

**LBRIS**

We know  
books

# **OUR FAULT**

**MERCEDES  
RON**

*Bloom books*

## PROLOGUE

IF NICK AND I HAD BROKEN UP MORE THAN A YEAR AGO, why was I crying as if it had only really happened now? At one point, I had to pull off the road, cut the motor, and hug the wheel so I could sob without worrying about crashing into anyone.

I cried for what we had been; I cried for what we could have been; I cried for his sick mother and his baby sister... I cried for him, for disappointing him, for breaking his heart, for getting him to love me and then showing him love didn't exist, at least not without pain, and that pain had now scarred him for life.

I cried for Noah, the Noah I had been when I was with him. That Noah full of life, the Noah who, despite her inner demons, had known how to love with all her heart. I had loved him more than anybody, and that was something to grieve, too. When you meet the person you want to spend the rest of your life with, there's no going back. Lots of people never learn what that feels like. I knew that Nick was the love of my life, the man I wanted to be the father of my children, the man I wanted by my side through good and bad, in sickness and in health, till death did us part.

Nick was *the one*; he was my other half, and now I'd have to learn to live without him.

**LBRIS**

We know  
books

*Part One*

**WE MEET AGAIN**

|  
*Noah*

THE NOISE AT THE AIRPORT WAS DEAFENING. PEOPLE WERE coming and going frantically, dragging their suitcases, their carts, their children. I looked at the screen overhead, trying to find my destination and the exact time of my departure. I didn't like traveling on my own—I'd never cared much for flying at all—but there weren't many options. I was alone now; it was just me and no one else.

I looked at my watch and back at the screen. I had time to spare. I could drink a coffee in the terminal and read a while. That would probably calm me down. I walked through the metal detectors. I hated that, hated getting patted down, and it always happened because I always had something that set off the alarm. Maybe it was that heart of iron I'd been told I carried in my chest.

I dropped my backpack on the conveyor belt, took off my watch and bracelets, took off the necklace with the pendant that I always wore—even if I should have taken it off a long time ago—and set it all down next to my cell phone and the spare change I had in my pocket.

"Your shoes, too, miss," the young TSA worker said in a weary tone. I got it—the job was the very definition of dull; it probably gave you brain damage, doing and saying the same things over and over, all day, every day. I put my white Chucks on the tray and was glad I'd chosen plain socks instead of little kiddy ones with some embarrassing design. As my things moved forward on the belt, I passed through the scanner, and of course, it started beeping.

"Step to the side, please, hold out your arms and spread your legs," the person ordered, and I sighed. Did I have something metal on me, a sharp object, some kind of...?

"I don't have anything on me," I said, letting the officer pat me down. "This always happens. I don't know why. Maybe it's a filling."

The guy grinned, but that only made me wish he'd take his hands off me sooner.

When he finally let me go, I grabbed my things and went straight to the duty-free shop. Hello? Giant Toblerones? Sign me up. That was the one pleasant thing about going to the airport. I bought two, stored them both in my hand luggage, and went to find my departure gate. LAX was huge, but luckily, I didn't have to go far. Walking over arrows meant to point me in the right direction, I passed by signs that said *goodbye* in dozens of languages before I reached where I was going. The gate was empty, so I grabbed a chair near the window, took out my book, and started in on my Toblerone.

Things went fine until the letter I'd stuffed between the pages fell into my lap, reviving memories I'd sworn were

dead and buried. I felt something hollow in the pit of my stomach as a stream of images rose in my mind, and what had been a relaxing day took a nosedive.

---

NINE MONTHS EARLIER...

The news that Nicholas was leaving reached me through unexpected channels. No one had wanted to talk to me about him, and it was clear he'd told everyone not to in no uncertain terms. Even Jenna was mum on the subject, and I knew they'd seen each other more than once. The worry I saw on her face sometimes must have reflected things she'd seen when she and Lion had gone to Nick's apartment. Her back was against the wall. Once again, that was my fault.

I hadn't seen Nick again, and I couldn't have predicted how he'd act. Just two weeks after we broke up, boxes with my things in them appeared at my apartment. When I saw N in an animal crate, I had an anxiety attack and cried my eyes out until I was exhausted. Our poor little kitty; now he was all mine... I had to leave him with my mother because my roommate was allergic. It was hard to say goodbye, but I didn't have another option.

That period in my life when I just cried and cried, I referred to as my dark ages, because that was how it was: I was in a black tunnel with no lights, sunken in shadows, unable to come out even when the sun shone, even when I had a light on by my bed. I'd had almost daily panic attacks

until I finally went to the doctor, and she sent me straight to a psychiatrist.

At first, I wasn't remotely interested in therapy, but I guessed it did help me because at last I started getting up in the morning and doing the basic things a human being did...until that night. The night I realized Nick was leaving, that everything was over, and that this time it was forever.

