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We know
books

THINGS I WANTED TO SAY
(BUT NEVER DID)

MONICA MURPHY



PENGUIN BOOKS

air about him that says he owns everything. The boy is watching me.

The man is watching my mother.

The boy raises his brows, tilting his head in my direction. I turn away from him, not wanting to see the smug satisfaction on his stupidly handsome face. He knows I figured it out. He already had figured it out.

And damn him, he was right.

ONE SUMMER

SENIOR YEAR

I WALK the hallowed halls of Lancaster Prep, my head ducked down, studying my feet as I place one in front of the other. Again and again and again. My shiny new penny loafers pinch my feet and the wool of my green and navy plaid skirt is itchy against my thighs. I remember wanting to come here so badly the summer before my freshman year, and how angry I was that my parents wouldn't pay the tremendous amount of money it cost to go to Lancaster.

Now I'm here, for one year only. My final year in high school. It's late August, and while the air is cool, thanks to the ocean breeze outside, it's stifling in this old building with the beautiful wood paneling and the horribly outdated cooling system. Do they even have central heat and air in this place?

Probably not.

"Come on," Mother says through her teeth, snapping her fingers at her waist to get me to walk beside her.

I hurry my steps, keeping pace with her, lifting my head to see other students pass by us with curious expressions on their faces, their gazes taking in the familiar Lancaster uniform that I'm wearing.

A new girl. A transfer. I'm sure they'll be curious. I'm sure they'll Google my name, and find out my family scandal.

I came out mostly unscathed. Mother made sure of that. She wasn't about to let my future crumble. She knows people, and she used that power to ensure that I would be protected.

That's why I'm here, at Lancaster Prep. The most elite boarding school on the east coast. Founded by one of the richest, oldest families in the country. The Lancasters go way back, to the time of the Vanderbilts, the Astors and the Rockefellers. Their money is so old, most don't know exactly where it originally came from.

Like me. I've heard maybe shipping? Oil? Bought up all available land on the east coast and then sold it over the years. I don't know. I don't really care. I just know they're filthy rich.

And for years, my mother, my prim and proper mother, was having a raging affair with Augustus Lancaster the fifth.

"Here we are," Mother singsongs, and I can hear the slight tremble in her voice. She's nervous for me, and I stand taller, wanting to prove to her that I'm not scared. "The admissions office."

She opens the door and I enter first, smiling at the older woman sitting behind the high wooden counter. She rises slowly to her

feet, clad in a navy skirt suit, the jacket barely able to come around her ample bustline.

"Good morning!" The woman smiles at my mother before her gaze lands on me. "You must be Summer Savage," she says with an overly friendly smile.

"I'm her mother, Janine Weatherstone." She always holds out her hand in a way that makes it seem like she's a queen greeting her loyal subjects. I can tell this doesn't impress the woman whatsoever, but she takes her hand anyway, weakly shaking the tips of her fingers.

"Lovely to meet you. We're so glad to have Summer here for her senior year." The woman's expression grows solemn. "Such a tragedy, what happened. I'm sorry for your loss."

Mother glares. That is the last thing she wants to talk about, especially with a stranger. "Thank you," she says crisply. "Is Mr. Matthews available?"

The woman stands up straight. "Of course! I thought you'd want Summer's schedule so she can get going. First period has already started, I'm afraid." She casts me a look of judgment. Like it's my fault I'm late.

I can't help it that it took Mother forever to pack her things and leave the hotel room, complaining the entire time that she didn't get enough sleep. I, on the other hand, have been up since six, too anxious to sleep.

"Yes, please give us her schedule," Mother demands. "And we need to talk to Mr. Matthews first before she goes to class. I'm sure he'll write her an excuse."

"Of course." The woman—she must be the headmaster's secretary—hands over a pale pink slip to me. Mother snatches it out

of her grip, glancing over my list of classes, and I stand there, anxiously awaiting a glimpse.

