

KATE  
RACCULIA

this  
must  
be  
the  
place



*a novel*

## Sixteen Years Before

Amy considered the postcard: a boardwalk scene. Throngs of people wandering in the sun. Sparkling blue ocean to the right, cheery awnings on the shops. She sniffed. The man beside her on the bus stank of tuna fish and cigarette smoke.

*This must be what it feels like to die*, she thought.

She was sore all over, sore and too tired to be scared. She suspected this *was* what it would feel like to die: to give up everything that came before, to just—cut it off. Tear it out. She wasn't religious. Her parents died before they had a chance to impart much wisdom on the nature of immortal souls, and her grandfather, when she first went to live with him, told her he was allergic to church. But she suspected there was something beyond what she knew. Beyond what she could touch and smell. She suspected there was a sort of transition period, where you had a chance to say good-bye to your old self and your old life, and this was hers, on this Greyhound, her sandaled feet propped on her backpack, with nothing but a postcard on which to mark her passing.

Not that she ever intended to mail it.

She'd never intended to, not even when she bought it. She'd been waiting for Mona to finish her shift at the pizza place—and by *finish her shift* Amy meant *break the suction with her boyfriend's face*—and was killing time in one of those boardwalk junk shops. The boardwalk was full of junk; there was shit *everywhere*. Key chains and T-shirts and snow globes (how lame was that, snow globes at the beach?), and stupid little sculptures built out of shells; Amy, of all people, could appreciate tiny objects, but there was just so *much*. It made her think of how many people there really are in the world, and whenever she thought about

that, she felt suffocated and insanely lonely, which was classic irony when you thought about it: that realizing she was one of a million billion or whatever made Amy Henderson feel like she would never be anything but alone.

She bought the postcard because the guy behind the counter was giving her weird looks and she wanted to prove to him that she wasn't loitering, even though she was: she was a fucking grown-up. She had money.

She smoothed the card over the top of her leg: OCEAN CITY MISSES YOU! said bright red letters across the sky. Hardly. She chewed her pen and turned the card over to the blank side and wrote, *Mona, I'm sorry.*

She didn't know what else to say, so she filled out the address. She still wasn't going to send it, but it felt good to state the facts: *Desdemona Jones, Darby-Jones House, Ruby Falls, New York.*

Maybe she should apologize a little more. *I should have told you,* she wrote.

What was the one thing she wanted to tell Mona? What could you put on a postcard—knowing that some nosy postal worker would probably read it, and you barely had enough room to say anything important anyway?

*You knew me better than anyone—I think you knew me better than me.*

That would make Mona happy. Mona wanted to be someone's best friend more than anything in the world. It was a little pathetic; but then sometimes it made Amy a lot happier than she wanted to admit.

Mona would worry, so next she wrote: *Don't worry. I swear I'm happier dead,* which was a little mean, because it would make Mona wonder whether Amy had flung herself off a cliff or across some train tracks or taken a whole bunch of pills and gone to sleep. But Mona should know better. If Amy hadn't done any of those things while they were still stuck in Ruby Falls, she sure as *hell* wasn't going to do it once she finally escaped.

It was getting late, and Amy wasn't so tired that she didn't know how hungry she was. She'd bought a few bags of pretzels at the last bus station, and now she crunched into them happily, her lips shriveling from the salt. She started to remember where she was going, and that of

course made her remember where she'd just come from, and she thought of Mona, who would have been so scared when she found her just—*gone*.

She didn't know why she'd done it. She woke up early and knew today was the day (or rather, yesterday was the day; she'd been on this bus for something like twenty hours now), and when you knew something, there was no point in not-knowing it, just like there was no point in waiting. What day was it, the eighteenth? She uncapped her pen and wrote *August 18, 1993* on the top edge of the postcard, where the stamp would go. Her stomach and her knees and her butt hurt, and she was grateful to be in the window seat, even though it was dark and there wasn't much to see. She pressed her forehead against the cool glass.

She thought she was in Indiana, or Kansas maybe, by now. Hollywood was closer than ever. Her future was closer. The world flickered by, unspooling like a reel of undeveloped film.

The darkness of the bus, close and warm, reminded her of sitting in the dark of a movie theater on the boardwalk with her father, a million years ago, it seemed: the summer before he died, when she was four and he took her to see *The Clash of the Titans* on a rainy day when it was too cold to go to the beach. "This is Ray Harryhausen's masterpiece," he whispered to her. "You think those skeletons in *Jason and the Argonauts* are cool, wait till you see Pegasus. Wait till you see Medusa. Wait till you see the Kraken." She remembered sucking the chocolate coating off each Junior Mint and thinking it was funny that there was sand on the floor, like the beach just couldn't stay away, and then the lights came down and she forgot about the mints and the sand. She left the earth completely. She traveled to Olympus. She rode the back of a white winged horse. She shrank from the red death rattle of Medusa and goggled at the great titan of the sea, the Kraken, as it rose screaming from the depths to claim the sacrificial Andromeda.

And he—Ray Harryhausen—had created them! Had *built* them, improbably, from wire and clay and plastic and feathers; built them and given them movement, and desire, and souls. Harryhausen, come to think of it, was the only god she had ever learned to worship; he created a world in his movies that captured her, that thrilled her, that felt like home. It was a world she'd spent her entire life trying to find.

And now she could see the doorway, just a little down the road, waiting for her to walk through.

She sat up and grabbed her pen.

*Anyway, I left you the best parts of myself, she wrote. You know where to look.*

There was nothing more to say.



*Part I*



## 1 *~ The Runaway*

Arthur Rook didn't know.

He woke up on Friday morning when Amy rolled out of bed, but the running of the shower sang him back to sleep. When his alarm buzzed at seven he woke again, shaved and dressed and fed himself and Ray Harryhausen, the cat, and stood on the curb in front of his apartment complex in Toluca Lake, just north of Hollywood, waiting for a ride to work. Like every morning in Los Angeles, it was colder than Arthur, who grew up in Boston, thought LA was supposed to be. He squinted at the sun, hugging himself. He saw his breath on the air. He wished Max Morris would show up already, hopefully with coffee, or maybe those little homemade donuts Max's boyfriend Manny made, that Max didn't like and didn't have the heart to admit. Manny put little notes in with the donuts—always a pun (*You're my favorite in the hole world!* or *Donut what I'd do without you!*)—and Arthur felt a little guilty devouring sweets specially packed for another person. When Arthur asked Max why he let Manny go on thinking he liked the donuts—wasn't he worried some day Manny would discover the truth and be hurt?—Max shrugged and said sometimes you let the people you love believe what they want to believe.

