

*Sometimes my life is like a fairy tale.*

*It's not Prince Charming or dancing pumpkins though. It's more like the Grimms' fairy tales. You know, before they were all cleaned up and bleached for proper Victorian children. My story is more like the dark woods and blood falling from fingertips and toes hacked off for glass slippers that don't fit.*

*Here's the thing.*

*I'm a freak.*

*And no, it has nothing to do with my purple hair or nose ring. I wish it were that simple. I can deal with people thinking I'm a freak because of the way I look. That's normal stuff. Maybe not fun, but not that big a deal either. I mean, there are always going to be mean girls in the dark forests of high school. You just have to deal with them.*

*But dealing with this isn't so easy.*

*Because how do you explain the way glass breaks around me for no good reason?*

## CHAPTER 1

**Some** things are sacred. Like chocolate, Johnny Depp movies...and a girl's bedroom. I mean, seriously. It was bad enough when I got home from school and found the furniture moved around. But worse, much worse, was finding *people* in my room. I froze in the doorway and stared at Ella, my dad's fiancée, and her daughter Katie.

Katie swung open my closet door and shuddered.

"Mom, she like, wears rags. It's mortifying."

My mouth hung open.

"Excuse me! What are you doing in my room?"

Ella and Katie turned toward me.

“Oh, hello, Ash.” Ella smiled. “How was school?”

“*What* are you doing in my room?” I marched in and shut the closet door with the toe of my shoe.

Julia, Ella’s other daughter, was standing in the bathroom that connected my room to the guest room. She smiled weakly, looking embarrassed. She was annoyingly perfect on a regular basis.

“Your father invited us for dinner,” Ella replied.

“In my *room*?”

“No, of course not,” Ella said.

I plucked the blue glass paperweight my mom had made for me out of Katie’s hand. “Give me that,” I said.

“I was only looking at it,” she sulked. She was twelve years old and a brat.

“Your father wanted us to come and get a feel of the house before we move in,” Ella explained. “He wants us to feel at home.”

My father had proposed to Ella last night. I used to like Ella when she was Dad’s girlfriend, but now she and her daughters would be moving in. Just before my sixteenth birthday. Some birthday present!

The paperweight in my hand cracked down the centre and I jumped. I looked up, but no one seemed to have noticed.

I just stood there, my heart beating madly, staring at the crack. It looked like ice breaking up on a river. My mother’s

paperweight. I wanted to cry. I slid it into my pocket the same way I hid the pieces of the cup that broke in my hand last night after my dad announced the engagement.

What the hell was wrong with me? It’s one thing to drop stuff. It’s another thing entirely when stuff shatters just because you’re in the room. I’d broken glass a couple of times since my mom died. And now it had happened twice since the engagement—and the engagement was only a day old. It made me nervous.

“We just need to measure your room so we can figure out where to put Katie’s bed. Then we’ll get out of your way.”

“Excuse me?” I swear my blood went cold, like a river in January. If I were a tree, I would have lost all my leaves right then and there.

“I want to sleep there, under the window,” Katie said, pointing to where my bed was tucked under the windowsill.

“That’s where I sleep!”

“The guest room will be Julia’s,” Ella continued, as she pulled a tape measure out of her purse. “You and Katie will share this room.”

“Are you kidding? I’m not sharing my room.”

“There are only two bedrooms, Ash,” Ella said calmly. “Two of you have to share.”

“Not *me!*” And *hello?* I bet if she came home one day and I was in *her* room moving *her* bed and going through *her*

closet she wouldn't be too thrilled.

I crossed my arms. "Look, no offence, but I'm going to be sixteen next week. I'm not sharing my room with a twelve-year-old." That was *not* what I had in mind for a birthday present. I was thinking more along the lines of a television for my room.

Katie leaped up and glared at me. "It's *my* birthday this week. And I'm going to be thirteen," she said. "And my boobs are already bigger than yours."

Ella looked like she was trying not to laugh. "I suppose Julia and Katie could share the guest room," she said slowly, as if she was thinking out loud.

"Mom," Julia said, "you promised I wouldn't have to share once I turned sixteen. And I'm already seventeen."

"I'm not sharing," I repeated, just to be sure.

"Oh, girls." Ella pinched the bridge of her nose.

