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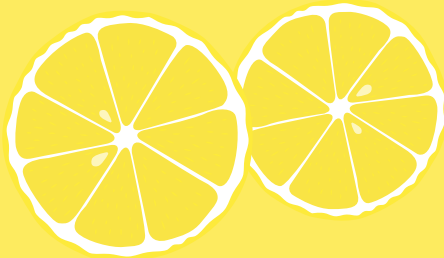


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READS

Excerpt Sampler
2018

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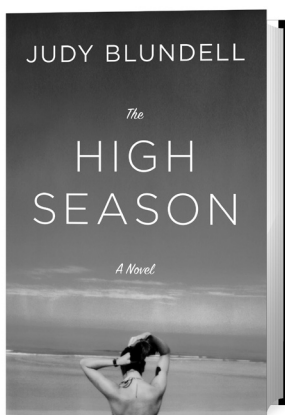
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1

EVERY SUMMER RUTHIE gave away her house by the sea. During the month of May, she packed and polished. Sneakers were scooped up from their kicked-off positions. Earrings, loose change, buttons were swept off the tops of bureaus. Post-its with phone numbers marooned from their meaning had been thrown away, anything threadbare or worn dumped into one of the summer boxes and sealed with squealing tape. T-shirts had been whisked off the hooks on the backs of bathroom doors, and fragrant chunks of Provençal soaps nestled in blue-and-white bowls by the sinks.

Ruthie knew how to create a house that looked lived-in, but lightly. When her summer tenants walked through the door, they breathed in peace and lemons. In this house no one ever had a sleepless night. No child slammed a door, screaming of injustice. No one was ever sick, or sorrowful, or more than pleasantly tired. Summer was a forever season, and held no pain.

With a fistful of yesterday's news, she polished the picture window, spotless enough to slam into and raise a bruise. Now she had a better view of her daughter slacking off. In the yard Jem was doing what teenagers do, texting while doing a chore in a halfhearted fashion, loading gear into the truck bed with one hand while her thumb jitterbugged on a screen.

It was the first big weekend of summer, and winter's trap had sprung. All along the hundred miles of Long Island, from Manhattan to the East End, skeins of highway were traffic-snarled by eight in the morning. On the North Fork families were spilling out, stretching and inhaling after the dawn ride from Manhattan, parents having bawled at their children, still thickheaded with dreams, to pull on shorts and get the hell in the car. Barbecues were rolled out from the garage, convertible tops folded down, beach chairs snapped to.

High above the creeping cars, helicopter blades purred the air as they carried the rich and the lucky to the Hamptons on the South Fork. At the airport drivers waited by dark-windowed SUVs, patiently sipping coffee. Shopkeepers checked inventory on summer-weight cashmere. House managers reviewed details of schedules and flower deliveries to the vast homes behind the hedges.

Ruthie's renter would arrive at noon. Adeline Clay had paid like a rich person, taking the Beamish-Dutton house for the entire season, and the whopping check was sitting in the bank. By Thanksgiving the money would have disappeared, distributed to various wheezing accounts: the college fund, the taxes due, the unseen needed repairs. But right now Ruthie felt pleasantly, if temporarily, solvent, her feet on a wide-planked floor rubbed with beeswax, the sky bouncing light off the sea. There were a few details left to take care of: one more swipe of

the counters, local honey and flowers from the garden to welcome the tenant, a final sweep, and then skedaddling off into their own summer in a rented guesthouse.

“The summer bummer,” Jem called it, because giving up the house in the best months of the year was the only way to keep it.

Ruthie’s phone vibrated in her pocket. A text from her board president, Mindy Flicker. Mindy had left her Park Avenue apartment earlier in the week to beat the traffic. Ruthie’s phone had been pinging with texts for days. Mindy might not have known what she was talking about, but she was firmly committed to conveying it as often as possible.

IDEA! A bouquet would be super to welcome Adeline Clay

...

W a card saying it’s from the Belfry. Do you have a card? I could drop one off.

I buy them in bulk.

Mike came up behind her as she texted *All taken care of*. As the director of the Belfry Museum, she knew that wealthy board ladies were part of the job. Cosseted as children, driven hard as young women, married off to suitably successful and politically like-minded men, tightly surgeried and whittled down to bone, they could be fierce and admirable or simply awful. Mindy was the latter. She had joined the board three years ago with an excess of sebum and verbiage, and with a combination of big money and a perfect attendance record at meetings, she’d taken over as board president only a year before. Since then, Ruthie’s once pleasant and busy job had turned into a constant battle to deflect Mindy’s more idiotic ideas while flattering her verve. It would be a summer of too many meetings, of texts and surprise visits and hair twirls accompanied by *Wouldn’t it be interesting if we . . .*

“Mindy,” she said to Mike.

“Can’t you just ignore her?”

“Would you be able to ignore a hyena gnawing on a kidney?”

“Ow.” He put his hands on her shoulders. Once, she would have

leaned back against him. “Hey. You did it. The place looks great.”

“World’s perfect,” Ruthie agreed. “Wait. The porch. Did you fix the second step?”

“Ruthie.” The hands dropped.

Even in his weariness, in his mustard-colored T-shirt with the hole near the collar, he had allure. Forty-eight and he looked like a surfer. She was three years younger and looked like his grandmother. Teenage carelessness regarding sunscreen had taken its toll. Skin elasticity was beginning to break down. Middle age had settled into her laugh lines. Any moment now she’d be initiated into the feminine mysteries of the chin wax.

“Do we have time for coffee?”

“We can’t make coffee. The kitchen is clean.”

“She won’t be here for three hours.”

“Don’t bother, Daddy,” Jem said, stuffing shirts into a duffel as she walked. “God forbid we do some actual living in this house. For the past month I’ve had to eat my muffin on the porch.”

“What say we finish loading the truck!” Ruthie suggested in what Jem called her “me-hearties” voice.

Jem settled the duffel on one shoulder and picked up a canvas tote stuffed with last-minute items—books, soap, sandals, a rolled-up pair of shorts, a box of linguine. She’d worn the same aggrieved expression all morning. It was an old fight; at fifteen, Jem had long passed the age where Mike and Ruthie could make a game out of packing up her room to make way for strangers who would eat off her plates and swim off her beach. It was no longer an adventure to stay in a borrowed trailer at a campground, or flop in a garage apartment. Jem was old enough now to realize that a sofa bed was no lark to sleep on.

They watched her go, blond braid swishing, flip-flops snapping a rebuke.

“We had a fight this morning over the bleach,” Ruthie said as soon as the screen door banged. “She promised me she’d help me do the last-minute clean, and she tried to wriggle out of it. Meret wanted her to get a hot wax pedicure.”

“What’s that?”

“Seventy-five dollars.”

“Meret,” Mike muttered. “A fur cup of trouble.”

“A fur cup with toenails.” Jem’s lovely best friend Olivia had moved away a year ago, and Ruthie still bemoaned the day Meret Bell had stopped by Jem’s table in the cafeteria and said, “I like your hair that way.”

“She’ll be okay,” Mike said, watching through the screen as Jem leaned against his pickup, texting furiously. Boxes and suitcases and a broken chair surrounded her in Joad-like fashion. “She’s going through a girly stage.”

“She’s not going through a girly stage, she’s a *girl*. She’s a girl who thinks she’s a woman.”

“Didn’t Gary Puckett and the Union Gap sing that?”

“You know, it would make me so happy if you’d worry with me.”

Mike sock-skated across the wood floor, heading for his shoes on the porch.

“Sweetie, give me something worthy to worry about, and I can worry with the best of them. I can’t worry about a pedicure. Whereas you like to exist in a fog of general anxiety. Probably why we’re incompatible. Irreconcilable worry patterns.”