Why? Arthur had asked.

Because you love 'em, Max had said.

There. Right then.

That was the moment it happened, they would tell him: at 7:48, while Arthur was waiting for Max to show up in his stuttering silver Geo, thinking about Manny's donuts.

Arthur got into the car when Max arrived—late, sans both coffee

and donuts—and the two of them headed down Cahuenga into Hollywood, creeping in a sludge of traffic. Max apologized for not bringing any breakfast, and Arthur lied and said he'd eaten at home, and when Max called him on it, they pulled into a gas station and Arthur ran inside for two cups of coffee and a box of Ho-Hos.

"You eat like a freaking teenager, Rook," Max said. "One of these days your metabolism is going to implode, creating a black hole that sucks this entire universe into it."

"I am the destroyer of worlds," Arthur said. He was tall and thin and had a recurring nightmare in which he grew thinner and thinner until he was a skeleton holding a sword and shield, like the vengeful dead in Harryhausen's *Jason and the Argonauts*. When he told Amy, she smiled and said she'd still love him if he were a special effect. She laughed—I *might even love you more*—and Arthur thought, *Of course you would.*

Max parked in the faculty lot of Hollywood High and they hauled their equipment into the front hall, just like they had last year on school picture day and the year before that. Then Max disappeared to speak with their office contact, and Arthur, chewing a Ho-Ho, unpacked the lights and the backdrops and the cables and cords. It was 8:45—8:43 was the time of the first missed call on his cell phone.

From 9:15 to 10:30, Arthur stood behind the tripod and told one hundred and fifty freshmen to smile like they meant it. This was his favorite part of the job. It was the reason he became a photographer: for love of the moment when his subjects showed themselves to the camera and to him. Arthur loved people. He didn't really understand them or feel like he belonged among them, even, but he adored being a witness to their existence. He loved how various they were, how fragile and tough and strange and each his own universe: self-contained and whole. He was a Watcher. Amy told him, one afternoon six months after they met, that he would be unbelievably creepy if he weren't so damned good.

"You think I'm good?" Arthur had asked. He didn't care if Amy thought he was creepy—he *was* a little creepy, he knew that; anyone who goes through life preferring to watch than participate will trend that way—but he had been enchanted that she thought he was good. "You mean pure of heart?" he asked. "Valiant?"

“Not quite,” Amy said. They were in bed. “The truly pure don’t know how to do *that*.”

“Sometimes they do,” he said. “When they’ve been driven to it.”

Amy grinned at him. “What I mean,” she said, “is that you believe other people are basically worth living for, and it shows.”

“You mean I’m an optimist.”

“I mean you *see* people, you see people all the time, and you don’t get bored or tired of them. You don’t start to hate them. How do you manage?”

He remembered the weight of her hand on his face, the pressure of her thumb against his cheek.

“How do you do it?” she said.

“You give me too much credit,” he said. “I hate them plenty.”

“You are such a liar. Name one person you hate, one person.”

“Adolf Hitler. Douchebag.”

Amy laughed.

“Cigarette-Smoking Man.” Arthur counted on his fingers. “Iago.”

“I mean one *real* person—”

“Short people who recline their seats all the way back on airplanes.”

“—I mean who you *know*, personally, that you hate.”

Arthur kissed her to buy himself time to think. “That guy,” he said. “That guy at the restaurant the other day.”

“Which guy?”

“With the bad suit and the tacky tie.”

“Who yelled at the waitress and made her cry?”

“Yeah, him,” he said. “I *hate* that guy.”

Arthur couldn’t hate people, any more than he could hate water or grass or stone. Ordinary people, like the chubby freshman girl slumping on the padded stool in front of default Backdrop A (Mottled Blue Slate), were too magnificent and too oblivious to *hate*. He asked for her name and homeroom.

“Jennifer Graves. I’m in Mr. Woodbridge’s.” She was pale and had flat brown hair, pulled back in an unforgiving ponytail. There was an angry red spot on her chin.

“Jennifer, hi,” Arthur said. “I’m Arthur.”

“Hi,” she said.

“You don’t look like you want to get your picture taken.”

She crossed her arms and scowled. “What gave you that idea—oh, do you have eyes?”

Arthur smiled at her. “You know what they say about high school?” He ducked to look through the viewfinder.

“That they’re the best years of my life?” She had a truly scorching glare. He framed her in the camera sight. “These are my glory days?”

“Only the strong survive,” he said.

She twitched a smile. He saw it through the lens and captured it, plucked it out of time and space and made a digital copy in ones and zeroes. And in two months when Jennifer Graves’s parents opened the folio of their daughter’s freshman-year portraits, Arthur thought they’d see someone familiar in her eyes, her lips, the lift of her cheeks. Not the sullen unhappy girl who slammed her door and said mean things just to say them. They’d see the little girl who’d known the joy of running naked through a sprinkler. Who’d spent the better part of 1994 lumbering around the house after her delighted little brother, pretending to be a *Tyrannosaurus Rex*. They’d see a hint of the person Jennifer would grow up to be, after she’d bested this phase of her life simply by outliving it.

They’d see what Arthur Rook had seen.

Max took over for the sophomores. Arthur stepped outside with what was left of his cold coffee and watched the traffic roll by. It had never felt right to him to have a high school this close to so many cars, so much exhaust. There was a gas station down on the corner, and the Walk of Fame was only one street up. He could see the top of the theater where they held the Oscars. Growing up in Los Angeles was unfathomable to Arthur—Los Angeles period, as a place where people lived normal lives, was unfathomable. When he first arrived, it had felt like the city was teasing him, rubbing up against him in a way that felt embarrassing and unreal, like a stranger crowding him on an otherwise empty bus. Alien vegetation, spiny and thick-leaved, sprouted beside walkways and highway medians or waved their triffid fronds high above his head. The world smelled of fresh-turned earth, of wet dirt. The murals that lined Hollywood Boulevard—Bette Davis, Bob Hope, Marilyn Monroe—rippled like mirages on storefront security gates, disavowing anything

so pedestrian as death. There were a million pictures of corpses in Hollywood: eyes smoldering, cowboy hats tipped forward, skirts blowing up around their thighs forever. The city romanticized eternity by reminding you how many people were already dead, and in the presence of so many beautiful zombies, Arthur felt doomed.

