

THE LEGACIES

JESSICA GOODMAN



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*To Maxwell,
who makes it all possible.*

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AFTER THE BALL

THE LEGACY BALL had never ended in a murder—obviously. Usually, the seniors from New York's elite institutions capped off the night by watching the sunrise at some elaborate after-party. An all-nighter at a mansion in Bronxville. A beach bonfire at a sprawling estate in Southampton. A strobe-lit rave in a Ridgewood loft. This year, the nominees were supposed to be whisked away in a fleet of Suburbans heading to someone's country manor in the Hudson Valley.

But that's out of the question now, with the body and all.

Bernie Kaplan stands on the corner of Sixty-First Street in glittering four-inch stilettos and a silk pleated gown, Skyler Hawkins's tuxedo jacket hanging off her shoulders, even though it's warm for September. If you look closely enough, you can see she's trying not to shiver. A light breeze whips at the diamond drops dangling from her ears. The sirens from the cop cars wail, and Bernie glances down at her pale pink manicured fingers, now flecked with blood and dirt. Her bright red hair is messy, out of place. Her mother usually whispers for her to tuck back the flyaways before onlookers can snap photos, but Esther Kaplan is nowhere to be found, so Bernie lets them go free.

Bernie's eyes move to the curb as the rest of the attendees of the Legacy Ball spill onto the street to see the commotion. She wishes Tori were by her side. A week ago, that girl was no one. A scholarship senior from Queens who had stayed in the background for three whole years. Now, it's obvious that all of the Legacies underestimated her.

Bernie opens her mouth as if to say something, but snaps it shut when

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Jessica Goodman

01 *the whispers around her erupt into frantic, excited chatter. The won-*
02 *dering, the gasps, as police roll a stretcher away from the side entrance*
03 *of the Legacy Club, away from the Ball. The body's on it, covered by a*
04 *white sheet. An outline of lifeless fingers, legs, arms. The medics push the*
05 *corpse into an ambulance and shut the door. It speeds north.*

06 *The commotion gets louder. People are screaming and sobbing, drown-*
07 *ing out the crackling voices coming in over walkie-talkies. Bernie longs*
08 *for Isobel, the closeness they once shared. For Skyler, too. For what he*
09 *represented.*

10 *But she can't think about them right now. Because in this moment,*
11 *there are questions. So many questions. And no one seems to have the*
12 *answers.*

13 *All anyone knows for certain is that as the clock strikes midnight, a*
14 *member of one of New York City's oldest, most exclusive institutions is*
15 *dead, and that Bernie Kaplan is the one with blood on her hands.*

FOUR DAYS
BEFORE THE BALL

Bernie

"ISN'T IT WEIRD?" Isobel asks, her voice lilting. "To see all these strangers here, at *our* school? At Excelsior Prep?"

We're standing together at the entrance of our high school's cafeteria, though *cafeteria* isn't really the right word to describe this room, with its sky-high marble entryway and custom round oak tables that seat twelve people. *Dining room* is more apt, though *Architectural Digest* once called it "the prettiest place to eat in all of the five boroughs." Across the atrium, floor-to-ceiling picture windows overlook the lacrosse fields down below, freshly mowed to a uniform length.

On the western side, you can see the turrets of the lower school peeking through the orchard across campus, the weeping willows and tall apple trees swaying through the glass. Headmaster Helfrich likes to say that Excelsior's campus is a quarter the size of Central Park and just as beautiful, a massive sprawl north of Manhattan, over the Bronx border.

If I close my eyes, I could walk right out that door and all over Excelsior's grounds without tripping or falling or bumping into anything. We're only a few weeks away from the start of senior year, and coming here, even today before classes begin, feels like coming home.

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01 Except I can't help but feel a wave of anxiety, nerves building
02 in my stomach. Isobel and I inch forward in line, and I look be-
03 hind me at the other nominated seniors from different schools in
04 the Intercollegiate League. They're dressed in their most appropri-
05 ate luncheon attire, standing up straight, smiles perky. Skyler's at
06 the back of the line with Lee, Isobel's boyfriend, since they were
07 late and I refused to wait for them. I spot the other Excelsior
08 nominee we know about, Kendall Kirk, in a heated conversation
09 with the debate champion from the Quaker school, Manhattan
10 Friends, over by the drinks table. There should be six of us from
11 Excelsior, but no one's figured out who the last nominee is. Not
12 yet. I crack my knuckles, tuck a stray lock of hair behind my ear. I
13 remind myself that I'm wearing what I'm supposed to wear, acting
14 how I'm supposed to act. Everything will go exceedingly well this
15 week. It must. But my sense of unease won't go away.

16 "They're not strangers," I whisper, leaning close to Isobel so
17 none of the students behind or in front of us hear. "At least they
18 won't be by the end of the week."

19 Isobel nods, considering this assessment. If I were feeling a
20 little less on edge, I might take the time to remind her to not be
21 so snippy, which has been her default defense mechanism since I
22 met her in fifth grade. After all, first impressions start *now*, as my
23 mom told me, and can last until the final donation is made during
24 the Legacy Ball in only four days. If we want to win—and we all
25 *do*—you have to start on a good note, even with your peers. You
26 never know whose parents or aunts or family friends are already in
27 the Club or how deep their pockets are.

28 Plus, most of the other nominees are people we've seen around
29N our whole lives—other seniors at schools in the Intercollegiate
30L

The Legacies

League we've played in field hockey or competed against in Model UN. There are only thirty-six of us here—six chosen from each of the six sister schools—and half of these kids summer out east with me and the other half I recognize from Skyler's party scene.

The ones we *don't* know, we sure as hell will soon. And if we're smart, we'll keep them close for the rest of our lives. That's what Mom says, at least. Those chosen for the Legacy Club will be our college roommates, spouses, business partners, and investors. They'll be our allies in not only New York society, but in our long, storied futures that are only just beginning.

"Never forget, that's how I met Lulu Hawkins," Mom likes to say, while giving Skyler's mom a little elbow nudge in the ribs. And the single one of us who wins the presentation competition will ascend to the top of the Club immediately, gaining not only a board seat that helps determine future nominees but also a cash prize. Though no one really cares about the cash—no one here needs to. Mom says it's tradition for the winner to donate it back to the Club to fund scholarships. But winning is an honor. A distinction that you are the elite among the elite. And I want it.

Isobel looks like she's about to say something else, but the line moves quickly, and I reach for her elbow before she can blurt out something sarcastic. "Come on," I say. "We're next."

I lead Isobel up to the registration table in front of the Wall of Fame, an eighteen-foot-tall panel that has names of Excelsior's most adored alumni chiseled into stone. Among them are a Supreme Court justice, two Academy Award-winning actors, three long-serving members of the House of Representatives, a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, a celebrity chef, and more start-up founders and heads of banks than I could possibly count. When

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01 I was little, I asked Mom why *her* name wasn't up there. She told
02 me it was because being the best mom didn't count as an accolade,
03 even though it was the most important job in the world.

04 That was when I vowed to have my name on there. Ideally as
05 a renowned politician. A senator, maybe. Or even New York City
06 mayor. Though, to be honest, Isobel has a better shot of making
07 it for her drawings, since she's already had a group show at the
08 Brooklyn Museum when they honored young city-bred artists.
09 She sold four charcoal pieces that week. And she didn't know a
10 single one of her buyers. Even Mom was impressed.

11 I look up and see Jeanine Shalcross sitting behind the registra-
12 tion table, a smile spreading across her face when she recognizes
13 me as Esther Kaplan's daughter. Most people do, thanks to the fact
14 that we could basically be twins with our curvy builds and long,
15 strawberry hair.

16 "Bernadette Kaplan," she says. "So nice to see you! Shani wanted
17 me to say hi. She just moved into her dorm at Cornell, you know.
18 First class was this week. Excelsior certainly prepared her for the
19 rigorous coursework, I can tell you that." Her mouth grows wider,
20 over-eager, and I fight the prickling sensation crawling up my spine.

21 "Hi, Mrs. Shalcross," I say, extending my fingers. Her eyes flit
22 down to my perfect pink manicure, the emerald ring on my middle
23 finger, and she shakes my hand heartily. Mom always said Jeanine
24 had been a total follower since they were classmates at Excelsior
25 all those years ago. But they went to college together, were in the
26 same sorority, and moved back to the Upper East Side at the same
27 time, so she'd been a fixture in my mom's social life forever.

28 "Lovely to see you. My mom said Shani's Legacy presentation
29N was wonderful last year."
30L



The Legacies

If I recall correctly, she also said Jeanine Shalcross is a pushover who would lie down in the middle of Fifth Avenue in couture if Mom asked her to.

Mrs. Shalcross beams with pride. “Ah yes, Shani didn’t win, of course. But did us proud. Your mother, though, her presentation was legendary when we were seniors. Won by a landslide.” She flips through the name cards in front of us and hands me mine. “She winged it, you know. Came up with the whole thing on the spot. At least that’s what she told me. But that’s Esther for you. Flakey as a croissant but always sticks the landing.” She pauses then purses her lips, like she didn’t mean to say that out loud.

I smile politely and glance at my name card, handwritten in cursive. I’ve heard that story dozens of times: how Mom got up on stage and made some charming, hilarious speech totally off the cuff. Skyler’s mom said it ended with a standing ovation.

“You girls must be so excited,” Mrs. Shalcross says, changing the subject. “Finally, your turn to participate in one of the city’s most illustrious traditions.” She sighs and looks past us, and for a second, I wonder if she’s remembering her own Legacy Ball, and how it was likely the best night of her life, even if she didn’t win.

