty sure I was already blushing, and I didn’t want Seth to know.

“You showed up at a mini golf course too late to save me from anachronistic criminals after turning down my generous offer of boyfriend status and disappearing, so you definitely have to start this one,” I said.

“I didn’t know that was the rule.”

I shook my head. “You seem so smart, and yet the basic

rules of etiquette elude you.”

“Okay, about the grave robbers. It’s just that um, they’re here because... argh.” Instead of talking he just scratched at his face.

We approached a small park I used to play in as a kid.

“Come on, I want to swing.”

Without the light we had to walk carefully over the bark around the slides, eventually settling into the two adjacent swings. I pushed myself lazily with my feet. He stayed eerily still.

“You’re doing that thing again, where you’re not getting past the first two words of your sentences,” I pointed out.

“I know. This sentence is particularly hard. You have no idea.”

“That’s just it. I have no idea. A fact that you could remedy by, I don’t know, telling me the truth for once.”

“I’m doing my best.” His right arm wrapped around his body to scratch his left elbow, and he looked down at his feet. “You have to know by now that there’s something different about me, right?”

“That’s pretty damn obvious,” I said. “For one, you don’t know how to talk to other human beings. For another, your skin seems to itch all the time. Have you heard of lotion?”

“That’s not it. Something is really different. And I don’t do lotion.”

“Okay, oil then.”

“More my speed but you’re stalling.”

“I’m stalling? You’re the one who’s supposed to tell me what the hell you are.”

“You know what I am.”

“No, I don’t. I’m dying to find out though.”

“Don’t say it that way.”

“How should I say it?”

“Just say it.”

“Why is this on me again, Seth? This is definitely your turn but you keep passing.”

“It’s better if you say it. It’s right there on the tip of your tongue. Just say it.”

“You’re a...”

“Say it.”

“A... a...” Finally I just blurted it out. He’ll have to deal with it. “A hipster.”

“What?” He burst out laughing. “I’m a hipster?”

“Well sure, the skinny jeans, the bandages, the gaunt look, the perfect hoodie. That chic, dusty cologne you wear. You probably have great taste in music and coffee.”

“You’re amazing.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Sofia, that’s not at all what I’m talking about. Can’t you see what I am?”

Now I was confused. “Well you’re definitely not a jock. Kinda goth in your demeanor, but you wear really light colors.”

“No. But it’s more than just what clique I belong to. Look at me. I’m covered in bandages, afraid of moisture, smell like sand, grave robbers started showing up in your life right after I did...”

“You’re in the mob.”

“No.”

“You’re on drugs! Oh God, I knew it.”

“I’m not on drugs. Jesus, Sofia. I’m a mummy. I’m clearly a mummy. ... How can you not see that?”

I felt his words in my chest. He’s a mummy. A walking, talking reanimated corpse Had I known all along? No, probably not. That would be a ridiculous conclusion for me to have come to. This one isn’t on me.

But the facts were staring at me from his hollow eye sockets: the logo on his hoodie was the same as the mummy in the picture.

“You’re a mummy.”

“I’m a mummy.”

“But mummies are dead. And you’re walking around kissing people.”

“In many cases, they are dead. But a lot of us are cursed to walk the earth. Kind of... undead. And I’ve only kissed the one person.”

“Like vampires?”

“No, vampires aren’t real.”

“But if you’re real, there must be loads of other magical creatures that are real too. Werewolves?”

“Nope. Just mummies.”

“You’ve only kissed me? Wait, how about witches? Are they real?”

“Pretty much just mummies. And yes, you’re the only person I’ve kissed.”

“Alright Mr. Smartypants, then who made the mummies?” I asked, one eyebrow raised.

“Fine,” he said sighing. “There are some magical priests and stuff like that. But really it’s just mummies and other

creatures that are directly related to mummies.”

“So there are wizards.”

“Not exactly. Mummies, Priests, that’s it.”

