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books

**ALSO BY PENELOPE DOUGLAS...**

***Stand-Alones***

Misconduct

Punk 57

Birthday Girl

Credence

Tryst Six Venom

***The Devil's Night Series***

Corrupt

Hideaway

Kill Switch

Conclave

Nightfall

Fire Night

***The Fall Away Series***

Bully

Until You

Rival

Falling Away

Aflame

Adrenaline

Next to Never

***The Hellbent Series***

(Fall Away Spin-Off/in progress)

Falls Boys

Pirate Girls

Quiet Ones

Night Thieves

Parade Alley

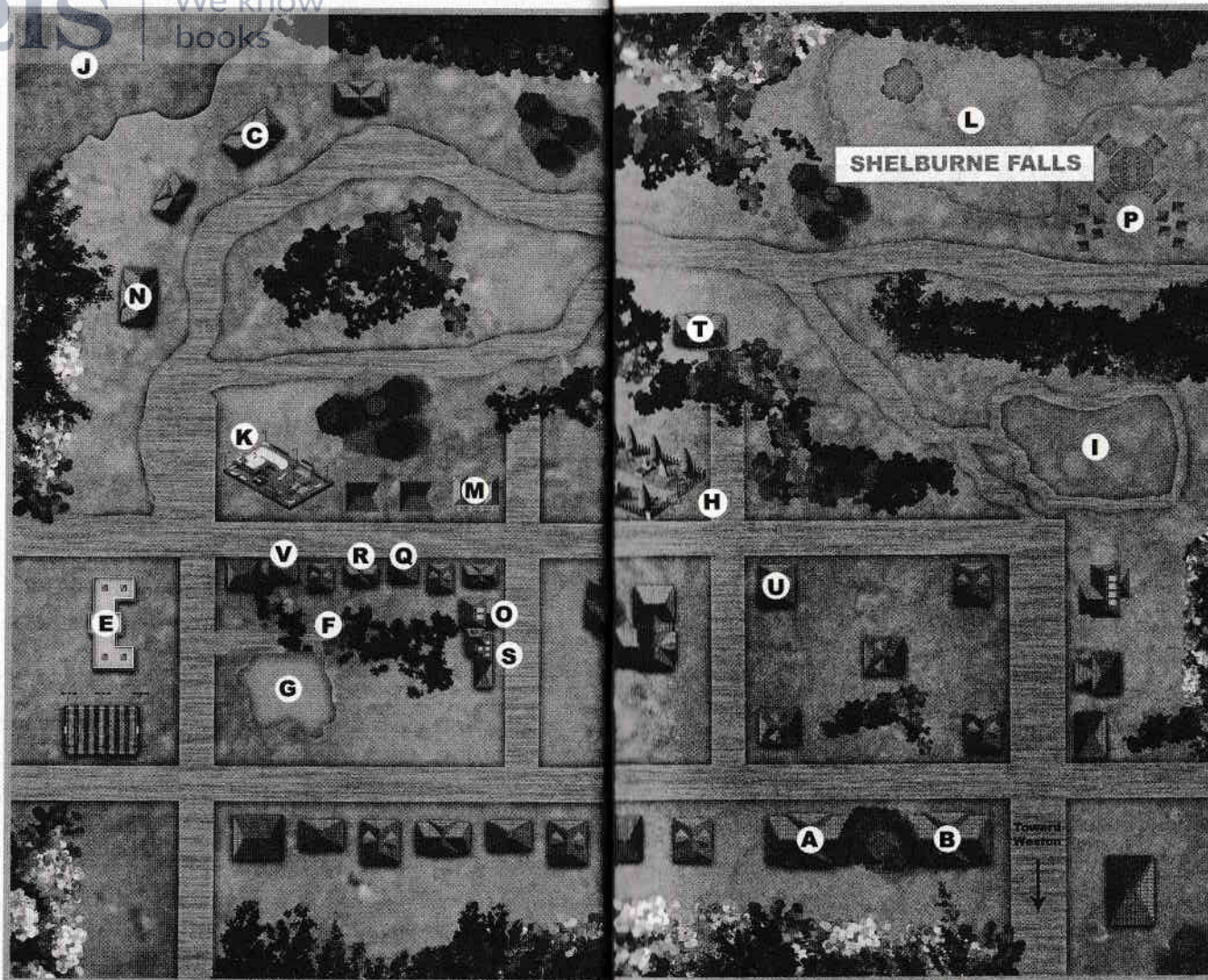
Fire Falls

# **FALLS BOYS**

PENELOPE  
DOUGLAS



PIATKUS



- A. HAWKE'S HOUSE
- B. DYLAN'S HOUSE
- C. KADE'S HOUSE
- E. HIGH SCHOOL
- F. EAGLE POINT PARK
- G. FISH POND
- H. CEMETERY
- I. THE LOOP/FALLSTOWN
- J. MINES OF SPAIN