Mom always said it was hers—that it would be mine, too. She even promised me that, for the occasion, I could wear my grandmother’s beloved diamond necklace, the one that’s been in her family since they fled from the pogroms in Russia—that even more than my bat mitzvah, the event would mark my entrée into adulthood. And for seventeen years, I’ve believed her.

Isobel clears her throat. “Isobel Rothcroft,” she says, looking at the stack of cards. Mrs. Shalcross gives her a once-over, taking in Isobel’s dark blunt bob and her silk V-neck jumpsuit. Even

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01 though it's vintage Halston, pulled from her mom's outstanding
02 collection, I should have warned her that it would be a little too
03 bold—too Brooklyn—for the Legacy crowd. Not that it would
04 have stopped her from wearing it. I smooth out my own dress, a
05 nautical-inspired sleeveless A-line number my mom had steamed
06 last week, and stand up a little straighter in my espadrilles.

07 “I hope your mother feels better,” Mrs. Shalcross says, leaning
08 in. “She texted me yesterday that she had a nasty cold and couldn't
09 make it. I have to tell you I was shocked. She must be extremely ill
10 if she'd miss the welcome luncheon, especially since it's your year
11 as a nominee.”

12 My cheeks burn and I bite down on my tongue to keep from
13 lashing out.

14 A girl from Tucker Country Day clears her throat behind me,
15 and I give Mrs. Shalcross a little shrug before excusing myself to
16 make way for the other kids.

17 “That was rude,” Isobel mutters. “Can't your mom be sick for
18 once?” She rolls her eyes and I loop my elbow through hers, grate-
19 ful, as always, that Isobel has the guts to say what I'm thinking
20 out loud.

21 Isobel and I walk farther into the cafeteria, which has been trans-
22 formed into a full luncheon with boxy flower centerpieces sitting on
23 each table. Every place is set with round gold chargers, china plates,
24 three different types of forks, and printed menus with handwritten
25 names at the top, indicating where each guest should sit.

26 Isobel grabs a glass of iced tea off a tray passing us by. “I wish
27 they had something stronger,” she says as she takes a sip through
28 a metal straw, then stabs at a mint leaf that had been propped up
29N inside.
30L

The Legacies

I look around the room at everyone trying to be so prim and proper and realize I couldn't disagree more. If there were booze here, I'd make a fool of myself somehow. Flub a name or stumble in my heels. That's why I don't like drinking so much or really at all. The whole losing-control thing. Not my vibe. I'd rather know exactly what's coming my way, so I'll be ready. Prepared.

Isobel, though? Whole other story.

Is looks at me and pouts. "This is all just so . . . formal."

A waiter walks by with a silver platter full of poached shrimp on skewers and little pots of bright red sauce. Mom likes to say that shrimp cocktail is just a sign that the hosts decided not to pay extra for oysters, which she mentioned dozens of times this summer as she went back and forth over the luncheon menu with the other board members. She was so pissed when she was outvoted, calling the whole week gauche as a result.

"We're in Legacy Club territory. Of course it's going to be stuffy." All around us kids are doing their best preprofessional impressions, fiddling with their ties, making small talk with strangers, and smiling with all their white teeth on display. I try to imagine my mom's commentary if she were here, how she'd tell me to stand up straight but then make fun of Jeanine's dress in the same breath.

"Is your mom okay, by the way?" Isobel asks, looking around the room. "Last week, she said the only thing that would keep her from all the events would be nuclear warfare."

"Super contagious," I say. "Doesn't want to give it to any of us before the big night. Totally sucks, I know." The lie rolls off the tip of my tongue, hot and fast. Isobel has always been able to tell when I'm fibbing—when I said I had a migraine but really just wanted to skip an all-night rager or when I told her I had five tequila shots

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01 at last year's junior prom and was *so* wasted but really was dead
02 sober. Now she's so distracted, I'm hoping she won't notice.

03 She turns to me, a concerned look on her face. "Everything okay?"
04 Guess not.

05 "Of course." I flip my hair over my shoulder and flit my eyes
06 around the room, landing on Skyler, laughing in a corner with Lee.
07 I need to get out of Isobel's presence ASAP or else she'll start to
08 suspect something's up, and I don't want to have to lie to her any
09 more than I have before. We've come so far since that big blow-up
10 fight in Shelter Island at the beginning of the summer. We've both
11 done everything we could to come back to each other, and I'm not
12 going to let my mom's whereabouts affect that.

13 I nod to her card. "What's your table?"

14 She glances down. "Four."

15 I look at mine, a bit relieved. "One. We should probably sit
16 down."

17 Isobel looks at me, skeptical, but nods. "Text me for a bathroom
18 break?"

19 "Mm-hmm," I say, but I'm already walking away from her to
20 find my table at the front of the room, where a few kids from other
21 schools have already taken their places. As everyone else finds their
22 seats, we make small talk and sip our goblets of ice water, pick at
23 the bread basket in front of our plates. I catch two of the kids from
24 Manhattan Friends staring, their eyes lingering a bit too long on
25 me, my dress, my hair.

26 I should be used to it by now. The curious gaze. Comes with the
27 territory of being Bernie Kaplan, daughter of legal megastar slash
28 always-on-TV pundit Rafe Kaplan and Esther Kaplan, one of the
29N city's most prominent and covered socialites. When they catch me
30L

The Legacies

looking, they turn away. I paste a smile on my face, but under the table I wring my hands around my thick white napkin. All because I can't shake the gnawing, pulsing secret I'm keeping:

The fact that Mom disappeared last night without a word.

I thought it was strange that she was missing from her bedroom at midnight, when I went in to curl up beside her like I sometimes still do on nights where my insomnia kicks in. But her room was empty, and I didn't want to knock on Dad's door even though his light was still on. Maybe she was at the Legacy Club, going over last-minute details with people like Mrs. Shalcross.

But when she was still missing this morning, I knew for certain that something was wrong. Really wrong.

She's the kind of parent who volunteers as class mom every single year, who runs the PTA and is on a nickname basis with half the teachers. She texts me forty-five times a day with funny musings about the tourists in Central Park or the hot new barista at our favorite coffee shop. We share clothes and jewelry and handbags, big bowls of buttered popcorn on the couch, and memes about Bravo shows. She goes on unexpected trips all the time, but she always texts me while she's en route. Not hearing from her for twenty-four hours is not just uncommon, it's unimaginable. Especially only five days before *my* Legacy Ball, which she's been planning since last September and talking about since I was in preschool.

The only secret she's ever kept from me is who she nominated this year, telling me in a singsongy voice that I'll find out along with everyone else the night before the actual Ball itself.

When I confided in Dad this morning that I thought maybe something had happened to her, he scoffed and waved his hand at

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01 me. Then he went back to his laptop, perched on his standing desk
02 inside his wood-paneled home office. “Don’t worry. She’s fine.”

03 He’s surely right. Almost certainly.

04 Tearing apart a piece of focaccia, I get a sinking feeling in my
05 stomach that everything is about to change. Mom always said the
06 Legacy Ball is where the chosen ones become adults. It’s when life
07 starts, where opportunity begins. And since I was lucky enough
08 to have her, I’d never have to worry about going through it alone.

09 Suddenly, my clutch vibrates in my lap, and I reach for my phone,
10 a desperate pulsing in my chest. When I see my mom’s name on
11 the screen, I let out a breath.

12 Sorry to skip the luncheon, but fear not, love. I’ll be back soon.
13 Enjoy the oysters for me! Bet you’re glad we skipped the shrimp, ha!
14 xo Mom

15 My stomach settles, realizing Dad was right. Mom’s probably
16 just pampering herself before the Ball or taking one of her solo
17 weekends out East. She’ll be back. She’s fine.

18 But when I read her message again, I frown. She knew the
19 menu—went over it painstakingly with Jeanine dozens of times
20 and complained about losing the oyster war. She never would have
21 written this.

22 So, if she’s not texting me . . . who is?
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Isobel

"NEED ANY BARS?"

The voice is low and menacing, even though I know who it belongs to. I spin around in my chair and see Skyler Hawkins sliding into the seat next to me, unfolding his napkin in his lap. His white button-down is crisp against his navy jacket, and his dark hair swoops down over one gray eye. Without looking, I know that he's got the attention of dozens of our peers, seated around the room. He always does.

"No." I fold my arms across my chest, indignant, even though yes, of course, I'd kill for a Xanax. But I don't want to let Skyler know that. Not today.

He probably suspects I'm lying, but he doesn't push it. He knows where he is—who's watching. He smirks and reaches for his water glass, nodding at the other kids at our table, saying hi and introducing himself as the class president at Excelsior Prep.

I can't believe I'm forced to sit with him at the Legacy Ball kickoff.

Bernie warned me that they usually separate people from the same school during this event, so I didn't expect to be with her, Lee, Kendall Kirk, or whoever else our sixth nominee is—no one seems to know. But it didn't even register that I could possibly be stuck next to Skyler for an afternoon.

Since that party in Shelter Island a few months ago, I've tried to keep my distance—to make sure we're never alone together. It

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01 hasn't been that hard, since Lee's his best friend and Bernie's his
02 girlfriend, making it extremely normal for the four of us to be
03 together, for me to dip out with either one of them. But the oc-
04 casional moment at the end of a park picnic or the brief periods
05 when Lee decamps for the bathroom during a kickback . . . they
06 always leave me on edge.

07 I look around the room and see Bernie sitting at the middle
08 table, sandwiched between a kid from Lipman, who is rumored to
09 have been cast in a leading role in the next HBO prestige drama,
10 and another from Gordon Academy, who discovered a new set of
11 galaxies for NASA over the summer.