“Reason number three hundred and thirty-seven,” Ruthie said, following him to the door. It was an old joke. “Can you pick up Jem after work today? I’ve got Spork prep, and it’s going to be crazy.”

“Sure.”

“And you’re not allowed to call me sweetie, remember?”

“Ah, Rules for a Good Divorce. Thank God you remember them or we’d be in worse trouble.”

“Hey. They were just suggestions.”

“You emailed me a list. There were *asterisks*.” Mike stood at the screen door. Dodge, the artist who lived down the road in the summers, honked and waved from his yellow convertible, yelling something as he went by, most likely “Cocktails!” All summer they would promise to have cocktails together and never do it. Dodge was the new breed of summer renter in Orient; he had a social calendar.

“Every year we watch them come back,” Mike continued, waving at Dodge. “Every year we give up our house. How long can we do this, anyway?”

“Do what?”

“This,” Mike said. “Live next to things we can never have. It gets worse every year. Did you see the house they’re renovating over on Orchard? Dave said there’s a home gym and a lap pool. A home gym! It’s a death knell, I’m telling you.”

He gazed out at the bay, a powdery blue today, with a scattering of white sails skittering toward Bug Light. A rainstorm the night before had failed to clear the humidity, and the world had summery blurred edges. “We wouldn’t have to uproot Jem every summer if we sold it. And we’d have money. We’ve got to be at the top of the market right now.”

When they’d sat down to discuss the divorce three years before, child custody had been decided in an exchange of less than ten words (*And Jem? We just have to . . . Of course.*)—but the house, ah, the house. Marital vows they could abandon, but a shingled house with a water view in an escalating market? They had put everything into the house, they had borrowed and scraped in order to renovate it. It was their version of a hedge fund, held against disaster and college tuition. If everything fell apart, they said, *they could sell the house.*

Divorce papers were inevitable, but it became an item on an ever-growing to-do list that could have been titled “Things to Ignore for Now.” Divorce needed attorneys and turned amicable separations into expensive fights. They decided, for now, to treat divorce as a state of mind rather than polity. Yes, they were divorced. No, the state of New York didn’t know it yet.

So Ruthie stayed in the house with Jem. Mike had moved into an apartment in the bigger village of Greenport, a few blocks from the hardware store, which was at least handy for a carpenter.

Her phone vibrated again. Mindy, no doubt. She ignored it.

“We should move to Vermont, or Nova Scotia,” Mike said. “To the real country. Where hot wax is on a candle where it belongs, not on your daughter’s toes. Where people think Pilates is next to the Big

Dipper. Where they've never heard of kale chips."

"Are we moving to Vermont or 1910?"

"Our town is a barnyard full of hammers and nails," Mike said. "You can't walk down a block without hearing a buzz saw. And the storms get worse every year—another Hurricane Sandy moves a degree to the east and we're finished. How can you time a last chance except by taking it? This could be the moment to cash out."

"We don't have enough equity yet," Ruthie said. "We're still paying off the loan for the master suite."

He pressed his lips together the way he always did when she brought up financial reality. He'd grown up as a Dutton, with streets named after his family in Connecticut towns. The fact that his father had run through the money by the time he was twenty should have made him practical, but it only made him less inclined to hear facts.

"She has two years of high school left," she said. "After that . . ." After that, what? The ellipsis defined the sentence. She didn't know.

The problem was, she thought they were lucky, and he did not. For Mike, losing the house for three months canceled out having it for nine. For her, it guaranteed it.

This was what she'd never had and what she always craved. *Home*, she thought. *This*. Even if she had to leave it in order to afford it, it was hers. This lovely, perfect village, neighbors who knew her, the bluest hydrangeas, the best view on the North Fork. *This!*

The only thing she missed, she thought, gazing at Mike's profile, was *that*.

"Now Jem's in that rotten crowd, with the pedicures and the purses and you have to wear pajama pants on Thursdays or you can't sit at the table at lunch . . ." Mike shook his head. "Remember that argument when you bought her the wrong slippers? Like you'd *stabbed* her. We're losing her."

"Of course we're losing her. She's a teenager. And we broke up. Don't you think it's sort of ludicrous for us to leave town together?"

Mike grinned. "Hey. We're divorced, but we're family."

A spark ignited in that tinderbox that was Ruthie's heart. It contin-

ually infuriated her that Mike was so adept at disarming her.

Which could be reason number two for why they were apart.

Reason number one? He'd decided that he wasn't in love anymore. ("I don't need a *pal*," he'd said to her. "I need a *destiny*.")

"We struggle so much just to keep it all going," Mike said. "We're still not happy."

"That's why you left, so that we'd all be happy. Remember?"

"Yeah," said Mike. "Look . . ."

A helicopter passed overhead, not loud enough to drown his voice, but he stopped.

So she obeyed him. She looked. The way he stood, half turned toward her, his hand flat against the screen door, ready to push. A man always half on his way out a door.

"Have dinner with me tomorrow? So we can talk?"

"Talk about . . ."

"I don't know, a rethink. Really talk."

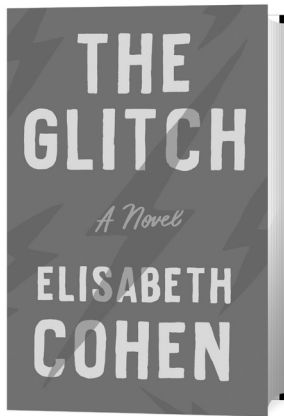
The world shut down into quiet. There was something in his face she hadn't seen in a long time. He was really looking at her, for one thing. So much of the end of a marriage was exchanging information without eye contact. "I've got Spork tomorrow."

"It's over at five. After we can go to the Drift."

The Spindrifft was the place they jokingly referred to as "the bad news bar," a local dive where once they had commiserated about disasters over drafts of beer and free hard-boiled eggs and peanuts. Sometimes that was dinner. Tim would slide the jar of mustard down the length of the bar and Mike would catch it in one hand. Outside light would be falling, Jem would be at a friend's, the twilight would last forever, their kisses would taste of hops and yolk.

"Sure." *The bar is not a signifier*, she told herself. *It's just a bar.*

Sound rushed in. Tires crunching over gravel. Adeline Clay swung down the driveway in her Range Rover, three hours early.



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—*Kirkus* (starred review)



Chapter 1

Like a lot of successful people, I have problems with my sinuses. I was digging in my bag for a tissue when I felt my phone buzzing. It was work. And so between the call and my nose, I didn't notice our child had gone missing.

First things first: we were in France, on the beach. We had stopped beside a little café with a red awning and a menu board advertising moules marinières and dorade grillée and a kind of wide-topped ice cream cone in which the two scoops sit side by side, competing for your attention. The café had an astonishing number of little tables on the pavement surrounding it, suggesting that its gross revenue per square foot was high for the local market, thanks to the competitive advantage of its beachfront location.

But nobody was eating there now. It was too late for lunch and too early for dinner. People were catching up on email in their hotel rooms, or running out of their offices to do an errand, or coming home from nights out that had stretched into the next afternoon. And then there was us: Rafael and I, both on our phones for work, and our two little kids—well, one of the two. I was thinking, Nova would like those double ice cream cones, and I was about to show her, and then I thought, where is Nova?

Have you ever been to Cap Ferrat? It's very nice. A little trashy, not exactly what I expected, but nice. We were beside the café and a parking lot, at the edge of the beach, with the sea beyond. Rafael had his phone against his ear and our baby, in a carrier, strapped to his chest. The baby looked placid and content as Rafe rocked from one foot to the other, murmuring in the soothing voice he uses to discuss leveraged buyouts.