Then he met Amy. He'd been in town for a month—a long dreadful month, with no job secured, no apartment rented, no friends met. No validation that his decision to come to LA—once so appealing for its diametrical opposition to Boston—had been anything other than a poor decision. He'd driven around the boulevards of North Hollywood aimlessly, refusing to get on the freeways (he had never owned a car, had never had to develop any quick instincts behind the wheel). When he accidentally turned onto Mulholland Drive, he was so frightened by the hairpin curves that he drove straight back to his motel and didn't go out for three days. He didn't speak to anyone in that time without the assistance of a telephone, and when his mother told him that no decision is absolutely permanent and he could come back to his old room any time, he didn't say no. He said, *I'll think about it.*

Fantasizing about flight yet refusing to leave Los Angeles before he'd properly seen it, Arthur mustered his courage and drove down to Hollywood. He passed the Chinese Theater and a man dressed as Dr. Frank-n-Furter stuck out a beautiful fishnetted leg and tried to wave him down. Arthur waved in return but didn't stop. He passed the Roosevelt Hotel and the Chateau Marmont and the Viper Room, knew he would never be cool enough to step inside them, and was grateful for it.

In-n-Out Burger—now, that was more his speed. He pulled into the In-n-Out on Sunset and parked. In the lot there was a boy in a white paper cap holding a board in front of him like a cigarette girl, taking orders from the cars in the drive-thru line. It was a long line—it was lunchtime, he realized. He also realized he was hungry. He didn't remember when he ate last, though he did know it had been something from the vending machine at the motel.

But his appetite, and his fledgling good mood, evaporated the moment Arthur Rook stepped inside the Xanadu of Southern California fast food. White-capped workers buzzed with efficiency, their red aprons held together with large wicked safety pins; customers casually

ordered items that weren't even on the menu (a double-double? a Flying Dutchman?). The restaurant was tiled like a bathroom or a hospital, bright red and clean white, and rows of red palm trees marched across the walls, the rims of the drink cups, the paper place mats lining the trays. Everyone else knew what to do but him; everyone had a place here but Arthur, the out-of-joint socket, the improper cog in this beautifully humming machine. And now he was at the counter and the girl behind it was smiling broadly, and behind her another happy worker was murdering potatoes with a diabolical contraption that was half guillotine, half garlic press. The giant silver handle came down on a naked potato, and it splintered into pale fingers.

“What can I get for you, sir?”

*I do not belong in this place.*

His eyes flew to the hand-painted menu above her head. Hamburger, cheeseburger. No other options. No one else had ordered just a hamburger or a cheeseburger. Would they know, could they tell, if he tried to fake it?

“Sir?” The girl at the register was stunning. Everyone in LA was beautiful, even the girls at the In-n-Out. It made him sad, and he didn't know why.

Arthur opened his mouth but nothing came out.

“Sorry, I didn't catch that.”

The machine was slowing. He, Arthur the interloper, was screwing it up. He had a sudden violent premonition that it was too late for him to escape. He would be crushed by this city, eaten, and then forced to wander it forever: nameless and alone in an undead town.

“He'll have a double-double and an order of animal fries.”

It was a girl's voice, behind him: strong and bright and sure. It continued. “And I'll have a two-by-three and a Neapolitan shake.”

The voice stepped beside him and smiled, and the lonely Watcher, invisible for so long, was seen at last.

Seen by a beautiful girl—a woman. Maybe twenty-five. Tall, like him, with straight dirty-blond hair and wide open eyes and broad shoulders. She had a geometric body, all angles and planes and edges except for her breasts—large breasts that Arthur, at the same time as appreciating the hell out of them, imagined she might have hidden under

sweatshirts and oversize flannel shirts for years. The way she held herself now felt new and unpracticed, as if she had only recently learned how to be at ease but had learned it and learned it well. Arthur smiled at her like a man granted his dying wish. The machine around them began to purr again, and he opened his mouth but still nothing came out.

“Don’t mention it,” she whispered.

That was how Arthur Rook met Amy Henderson. Amy, who would sit down with him at a table in the sun, who would explain the difference between a double-double and a Flying Dutchman and then wipe a dot of ketchup from the corner of his mouth with her left fingertip. Who would teach him how to navigate, how to survive, how to fall in love with LA’s charmingly daft will—finding its resolve to exist for its own superficial sake perfectly romantic and not a terminal fool’s dying delusion. Who would teach him to fall in love with her. Who would be his friend and his lover and then his wife, who would be his home, who could create life from metal and rubber and wires for the sake of a few frames of film, and who would, at 7:48 on a Friday morning in early October, send ten thousand volts from the tip of the same finger that had wiped the ketchup from his lips through all the chambers of her heart.

Amy, who would be killed instantly.

Amy, who would make Arthur Rook a widower at thirty-two.

“Hey, Arthur, your phone.” Between students, Max jerked his head at Arthur’s coat, draped over an open equipment trunk. “Been ringing like crazy.”

Arthur set down his empty coffee cup and flipped his cell phone open. He had ten missed calls.



Of the ten calls missed, there was only one message, left by Amy’s boss, Stantz. His real name was Bill Bittleman, but he loved *Ghostbusters* and wanted everyone to call him Stantz—everyone Amy worked with loved at least one movie like a religion; they loved movies, period, but there was always one movie above the rest. Bill Bittleman’s was *Ghostbusters*.

“Arthur, I’m so sorry—oh, Christ, Arthur, I’m so sorry,” said Stantz’s message. “Call me. Call me on . . . this phone, this number, I

couldn't find your number so I looked it up on Amy's . . . phone. Call me *immediately*. Where *are* you?"

Arthur was cold. Freezing.

His fingertips were numb when he redialed Amy's number. Her picture appeared on the tiny screen of his phone: Amy with Ray Harryhausen draped across her shoulders like a fur wrap—a very alive, very pissed-off wrap.

*Why was Stantz using Amy's phone?*

"Arthur!" shouted Stantz. "Arthur, I—I don't know how to tell you this."

Bill's voice cracked. Bill was crying.

"It was an accident," Stantz said. "It was just a stupid accident, a stupid—"

Arthur heard a high whine. The sound of crystal vibrating.