12 I try to take in all the other faces, identifying people I've met
13 at Skyler's parties or when I spend the weekend in the Hamptons
14 at Bernie's. Immediately, I realize this crowd is just as boring and
15 predictable as I thought it would be, another reason why I didn't
16 even *want* a nomination in the first place. But I could never admit
17 that to Bernie, who had been talking about the Legacy Club since
18 I met her and had been promising that she would drop hints to
19 her mom that she should nominate me. I've had years to tell her,
20 *no, please don't*. But I never got the courage to explain that even
21 though we were best friends, there were somethings we didn't need
22 to share—*this* being one of them.

23 And so, here I am, taking a coveted spot in this ridiculous club.

24 Usually, at these types of things, Bernie's all about making small
25 talk, flipping that long red hair of hers over her shoulder and in-
26 gratiating herself with everyone. It's something I love about her.
27 Her ability to talk to anyone about anything. It's useful when you're
28 someone like me, who'd rather be alone with a set of charcoals and a
29N sketchpad. But now, Bernie's staring down at her plate, disengaged
30L



from whatever conversation's happening at her table. Maybe she's nervous, being the ball's student chair and all. Or maybe . . .

No. There's no way.

But she *was* rather weird with me just now, wasn't she? Avoiding my questions and dismissing me to sit down early. I got the sense she was lying about *something*.

I yank at Skyler's elbow, pulling him away from a conversation with a student from Tucker Country Day that ends with the kid saying something about his squash team.

"What?" Skyler asks, ducking his head toward mine.

My throat is scratchy, and I wish I had thought to bring a nip of vodka to slip into my iced tea, though Bernie warned me I'd get caught in a second.

"Do you think Bernie knows?" I ask, my voice small.

Skyler's head snaps up and his wide gray eyes find mine. When he looks at me like this, it's easy to remember why Bernie fell in love with him—why she's been with him since freshman year. Despite the fact that their families are so intertwined, there's more to it. His beauty. The way he looks at you with that intense gaze, those high cheekbones. His cupid's-bow lips. In another life, maybe I would have been the one who garnered all of Skyler's affection. Maybe I'd be Bernie. But in this one, we're tied together only by her—and our desire to keep our shared secret.

"What makes you think that?" he asks, masking a fear I know is there.

I look over at Bernie, who's now fully engaged in conversation with the actor kid, nodding along to whatever he's saying, smiling, laughing at all the right moments.

"I don't know, she seemed weird before."

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01 “Weird how?”

02 “Distracted.” I pause. “And did you see Esther’s not here?”

03 Skyler looks around the room. “She’s probably sick or some-
04 thing. You know how she is.” A waiter reaches over his shoulder
05 and sets down a plate of frisée lettuce dotted with little pieces of
06 bacon and blue cheese.

07 “Maybe I’m just paranoid.”

08 “Self-medicate or something. But don’t start twisting shit.”

09 “Hey,” I say, slightly hurt. “Asshole.”

10 Skyler narrows his brows. “You didn’t tell her anything, right?”

11 “Obviously.”

12 He purses his lips, and for a second it looks like he doesn’t
13 believe me, like he’s trying to suss if I’m telling the truth. But I
14 am—because I don’t really have a choice. Telling Bernie was never
15 an option. After a beat, he nods. “Neither did I, which means that
16 Bernie doesn’t know shit, okay? Let’s just get through this week
17 alive. You know how much the Ball means to her.”

18 I push a piece of lettuce around on my plate and chew on the
19 inside of my lip. Skyler’s right. Bernie has no idea what happened
20 at that party at Lee’s house on Shelter Island. At least not what
21 happened after she left. And what’s been going on since.

22 Her words from that night still sting, how she told me I was
23 acting like a *fucked-up fool*. But that was nothing compared to what
24 I said to her. We apologized to one another the next day and sheep-
25 ishly, with hesitation and our guards up, decided to stay friends.

26 Because that’s the thing about Bernie. She stayed loyal to me,
27 even when she shouldn’t have.

28 I wasn’t even supposed to be at Lee’s house that night. That was
29N my first mistake. Telling her I was home in Brooklyn when I was
30L

really at Lee's. It wasn't like we planned to throw a party. Or that we intentionally didn't invite her. It just sort of . . . happened.

"Hey, gorgeous."

I jump at Lee's voice as he plants a soft kiss on my bare shoulder. When I spin around in my seat, I see him crouching behind me in a rumpled linen button-down, his charcoal-gray blazer fitting perfectly over his muscular arms. He's got dark skin and beautiful brown eyes that never break contact, thanks to the confidence instilled in him by his dad, the renowned artist Arti Dubey, and his mom, Arti's gallerist Lizzie Horowitz. Arti, who was born in Goa but came to the States to study fine art at Yale and never left, is best known for his work in the mid-nineties in which he smeared bodily fluids onto eighteen-foot-wide white canvases. He once did a performance piece at Brooklyn Academy of Music that was an allegory about climate change. Except, he performed it nearly nude. Lee hated that project, but I thought it was kind of brilliant.

Arti's pretty revolutionary in the contemporary space and was one of my artistic heroes even before Lee and I got together last year. Since then, I've probably spent more time with Lizzie and Arti than I have with my own parents. Two art world icons are way more interesting than a magazine editor and a cardiologist.

It's not that I started dating Lee only because of who his parents are—or because they showed interest in my work after my exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum. But I'd be lying if I said that I didn't at least *think* about the fact that being with Lee means I get to hang out with one of my idols, someone I've been reading about for years, pretty regularly.

"Where are you sitting?" I ask.

Lee nods over to one of the tables on the side, under a wall of

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01 windows that overlooks Excelsior's Olympic-size indoor swim-
02 ming pool. The only person over there I recognize is Kendall, who
03 looks up and smiles in our direction, giving a little wave.

04 Kendall and I met in a mommy-and-me music class in Fort
05 Greene Park and even had a nanny share together. But while I
06 stayed in Brooklyn for elementary school, he started at an all-boys
07 prep school uptown in kindergarten. After his dad's health tech
08 company went public, the whole family moved to Tribeca, and
09 then I barely saw him or his little sister, Opal, at all. Not until we
10 both started at Excelsior. Now he spends most of his time working
11 on science experiments or popping by the very occasional party.
12 He's friendly with Lee and Skyler, even though based on what
13 happened at the Shelter Island party, he should probably want to
14 claw Skyler's eyes out. Though he has no idea. He wasn't there.

15 All of a sudden, the violin music that had been pumping through
16 the speakers starts to fade away and someone taps the microphone
17 set up at the front of the room.

18 Mrs. Shalcross, from the registration table, smiles brightly and
19 addresses the crowd. "Lunch will be served momentarily, so please
20 take your seats. The Legacy Ball Kickoff Luncheon is about to
21 begin!"

22 Lee squeezes my shoulder and heads off to his table, and as
23 soon as he's out of earshot, Skyler leans over so his breath is warm
24 against my skin.

25 "Now you want that bar?"

26 I elbow him in the side a little too hard and he winces but
27 doesn't pull away. Finally, like my body has a mind of its own, I nod
28 and watch Skyler pull out a slim pill from his pocket. He presses it
29N in my palm, and I feel its familiar grooves pressing against my skin.
30L



The Legacies

It calms me, the little pharmaceutical. The possibilities within. I'm tempted to eat the whole thing now, here. But I already had one today, downed it with my morning coffee a few hours before we got here. And I *did* eat a small hunk of Adderall to get a little more pep just before I entered the building.

But looking around . . . eh, I need this.

I slip it into my mouth and swallow a gulp of water. "That's the last one I take from you," I whisper, already feeling relief.

He laughs softly, mostly because we know that's just another lie shared between us.

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I THOUGHT I was prepared for the kickoff luncheon. I thought that having an odd fascination with the Club—one that led me down YouTube rabbit holes where old dudes claimed the Club was part of the Illuminati and back to my scholarship pamphlet where I first heard mention of the Club—would mean that I was ready to be part of this world myself.

But stepping into Excelsior Prep today, it was immediately obvious that I was foolish to think that stalking alumni on LinkedIn and hunting through our school's digital archives for any mention of the Club could make me feel ready for *this*, an event so over-the-top, so elegant, so extreme that it's hard to believe it's only the first in a series of many that will soon dominate my week.

Who am I kidding? *My life.*

My heart beats faster than usual, and I can't tell if it's from excited anticipation or dread. Probably a bit of both. I'm seated at a table with eleven other nominees, kids I've never seen before, though apparently, they go to schools just like mine throughout the city.

I wonder if I make eye contact with them long enough, they'll be able to smell the inauthenticity coming off of me in waves. I wonder if they'll know that I don't deserve to be here, not in my simple black sheath dress and Doc Marten loafers, or worse, if they'll know that I'm a recipient of one of the scholarships we'll spend this whole week raising money for. That thought turns my stomach.

The Legacies

“Tori?” says the preppy-looking kid next to me.

“How’d you know?” I wipe my sweaty palms against my thighs.

He points to my name card. “Tori Tasso, Excelsior Prep.”

“Oh. Right.”

He extends his hand. “I’m Chase Killingsworth. Gordon Academy.”

I take it, even though my skin must be slick. Somehow his grasp is perfectly room temperature, which furthers my girlfriend Joss’s theory about all rich people: They somehow stay climate controlled no matter the circumstance.

I’ll have to remember to tell her it checks out when I get home to Queens later.

“So,” he says. “Any idea who nominated you? I’m pretty sure my dad’s golf buddy Anders Lowell put my name in.” He says it like I’m supposed to know who Anders Lowell is, and unfortunately, I do, since if you have half a brain cell, you know that Anders is one of the anchors on the *Today* show. But I don’t want to give this Chase kid that satisfaction.

“No idea.” Chase frowns and I sneak a peek at Skyler sitting over by Isobel Rothcroft, with a look of composed disdain on her face. I wonder how it feels to be him, to be *any* of the other kids here. The ones who take their place in this room for granted, who have assumed from birth that they will become Legacies.