Our daughter too had just been there with us, and all at once she was not there. I stood up and blinked, thinking that might rearrange things, rematerialize her. I hoped to reboot the situation.

She was not very tall—she was four, but even for four she was shrimpy. That comes from my side. She has dark hair, a pale dress, legs, feet, sandals, big pockets bulging with grass stalks and little walruses and pieces of sea glass, which get put into a bin in our laundry room. She's not that musical, but she does sing. She plays soccer, though she hasn't shown any special aptitude for it. She hasn't mastered her Chinese tones. She likes drawing. She draws spirals that look like concepts for product logos, often going right off the edge of the paper. "You have to stay on the paper," I'd told her just that morning at the hotel. "Look, you're making marks on this table. Stay on the paper, don't wander off."

It was good advice. She was the type to hide under the tablecloth in a restaurant or fall behind, transfixed by a fountain. I thought she must be nearby, even if I couldn't see her.

Tall, thin cypresses lined the road, and olive trees. There was a breeze off the water that smelled of fish and lavender. Unrealistically blue water slapped at the hulls of the sailboats in the marina.

It would have been very enjoyable had she been there. Planters with blue and yellow flowers. That strikingly legible European signage. Just a few minutes before, we had walked along the road and stared at the Plan du Port (I think I can translate that: Plan of Port) and a little sign pointing the way to the Ship Chandler.

“That’s the person who sells candles to pirates,” Rafael had explained, and Nova had looked up at him quizzically with her cloudy little expression, as if she wasn’t sure if it were true or he were joking. That cloudy look was often on Nova’s face. Earlier. Twenty minutes ago. Before we’d lost Nova.

The boats’ masts cast long pointy shadows across the pavement where we were walking. The shadows bobbed and dipped as the boats stirred. Nova, who had been in a good mood for once, had run along the sidewalk jumping over each one.

“Take a picture!” I’d said.

“Good idea,” Rafael said. “In a second. I have to take this call. It’s Zach.”

I was overwhelmed, as I often am, by the tidal currents behind my nose. My sinuses were giving me trouble. I dug for a tissue and from the depths of my bag saw the bright glow of my own phone trying to summon my attention.

“Yes?” I answered, cupping my ear. I struggled to maneuver the tissue out of my bag and deal with my nose without altering the crisp, resonant timbre of my phone voice.

I’m not sure how many moments later I noticed she wasn’t there. I got into Rafe’s line of sight and lip-mimed (because we were both still on our calls), *Where’s Nova?*

He gave me a distracted thumbs-up. Without missing a beat he said, out loud, “There’s a lot of opportunity there, yeah.”

I mimed confusion. Into my own phone I said crisply, “Brad, yes! I met with them just last week. They’re putting out feelers. They want to get in on the action. It could be huge for them. Haptics are an exploding field.”

I turned, expecting her to have appeared. She hadn't. *Rafe*, I signaled, *Nova*?

Rafael put his finger into his ear and shook his head. He was on a call with an investor and he seemed to be straining very hard to hear and pull meaning in through the connection. Our eyes met and Rafe looked away; he had the expression he gets, slightly constipated, when he's doing calculations in his head. Or also, when he's in the bathroom.

"I think it's undervalued," he said into his phone. "For comparison, Mexbol's up a little over two percent this year. I like what I'm seeing. I'm just sitting here looking at some numbers with Pete." Which was not strictly true. "I can just go back a page, hang on, the screen is loading . . . You having internet problems out there . . . ?"

Nova! I mouthed, silently, hugely, inches from his face.

What? he mouthed back, with hand gestures. He began to look around, checking for *Nova*. His eyes widened.

"I agree completely," I said abruptly into my phone. "I've framed out three different options. We could do it through a merger or acquisition, but a licensing deal could also work, if we could get favorable renewal options. I went over the details with Stefan yesterday, but I'm happy to lay them out to you or the committee—maybe we could do that this afternoon. I'm prepping to go into a meeting in about ten minutes." Which was not strictly true either.

Rafe strode purposefully toward the back side of the café, showing confidence that he would find her. "Who wants to go down there? Not me. But yeah, it would be good to have a guy on the ground. A satellite office, even. I'm looking at some other numbers." In fact he was looking at me, eyes wide, as he came back around the other side of the café, alone, still talking. "I have historical trends right here." His voice was measured and exact, his face contorted with worry. He drew an exclamation point in the sand with his shoe.

Weren't you holding her hand? His expression was reproaching.

I did, I silent-screamed back. *Until the phone . . .*

What?

Until a minute ago!

What?

A minute! I pointed at my watch.

How long?

I pinched my thumb and finger together to show a small bit and banged my fingers against the crystal of my watch. Unlike most executives in Silicon Valley, I do wear a watch. It may make me seem older, but I like knowing what time it is. It's just another stereotype I've had to overcome. My fingertips were still stained from the raspberries I'd fed our son at lunch. *A minute!* I screamed it, silently, till my ears popped from the pressure on the tendons along the back of my neck. My Conch slipped out of position, and I pressed it against the back of my ear.

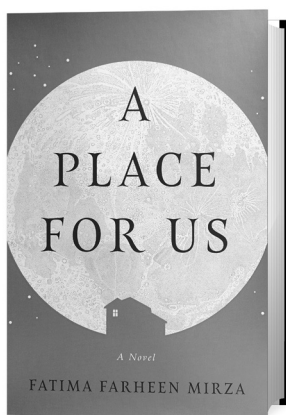
Rafael put his hand over the speaker of his phone. On the edge of audibility, he whispered, "Go that way, I'll go this way."

I nodded and set off. "Brad, sure, no, no trouble at all, sure I'd love to take you through the options, I'll sketch them out for you right now, no, of course, now is fine, now's terrific." I took a deep breath. "So you've got the possibility of a turnkey solution through a straight acquisition of one of the smaller players in the thermoelectric energy harvesting space, say . . . and I think that's a valid possibility for us . . ." Keep it slow, keep it calm, don't give it away, don't blow cred on this because you might need it more tomorrow, you might need it more in ten minutes—and I continued to speak in the same measured way, my breathing even, while I began sprinting along the sand looking for Nova's little sprigged white dress, her red plastic bucket.

There was nobody on the beach or around. Above us, on the cliff that ringed the horseshoe beach, were houses, but could anyone have seen anything from so far above? My heart was accelerating. A little catch in it, like a diesel car on a cold morning. I concentrated on my voice, keeping it smooth and clear and even. You're good at this, I thought. You succeed, every time, what's one more. The previous night, I had set my alarm for 2:25 so I could get on a 2:30 conference call—2:30 a.m. Central European Time, 5:30 in the evening back in California where the main players were. I didn't even have to set the alarm; these days I always wake when I need to. I didn't mention I was away, or that I

was at that moment sitting on a balcony with my fingers circling the cold metal railing, looking out into darkness where the sea pulsed invisibly beyond the dark fog, wearing both hotel robes over my pajamas for warmth. I added some vibrant insights to the directors' call, pushed back against a subordinate's idea, assigned some deliverables, clarified the next steps, and then clicked off, stumbled back in, dropped the robes on the floor, and climbed into our palatial bed.

Hang up the goddamn phone, a voice in my head said. It sounded remarkably like my own in a managerial moment. I countered: If I don't find her in sixty seconds, I'll say there's a problem I have to deal with and I'll call him right back. I'll say I'm up against a hard stop. No, new approach, even better—I'll say I can't hear him, that my connection is breaking up. Don't mention a problem unless you've formulated the solution, that's a core principle of mine. Say I'm about to drive into the woods. Let him assume I'm talking about the ones down Page Mill Road. Let him make the excuses for me. Let him tell me the connection's gone bad. That's best. Give it sixty seconds, starting now, and then pretend the connection's broken up. I glanced down at my watch. *You can drown in sixty*, the voice said. True. I appreciate your input and I'm going to act on it. I always appreciate smart suggestions, no matter who they come from. Let's say forty-five.



