

YELLING AT THE **STARS**

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HOME IS WHERE THE HURT IS

What?" I shout, sounding similar to Grandpa's screaming goats. "Why do we have to move?"

"It's a good opportunity," Mom assures me. "Your grandpa left us the farm."

"A good opportunity for who?" I look at Dad to see if that crossed the line.

"Asher!" he roars. "Watch it!"

Yep. Crossed it.

He jabs his finger at me from his side of the table. I can almost feel the thump, thump, thump of his fingertip on my chest.

Rory buries her head between my back and the couch cushion, probably wishing this would all just go away. The problems aren't going anywhere, but apparently we are.

"But what about my friends?" I argue. "I just leave them?"

"I'm so sorry, sweetheart," Mom says. "I know this is hard. We can come back and visit. We'll only be forty-five minutes down the road, and you can talk with your friends on the phone whenever you want."

"Are you serious? I don't talk to my friends. We play outside."

"You could play games on video chats," says Rory, the words somehow escaping her pillow-muffled mouth.

"Would you want to do that?" I ask.

"No," she says. "Probably not."

"And you're forgetting that the farm doesn't even have Internet. You have to go to the library to use it. I'm not going to the library to talk to my friends."

Mom chimes in. "We'll make it work."

"Why can't we make it work here?"

"Listen!" Dad barks. "We're not asking for your permission. We're telling you that we're moving."

I've always considered myself a polite kid, but Dad is making it nearly impossible lately. It's hard to respect someone that doesn't deserve it.

"Now quit the whining," he commands. "End of discussion."

"That was a discussion?" I ask, accidentally out loud.

SLAM!

Dad hits the table, which makes me jump. Mom's glass tumbles over, spilling water all over Rory's art. The colors bleed together, trickle off the table, and pool on the floor.

Rory yanks her head out from behind me, flings herself over the back of the couch, and crawl-sprints down the hallway.

"Mac," Mom whispers, as she puts her hand on his knee.

"Don't *Mac* me," he orders.

Then he pushes her hand away and turns to me with a look that dares me to keep talking.

"What more do you want to discuss?" he asks.

He doesn't really want to know. His face isn't inviting me to share. It's threatening me if I do. It's like the time he asked, "*Do you have a problem with that?*" after he told us he quit his job. The only correct answer was *no*.

I muster up my calmest response.

"I'm just wondering why."

"Why?" he scoffs, as if the word itself is offensive. "Life sucks sometimes. That's why."

This year has proven that already. I didn't need a reminder.

"We don't have a choice," he continues. "We're losing the house."

It takes a second for the words to set in.

We're losing our house?

"You happy now?" he says. "Is that a good enough reason?"

How do you lose a house? I thought we owned it.

"Great," he says sarcastically. "If there aren't any more questions, I have work to do."

"What work?" I ask, then instantly regret it.

"Work!" he says. "Somebody needs to hold the government accountable. I can't let them win."

I know better than to discuss the government with Dad. It's like he bottles up all his anger toward "the man" and dumps it on Mom, Rory, and me. If this is what he's been wasting his time on instead of finding a job, then I'm the one who should be angry, since *He's* letting the government ruin my life.

There are no words for moments like these. Anything I say would just make things worse.

"Great," he says. "Now go find your sister and start packing. We leave in a week."