

PREPUBLICATION EXCERPT



# DOROTHY MUST



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sneak peek at  
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MUST DIE!**

DANIELLE PAIGE

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AND HER NAME IS DOROTHY.

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DOROTHY MUST

DIE

DANIELLE PAIGE

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Dorothy Must Die

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First Edition

# ONE

I first discovered I was trash three days before my ninth birthday—one year after my father lost his job and moved to Secaucus to live with a woman named Crystal and four years before my mother had the car accident, started taking pills, and began exclusively wearing bedroom slippers instead of normal shoes.

I was informed of my trashiness on the playground by Madison Pendleton, a girl in a pink Target sweat suit who thought she was all that because her house had one and a half bathrooms.

“Salvation Amy’s trailer trash,” she told the other girls on the monkey bars while I was dangling upside down by my knees and

minding my own business, my pigtails scraping the sand. “That means she doesn’t have any money and all her clothes are dirty. You shouldn’t go to her birthday party or you’ll be dirty, too.”

When my birthday party rolled around that weekend, it turned out everyone had listened to Madison. My mom and I were sitting at the picnic table in the Dusty Acres Mobile Community Recreation Area wearing our sad little party hats, our sheet cake gathering dust. It was just the two of us, same as always. After an hour of hoping someone would finally show up, Mom sighed, poured me another big cup of Sprite, and gave me a hug.

She told me that, whatever anyone at school said, a trailer was where I lived, not who I was. She told me that it was the best home in the world because it could go anywhere.

Even as a little kid, I was smart enough to point out that our house was on blocks, not wheels. Its mobility was severely oversold. Mom didn’t have much of a comeback for that.

It took her until around Christmas of that year when we were watching *The Wizard of Oz* on the big flat-screen television—the only physical thing that was a leftover from our old life with Dad—to come up with a better answer for me. “See?” she said, pointing at the screen. “You don’t need

wheels on your house to get to somewhere better. All you need is something to give you that extra push.”

I don’t think she believed it even then, but at least in those days she still cared enough to lie. And even though I never believed in a place like Oz, I did believe in her.

That was a long time ago. A lot had changed since then. My mom was hardly the same person at all anymore. Then again, neither was I.

I didn’t bother trying to make Madison like me now, and I wasn’t going to cry over cake. I wasn’t going to cry, period. These days, my mom was too lost in her own little world to bother cheering me up. I was on my own, and crying wasn’t worth the effort.

Tears or no tears, though, Madison Pendleton still found ways of making my life miserable. The day of the tornado—although I didn’t know the tornado was coming yet—she was slouching against her locker after fifth period, rubbing her enormous pregnant belly and whispering with her best friend, Amber Boudreaux.

I’d figured out a long time ago that it was best to just ignore her when I could, but Madison was the type of person it was

pretty impossible to ignore even under normal circumstances. Now that she was eight and a half months pregnant, it was really impossible.

Today, Madison was wearing a tiny T-shirt that barely covered her midriff. It read Who's Your Mommy? across her boobs in pink cursive glitter. I did my best not to stare as I slunk by her on my way to Spanish, but somehow I felt my eyes gliding upward, past her belly to her chest and then to her face. Sometimes you just can't help it.

She was already staring at me. Our gazes met for a tiny instant. I froze.

Madison glared. "What are you looking at, Trailer Trash?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Was I staring? I was just wondering if *you* were the teen mom I saw on the cover of *Star* this week?"

It wasn't like I tried to go after Madison, but sometimes my sarcasm took on a life of its own. The words just came out.

Madison gave me a blank look. She snorted.

"I didn't know you could afford a copy of *Star*." She turned to Amber Boudreaux and stopped rubbing her stomach just long enough to give it a tender pat. "Salvation Amy's jealous. She's had a crush on Dustin forever. She wishes this was her baby."

I didn't have a crush on Dustin, I definitely didn't want



a baby, and I absolutely did not want Dustin's baby. But that didn't stop my cheeks from going red.

Amber popped her gum and smirked an evil smirk. "You know, I saw her talking to Dustin in third period," she said. "She was being all flirty." Amber puckered her lips and pushed her chest forward. "Oh, Dustin, I'll help you with your algebra."

I knew I was blushing, but I wasn't sure if it was from embarrassment or anger. It was true that I'd let Dustin copy my math homework earlier that day. But as cute as Dustin was, I wasn't stupid enough to think I'd ever have a shot with him. I was Salvation Amy, the flat-chested trailer trash girl whose clothes were always a little too big and a lot too thrift store. Who hadn't had a real friend since third grade.

I wasn't the type of girl Dustin would go for, with or without the existence of Madison Pendleton. He had been "borrowing" my algebra almost every day for the entire year. But Dustin would never look at me like that. Even at forty pounds pregnant, Madison sparkled like the words on her oversize chest. There was glitter embedded in her eye shadow, in her lip gloss, in her nail polish, hanging from her ears in shoulder grazing hoops, dangling from her wrists in blingy bracelets. If the lights went

out in the hallway, she could light it up like a human disco ball. Like human bling. Meanwhile, the only color I had to offer was in my hair, which I'd dyed pink just a few days ago.

I was all sharp edges and angles—words that came out too fast and at the wrong times. And I slouched. If Dustin was into shiny things like Madison, he would never be interested in me.

I don't know if I was exactly interested in Dustin, either, but we did have one thing in common: we both wanted out of Mission, Kansas.

For a while, it had almost looked like Dustin was going to make it, too. All you need is a little push sometimes. Sometimes it's a tornado; sometimes it's the kind of right arm that gets you a football scholarship. He had been set to go. Until eight and a half months ago, that is.

I didn't know what was worse: to have your shot and screw it up, or to never have had a shot in the first place.

"I wasn't . . .," I protested. Before I could finish, Madison was all up in my face.

"Listen, Dumb Gumm," she said. I felt a drop of her spit hit my cheek and resisted the urge to wipe it away. I didn't want to give her the satisfaction. "Dustin's mine. We're getting married as soon as the baby comes and I can fit into my aunt Robin's

wedding dress. So you'd better stay away from him—not that he'd ever be interested in someone like you anyway.”

By this point, everyone in the hallway had stopped looking into their lockers, and they were looking at us instead. Madison was used to eyes on her—but this was new to me.

“Listen,” I mumbled back at her, just wanting this to be over. “It was just homework.” I felt my temper rising. I'd just been trying to help him. Not because I had a crush on him. Just because he deserved a break.

“She thinks Dustin needs her help,” Amber chimed in. “Taffy told me she heard Amy offered to *tutor* him after school. Just a little one-on-one academic counseling.” She cackled loudly. She said “tutor” like I'd done a lap dance for Dustin in front of the whole fourth period.

I hadn't offered anyway. He had asked. Not that it mattered. Madison was already steaming.

“Oh, she did, did she? Well why don't I give this bitch a little tutoring of my own?”

I turned to walk away, but Madison grabbed me by the wrist and jerked me back around to face her. She was so close to me that her nose was almost touching mine. Her breath smelled like Sour Patch Kids and kiwi-strawberry lip gloss.