Skyler’s eyes flit toward mine and I look away, embarrassed. My chest tightens, but I try to keep my breathing calm. I wish I could say I earned my spot at this table. That I deserve to be here. But he and I both know that’s not true—and maybe that’s why I can’t help feeling like someone’s going to pop out from under the table and banish me from the luncheon any second.

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01 Chase shrugs. “Guess we’ll find out for sure at Nominations
02 Night, huh? I hear they do a whole big presentation where every
03 senior has to guess which member of the alumni committee
04 nominated them and if they *don’t* get it right, they’re banned from
05 the Ball.”

06 My stomach drops. “That can’t be right.”

07 “You’re so full of shit, Chase.” The girl to his left leans over and
08 smiles at me. “He’s been looking forward to this week since he
09 was like, ten, so please excuse him.” Chase shrinks in his seat, but
10 before the girl can keep talking, that bug-eyed woman from the
11 registration table who looked at me like I had three heads when I
12 said my name walks up to the microphone and gives it a little tap.

13 I say a silent prayer that I don’t have to make conversation with
14 Chase anymore and focus my attention on the woman up front.
15 Behind her, a dozen or so adults are standing in a neat little row,
16 smiling and clasping their hands in front of them.

17 “On behalf of the Legacy Club Nominating Committee, we
18 want to welcome you all to the annual Kickoff Luncheon!” Mrs.
19 Shalcross says. Behind her, the adults applaud, gazing out at the
20 tables full of students.

21 “As you know, every year, the Nominating Committee taps
22 thirty-six Legacy members to select one senior from the Intercol-
23 legiate League high school from which they graduated to join the
24 Legacy Club, an honor that begins now but lasts long after you
25 graduate from high school. Though you won’t have access to the
26 actual Club on Sixty-First Street until the Ball itself, after Satur-
27 day, you’ll get your full membership and a key—yes, a real work-
28 ing key!—which will let you in all hours of the day for the rest of
29N your lives. Inside the club, you will find hotel rooms, a restaurant,
30L

The Legacies

a squash court, an indoor pool, a historic library, a ballroom, and so, so much more.”

She pauses, a hitch in her breath, and presses one hand against her heart. “We can’t tell you how much it means to us to invite thirty-six new, young members into our fold. Look around. These are the people you will go through this week with, the people who will be alongside you through the good and the bad, the fun and the stressful. If you’re lucky, they will become some of your best friends, your colleagues. Because Legacy Club members always look out for their own.”

I do as she says, zeroing in on all the other students, people who’ve overlooked me for years ever since I came into their fold. Isobel Rothcroft, who I’m not sure knows my name. Lee Dubey, who called me Taylor when I showed up to his Shelter Island party. Kendall Kirk, who’s too busy pining after Isobel to notice anyone else. Bernie Kaplan, who’s basically the queen of this whole thing. And Skyler Hawkins, whom I can’t look at without feeling like he’s the only one who sees me for what I really am: an outsider who’s so desperate, she’ll do anything to claw her way in.

None of these people are my friends. The idea of them being part of my life forever is . . . impossible.

But I try to remember why I wanted this, why I used all the power I had to score a nomination, no matter the cost. The Club can open doors for me that not even Excelsior can. Sure, I have a perfect GPA, a stellar track record on the debate team, and a full slate of AP courses. But even I know that all of those accolades mean nothing if the right people have no idea you exist. Sure, an outstanding resume can get you an interview at a prestigious job or a second look from a college admissions counselor, but growing

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Jessica Goodman

01 up in New York City, going to a school like Excelsior, I've learned
02 decisions are made based not on how much you know, but who.

03 And the only *who* that matters are members of the Legacy Club.

04 I swallow the lump in my throat and remind myself of one thing:
05 I need this.

06 I straighten my shoulders and shake my dark hair down my
07 back, listening to Joss's voice in my head. *You're Tori Tasso from*
08 *Astoria, Queens, whose family has owned the best diner in the neigh-*
09 *borhood for the past forty years. You know how to fight for yourself. You*
10 *deserve a place in this world—now and always. Don't let them tell you*
11 *otherwise.*

12 Mrs. Shalcross cedes the mic to a tall Black woman in a navy
13 skirt suit and blouse printed with some sort of coat of arms. "I'm
14 Yasmin Gellar, an Excelsior alum," she says. "Proud to be up here
15 with our nominating committee, even though I'm filling the im-
16 posing shoes of our chairwoman Esther Kaplan today."

17 I sneak a peek at Bernie, whose cheeks are now as red as her
18 hair, though a smile is still plastered on her face. Across the room
19 I see Isobel look my way and do a double take, her mouth forming
20 a small O shape. I avert my eyes, clench my fists. Of course she
21 didn't expect me to be here.

22 "It's my distinct pleasure to walk you all through this week's
23 schedule and the rules that come with being part of this year's
24 nominated class." Mrs. Gellar pulls a pair of glasses out of her
25 pocket and begins to read off of a few notecards.

26 Some of the kids around the room start to zone out, like it's ob-
27 vious they've heard the spiel before from their parents or siblings,
28 aunts or uncles, people in their inner orbit who have been through
29N the mysterious, shrouded Legacy Ball week, which I'm told always
30L



The Legacies

takes place during the last few weeks of summer vacation. But I spy a few nominees who perk up, eager to learn more about what they're getting into, what parts of ourselves we'll have to put up for auction this week, how much we'll have to put on display.

"At the Ball, each of you will be asked to give a short presentation about the value of one of the scholarships the Club funds," Mrs. Gellar says. "Then, all the members in attendance will offer donations to help boost the endowments of those scholarships. But here's the catch." She smiles devilishly and leans in. "Each member has the chance to make a donation in one of *your* names based on how excellent your presentation is."

My stomach jolts. I received one of those scholarships, the Arts and Letters one, the summer before entering Excelsior. It's the only way I got to go here, and I've done my best to keep it hidden. I still remember reading over the pamphlet, a small paragraph on the back of the glossy paper jumping out at me:

All Intercollegiate League scholarships are funded by the Legacy Club, one of New York City's premier institutions for independent education. Members of the Club are delighted and honored to welcome in a new class of recipients, who will follow in the footsteps of past students to leave their mark on the Intercollegiate League.

That was the first time I heard about the Club, the first of *many* times I googled them and read every single word I could find, trying to figure out what it was, who was part of it, and how they became members.

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01 I asked Mom about the Club once, if she thought it was strange
02 that a group of random people decided who got this money, but
03 she told me not to worry about who was in it or why and to just do
04 my best and hope that one day I'd get a scholarship, not that I'd be
05 in the Club. But after I got to Excelsior, it became clear to me how
06 much the Club lords over the school—the city.

07 All around Excelsior's campus, there were little plaques posted
08 on trees, benches, lunch tables, doorways—GIFTED BY THE LEGACY
09 CLUB. At all-school assemblies, there were always Legacy Club
10 members, holding those signature gold keys, sitting on the dais.
11 They were everywhere, running banks and law firms, museums and
12 talent agencies, and they all came from schools like mine. Once, I
13 overheard an admissions counselor complaining about how they
14 *had* to let in every single Legacy member's child, even if they didn't
15 pass the admissions test, how she heard they even gave out no-
16 interest loans to certain members.

17 Over the past three years, it has become obvious to me what the
18 Club means, that it affords you not only a permanent place in New
19 York elite society but also a surefire way to financial freedom. And
20 it's also impossible to get nominated if you don't know anyone.

21 Or so I thought.

22 It all started with that scholarship, all because of Mom. I won-
23 der what she'd think about me being here now. I fight the stinging
24 in my eyes. I can't let myself cry. Not here. No matter how much
25 I miss Mom.

26 "Alumni are told to judge the presentations based on your
27 argument, knowledge of the Legacy Club, commitment to scholar-
28 ship, and, of course"—she pauses, smiling wide—"charisma."

29N A titter of laughter passes through the room.
30L

The Legacies

“While you will all end this week with a membership in the Club, only one of you will win the cash prize.”

I sit up straighter in my seat, leaning in. This is what I have been waiting for.

“The student who earns the most donations in their name will also receive twenty-five thousand dollars, outfitted by the generosity of our nominating committee.”

I suck in a breath of air, shock pooling in my throat, and expect those around me to do so, too. But none of the kids at my table stir. A few of them pick at the plates of poached salmon that appeared in front of us while Mrs. Gellar was speaking, tearing the pink flesh with their sterling silver forks.

I guess, for these students, twenty-five thousand dollars might be spending money in college or a few first-class flights to Europe. It may pad their trust funds, their dining budgets. But for me, that money could help buy the twins new laptops, fund Helen’s tuition at her soccer clinic, help Dad get through a few mortgage payments, a month of payroll. A sour, bitter feeling swarms my stomach. The people around me have no idea what that might be like.

No one in the house denies that things have been tight since Mom died last spring, and Dad always says he doesn’t want me to help—that I shouldn’t take up extra shifts at the diner—but this money could give us some much-needed breathing room. This money might change things.

As Mrs. Gellar continues talking about the week’s events, how tomorrow we’ll all pick up our outfits, and on Thursday we’ll convene for the Acts of Service Day, how Friday’s event will reveal our nominators, all I can think about is that I need to earn that prize—and how far I’m willing to go to get it.

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After the Ball

THE POLICE DO *their best to keep everyone on the corner of Sixty-First Street, which, before tonight, none of the officers had any idea was a significant location. One rookie detective, a young woman with a short dark ponytail, eyes the plaque bolted to the limestone exterior.*

LEGACY CLUB, it reads. MEMBERS ONLY.

