



THE HANDBOOK

FROM *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR
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CHAPTER ONE



Trash Day.

It came every Friday on Banbury Road.

It's a truly wonderful day, a bit like Christmas, except the gift givers were not aware that they were giving anybody a gift, and it's not uncommon for the gift to be a dirty diaper.

Jack's next-door neighbors, the Wallaces, had just sold their house, and an immense mountain of their discarded junk sat on the curb and beckoned to Jack. It's not often that this much high-quality trash gets piled up on the curb, and it was calling to Jack like a big, filthy, discarded mermaid. Jack was helpless to resist it.

Jack's mom didn't understand the value of harvesting other people's trash.

How many times had Jack heard her lecture him endlessly about the topic?

“Can you imagine what people will think of you? And you could cut your hand on something. Sometimes people throw away acid and things like that and you could be scarred for the rest of your life. Acid could dissolve off your face. Is that what you want, a dissolved-off face?” she would ask, her voice reminding Jack of a handful of spoons in a garbage disposal.

And seriously, was the answer to the question ever in doubt?

Why, yes, Mother, a dissolved-off face is the coolest new thing. It's exactly what I want.

But he couldn't think about her lectures just then. He needed his full trashful concentration.

Jack rode around the pile, circling it like a shark, like a shark analyzing his prey, like a blond, green-eyed shark throwing occasional glances over his shoulder to see if his mom was watching.

Mom knew how to move the drapes ever so slightly, just enough so that a single accusing eye could glare through the gap. Jack knew that if she did the Drap Gap Move at this very moment, she would see the trash acquisition in

progress, throw open the front door, and start howling like a baboon with its tail caught in a lawn mower.

The mission would fail, the trash would not be acquired, and this was precisely why, he was certain, sharks never brought their moms along on hunts.

He knew she was probably busy washing clothes or washing dishes or washing a tree or any of the other million things that moms apparently love to wash, but she could be unpredictable at times and had disrupted his plans more than once. *Precision*, he thought. This was a mission of precision. He noticed that the phrase *mission of precision* kind of rhymed and he felt that this made it more legitimate somehow.

There were no flies buzzing around the pile. This was a good sign. Flies meant that there was a lot of icky garbagey stuff inside, like half a tuna casserole, or kitty litter, or the other half of that tuna casserole. Jack remarked to himself that if people really cared about kids, they would throw away only nice things.

Jack had picked through more than his fair share of trash in his young life, and he had come to realize that adults apply a kind of science to trash stacking.