“Who the hell do you think you are, trying to steal my boyfriend? Not to mention my baby’s dad?”

“He asked me,” I said quietly so that only Madison could hear.

“What?”

I knew I should shut up. But it wasn’t fair. All I’d tried to do was something good.

“I didn’t talk to him. He asked me for help,” I said louder this time.

“And what could he find so interesting about you?” she snapped back, as if Dustin and I belonged to entirely different species.

It was a good question. The kind that gets you where it hurts. But an answer popped into my head, right on time, not two seconds after Madison wobbled away down the hall. I knew it was mean, but it flew out of my mouth before I had a chance to even think about it.

“Maybe he just wanted to talk to someone his own size.”

Madison’s mouth opened and closed without anything coming out. I took a step back, ready to walk away with my tiny victory. And then she rolled into her heels, wound up, and—before I could duck—punched me square in the jaw. I felt my

head throbbing as I stumbled back and landed on my butt.

It was my turn to be surprised, looking up at her in dazed, fuzzy-headed confusion. Had that just happened? Madison had always been a complete bitch, but—aside from the occasional shoulder check in the girls' locker room—she wasn't usually the violent type. Until now.

Maybe it was the pregnancy hormones.

"Take it back," she demanded as I began to get to my feet.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Amber a second too late. Always one to take a cue from her best friend, she yanked me by the hair and pushed me back down to the ground.

The chant of "Fight! Fight! Fight!" boomed in my ears. I checked for blood, relieved to find my skull intact. Madison stepped forward and towered over me, ready for the next round. Behind her, I could see that a huge crowd had gathered around us.

"Take it back. I'm not fat," Madison insisted. But her lip quivered a tiny bit at the f-word. "I may be pregnant, but I'm still a size two."

"Kick her!" Amber hissed.

I scooted away from her rhinestone-studded sandal and stood up just as the assistant principal, Mr. Strachan, appeared,

flanked by a pair of security guards. The crowd began to disperse, grumbling that the show was over.

Madison quickly dropped her punching arm and went back to rubbing her belly and cooing. She scrunched her face up into a pained grimace, like she was fighting back tears. I rolled my eyes. I wondered if she would actually manage to produce tears.

Mr. Strachan looked from me to Madison and back again through his wire rims.

“Mr. Strachan,” Madison said shakily. “She just came at me! At us!” She patted her belly protectively, making it clear that she was speaking for two these days.

He folded his arms across his chest and lowered his glare to where I still crouched. Madison had him at “us.” “Really, Amy? Fighting with a pregnant girl? You’ve always had a hard time keeping your mouth shut when it’s good for you, but this is low, even for you.”

“She threw the first punch!” I yelled. It didn’t matter. Mr. Strachan was already yanking me to my feet to haul me off to the principal’s office.

“I thought you could be the bigger person at a time like this. I guess I overestimated you. As usual.”

As I walked away, I looked over my shoulder. Madison lifted

her hand from her belly to give me a smug little wave. Like she knew I wouldn't be coming back.

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When I'd left for school that morning, Mom had been sitting on the couch for three days straight. In those three days, my mother had taken zero showers, had said almost nothing, and—as far as I knew—had consumed only half a carton of cigarettes and a few handfuls of Bugles. Oh, and whatever pills she was on. I'm not even sure when she got up to pee. She'd just been sitting there watching TV.

It used to be that I always tried to figure out what was wrong with her when she got like this. Was it the weather? Was she thinking about my father? Was it just the pills? Or was there something else that had turned her into a human slug?

By now, though, I was used to it enough to know that it wasn't any of that. She just got like this sometimes. It was her version of waking up on the wrong side of the bed, and when it happened, you just had to let her ride it out. Whenever it happened, I wondered if this time she'd be *stuck* like this.

So when I pushed the door to our trailer open an hour after my meeting with the principal, carrying all the books from my locker in a black Hefty bag—I'd been suspended for the rest

of the week—I was surprised to see that the couch was empty except for one of those blankets with the sleeves that Mom had ordered off TV with money we didn't have.

In the bathroom, I could hear her rustling around: the faucet running, the clatter of drugstore makeup on a tiny counter. I guess she'd ridden it out again after all. Not that that was always a good thing.

"Mom?" I asked.

"Shit!" she yelped, followed by the sound of something falling into the sink. She didn't come out of the bathroom, and she didn't ask what I was doing home so early.

I dropped my backpack and my Hefty bag on the floor, slid off my sneakers, and looked over at the screen. Al Roker was pointing to my hometown on one of those big fake maps. He was frowning.

I didn't think I'd ever seen America's Weatherman frown before. Wasn't he supposed to be reassuring? Wasn't it, like, his job to make us feel like everything, including the weather, would be better soon? If not tomorrow then at some point during the extended ten-day forecast?

I picked up the remote and clicked Al's doom and gloom out of my life.



“Hey,” Mom said, finally stepping out of the bathroom. “I was watching that. Did you hear? There’s a tornado coming!”

I wasn’t too worried about it. They were always predicting disaster around here, but although nearby towns had been hit a few times, Dusty Acres had always been spared. It was like we had cliché to shield us—Tornado Sweeps Through Trailer Park, Leaves Only an Overturned Barbecue. That’s something that happens in a movie, not in real life.

My mom emerged from the bathroom, fussing with her hair. I was glad to see her vertical again, freshly scrubbed with her face all done up, but I had to wince at the length of her skirt. It was shorter than anything I owned. It was shorter than anything Madison Pendleton owned. That could only mean one thing.

“Where are you going?” I asked, even though I knew the answer. “For three days, you’re one step away from a coma and now you’re heading to the bar?”

It was no surprise. In my mother’s world, there were only two pieces of scenery: the couch and the bar. If she wasn’t on one, she was in the other.

She let out an accusatory sigh. “Don’t start. Tawny just broke up with Billy. She needs an ear. I thought you’d be happy that I’m back on my feet again. Would you rather I just lay on the

couch? Well, you might be content to mope around the house all day, but *some* of us have a life.” She fluffed up her already teased hair and began looking for her purse.

There were so many things wrong with everything she’d just said that I couldn’t even begin to process all the ways it was infuriating. Instead, I decided to try the sensible argument. “You’re the one who just told me there’s a tornado on the way. It’s dangerous. You could get hit by a tree or something. Won’t Tawny understand?”

“It’s a *tornado* party, Miss Smarty Pants,” Mom said, as if that explained things. Her bloodshot eyes lit up as she spotted her purse lying on the floor next to the refrigerator and slung it over her shoulder.

I knew there was no point arguing when she got this way. “You need to sign this,” I demanded, holding out the slip of paper Strachan had given me. It was to show that she understood what I’d supposedly done today, and what the consequences were.

“I got suspended,” I told her.

It took her a few seconds to react, but when she did, her face registered not surprise or anger, but pure annoyance. “Suspended? What did you do?” Mom pushed past me again

to get to her keys. Like I was just a thing that was in the way of something she wanted.

If we lived in a regular house, with one and a half bathrooms, I wondered, would she still hate me this much? Was resentment something that grew better in small spaces, like those flowers that Mom used to force to bloom inside in little vases?

