

LBRIS

We know
books

Also by e. lockhart

The We Were Liars Novels

We Were Liars

Family of Liars

Genuine Fraud

Again Again

Whistle: A New Gotham City Hero

Fly on the Wall

Dramarama

How to Be Bad (with Sarah Mlynowski and Lauren Myracle)

The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks

The Ruby Oliver Quartet

The Boyfriend List

The Boy Book

The Treasure Map of Boys

Real Live Boyfriends

**we
fell
apart**
e.lockhart

HOT
KEY
BOOKS

LBRIS

We know
books

contents

Dear Reader

PART ONE: Matilda

PART TWO: Martha's Vineyard

PART THREE: Hidden Beach

PART FOUR: Beechwood

PART FIVE: Fairy Tale

PART SIX: Bone Tower

PART SEVEN: Truth

PART EIGHT: Now and Forever

PART NINE: Later On

LBRIS

We know
books

PART ONE

Matilda



1

IT WAS A bad place to fall in love.

On the property called Hidden Beach, a wooden castle stood on a monstrous cliff. It was a place of barbecues, sunblock, acoustic guitars, and midnight swims. Oil paint, intrusive briars. Hungry dogs. Drawings on skin, terrible lies, and long afternoons at the edge of the sea.

The three boys who lived in the castle followed strange rules, fended for themselves, and became the whole world to each other, keeping their secrets locked in a tower. They were prisoners in an endless idyll.

There was something rotten there, like a bowl of beautiful berries gone putrid in the heat.

I was eighteen, a cold cup of tea, unwanted.

I had an arsenal of weapons.

I was the bringer of madness.

WHEN HE FIRST began building the castle on the cliff, my father's friends traveled to see him. People slept in half-constructed towers and outbuildings. They even slept in tents on the lawn. They cooked clams in bonfires on the beach and threw themselves into the ocean waves on hungover mornings. The idea was that they'd live apart from the rest of the world, free of obligations and conventional beliefs.

Some of those friends didn't leave for years. They took up lives in the towers and the pool house. They played guitar, wrote poetry, took photographs, and wove tapestries. They took drugs and raised children.

And they modeled for my father. He spent his days with paintbrush in hand, capturing the faces and bodies of his friends, the frenzy of the sea at his feet.

That's all over now.

2

MY NAME IS Matilda Avalon Klein. I am the only child of Isadora Hirschel Klein.

My mother escaped her parents pretty young. They told her she was worthless and she disagreed. She spoke to them as little as possible when they were alive. It was better to keep away, and now they're gone.

She and I have always been a family of two.

If I asked about a dad, Isadora told me we were better off without him and left it at that. The details never seemed important.

Then, midway through the summer after I graduate high school, my father introduces himself by email:

Matilda,

This is Kingsley Cello. I am an artist. I am your father.

I know I have never been in your life, but I'd like to change that.

There is a painting I want to give you. Please come see me at Hidden Beach for a visit.

I never even knew my father's name until today. And maybe I should hate this guy Kingsley for never being around, for whatever he did to Isadora. But instead, his stilted note makes the world begin to hum.

Think of it like: You unlock a secret level you never even imagined was in a game. It's an invitation to go in an unexpected direction. Today, I am invited to a hidden beach. Waiting there for me is the father I never thought I'd meet.

When I search for him online, I realize the level I've unlocked is massive. Kingsley Cello is just about as famous as a living painter gets. There are hundreds of hits: articles in fancy-sounding art magazines and reviews of solo exhibits at major museums.

Here are questions the search engine pops up when I look for his name:

What is Kingsley Cello best known for? Controversial neoclassical paintings. (I have no clue what that even means.)

What is important about Kingsley Cello? The artist's dark vision and fairy tale interpretations have influenced many other artists.

What was the scandal about Kingsley Cello? In his 2012 Whitney Museum show, Cello's extremely violent painting, *Prince of Denmark*, enraged critics.

Where does Kingsley Cello live? The reclusive artist does not disclose his place of residence.

I search dollar value of Kingsley Cello paintings.

They average two million dollars.

3

I TEXT MY mother: I got this email from Kingsley Cello.

She texts back right away: Hm.

I wait, but she doesn't write more. Hm what? I ask, after a few minutes.

Not a great guy.

What kind of not great? I press.

Just not. Why is he reaching out?

What's he like?

Strange, she writes. Obsessive. Wounded.

He's my father, I write back.

No answer from Isadora.

Is he my father? I write. He says he's my father.

No answer.

HELLO IS HE MY FATHER BECAUSE HE SAYS HE IS.

Hold on, she texts. I'm at a fruit stand.

YOUR FRUIT IS NOT IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW JUST TYPE YES OR NO.

Yes. Then she adds another text: I didn't think he knew where I was. And another. Did he ask about me?

I ignore her and read some more about Kingsley online. The art magazine articles are filled with phrases like *grandly sordid imagination* and *the enfant terrible of twenty-first-century neoclassicism*. The story from Wikipedia is that Cello burst onto the art scene in what was probably his late twenties. (He gives different birth dates to nearly

every interviewer.) He never admits to attending art school and first attracted attention with a New York pop-up exhibition in a warehouse space rented for him by an anonymous patron.

His early paintings were considered audacious. They show women (and occasionally men) laughing. Some figures are in baths or showers. Some are watching television or cooking dinner or doing some other mundane activity. None of them wear clothes.

