

CHAPTER ONE

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# The Key

*Palm trees.*

*Flowers.*

*Beach.*

*Ocean.*

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*Flowers.*

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For two hours, Lissa and her father had been driving down the

Looooooooooooooooooooooooonnnnggggggggggggg

Strrrrrrrrrrrraaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiight

highway that runs from Miami to Key West.

For a while, she enjoyed the view:

Tall skinny palm trees swaying this way or that.

Fire-colored blossoms exploding on exotic bushes.

Golden-white beaches.

Glistening blue water.

It was like watching a commercial on TV.

The longest commercial ever.

Enough was enough.

For Lissa enough had arrived at least an hour ago.

“Are you bored already?” her father asked.

“No,” Lissa replied.

This was not exactly not the truth. It wasn't that she was bored. She just wanted something to happen.

Lissa's mother had been the same way. Lissa remembered her always in motion, a flash here, a blur there. She had been a wildlife photographer, jetting off (too often) to faraway lands and wild locations.

Lissa's father, on the other hand, was never happier than when he was just sitting and watching. He was a poet. But he didn't make much money as a poet, so he also taught poetry at a small college in Minnesota.

Lissa had sensed something weird about her father ever since they landed in Florida. Lissa spun mentally through the thesaurus her father had drilled into her brain since she was two, looking for the exact word, the

perfect word, to describe her father's attitude.

*Agitated?*

No.

*Anxious?*

No, something more positive.

*Excited?*

No, too much, especially for her father, whose voice never varied more than five decibels in volume, unless he was reading poetry—then all bets were off.

*Eager?*

Yes, that was it, Lissa decided. Her father was eager.

“You’re acting weird,” Lissa said.

“I’m a poet. Poets are weird.”

“You’re a Poetry Professor. That is epic weird.”

Lissa went back to staring out the window.

“Do you know the derivation of the word weird?” her father asked.

“Oh please no. Not derivations. Anything but derivations.”

“The word *weird* comes from Old English, w-y-r-d, and it meant destiny. I am weird hence I am your destiny.”

Lissa rolled her eyes.

“Great. I’m going to be a single parent poetry professor who loves to inflict weirdness on her progeny.”

Her father was silent a moment.

“I’m sorry,” Lissa said.

He smiled.

“No. It’s fine. I was just thinking how much your mother would have loved to be here with us.”

Lissa reached inside her shirt and pulled out the locket she was wearing. She flipped the locket open and looked at the picture inside.

Long waves of hair with a slight reddish tint, strawberry blonde it was called it.

Greyish blue eyes.

Fair healthy skin.

Notable freckles.

“She was so beautiful,” her father said, and then in a quiet voice began to recite.

*“Glory be to God for dappled things –*

*For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;*

*For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;*

*Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;*

*Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow,  
and plough;*

*And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.*

*All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise him.”*

“Gerard Manley Hopkins,” Lissa announced with assurance.

He smiled, proud at first, then sad.

“I don’t know how well you remember her. You were so young. Seven years ago, you would have been...”

“Five. I was five when she died. But I remember.”

Lissa turned to him.

“Why did you, why did she, leave so often. I know it was her job, but—”

Her father took a deep breath.

“Why did I let her go? Is that what you want to know?”

Lissa sat back.

“I don’t blame you. It was an accident I know.” Lissa said. “I just—”

Her father put out a hand and touched her shoulder lightly.

“If you are very very lucky in this world, you will find the work that you are meant to do. Your mother’s work was to find beauty in the wild and capture it, so that people all over the world could share it.”

“I know,” Lissa said. “But I’m glad that’s not your work.”

“Being a poet can be dangerous too. Though not usually in the same way.”

“Is that the work you were meant to do? Being a poet?”

Her father smiled.



“I thought so. For a long time. But now I think maybe my work is helping you, helping you become someone like your mother. And you know, I think my work is almost done. You remind me of her so much.”

He grinned.

“And not just because of the freckles.”

Lissa turned away, leaning back against her father’s shoulder. In the faint reflection in the window, she saw the resemblance to her mother:

Strawberry blonde hair.

Greyish blue eyes.

Fair skin.

And yes, freckles.

Then her eyes focused on the world outside, framing in her mind the pictures passing before her, just the way her mother had taught her.

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