“I got in a fight,” I said evenly. Mom kept staring. “With a pregnant girl.”

At that, Mom let out a long, whistling sigh and looked up at the ceiling.

“That’s just great,” Mom said, her voice dripping with something other than motherly concern.

I could have explained it to her. I could have told her exactly what happened; that it wasn’t my fault. That I hadn’t even hit anyone.

But the thing is that, at that moment, I kind of liked having her think I’d done something wrong. If I was the kind of girl who got in fights with pregnant girls, it meant it was on her. And her stellar lack of parenting skills.

“Who was it?” Mom demanded, her plastic purse slamming into the counter again.

“Madison Pendleton.”

She narrowed her eyes but not at me. She was remembering Madison. “Of course. That little pink bitch who ruined your birthday party.”

Mom paused and bit her lip. “You don’t see it, do you? She’s already getting hers. You don’t need to help it along.”

“What are you talking about? I’m the one who was suspended.”

Mom flung her hand out and gripped the air mimicking a pregnant belly. “I give her a year. Two tops before she’s got a trailer of her own around the corner. That boy she’s with won’t stay. And she’ll be left with a little bundle of karma.”

I shook my head. “She’s walking around like she’s God’s gift. Like she and Dustin are still going to be prom king and queen.”

“Ha!” Mom hooted. “Now. But the second that kid comes, her life is over.” There was a pause I could drive a truck through.

For a split second, I thought of how things used to be. My *before* Mom. The one who’d dried my tears and challenged me to a cake-eating contest at that fateful birthday party. “More cake for us,” she’d said. That was when I was ten. After Dad left, but before the accident and the pills. It was the last time she’d even bothered remembering my birthday.

I didn't know what to do when she acted like this. When we were almost having a normal conversation. When she almost seemed like she cared. When I almost saw some glimmer of who she used to be. I knew better but I leaned into the kitchenette counter anyway.

"One second, you have everything, your whole life ahead of you," she said, fluffing her hair in the reflection from the stove. "And then, boom. They just suck it all out of you like little vampires till there's nothing left of you."

It was clear she wasn't talking about Madison anymore. She was talking about me. I was her little vampire.

Anger pricked in my chest. Leave it to my mother to turn any situation into another excuse to feel sorry for herself. To blame me.

"Thanks, Mom," I said. "You're right. I'm the one who ruined your life. Not you. Not Dad. The fact that I've been taking care of you every day since I was thirteen—that was just my evil scheme to ruin everything for you."

"Don't be so sensitive, Amy," she huffed. "It's not always about you."

"All about me? How could it be, when it's always about you?"

Mom glared at me, and then there was a honk from outside. “I don’t have to stand here and listen to this. Tawny’s waiting.” She stormed to the door.

“You’re just going to leave me in the middle of a tornado?”

It wasn’t that I cared about the weather. I wasn’t expecting it to be a big deal. But I wanted her to care; I wanted her to be running around gathering up batteries for flashlights and making sure we had enough water to last through the week. I wanted her to take care of me. Because that’s what mothers do.

Just because I’d learned how to take care of myself didn’t mean I didn’t still feel panic setting in every time she left me like this—all alone, with no clue when she’d be back, or if she’d ever be back at all. Even without a tornado on the way, it was always an open question.

“It’s better out there than in here,” she snapped.

Before I could think of a good enough retort, she was gone.

I opened the door as she slid into the front seat of Tawny’s Camaro; I watched as Mom adjusted the mirror to look at herself and saw her catch a glimpse of me instead, just before the car vroomed away.

Before I could have the satisfaction of slamming the door myself, the wind did it for me. So maybe this tornado was

coming after all.

I thought of Dustin and his wasted scholarship, and about my father, who'd left me behind just to get out of here. I thought of what this place did to people. Tornado or no tornado, I wasn't Dorothy, and a stupid little storm wasn't going to change anything for me.

I walked to my dresser, pushed up flush against the kitchen stove, and opened the top drawer, feeling around for the red-and-white gym sock that was fat with cash—the stash of money I'd been saving for an emergency for years: \$347. Once the storm cleared, that could get me bus tickets. That could get me a lot farther than Topeka, which was the farthest I had ever gone. I could let my mother fend for herself. She didn't want me. School didn't want me. What was I waiting for?

My hand hit the back of the drawer. All I found were socks.

I pulled the drawer out and rifled through it. Nothing.

The money was gone. Everything I'd spent my life saving up for. Gone.

It was no mystery who'd taken it. It was less of a mystery what she'd spent it on. With no cash, no car, and no one to wave a magic wand, I was stuck where I was.

It didn't matter anyway. Leaving was just a fantasy.

In the living room, Al Roker was back on TV. His frown was gone, sort of, but even though his face was now plastered with a giant grin, his jaw was quivering and he looked like he might start crying at any second. He kept chattering away, going on and on about isotopes and pressure systems and hiding in the basement.

Too bad they don't have basements in trailer parks, I thought.

And then I thought: Bring it on. There's no place like anywhere but here.



TWO

I had to admit it looked a little scary outside: the darkening sky stretched out over the empty, flat plain—a muddy, pinkish brown I'd never seen before—and the air seemed eerily still.

Usually on a day like today, even with bad weather, the old guy next door would be out in the yard, blasting old-fashioned country songs—the kind about losing your car, losing your wife, losing your dog—from his ancient boom box while the gang of older kids I never talked to would be drinking neon-colored sodas from little plastic jugs as they sprawled out on the rusty green lawn furniture and old, ratty sofa that made up their outdoor living room. But today, they were all gone. There was no movement at all. No kids. No music. No nothing. The only color for

miles was in the yellowed tops of the dried-out patches of grass that dotted the dirt.

The highway at the edge of the trailer park, where cars normally whizzed by at ninety miles an hour, was suddenly empty. Mom and Tawny had been the last car out.

As the light shifted, I caught a glimpse of myself in the reflection and I saw my face, framed by my new pink hair. I'd dyed it myself three days ago and the change was still a shock to me. I don't even know why I'd done it. Maybe I just wanted some color in stupid, boring gray life. Maybe I just wanted to be a little bit more like Madison Pendleton.

No. I didn't want to be anything like her. Did I?

I was still studying my face when I heard squeaking and rustling and turned around to see my mom's beloved pet rat, Star, going crazy in her cage on top of the microwave. Star has got to be the world's laziest rat—I don't think I've seen her use her wheel a single time in the last two years. But now she was racing frantically, screaming her gross little rat screams and throwing herself against the sides of her home like she was going to die if she didn't get out.

This was new.

"Guess she abandoned both of us, huh?" I tried to ignore

the twinge of triumph I felt at this. I'd always had the sneaking suspicion that Mom loved Star more than me. Now she couldn't be bothered with either of us.

The rat stared right at me, paused, and then opened her mouth to reply with a piercing squeal.

"Shut up, Star," I said.

I thought she'd stop after a second, but the squeal just kept coming.

Star didn't stop.

"Fine," I said when I couldn't take it anymore. "You wanna come out? Fine." I unlatched the top of her cage and reached in to free her, but as I wrapped my hand around her body, she thanked me by sinking her tiny teeth into my wrist.