"She wasn't put in honors English," Mother says, shoving the schedule in my direction, her irritation clear.

Disappointment fills me as I scan the list. Senior English. World Religions. Math. Advanced French. There's a free period listed right after lunch, and American Government is my last class. "I'm okay with this schedule," I tell Mother, but her lips thin and she shakes her head.

"You're an excellent writer, Summer. Always scribbling in those journals of yours," Mother says. Her voice is low, but I see the way the secretary perks up.

My cheeks color and I shrug. "It's nothing. Please don't change the schedule. I'll be fine."

"Let's have you go into Headmaster Matthews' office and you can wait for him in there," the woman says, waving toward a partially open door behind her. "He's on campus right now but I'll let him know you're waiting. He'll be right in."

I follow Mother into the cramped office, the both of us settling into the chairs facing the giant, ornate desk as the secretary shuts the door with a quiet click. The moment Mother knows we're alone, she turns on me, her scowl obvious.

"What do you mean, you don't want honors English?" she hisses.

"I don't want to cause any trouble." I've become a mere shadow of myself since the accident happened, not wanting to draw attention. "It's enough already, don't you think? That you were able to pull some strings to get me in here."

"It's the least I could do, considering how long I've known Augie," Mother mutters, referring to her former lover.

The one who ended up divorcing his wife, thanks to my mother's years-long affair with her husband. It was a huge scandal. One splashed all over the internet and tabloids. It broke my stepfather's heart. And then it enraged him.

It was not a pleasant experience.

The door suddenly creaks open and in walks a handsome older man. Headmaster Matthews, I assume. He smiles at us, his dark eyes crinkling in the corners, his grin wide, showing off dazzling white teeth. He shuts the door and moves so he's standing behind his desk as some sort of barrier, and holds his hand out to Mother first.

"Mrs. Weatherstone, an absolute pleasure to meet you," he says, his voice smooth, his expression pleasant.

She rises to her feet and gives his hand a quick shake. "Thank you for meeting with us, Mr. Matthews."

They both settle in their chairs, smiling at each other and I blink at the two of them. It's almost as if they've forgotten all about me.

"This is Summer," Mother says, indicating me with a tilt of her head.

"Summer, we are so glad to have you here, attending our prestigious school," Mr. Matthews says, his voice warm and sincere. "I've personally looked over your transcripts, and I'm most impressed with your classes. And your grades."

"Thank you." I'm a good student. A little out of control in my earlier years and a little boy crazy, but I've always got good grades.

"You had some trouble early on though," he continues, his gaze meeting mine. "I assume you've straightened up since then?"

I stiffen my spine, nodding. "Yes, sir."

"She's not enrolled in honors English," Mother says, and I glare at her. She ignores me. "Summer is an excellent writer. She was on the newspaper staff at her previous school. She's won awards for her writing. It's exceptional."

"Ah, I'm afraid getting into the senior honors English class here at Lancaster is a privilege, not a right. The students in Mr. Figueroa's class have worked hard the last three years. He handpicks them at the end of their junior year, and there's only twenty in the class." Mr. Matthews rests his forearms on top of his desk, his hands clasped. "I'm afraid I can't just enroll Summer without his consent."

"Maybe you could talk to him." Mother's voice is lilting. Pleasant.

His smile never falters. "I'm afraid not."

"Maybe you could extend a favor my way." Her voice becomes a little sterner.

"It's Figueroa's class, not mine."

Her smile is gone. "Maybe I can reach out to Mr. Lancaster and see what he could do for me."

I want to die. This is so embarrassing. I don't care about the honors English class. I don't want to stand out. I definitely don't want to make a scene. Me walking into a classroom of twenty

students who've risen up the ranks for the last three years would be a nightmare. They'd automatically hate me.

Matthews' lips quiver the slightest bit and his gaze dims. "I'll make it happen."

"See that you do." Her smile returns and Mother takes a deep breath, glancing over at me. "Will this alter her schedule dramatically?"