Arthur was lying in bed in the dark, under the covers, fully clothed. His sneakers were still on and his mouth tasted like tin. He couldn't remember Max dropping him off after work. He didn't remember if he'd fed Harryhausen. He kept more regular hours than Amy, so feeding the cat was his—responsibility—



Arthur was standing in the shower. A freezing cold shower. He was resting his head against the tile in the corner, and when he stood back, he felt a ridge pressed into the skin of his forehead. His throat was sore. His hand—hurt—Jesus, what did he do to his hand? His knuckles were raw and stung, bloody, under the cold spray from the showerhead. He turned off the water and stepped out of the shower and there were little red polka dots all over the bathroom sink, and Arthur saw that someone had punched the bathroom mirror. It hadn't shattered but it was cracked in one corner and dangling off the cabinet's glide track.

He wrapped a towel around himself and opened the door.

Ray Harryhausen was lying in the middle of the hallway, his furry bulk puddling over his paws so that he looked like a striped brick with a cat's head.

“Are you hungry?” Arthur asked him. “Did I feed you? Huh, Harry?”

Harryhausen, who tended to be either inert or asleep, wasn't exactly behaving oddly by lying in the middle of the hallway, but something was wrong about it. Something was wrong about *him*. Arthur and Harry had never liked one another—Harry was really Amy's cat, had been her roommate for years before Arthur came along—

Amy's cat—

Harryhausen made a horrible, horrible noise and Arthur sank to the carpet on his knees. Everything that had happened that day, everything he lost, flooded back as a nightmare: Max driving him to the hospital, to the morgue. Standing there while Stantz, red-faced, explained that Amy had blown a fuse while working on an armature and went back to the breaker and there was a wire—that was old or stripped—Arthur couldn't understand, didn't want to—wires were crossed. Electrons flew. Into the tip of her finger (her left index, he had kissed it a thousand times) and up her forearm (pale underside, purple veins) and through her bicep, her shoulder. Straight down into her heart. *Fibrillated*, they said.

*Fibrillated.*

Stantz kept talking—about the sound and the blowback and the smell—and Max told him to shut *the hell* up, and the morgue was cold, and Amy was blue and dull and not-Amy. Her left hand was angry and swollen. Burned.

*Did she have a will?*

I don't know, Arthur said. She liked grapefruit and coffee together for breakfast.

*Did she want to be buried or cremated?*

I don't know, he said.

She wore his old concert T-shirts to bed and sang him lullabies as Axl Rose (*Good night to the jungle, baby!*) and Mick Jagger (*Hey! You! Get into my bed!*).

*Any family?*

All gone, he said. Just me. Just her and me.

*What would you like to do with the body?*

Max took him home—Max took him home and got him into bed

and Arthur was pretty sure Max held his hand for a while and kissed him on the forehead—and then Max left.

Harryhausen made the horrible noise again. Arthur had never heard him cry before. Complain and hiss, sure, but this was completely different. This was deep and wild; it sounded like he was scraping it from the bottom of his tiny cat lungs. Like it was tearing his throat open.

Arthur sat on the carpet and stretched his legs out in front of him, in the hall, in the dark, and dripped cold water out of his hair and down his bare chest and tried to swallow but he didn't have any spit. He ached.

He lurched forward and his body tried to vomit but there was nothing in his stomach. Harryhausen jumped to his feet, hissing, and padded away, enormous fuzzy gut swaying from side to side.

Arthur didn't know anything. He didn't know if Amy wanted to rest in the ground or flame out into a million tiny particles. He didn't know if she'd made a will, or if there was an object, a memory, she wanted carried on by someone else in her name.

He didn't know and he was never *going* to.

He had to be dreaming. None of this was even remotely possible. He was thirty-two. Amy was thirty-one. They were young and full of blood. Their bodies and their minds were still their own to control. He couldn't imagine Amy—her body, Amy's body—lit with electricity. Had she flown? Had she fallen? Had she looked like she was dancing?

She liked to dance.

*Of course* Amy hadn't made out a will, it was too soon—but he didn't know that, not for certain. And just because she might not have officially left a will didn't mean Amy didn't want certain things done or said or given after her death. Just because Arthur didn't know what Amy wanted him to do with her body didn't mean *Amy* didn't know.

Why hadn't she told him?

Why hadn't he asked?

*What else didn't he know?*

What else hadn't he—the Noticer, the Watcher, the Good Seer of so many strangers—not known about his wife? What had he missed? What could he still see, if he looked hard enough?

He pressed his back against the wall for leverage and slowly, gently, pressed himself up from the floor. He blinked back stars. He could do this—if he, Arthur Rook, could see anything, he could see his wife. It didn't matter that she wasn't here. He could see.

He started in the bedroom. He looked through her dresser and saw her yellow-and-black striped socks, her grandfather's enormous green sweater, the blue lace bra she wore on their third anniversary that made her pale skin glow. He smelled Amy all around, but he didn't see anything he didn't know. He looked under the bed and saw her purple bowling shoes, also the white open-toed pumps she named Marilyn (left) and Norma Jean (right). He looked in the bathroom, in the broken medicine cabinet and the hamper. He tossed razor blades she would never use and unopened tubes of toothpaste and dirty clothes on the floor, and still he didn't see anything. Arthur was slowly drying from his shower but he was cold, only wearing a towel, and shaking so viciously his teeth chattered in his skull. He ran to the kitchen and looked in every cabinet and in the refrigerator, and all he saw were the plates they had bought together, the cups and the bowls they'd eaten ice cream and cereal and hot soup from. An unfinished gallon of milk, leftover Thai take-out, half a grapefruit swaddled in plastic wrap that she'd been saving for breakfast tomorrow. Arthur saw all these things but he did not see Amy—only trace evidence of what she'd worn, what she'd eaten, what her body had done.

"Where ARE you?" Arthur shouted, scaring himself. "*I know you're here!*"

He heard Harryhausen crying again, followed the sound to the living room, saw Amy's monster movie posters—*The Clash of the Titans* (her One Movie, her religion), *The Thing*, *The Beast from 10,000 Fathoms*—and saw his own reflection in the framed glass. He tossed the cushions off the couch and found thirty-six cents and a single blue sock. There was nothing else—nothing that he didn't know—no clues to solve, no hints, no indication.

Nothing to see that hadn't already been seen.

Shuddering now, muscles twitching with cold and fear, Arthur returned to the bedroom. At some point he had begun to cry. He sat on the edge of the mattress and told himself to calm down, that he'd just

proved he knew everything there was to know about Amy Henderson. He'd seen her. He'd seen *all* of her. She hadn't told him what he didn't know because there wasn't anything to tell.