I found out through an everyday conversation at the cafeteria on campus. Even the college girls knew more about Nick than I did at that time.

This girl was gossiping about my boyfriend—sorry, ex-boyfriend—and without realizing it, informed me that he was headed to New York in just a few days.

Something took hold of my body and forced me to get into my car and drive to his apartment. I had tried not to think about that place, about all that had happened, but I couldn't let him leave, not without seeing him, not without at least talking. It was our first time seeing each other since the night we'd broken up.

With my hands trembling, my legs on the verge of buckling over the asphalt, I made it to his building, got in the elevator, and stood in front of his door.

What was I going to tell him? What could I do to make him forgive me, to keep him from going, to get him to love me again?

I nearly fainted as I rang the doorbell. I was scared, sad, yearning, as he pulled the door open.

We didn't say anything at first; we just looked. He hadn't

expected me. I'd almost guarantee his plan had been to go without looking back, to forget me, to pretend I'd never existed. He didn't realize I wouldn't make it that easy for him.

The tension was almost palpable. He looked incredible: dark jeans, white shirt, hair messy. Incredible, but there was something more; he always looked good, but that look, that light that appeared in his eyes whenever he saw me arrive, was gone, and with it, the magic that had entranced us whenever we'd stood across from each other.

He was so handsome, so tall, and he used to be mine... I felt like I was being punished, like someone was rubbing my nose in all that I'd lost.

"What are you doing here?" His voice was cold as ice, and hard, and made me emerge from my stupor.

"I, uh..." My voice failed me. What could I tell him? What could I do to get him to look at me as if I were the apple of his eyes, his hope, his life?

He didn't even seem to want to listen and tried to shut the door in my face, but I made a decision: if I had to fight, I'd fight. I wouldn't let him go. I couldn't lose him because without him, there was no way I could survive. My soul hurt when I saw him there and couldn't even ask him to embrace me, to calm that pain that consumed me from one day to the next. I stopped him, pushed my way through, invaded his apartment—that apartment that had once been my refuge.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asked, following me into the living room. It was unrecognizable: there were boxes everywhere, white sheets on the sofa and coffee table,

and memories, endless memories of breakfasts together, kisses stolen on the sofa, cuddles while watching movies, him cooking, me sighing with pleasure on the cushions as he took my breath away...

All that was gone. There was nothing left.

Then the tears started welling in my eyes, and unable to contain myself, I said, stuttering, "You can't leave."

"Go away, Noah. I'm not doing this," he replied, his jaw clenched.

His tone surprised me, and I sobbed harder. No. No, dammit, I wasn't going. Not without him, at least.

"Nick, please. I can't lose you." My words weren't eloquent, but they were sincere, totally sincere. I couldn't survive a life without him.

Nicholas seemed to be breathing harder. I was scared I was pressuring him too much. But I was there; I might as well give it my all.

"Leave."

His command was clear and concise, but I was an expert at disobeying him. I always had been. I wasn't going to change now.

"You don't miss me at all?" I asked. My voice cracked halfway through the sentence. I looked around, then back at him. "I mean, I can barely breathe without you... I can barely get up in the morning. I go to bed thinking about you. I get up thinking about you. I cry over you..."

I wiped away my tears impatiently. Nicholas stepped forward—not to calm me down, but the opposite: He grabbed my arms tight. Too tight.

"What the hell do you think I do?" he asked, enraged. "You destroyed me, goddammit!"

Feeling his hands on my skin, even if the gesture was an ugly one, gave me strength. I had missed the contact with him so badly, it felt like a shot of adrenaline right into the middle of my soul.

"I'm sorry," I said, lowering my head. It was one thing to feel him, another to look into those gorgeous eyes and see them seethe with hatred. "I made a mistake. A huge one, unforgivable, but you can't let that ruin what we have." I looked up. This time, I needed him to believe me, to see that I was speaking from the heart. "I'll never love anyone the way I love you."

Those words seemed to burn, because he pulled away, turned, ran his hands through his hair in desperation, and then looked back. He seemed almost deranged, caught in the worst struggle of his life.

"How could you?" he asked, and my heart broke again as I heard how hard it was for him to speak.

I took a hesitant step forward. He was hurt, it was my fault, and all I wanted was for him to hold me in his arms, embrace me again, tell me there was a solution to it all.

"I don't even remember..." I said in anguish. And that was true—I didn't. My mind had blocked it out; that was how destroyed I had been on that fateful night when I thought he had done the same thing as I; the notion that I couldn't stop him had made my mind, my soul, pull away from my body. "I don't remember anything but you, Nick. I need you to forgive me. I need you to look at me the

way you used to.” I lost my train of thought; my heart was aching. Even though I saw him there, he felt so far away. “Tell me what I can do to make you forgive me...”

