

Chapter One

Ethan

No one can see it. No one can feel this other than me. It's as if someone carved my heart out with a sword dipped in poison, leaving a hole in my chest the size of a fist. The poison continues to corrode the edges, enlarging the hole, while the weight of its emptiness grows heavier every day.

I miss Rochelle, and I don't know what to do.

Knowing she's gone and never coming back is so final, I ache trying to understand that she doesn't *exist* anymore. How is it even possible? One second she's talking to me, smiling at me, kissing me, and the next she's falling limp into my arms.

I think about her all the time. About what we almost had. Now, without Rochelle, there's nothing.

I roll onto my back, kicking my sweaty, tangled sheets to the floor. So much thinking locks up the space my lungs have to expand. It's as if there's a steel cage around my chest. Rubbing my palms over my ribs I feel the cage tightening again. If this continues, soon I won't be breathing at all.

How am I supposed to stop thinking about her? How do I do that?

God... how do I live knowing she doesn't?

I drag my gaze from the ceiling and force my legs over the side of my bed. I could fall back, curl my legs up to my chest and sleep all day. Only in sleep does it not hurt as much. Until I dream. My mouth trembles and I let my head fall back and stare at the ceiling some more.

Noooo...

Today I have to push hard because I have something to do, somewhere I need to be. Today will be the second worst day of my life.

I have to shower, so I get up and head to the bathroom. It's been days so it will make my parents happy. But I have no energy. My legs are heavy, as if weighted down with bricks. I lift my hand to collect the soap, only the soap weighs as much as a bar of concrete. After a few minutes I slide down the tiles until I'm sitting with my knees up, head down, and the hot spray stinging the back of my neck.

For Rochelle, I find the energy to get up.

I dress in my best pair of black pants, white shirt and blazer. Sitting on the edge of my bed I slip on the new pair of black socks Mum must have left here while I was showering. Shoes next. I stare at the tie. What am I supposed to do with that? I don't wear ties and I doubt it would matter to Rochelle. I leave it untouched on my bed.

A knock at the door has Mum poking her head in. 'Honey, are you ready?'

'Yeah, I'm ready, Mum.' My words are mechanical. How is anyone ever ready for this?

'Isabel phoned. She'll meet us there, and she said someone named Ar-kar-ian will be there too.'

'Arkarian is coming?'

She nods. 'Dad had the same surprised reaction as you. Who is this Ar-kar-ian?'

My bottom lip trembles again. I bite on it. 'Arkarian is Isabel's boyfriend. He has blue hair.'

'What? Blue hair?'

I walk out and she hooks her arm through mine. She can tell I don't want to talk about Arkarian's hair. It's just better she knows.

'Honey, it may not seem like it now, but everything will turn out all right.'

She's wrong. Nothing will be all right again. I try to take a deep breath but the cage is too tight.

Dad is waiting by the car. He sees me and opens the front door.

Instead of moving forward I step back. Then again. And with each step my lungs open a little more.

Mum and Dad share a worried glance. Dad says, 'Ethan, where are you going?'

Mum steps towards me but stops, worried that if she comes closer I'll run. I *am* going to run, but not because of what she might do.

'I won't be long,' I tell them, and before either try to stop me, I take off jogging into the forest and don't stop until I break free of the trees. There's not a lot of warning before I reach the cliff. I stand with my toes at the edge and take my first real breath since Marduke avenged his heart and slayed mine.

Far below is the valley of Angel Falls. In the distance I can just make out the ocean beneath a winter morning mist. To my right the upper falls cascade down the adjoining ridge over rocks and boulders, pooling in the valley floor.

Once I thought they were spectacular. Coming to this place would keep me sane, and calm.

Now they mean nothing.

Except a memory.

It was here that Rochelle ran to that day. It was here I peeled off her gloves and tossed them over the cliff, my heart beating hard as she held my hands. And it was here I looked into her emerald eyes and kissed her. Her mouth melted against mine, and our two hearts merged. We were finally together, and I had no intention of ever letting her go.

And today I'm supposed to say... *good bye*.

Her life shouldn't have ended the way it did.

I have loved her since the day we met. I didn't know it then, but my heart did. And now my heart is gone. In its place there is nothing. Who knew that nothing could weigh so much, and give out so much pain?

The valley blurs before my eyes and I drop to my knees, rage and reason churning my insides into rocks that give me no answers for why this happened. Now I have to live without her. I tip my head back, stretch my arms to the sky and shout at the heavens, and the world, and anyone who will listen, 'IT'S. NOT. FAIR!'