



**MISSING
PIECES**

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PROLOGUE

T*hat isn't dreaming, my grandma used to say. That's your soul getting into trouble.*

I was what my parents called a restless sleeper. My grandma knew better, though. It's like she was there when I closed my eyes and drifted off. When I would wake up, she'd make me wash my hands, just like she did, first thing every morning.

She'd click her tongue while she scrubbed my hands raw, shaking off the water and raking them dry with a towel.

You're the wandering type, she'd say sometimes. Your soul makes your body wander, makes you get lost. Then she would watch me closely as I ran off to my room to get dressed for the day. Even after I closed the door, I could hear her scolding me: *You stop that wandering, Boychik! Or one day, you won't make it home!*

That's when my dreams turned to nightmares.

My grandma was nearly blind when she died, but she saw me clearer than anyone ever has.

Until I met Aaron.



CHAPTER 1

“**N**icholas, now means *now!*” Mom yells from the foot of the stairs. With the house empty, her voice bounces toward me like a ball, careening off the walls and straight through my aching head.

“Give him another minute, Lu.” Dad’s voice is quieter, but the sound of it still hurts. I know they think I was up all night doing something I wasn’t supposed to be doing like playing video games and eating Cheez Whiz from the can, but I was actually up all night doing nothing at all. I was staring at the wall, then staring at the ceiling, then staring at the fly that got stuck on the tail end of the packing tape that came loose from the box holding my tools and three dismantled CB radios.

“We’re paying the movers by the hour, Jay. Either he comes now or the new tenants are going to have to adopt him.”

“Time to go, Narf,” Dad says as I trudge downstairs, and I smile because Dad’s trying. In her own way, I think Mom’s trying, too.

“Yikes,” Dad says after Mom kisses me a little too hard on the head and walks out the door.



“What?”

“That smile is fooling no one. It looks creepy,” he says. I stop, and now we can both relax.

“I know this is bad,” he says, rubbing the back of his head. “Devastatingly bad.”

“It’s just a few states over,” I say, repeating what Mom has said every day for the past three months.

“That’s light-years away,” says Dad, and thank the Giant Space Alien Overlords that someone is finally telling the truth.

“Yeah, my legions of friends begged me not to go. They made me promise I’d write,” I say, and the smile slips from Dad’s face because he knows I’m faking it again.

“This just wasn’t your city,” he says. “Raven Brooks, though, Raven Brooks will be your city.”

He closes the door to the house that never really felt like my house, just like the last one didn’t and the one before that.

“Goodbye, Red House,” Mom says as she eyes it in the rearview mirror, following the moving truck a little too closely down the long driveway. She gets teary-eyed, and Dad gives her shoulder a little squeeze.

“Raven Brooks will be our city,” he says again, this time so Mom can hear it, and she looks about as convinced as I feel. We drive 715 miles in near silence, swallowing the lie that Raven Brooks really isn’t that far from Charleston, just



like we swallowed the lie that the blue house in Ontario was any different from the brown house in Oakland or the yellow house in Redding or the beige house in Coeur d'Alene. The lies get a little bigger with each move—with each realization that towns don't need newspaper editors if they don't have newspapers to edit anymore, but landlords still need rent money no matter what.

So what was one more move, one more town, one more new school and new house that wouldn't really be our house anyway? I only had to get used to it for a little while. This time, maybe I wouldn't even unpack.