Julia sighed.

"It's okay, Mom. Never mind. I'll share with Katie. It's no big deal."

"Are you sure?" Ella asked, clearly relieved.

"I'll be at university next year anyway."

"Thanks, honey. You're such a good girl." Ella hugged Julia and then tweaked Katie's braid. "Let's give Ash her privacy."

I had barely shut the door behind them when the phone rang. It was my best friend, Mouse.

"You'll never believe what just happened," I said, not even bothering with hello.

"Never mind that," Mouse broke in. "What are you doing before school tomorrow? Because I have a great idea."

"Oh, God."

**If** the day didn't end in detention, I would be very surprised.

"Pssst."

I jumped and looked into the shadowy bushes.

"I said: Pssst."

I rolled my eyes at Mouse.

"I heard you, weirdo. What are you doing in there?"

She grabbed my hand and pulled me down next to her under the lilac bush. A branch nearly poked me in the eye.

"We have to wait until the janitor's on the second floor."

"It's too early to go all commando," I complained. I couldn't believe she'd managed to drag my butt out to school at this hour for another one of her pranks. I could barely keep track of them at this point.

"No whining." Mouse nudged me. "We're the revolution; show a little enthusiasm."

I just stared at her as if she'd gone crazy. "I don't *do* perky."

She smiled. "You can be the quiet loner with the

blueprints for the building in your pocket next to several fake passports and aliases. I'll be the loud-mouthed activist who creates the distraction."

I had to laugh. "You're whacked. Where do you come up with this stuff? And by the way, you're scaring me. You told me we were going in there to paint on the walls, not break into the principal's office or set the bio lab snakes free."

"Those are both really good ideas."

"Forget it. I like my little misdemeanours. I'm not into serving hard time, unlike *some* people."

Sparrows lifted out of a nearby tree, blurring across the dawn like water bugs over the skin of a lake. One lost its way and swooped down, darting in front of me. A stray feather drifted past my nose. The lights in the second floor classrooms flickered on, and Mouse jumped to her feet.

"Come on." She hefted a large bag, which rattled alarmingly, over her shoulder. "Just paint supplies," she said, taking us around the side of the school. "The moment of truth," she added. "He usually comes in through these doors and leaves them unlocked."

"Who does?" I peered into the bushes, half-expecting a teacher to spring out of the scraggly yews.

"The janitor." She said it like it was common knowledge.

"Okay, seriously, doesn't it creep you out that you know the janitor's morning habits? Don't you think that's a sign?"

"Stop whining," Mouse said, pushing the door open. "Ha! We're in."

I glanced behind us. The streetlights were still on, their light as soft as honey. The clouds gathering in the west looked medieval, like pewter goblets and tarnished swords.

"Come quick, Perrault."

"Yeah, yeah."

We walked down the empty hallways, our shadows stretching over the worn tiles. The school smelled like pine cleaner and bubblegum. Posters everywhere announced that the Halloween costume dance was fast approaching. At the staircase leading up to the bio lab was a mural of historical figures: Shakespeare, Louis Riel, Pierre Trudeau and Champlain.

Mouse stopped in front of it, planting her hands firmly on her hips. Her smile was dark and mischievous.

"This isn't going to be like that fur ad in the bus shelter, is it?" I asked. "I never really got the red paint off my boots."

Mouse pursed her lips. "There's not a single woman in this mural," she said. "They're all dead white guys." She handed me her sketches. "It's ridiculous and wrong and it's teaching us that women have nothing to offer. And that only men are important."

I held up my hand. She was working herself up into another rant. "I got it. You don't have to convert me." I tilted my head. "Out of curiosity, did you ever think of just asking

if you could do this? They probably would have given you permission.”

Mouse brushed her hair off her face. “You don’t ask for permission to challenge the status quo, Perrault.”

“I forget sometimes how much you love detention.”

Mouse pulled a pencil out of her bag and began to draw on the white wall around the mural. Her hands were quick as wasps. I’d known her long enough to recognize the face forming under her clever fingers. I rolled my eyes at her.

“Not Anne Boleyn again,” I muttered.

Mouse grinned. She was infatuated with the Tudor queen whose head was chopped off. We worked quickly. Anne Boleyn and Marie Curie were joined by Charlotte Brontë and Hatshepsut.

