

**LBRIS**

We know  
books

# slammed

**Colleen Hoover**



**SIMON &  
SCHUSTER**

London · New York · Sydney · Toronto · New Delhi

**LBRIS**

We know  
books

**part  
one**

## 1.

*I'm as nowhere as I can be,  
Could you add some somewhere to me?*

—THE AVETT BROTHERS, "SALINA"

KEL AND I LOAD THE LAST TWO BOXES INTO THE U-HAUL. I slide the door down and pull the latch shut, locking up eighteen years of memories, all of which include my dad.

It's been six months since he passed away. Long enough that my nine-year-old brother, Kel, doesn't cry every time we talk about him, but recent enough that we're being forced to accept the financial aftermath that comes to a newly single-parented household. A household that can't afford to remain in Texas and in the only home I've ever known.

"Lake, stop being such a downer," my mom says, handing me the keys to the house. "I think you'll love Michigan."

She never calls me by the name she legally gave me. She and my dad argued for nine months over what I would be named. She loved the name Layla, after the Eric Clapton song. Dad loved the name Kennedy, after a Kennedy. “It doesn’t matter which Kennedy,” he would say. “I love them all!”

I was almost three days old before the hospital forced them to decide. They agreed to take the first three letters of both names and compromised on Layken, but neither of them has ever once referred to me as such.

I mimic my mother’s tone, “Mom, stop being such an *upper!* I’m going to *hate* Michigan.”

My mother has always had an ability to deliver an entire lecture with a single glance. I get the glance.

I walk up the porch steps and head inside the house to make a walk-through before the final turn of the key. All of the rooms are eerily empty. It doesn’t seem as though I’m walking through the house where I’ve lived since the day I was born. These last six months have been a whirlwind of emotions, all of them bad. Moving out of this home was inevitable—I realize that. I just expected it to happen after the *end* of my senior year.

I’m standing in what is no longer our kitchen when I catch a glimpse of a purple plastic hair clip under the cabinet in the space where the refrigerator once stood. I pick it up, wipe the dust off of it, and run it back and forth between my fingers.

“It’ll grow back,” Dad said.

I was five years old, and my mother had left her trimming scissors on the bathroom counter. Apparently, I had done what most kids of that age do. I cut my own hair.

“Mommy’s going to be so mad at me,” I cried. I thought that if I cut my hair, it would immediately grow back, and no one would notice. I cut a pretty wide chunk out of my bangs and sat in front of the mirror for probably an hour, waiting for the hair to grow back. I picked the straight brown strands up off the floor and held them in my hand, contemplating how I could secure them back to my head, when I began to cry.

When Dad walked into the bathroom and saw what I had done, he just laughed and scooped me up, then positioned me on the countertop. “Mommy’s not going to notice, Lake,” he promised as he removed something out of the bathroom cabinet. “I just happen to have a piece of magic right here.” He opened up his palm and revealed the purple clip. “As long as you have this in your hair, Mommy will never know.” He brushed the remaining strands of hair across and secured the clip in place. He then turned me around to face the mirror. “See? Good as new!”

I looked at our reflection in the mirror and felt like the luckiest girl in the world. I didn’t know of any other dad who had magic clips.

I wore that clip in my hair every day for two months, and my mother never once mentioned it. Now that I look back on it, I realize he probably told her what I had done. But when I was five, I believed in his magic.

LIBRIS | We know books

I look more like my mother than like him. Mom and I are both of average height. After having two kids, she can't really fit into my jeans, but we're pretty good at sharing everything else. We both have brown hair that, depending on the weather, is either straight or wavy. Her eyes are a deeper emerald than mine, although it could be that the paleness of her skin just makes them more prominent.

I favor my dad in all the ways that count. We had the same dry sense of humor, the same personality, the same love of music, the same laugh. Kel is a different story. He takes after our dad physically with his dirty-blond hair and soft features. He's on the small side for nine years old, but his personality makes up for what he lacks in size.

I walk to the sink and turn it on, rubbing my thumb over the thirteen years of grime collected on the hair clip. Kel walks backward into the kitchen just as I'm drying my hands on my jeans. He's a strange kid, but I couldn't love him more. He has a game he likes to play that he calls "backward day," in which he spends most of the time walking everywhere backward, talking backward, and even requesting dessert first. I guess with such a big age difference between him and me and no other siblings, he has to find a way to entertain himself somehow.