"Ow!" I yelled, dropping her to the floor. "What's wrong with you?" Star didn't answer—she just scurried off under the couch. Hopefully, never to be seen again. Who even keeps a rat as a pet?

Suddenly, the door of the trailer swung open.

"Mom!" I called, running to the open door. For a split second, I thought maybe she'd come back for me. Or, if not for me, then at least for Star.

But it had just been the wind. For the first time, it occurred to

me that the impending tornado might not be a joke.

When I was twelve, when it all first started, I didn't get it at first. I thought Mom was actually changing for the better. She let me skip school so we could have a pajama day. She took me to the carnival in the middle of the school day. She jumped on the bed. She let us eat pizza for breakfast. But pretty soon, she wasn't making breakfast at all, she was forgetting to take me to school, and she wasn't even getting out of her pajamas. Before long, I was the one making breakfast. And lunch. And dinner.

The mom I'd once known was gone. She was never coming back. Still—whoever she was now—I didn't want her out there on her own. I couldn't trust Tawny to take care of her in a disaster. More than that, I didn't want to be alone. So I picked up my phone and punched in her name. No service. I hung up.

I went to the door, still open and creaking back and forth on its hinges, and took a step outside to scan the horizon, hoping I'd see the red Camaro zooming back down the highway. A change of heart.

As soon as I put my foot on the first stair outside the trailer, I heard a whooshing noise as a plastic lawn chair flew through the air toward me. I ducked just in time to avoid getting beamed in the face.

Then, for a moment, everything was still. The lawn chair was resting on its side a few feet away in the dirt like it had been there all along. It began to drizzle. I thought I even heard a bird chirping.

But as I hesitantly got to my feet, the wind started back up. Dust swirled and stung my eyes. The drizzle turned into a sheet of rain.

The sky just overhead was almost black and the horizon was a washed-out, cloudy white, and I saw it, just like in the movies: a thin, dark funnel was jittering across the landscape and getting bigger. Closer. A low humming sound, like an approaching train, thrummed in my ears and in my chest. The lawn chair shot up into the air again. This time, it didn't come back down.

Slowly, I stepped backward into the trailer and yanked the door closed, feeling panic rising in my chest. I turned the dead-bolt and then, for good measure, pulled the chain tight, knowing none of it would do any good.

I pressed my back to the wall, trying to keep calm.

The whole trailer shook as something crashed against it.

I had been so stupid to think this might be a joke. Everyone else was gone—how hadn't I seen this coming?

It was too late now. Too late to get out of town—even if

I'd had the money to do it. I had no car to get to a shelter. Mom hadn't even thought to ask Tawny to drop me off somewhere. I was trapped here, and whichever way you sliced it, it was my mother's fault.

I couldn't even lie down in the bathtub. We didn't have a bathtub any more than we had a basement.

Al Roker's voice on the TV had been replaced by the buzz of static. I was alone.

"Star?" I squeaked. My voice barely made it out of my chest. "Star?"

It was the first time in my life that I'd been desperate for the company of my mother's rat. I didn't have anyone else.

As I sank onto the couch, I couldn't tell if I was shaking, or if it was the trailer itself. Or both.

My mom's stupid Snuggie was rancid with the stench of her Newports, but I pulled it over my face anyway, closing my eyes and imagining that she was here with me.

A minute later, when something snapped on the right side of the trailer, everything pitched to the side. I gripped the cushions hard to keep from falling off the couch. Then, there was another snap, and a lurch, and I knew that we'd come loose from our foundation.

My stomach dropped and kept dropping. I felt my body getting heavier, my back plastered to the cushions now, and suddenly—with a mix of horror and wonder—I knew that I was airborne.

The trailer was flying. I could feel it.

Dreading what I would see, I peered out from under the blanket and toward the window, squinting my eyes open just a crack to discover my suspicion had been right: Pink light danced through swirling clouds. A rusted-out car door floated by as if it were weightless.

I had never been on a plane. I had never been higher than the observatory, the tallest building in Mission. And here I was now flying for the first time in a rusty old double-wide.

The trailer bounced and swayed and creaked and surfed, and then I felt something wet on my face. Then a squeak.

It was Star. She had made it onto the couch and was licking me tenderly. As her soft squeaks filled my ear, I let out a breath of something like relief just to have her here with me. It wasn't much, but it was something.

Mom was probably on her third drink by now, or maybe huddled with Tawny in the basement of the bar, a stack of kegs to keep them happy for as long as necessary. I wondered what

she would do when she got back—when she saw that the trailer was gone, and me along with it. Like we were never here. Would her life be better without me in it?

Well, I had wanted to be gone. I'd wanted it for as long as I'd known there was anywhere to go. I wanted other places, other people. Another me. I wanted to leave everything and everyone behind.

But not like this.

I scratched my index finger against Star's furry spine and waited for the falling part. For the crash. I braced myself against the cushions, knowing that my tin-can house wasn't going to protect me when we hit the earth. But the crash didn't come.

Up and up and up we went. More white-pink light, more swirly pink clouds, and every kind of junk you could imagine all swirling around in the surreal air blender: an unbothered-looking Guernsey cow. An ancient, beat-up Trans Am. An old neon service-station sign. A tricycle.

It was like I was on the world's most surreal amusement park ride. I've never liked roller coasters. Going up would be fun if you didn't have to think about what always came next.



# THREE

When I came to, the first thing I saw was the spongy gray floor of the trailer above me. Star was scampering around my achy body like it was a racetrack, trying frantically to wake me. It took me a second to realize that I was lying on the ceiling.

Light streaked through the dirty windows—normal, bright white light again, not the blushy pink I’d seen during the tornado or the watercolor brown just before it.

I was alive. And someone was talking to me.

“Grab my hand,” he was saying. “Step lightly.” I turned my head and looked up to see a torso leaning in through the open door, half-in, half-out, and an arm reaching for me. It was a he, silhouetted by light pouring in from behind. I couldn’t make out his face.

“Who are you?” I asked.

“Just take my hand. Try not to make any sudden movements.”

From my side, Star squeaked and scrambled into the pocket of my hoodie.

I rose slowly to my feet and dusted myself off. Nothing seemed to be broken. But everything hurt like I was a rag doll that’d been thrown around in a giant tin can. When I took a step, the double-wide lurched beneath me. I rolled back on my heels, trying to get my balance, and it rocked with even more menace. I stopped.

“Just two steps and you’re home. Hurry,” he said. The distance between his hand and me seemed farther than two steps. I wanted to move again. But I didn’t.

“It’s okay,” he said. “Don’t panic. Just move.”

I took another step, careful not to upset the equilibrium, and then another. I put my hand in his.

As my skin touched his, I saw his face, and I felt electricity shooting through my body. His eyes were the first thing I noticed: They were emerald green with flecks of something I couldn’t even describe to myself, and they seemed to be glowing, almost floating in front of his face. There was

something about them that seemed almost alien.

Was he a rescue worker? And if so, how far from home was I, exactly?

“Am I dead?” I asked. It certainly seemed possible. Likely, even. It was hard to believe that I had survived any crash.