“What about--”

He cut me off. “Sofia. It’s just mummies. And maybe Sasquatch. We’re not sure.”

“Really?”

“I’m kidding. It’s just mummies!”

“How can you joke about this?”

“Uh, I’ve had more time to process this than you have, obviously. Speaking of which, you’re much calmer about this than I expected. I just told you I’m an undead monster and all you can ask about is if vampires are real too.”

“I’m just trying to get a grasp on the world I live in now. Are poltergeists real?”

“Just mummies. Listen, you’re not grossed out by me? You’re not terrified? You kissed a mummy. Twice.”

“Technically a mummy kissed me.” I said. “I think that makes all the difference. And it was three times.”

“Fine, but... you’re not running away.” It was a statement, not a question.

“I can’t run away from you, Seth. I don’t know what it is or why it is, but it is. There’s something about you.”

He shook his head. “You’re drawn to the danger.”

“It’s not that at all. I don’t even like rollercoasters because they seem too dangerous. I’m drawn to you because you’re hot. And because you really seem to care about what happens to me. You were there when I got attacked today, you caught me when I tripped that one time. And the geography presentation. You’re there for me, even

when I think you’ve gone forever.”

He cocked his head and looked at me with those deep, grey eyeholes that I was powerless against.

“You’re right about that. I’ve always been there for you, and I always will be.”

He leaned in to kiss me. I pulled back.

“Wait, wait. So what about trolls? Do trolls exist?”

“Just mummies. Now shut up and let me kiss you.”

“What about--”

And then he kissed me. Four times now.

It was weird but I liked it. It was like being in an attic—dusty, but electric with possibility. He wiped his mouth with his sleeve, and I didn’t copy him. I didn’t need to.

A young couple with a baby stroller walked by talking quietly. Even in the dim light, we were probably kissing too much for a playground. I just couldn’t help myself. The whole world melted away when I was with him.

Kissing him had always been new and exciting, but it was drier than I expected, and his lips weren’t exactly in pristine condition, with the lower one hanging slightly lower than one would hope. At first I had chalked it up to my inexperience at kissing and his refusal to use Chapstick, but now I knew it was something different. He was a 5,000-year-old reanimated corpse. No. He was MY 5,000-year-old reanimated corpse.

We stood up and started walking toward my house. He took my hand gingerly.

“One of the grave robbers said something that really bothered me,” I said casually.

“You’re going to need to let them go, Sofia.”

“In my defense, somebody tried to kill me today. The least I can do is think about it for a second.”

“I guess you’re right.”

“He said something about knowing my fate. I don’t remember exactly. But really the whole time they were attacking us, they seemed to know me. Which is crazy, because I know zero grave robbers in real life.”

He was silent for a minute.

“Sofia, there’s a lot more to this than I’ve told you.”

“That’s the least surprising thing I’ve heard all day, including my dad telling me it would be hot out. I’m shocked—SHOCKED—to learn you’ve been withholding information from me.”

“It may feel like I’ve involved you in something terrible. But really, you’ve always been involved,” he said. “This is harder to say than the mummy thing, which was pretty hard, but I was actually sent to protect you, Sofia. We didn’t meet by chance.”

“It’s fun how you manage to make things both vague and extremely creepy at the same time.”

“I’m trying, Princess. I really am. And the sarcasm, while entertaining, isn’t helping me get through this.”

“I’m not sure it’s my job to make this easier on you.” I smiled and he feebly squeezed my hand. “But that’s another thing. They called me Princess too, the Grave Robbers. What’s that about?”

“I’ll tell you the whole story some time.”

“Are they going to come after me again?”

“Yes.”

“Promise me you won’t leave me this time?”

“I’ll never you leave you again, Sofia. No matter what.”

I lightly stroked the palm of his hand, careful not to damage the fragile bone remnants.

“Centaur. Half real?”

A sigh. “Just. Mummies.”