"No. No, it shouldn't." He finally frowns as he turns toward the computer on his desk. He starts tapping away at the keyboard, the screen angled just enough toward us that I see my information brought up on the screen.

My transcripts. Notes from previous teachers and my counselor throughout the years. Administration notes take up the most of it.

Summer is disruptive in class. Lashes out for no reason.

Was caught vaping in the bathroom. Two-day suspension.

Caught having sex in the gymnasium. Five-day suspension.

Detained and searched. Found with her mother's Xanax prescription in her backpack. Two-day suspension.

And that was all by the end of sophomore year.

My stepfather—God rest his soul—put the hammer down after the Xanax incident. He threatened to put me in military school for the remainder of my high school years. I cried and begged, pleaded with him on my knees not to make me go. They enrolled me. It was going to happen.

And then my mother's affair with Lancaster became public, and he forgot all about me. He focused on my mother instead.

We moved out. Found a smaller apartment. The media was so focused on my family, I retreated into myself. Stopped causing trouble at school and focused solely on my schoolwork. Lost all of my friends. Mother worked Jonas over. And over. And over.

Until we moved back into his house in the spring. Yates soon returned, home from college, and he was so glad to see me. He lit candles in his room and forced me to meet him that night. Put his hand over my mouth and his hand in my pants before he—

“Ah, we’ll have to switch a couple of your classes,” Mr. Matthews says, disrupting my thoughts, “but that shouldn’t be a problem.”

He taps a few more keys, angling the screen more toward himself, as if he just realized that we could read everything about me. Mother keeps up the pretense, but I see the tightening of her lips, the clouds in her eyes.

Those old memories aren’t pleasant. I wasn’t happy—far from it. No one was listening to me. I only found absolute peace when I got away from Yates and it was just Mom and me. Living with him, having to deal with him all the time, his persistence eventually wore me down. More times than I could count.

And it was...horrible.

Knowing that I was about to spend my entire summer with him, the summer before my senior year, pushed me to my limits. I did something that’s almost...scary.

But it got me away from him.

Forever.

“I just sent your new schedule to the printer. Vivian will have it ready for you. Good luck today, Summer,” Headmaster Matthews says, his shrewd gaze landing on me.

You’re going to need it.

I can hear the unspoken words there, hovering in the room. Oblivious to it all and pleased with getting her way, Mother stands and I rise too, fighting the nerves swimming in my stomach.

“Thank you for understanding our needs,” Mother says. “We’re so grateful.”

“Of course. Anything for a—*friend* of Mr. Lancaster’s,” he says.

I catch the emphasis the headmaster made. So does Mother. She marches out of his tiny office with her head held high, snatching the newly printed schedule from Vivian’s fingers without so much as a thank you as we pass by her. Vivian mutters something under her breath, and I pretend like I didn’t hear it, though I did.

“Whore,” is what she whispered.

The word follows my mother everywhere she goes, and she’s an expert at ignoring people. I don’t know how she does it. I remember the boy I met. The son of the man she had the affair with, and how he called me a whore too. Those memories linger in the forefront of my mind, especially when I’m in bed late at night. I remember how he made me feel. His cruel words, his brutal kiss.

I’ve been chasing after that feeling ever since.

TWO
SUMMER

I ENTER the honors English class early, since I already missed most of first period, and go to the desk where a giant, dark-haired man is sitting, chatting with a couple of students. The girls are pretty, their uniforms immaculate, their hair a matching golden blonde, long and parted in the middle. They're carefree in the way they toss their heads back and laugh at something the teacher said, and I envy just how comfortable they are. They're so confident, so sure of themselves, and I understand why. They've been here for three years; they've put in the time, and now they're on top. The seniors. Ready to rule the school.

And here I am, barging into their class thanks to my overbearing mother, as if I belong here. I don't.

And I know it.

When they all turn to look at me, their expressions full of disdain, I shrink back from them, handing over my schedule to Mr. Figueroa with shaky fingers.

"Hi. I'm in this class," I say.