“Of course not. If you were dead, would we be having this conversation?”

With that, he gave my arm a sharp, strong yank and pulled me through the tipped doorway. We fell backward, tumbling onto the ground outside.

I scrambled quickly to my feet and turned around to see that I was standing on the edge of a deep ravine. My poor little trailer was barely holding on, teetering on the precipice.

The chasm was more like a canyon: it was as wide as a river and stretched on for as far as I could see in either direction. The bottom was all blackness.

“What the . . . ?” I whispered.

My trailer heaved, and then, with a final, aching creak, it lurched backward, letting go.

“No!” I screamed, but it was too late. The home that had once been mine was spinning down and down and down into the hole.

I kept expecting to see it crash and shatter into a million pieces, but it just kept on falling as I stood there watching it disappear into the abyss.

It was gone without even a sound. I had almost gone with it.

Everything I owned was in there. Every piece of ugly clothing. Every bad memory.

I was free of all of it.

"I'm sorry about your house," my rescuer said. His voice was soft, but it startled me anyway. I jumped and looked up to find that he was standing at my side. "It's a miracle you made it out. A few inches to the left and you'd have gone straight into the pit. Lucky, I guess." The way he said it made it sound like he thought it had been something more than luck.

"Did the tornado do that?" I asked. I stared back into the pit, wondering how far down it went. Wondering what was down there. "I didn't know tornadoes made giant holes in the ground."

"Ha. No." He laughed, but he didn't seem to think it was all that funny. "The pit's been here for a long time now." He didn't elaborate.

I turned to face him, and when I saw him standing there in the pale blue-gray sunlight, my breath caught somewhere

beneath my ribs. The boy was probably my age, and about my height, too. He was slim and sinewy and compact, with a face framed by dark, shaggy hair that managed to be both strong and delicate at the same time.

His skin was paler than pale, like he'd never left home without SPF or like he'd never left home period. He was part rock star, part something else. I couldn't put my finger on what the something else was, but I knew that it was somehow important.

And those eyes. They were glittering even brighter than before, and there was something about them that made me uneasy. It was like he had whole worlds behind his eyes.

He was beautiful. He was too beautiful. It was the kind of beautiful that can almost seem ugly; the kind of beautiful you don't want to touch, because you know it might burn. I wasn't used to talking to people who looked like him. I wasn't used to being *near* people who looked like him.

But he had saved my life.

"I won't miss it," I said, not sure if I meant it or not. "The house, I mean."

I could tell he didn't believe me, but he didn't argue. "I've never seen anything like it. Your tin farm. It must be very precious. A house made out of metal."

I guess they didn't have trailers where he was from. Lucky him.

I realized, looking around for the first time, that we weren't in Dusty Acres anymore. But where were we?

On the side of the pit on which I stood, a vast field of decaying grass stretched into the distance. It was gray and patchy and sickly looking, with the faintest tinge of blue. On the far side of the pit was a dark, sinister-looking forest, black and deep. Everything around here seemed to have that tint to it, actually. The air, the clouds, even the sun, which was shining bright, all had a faded, washed-out quality to them. There was something dead about all of it. When I looked closely, I saw that tiny blue dust particles were floating everywhere, like the wispy floating petals of a dandelion—except that they were glittering, giving everything a glowing, unreal feeling.

But not everything was blue. Underneath the boy's feet, yellow bricks, as vivid as a box of new crayons, were almost glowing in stark contrast to the blown-out, postapocalyptic monochrome of the landscape.

The golden path led all the way up to the ravine and then dropped off into nothingness. In the other direction, it wound its way through the field and spiraled off into the horizon.

It was a road.

“You’ve got to be kidding me.” I was so astonished that I wasn’t even sure if I had said it out loud or not.

I had been dropped here by a tornado, and now I was standing on something that looked remarkably like a road of yellow bricks.

This had to be some big mix-up. Maybe Kansas had finally cashed in on the whole Dorothy thing with a theme park and the tornado had just happened to drop me there. In which case, this guy was just a really hot park guide. I stared at him, waiting for him to explain.

“Welcome to Oz,” the boy said, nodding, like he expected I’d figured that out already. It came out sounding almost apologetic, like, *Hate to break the bad news.*

Oz.

I touched my head, looking for a bump or something. I must have gotten knocked out and was having a particularly crazy hallucination.

At that, I let out a hoot of laughter. Good! With the way things had been lately, I figured I could use a fantastical hallucination right about now. It seemed like it had done Dorothy some good in the movie—and in Dorothy’s fantasy, she’d been

greeted by a bunch of Munchkins. A beautiful boy beat that any day.

“Aren’t you supposed to sing me a song or something?” I asked, still laughing.

Instead of laughing along with me, concern washed over the boy’s face, like he was worried I was going a little bit crazy.

Was I crazy? My head was swimming. If this was a fantasy, it was a strange one: this wasn’t the Oz that I had read about or seen in the movie. It was as if someone had drained out some of the Technicolor and introduced some serious darkness.

Where were the good witches, the fields of enormous poppies? Where were the singing Munchkins? I guess even in my concussion-induced fantasies, I’m not creative—or cheerful—enough to come up with all that. Instead, I’d conjured up something that looked suspiciously like Dusty Acres right after a nuclear explosion.

I spun around to take it all in—a little too quickly in my excitement—and began to wobble at the edge of the cliff. My rescuer was there with a hand on my wrist, pulling me onto the brick road just in time to save me, yet again, from plunging to my death.

It took me a second, but I recovered my balance and took a



step forward, getting my bearings. As I set one foot and then another onto the road, the bricks themselves seemed to almost pulse under me. Like there was a current running through them. “It feels like there’s something under there,” I said, looking down at my sneakers.

“The road wants you to go to the city.”

“The road? Wants . . . me?” I rubbed my head in confusion.

“It wants everyone. That’s what it’s for. The road’s been here longer than any of us. There’s deep magic in there—magic even she doesn’t understand. Some people think it has a mind of its own. It wants you to go to the city, but it doesn’t like to make the trip easy.”

It figured. Nothing was ever easy, in my experience.

“Who’s ‘she’?” I asked.

The boy reached out and tugged at a lock of my hair. The way he did it wasn’t romantic, but more curious really. It was tender, too, but it was a sad kind of tenderness. No one ever touched me, anyway, and I flinched automatically. “There is so much you don’t know. So much you have to learn. I wish you didn’t.”

Learn what? I wanted to ask. Or maybe I didn’t want to know.

Then I felt a wriggling at my hip and looked down to see that Star was poking her head out of the pocket of my hoodie and was sniffing the air, looking just as confused as I felt. I pulled her out and placed her on the bricks, and she jolted. I guess the road had given her the same feeling it had given me.

“Easy, girl,” I said. “You’ll get used to it in a second.” I looked back up at the boy. “If this is Oz . . . ,” I trailed off, searching for the question that was on the tip of my tongue. Then I found it. “What happened here?” I asked.

I was waiting for him to answer when, out of nowhere, a look of panic crossed his face. For a moment, he looked disoriented, like he’d forgotten who he was. Something around the edges of his body seemed to flicker.

