

## CHAPTER 1

It was another normal day in Sophia's life. She had been sent to the principal's office twice, but this was no surprise. All her teachers at Bigelow Hollow High School agreed that she had the most potential of anyone in the class. But she was also the most introverted of all the students and she found herself constantly daydreaming in class. She had no interest in daily school activities and felt uncomfortable around the other students. Many of them had tried to make friends with her, but she found being social very difficult; therefore they soon forgot about her and, those that felt rejected by her, resorted to picking on her. She tried to make friends to appease her mother, but she was too withdrawn and this solitude inhibited any normal school age relationships. Eventually, she stopped trying and devoted her time entirely to reading. She devoured books; lots and lots of books. She would read between classes, during lunch, sometimes even at the dinner table, though this last practice was prohibited by her mother, who did not want her daughter to be alienated from her own family. To her relief, this helped Sophia feel comfortable in her own home at least.

The reason she had been sent to the principal's office this time was quite simple. In English class, her worst fear became reality. She was called to the front of the classroom by her teacher, "Now Miss Larsen, would you care to tell us what you thought of the book we were assigned this week?" Sophia wasn't paying much attention and when she didn't answer quickly enough Mr. Jameson questioned, "You do know what book I am talking about, don't you?" He was a very short man with little patience for pubescent students. Sophia clenched her fists tightly. She knew what was coming. She felt attacked and did not like it and she tried hard to control her anger. Of course, she knew the book they were supposed to read was *Lord of the Flies* and she had read this book at least fifteen times. Fearing that she would say something inappropriate, she chose to say nothing, hoping that the spotlight on her would shine on someone else. "We are waiting," her teacher said impatiently, while pushing his glasses back on his protruding nose. But, still she chose not to say a word. After a minute, that seemed like an eternity, in a classroom full of nonsympathetic kids, Mr. Jameson let her return to her seat. As Sophia sat down she heard a small snicker coming from the back of the classroom and, without thinking, she turned around to face the source of the sound. She saw a boy with reddish brown hair and green eyes.

"Of course," she thought, "Garret." For some unknown reason, out of the entire classroom, she had been his main target over the years and not a day passed that he didn't ridicule her. Sophia looked at him with curiosity. She didn't even realize she was angry with him until she noticed how terrified he was. She quickly turned around, thinking maybe she had made a face that had scared him. She did that sometimes without thinking.

It had been one of the worst days of her life. She had gotten two Cs, which irreparably destroyed her A minus report card. Those substandard grades had been a result of her lack of sociability or, at least, that is what her teachers told her. At lunch, she had spilled soda on her red sweater, but the weather was still too cold for her to remove it. She felt humiliated, while walking from classroom to classroom, with the entire student body laughing at her incessantly. Usually, she was able to fade unnoticeably into the background, but today she was unfortunately the center of attention. And, adding insult to injury, she had to endure a ten minute lecture in the principal's office on her "inability to be normal".

When the final bell rang, she crossed her classroom building to her brother's class and waited outside for him as she always did. She loved her brother, but sometimes she wished he could be a little less normal. Admittedly, she was a bit envious of his skill to not only survive school, but truly enjoy it. Dennis was the most popular guy in his grade; in fact, in the entire school. He was the only reason girls talked to her or pretended to like her. He was the typical blue eyed boy with blond hair. In schoolgirl terms, he was a hottie. He was tall and athletic and no one messed with him. Sophia would have gladly traded her excellent grades to be as gregarious as Dennis. His grades certainly did not compare to hers, but he was an above average student academically, as well as being the most popular. Sophia sat outside her brother's building, reading one of her books. She had just started a new page when she had an uncomfortable sensation; the feeling that someone was staring at her. She thought this was crazy. No one had any reason to look at her, but the feeling persisted. "Maybe I've finally gone nuts," she thought to herself and waited for the feeling to cease, remaining focused on her book. Reluctantly, she slowly lifted her eyes from the page she was reading.