He glances over the schedule, his dark brows drawing together. "I'm afraid there must be some mistake."

I say nothing. Just glance around the classroom, pretending I don't know what just happened in the headmaster's office.

Figueroa picks up the phone on his desk and dials a three-number extension. "Hey. Yes, I have a—" he looks over my schedule, "—Summer Savage here, claiming she's in Senior Honors?"

He goes quiet, listening to whatever Headmaster Matthews is telling him and I want to disappear into myself. The girls are obviously listening, their gazes cutting to me, and one of them leans over to whisper to the other, her hand cupped around the other girl's ear so I can't hear them.

They don't bother trying to hide they're talking about me. I suppose I shouldn't be surprised.

"I see." His voice is low. A little cold. "All right then. Thank you." He hangs up the phone and looks at me, his expression impassive as he hands me back my schedule. "You can go ahead and sit down, Miss Savage. Class will begin in a few minutes."

I do as he says, sitting in the very front, on the farthest side of the classroom. I pull out a fresh notebook and a pen, taking the cap off with my teeth before I open the notebook, smoothing my hand down the blank page. I'm filled with the urge to write in my journal, but it's buried deep in my backpack and I don't want to pull it out, only to have to put it away.

My journal carries all of my thoughts. My feelings. Notes and doodles. Scraps of paper I wanted to save. A receipt from the time my friends and I went to that new coffee shop, right before

I moved. A concert ticket stub when I went to see Harry Styles. A note from Yates, threatening me. A crumpled, stained with champagne cocktail napkin taken from that party, the night I kissed that terrible boy. It was a dark navy blue, with a giant white L in the dead center.

For Lancaster.

Sometimes I like to flip through my journal, running my fingers over the bits of paper, rereading my entries. Some are hard to read, like the night of the fire. My interactions with my stepbrother. The argument with my stepfather. My falling out with my friends.

Others make me smile. Still others make me yearn for the old times, when I was still young and innocent and believed there were good people in the world.

Now I'm not so sure if any even exist.

Students slowly trickle into the classroom, every single one of them looking at me with confusion in their eyes. They expect to know every single person in this class, so I understand why I trip them up.

"Okay, are we all here? I think so." Figueroa stands and goes to the white board, writing *Romeo and Juliet* in blue ink. "Welcome to senior honors English. It is truly an honor to be here." He smiles. The class chuckles. He points at the board with his capped marker. "This was your summer reading assignment. I hope you're all fully prepared for the assignments I'm about to make."

He sends me a doubtful look and I smile in return, writing *Romeo and Juliet* on the first line of my page. This is too easy. I

read this book my sophomore year. I'll need a refresher, but I'm not worried.

"I'm sure you've all noticed we have a new student in here with us. Please say hello to Summer." His gaze never leaves mine as he speaks, and I look away first, uncomfortable with his scrutiny.

A few people offer murmured hellos, but not too many. I'm sure they hate that I'm in here with them. In their eyes, I'm sure they believe I don't belong here.

The door suddenly bursts open and a boy strides in, his head turned as he yells to someone in the hall. The door slams shut behind him, and everything within me comes alive. I sit up straight. My skin prickles. My heart races. My breath stalls in my throat, and sweat beads along my hairline.

I know who it is. I told myself he wouldn't be here, but I was wrong.

He is.

Whit Lancaster. The boy who kissed me. Who wanted to fuck me and called me a whore when we were barely teenagers. He's taller than I remember. Well over six feet, and his shoulders look so broad, clad in the requisite navy uniform jacket. His arrogance is palpable. He saunters into the classroom as if he owns the place, and technically, he does.

After all, it's his family name on the sign.

I stare, caught up in his magnificent face. It's better than I remember. He's heartbreakingly beautiful. Piercing blue eyes, sharp cheekbones, aquiline nose, angled jawline. His mouth is lush, his lips a deep pink and he bares his teeth in a smile for our teacher that is hopelessly fake.