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AS AMAR WATCHED THE HALL FILL WITH GUESTS ARRIVING for his sister’s wedding, he promised himself he would stay. It was his duty tonight to greet them. A simple task, one he told himself he could do well, and he took pride in stepping forward to shake the hands of the men or hold his hand over his heart to pay the women respect. He hadn’t expected his smile to mirror those who seemed happy to see him. Nor had he anticipated the startling comfort in the familiarity of their faces. It had really been three years. Had it not been for his sister’s call, he might have allowed even more years to pass before summoning the courage to return.

He touched his tie to make sure it was centered. He smoothed down his hair, as if a stray strand would be enough to call attention, give him away. An old family friend called out his name and hugged him. What would he tell them if they asked where he had been, and how he was

doing? The sounds of the *shenai* started up to signal the commencement of Hadia's wedding and suddenly the hall was brought to life. There, beneath the golden glow of the chandeliers and surrounded by the bright colors of the women's dresses, Amar thought maybe he had been right to come. He could convince them all—the familiar faces, his mother who he sensed checking on him as she moved about, his father who maintained his distance—he could even convince himself, that he belonged here, that he could wear the suit and play the part, be who he had been before, and assume his role tonight as brother of the bride.

*

IT HAD BEEN Hadia's decision to invite him. She watched her sister Huda get ready and hoped it had not been a mistake. That morning Hadia had woken with her brother on her mind and all day she willed herself to think as other brides must—that she would be using the word *husband* when speaking of Tariq now, that after years of wondering if they would make it to this moment, they had arrived. What she had not even dared to believe possible for her was coming true: marrying a man she had chosen for herself.

Amar had come as she had hoped. But when she was shocked at the sight of him she realized she never actually believed he would. Three years had passed with no news from him. On the day she told her parents she would invite him she had not allowed herself to pray, *Please God, have him come*, but only, *Please God, let my father not deny me this*. She had practiced her words until her delivery was so steady and confident any onlooker would think she was a woman who effortlessly declared her wishes.

Huda finished applying her lipstick and was fastening the pin of her silver hijab. She looked beautiful, dressed in a navy sari stitched with silver beadwork, the same sari that a handful of Hadia's closest friends would be wearing. There was an excitement about her sister that Hadia could not muster for herself.

“Will you keep an eye on him tonight?” Hadia asked.

Huda held her arm up to slip rows of silver bangles over her wrist,

each one falling with a click. She turned from the mirror to face Hadia.

“Why did you call him if you didn’t want him to come?”

Hadia studied her hands, covered in dark henna. She pressed her fingernails into her arm.

“It’s my wedding day.”

An obvious statement, but it was true. It did not matter if she had not heard from her brother in years, she could not imagine this day without him. But relief at the sight of Amar brought with it that old shadow of worry for him.

“Will you call him here?” Hadia said. “And when he comes, will you give us a moment alone?”

She returned Huda’s gaze then. And though Huda looked briefly hurt, she didn’t ask Hadia to share what she was, and always had been, excluded from.



AS SHE GLIDED between guests and stopped to hug women she had not yet greeted, it occurred to Layla that this was what she might have pictured her life to look like once, when her children were young and she knew who her family would contain but not what life would be like for them. She walked with a straight back and careful smile and felt this event was hers as much as it was her daughter’s. And Amar was nearby. She looked to him between conversations, tracked his movement across the hall, checked his face for any displeasure.

The wedding was coming together wonderfully. People were arriving on time. There was a table for mango juice and pineapple juice and another for appetizers, replenished as soon as the items were lifted from the platter. White orchids spilled from tall glass vases on every table. Little golden pouches of gifts waited on each seat for guests to claim. Huda had helped Layla make them and they had stayed awake late into the night, singing a little as they filled each one with almonds and various chocolates. The hall was grand—she had chosen it with Hadia months ago—and as she walked beneath its arches into the main hall she was pleased with her decision. It had been dimmer when they first saw it, but now it looked like the set of a movie, high ceilings and

every chandelier twinkling so bright they seemed to compete with one another to illuminate the room. Men looked sharp in their dark suits and *sherwanis*, women dressed so that every shade of color was represented, light reflecting off of their beadwork and threadwork. Layla wished her parents had been alive to see it. How proud they would be, how happy to attend the wedding of their first grandchild. But tonight even their absence could not dull all she had to be grateful for, and beneath her breath she continued to repeat, *God is Great. God is Great, and all thanks are to Him.*

Just an hour earlier she had helped Hadia into the heavy *kharra dupatta*, whispered prayers as she clasped safety pins in place. Hadia had not spoken as Layla moved about her, only thanked her once, quietly. She was nervous, as any bride would be, as Layla herself had been years ago. Layla adjusted the outfit's pleats, hooked a *teekah* into Hadia's hair, and stepped back to take in the sight of her daughter. All her intricate henna. Her jewelry catching light.

Now she searched the crowd for her son. It felt unfathomable that just days ago she still had trouble sleeping when the darkness called forth her unsettling fears. In the daylight she could reassure herself that it was enough to see her son's face in the photographs she saved, hear his voice in the family videos she watched—Amar on a field trip she had chaperoned, his excitement when the zookeeper lifted up a yellow python, how his hand was the first to shoot into the air, asking to touch it. It was enough so long as she knew he was still out there, heart beating, mind moving in the way she never understood.

But this morning she had woken to a home complete. Before her children could rise she took out *sadqa* money for them, extra because it was a momentous day, then more, to protect from any comment about her son's return in a tone that could threaten its undoing. She drove to a grocery store and stocked the fridge with food Amar enjoyed: green apples and cherries, pistachio ice cream with almonds, cookies with the white cream center. All the snacks she once scolded him for. Was she cruel to feel more happiness, greater relief, at his return, than for her daughter on the day he had come back for? Before Rafiq left to oversee arrangements in the hall—the tables brought in, golden bows tied to

the chairs, the setting of the stage where Hadia and Tariq would sit—Layla climbed the stairs to their bedroom, where he was getting ready.

“*Suno*,” she said, “will you listen? Can you not say anything that will anger or upset him?”

She always found ways to speak around her husband’s name. First it was out of shyness and then it was out of custom and a deep respect for him, and now it would be unnatural; she felt obliged to avoid his name out of habit. He paused buttoning his shirt and looked at her. It was her right. She had not interfered with his decisions for so long. She pressed on. “Please, for me, can you stay away from him tonight? We can speak tomorrow, but let us have this day.”

The previous night, when Amar first arrived, the two of them had been amicable. Rafiq had said *salaam* before Layla took over and guided Amar to his bedroom, heated him a plate of dinner.

For a moment, she wondered if she had hurt Rafiq. Carefully he clasped the button at each wrist.

“I will not go near him, Layla,” he said finally, dropping his arms to his sides.



WHEN HE MET his father’s eyes from across the crowded hall, Amar understood that an agreement had been made between them: they knew who they were there for, and why they would not approach one another beyond the expected *salaam*. Amar looked away first. He still felt it. His anger, and the distance it caused. It was as if something had clenched in him and could not now be loosened.

Amar had played a game during the first few conversations when asked what he had been doing lately. A painter, he said to one guest, of sunsets and landscapes. The look on their faces amused him. To another uncle he said engineer but was annoyed by how it impressed him. Once he said he was pursuing an interest in ornithology. When the man blinked back at him he explained. Birds, I would like to study birds. Now he spoke without embellishment. He excused himself from conversations shortly after they began.