"Hurry to says Mom Layken!" he says, backward.

I place the hair clip in the pocket of my jeans and head back out the door, locking up my home for the very last time.

\* \* \*

LIBRIS | *books*

OVER THE NEXT few days, my mother and I alternate driving my Jeep and the U-Haul, stopping only twice at hotels to sleep. Kel switches between Mom and me, riding the final day with me in the U-Haul. We complete the last exhausting nine-hour stretch through the night, only stopping once for a short break. As we close in on our new town of Ypsilanti, I take in my surroundings and the fact that it's September but my heater is on. I'll definitely need a new wardrobe.

As I make a final right-hand turn onto our street, my GPS informs me that I've "reached my destination."

"My destination," I laugh aloud to myself. My GPS doesn't know squat.

The cul-de-sac is not very long, lined with about eight single-story brick houses on each side of the street. There's a basketball goal in one of the driveways, which gives me hope that Kel might have someone to play with. Honestly, it looks like a decent neighborhood. The lawns are manicured, the sidewalks are clean, but there's too much concrete. Way too much concrete. I already miss home.

Our new landlord emailed us pictures of the house, so I immediately spot which one is ours. It's small. It's *really* small. We had a ranch-style home on several acres of land in Texas. The minuscule amount of land surrounding *this* home is almost nothing but concrete and garden gnomes. The front door is propped open, and I see an older man who I assume is our new landlord come outside and wave.

I drive about fifty yards past the house so that I can

back into the driveway, where the rear of the U-Haul will face the front door. Before I put the gearshift in reverse, I reach over and shake Kel awake. He's been passed out since Indiana.

"Kel, wake up," I whisper. "We've reached our *destination*."

He stretches his legs out and yawns, then leans his forehead against the window to get a look at our new house. "Hey, there's a kid in the yard!" Kel says. "Do you think he lives in our house, too?"

"He better not," I reply. "But he's probably a neighbor. Hop out and go introduce yourself while I back up."

When the U-Haul is successfully backed in, I put the gearshift in park, roll down the windows, and kill the engine. My mother pulls in beside me in my Jeep and I watch as she gets out and greets the landlord. I crouch down a few inches in the seat and prop my foot against the dash, watching Kel and his new friend sword fight with imaginary swords in the street. I'm jealous of him. Jealous of the fact that he can accept the move so easily, and I'm stuck being the angry, bitter child.

He was upset when Mom first decided on the move. Mostly because he was in the middle of his Little League season. He had friends he would miss, but at the age of nine your best friend is usually imaginary, and transatlantic. Mom subdued him pretty easily by promising he could sign up for hockey, something he wanted to do in Texas. It was a hard sport to come by in the rural south. After she

agreed to that, he was pretty upbeat, if not stoked, about Michigan.

I understand why we had to move. Dad had made a respectable living managing a paint store. Mom worked PRN as a nurse when she needed to, but mostly tended to the house and to us. About a month after he died, she was able to find a full-time job. I could see the stress of my father's death taking its toll on her, along with being the new head of household.

One night over dinner, she explained to us that she wasn't left with enough income to continue paying all the bills and the mortgage. She said there was a job that could pay her more, but we would have to move. She was offered a job by her old high-school friend Brenda. They grew up together in my mother's hometown of Ypsilanti, right outside of Detroit. It paid more than anything she could find in Texas, so she had no choice but to accept. I don't blame her for the move. My grandparents are deceased, and she has no one to help her. I understand why we had to do it, but understanding a situation doesn't always make it easier.

"Layken, you're dead!" Kel shouts through the open window, thrusting his imaginary sword into my neck. He waits for me to slump over, but I just roll my eyes at him. "I stabbed you. You're supposed to die!" he says.

"Believe me, I'm already dead," I mumble as I open the door and climb out. Kel's shoulders are slumped forward and he's staring down at the concrete, his imaginary

LBPS | *Wicked* books

sword limp by his side. Kel's new friend stands behind him looking just as defeated, causing me immediately to regret the transference of my bad mood.

"I'm already dead," I say in my best monster voice, "because I'm a *zombie!*"

They start screaming as I stretch my arms out in front of me, cock my head to the side, and make a gurgling sound. "Brains!" I grumble, walking stiff-legged after them around the U-Haul. "Brains!"

I slowly round the front of the U-Haul, holding my arms out in front of me, when I notice someone grasping my brother and his new friend by the collars of their shirts.