*She* hadn't known either.

Arthur choked on nothing.

Harryhausen hissed at him and Arthur looked up, and there was Harry, in front of the closet—how stupid Arthur was, not to have looked in the closet. He didn't have the strength to stand, so he crawled over to the door and pushed it open, and there were all his pants and shirts and Amy's skirts and dresses, hanging silently, companionably. Suspended. Sleeves waiting for arms that would never fill them. Collars waiting for a throat that had grown cold and still. Shoes entombed and stacked in bright paper boxes. And Arthur, exhausted, fell over on the carpet, hating himself for not being able to see.

He blinked. He breathed. The pile was rough on his cheek. He felt Harryhausen walk by his head and closed his eyes and wished he could just fall away and forget everything, could make it untrue, could make it unhappen. He tried to will himself to sleep for a long time and couldn't. He opened his eyes again.

And Arthur's eyes, which had only needed time to adjust to the dark, saw a shoebox. A huge shoebox on the floor of their closet that he'd seen a million times, that he remembered moving into the apartment, even; but a shoebox that—despite its bright pink cardboard, the word GUMBALLS! like a cattle brand on its side, big enough to hold a pair of black stiletto boots (pictured) that Arthur had never seen his wife wear—had always been effectively invisible, tucked neatly beneath the hems of their everyday lives. He had never opened it. He had never asked Amy what it contained. He had never even been curious until the day his wife disappeared.

It was so very pink, even in the dark.

He lifted the lid.

He saw Amy.



At eleven o'clock the next morning, Arthur Rook's apartment would be broken into by Max Morris, who, after Arthur didn't answer any of his

phone calls, would worry the door open with a credit card only to find the tiny one-bedroom he'd never actually stepped inside ransacked. Gutted. The refrigerator door open, motor wheezing. Papers strewn across the hallway and the bedroom floor. A trail of empty duffel bags and packs like shed skins leading from the hall closet to the bedroom, where, on a bed littered with clothes, an empty space the size of a large case told Max that Arthur had packed and fled. Arthur Rook would never know, but Max, who was a little in love with him (he couldn't help it; he'd never met anyone so guileless), would put everything away as best he could. He would fold the clothes and place them in drawers and on hangers. He would find Arthur's cell phone on the living room floor and feel a little less hurt that Arthur hadn't answered any of his calls. He would stack the papers neatly on the kitchen table and close the refrigerator but throw out the milk (probably spoiled). He would leave the blood in the bathroom. He would see the cat food dishes on the counter and guess that Arthur had taken Amy's cat with him. Then Max would steal a lukewarm beer for his efforts, and call the police, and sit in the living room and wait for them to arrive, examining a picture of Arthur and the late Amy Rook: huddled together on a beach somewhere, the wind whipping her hair across both of their faces. And Max would hope that his strange, quiet, runaway friend, wherever he'd gone, would be able to find his way back home.

But Arthur's home had ceased to exist. Its ghost had called to him and told him where to run.

## 2 *∞* *Freaks and Worthy Souls*

Oneida Jones was a freak. It was nonnegotiable. It was absolute. It was common knowledge among both her fellow classmates and the population of Ruby Falls at large, but it wasn't until after her twelfth birthday that she ever considered the possibility that it was something to be embraced rather than raged against. Her fellow sixth-graders thought she was a freak because she had huge frizzy hair and dark eye-brows that touched in the middle of her forehead, because she demanded that Mr. Buckley teach them about Japanese internment camps, and because she was named after a spoon (not true). Ruby Falls, in the most general sense, considered her the freak reminder of the downfall of her mother, Desdemona Jones—the Fallen Prom Queen, as Mona was fond of calling herself, even though the title was something of a misnomer; Mona technically never made it to the prom.

Mona, the teenage daughter of Gerald and Mary Jones, pillars of the community, their boardinghouse a veritable Ruby Falls institution, ran away in the spring of 1993—and reappeared that August with a baby. Suddenly there was the infant Oneida and Mona, jiggling her on her hip, refusing to be denied or swept away: in her senior year at Ruby Falls High, shopping in the same convenience mart where all of Ruby Falls shopped, acting as though nothing remarkable had happened. Nobody ever said anything to Oneida about her mother, not directly. But she had spent her young life interpreting the awkward pauses and silences in conversations with the old guard of Ruby Falls, her grandparents' friends and colleagues, who thought her mother ought to have accomplished something more respectable with her life than having a kid at sixteen and baking wedding cakes for a living.

Oneida thought it was a perfectly acceptable way to live; Mona never gave her reason to think otherwise. When she was old enough to ask questions about her father, her mother always said the same thing: he wasn't ready to be a dad but I was ready to be a mom, so I brought you home. Her grandparents had always been kind and loving. If they had ever felt awkward around her, it must have been during her infancy, because she didn't remember anything other than juice boxes, endless hands of rummy, and pockets in cable-knit sweaters full of butterscotch candy, sticky in crackly orange wrappers. They were dead now, and her mother ran their boardinghouse, the Darby-Jones, a rambling mansion built in 1899 by her great-great grandfather, William Fitchburg Jones, and his business partner, Daniel Darby, who had sold hardware, farm tools, and milking equipment to the dairy farmers who still made up the entire tax base of Ruby Falls.

Oneida spent her childhood wandering the old creaky hallways of the Darby-Jones, variously hiding from and pestering the tenants over the years: Alice Cooper, an octogenarian who went to church every day to pray for the soul of that "devil rock musician who slanders my good name"; Roger Beers, an old hippie who worked for the post office and taught her the intro chords to "Smoke on the Water"; Kitty Grace, the former home economics teacher at Ruby Falls High who worshipped John F. Kennedy and had a small tattoo of his profile on her shoulder blade. It was a childhood almost completely devoid of other children. It wasn't until she went to kindergarten that Oneida understood not everyone had a working knowledge of mah-jongg, knew what *glasnost* meant, or had played with a stereopticon. Once the other kids figured out Oneida had more in common with their own parents and grandparents than with them, they found her largely uninteresting; once Oneida insisted that they would like learning about canasta and the Andrews Sisters, that the ancient set of encyclopedias in the den was a thousand times more fascinating than the Internet and she wanted to tell them all about it, the brand of *raging weirdo freak named after a spoon (not true!)* became permanent.