The detective pauses and looks around at the teenagers in their ball gowns, their diamonds, their tuxedos, rumpled from a night of dancing—or whatever it was they were doing inside this mysterious building. None of it looks right. None of it looks real. But she should be used to this by now, having worked dozens of cases on the Upper East Side, where the biggest problems have to do with white-collar criminals or rich people yelling about the unhoused neighbors who sleep outside their townhouses.

An older policeman with a graying beard pulls out a megaphone. “We’re going to ask everyone to go back inside the building,” he says. “No one is allowed to leave the premises. Not until we ask some questions.”

A murmur breaks out, and some of the adults, pulling their teenagers along with them, begin to balk at orders coming from a nobody, even if he has a badge. These are people who are unafraid to break the rules, to bend them to their will.

That’s what these people do, after all. Break things.

But this isn’t one of the crime scenes Homicide usually deals with—the ones where no one cares about the John Does. Tonight’s death is different. This lost life was one of the city’s best. Most important. Or at least that’s what these people will have you believe.

The Legacies

Despite their protests, everyone is nudged back inside the six-story townhouse, gleaming white in the thick, humid air. Along the entryway there are no identifying characteristics—no bulletin board proclaiming upcoming events, no welcome sign, no indication of who owns the place. What it does. What happens inside.

The crowd moves slowly, against their will, until finally all of the guests are commandeered inside the lobby, where a half-eaten ice cream sundae bar melts against the wall, dripping bright green, pink, and brown on the granite floor. A bowl of maraschino cherries sits untouched, urns of coffee cooling beside them.

“Looks like a great party,” one cop mumbles to the detective. “Except for the dead body.”

She doesn’t laugh. Instead, she looks around at the crowd, their sniffling echoing throughout the room. “Time to divide and conquer?” she asks. The rest of the officers nod.

They’ve got questions, and perhaps these people have answers.

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Bernie

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06 **THE LUNCHEON ENDS** with plates topped with slices of warm apple
07 pie made from fruit picked at Excelsior's orchard upstate, but I'm
08 too anxious to eat a single bite. Mrs. Gellar didn't have to call out
09 my mom's absence, but she *did*, and now all I can hope is that no
10 one else noticed.

11 I glance at my phone for the millionth time today, willing my
12 mom to text me again. She didn't respond to my reply, the one that
13 said, Glad to know you're okay. See you tonight?

14 I toggle over to Find My Friends and expect to see her icon
15 pop up somewhere in the city, but just as I saw this morning, there's
16 nothing. She's nowhere, and I can't fight the feeling that still,
17 something's wrong.

18 Around me, wooden chair legs screech against the floor as stu-
19 dents stand up, shake hands with one another, and prepare to pick
20 up slim black leather folders, which are sitting at the registration
21 table. Even from here, I can see they have our names on them,
22 lined up in alphabetical order. Inside, our scholarships will be re-
23 vealed, as will the rest of the rules for the week. When I was little,
24 Mom would show me *her* folder that she kept from when she was
25 a Legacy nominee and tell me stories about what was inside. I
26 always thought when I got mine, we'd pore over it together.

27 Guess not.

28 Isobel appears by my side, her eyes hooded slightly, which makes
29N me wonder what kind of fun she and Skyler got into at their table.
30L



The Legacies

I can't help but feel a small ball of desperation forming in my stomach. It's always been this way with Isobel—me wanting to protect her, to save her mostly from herself. I've succeeded at times, like when I convinced her to wear one of my tasteful silk tea-length dresses to homecoming instead of her metallic plunge-neck mini, which made her look a little trashy, or when I successfully paired her up with Lee—a huge win for all of us, really—so she would stop making out with those going-nowhere art students always hanging around her neighborhood.

And, of course, there was the time when I forced her to puke up everything she had consumed after it was very obvious she was on the verge of alcohol poisoning at last year's junior prom. Or when I was able to get her into a cab after finding her passed out in some senior's bedroom during a Halloween party freshman year.

But recently, she's been unwilling to take it easy and I'm not so interested in telling her to cool it. I tried that during the Shelter Island party and that almost broke us. It's exhausting taking care of Isobel.

"Did you see who the sixth nominee is from Excelsior?" She drops her head toward mine, shielding her face with her short hair.

"Nuh-uh," I say. I was too busy trying to keep my composure during the presentation to look around and care.

"Tori Tasso," she whispers.

My head whips around. "Tori Tasso?" I repeat. "She's not . . ." I stop myself before I finish my sentence. There's no point, since both Isobel and I know what I was going to say.

She's not one of us.

"Isn't she from Queens?" I ask instead.

Isobel swats my arm. "I'm from Brooklyn."

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01 “I just . . . I didn’t peg her for a Legacy.”

02 Isobel shrugs. “Guess someone did.”

03 I spin around the room and spot Tori in the back by the bay
04 window with her long dark hair and chunky lace-up shoes. She’s
05 walking around, not really talking to anyone, looking sort of lost,
06 the same way she did during freshmen orientation. She stuck out
07 then, too, like she didn’t know that you should always walk with
08 your shoulders back, your chin tilted up. You could tell she wasn’t
09 used to the grandeur of a place like Excelsior by the way she
10 gawked at all the wide-open spaces, the pristinely kept classrooms.
11 Even though she’s been our classmate for all of high school, she
12 still has that wide-eyed, unsure look about her. Except this time,
13 it’s directed at our peers, the other Legacies.

14 Tori and I have barely said more than two words to each other
15 since freshman year, but maybe I should go talk to her and at least say
16 hi. If someone thought she deserves to be here, then maybe she does.

17 Isobel tugs on my arm. “Lee wants to go find somewhere to get
18 a drink,” she says, lowering her voice. “Wanna join?”

19 I open my mouth to say yes, of course, because that’s what
20 we do most of the time—hit up the places that have been passed
21 down from generation to generation as *the* bars that don’t card or
22 don’t care. There’s the Mexican spot on the Upper West Side that
23 Skyler loves because they make their margaritas extra strong, and
24 the tapas place near Lee’s townhouse in Chelsea that always gives
25 us free mezcal because Arti Dubey is a regular. Isobel doesn’t play
26 favorites, though she’s always begging us to pop by the natural
27 wine bar near Fort Greene Park so she can walk home for once.
28 Even if I don’t like to drink, I still like to be part of it. Because if
29N I’m not, I’m nothing.
30L

“Where are you going?” I ask.

Skyler slinks up behind me and wraps an arm around my waist, which causes Isobel to flinch. “Taking the party elsewhere?” he asks, planting a soft kiss on my cheek.

Isobel looks at me, waiting for my response.

I nod to Isobel and Lee, who’s appeared by her side, lacing his fingers into Isobel’s. “They’re heading out.”

Skyler bounces on the balls of his feet. “Ooh, let’s go. This thing was stiff as fuck.” He loosens his tie. “Let’s *do* something.”

Lee wiggles his eyebrows at Skyler, and I can already tell they’re scheming about what they can get up to for the rest of the evening, but something inside me rebels against the idea of following them.

Sure, we don’t have any other Ball obligations today, but tomorrow’s our final dress fitting, and if my mom isn’t there, then everyone will *really* start to wonder where the hell she is and what’s going on. I have to find her today. Or at least try.

I shake my head. “You guys go on without me. I feel a migraine coming on.” The lie rolls off my tongue and I reach a hand to my forehead, feigning ill.

Isobel cocks her head. “You sure?”

I nod. “Of course. I’ll catch up with you guys tomorrow.”

Skyler pouts but leans toward me to give me a soft kiss on the mouth, one that sends a fizzling, crackling sensation all through my stomach. I didn’t always think we’d be together. Not in the second grade, when Mom told me she and Lulu had already started planning our wedding, but Skyler had just pantsed me on the playground. (“He has a crush on you!” she insisted, though I knew better.) But Skyler was always the person I had run around in diapers with, the boy who let me help decorate his Christmas tree because

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01 we didn't have one. We were intertwined in ways we both realized
02 but didn't fully understand.

03 Not until the summer before ninth grade, when Skyler had a
04 growth spurt and I grew breasts larger than any girl in our class.
05 One August night, a few weeks before school was due to start, we
06 met on the beach between our houses in the Hamptons to watch
07 a meteor shower and share a French chocolate bar my mom had
08 gotten from the boulangerie in town.

09 We were lying on the blanket together when Skyler rolled over,
10 propping his head up with one hand. I was worried about how I
11 looked to him then, if I was all flattened out, lying like that, or if
12 my hair was too wild from the sea salt misting in the air. But Skyler
13 just looked down at me and smiled, as if he had been waiting for
14 that moment all summer long.

15 "Bernie." He said it in a whisper, like it was a secret.

16 I sucked in a breath of air, afraid to say his name back.

17 "Should we make our parents happy for once?" He bit his lip,
18 devilish and sweet, sending a spasm straight to my stomach, heat
19 throughout my core.

20 I wanted to play dumb, but it seemed ridiculous. Of course I
21 knew what he meant, and there was only one thing to say.

22 "Yes."

23 He closed the space between us, pressing his soft lips to mine,
24 his warm hand to my bare stomach, under my sweatshirt.

25 We stayed like that for a while, listening to the wind, the waves,
26 the sound of our breathing. And when he pulled back, we both
27 laughed and flopped back down on the blanket. He grabbed my
28 fingers and rubbed his thumb against the back of my hand. "It's
29N just the beginning, isn't it?"
30L



The Legacies

Falling in love with Skyler felt like fulfilling a prophecy, like walking toward my predetermined future. With Skyler, all of these things felt easy: Watching old rom-coms in his bedroom as his hand snaked up my back to undo my bra. Whispering about our future children and if their hair would be fiercely red like mine. Laying my head on his shoulder as we took the crosstown bus to Barney Greengrass on Sunday mornings.