- K. SKATE PARK
- L. BLACKHAWK LAKE
- M. JT RACING
- N. QUINN'S HOUSE
- O. QUINN'S BAKERY
- P. BLACKHAWK SUMMER CAMP
- Q. BOWLING ALLEY
- R. MOVIE THEATER
- S. RIVERTOWN
- T. THE DIETRICH HOUSE
- U TBD
- V. TBD

*\*This map is a loose representation of Shelburne Falls to give you a basic idea of the placement of homes and points of interest. There are more streets and businesses than what the map includes.*

R  
I  
V  
E  
R**CHAPTER  
ONE***Aro*

I don't know how I'll die, but God, I hope it's with a view. The rafters above cross over my head, ascending higher and higher and only visible by the faint light of the moon streaming through the windows.

But as I stretch my eyes, trying to see deeper into the darkness up there, it just becomes a void. Invisible. Empty space. I can't make out what's beyond, and I almost like that better.

Mystery. Discovery.

Hope.

I spend too much time looking up. More so than ever now.

"I sent him!" Hugo yells into his phone. "You got a problem with that?"

I wince, dropping my eyes.

"Flaco got arrested," he explains to a customer as I look over at him at his desk. "You got a new guy now."

Nicholas and Axel sit off to the side, cutting lines on a small round table with a girl in the middle. Her hands clasp a beer can in her lap.

*Not a girl.*

A kid.

She tries to look older with the blue streaks in her white hair, but she can't be more than thirteen.

A Metallica song covered in Spanish blasts over the speakers, but I still hear Hugo as he continues to gripe into the phone. "You know what the transiency rate is on runners? You think I got a damn secretary who can call and alert you every time one is replaced? You want the shit or not?"

I'm almost amused, but only because I like to see him stressed. It's a pain in the ass for the delivery service as well as the customer. You text, and the last thing you want is someone you don't know showing up at your house with the drugs you ordered. Hugo's right, though. Runners come and go. They get arrested, deported, they O.D....

Three guys line up behind me, waiting their turn as we stand in the repurposed fire house. The bay door behind me still works too, letting cars enter from time to time. It's like a massive garage, but despite what goes on in this building, I like it. It's old and still smells like the tires of the old fire engines they used to keep here.

I glance up once more, my body—for just a moment—way up there and looking down at all of this. From high above. Away. Safe. In the quiet.

I murmur to myself, "Tranquila."

*Peace.*

But then someone speaks. "Come on, kid," they say.

I look over, watching Axel hand the girl a severed straw and direct her to the coke on the table.

Every muscle in my body hardens, my legs immediately moving without thinking. I close the distance in two steps, grab the straw out of her hand, and shove her in the chest, pushing her dumbass back into her seat.

Axel and Nicholas rear back, looking up at me, but I'm talking before they have a chance. "What are you wasting blow on her for?" I snap.

Axel rolls his eyes, picking up another straw. "White kids got problems too, Aro."

He plugs one side of his nose, sticking the straw into the other, and leans down. I turn away, but I hear his snort behind me.

Hugo tosses his phone onto his desk, turns down the music, and I step back up, my hands in the pockets of my black bomber jacket.

"How are you?" he asks, picking up his half-eaten hamburger and taking a bite. He washes it down with a swig of beer and rises, digging in the file cabinet behind him.

When I don't answer, he turns to meet my eyes, my keys for the night jingling in his hand.

I stare at him.

He laughs under his breath, shaking his shaved head and I eye the scar on his eyebrow that he got from a fight when he was eighteen. He'd stitched himself up after downing half a bottle of tequila that night, and I looked up to him as a role model.

I don't anymore.

"So rude to me," he teases. "You used to love me."