The articles chronicle his rise to fame as a critical darling, but later he became a controversial figure. He started making work with classical literature and fairy tale references. Some people say Kingsley "eroticizes suffering" and others think his work is "juvenile and needlessly violent."

He never brings journalists to his studio and seems to do all his interviews sitting on park benches in different cities, mostly managing not to reveal much about himself at all. He says he's American but was raised in Italy by a strict and horrific grandmother. He also says that he grew up in a hardscrabble town in the Midwest.

And that he spent his youth in a Swedish tuberculosis sanatorium.

And that he was raised by queer fishermen in Alaska.

I flip through some of his most famous paintings online. Turbulent seas, burned forests, monsters, nudes, people in contemporary clothing confronting fairy tale creatures, castles crumbling, animals transforming into people. They're beautiful and disturbing at the same time.

Then I'm looking at a painting of my mother.

PERSEPHONE ESCAPES THE UNDERWORLD shows

a castle built of stone.

It is burning.

Doesn't matter that stone doesn't burn. It burns anyway.

From the windows at the top, black smoke pours.

The drawbridge is in flames, as well.

Kingsley has painted Isadora Hirschel Klein

as Persephone, wife of Hades.

In Greek mythology, Hades was lord of the underworld. But Persephone never wanted to live down there with him. She wanted to breathe a different air.

My mother wears a white slip of
see-through fabric.

We look at her through a
haze of smoke that billows into the foreground.

She doubles over with fatigue, but her face is alight with laughter, as if she's marveling at her own
escape.

THE PHONE RINGS in my hand and I startle.

My mom very rarely calls me. She lives in Mexico City. "Why are you the mostly naked runaway queen of the underworld?" I bark, without saying hello.

"What did Kingsley want?" she shoots back.

"He invited me to visit. He's giving me a painting."

"Giving you a painting? God, they're worth a ton."

"I won't sell it, so it doesn't matter."

"Why not? You should definitely sell it."

"Because it would be the only thing I have in the world from my father. Did you give him my email?"

"I haven't heard from Kingsley since before you were born."

"Hm."

"Really."

"So how is that painting of you—*Persephone*—how is that even a thing that exists?" I ask.

"I modeled for him," she says. "I was in college."

"It's a famous piece of art, though. Right? The internet thinks it's famous."

"Um-hm."

"So you just never told me? Or mentioned it in front of me?"

"I didn't even want you to know he was your father. I don't like to talk about Kingsley Cello. You know our family is just the two of us."

I can hardly believe she's saying "just the two of us" when she lives in Mexico City and I live in LA, but I don't want to fight with her. She's already made her choice. "It's in the Saint Louis Museum of Art," I say.

"I know. Listen, I don't think you should visit him. He's a difficult person. Is he sending you a plane ticket?"

"No. Maybe. I don't think so."

"How did he find you?"

"I asked you that. But it's MatildaAvalonKlein at gmail. He probably just guessed."

She clucks her tongue. "You're not some plaything he can just pick up when he decides he's bored."

"Please. Will you just tell me?"

"Tell you what?"

"What happened with you and Kingsley."

5

ISADORA WAS NINETEEN when she met my father. And he was forty-three. Or maybe he was even older. She isn't certain.

She was a student at Fordham University in New York. She made money posing for classes at the Cooper Union art school, downtown. Kingsley was a friend of the painting teacher. One evening, he dropped in at the end of class. The students clustered around the famous man, asking questions, eager to bask in his light.

Kingsley didn't see my mother nude, but he did see fifteen paintings of her around the room in various stages of completion. As she was putting on her coat, he told her he could make a "real painting" of her, if she was willing.

She was. She tells me it was because she was broke. But I think she liked the idea of being immortalized, liked being worth this great man's attention. Her beauty interested a man who famously specialized in beauty.

She went to his studio, which was in a warehouse neighborhood in Brooklyn. Upstairs was a loft apartment where Kingsley lived in haphazard splendor. Isadora had imagined he'd pay her for posing, but money was never discussed. Instead, she moved in with him for three months and shared his bed. She found herself pregnant several days after he told her to pack her things.

Insert angry phone calls, hateful arguments, and the revelation that Kingsley was seeing another woman. He refused to help with the pregnancy or the baby, and before I was even born, Kingsley had disappeared from that Williamsburg loft.

He was impossible to find. Isadora never heard from him again. She sent a birth announcement to his old address.

She moved back home with her parents temporarily, but the Kleins told her she was a stupid, lazy dropout and unfit to be a mother, so Isadora moved out to live with another single mom and share childcare. Soon after that, she met a different artist—a sculptor this time. We moved to Santa Fe to live with him.

Later my mother learned that Kingsley's painting of her, *Persephone Escapes the Underworld*, sold for upwards of four million dollars to a private collector who eventually donated it to that museum in St. Louis. It's now used to advertise their twenty-first-century art collection.

She never made a penny from it.

6

I HAVEN'T EXPLAINED why I don't live with my mother anymore. It's because she's a muse. Or, you could say, a groupie. That's her calling.

Yes, she baked cookies and taught me to swim and took me for doctors' checkups.

She tucked me into bed and drove me to school.

But she doesn't really like being a mother.

Even at thirty-eight, Isadora looks like a tree nymph—earthy