“Are you okay?” I asked. He didn’t answer. He hadn’t moved; now he seemed to be looking right through me.

I reached out and touched him on the shoulder.

“I have to go,” he said.

“Go?” I didn’t understand. He just got here. I just got here. What the hell was happening? “Where are you going?”

He shook his head. “Sorry,” he said. “It’s getting late. I’ve never left for this long. I have to get back before . . .”

“Don’t,” I said, maybe a little too desperately. Maybe this

was a dream and maybe it wasn't, but either way, I didn't want to be left here, in the middle of nowhere, all alone. "Before what? What are you talking about? Who are you?"

"I'm no one," he said, turning away and walking toward the pit.

"Please," I begged.

He turned back to me one more time.

"This is where it all began, you know. I don't know why you're here or who brought you, Pink Hair, but if you're here, it means it's all beginning for you, too. You're like her in so many ways, but I can tell you're different. I can't help you. I'm not powerful enough. But you can help yourself. Prove me right. Don't make the same mistakes she did."

"But . . ."

"Be brave," he said. "Be angry. Don't trust anyone. I'll see you soon."

He stepped to the edge of the road, to right where the bricks crumbled away into the black. Then he jumped.

"No!" I screamed, lunging forward, catching myself just in time before I followed him. Below me, the darkness looked relentless and unforgiving. The road wanted something, he had told me, and now I knew the pit did, too. It was hungry. It was

already infinite and still it wanted more.

There was no sign of him. The boy was gone.

I looked down at Star, who was perched on her haunches at my feet. “So what do we do now?” I asked, half-expecting her to say something back.

She didn’t need to. I knew the answer already: what I was going to do next was the same thing I’d been doing my whole life.

I turned back. Just put one foot in front of the other. Nothing had changed except the color of the road.

# FOUR

Star and I walked, following the road, and when she seemed to get tired, I took her and placed her on my shoulder, where she perched patiently and looked out into the distance. She knew just as well as I did that we were very far from home.

Despite my crash landing in Oz, my body was surprisingly free of bruises, aches, and pains. Actually, I felt pretty good. The headache I'd had when I'd first landed had subsided, and now I felt full of energy.

I was hoping that the place would cheer up as I got farther away from the pit. I was still hoping for a tree that grew lollipops or a welcome committee of cheerful Munchkins—or *anything* cheerful, really. But as I walked down the road, the countryside

remained as grim and desolate as before, everything cast in the eerie blue light that reminded me of the glow of a television from underneath the crack of a closed door.

There were no chirping bluebirds. The only sign of life were the giant ravens that occasionally swooped overhead, startling me every time they crowed. There were no trees to be seen, but the air smelled vaguely of burning leaves.

After a while, the bedraggled fields by the side of the road sprung up into huge cornfields on either side, with stalks as tall as my body. I was used to cornfields back in Kansas, obviously, but this one was different: every ear was as black and shiny as oil. It looked like each one had been dipped in tar. Or like all the life had been sucked out of them and had something dead and evil pumped back in their place.

Curious, I reached out to pull one of them from its stalk. Before I could even touch it, a black vine sprung up from the ground and curled around my arm like a whip, squeezing tight. It burned. I yelped and pulled away, managing to twist myself free, and retreated to a spot in the center of the road that I hoped was safely out of reach. I made a note not to go poking around at anything else around here. This wasn't Dorothy's Oz.

It was Oz, wasn't it? The boy had called it that, and the

fact that I was walking along a road made of yellow bricks was enough to convince me I wasn't in Canada or Argentina. I just had no idea what *this* Oz had to do with the story I knew. It would have been nice if he'd given me a little more information.

Or maybe he had: Suddenly, I remembered the last words he'd said to me before he'd disappeared into the pit. "Don't make the same mistakes she made."

Could he have been talking about Dorothy? "This was where it all began for her," he'd said. Who else could he have meant? And what "mistakes" had she made?

I thought about it some more. What if Dorothy had been here, just like the book said, but she had somehow gotten it wrong? Like, what if the witch had killed *her* instead of the other way around? If so, this depressing version of fairyland definitely felt wicked enough to be the result.

It was a weird idea—so weird that I felt my headache coming back as I tried to wrap my head around it—but what if Dorothy had screwed everything up and someone had decided to bring over another girl from Kansas as some kind of do-over?

I shuddered to myself. I had enough problems of my own back in Kansas. Why couldn't I have been swept away to an imaginary kingdom where nothing was wrong at all—where I

could just kick my legs up and enjoy a nice, relaxing vacation? I racked my brain, trying to remember if there were any books or movies like *that*, and realized there weren't any.

Well, one thing was for sure—I didn't have any magical shoes to take me home. Even if I *could* click my heels together and be right back in Kansas where I'd started, I wouldn't. This place was dark and scary and a little evil seeming, but it was something new and different. Now I just needed to find someone to tell me what was going on here.

So I felt my heart leap when the road dipped down into a shallow valley and curved to the right, heading right toward a cluster of buildings that was sprawled at the foot of the hill.

A town. There *had* to be people living there. This time, I would make them give me some answers.

As I made my way toward it, though, I began to see that my hopes for human contact might need to wait a little longer. The buildings, which were arranged around a crumbling stone plaza, were all cracked and crumbling and grown over with ivy that looked like it had never been tended. The faces of some of the houses had been spray-painted with some kind of graffiti tag: an angry, green frowny face.



The whole area had the distinct look of a place that had slowly been deserted, kind of like the town a few miles away from Mission that everyone had abandoned when the plastic flower factory had shut down.

“Hello?” I called out when I had reached the ring of buildings encircling the town square. There was no response.

From up close, it was clear that this place had actually been nice, once. Even abandoned like this, there was something cheerful and quaint about the way the houses—all of various heights—were built so close together that they were practically stacked on top of one another, as if personal space wasn’t something they cared about around here. And although they were falling apart now, each house was beautifully crafted, with domed roofs and round windows and ornate wooden shutters with fancy iron hardware.

I had to hunch a little to peer inside the nearest window, which barely reached my chin. Inside, there was a table set for five with moldy food on each plate, like whoever had once lived there had left in the middle of dinner.

“They could really use some Munchkins around here, huh?” I said to Star, who hadn’t moved from her perch on my shoulder. She just stared back at me balefully and didn’t bother squeaking

a response.

I jumped back in surprise when I stepped into the square. Someone was smiling down at me triumphantly. Then I realized it wasn't a *person* at all. It was a statue cast in marble, and it was the first thing I'd seen in the whole town that wasn't dirty and crumbling. In fact, it was so white that it was glowing—all except for the pair of glittering silver shoes on its feet.

Of course, I recognized it immediately. With her kind, smiling face, her jaunty gingham dress, and her neatly curled braids, there was no mistaking her: it was Dorothy. The silver plaque on the pedestal confirmed it:

Here Stands Dorothy Gale, it read. She Who Arrived on the Wind, Slayed the Wicked, and Freed the Munchkins.