He looked at me incredulously, as if I were asking for the impossible, as if my words were ridiculous, incoherent even.

And that was how I felt, too. Could I have forgiven someone for cheating on me? Would I have forgiven Nick?

I felt an immense ache in my chest. That was enough for me to know the answer... No, of course I wouldn't have. The mere thought of it made me want to pull out my hair and forget the image—Nick and another woman—that question conjured up. I wiped my tears away with my forearm, realizing there was no point. We remained in silence for a few moments, and I knew I needed to go. I couldn't bear the feeling of loss, and I *had* lost him, and no amount of begging would bring him back.

My tears continued streaming down silently. So that was our goodbye. Goodbye... My God, I was telling Nick goodbye! What was the script for that? How did you say goodbye to the person you loved most, the one you needed in your life?

I walked toward the door, but Nick moved past me, planted his lips on mine, grabbed my shoulders, pulled me close, immobilizing me as I received a kiss I'd never have expected.

I took his face in my hands. I didn't have time to analyze what was going on. My back struck the wall, and he held me there, searching for my mouth as if it were his lifeline. I brought him close as his tongue explored my mouth and his

hands slid down my body. But then something changed; his attitude became more insistent, his kiss harder, colder. He pulled back, pressing me away from him with force.

“You shouldn't be here,” he said. I opened my eyes and saw the tears streaking down his cheeks. I'd never seen him cry like that. Never.

I felt suffocated; I needed to go. What we were doing wasn't right, not at all. I wanted to stroke his cheek, wipe away those tears, hug him, say I was sorry a thousand times over. I didn't know what he saw in my face just then, but his eyes seemed to light up with rage and pain, a pain I knew all too well.

“I loved you,” he said, burying his head in my neck.

I felt him trembling, and I grabbed hold of him as though I never wanted to let him go.

“I loved you, dammit!” he repeated, shouting this time, pulling away from me.

He stepped back to look at me, as though he'd never seen me before; then he looked down; then he looked me in the eyes. “Get out of this apartment, and don't ever think about coming back.”

I knew then that everything was lost. Tears were continuing to fall from his eyes, but there wasn't a trace of love in them anymore, just pain—pain and hatred—and there was nothing I could do about it. I'd thought I could get him back, had thought my love for him would be enough, but I was oh, so wrong. Hate was just one step away from love...and I was watching him take that step.

I hadn't seen him since.

“Miss,” I heard a voice next to me say, bringing me back to reality.

I looked up from the letter and saw a flight attendant looking at me impatiently.

“Yes?” I said, sitting up, and the book and the Toblerone in my lap fell to the ground.

I looked around. Shit! I was the last one left at the gate. The airline employees were staring at me from the Jetway that led to the plane. I stood up. Dammit!

“I’m sorry,” I said, digging around inside my backpack for my ID and ticket. The girl took them and walked to the doorway. I followed her, looking around beforehand to make sure I wasn’t leaving anything behind.

“Your seat is in the back to the right... Have a good flight.”

I nodded and walked down the passageway, a nervous feeling in the pit of my stomach.

A six-hour flight to New York. That was what I had ahead of me.

The trip seemed eternal. I didn’t want to even think of how muggy New York would be in mid-July, and I was happy I wouldn’t be there long. I only had one thing I needed to do.

---

I walked straight from the plane to the AirTrain, which I rode to the Jamaica station. From there, I’d catch the train to East Hampton. I couldn’t believe I was going somewhere so

snooty, somewhere I’d never once cared about visiting, but Jenna—Jenna!—had wanted to pull out all the stops for her wedding and had spent months organizing every last detail. Her mother had owned a mansion there forever, and they almost always summered there. Jenna loved it, it harbored all her childhood memories, and of course, it was *the* place to get married for a rich girl like her. I’d looked around online to see how many millions the houses there cost. It was insane.

Jenna had told me she wanted me to spend a week with her before the wedding. It was Tuesday, and she wouldn’t be giving up the single life forever until that Sunday. Lots of people said it was crazy to get married at nineteen, but who was I to judge another couple? If they loved each other and were ready and were certain of their love, then to hell with convention.

So there I was, in Jamaica station, with another two and a half hours on the train ahead of me to accept the fact that I wouldn’t just be seeing my best friend get married, I’d be seeing Nicholas Leister again after ten months of knowing nothing of him apart from what little I’d found out on the web.

Nick was the best man, and I was one of the bridesmaids... Just imagine. Maybe the time had come for our wounds to heal. Maybe it was time to forgive. I didn’t know, but one thing was clear: we were going to be face-to-face, and it might lead to World War III.