So much has happened since we decided to seal our fate three years ago. But one thing has always stayed constant: our unwavering understanding that we were meant to be together.

Skyler raises his hand and rests his finger pads against my neck. I turn my face up to his. "I'll see you guys tomorrow, don't worry."

"Love you," Skyler whispers into my ear, and for a moment, that settles me, the reminder that even though Mom is missing on the most important week of my life, at least I have Skyler. I'll always have Skyler.



The penthouse is still and silent when I push open the heavy front door. Thirty-five flights up, this whole floor has been ours since before I was born, since Mom and Dad purchased it with a few million dollars of the fortune they inherited from my maternal grandparents. Over the years, it's become a party venue, hosting Legacy Ball gatherings and a boardroom for when Dad was working until the wee hours of the night with Lulu Hawkins on some of the biggest cases of his career. It's been home to political fundraisers, private performances from Broadway singers, shivas for some of the city's most iconic personalities, and the best sleepover

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01 setting in all of New York, complete with lox and bagel spreads
02 that Mom has catered for Isobel and whoever else has stayed over
03 in one of the many guest rooms.

04 But to me, it's home.

05 I step out of my heels in the entryway and set my purse down
06 on the velvet-covered bench. My bare feet echo across the hard-
07 wood floors as I make my way past the grand piano toward the
08 kitchen. I plunk a C chord and listen to it echo through the empty
09 rooms.

10 I yank open the fridge to find it full. It's almost a tease, the
11 fact that all of Mom's weekly deliveries still arrived this morning
12 even though she's not here. The CSA box showed up at eight, full
13 of end-of-summer tomatoes and melons and fresh loaves of sour-
14 dough bread. The flower arrangements appeared an hour later in
15 their elegantly wrapped white paper. And just before I left for the
16 luncheon, Damien the doorman rang up with a pink box full of
17 chocolate croissants. That one stung the most. Weekly pastries
18 are *our* thing, pinching off buttery bites of flaky dough from the
19 tucked-away French bakery on Seventy-Fifth. Eating one without
20 her felt like treason.

21 Mom is big and happy, with elegant features and stark red hair,
22 just like me. She passed her body down like a legacy, and together
23 we revel in our many curves, our strong, wide builds. Sharing
24 croissants before school is a celebration of our bodies, that's what
25 she says.

26 "I will never catch you counting calories, Bernadette Kaplan,"
27 she told me once when talking about her own mother, who was
28 obsessed with being thin and died when Mom was a teenager.
29N "Grandma Rachel was a wonderful woman, but she never learned
30L that food is meant to be fun—a pleasure."

The Legacies

Our fridge always reflects that. I pull out a plastic tub of whitefish salad, grab a box of everything bagel chips from the pantry, and set them on the marble island. I wonder for a second if I should get some utensils, but then I remember Mom's the only other person in the house who likes smoked fish, and I dunk a chip right into the dip.

The open container doesn't make the smell go away, though. Mom's scent. Her lilac perfume. It's everywhere. Dabbed on napkins, on the drapes, on the tablecloth. She's always here, even when she's gone.

Gone.

Where *is* she?

"There you are."

I nearly jump as my dad pads into the kitchen wearing no shoes and a suit, his tie sloppily hung around his neck. His forehead is dewy like he's been sweating, and there are bags under his eyes.

"I thought you were at work," I say.

He gives the whitefish a funny look but reaches for a cracker. "Remote depositions today."

I nod like I care what that means. There's a tension between us as the wet sounds of chewing fill the air. Dad rests his hands on the counter and flexes his fingers. He peers at me over his glasses.

"Everything okay?" I ask.

"Work stress." He doesn't offer much else.

There's an awkward pause, and I fill the void. "I got my scholarship assignment. Arts and Letters."

Dad grunts. "That's what your mom had when she was your age. Never shut up about it."

An unsettled feeling rises in my stomach. Dad didn't grow up like Mom, with her private schooling and the inherited Hamptons



01 house. He comes from a working-class suburb of Detroit, where
02 most everyone he knew was employed by an auto company. Dad
03 always says he was ostracized for caring more about his math text-
04 books than changing motor oil. As Mom tells it, Rafe Kaplan was
05 a star student and earned a full ride to Cornell, which is where he
06 met Mom, who knew she would go there since she was a child,
07 thanks to the donation that helped fund the library renovation.

08 Dad pretends he's above all this Legacy Club stuff and every-
09 thing that comes with membership, but after three martinis last
10 year, Mom told me that's how he and Lulu Hawkins were able to
11 start Hawkins Kaplan in the first place. After Mom introduced
12 Dad to Lulu one winter break home from college, Lulu and Dad
13 were determined to start their own law firm that "takes down bad
14 guys," as Dad likes to put it. After law school and stints at big cor-
15 porate law firms, they finally were able to do that, thanks to some
16 hefty networking done at the Legacy Club.

17 Hawkins Kaplan struck gold twenty years ago when they won
18 a suit against a major gas and electric company that was contami-
19 nating the water in a small town in Idaho, which gave thousands
20 of people cancer. The plaintiffs in that case walked out with huge
21 settlements, while Lulu and Rafe became heroes, landing the cover
22 of *Time* magazine, a visit to the White House, regular TV appear-
23 ances, and even more high-profile cases that keep them in the
24 spotlight. Now, it's hard to turn on the news without seeing my
25 dad talking back at me.

26 But all their success can be traced back to the Club. It's where
27 they were able to get their first celebrity clients all those years ago,
28 thanks to Yasmin Gellar being one of the top talent agents in New
29N York. It's not a coincidence that Anders Lowell has Dad on the
30L



The Legacies

Today show every other week. It's the Club connection and he knows that.

Dad starts to move back toward his office, where I know he'll stay for the rest of the night—the week, if he had it his way—but I can't let him go. Not yet.

"I got a text from Mom," I say.

Dad stops, his bare feet flexing on the floor. He turns around, his mouth a firm, straight line. "See?" he says. "She's fine."

"It didn't sound like her. She got the menu wrong."

Dad winces, running a hand through his hair, gray and thinning. He licks his lips, looks up to the ceiling.

"What?" I ask.

I can tell he's mulling over a few different lies, playing out each one in his head.

"I'm not one of your clients, Dad, I can handle the truth."

He opens his mouth, then shuts it, and looks me right in the eye. "You think you're old enough?"

I nod fiercely, though as soon as he asks, I'm not sure I am.

Dad's face relaxes and it's as if something inside him releases. "I sent that text."

"What?"

Dad shrugs. "From her iPad. No oysters, huh?"

Fear rises in my throat. "I don't understand. Where is she?"

He shrugs. "I have no idea."

"Don't you think we should call the police or something?"

Dad laughs and shakes his head.

"How is this funny to you? Your wife is *missing*."

"Sweetie, your mother has done this before."

I blink once, then again. "What are you talking about?"



01 Dad sighs. “That time she went to the Hamptons to finish the
02 bathroom renovations when you were in sixth grade?” He throws
03 up his hands. “Had no idea.”

04 I shake my head, remembering the texts she sent me while she
05 was gone during that trip.

06 Dad points his thumb back at his chest. “Me,” he says. “I texted
07 you. Same thing when she left for that sailing trip to Spain. There
08 was no renovation, no sailing trip. She turns her phone off and
09 goes . . . wherever. She does this, and I’ve always covered for her.”

10 I press my palm to my temple. “I don’t understand. She just . . .
11 disappears? And you text me, pretending to be her?”

12 “We made a deal years ago. Your mother needs her space. It’s
13 just something about her that I gave into a long time ago.” He
14 says it bitterly, and I know what he means. That marrying Esther
15 Baum, marrying into her world meant that he had to defer to her
16 needs over the years, acquiesce, make himself smaller. It was the
17 price he paid for gaining access to her wealth, her network, even
18 after he became *the* Rafe Kaplan. “It’s one of her . . . quirks. A
19 selfish one.”

20 “But where does she go?” My heart is racing and it feels like the
21 ground is moving beneath me.

22 He waves a hand around. “Oh, wherever. I often find out later.
23 Some spa in Arizona. A villa in Mexico. The Soho Farmhouse in
24 England once. I think she gets off on keeping it a secret, knowing
25 no one in the world can find her. Not even you.”

26 I step back, almost like I’ve been hit. “But Mom tells me every-
27 thing.”

28 Dad sighs. “Turns out, she doesn’t.” He reaches over and pats
29N my hand awkwardly. “That’s why I’m *not* worried.”
30L



“So, what? We just wait around until we figure out where she is? If she’s coming back?”

Dad looks annoyed now, crossing his arms over his chest and checking his watch, like he has to get back to work. But then he looks at me with a pang of pity on his face. “I’m sorry to let you in on the secret that your mother is less than perfect, Bern. But maybe it’s time you found out. See who she really is. You said yourself that you were old enough.”

My jaw drops open and my head swims with questions, but before I can ask them, Dad looks at his watch, a frustrated scowl coming over his face. A few beads of sweat form at his brow. “I have to get back,” he says and begins to disappear down the hallway. Then suddenly something dawns on me—one question I must ask.

“She comes back, though,” I call. “Right? She’s always come back.”

Dad turns around and nods. “She does,” he says. “We just don’t know when.”

He closes the door to his office, and the kitchen is suddenly cold, colder than it was before, and now all I want to do is find Mom and prove him wrong. She would never leave me stranded this week of all weeks.

With shaking hands, I pull out my phone and let my muscle memory move through it, pulling up our texts, where nothing has changed, and our location sharing app.

Sure enough, no one’s there, just an empty map of New York City. But then something blinks—a photo of a woman who looks just like me, with bright red hair and dark sunglasses shielding her eyes. My mom’s icon photo.