He stepped out beneath the arched doorway, past the children play-

ing, past the elevators, until the *shenai* quieted. He had forgotten what it was like to move through a crowd feeling like a hypocrite among them, aware of the scrutinizing gaze of his father, expecting Amar to embarrass him, anticipating the lie he would tell before he even spoke. He walked until he found himself standing before the bar on the other side of the hotel. Of course, no one invited to Hadia's wedding would dare come here. The sound of the *shenai* was so far away he could catch it only if he strained to hear. He took a seat beside two strangers. Tonight, even that felt like a betrayal. But taking a seat was not the same as ordering a drink. He leaned forward until he could rest his elbows on the counter, lowered his face into his hands and sighed.

He could hardly believe that, just the night before, he had managed to walk up to the door of his childhood home and knock. What had surprised him was how little had changed—the same tint of paint at nighttime, the same screen missing from his old window on the second floor. There were no lights on. Wide windows, curtains drawn, nobody home. Nobody would know if he decided to step back into the street. It was a comforting thought—that he would not have to face his father or see how his absence had impacted his mother. The moon was almost full in the sky, and as he had when he was a child, he looked first for the face his schoolteacher had said he could find there, then for the name in Arabic his mother always pointed out proudly. Finding them both, he almost smiled.

He might have walked away were it not for a light turning on in Hadia's room. It glowed teal behind the curtain and the sight of it was enough to make his chest lurch. She was home. He had made his life one that did not allow him to see or speak to his sister, to even know she was getting married until she had called him a month earlier, asking him to attend. He had been so startled he didn't pick up. But he listened to her voicemail until he had memorized the details, felt sure some nights he would return and on other nights knew no good would come of it.

Her lit window and his own dark beside it. One summer they had pushed out their screens and connected their rooms by a string attached to Styrofoam cups at each end. Hadia assured him she knew what she

was doing. She had made one in school. He wasn't sure if he could hear her voice humming along the string and filling the cup, or carried through the air, but he didn't tell her this. They pretended a war was coming to their neighborhood. This was Hadia's idea—she had always been brilliant at thinking up games. They were in an observation tower making sure nothing was amiss. Bluebird on branch, Amar said, looking out the window before crouching down again, over. Mailman driving down the street, Hadia said, lots of letters, over.

That night their father had been furious to find the screens discarded on the driveway, one of them bent from the fall. The three of them were made to stand in a line. Hadia, the eldest, then Huda, then Amar, the youngest, hiding a little behind them both.

"You instigated this?" his father said, looking only at him.

It was true. It had been his idea to push out the screens. Hadia stared at the floor. Huda nodded. Hadia glanced at her but said nothing.

His father said to his sisters, "I expected better from you two."

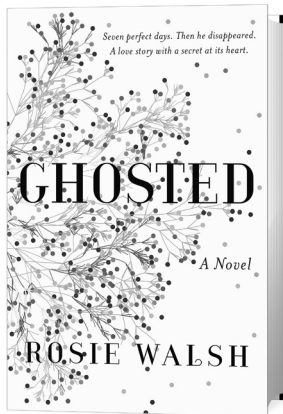
Amar had sulked to his bedroom, closed his open window, sunk onto his cold sheets. Nothing was expected of him. And though Hadia never pushed her screen out again, he had, every few years, until his father gave up on repairing it entirely.

"Have you changed your mind?" the bartender asked him.

Amar looked up and shook his head. It wouldn't have been so bad to say yes. It might have even been better for him and everyone else. A drink would calm his nerves, and maybe he could enjoy the colors and the appetizers and the sorrowful *shenai*. But he had come home for his mother's sake, his sister's sake, and this night was the only one asked of him.

His phone buzzed. It was Huda: *Hadia is asking for you, room 310.*

All day he had feared his sister might have only called him out of obligation, and suspected that maybe it was that same sense of duty that had brought him back. Now something swelled up in him, not quite excitement or happiness, but a kind of hope. He stood and stepped back toward the music. His sister, surrounded by close friends and family, was asking for him.



Available July 2018 • Pamela Dorman Books • Hardcover, eBook, Audio, and Large Print Editions

For fans of Jojo Moyes, Liane Moriarty, and David Nicholls' *One Day*.

“A perfectly paced domestic drama centered on two lovely, lonesome people, *Ghosted* is a brilliant debut novel that explores the power of fate.”

—*Booklist* (starred review)



Day Seven: When We Both Knew

The grass had become damp. Damp and dark and full of industry. Stretching away toward the blackened ridge of the woods, it quivered with battalions of ants and ponderous snails and tiny, gossamer-spinning spiders. Underneath us, the earth drew to itself a last residue of warmth.

Eddie, lying next to me, was humming the *Star Wars* theme tune. His thumb stroked mine. Slowly, gently, like the clouds moving across the fine clip of moon above us. “Let’s search for aliens,” he’d said earlier, as the violet sky had thickened to purple. We were still there.

I heard the distant sigh of the last train disappearing into the tunnel farther up the hill and I smiled, remembering when Hannah and I used to camp out here as children. In a small field in this same small valley, hidden from what still felt like a small world.

At the first sign of summer Hannah would beg our parents to put up the tent.

Sure, they said. As long as you camp in the garden.

The garden was flat. It was at the front of our house, overlooked by almost every window. But it was never enough for Hannah, whose spirit of adventure—even though she was five years my junior—had always exceeded mine. She wanted the field. The field straggled up the steep hill behind our house, flattening just enough at the top to fit a tent. It was overlooked by nothing other than the sky. It was speckled with hard Frisbees of cowpat and was so high up you could almost look down our chimney.

Our parents were not so keen on the field.

“But I’ll be perfectly safe,” Hannah would insist, in that bossy little voice. (How I missed that voice.)

“I’ll have Alex with me.” Hannah’s best friend spent most of her time at our house. “*And Sarah. She can protect us if any murderers come.*”

As if I were a well-built man with a reliable right hook.

“And you won’t have to make our dinner if we go camping. Or our breakfast . . .”

Hannah was like a tiny bulldozer—she never ran out of counterarguments—and our parents inevitably gave in. At first they camped in the field with us, but eventually, as I fought on through the knotted jungle of adolescence, they allowed Hannah and Alex to sleep up there alone, with me as bodyguard.

We would lie in Dad’s old festival tent—a lumbering thing made of orange canvas, like a small bungalow—and listen to the symphony of sounds in the grass outside. Often, I’d stay awake long after my little sister and her friend had slackened into sleep, wondering what kind of protection I’d actually be able to offer were someone to burst in. The necessity of protecting Hannah—not just as she slept in this tent, but always—felt like molten rock in my stomach, a volcano barely contained. And yet what would

I actually do? Karate chop them with my teenage wrist? Stab them with a marshmallow-toasting stick?

Often hesitant, not entirely certain of herself, was how my form tutor had described me on a report.

“Well, that’s really bloody useful,” Mum had said, in the voice she normally reserved for telling off our father. “Ignore her, Sarah. Be as uncertain as you like! That’s what your teenage years are for!”

Exhausted, eventually, by the competing forces of protectiveness and powerlessness, I’d fall asleep, waking early to assemble whatever disgusting combination of things Hannah and Alex had packed for their infamous “breakfast sandwich.”

I laid a hand on my chest; dimmed the lights on the memory. It wasn’t an evening for sadness; it was an evening for now. For Eddie and me, and the great, still-growing thing between us.