"Get 'em!" The stranger yells as he holds the two screaming boys.

He looks a couple of years older than me and quite a bit taller. "Hot" would be how most girls would describe him, but I'm not most girls. The boys are flailing around, and his muscles flex under his shirt as he tries hard to maintain his grip on them.

Unlike Kel and me, these two are unmistakably siblings. Aside from the obvious age difference, they're identical. They both have the same smooth olive skin, the same jet-black hair, even the same cropped hairstyle. He's laughing as Kel breaks free and starts slicing at him with his "sword." He looks up at me and mouths "Help," when I realize I'm still frozen in my zombie pose.

My first instinct is to crawl back inside the U-Haul and hide on the floorboard for the remainder of my life.

Instead, I yell “Brains” once more and lunge forward, pretending to bite the younger boy on top of his head. I grab Kel and his new friend and start tickling them until they melt into heaps on the concrete driveway.

As I straighten up, the older brother extends his hand. “Hey, I’m Will. We live across the street,” he says, pointing to the house directly across from ours.

I reciprocate his handshake. “I’m Layken. I guess I live here,” I say as I glance toward the house behind me.

He smiles. Our handshake lingers as neither one of us says anything. I hate awkward moments.

“Well, welcome to Ypsilanti,” he says. He pulls his hand from mine and puts it in his jacket pocket. “Where are you guys moving here from?”

“Texas?” I reply. I’m not sure why the tail end of my reply comes out like a question. I’m not sure why I’m even analyzing why it came out like a question. I’m not sure why I’m analyzing the reason why I’m analyzing—I’m flustered. It must be the lack of sleep I’ve gotten over the past three days.

“Texas, huh?” he says. He’s rocking back and forth on his heels. The awkwardness intensifies when I fail to respond. He glances down at his brother and bends over, grabbing him by the ankles. “I’ve got to get this little guy to school,” he says as he swings his brother up and over his shoulders. “There’s a cold front coming through tonight. You should try to get as much unloaded today as you can. It’s supposed to last a few days, so if you guys

need help unloading this afternoon, let me know. We should be home around four.”

“Sure, thanks,” I say. They head across the street, and I’m still watching them when Kel stabs me in my lower back. I drop to my knees and clutch at my stomach, crouching forward as Kel climbs on top of me and finishes me off. I glance across the street again and see Will watching us. He shuts his brother’s car door, walks around to the driver’s-side door, and waves goodbye.

IT TAKES US most of the day to unload all of the boxes and furniture. Our landlord helps move the larger items that Mom and I can’t lift on our own. We’re too tired to get to the boxes inside the Jeep and agree to put it off until tomorrow. I’m a little disappointed when the U-Haul is finally empty; I no longer have an excuse to solicit Will’s help.

As soon as my bed is put together, I start grabbing boxes with my name on them from the hallway. I get most of them unpacked and my bed made, when I notice the furniture in my bedroom casting shadows across the walls. I look out my window, and the sun is setting. Either the days are a lot shorter here, or I’ve lost track of time.

In the kitchen, I find Mom and Kel unloading dishes into the cabinets. I climb into one of the six tall chairs at the bar, which also doubles as the dining room table because of the lack of dining room. There isn’t much to this

house. When you walk through the front door, there's a small entryway followed by the living room. The living room is separated from the kitchen by nothing more than a hallway to the left and a window to the right. The living room's beige carpet is edged by hardwood that leads throughout the rest of the house.

"Everything is so clean here," my mother says as she continues putting away dishes. "I haven't seen a single insect."

Texas has more insects than blades of grass. If you aren't swatting flies, you're killing wasps.

"That's one good thing about Michigan, I guess," I reply. I open up a box of pizza in front of me and eye the selection.

"One good thing?" She winks at me as she leans across the bar, grabs a pepperoni, and pops it into her mouth. "I'd think that would be at least *two* good things."

I pretend I'm not following.

"I saw you talking to that boy this morning," she says with a smile.

"Oh, please, Mom," I reply as indifferently as I can get away with. "I'm pretty positive we'll find it no surprise that Texas isn't the only state inhabited by the male species." I walk to the refrigerator and grab a soda.

"What's anabited?" Kel asks.

"Inhabited," I correct him. "It means to occupy, dwell, reside, populate, squat, *live*." My SAT prep courses are paying off.