It appears fast, a moving target as it heads up Madison Avenue,

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Jessica Goodman

01 stopping at Seventy-Sixth Street. But just as quickly as it appeared,
02 the icon vanishes. No location found.

03 I pull up Google Maps, trying to remember what the hell is
04 on that corner. Could she possibly be *here* only a few blocks away?
05 Not in some faraway paradise, forgetting all about the Legacy Ball?
06 About me? I zoom in and when I see what's there, a beat of hope
07 thumps in my chest. The Trinity Hotel, Mom's favorite place to get
08 a drink or a massage.

09 Before I can think too hard, I'm back at the front door, stuff-
10 ing my feet into my platforms and grabbing my bag. If I time it
11 right, I'll be there in fifteen minutes and with any luck, my mom
12 will be, too.
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Isobel

"OHMIGOD, NOT BARTHOLOMAY'S." I groan as we hop out of the taxi in front of the Trinity Hotel. I know my way around the Upper East Side almost as well as I do my own neighborhood, Clinton Hill, but I wasn't really paying attention to the address Skyler gave the driver, thanks to Lee's wandering hands in the back seat.

Skyler and Lee think this place is the most fabulous bar in all of New York, but in reality, it's a stuffy, old-school place known for serving twenty-five-dollar cocktails and overlooking our ages thanks to the fact that Skyler's family owns one of the long-term rooms that they often let relatives stay in when they come to town. Putting the tab on the Hawkins card didn't always feel so bad, but since Shelter Island, I've bristled at the idea.

Skyler waves me off and Lee grabs my hand. "Come on," he says. "It'll be fun." He rests two fingers on my chin and smiles, which is all it takes for me to give in. Plus, I know he's right. It *will* be fun, and right now I'm itching for something to change my mood—a drink, a buzz, anything to turn this afternoon into something *fun*. He grabs my hand and I let him pull me inside the hotel lobby, past the guests with their Louis Vuitton luggage and their dozens of dress bags. No one stops us as we head to the bar, dark and luxe, with mahogany woodwork and thick, hand-painted wallpaper. No one bats an eye when Skyler plunks down in a booth and wiggles his fingers up to the waiter, who comes right over.

He orders us martinis, and as soon as the frosty coupe glasses

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01 arrive, my adrenaline kicks in, and the promise of this boring, stuffy
02 day turning into a full-on *night* takes hold. I take a big gulp, feel
03 the cold briny liquid slide down my throat, and let the familiar
04 feeling wash over me. The one that tells me to *keep going, don't stop,*
05 *more, more, more.* It's like there's a pilot light inside me somewhere
06 and one sip, one pill, one *anything* has the power to set it aflame.

07 It's the same urge, the same rushing, churning hunger that keeps
08 me on the hunt for the greatest party, the latest night, the most fun
09 anyone has ever had in their entire lives. I've always been this way,
10 even when I was little—constantly searching for a greater power,
11 a better time. And often it has come in the form of altering my
12 reality and exploring what else is possible.

13 Sometimes I wish I could moderate myself like Bernie does,
14 have a bit more control. But then I wouldn't have the stories—the
15 *life.* Sure, sometimes those stories end with little memories and a
16 few moments in front of the toilet bowl. But it sure beats acting
17 like Bernie, like every little decision is one that might set off a se-
18 quence of consequences that could alter the course of your life for
19 the worse. Being her must be exhausting. All I want is a little fun,
20 and I sure as hell didn't find it at the Legacy luncheon.

21 I drain the rest of my martini and lean into Lee, feeling his
22 warmth. He wraps an arm around me and laughs at some story
23 Skyler's telling. But all of a sudden Skyler stops talking and looks
24 right at me. "Want another, Is?"

25 Lee turns to me, curious.

26 I kick Skyler under the table, but he doesn't take the hint.

27 "I'm fine." I reach for my drink but realize it's empty.

28 "We had a little fun at the luncheon." Skyler nudges Lee's
29N side but Lee frowns. He may not mind that my dad's diagnosed
30L anxiety means that I know exactly where he keeps his stray

The Legacies

medication—old refills he’s forgotten about hidden in dressers—
and that we can enjoy them together, for fun, just us. But whenever
Skyler gets involved and starts feeding them to me, Lee’s quick to
harden. Good thing he doesn’t know that most of my stash comes
from Skyler—or what secret I’m keeping to make sure it stays that
way.

“I’m good,” I say, pressing my fingertips into my glass.

Skyler narrows his eyes. “Liar,” he says. But before he pushes
it, he stands up abruptly, knocking over my glass. “I’m gonna go
to the bathroom.” He steps out of the booth and walks toward
the hallway, but not before checking out every single woman in
the bar, even though they’re all nearly twice our age. I slide farther
down the booth, suddenly not wanting to be here at all.

There’s an awkward silence now, one that tends to creep into
our dynamic more and more these days when it’s only Lee and
me, free from Skyler or Bernie, or his parents to fill the void.
We *do* have things in common—friends, art, partying, our physi-
cal chemistry—but sometimes when it’s just the two of us, alone
without buffers I wonder if we would be together if it weren’t for
our friends. I try to think of something to say, but then Lee turns
to me. “You gotta be careful at Legacy stuff this week.”

My stomach seizes and I already feel the excuse coming up
my throat. *I get anxious.* Which is true, even though I don’t have a
diagnosed disorder like Dad. *I needed to take the edge off.* Also true.
I was bored.

But I say none of those things and instead tap my empty glass.

“Should we get another?” I ask.

“You sure?”

As if I don’t know my limits. But the last thing I want to do
right now is pick a fight with Lee.

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01 “I’m fine,” I say. “But if you want to dip, we can head back to
02 your place? Watch a movie or something?”

03 I slide my hand onto his thigh, knowing just where to squeeze
04 to get a reaction, but Lee stays still and shakes his head.

05 “I promised Dad I’d go over my Yale essay with him tonight.”

06 “Oh?” I say, perking up. “I could come with you. I’ve been mean-
07 ing to talk to Arti about—”

08 Lee clears his throat, cutting me off, and for a second there’s
09 another uncomfortable moment of quiet between us. “Sorry,” he
10 says. “I gotta do this one-on-one with him.”

11 “Oh yeah,” I say, worried my desperation to talk shop with Arti
12 is a little too obvious. “Of course.”

13 He checks his watch. “Shit, I should probably get going soon,
14 anyway.” His eyes flit to mine. “You finish your application yet?
15 My dad said he’d look it over, you know. Put in a good word with
16 the fine arts school.”

17 A lump forms in my throat as I nod, the lie swelling in my
18 brain. Just a few months ago, when Lee and I were still new and
19 shiny, he wanted us to promise that we would both apply early ac-
20 tion to Yale. That way I could follow in his dad’s footsteps in their
21 art program and he could pursue environmental science just like
22 he planned—and we’d only be a few quick hours from New York.

23 But even though it’s where Arti studied *and* he said he would
24 help me with my portfolio, I’m not so sure I want to go to Yale. Or
25 college at all right now. The more I think about it, the more I want
26 a reset—a break in the form of a year away from basically every-
27 thing I grew up with. My brother, Marty, suggested this gap year
28 program in Australia, where you help kids who’ve been through
29N trauma heal with drawing. I even started filling out an application.
30L

But I can't say that to my parents, who are obsessed with the idea of me getting a degree immediately. And I certainly can't say that to Lee, who's convinced the best years of our lives await us together in New Haven.

"I'm almost done."

Lee smiles, the unease that was there a minute ago gone. "Good." He looks around, then gets up. "Don't tell Skyler I left. He'll kill me for ducking out early." He leans down and kisses me before I can protest. "See you tomorrow."

"Wait—" I say, but he's already gone and suddenly I'm sitting here, very aware of the fact that I'm about to be alone with Skyler and feel the need to get the hell out of here as soon as possible. But before I can follow Lee out the door, Skyler slides back into the booth.

"Where'd fucker go?"

"Home. I should probably get going, too." I make a move to pick up my purse, but Skyler grabs my wrist a little too tightly.

"One more drink. You can't leave me alone." He pauses, raising an eyebrow. "Unless you'd prefer I call my other friend?"

I try to wriggle my wrist away, but Skyler doesn't let go. His grip is tight and his eyes flash a warning, a sign that he loves that he *owns* me in this sick, twisted way. I wish I could tell Bernie the truth, but even if I did, I'm not quite sure she'd believe me. There's a risk she'd choose Skyler over me, especially after what I said to her that night. And I'm not about to take it.

Right now, his smirk is menacing, but the martini has hit me harder than I'd like to admit, so when the waiter comes around, I let Skyler order me another one as he drops my arm. The second drink makes it easier to ignore him and the way his eyes keep

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01 glancing down to my chest, the way he licks his lips as older fe-
02 male guests walk by in heels.

03 But when he stops talking and elbows me in the side, caus-
04 ing me to spill half my drink down my jumpsuit, I zone back in.
05 “What the fuck is wrong with you?” I hear myself slurring as I
06 drop a wad of napkins into my lap, hoping to soak up the spill.

07 Skyler points to the front desk. “Didn’t she have a migraine?”

08 I follow his gaze to find Bernie, with her bright red hair, talk-
09 ing closely to the concierge, her brow furrowed and her fingers
10 clenched around her purse.

11 I nod. But why was she lying?
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Tori

I LOVE THE way the diner smells during the dinner rush, like meat grease and French fries, mixed with the sweet, clean scent of lemon Pledge coming from a spray bottle.

All the servers are moving in a swift, graceful choreography I've known since I was thirteen, when Dad finally started letting me put on the white apron and hand out laminated menus. Tasso's is the most welcoming place in all of New York City. At least to me.