I concentrated on the sounds of a woodland clearing at night. Invertebrate rustle, mammalian shuffle. The green whisper of moving leaves, the untroubled rise and fall of Eddie’s breath. I listened to his heart, beating evenly through his jumper, and marveled at his steadiness. “More will be revealed,” my father always liked to say about people. “You have to watch and wait, Sarah.” But I’d been watching this man for a week, and I hadn’t sensed any disquiet. In many ways he reminded me of the me I’d trained myself to be at work: solid, rational, untroubled by the shifting tides of the nonprofit sector—but I was someone who’d spent years practicing, whereas Eddie seemed, simply, to be that way.

I wondered if he could hear the excitement careening around in my chest. A matter of days ago I’d been separated, approaching divorce, approaching forty. Then this. Him.

“Oh! A badger!” I said, as a low shape shuffled across the darkened edge of my vision. “I wonder if it’s Cedric.”

“Cedric?”

“Yes. Although I suppose it probably isn’t him. How long do badgers live?”

“I think about ten years.” Eddie was smiling; I could hear it.

“Well, then it’s definitely not Cedric. But it could be his son. Or maybe grandson.” I paused. “We loved Cedric.”

A vibration of laughter traced through his body, into mine. “Who’s we?”

“Me and my little sister. We used to camp quite near here.”

He rolled over onto his side, his face close to mine, and I could see it in his eyes.

“Cedric the badger. I . . . you,” he said quietly. He traced a finger along my hairline. “I like you. I like you and me. In fact, I like you and me very much.”

I smiled. Right into those kind, sincere eyes. At those laughter lines, at the heavy angle of his chin. I took his hand and kissed his fingertips, rough and mottled with splinters after two decades of woodworking. Already it felt like I’d known him for years. For a lifetime. It felt like someone had matched us, maybe at birth, and nudged and aligned and planned and schemed until we finally met, six days ago.

“I just had some very mushy thoughts,” I said, after a long pause.

“Me too.” He sighed. “It feels like the last week’s been set to a score of sweeping violins.”

I laughed, and he kissed my nose, and I wondered how it was that you could spend weeks, months—*years*, even—just chugging on, nothing really changing, and then, in the space of a few hours, the script of your life could be completely rewritten. Had I gone out later that day I would have got straight on the bus and never met him, and this new feeling of certainty would be no

more than an unheard whisper of missed opportunities and bad timing.

"Tell me even more about you," he said. "I still don't know enough. I want to know everything. The complete and unabridged life story of Sarah Evelyn Mackey, including the bad bits."

I held my breath.

It wasn't that I hadn't known this would happen at some stage, more that I still hadn't decided what I'd do when it did. *The complete and unabridged life story of Sarah Evelyn Mackey, including the bad bits*. He could take it, probably. There was an armor on this man, a quiet strength that made me think of an old sea-wall, an oak tree, maybe.

He was running a hand along the curve between my hip and rib cage. "I love this curve," he said.

A man so comfortable in his own skin you could probably sink any secret, any truth into him, and he'd be able to hold it without sustaining structural damage.

Of course I could tell him.

"I have an idea," I said. "Let's camp out here tonight. Pretend we're still young. We can make a fire, cook sausages, tell stories. Assuming you have a tent, that is? You seem like a man who'd have a tent."

"I am a man who has a tent," he confirmed.

"Good! Well then, let's do it, and I'll tell you everything. I . . ." I rolled over, looking out into the night. The last fat candles of blossom glowed dully on the horse chestnut at the edge of the woods. A buttercup swayed in the darkness near our faces. For reasons she'd never deigned to share, Hannah had always hated buttercups.

I felt something rise in my chest. "It's just so lovely, being out here. Brings back so many memories."

“Okay,” Eddie smiled. “We’ll camp. But first, come here, please.”

He kissed me on the mouth and for a while the rest of the world was muted, as if someone had simply pressed a button or turned a dial.

“I don’t want tomorrow to be our last day,” he said, when the kissing came to an end. He bandaged his arms more tightly around me and I felt the cheerful warmth of his chest and belly, the soft tickle of his cropped hair under my hands.

Closeness like this had become a distant memory, I thought, inhaling the clean, sandy smell of his skin. By the time Reuben and I had called it a day, we were sleeping like bookends on either side of our bed, the stretch of untouched sheets between us an homage to our failure.

“Till mattress us do part,” I’d said, one night, but Reuben hadn’t laughed.

Eddie pulled away so I could see his face. “I did . . . Look, I did wonder if we should cancel our respective plans. My holiday and your London trip. So we can roll around in the fields for another week.”

I propped myself up on an elbow. *I want that more than you will ever know*, I thought. *I was married for seventeen years and in all that time I never felt the way I do with you.*

“Another week of this would be perfect,” I told him. “But you mustn’t cancel your holiday. I’ll still be here when you get back.”

“But you won’t be here. You’ll be in London.”

“Are you sulking?”

“Yes.” He kissed my collarbone.

“Well, stop it. I’ll be back down here in Gloucestershire soon after you get back.”

He seemed unappeased.

"If you stop sulking, I might even come and meet you at the airport," I added. "I could be one of those people with a name on a board and a car in the Short Stay."

He seemed to consider this for a moment. "That would be very nice," he said. "Very nice indeed."

"Done."

"And"—he paused, looked suddenly uncertain—"and I know it's maybe a bit soon, but after you've told me your life story and I've cooked sausages that may or may not be edible, I want us to have a serious conversation about the fact that you live in California and I live in England. This visit of yours is too short."

"I know."

He tugged at the dark grass. "When I get back from holiday, we'll have—what, a week together? Before you have to go back to the States?"

I nodded. The only dark cloud over our week together had been this, the inevitability of parting.

"Well then, I think we have to . . . I don't know. Do something. Decide something. I can't just let this go. I can't know you're somewhere in the world and not be with you. I think we should try to make this work."

"Yes," I said quietly. "Yes, me too." I slid a hand inside his sleeve. "I've been thinking the same, but I lost my nerve every time I tried to bring it up."

"Really?" Laughter and relief spilled into his voice, and I realized it must have taken some courage for him to start the conversation. "Sarah, you're one of the most confident women I've ever met."

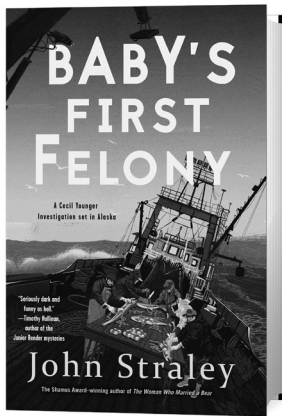
"Mmmm."

"You are. It's one of the things I like about you. One of the many things I like very much about you."

It had been a great many years since I'd had to start nailing

confidence to myself like a sign on a shop. But even though it came naturally now—even though I spoke at medical conferences around the world, gave interviews to news crews, managed a team—I felt unsettled when people remarked on it. Unsettled or perhaps exposed, like a person on a hill in a thunderstorm.

Then Eddie kissed me again and I felt it all dissolve. The sadness of the past, the uncertainty of the future. This was what was meant to happen next. *This.*



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**For fans of Raymond Chandler, James Crumley,
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Shamus Award–winner John Straley returns to his critically acclaimed Cecil Younger detective series, set in Sitka, Alaska, a land of perfect beauty and not-so-perfect locals.



“You posted it online?”

“Duh . . . Of course. It’s epic.”

I had ringing in my ears. I had heard the expression “seeing red” before, but this was the first time that I think I was actually experiencing it. Todd stood there looking at me with his blank goofy smile.

“It’s epic,” he said.

“Did you consider? Did you consider Todd? Did you think that you might be exploiting Todd’s . . . Todd’s personality?”

“God, Cecil . . . what a snob. I asked him. It’s okay with you isn’t it, Todd?”