But one month to the day after her twelfth birthday, during a science lesson about the properties of light, Oneida Jones woke up. The tiny voice in her head, that had whispered *You're weird, nobody likes*

*you, they all think you're a freak*, from the moment she climbed on the bus in the morning until she opened her front door in the afternoon, stopped speaking. In the silence, Oneida could finally hear what was happening around her. Jessi Krenshaw was asking Mr. Buckley to explain the difference between reflection and refraction—*again*—and Mr. Buckley replied in his most sanctimonious tone that light reflected when it bounced off a surface at an angle.

“What does reflected light do? Like, can we use it for anything?” asked Jessi.

“Refraction,” said Mr. Buckley, “is one of the main principles behind lasers. It’s the reflecting power of light that make lasers possible.”

Oneida felt like she’d had a bucket of ice water dumped over her head. Exhibit A: Mr. B had never shown signs of a speech impediment, which, to her mind, was the only excuse for thinking *reflect* was a word. Exhibit B: He was wrong. He was *just wrong*. Refraction occurred when light passed through substances and appeared to bend; refraction was what happened in prisms, not lasers. She knew she was right because she’d spent the previous weekend poring through the L volume of the *World Book Encyclopedia* (*legislature, light, lunar eclipse*), not to mention she’d done the homework. She looked around the classroom. No one else was paying attention: they were scribbling in notebooks, winding hair around fingers, staring into space. And Mr. B just kept saying it: “Light hits the pavement and reflects in all different directions”; “If light hits a mirror, do we think it will reflect or refract?” Oneida put her hand over her mouth to quell the wild whoop of laughter that was building in her body, because she had just figured it all out: If being a freak meant she was the only one in the room to realize her teacher was a complete dumb-ass, then she’d be a freak and be proud of it. In that moment, she consciously chose the lonely, superior life of freakdom. It was a life she was already living anyway, but she accepted it on the basis that it was better to be lonely and right than stupid with friends.

That was the credo by which her entire existence took shape, the mantra that she’d repeat to herself when she moved up to the combined junior-senior high, through middle school and into her freshman and sophomore years, whenever her mother asked if she was having trouble: she never had friends over, she never asked for a ride to the movies or

the mall. Better lonely and right than stupid with friends, she'd think, and tell Mona that the other kids weren't interesting. They didn't understand her and it was pointless to pretend she cared about useless things like who was taking who to homecoming and who said what on Facebook and blah blah boring.

"They can't all be bad," Mona would say. "There were plenty of boring people in my class, too, but there were a few worthy souls. You just have to figure out how to recognize each other." Oneida, aside from finding this almost impossible to believe, chafed at her mother's suggestion that the reason she didn't have any friends was because she wasn't trying hard enough. What the hell did her mother know? Mona didn't have to spend the day bouncing from class to class, struggling to stay awake and interested, when all she really wanted to do was curl up with a book and teach herself what she really wanted to know—which, incidentally, was *everything*, something she was fairly certain was absent from the curriculum at Ruby Falls High.

And then her sophomore year Andrew Lu transferred into the district, and Oneida understood what her mother meant about recognizing worthy souls.

Andrew Lu was beautiful. He was an athlete with skin the color of milky tea and warm dark eyes. He was also the only Asian in the entire school system, and rumor held that he had been born and raised in China until he was eight. He spoke three languages—English, Chinese, and French. He signed up for cross-country, the fall sport for smart jocks, and when he walked through the hall, cool rolled off him in waves. Oneida didn't understand how anyone under the age of eighteen could possibly be as comfortable in his own skin as Andrew Lu was. She envied him. He fascinated her. She wanted to ask him how he did it: how could he be so confident and yet so *different* from everyone else?

They had the same American History class, and Oneida, who sat three rows behind him to the left, would spend the whole period waiting for him to answer one of Mrs. Dreyer's questions. He'd raise his hand, and she'd notice how smooth and muscular his upper arm was, and then he'd answer the teacher's question correctly and confidently, without stuttering or rambling or adding extraneous detail, as Oneida was wont to do whenever she was called upon because Dreyer didn't

think she was participating enough. One day, after Oneida had given a miniature treatise on the Whiskey Rebellion under such duress, Andrew Lu had actually turned around, made eye contact, and smiled. Oneida felt she'd been plugged to an electric generator; her entire body was shocked. It made her violently aware of a hunger she didn't even know she had, and she'd spent the rest of the day hiding in the drama club's prop closet, in the loft above the auditorium stage, sulking and crying and generally feeling sorry for her freakish, friendless self.



The fates aligned: Mrs. Dreyer assigned Andrew Lu and Oneida Jones to the same group history project. The worthy souls were being given a chance to recognize each other at last. That the other members of their group were two of Oneida's least favorite people at Ruby Falls High, not to mention in the world, hardly seemed relevant. That is, until they were sitting in her kitchen and wouldn't shut up.

"I don't know why anybody still cares about the Beatles," Dani Drake said. She jiggled her leg against the kitchen chair and rubbed her temple with her pen. "They're just . . . they're so *done*, you know? Everybody knows they're, like, the gods of pop music, but who cares *now*? You know? God is dead, so if the Beatles are God, wouldn't it follow they're *also* dead?"

"Who would you rather we write our reports on?" Oneida asked. She reshuffled her stack of loose-leaf history notes until all the pages were straight and neat. Oneida was proud of her compulsive tendencies. They made her feel older than fifteen, more in control, able to stop herself from grabbing a hunk of Dani Drake's bangs and bashing her head-first into the kitchen table.

"Oh!" said Dani with mock urgency, gazing heavenward. "Oh, you're right! There's no other band in the history of music that could possibly be more important than the Beatles! How stupid of me!"

Wendy chuckled into his can of soda, which surprised Oneida: she never would have thought Eugene "Wendy" Wendell possessed anything approximating a sense of humor. What he did have was a reputation: he was to be feared and avoided. It was commonly known that he drank grain alcohol with every meal, kept a Bowie knife duct-taped to

his thigh, and that the white rope of scar running from his temple through his eyebrow was the result of a broken bottle fight with a hooker from Syracuse. The hooker won, but Wendy was still a badass mother-fucker. It didn't seem right for him to chuckle, even if the joke was mean.