That was when she saw him for the first time. He was looking straight at her, his eyes steady and piercing. Sophia saw a tall, handsome figure with dark, brown eyes focused on her face. His hair was honey brown and moved in perfect harmony with the wind. He was leaning against the corner of the building directly in front of her. He was completely oblivious to the group of girls forming around him. Even from her sitting position, Sophia could see that he was much taller than she. She looked at him intermittently and tried not to blush. But, this back and forth did not last long. She returned to reading her book and pretended not to notice him. "What does he want?" she thought, as she put her hands to her cheeks. She didn't have time to think of an answer. When she raised her head a second time, he was gone.

## CHAPTER 2

Dennis arrived a few minutes later. "Where were you?" yelled Sophia.

"Sorry, So. Had some fan mail to collect," he said raising a handful of letters.

"Ugh! Don't call me that. I hate it," she scowled.

Dennis laughed, "I know." She could only smile back. "How will Mom's mood be today?" he asked her as they headed home, his smile replaced with obvious concern.

"Sad, like always."

"Maybe you could sing a bit more today. That always makes her happy," he reminded her.

"Yeah right," she answered quickly, blushing.

"No, I'm serious. Her mood always gets better when you sing to her."

"I can't help it if my mind doesn't see the difference between inner music and outer music!" Sophia retorted. Dennis wanted to ask again, but knew that it was wise to drop the subject.

Her brother had been the man of the family, since their father's death. He had taken care of his mother and sister, trying to make them happy and not getting seriously involved in anything else. Sophia sadly remembered the day her father died. She thought of the days in the hospital when the doctors asked them to prepare for the inevitable and how difficult it was to think that every goodbye could be the last. When all hope finally vanished and there was nothing but sadness and a sense of emptiness, Sophia faced the reality of life without a parent. How quickly a child grows up, when a parent dies prematurely. She was frightened by this new void in her life and she decided that she didn't want to feel that way again. Unfortunately, she repeated the scene frequently, but learned to suppress the memories and focus on the future.

The streets of Danielson are lonely and quiet during the winter months. The local inhabitants transitioned from outdoor activities to indoor projects. Christmas was near and everyone became involved in the perfunctory holiday traditions. They hadn't had a decent snowstorm in years, but the tradition of placing a glass of ice by the front door continued faithfully with the hope that this would attract snow to the area. Sophia was not

superstitious and thought this practice was ridiculous, but she never said anything since her own mother blindly followed the others. Sophia kept brushing her eyes with the sleeve of her brown sweater. Her eyes teared continuously in the cold weather and her body temperature remained depressed, which meant she was uncomfortably chilled throughout the winter season. Although Christmas was a wonderful time of year, she could never adjust to the cold regardless of the multiple layering of clothes. Dennis knew her reaction to this weather and he always had an extra sweater in his backpack. The game between them was that she never asked for the extra garment; she always waited for him to offer.

"I have a sweater, you know."

"Thanks, Den." Sophia smiled, as she accepted the yellow and green sweater that was several sizes too large for her, but warmed her immediately.

Dennis shrugged. "Girls are weird," he thought to himself. Sophia and Dennis could now see their house with school only a few blocks behind them. The proximity of school to their house was one reason Sophia had never learned to drive. For her, learning to drive was an unnecessary waste of time; and to be honest, she was terrified of driving. Her mother had tried to teach her, but Sophia was so frightened by the experience it was dangerous for her to be behind the wheel. Dennis, however, started driving as soon as he reached the legal age. His busy social schedule naturally required him to have access to a vehicle.

Their home suffered from years of untended wear on the outside. In stark contrast, the small front garden received careful attention and, it was evident, that was her mother's only hobby. Any visitor to the house would first notice the thick, wooden, front door. It was beautifully highlighted with Irish carvings and a large golden doorknob. Her mother had seen the door on sale and loved it instantly. It didn't bother her that the door had nothing to do with the rest of the architecture and, therefore, was ostensibly out of place. Except for the door, the house was simple and boring. The original siding was painted pale blue, though the color was hard to detect due to the years of harsh weather it had endured. The small front porch protected two large windows. One window was for the living room and the other was for the dining room.

### CHAPTER 3

When they entered the kitchen, Mrs. Larsen hurried to greet them. Sophia's mother was always cheerful; but the test of time diminished her smile more each year. "How was your day?" she asked, as she always did.

"Fine," they answered, simultaneously; Sophia sounding irritated and Dennis delighted.