I couldn’t believe I was just painting away, when my dad was about to get married again. I wondered what my mother would have thought about all of this. I’m sure she would have wanted my dad to be happy. But what about me? I was sure she would have handled it all better than he had; at least she would have given me a little warning.

I turned back to the painting. It was too early to think about the mess my life was becoming.

**Mouse** and I didn’t get busted until the next day.

When I opened the front door to chase down the bus that

morning, Julia was waiting in the driveway in her white car.

“What’s she doing here?” I asked as my dad rummaged through his pockets for his keys. He looked over his shoulder and smiled at Julia.

“Ella and I thought it would be nice if you two got to know each other. So Julia’s going to give you a lift to school.”

“Oh.” Why did parents always forget to pass on vital information?

“Have a good day at school.”

“Bye, Dad.” I slid into the passenger seat. “Um, thanks. Dad didn’t tell me you’d be here.” It’s not that I didn’t want a lift. I hated the bus—it always smelled like corn chips. But I just didn’t know what to say to Julia. There was so much pressure: were we supposed to be best friends? Evil stepsisters? What?

“It’s no problem.” She shrugged. “It’s on the way for me anyhow.”

I looked out the window.

“It’s kind of weird, isn’t it?”

I nodded. “Yeah, kind of. It must suck to have to pack.”

She rolled her eyes. “You have no idea. My mom’s really organized. It’s kind of scary sometimes.”

I smiled. It felt a little awkward, but I liked the music Julia was playing. It was some retro mix.

“Cool car,” I said. I was hoping for my own car this year.

“Thanks.”

When we got to school, Julia’s boyfriend, David, was waiting for her in the parking lot. He was tall and looked like he climbed mountains on the weekends. He was perfect for Julia. Even his teeth were perfect.

I went straight to art class. Mouse was wearing her usual odd combination of clothing: a forties-style dress she’d made herself and clunky shoes. Her bangs were short and slightly curled under to match her outfit, and she was wearing too-red lipstick. I was in my customary cargo pants and zippered sweatshirt, the same as yesterday.

I sat down behind Seth Riley. He was tall and popular and just a little sullen. I was really glad he chose art as an elective this year. Even if he no more thought of me than he thought of Ms. Harding, our art teacher. He probably thought of Harding more than me actually, since she at least gave him homework. I stared at the back of his neck, imagining his muscles beneath his sweatshirt. Pathetic, right? Mouse would never forgive me for having a crush on him. If this was even a crush. It was probably just a passing thing, like the flu. I’d just keep it to myself and hope it didn’t get worse.

Ms. Harding’s voice interrupted my thoughts.

“Mosaics are a very old art form, especially popular in ancient Rome. They’re very easy to do. It’s just a matter of gluing pieces of tile or broken glass or pottery into

specific designs and then laying grout over the whole thing. Old plates are especially useful, but almost anything works: pebbles, shells, marbles, even shards of a broken mirror.”

I thought of the cracked paperweight as she handed around a few books with photos of mosaic artwork. Around the room there were some examples from previous art classes. I flipped through one of the books. The mosaics were simple and pretty; all those colours, all those bits of chaos creating something cohesive and beautiful. There were Roman men in togas, mermaids, birds, spiralling waves. There were bowls, frames, tables, tiles, coasters, even frying pans covered in bits of tiles and hung on a wall.

Something tingled in my stomach. I ran my fingers over the glossy pictures. There were instructions on how to break plates by putting them in plastic bags and smashing them against the sidewalk. It sounded therapeutic.

And not nearly as weird as the way I’d been doing it.

I barely noticed when Ms. Matthews, the school secretary, poked her head in the classroom. Her gaze fell directly on Mouse.

“Victoria,” she said with a sigh, “the principal would like to see you.”

There were whispers, and someone hooted. Mouse stood up and took a bow. Ms. Matthews turned to me. “And you as well, Miss Perrault.”

I looked down and noticed a streak of red paint on the

cuff of my sweatshirt. I took it off and stuffed it quickly into my bag. No sense being caught red-handed. I stood up and hurried to catch up to Mouse.

As I passed by Seth, I could have sworn he looked at me and smiled.