By now, I'd given up on the idea that I was dreaming—my body felt too heavy and solid, and as bizarre as everything was, none of it had the sticky, underwater quality of a dream. Even so, it was kind of unreal to confirm the alternative with my own two eyes: that I had been thrown into a fairy tale.

"Dorothy likes her statues," a voice said, from out of nowhere. Startled, I looked around to see where it was coming from, and saw a face peering down at me from the second-story window of a house a few paces off. "Me, I have to say, I'm pretty sick of them."

There was a thud as a small black knapsack landed next to me. Unthinkingly, I reached down for it.

“Don’t touch that!” the voice growled. I jumped back and saw her scrambling out the window. She dangled by her fingers before dropping to the ground, landing softly as if the height were no big thing. It was a girl. She looked up at me with a mixture of suspicion and curiosity, and when she sprang to her feet, I saw that there was no way she was more than four feet tall, even in her platform boots.

Now *this* was more like it. I was face-to-face with a real, live Munchkin.

At least, I was pretty sure that’s what she was. Her hair was inky blue-black and her eyes were caked in thick eyeliner with triple-fake lashes. She was wearing a vampy eggplant-hued lipstick and a leather skirt. Her T-shirt revealed arms covered in complicated tattoo sleeves.

But she was short, and she moved with a springiness and agility that was something more than just plain old human. Anyway, I’d already been here long enough that I wasn’t shocked to find out that there was such a thing as a Munchkin Goth.

“Excuse me?” the girl barked as I looked her up and down curiously. “Do you have a problem?”

Heat rose to my face as my mind flashed to Madison Pendleton.

“Nope. Do you?” I snapped right back at her. I couldn’t even look at a *Munchkin* without starting trouble. Was she going to punch me now, too?

She didn’t. Instead, she let out a wry cackle and rolled her eyes. “Let’s see,” she said. “Do I have a problem? How about, do I have *five thousand*?” She marched right over to where I stood and grabbed her bag from where it lay at my feet. It was stuffed to the seams with what I figured must be an entire leather wardrobe. “The answer’s yes, by the way.”

“I’m Amy,” I said, hoping this was what passed for friendly in Munchkin country. I reached out a hand, which she ignored.

“Indigo,” she replied with a shrug. She eyed my shoulder. “Cool rat, by the way. I love rats. Does it talk?”

I glanced at Star, still hoping she would decide that the answer was yes. She didn’t respond.

“Nope.” I shrugged.

“Too bad.” Her eyes traced up to my head. “But I don’t know about the hair. *She’s* not going to like it.”

I put a hand to my scalp and brushed a pink lock from my eyes.

“Why would my pet rat care what my hair looks like?”

Again, Indigo hooted. “Not your rat, dumbass. *Her*.”

“Who’s *she*?”

Indigo scrunched her face up and swiveled her neck like I was a complete moron. “Oh yeah, *who’s she*, she asks. Please.”

“No, seriously,” I said. “I’m new around here. Tell me who you’re talking about.”

“*I’m new around here*,” Indigo mocked me in a squeaky falsetto, slipping her backpack on. But as she did it, she looked at me. Really looked at me.

“Wait, you’re not kidding, are you? You really *aren’t* from around here.” She was staring at my clothes. I guessed that jeans and a hoodie were not what the kids were wearing in Oz.

“No,” I said simply. “I’m not.”

Her jaw dropped open in slow motion as it dawned on her. “Holy *shit*,” she said. “You’re from the Other Place, aren’t you?” She looked over one shoulder and then the other, then asked quietly: “How did you get here?” I couldn’t tell if her tone was one of excitement or fear.

“It was a tor—” I began, but before I could finish, I was cut off by a loud, metallic clanking sound from somewhere off in the distance.

Indigo took a step backward. “You know what?” she said, her eyes darting nervously from building to building. “Never mind. It’s better if I don’t know. In fact, it’s better if I don’t talk to you at all. “

“What? Why?”

She busied herself with her backpack, her tiny face scrunched up with worry.

“Like I said, I’ve already got about five thousand problems, give or take a thousand. Getting caught conspiring with an outlander would be five thousand and one. I’d love to hear your story, but it’s not worth it. Good luck. You’ll need it.” With that, she hoisted her pack on her shoulders and began to walk away.

“No way!” I yelled. “Just let me ask you some questions. I have *no* idea what’s going on.”

“If you’re lucky, you’ll never find out,” she said, not slowing her pace or bothering to look back.

I wasn’t going to let this happen again. She was speeding along, heading off the road, but my legs were longer. I raced after her and grabbed her by the elbow.

“Hey!” she said, whirling around to face me. “Don’t touch me!” She yanked her arm away, but I yanked right back. And I was stronger.

“Let me come with you,” I whispered urgently. I didn’t know where she was going, but she was the best hope I had. Hope of what, I wasn’t sure, but I would figure that out later. “I promise—I’ll do whatever you want. I swear I won’t get you in trouble. But I’m alone here, and I have no idea what I’m doing.”

She bit her lip. The thing is, I could tell she was as curious about me as I was about her. I could tell part of her wanted to relent.

But then we heard that clanging noise again. This time it was louder.

“You seem like a nice person,” Indigo hissed. “And I love rats. But get your fucking hands off me and get the hell away from me. The best thing you can do right now is get your ass back to wherever it is you came from and hope you never wind up in this sorry place again.”

“I don’t know *how* to go home,” I said. But I let her elbow go. This wasn’t getting me anywhere.

“It looks like you’ve got problems, too, then.” Indigo folded her arms across her chest, planting her stocky body firmly in place. “See ya,” she said.

Honestly, I was starting to think this girl was kind of an

asshole. But if she wasn't going to help me, I couldn't think of any good way to force her. All I could do was keep following the road and hope it led me somewhere better than this.

So I walked away, back to the famous road paved with yellow bricks. At least I had a general sense of where that would take me. When I looked back over my shoulder, the angry little Munchkin was watching me go.

As I passed the statue of Dorothy, I changed my mind one more time. "Just tell me one thing," I asked her, spinning around. She shrugged, noncommittal. She hadn't budged from the spot where I'd left her. "They talk about Oz where I'm from. I've heard about it my whole life. But this is messed up. What happened here?"

Indigo's impassive face twisted into a snarl. "*Dorothy* happened," she said.



# **B&N EXCLUSIVE CHAPTER**

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# FOURTEEN

A chill rushed through my body. I should never have come with Mombi, should never have trusted Gert. But what choice did I really have when I was standing in the palace dungeon, about to go on trial for a Fate Worse Than Death, the Tin Guard advancing? It's not like I had a ton of options.

"She's one of *you*?" I asked. My voice echoed through the cave.

Was this some kind of trap? Was this Dorothy's idea of a twisted punishment? They'd rescued me, cleaned me up, and now they were just going to turn me over to Dorothy's evil pink BFF?

*Like hell.*

I took a step back. And another. Then I turned toward the mouth of the cave and began to run. I'd have to navigate the weird maze of caves we'd come through, but it beat being trapped in a room full of witches with crazy superpowers behind me. And if Grandma Gert could read minds, who knew what the others could do? No, I had to get out of here.

Out of nowhere, I slammed into a cold, hard surface and then slid down awkwardly onto the stone ground. But there was nothing there. I'd run into an invisible wall.