"Guys—I don't think the Beatles are irrelevant, but for the sake of argument who else could we write this report about?" said Andrew. Oneida felt a little hurt. She tried not to hold it against him; being a good leader was mostly a question of diplomacy, after all, and Dani Drake lived off the bones that were thrown to her. Andrew had become the group's de facto leader, a position Oneida would normally have insisted upon holding herself had she not been immobilized by his physical presence in her house. In her kitchen. She wanted to run her hand through his thick black hair, wanted to will Dani and Wendy into nonexistence so she and Andrew Lu could sit and talk, just the two of them, on a Saturday afternoon, talk about anything and everything: *The Scarlet Letter*, which they were reading in English. What was his favorite movie? What had it been like to grow up in China? She wanted it so badly that she felt a little sick.

"I vote for The Clash," Wendy said.

"Uh, 'scuse me—*no*." Dani wrapped her bright blue gum around her finger and pulled a long strand from her teeth. "They're basically the Beatles of punk."

"The Sex Pistols are the Beatles of punk," Wendy said.

"*No*." Dani leaned forward on her elbows, the better to challenge him. "The Sex Pistols are the *Stones* of punk. Want to quit talking out of your ass?"

"Want to kiss it?"

"Ooh!" Dani chirped. "Nice one!"

In what was clearly an attempt to neutralize the situation by ignoring it, Andrew pulled out the assignment sheet their history teacher had passed out three days ago and studied it intently. The project required them to write their own research paper around a single theme and then give a group presentation on four "remarkable lives," as Mrs. Dreyer had put it. Oneida's group had at first been excited to pull musicians out of Dreyer's old ball cap, but whether to write about four separate musicians or four members of a single band was proving difficult to decide.

Oneida was torn between wanting the session to continue indefinitely—no matter how much she wanted it, Andrew Lu would most likely not stick around for cocoa and conversation without the excuse of a school project—and wanting Wendy and Dani out of her face as quickly as possible.

“We have to write about the Beatles,” she finally said, adjusting her glasses.

“No shit, Shirley,” said Dani.

“Well, they’re the only group we’ve mentioned so far where there’s a lot of information about all four members,” Oneida said to Andrew. “So unless you want to get stuck writing about, you know, the *other* guys in U2, we have to write about the Beatles.” She tapped her pencil on her notebook.

“That’s a great point,” Andrew said. Oneida felt her stomach tremble. She flushed and grinned. “I’ll take George,” he said.

“John!” Oneida said, raising her hand.

“Frick, I guess I’ll take Paul,” said Dani. “I look forward to exploring his pathological desperation to be liked and the ensuing artistic toll on the genius of John Lennon.”

Wendy rubbed his scar. “That leaves . . . what’s her name? Yoko Bono?”

“You’re really witty for a sociopath,” Dani said.

“Ringo,” Andrew said. “Ringo Starr, Wendy. OK?”

Wendy shrugged.

In a flurry of closing notebooks, the study group disbanded. Dani clomped through the kitchen and onto the side porch, and the relief Oneida felt upon hearing the screen door squawk behind her was palpable. If pressed, she probably wouldn’t have been able to quantify exactly what it was about Dani that drove her insane, but the cumulative effect of her gum-snapping, Beatles-trashing, obnoxiously quippier-than-thou ways incited Oneida to imagine acts of great physical violence befalling her. Oneida wouldn’t have said that she and Dani were enemies—nothing had ever occurred between them around which to base an epic loathing—but *damn*, they irritated each other.

“You don’t like her very much, do you?” asked Andrew Lu. He stood beside her on the porch as they watched Dani Drake weave her

bike down the unpaved gravel drive. His sudden proximity made her jumpy and she nodded, not trusting her voice. She needed to be comfortable around him. He wrinkled his nose and leaned into her side—he was only slightly taller, so the effect was of Andrew Lu pinning his hip to hers, like they were contestants in a three-legged race—and mumbled conspiratorially, “That makes two of us.” Then he hopped off the side porch and climbed on his own muddy bike. He even waved as he pedaled off.

Oneida wasn’t sure it had actually happened. She raised her arm to return the wave a beat late, and ended up waving at Andrew Lu’s retreating backside. She thought about how warm he had felt when he leaned into her, how ridiculously aware she had been of his solid mass. Oneida Jones was not the kind of girl who touched other people lightly, and she didn’t take it lightly when other people touched her, no matter how fleeting the gesture. It wasn’t that she didn’t like to be touched; she just didn’t trust it, or trust herself to interpret it.

She tucked a curl behind her ear and gnawed first on her right thumbnail, then her left. What she had wanted to happen—had it happened? Had Andrew recognized her worthy soul? Wind rustled through the trees, exposing the pale underside of the leaves. Her mother always said that when the leaves turned over, it meant a storm was coming. It was late September but it still felt like August: humid and gray, the air thick and anxious.

A thump from behind snapped her to attention. Wendy was still in her kitchen, opening and closing the cupboard doors.

“What are you . . . doing?” she asked, her arms popping with gooseflesh. She had volunteered for the first study session because nobody else did, plus the Darby-Jones, by its boardinghouse nature, had a perpetual open-door policy. But she felt defensive about Wendy rifling through her mother’s pots and pans—intruded upon—and her body tensed.

He shook his soda can, the few remaining drops swishing quietly. “Just wanted to recycle,” he said. He crushed the empty can between his palms and tossed it into the sink. It made a bright metallic *clank* and Oneida frowned, thinking of the vintage porcelain basin her mother adored.

Wendy walked right up to her and examined her face intently. He

didn't blink. He was less than a foot away. The only thing she could think to do was stand very, very still.

"So," she said, her voice catching. "Are you looking for something?"

Wendy didn't say anything. He stared. He still hadn't blinked. His scar, up close, was mesmerizing, a twisted vine of white and pink that cut a half-circle down from his temple, so that his eyebrow was like a line of Morse code: a dash and a dot. Oneida focused on the scar for too long—long enough for Wendy to realize she was staring at it.

"I've been thinking," he said.

Wendy thrust a spoon at her. Oneida flinched, badly.

"Hey," she said. Her mouth seemed to have dried up. She coughed. "Hey, what are you doing with—"

"What does the back of this spoon say?" he asked. "Can you read it for me?"

She gritted her teeth. "It says Oneida," she said. "So what?"

"So you're named after a spoon." And he grinned, a huge wolf grin that sent a cold charge up the back of her neck.

"I'm not going to discuss this with you," she said. "But let's just say that both the spoon and I are named after the same geographic location and Native American tribe."

"Oh—oh, I see. What's your Indian name, Chief Red Spoon?"

"Hey!" she said, but Wendy just laughed.