There are mermaids painted on the walls, mint-green tiles on the floor, navy booths made of leather that never cracks. All the laminated menus, bound together with plastic spirals, have been wiped down and are stacked neatly in the hostess stand, a sign of another successful day at Tasso's. At first, it was hard to come here after Mom died. I saw her in every corner, screwing in wall sconces, laughing with the regulars, manning the pastry display. Sometimes I thought she loved this place more than my dad did, even though it had been passed down through *his* family. She always said it saved her, appeared in her life at a time when she needed it the most.

But after she died, coming back here was the only thing that made sense, made me remember her laugh and her smell and her smile. Being here now makes me feel like she's with me. At least for a moment.

I plunk down at the bar with a platter of fries and gyro meat and drop my bag to the floor.

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01 “They didn’t feed you at that fancy lunch-y thing?” Marina, the
02 hostess who’s been around since I was a kid, leans over the bar and
03 wipes down a few coffee and ketchup stains. She waves goodbye to
04 a couple over my shoulder.

05 I drag a fry through a puddle of tzatziki and pop it into my
06 mouth.

07 “Eh, none of it was as good as this.”

08 Marina clucks her tongue and shakes her head, causing her
09 frizzy dark curls to bounce around her face. “You’re ridiculous, you
10 know that?”

11 “I know.”

12 She laughs and glances over to the simple wood door that leads
13 to my dad’s office. No doubt he’s in there, triple-counting yester-
14 day’s haul, going over food orders and shift lineups.

15 “He okay?” I ask.

16 Marina gives me a little grimace.

17 “Tell me.”

18 She props her elbows up on the bar like she’s going to say some-
19 thing but then leans back, as if she’s changed her mind.

20 “Oh, come on. I can handle it.” But I know there’s no way
21 Marina’s going to tell me whatever’s going on. She’s known me
22 since I was in diapers and still sees me that way. Especially since
23 Mom died. She took it upon herself to stock our chest freezer with
24 forty-five frozen spinach pies and just as many trays of moussaka.

25 “Why don’t you talk to him yourself, huh?” She nods to the
26 door and leaves the bar to help an elderly foursome find their seats.
27 I finish the last French fry and bus my dish so the servers don’t
28 have to worry about it, and then linger by the door to Dad’s office.

29N “Tori,” Dad calls from inside. “Come on in.”
30L



The Legacies

I turn the knob and poke my head in. “How’d you know it was me?”

“You think I don’t know my own daughter’s footsteps?” He shakes his head, which is hanging down low over his desk, covered in yellow legal pads and an old desktop computer. I can see some sort of spreadsheet displayed on the screen. “Nah,” he says. “Marina texted me. Said to prepare for a line of questioning.”

I shut the door behind me and sink into the brown leather chair opposite his desk. I smile, grateful for these still moments when it’s just the two of us. It’s dorky to say but my dad’s always been my best friend. He used to schedule *Tori Time*, where we would spend the whole day together while Mom took diner duty for the day. They were the best—Mister Softee cones, trips to Coney Island, visits to the Socrates Sculpture Park, lazy days spent playing board games by the waterfront. I always told my dad everything.

Until this year.

When the nomination for the Legacy Club came, he first thought it was a notice related to my scholarship. But when I told him about how the Club selected high school seniors to be life-long members, he was straight-up confused. “Sounds like a place where children of billionaires can get tax write-offs.” He laughed at his own nonjoke and went back to making scrambled eggs at the kitchen, turning away from me.

Part of me was miffed that he didn’t seem to understand the weight that the invitation held, but the other part felt vindicated by the fact that he *didn’t* know anything about the inner workings of the Club. In some twisted way, this confirmed to me that it really *was* the type of thing whose importance could be fully

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01 comprehended only by those in the know. My dad was not one of
02 those people.

03 But perhaps I could be.

04 We didn't talk much about the Club after that, but I couldn't let
05 go of the gnawing guilt I felt about the way I got my invitation—
06 that I didn't really deserve access to that building, that lifestyle.

07 "Harold?" someone calls from outside. "Light's out in the bath-
08 room!"

09 Dad shakes his head. "Gotta do everything around here," he
10 mumbles before stepping out into the hallway.

11 I give him a half-hearted smile, but when he leaves, I take
12 a closer look at the papers strewn about on his desk. There are
13 a few new menu mock-ups and some seating charts laying out
14 the streetside tables. But underneath all that are papers, stamped
15 with bright red letters that make my stomach flip. They all say
16 OVERDUE.

17 I pick one up and try to decipher the rows and rows of numbers,
18 each climbing higher and higher into five digits. I fumble around
19 for another one, a letter from the Queens Savings Bank addressed
20 to Harold Tasso. When I start reading, my stomach lurches.

21
22 *This letter is to remind you that your mortgage payment*
23 *is due and payable on the 1st of every month and late if*
24 *paid after the 15th day of every month. To date we have*
25 *not received your full monthly payment, just as we did not*
26 *receive payment for the last three months. Your total owed*
27 *bill is \$21,890.*

28 *As you know, your failure to pay this month's principal*
29N *will result in a default. Please contact . . .*
30L



The Legacies

Before I can keep reading, the door opens and Dad steps inside and flops back down in the chair.

“I swear, these guys—” but then he sees me holding the letter. “Hey, Tori. Put that down.”

I shake my head. “Are we gonna lose—”

But Dad cuts me off with a steady hand on my shoulder. “Everything’s fine, Tori.”

“I know things have been tight since Mom died. I’m not a child.”

Dad looks at me hard. “I know you’re not a child.”

“Then treat me like an adult. Tell me how bad it is.”

Dad pulls off his glasses and rubs his eyes, and for a second, I think he might cry. When he looks up, I see exhaustion on his face.

“Tori,” he says again. “We’re gonna get through this. The money is coming, you know. The lawyers promised. Any day now.”

My eyes sting and my throat becomes scratchy. He’s been saying that forever, like these lawyers are about to drop us a golden parachute. But as the days have turned into weeks and now months, I can’t help but feel like the tiny amount of hope in my heart is more juvenile than realistic. And yet . . . and yet, I’m desperate to believe him, to make money a nonissue for us.

It wasn’t always like this. Not when Mom was healthy, before she fell down the stairs while taking ingredients into the diner’s basement and fractured her hip. It wasn’t a life-threatening injury, just an unfortunate accident. A huge pain in the butt that would keep her off her feet for months. The ER doctor said it would require only one surgery and some inpatient rehab. Dad even made her a special cushioned stool so she could sit behind the hostess stand at the diner while she healed.

But her doctor admitted her to a hospital that was overcrowded

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01 and understaffed, and during her weeklong stay, no one realized
02 she had contracted pneumonia. She'd had asthma all her life, and
03 even though Dad threw a fit, the hospital didn't do much of any-
04 thing to help. The staff barely looked in on her at all. The infec-
05 tion spread quickly, and within two weeks she was on a ventilator,
06 dying right in front of us.

07 It was preventable. A devastating case of malpractice and neg-
08 ligence. That's what the lawyers said when they contacted us a
09 few weeks after her funeral, after the platters of meat and hand-
10 wrapped dolma stopped arriving on our stoop. Two twentysome-
11 things in dark suits and shiny hair came to our house and told Dad
12 we had a case against the hospital, that we could sue. That we'd get
13 millions of dollars in relief. They flashed some business card, and
14 I watched from the staircase as my dad, stooped over in shock,
15 shook their hands and said yes.

16 It didn't take long for those lawyers to settle with the hospital
17 system so the case wouldn't have some prolonged public trial, but
18 the money hasn't come yet. We're still waiting, trying to pay off
19 her medical bills while the reality of her death has barely sunk in.

20 "It's been months," I say, my voice small. "Can't they give you
21 a timeline?"

22 Dad swallows and runs a hand back and forth over his bald
23 head. "I keep calling and . . ." He throws up his hands. "Nothing."

24 "Maybe you should take *them* to court," I mumble, half joking.

25 I expect Dad to laugh but he just nods slowly, his arms crossed
26 over his chest. "I don't want you to worry, Tor," he says. "We're
27 gonna be okay."

28 I nod, knowing he's lying, that if we don't come up with this
29N money fast, we could lose everything my family's worked for.
30L

And if I'm being honest, it's not just that. Losing the diner would be like losing my mom all over again.

"Especially now that you have that fancy Club membership, huh?" He plasters a smile on his face and pats my arm, like he's proud. Like he *gets* it, even though he doesn't. "You're gonna run some business one day that's gonna make us all millionaires. But until then, we'll always have Tasso's."

"Sure, Dad."

His face falls slightly, but then he nods toward the door. "Why don't you help Nico with gelato service. Good tips tonight."

I stand up and leave his office, closing the door gently behind me, but not before hearing him sigh a little too loudly, his chair squeaking as he leans his weight back.

But he doesn't know that I can help. I can *do* something. I can win that money.

Twenty-five thousand dollars.

An obscene amount of money to most people in the world, to everyone I know. Everyone except the other Legacy Club kids. The students who didn't even raise an eyebrow when Mrs. Gellar mentioned a cash prize.

It would be more than enough to help float us for a few months.

I reach into my backpack and pull out the heavy leather folder I got at the end of the luncheon and open it up to reveal my scholarship assignment. *Arts and Letters*, the very one I was awarded three years ago.

Your job is to persuade donors to fund the Arts and Letters scholarship in your name by showing them why this scholarship can help those in need



Jessica Goodman

*experience the incomparable education you received
at one of the Intercollegiate League schools.*

I look up, a wave of realization passing over me. There's no one who can do this better than I can—no one who can convince these rich assholes better than me. A determination sets into my core. I'm going to win.

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