Glinda's laugh echoed around me. I guess it probably *was* funny. From her perspective, I mean. I must have looked like a duped Wile E. Coyote falling off a cliff.

I felt my face turn red. I wasn't embarrassed. Or at least, I wasn't *just* embarrassed. I was scared. And I was angry. But I couldn't fight it as an invisible hand clawed into my shoulder, pulling me up to my feet. It set me standing again, turned me around to face my captors, and marched me back toward them.

"Amy," Mombi said warningly. "We made a deal. Remember? You agreed to join us when you took my hand."

"I didn't know what I was agreeing to," I said, twitching against Gert's hold on me.

"Your ignorance makes no difference. The spell was cast.

You're bound to the Order now."

"Bound?"

"When I rescued you from your cell, it was under the condition that you would join us. You agreed. The spell was cast and I couldn't undo it if I wanted to. You're one of us."

I crossed my arms over my chest and glared at Glinda. "I know what you did to the Munchkins," I spat at Glinda. "You may look sweet, but I know who you are."

"Oh!" Glinda exclaimed. She laughed again, high-pitched and lilting. "I'm not who you think I am," she said.

She didn't so much stand as pose, seeming acutely aware that she was the pretty purple flower in a sea of gray and brown and black. "I'm not Glinda. I'm Glamora, her twin sister. She's the good witch; I'm the wicked one. Of course, she's also the one who's turned Oz into the hellhole it is now, so it's really all relative."

Then that laugh again.

I eyed the witch suspiciously. A twin? That seemed like a convenient excuse. As I thought back to my first day here in Oz, it was true that she didn't look *exactly* like the woman I'd seen in the field. Mostly, it was a matter of style. Rather than Glinda's bouncing curls, this witch had her strawberry-blonde

hair pulled into a severe bun. And though her dress was just as fancy as the one I'd seen Glinda wearing in the field that day, it was simple and elegant, nothing like the frilly nightmare Glinda had worn.

"You say *wicked* like it's a good thing," I said.

"You're getting the hang of it." Glamora's voice was glittering mischievously. "Down is up, up is down. Good is Wicked, Wicked is Good. The times are changing. This is what Oz has come to."

I looked around at the faces of the Wicked, or Formerly Wicked. I wanted some answers. "How did you find me?" I asked slowly. "How did Mombi know I fell from the sky? How did you know I was there in the palace?"

*We have eyes within the palace. And the palace has eyes everywhere. The rest I'm afraid I had to obtain from you.*

The thought popped into my head. A thought that wasn't mine. "Amy. Sit. Let us explain," Gert said, this time out loud. I ignored her command and her concerned gaze. I didn't want to look at her. "Sit," she repeated, this time a little louder. I resisted, but found I had no control over my own limbs. It hadn't been a request.

Fighting each step as I went, I walked over and sat down in

a cold metal chair.

“Oz has changed,” Gert said. “The trees don’t talk. The Pond of Truth tells lies, the Wandering Water stays put. The Land of Naught is on fire. People are starting to get old. People are forgetting how it used to be.”

“It used to be the three of us would never have imagined we’d be standing in the same room together,” Mombi said in her raspy voice. She gestured to herself, Glamora, and Gert. The boy still hadn’t said anything. He was just standing with his arms folded across his chest. He didn’t really look any happier to be here than I was. “Wicked witches aren’t supposed to work together. But that was before Dorothy.”

Gert could see that I wasn’t buying it. More than see, I guessed, she could read it in my mind. I wondered if she was included in the once-wicked, too. “We call ourselves wicked to show that we stand against Dorothy and everything she represents,” Gert said. “Wickedness is part of Oz. It’s part of the order of things. It’s always been the good versus the wicked. Magic can’t exist without Goodness. Goodness can’t exist without Wickedness. And Oz can’t exist without magic.”

“No matter *what* Dorothy might think,” Mombi said. “Glamora. Show her.”

Glamora waved her hand across the stone table, and it rippled as its surface transformed into a dark pool of water. Then she waved her hand again, and a picture began to form in the pool, reflecting up from the bottom.

It was a map, and it was divided into four equal triangles, each one its own color. Blue, red, yellow, purple. At the center was an irregular blob of green.

“This is Oz,” Glamora said. One by one, she pointed at each of the quadrants. “Munchkin Country, Quadling Country, Winkie Country, Gillikin Country.” Blue, red, yellow, purple. As she pointed, their names appeared in dramatic script. “Here on the edge”—she ran her finger along the perimeter of the rectangle—“is the Deadly Desert. It protects Oz from outsiders. No living thing can cross the Deadly Desert without using powerful magic. Anyone who touches its sands will turn instantly to dust. Or, that’s how it used to be.”

She jabbed a long purple nail at the blob in the center. “And *this* is the Emerald City. Where Dorothy lives.”

Then she passed her hand over the pool again, and the colors disappeared, replaced by shimmering white dots, little pricks of light covering every inch of the map. “The white lights represent Oz’s magic,” Glamora said. “Its lifeblood. This is what



Oz used to look like. And this”—she snapped her fingers—“is what it looks like now.”

The light dimmed and faded until most of the map was a dull, washed-out gray, dappled with a few gaping black holes here and there. There were still a few glittering spots spread across Oz’s four quadrants, as well as one spot in the south that was particularly bright, but other than that, the vibrant, shimmering brightness of just a moment ago was gone.

Except for at the very center of the map. The green blob was glowing brighter than any other spot, burning so bright that I had to squint to look at it.

I looked up at Glamora and then around the table, where Mombi, Gert, and the boy were all looking at me expectantly.

“We need your help,” Mombi said.

“The magic is disappearing from Oz,” said Gert.

“It doesn’t look like it’s disappearing,” I said, gesturing toward the center of the map. “It’s just *moving*.”

“Correct,” Glamora said with a narrow-eyed smile. “And can you guess *why* it’s moving?”

I looked at her blankly, and then it dawned on me. I remembered the pit in Munchkin Country that my trailer had fallen into, and Glinda with her Munchkin machine. I

remembered what Indigo had told me about *magic mining*.

“Someone’s taking it,” I said. Glamora arched a perfectly plucked eyebrow, waiting for me to figure out the rest. “It’s Dorothy,” I realized. “Dorothy’s stealing the magic.”

“Now you’ve got it,” Glamora said. “And losing its magic to Dorothy will mean the end of Oz. That’s why you’re here. We need you to stop her.”

I sat up straight. I didn’t know the first thing about magic. I didn’t know the first thing about *Dorothy*. “Me? I just got here. How am I supposed to stop anyone from doing anything?”

They all looked at me at once. The boy fixed me with an especially hard gaze. Finally Mombi spoke.

“Simple. You’re going to kill her.” She looked right at me and said, “Dorothy must die.”

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Laura Hanfin

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is a graduate of Columbia University and currently lives in New York City. Before writing *Dorothy Must Die*, her debut, she worked in the television industry, where she received a Writers Guild of America Award and was nominated for several Daytime Emmys. You can follow Danielle on Twitter @DanielleMPaige.

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