*I was fifteen.* It's amazing how quickly someone can wise up.

He takes a seat and writes down my schedule on a slip of paper. "How are the kids doing?" he asks.

I remain silent, watching the table to my left out of the corner of my eye and making sure they don't task me with driving the Falls girl to the hospital tonight. She needs to stay on her side of the river.

"Your foster mom staying out of your way?" he continues, folding the paper.

I hold out my hand for it, still not answering.

He pauses, staring up at me like he's waiting for something. Like for me to smile and hang on his every word like I did when I was younger and stuck in the same foster home with him.

I shift my gaze over to Axel and Nicholas, brothers we met back in the day when we were all placed together. They're both lanky and tall, but Axel's black hair is styled with a pompadour and shaved on the sides, helping to amplify his neck tattoos. Nicholas's is trimmed but messy, still looking like the same kid I grew up with in a lot of ways.

The four of us have barely gone a day without working together or running into each other, but unlike me, they're not still in contact with their real families and helping to support siblings. I have a family, just a mother who doesn't want me.

Axel's hand drops to the girl's knee, and I narrow my eyes.

"Addresses are programmed in." Hugo slips the paper and burner phone into my palm and then hands me the car keys. "Take the Cherokee. And as usual, you get twenty percent of whatever you come back with, and don't..."

He grabs my wrist, and a gasp escapes from me as he squeezes it.

"Don't come back empty-handed again," he warns. "I can get her to do it for free." He gestures to the kid sitting with Nicholas and Axel. "I keep you on because we're fam-

ily, but it's getting harder to justify to Reeves that you're not better for other work now."

I clench my teeth together, yanking my wrist free and knowing exactly what he means by that. I'm eighteen now. If I want to keep making money, they may decide there's only one way I can do that and collecting rent and running stolen merchandise isn't it.

"That's not what I want to see, Aro," he tells me, his eyes softening, "but..." He hesitates, and I stuff the shit into my pocket, keeping the keys in my hand. "Maybe it's better, you know? More money, a lot less risk..."

I shoot him a look.

"You're going to get caught," he states as if there's no doubt. "It's only a matter of time. And then, what happens to Matty and Bianca?"

I turn to leave, but he takes my arm, pulls off my hood, and yanks me in by the back of the neck.

I stiffen, but I don't fight. I don't fear him. Not *him*.

"He's coming tonight," he says.

I stare into his eyes, unfaltering, except for the tiny coil in my stomach.

"He wants an assortment of young and pretty." His eyes don't leave mine. "It'll suck, and it won't feel good, but it'll keep you out of jail and you'll have a wad of cash in your fist when it's over."

I would rather walk into oncoming traffic. I can get a wad of cash without taking off my clothes.

He lowers his voice, but I know the trio to my left is watching. "You don't even have to smile for him. A él le gusta cuando a las chicas no les gusta."

*He likes it when the girls don't like it.*

"Let me go," I say.

But I don't wait for it. I whip out of his hold, pulling up the hood of the sweatshirt I wear underneath my jacket and spin around.

"Believe it or not, I do care about you," he tells my back.

Yeah, cares about me enough to turn me out. *Fuck you.*

I reach over, grabbing a fistful of the girl's purple and white tie-dye sweatshirt, and haul her ass out of her seat. Drinks topple as the table nearly falls over, saved only by Nicholas.

"Hey!" she yells, stumbling to my side.

"Aro, what the hell?" Axel barks.

But I ignore them, swinging us around and tossing Hugo a look. "I'm taking help."

If Reeves is coming, then she's leaving. I push her in front of me, following her out and not sure why I give a shit. I guess I wish someone had done the same for me years ago.

I push through the door, hearing Hugo shout behind me, "And stay away from those little Pirate shits!"

The steel door falls shut, and the kid spins around, but I grab her arm and pull her forward again before she has a chance to run.

"Let me go!" she yells, her white hair falling into her face, the blue chunks vibrant like she just redid them. Technically, she's one of those *little Pirate shits*—a resident of Shelburne Falls, that clean, picturesque, All-American, CW lobotomy, seven miles away that loves to rub their money, cars, and Jared Trent in our faces, because he is their only bragging right, as far as I'm concerned.

But for some reason, they didn't want this girl, so she came over here to Weston to find people who did. I shove her toward the Jeep. "Get in the goddamn car."