“I had better get to work,” was all he said, and he walked quickly up the sidewalk and through the rain that was picking up now and bouncing off his yellow slicker.

“I did. I did ask him, and he said yes!” Blossom yelled.

“I know, but you know that he would do anything you said, just about. He trusts you. That’s what makes this so creepy, B. Can’t you see that?”

“It’s a funny joke. It’s not that bad, and the way he tells it is super funny.”

“B, it’s hurtful. People only think it is funny because of Todd’s condition.”

“I know for a fact it doesn’t hurt Todd. You know I wouldn’t do anything to hurt him.”

“Okay . . . just please take it down. Are there any more like it?”

“Maybe . . . a few.”

“Maybe how many?”

“Maybe a dozen . . . or two.”

“Ho . . . ly . . . crap. Don’t breathe a word of this to your mother. We are going to have to have a damage control strategy session if this comes out. And please, please, please . . . take them down.”

“All of them?” she whined.

“Jesus Christ! Look at my face, listen to my voice. Am I acting serious?”

“Yes . . .”

“Okay then take down all the footage you have of Todd that is available to anyone outside of our immediate family. What should be private will be private once again by dinnertime tonight, is that understood? If not, I will have to think up some unpleasant punishment, which I hate, hate, hate to do because it involves me acting like a cop, which is my least favorite thing to do in the world.”

“Yeah because you suck at it.”

“Bad time for sarcasm, little girl. Now go to school and don’t curse and make us proud.”

“Yes, Cecil.”

We had been walking the entire time we had been arguing, and we ended up at the cutoff by the gas station for the middle school. I took her cell phone from her, and she padded off up the hill to the back of the school with her backpack humped up on her tiny shoulders.

When I climbed the stairs to work, our office manager, Rhonda, was standing by her desk with Gus, the office hound, who was balancing

a dog biscuit on his nose.

“Watch this.”

I sat down next to Marvin Pete, an obese Native man in a Seattle Seahawks number twelve jersey, and watched as Gus balanced the treat on his nose for several seconds until Rhonda said, “Pop it,” and Gus bounced the treat in the air and snapped it up in his jaws.

“Good boy!” she cooed and lavished him with kisses. Rhonda is a glamorous Tlingit woman with a nice wardrobe and an athletic body.

“Dogs,” Marvin murmured to me, “dogs have all the luck.”

“They enjoy a right relationship, Marvin.” I smiled at him. “Are you here to see David? Does he know you are here?”

Marvin shrugged his shoulders with his eyes still on Rhonda. “Who knows with that guy.”

At that moment David Ryder came out of the back office wearing his usual rumpled, pleated khakis and a stained button-down shirt. David is an African American man in his midforties. A dedicated public defender originally from outside Washington, DC, he took a fishing trip fifteen years ago and fell in love with the place. He and his daughter, Rochelle, and a local cab driver named Hank Moore, make up the backbone of what the Democrats in town refer to as Sitka’s “black community.”

“Mr. Pete, I’m glad you are here, I will be with you in just a second. I need to talk with Cecil in his office for a moment.” He pointed at my door.

My office was in fact a break room, copying center, conference room and storage unit for our three-person operation. There were no windows and the configuration had been changed around so often that there were two doorknobs that stuck through the outside walls in seemingly random spots. I settled behind my desk, and David closed my door, picked up my baseball mitt and ball and sprawled in the overstuffed chair and started throwing the ball over his head and catching it in the glove.

“Jesus, Cecil . . . what are these people thinking?”

“Ah . . . thinking?”

“I mean Sweeper. You talked to him, right?”

“Yes . . . I stopped by yesterday. I gave him the basics. What is the problem?”

“He wants to seek employment with the city.”

“Seeking employment with the city” was our term for wanting to become a snitch, usually in hopes of consideration on current charges. Sweeper was in on burglary of the school, maybe a probation violation. He had been caught stealing glassware, beakers, and of all things, protective aprons from the science lab, and of course the liter of grain alcohol.

“Really?” I asked, not very helpfully. “Not to insult the Sweeper, but he doesn’t strike me as trustworthy enough for a position with the police. What is he looking at here?”

“Well, that’s the thing,” David was almost prone in the chair now, throwing the hardball up toward the fluorescent lights. “The DAO says they are looking into adding some DV charges. Apparently he and Sherrie got into it again last night.”

Sherrie Gault was the Sweeper’s long-time dance partner. Sherrie had also been a client, but not for a few years. We had all been rooting for Sherrie to wise up and leave the Sweeper in the dust.

David caught the ball and slapped it into the webbing of his mitt. “Anyway, I want you to go to the hooscow and talk to him. Get a broad proffer of what he might know—you know the drill: no names, but would he be willing to wear a wire? That kind of thing. Warn him about what life is like for a snitch and tell him how insecure and slow the process is. I doubt the Sweeper has a get out of jail free card. Did you give him a copy of *Baby’s First Felony*?”

Baby’s First Felony was a self-help book that David Ryder was always working on. Intended for intellectually challenged criminals, it was based on firsthand experience we’d had with our clients. It was going to have a limited print run on laminated pages and thick wire binding. It would have helpful advice that David and I had learned over the years, such as: *When confessing to a murder, stay away from hunting analogies, such as: “I know I had to put him out of his misery, so I put him down clean.”*

Also: *In any statement to the police, be sure to avoid the phrase, “Just how*

stupid do you think I am?" And: *Don't wear the tennis shoes you stole to court when the guy you stole them from will be there to testify and his name is still written inside of them.* These are bits of advice we had learned the hard way.

"Okay. I will head right over."

David paused a second, and I could tell he was holding something back.

"What?" I asked him.

"If he wants to talk about bail, ask about Wynn Sanders. The guy gives me the creeps, but he has put up bail for Sweeper. See if Sweeper wants to get involved with Sanders again."

Wynn Sanders was a local Libertarian/Republican owner of some businesses around town, including a large hotel. He had come from Oklahoma some thirty years before and wore a short-brimmed Stetson hat, one of the few in town. He also chewed on unlit cigars, or maybe that was a just detail my memory invented to fit my current recollection of him as some kind of an unrepentant southern cross-burning racist. Sanders had actually been on the city assembly. He was a local Republican booster of from-the-ground-up capitalism. He was of the opinion that the government had no place in the lives of its citizens, and sometimes he helped people with their bail money. He was a good citizen. He had helped both the Sweeper and Sherrie. He clearly had a complex and bitter relationship with the criminal justice system. He hated David, but he supported many of our clients.

"Why's he give you the creeps?" I asked.

"Oh . . . you know . . . the usual." He continued to catch fly balls in his imagination.

"You think he's racist?" I held my hand up and my boss chucked it to me.

"You mean a hood-wearing, cross-burning kind of guy?"

"Yeah, I guess. Did Sanders say something to you?" I threw the ball back.

"It's one thing to hate me for my job. I get that. He had a bad roll when his daughter died, but there is a very angry vibe about him. I guess I just don't like his manners."

David had used this expression before. “Not liking someone’s manners” was his own way of expressing that he suspected a person of having a racist attitude, or more accurately, a more racist attitude than the common underlying radiation of racism that exists in Alaska, every second of every day.

Sanders’s daughter had been a client. She had been caught selling heroin to an undercover cop. She “sought city employment” and plead guilty to a reduced charge of possession, down from distribution and misconduct with a weapon. When the cops frisked her outside the bar they found one of her daddy’s many pistols. The deal was completely her choice. She had been caught, the evidence was going to stand, and junkies when first arrested, hate . . . hate, the idea of doing any time at all, particularly entitled white girls who essentially don’t see what all the fuss is about.