"Shouts with a Spoon?"

"Get out," she said. She knew she was blushing horribly and she hated it, hated it, hated it—hated this stupid body of hers and its stupid blood. She shoved Wendy hard. He held up his hands in a *don't shoot!* gesture and backed up until he was on the porch.

"See you around," he said, "Sitting Spoon." Then he cackled and kicked the porch door open. For the first time since making the word her own, since co-opting it out of a sense of personal pride, Oneida spat it out as a gasping curse as she watched Wendy disappear.

"Freak," she said.



Less than thirty minutes later, the thunderstorm hit. Rain poured down the windows of the Darby-Jones in unbroken streams, splashing off the

sills, flooding the driveway, dripping into a blue saucepan on the side porch that Oneida had to empty constantly. She tossed another panful out the door and returned to the creaky pink- and orange-striped beach chaise where she did her best thinking, hidden away from the hustle of the rest of the house, nestled among lawn chairs, coolers, and a cracked flowerpot she had painted with misshapen pansies in the first grade. She'd brought the E volume from the old set of *World Books* in the study; E was one of her favorites (*Egypt, Einstein, electricity, elephants*), but today she wasn't interested, not really. Today she was a mess of nerves: because of Andrew Lu, because of Eugene Wendell, and because of the thunderstorm itself, which made the porch shudder and groan.

She hated being teased. She hated that Wendy thought it was funny to upset her, because—why? Was she absolutely *hysterical* when she got upset? But she knew how to cope with being teased. What she couldn't cope with were secrets, and Andrew Lu was a complete mystery, as inscrutable as the Chinese characters she had watched him doodle on the cover of his notebook. An echo of the voice she'd quelled at twelve piped up: *Why would he like you? Why would Andrew Lu, who is beautiful and brilliant and smells like coconut and coffee, whom strangers smile at when he walks through the hall, who has probably eaten sushi with real chopsticks and has traveled farther away than Syracuse—why would he like you?*

It was a question she couldn't answer, so she slapped the encyclopedia shut, rolled on her side, and watched the rain pour down. Wind filled the porch screens like sails, and Oneida shivered in the light mist. It was barely four o'clock but it was dark, and the darkness made her feel tired and worn out. She closed her eyes. She didn't see the yellow taxi rolling up the Darby-Jones driveway until it was close enough for her to hear the tires crackling in the loose gravel, popping like corn beneath the rain. At first she thought she was dreaming. She had never seen a taxi outside of television; there were no taxis in Ruby Falls. You could walk the entire length of downtown, past the convenience mart, post office, dry cleaner, gas station, library, Milky Way Bar and Grill, and town hall, in about fifteen minutes. The car had a checkered stripe running from hood to trunk. Gingerly, she craned her neck, still sore after flinching from Wendy, to watch the car disappear around the front

of the house. Barely five minutes later she heard her mother unlatch the main door and welcome the passenger into the hall.

*Oh, great, she thought. Another stupid mystery.*

She sat still on the porch. She heard her mother's scratchy alto welcoming the new tenant, asking for his coat, telling him to leave his bags at the foot of the stairs. Then Mona launched into her standard tour of the Darby-Jones, her voice drifting nearer as she made her way through the main communal rooms—the front hall, the dining room where Eleanor Roosevelt once drank a milk shake, the TV in the den, and the library; past the rear study (off limits to tenants, reserved as her daughter's study space) and the kitchen.

Her mother's bare feet slapped against the original antique tile as she described how the right side of the pantry was divided into equal spaces for each tenant but the left was strictly for Mona's personal use and house dinners. Had she mentioned that, for an extra two hundred a month, he could be included in the meals she cooked six days a week, excluding Fridays, when tenants pooled their money for take-out? The stove was gas; the left rear burner was finicky and needed to be lit frequently. The pots and pans were to be treated as though they were children, and if he was ever discovered using a metal scouring pad on anything Teflon, he would be lashed to a snowblower and dragged through town. Mona had a dry delivery, and when the mysterious new tenant didn't laugh or even chuckle awkwardly, Oneida wondered if he or she thought her mother was actually serious.

"And this," Mona said, stepping onto the porch, "is the side porch. Where we keep the lawn darts, watering cans, and my daughter." She smiled at Oneida and gestured for her to join them, which Oneida did, crossing her bony arms over her chest and leaning in as Mona hugged her shoulders. Her mother always smelled of flour and frosting, the result of years of mixing, baking, stacking, and piping sugar onto wedding cakes, and Oneida inhaled deeply. "Oneida," Mona Jones said, gesturing to the man standing in the kitchen, "this is Arthur Rook. He's taking the rooms over the garage."

Arthur Rook looked lost. He was very tall and thin, not skeletal like the tall boys at school, who had stretched the same amount of skin over bodies that grew half a foot taller in the space of a summer, but she

could picture him as one of those stretched-skin boys in the not-too-distant past. He was far younger than any of the other tenants, and she wondered what he was doing in Ruby Falls. He had dark hair and really needed a shave. His eyes were very dark and very bright, and he didn't blink. He was looking at everything—no, he was studying. He traced the outlines of all the vague, inanimate lumps on the porch, as if he were searching for something he'd left there years ago but would only remember once he saw it again. Arthur Rook's gaze finally made its way to Oneida, and when their eyes met she felt a strange tickle in her throat, like she was supposed to say something to this stranger, or he had something to say to her. He acted as though he knew something she didn't, which, as always, annoyed her.

A crack of thunder snapped Arthur from his trance. He shuffled forward and offered Oneida his hand, which she shook.

"Nice to meet you." His voice was uneven, as though he hadn't used it in a while.

"Where did you say you were from, Mr. Rook?" Mona asked.

"Los . . . Angeles." Arthur Rook shrugged, anticipating Oneida's knee-jerk response, she realized, of *So what the hell are you doing here?* "I had to leave," he said. "I was tired of it." He shook his head. "You need a decoder ring to order a hamburger."

"Oh, come on," said Mona. "Everybody knows about the secret menu at In-n-Out."

At that, Arthur Rook's face turned ashen and his eyes lost their intense focus, flicked back and forth, shone. In the awkward silence that followed, Mona offered to show him his room and he agreed—a little too quickly, Oneida thought, for a man who claimed he was just tired. She wasn't sure which mystery bothered her more: what Arthur Rook was doing in Ruby Falls, or what her mother had said to make him look like he wanted to cry.