"Well...," she said, without hearing their response. "Made any new friends today?" she inquired, hopefully. Sophia's stomach churned because she felt responsible for not being more sociable, especially since it meant so much to her mother. Mrs. Larsen noted her discomfort and abandoned her questioning. Sophia smiled and thanked her and then collapsed on the living room couch. She hated discussing her feelings, especially with her mother. Not because she didn't trust her, but rather she didn't want her to worry needlessly. It had been seven years since her father's death; she was seventeen now and, though seven years had passed, she still felt alone. She loved her family, but that wasn't enough. There was always something missing; she just couldn't figure out what.

After her mother announced that dinner would take a little longer, Sophia retired to her room leaving her brother to watch T.V. downstairs. She threw her backpack on the floor, laid on her bed and stared at the ceiling for a long time. She tried not to think of the encounter earlier in the day, but her mind kept focusing on the stare that strange boy had given her. Obviously, he was the new kid in town, if you could call him a kid. "Maybe I had something on my face," she sighed rubbing her nose instinctively. She tried not to give herself false hope. She knew boys were not attracted to her. She was too withdrawn and the fact that she was smarter than most of them didn't help either. After a while, she stood up and gazed around the room. It was very messy; she had piles of books lying around the room from the door to the small balcony outside her bedroom. On the opposite side of her bed was a computer desk with a small window above it. On the wall facing the bed was a large mirror. It was a family heirloom; passed from her grandmother to her mother to her. Her bedroom wasn't small; it just looked crowded because of all the books. Everything was old, except for her new stereo which she had gotten for Christmas two years ago. On top of the stereo was a pile of compact discs and some handmade candles she had collected.

Sophia got up and walked to the mirror. She stared at herself for a while. She saw a thin,

young girl with gray eyes and honey colored hair that almost reached her shoulders and a small hint of bangs. She considered herself to be quite plain with no unusual features. "Maybe my eyes are an exception," she admitted to herself. No one had ever complimented her eyes; but she also never looked anyone square in the face. As she continued looking in the mirror, she saw two shadows start to form inside it. The shadows grew and grew, turning into more recognizable shapes. She could now distinguish the figure of a tall man.

"Come here honey," he said, as he lifted a young girl barely the age of four. He was a handsome man with pale blue eyes and brown hair. "You are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen," he said with great pride.

"I love you Daddy," the little girl responded joyously. Sophia turned away. She couldn't watch any longer.

The next day began with an early breeze. The air was warm and fresh; something quite unusual for that time of year. Sophia heard her mother's voice, "Sophia, wake up dear".

But, she didn't have to call her. She was already awake. She had not slept at all. The nightmares had gotten worse. She didn't remember exactly what she had dreamed, but the parts that she did remember terrified her. There had been something stirring inside her. At one point, she was writhing in pain; a pain she could not control and a pain that would hurt the people she loved. Sophia got up and looked around her room for something to wear. She never cared about fashion or style. The last time she had bought new clothes was a year ago and her mother had to force her to buy at least one skirt. Today she would wear the skirt, since it wasn't too cold outside. And, for some reason she was afraid to admit, she wanted to look pretty today. Before going downstairs, she took a final look in the mirror. "Wow! My hair is a real mess," she said as she tried to brush it. Her hair was not like her mother's or brother's. Theirs was straight and manageable. Hers, well, hers was neither straight nor curly. It was the odd unmanageable in between type. After trying to neatly comb it for ten minutes, she gave up and just held it in place with a hairgrip.

"Someone took some extra time to dress today," her brother laughed as he saw her come down the stairs. "Where's the lipstick, So?" She ignored him and sat down at the kitchen counter.

"Good morning, honey. I got up extra early to make you guys some waffles." Sophia admired the beauty of her mother. Even without makeup, her mother had the smooth skin of a teenager. Her mother only grinned and turned away.

"You read my mind," Dennis exclaimed. "I love waffles." They all laughed. Dennis could be such a sucker for food. He ate like a football player and had the strength of one, too. "Are you going to eat that?" he asked her, with his mouth full.

"Yes!" she threatened. Dennis was always trying to steal her food.

"You'll give it to me later," Dennis said. This was certainly not the first time she gave him her leftovers. She had never had a big appetite and Dennis always ate enough for two.