She did her service for the city and about ninety days in jail, but three months after she got out of rehab she died of a “relapse overdose,” which is when a junky has been craving heroin for so long that they give in and binge, thinking that they can take right back up where they left off with the same dose, but with a clean system, that shot kills them.

Wynn Sanders took the entire thing out on David, insisting that her original possession and sale was a youthful experiment, and the deal she took put her in the drug world and caused his little girl to become a junky. In Wynn Sanders’s mind, her public defender had killed her.

I knew what David meant. Sanders had a taut, bloodless vibe. He looked a bit like an angry secretary of defense during war time: he had wire-rim glasses and a buzz cut; the skin on his temples seemed paper thin. His mouth was like a crack in an egg. Even without the hat or the cigar he seemed to vibrate with the hostility of an affronted southern sheriff whenever we were around. There is nothing quite like the rage of a wealthy white man when his privilege is not respected.

David Ryder caught the ball and turned back to me. “Anyway, I have heard from Sweeper that Sanders has offered to put up bail for

both Sherrie and Sweep, so inquire about that. Then when you get back, I want you to talk with Mr. Pete. We need to help him get into treatment.”

“Sure, boss.”

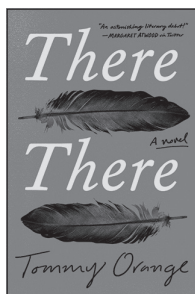
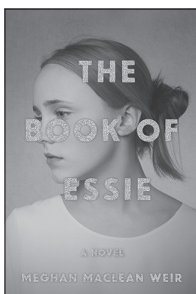
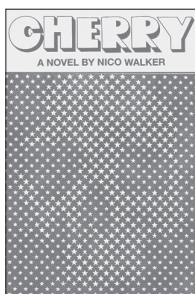
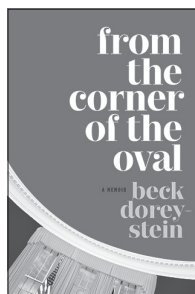
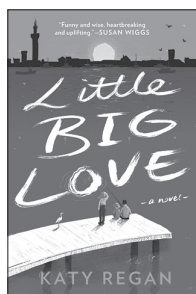
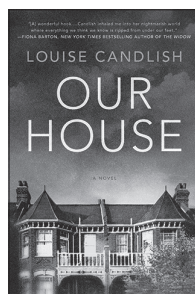
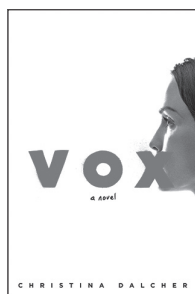
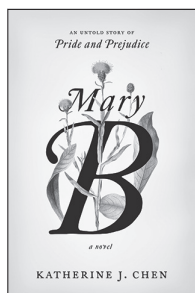
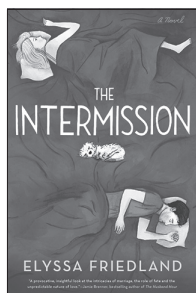
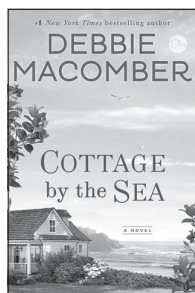
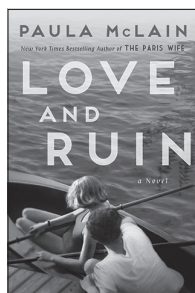
Baby's First Felony has an entire chapter on talking to the police, which could be boiled down to: *Don't do it. Don't ever do it. And don't ever do it.* Which makes becoming a snitch one of the worst ideas ever. First, everyone hates snitches, your fellow criminals for one. Convicts hate snitches with a passion, but the cops are not too keen on them either when it comes right down to it, no matter what they say about “turning your life around” and “serving your community” and “getting a second chance.” For most cops, once a bad guy always a bad guy . . . there are a few instances of them taking a frail little waif of a drug-addicted girl into their hearts, but that is pure sexism. Most snitches are forever orphans.

Another important piece of advice, besides not speaking pig latin to the girlfriend you are trying to talk into building a bomb over the prison phone, is to never use the prison phones in the first place. No matter how many times you are reminded that the calls are recorded. Somehow or another most of our clients think that either their calls have been exempted or that the cops cannot break codes such as ig-pay atin-lay, or their native Spanish tongue. Sweeper had not called in the two days he was in, so maybe he was heeding that advice.

Looking at Sweeper chained to the wall in the interview room later in the Sitka jail, I could not imagine the cops taking him into their bosom. He was rail thin and was missing some teeth since he had played football for the Sitka Wolves, some seven years ago. He had that pink-skin shine of a fresh jail shower, but he shivered like someone who was still burning off the meth.

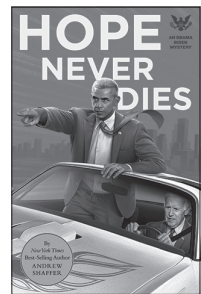
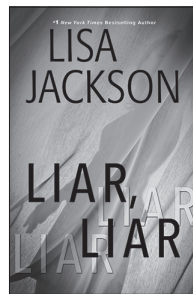
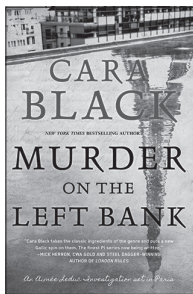
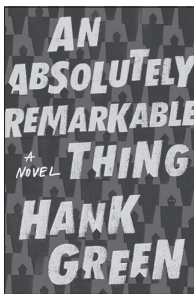
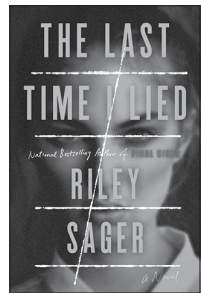
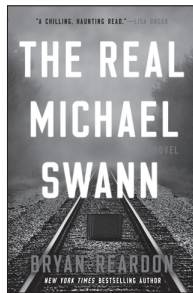
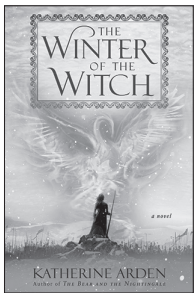
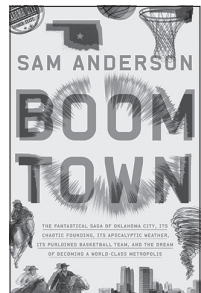
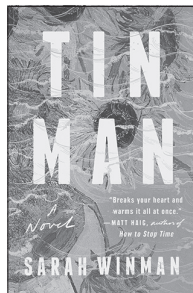
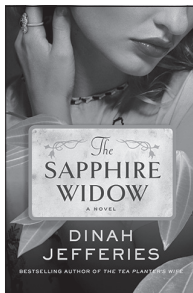
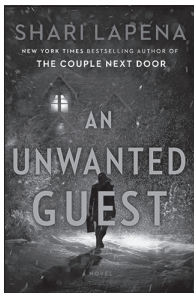
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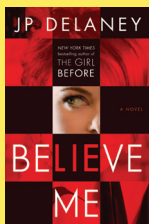
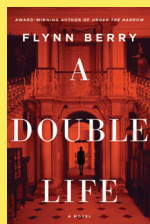
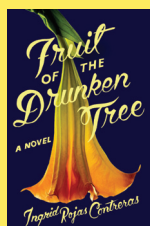
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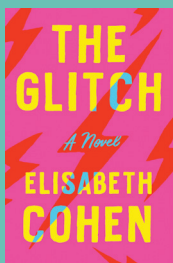
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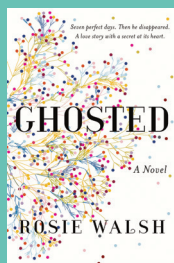
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