I round the rear of the old navy-blue vehicle, the remnants of a *My Kid Is an Honor Student at Charles A. Arthur*

*Middle School* bumper sticker hanging on for dear life on the bottom of the back windshield. Who knows how many owners ago that was, and I have no idea where Charles A. Arthur Middle School is.

I climb into the car and slam the door. "Tommy, right?" I ask. She's only been hanging out at the garage for a few weeks, and we've never spoken until now.

She throws me a look but doesn't answer.

I start the car. "So, what's up, Tommy? You got a family to support? Drughead parents? Are you starving?"

"No."

I shift the car into Drive and glance at her. "Are you abused at home?"

She turns her scowl on me, her eyebrows pinched together.

*Yeah, didn't think so.* "Then you should keep your ass there," I tell her. "It's so easy to slum when you have the security of knowing you don't really have to be here, isn't it? You get to leave anytime. You'll never be us."

She grabs the handle, about to throw her shoulder into the door to scurry out, but I click the locks just in time.

She glares at me. "You want me to go, but you won't let me leave!"

"Just shut up."

I take off, speeding out of the deserted parking lot, overgrown weeds spilling through the chain-link fence that separates the property from the field behind it. The August humidity makes the heat worse, and I jack up the A/C, desperate to remove my coat and hoodie, but a night of crime is kind of like riding a motorcycle. It's best to cover as much of you as possible.

"I get fifty percent of your twenty," she points out.

I turn left, watching the road. "Or you can get a hundred percent of a fat lip. How about that?"

Little punk actually thinks I want her tagging along tonight. No clue that I just saved her ass, and I'm damn-well not sharing my take on top of it.

I pull up in front of Lafferty's Liquor, park on the curb across the street, and leave the engine running. The old man who runs the place—Ted—moves past the windows from his position behind the counter.

I look over at Tommy. "Stay here," I tell her. "Keep the engine running. If a cop comes by—or an adult—you tell them you're waiting for your sister. Play on your phone while you say it, so they can't see how nervous your eyes look right now."

She furrows her brow.

I continue. "Don't stutter when you talk to anyone. And if you leave with this car, I will prank call 911 and tell them your dad is beating on me at your house. I think they know the address, Dietrich."

Her face falls, realizing I know exactly who she is. I know all the Pirates. She purses her lips, but she keeps her damn mouth shut. She's smarter than she looks, I guess.

Opening the door, I climb out of the SUV, resisting the urge to adjust the baton digging into my back as it sits just inside the waist of my jeans and hidden underneath my jacket.

Walking across the street, I ignore the Sentra honking as it speeds by and pull open the door to the liquor store. I see the top of a customer's head as they dig into the beer cooler at the far back, but tip my chin back down, avoiding the two cameras, one at the far right and one behind the counter.

I cast my gaze up, meeting the owner's eyes. I can just see the exhale as he realizes what day it is. As if he didn't know.

I come up to the counter but position myself a little off to the side to allow his customer to step up. I hold Ted's eyes until he finally tears his away from mine.

He rings up the beer, the guy pays and he takes his shit, walking out the door. As soon as the door closes, I grab the plastic display case of cigars on the counter, his worried eyes flashing to his goods as he sucks in a breath.

But I don't do it. I pluck a package of gum out of the box next to it and set it down, pushing it toward him. He only waits two seconds, because that's all it takes to realize what it took eighteen broken bottles of Dewar's to learn last time.

Reaching into the register, he counts out rent and pushes it with the gum toward me. I swipe it off the counter and walk for the door, spotting a rack of Hostess treats and snatch a package of powdered donuts, leaving the shop.

I tense as I cross the street, feeling it every time that I do this. The reminder that every action justifies a reaction, and this might be the day. He could come barreling out the door after me. A cop could be watching, waiting to catch me in the act.

Maybe I'll feel something hit my back, and it's the last thing I'll ever feel.

I don't turn around. I keep my head up, each step bringing me closer to safety.

I open the door, hold my breath, and slide into my seat, locking the doors like I do every time.

Sweat trickles down my back.

"Did it go okay?" the kid asks.

I toss the donuts into her lap, strap on my seatbelt, and pull away from the curb, keeping my eyes on the rearview mirror and still waiting.