**Dad** came home just as I was about to dial the pizza place. It was our Friday night ritual, because neither of us wanted to cook. He always got double pepperoni and I got extra pineapple, thin crust. My stomach growled.

“Ash, I’m home,” he called out.

“Hi, Dad, good timing. I was just about to order,” I said. I hopped up and sat on the counter just as he came in, smiling. My cat, Grimm, jumped up too and sat on my lap.

“No pizza tonight, budgie. Ella and the girls are coming over.”

I blinked. “So I’ll just order an extra-large pizza.”

“Ella’s going to cook.”

I didn’t know what to say. Maybe it was stupid to be upset. It was only pizza, after all, but it was our thing. We’d been doing it since the casseroles ran out after Mom’s funeral. It was important to me, but it didn’t seem to be a big deal to Dad. And now it felt lame that it mattered to me so much. My hand fell away from the phone.

“They’ll be here soon, but before they get here,” he said,

loosening his tie, “we need to talk.”

Okay, so maybe it mattered to him a little too.

“I got a phone call from your principal today, young lady.”

Or not. “Oh.”

“*Vandalism*, Ash?” He shook his head.

“It wasn’t vandalism,” I protested. Grimm was half-asleep over my knees and purring like he had a throat full of honeybees. “That mural only had men in it. Mouse and I just added some women. Like Hatshepsut and Marie Curie. If it was an art project, you would have been proud of me.”

“Art projects don’t generally require you to sneak into school at dawn. This could have ended very differently. You could have been suspended or even expelled. They could have made an example out of you.”

“They did make an example out of me,” I grumbled. “I have to help out with the dance committee and make decorations for the Halloween dance. Do you have any idea how lame that is?”

“Believe me when I say it could have been much worse.”

I just stared at him. Did parents and principals get their cues from the same manual? Mr. Batra said those exact same words to us before banishing me to tissue paper and tulle and banishing Mouse to the basement to paint pilgrims for the drama department’s production of *The Crucible*.

“It was a foolish thing to do.”

I wrinkled my nose. "It was just a stupid mural."

"Your household duties have just been increased," Dad continued. "You will vacuum. You will do laundry. You will clean the bathrooms. And you will like it."

Since those were basically the chores I had to do anyway, it didn't seem so bad. "Okay, Dad. Sorry."

"You know better than to pull a stunt like that," he said, walking out of the room. Grimm jumped off my lap and followed him.

Suddenly I wasn't all that hungry anymore.

I spent most of Saturday in my bedroom. Ella was measuring and moving things around again. It was starting to bug me, the way every single thing in the house needed adjusting. Our house didn't need re-arranging; it had worked fine for us for years.

I waited until they'd all left to go shopping before tackling my chores. I washed the kitchen floor and scrubbed the pans from breakfast. I put away my wrinkled sweaters and hung pants up in the closet. I even cleaned the mirrors in the bathroom and tried not to picture them shattering. I'd never be able to explain that.

When the kitchen was clean and the den was tidy, I went into the guest room. I forgot about the vacuuming because

I just wanted to get everything put away before Julia and Katie claimed their space. The dresser was still covered in knick-knacks on lace doilies. I taped together a cardboard box from the stack propped up against the wall and dumped everything in there.

It had been just Dad and me for five years. It would be really crowded with all those extra people coming to live with us. And what if Ella got rid of my mom's old record collection? And what if Dad let her? Okay, so we didn't even have a record player. That wasn't the point.

Not that I thought he needed my permission, but Dad might have at least mentioned he was going to marry Ella. In the movies, single parents always check in with their kids before doing this kind of thing. And in the movies, they always move in after they get married, not before.

I took the paintings down from the wall and packed them. Then I emptied the dresser of all the extra linens and packed them too. There wasn't much in the closet: a few boxes and a stack of Mom's albums. In the bottom dresser drawer I found a bundle wrapped in an old silk shawl that had belonged to my grandmother. It was heavy when I lifted it out, and I unwrapped it gingerly.

Inside were three glass birds. I hadn't seen them in years. Mom made them when I was really little when she first started taking classes in glass-blowing. I took them



to my room and lined them up on the windowsill. They were plump and round as little apples, with these funny turned-in feet.

I tried not to worry about whether or not they'd be safe in my room.