

FROM
YOU
TO
ME

K.A. HOLT



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CHAPTER ONE

TAYLOR SLAPS HER HAND ON her hip, the smack echoing through my bedroom. “I look good in these pants.”

“You are a loony toon, Taylor.” I hop into my matching pair, yanking up the zipper.

“Well, then I am a loony tune *who looks good in these pants.*” We stare at ourselves in the full-length mirror on the back of my bedroom door, lost in our own thoughts for a minute. When did Taylor get taller than me? I move my palm in a straight line from the top of my head and it bangs into her forehead. Taylor laughs.

“Okay, then.” I lean over and grab a black T-shirt from the pile of clothes we’ve been trying on since seven a.m. I pull it over my head and say, “We’re going to walk down those halls and every mouth in

Hemingway Middle School will gape open like that singing fish in your dad's office."

Taylor pulls an identical shirt over her head and tucks it into the identical black jeans she's trying on.

"I mean, you know what Beyoncé says."

Taylor raises her eyebrows in a mock questioning look. "Who run the world?"

"Girls."

"No, but *who* run the world?"

"GIRLS!"

We admire ourselves some more. All black. Yes. This will show the school that we mean business. This will tell everybody that summer is over and Amelia and Taylor are ready to take over the world. Top-dog eighth graders, that's who we are.

Taylor twists her long curls and spins them up to the top of her head. "I look like Sandy. Not even close to Beyoncé."

We start singing "You're the One That I Want" from *Grease*, both pretending to be Sandy from the end of the movie, when she's had her black leather transformation.

"You girls about done in there?" The annoyed voice calls over a loud knock on the door. "You don't want to be late on the first day!" Mom was a little grouchy about having to wake up so early to let Taylor in this morning. But then, thankfully, she realized the

importance of getting our first day of school outfits *juuust* right.

“Almost done!” Taylor giggles.

We do some last-minute shirt tucking and walk out of my room and past my mother, whose face always looks pained these days. Mom hands us both breakfast bars and we grab our schoolbags. Taylor whispers, “Who run the world?”

I smile and hope that all the joking and singing has worked as some kind of magical camouflage. If I act happy, I will be happy. If I tell myself I’m happy, I will be happy.

I will be happy.

I will be happy.

CHAPTER TWO

SOMETIMES WHEN WE DRIVE BY the lake, I think I can hear it growling. Is that crazy? I see the dark stillness of it spread out along the horizon and I wonder if maybe under that peaceful surface is the whole body of a monster. Its head is turned up to face the sky, its mouth is wide wide wide open like that one time I watched a rat snake eat a baby possum. The monster is waiting quietly, patiently, for its next meal. I press my ear against the window of Old Betsy and I hear the rattling of her rusty doors and the whining of her all-weather wheels, but I also hear something else. Something low, almost more of a feeling than a sound.

The lake is hungry . . .

It's been three years since its last meal . . .

"Amelia." Mom's golden eyes, her tiger eyes, dart up to the rearview mirror, catching a glimpse of me in the back seat. "Amelia. Are you okay?"

I don't answer. Taylor looks me over and seems to decide that I'm probably okay. She catches Mom's eye in the mirror and nods ever so slightly.

Mom's eyes dart back up to the rearview mirror and catch my gaze for just a second. My own tiger eyes—identical versions of hers, with the golden sparkle, the flecks of green, the rim of brown—try to tell her what I'm feeling. They try to explain about the monster under the lake.

"I'll be late to the General Store today, maybe four thirty. I told Mrs. Grant, and she said that was fine. Will you be okay?"

I nod. Taylor's grandma has been giving me extra cheese on my grilled cheeses at the General Store soda fountain for three full years now. She makes me milk shakes and lets me pick out a handful of penny candy anytime I want. It sounds amazing, like a birthday wish come true. But I'd trade all the cheese in the world to have Clara back.

Even now. Even when it's not supposed to hurt every single day.

My eyes brim with tears but the annoyance of almost crying, *again*, seems to shut them down, thankfully. Taylor reaches over and squeezes my hand really quick.

Old Betsy grunts and wheezes her way around the rotary in the center of town. Instead of a stoplight, there's a huge fountain in the middle of the road that

everyone has to drive around. A lot of days I think I feel like the fountain must feel. Everyone staring at it, wondering why it doesn't work. It looks totally fine on the outside, maybe a few cracks but nothing that's a big deal. But on the inside, something is definitely wrong. No matter how many experts and repairmen the town hires, no one can figure out why the fountain won't spray water anymore. It's been broken for thirty years because of some dumb prank, and it's like the prank just broke the fountain's heart.

My heart understands. Except that instead of NOT being able to spew water into the sky, I can't seem to stop spewing water from my eyes. None of the experts can fix me either. And believe me, a lot have tried.

Mom steers Old Betsy into the school drop-off lane and I thank the Universe that my water-spewing eyes seem dry right now. My heart is about to explode, but that I can handle.

That no one can see.

"Have a good day, sweetie," Mom says as Taylor shoves open the heavy car door and jumps to the curb.

You know those videos that are speeded up super fast? The ones showing a leaf falling from a tree, drying up, curling, and turning to dust in a matter of seconds? That's how I feel when Mom calls anyone—especially Taylor—"sweetie." But these days, pretty much anything that comes out of Mom's mouth makes me want

to either crawl in a hole or run away as fast as I can (which is not very fast, but still). I can't exactly figure out why anything she does makes me want to leap out of my skin, but there you go.

Just another unfortunate mystery orbiting Amelia Peabody.

I kick open the car door and grab my nearly empty messenger bag.

"I love you!" Mom calls after me.

I want to call over my shoulder, "I love you, too!" but I don't. I mean, as far as last words go, *I love you* is pretty good. Yet . . . there's this part of me, a huge part, that wants to believe I can keep her safe by not saying anything at all. You can't get into a fiery car crash, you can't get struck by lightning, you can't trip and fall and break your neck, you can't be swallowed by the lake, if there are no last words. Right?

Taylor and I walk toward the big live oak tree in front of the school. I don't look back at Mom, even though I hear Old Betsy wheezing, even though I hear the car behind her gently honking. I hold my hand up over my head, a wave, even though I don't turn around. And finally, Old Betsy harrumphs out of the drop-off line and Mom is safe.

"Who run the world?" Taylor knocks her shoulder into mine and grins.

"Girls!" I grin back.

The bell rings and we both take a deep breath. We link arms and walk up the stairs through the heavy doors. My chin is high, but my heart is pounding. I try to ignore it. Usually all eyes are on me because I'm the poor girl with the dead sister. But now all eyes are on me because I WANT all eyes on me. No one feels sorry for Sandy in *Grease*. No one feels sorry for Beyoncé. Surely, my face only looks pale because of the tight black T-shirt. Definitely not because I'm afraid someone will call my bluff and realize I'm still the girl with the dead sister, the one who can't be trusted to speak out loud in class because she might burst into tears.

No. I'm the new Amelia. They're staring at me because they know I mean business. They know eighth grade is mine for the taking.

Well, mine for the taking after I peel my face from the edge of the doorway.

"Amelia!" Taylor's hands are over her mouth as she does a poor job of stifling her laughter. "Um. Watch out."

Perfect. Arriving in homeroom with a crease down the middle of my forehead was exactly what I had planned. Sigh.

Instead of milling around and talking about summer vacation, everyone in the classroom wanders from desk to desk scanning papers, with shrieks and moans and laughs filling the room.