



## RESET DAY

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# CHAPTER 1

**A**re we there yet?" my sister, Delia, calls out as she kicks the back of my seat. She's asked this question maybe two hundred times since we got in the car on the drive to our new house, and if I hear her perky voice again—and feel her legs against the ridge of my back—I'll have no choice. I'll have to disown her.

"I don't know, but I'm going to need some serious massage therapy ASAP," I say, rubbing the spot where she punctured me through the seat.

"Pip, you're thirteen, not three hundred," replies Delia.

Mom, driving swiftly through some empty roundabout, realizes she has to play mediator.

"Girls, hold it together for another five minutes. We're almost there."

I groan. Mom has been saying "five more minutes" for the past hour. I won't admit it, but I agree with Delia. This road trip has taken *forever*.

I lean my head out the open window and feel the wind in my hair. The purple dye has faded to a lavender I actually like more, and it looks almost iridescent in the sun.

As Mom's car pushes on, the trees around grow thicker,

almost like we're entering a different part of the world. And I guess, in a way, we are. When I told my old friends I was moving to place called Raven Brooks, no one—including me—had ever heard of it. I put up a stink about moving, but then Mom said I could dye my hair if we did, and, well . . . you know the rest of that story.

"I think I made a wrong turn. Piper, weren't we on track near that forest preserve?" Mom says, chewing the fingernail on her index finger. She keeps asking me to check the map app on my phone, but it doesn't seem to recognize where we are, either.

The fading sun hits the tiny diamond on her wedding ring, and I swallow the knot that forms in my throat. Truth be told, my position as "road-trip navigator" is new—that was always Dad.

*Dad isn't here anymore, I remind myself. You've inherited the mantle.*

"Mom, that wasn't a road. That wasn't even a hiking trail," says Delia, and for the first time in over an hour, I don't argue with her.

After all, it's not Delia's fault. It's not Mom's, either. This whole mess isn't anyone's fault but the universe's.

Thanks, Universe.

I'm about to restart the map app for the eightieth time when Mom races by a signpost covered almost entirely by a massive tree branch.

"Mom, stop!" I screech.

In a move I don't think even she saw coming, Mom jams her

foot down on the break, lurching all three of us forward and skidding the car to a full stop in the middle of the road.

“What?” Mom demands.

“Uh, I think I saw a sign,” I say meekly, and she eases back into the driver’s seat, ignoring the tiny snort from Delia behind her.

“Sorry,” I say. “I didn’t realize you were so . . .”

“Exactly,” Delia helps me out. “Nope. Not tense at all. Totally chill.”

Mom reverses the car down the empty road.

There, as if hiding on purpose, is the back half of a sign. I can just barely make out the “RAV” above the “OKS” below it. But once I do, there’s no mistaking it—that’s the sign for Raven Brooks.

Mom stops the car so I can get out and move the tree vine in the way.

“Hmm,” I say, peering at the sign.

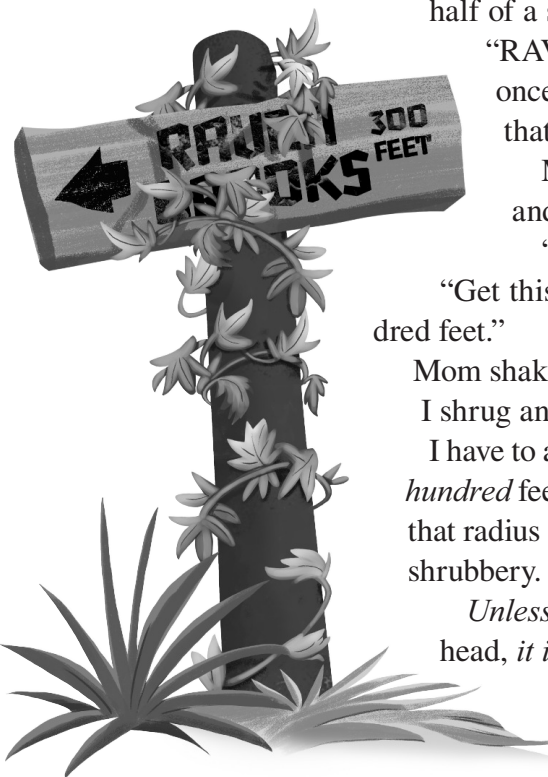
“Get this. It says Raven Brooks: three hundred feet.”

Mom shakes her head. “That’s not possible.”

I shrug and point up. “Tell that to the sign.”

I have to admit, though—Mom’s right. Three *hundred* feet? Surely we’ve been everywhere in that radius at this point. And it’s all overgrown shrubbery.

*Unless, a voice creeps in the back of my head, it isn’t?*



Mom sighs, her thousandth deep breath of our trip across three state lines. She sounds exhausted. I guess I would be, too. We only lost Dad a few months ago, and now we're moving, and on top of it all, she's got to deal with me and Delia. Mostly Delia, of course, but me, too. The very least the universe can offer her is an easy drive to our new home.

I climb back into the car. If I had any confidence that Raven Brooks really was three hundred feet ahead, I'd sprint the whole way, letting the thick July air coat my skin as I ran.

As we creep toward the three-hundred-foot mark, Mom slows the car to a near stop.

"There!" I yelp after several seconds of silent searching.

"Piper, are you sure?" Mom says, squinting into the thick spate of trees crowding the road's shoulder.

"Oh! I see it now," Delia says. "Just under the branch of that big, gnarly one."

She points to a tree suitable for any nightmare. It has that knotted-twisted-old-oak look that just screams *I've been here longer than you, and I'll outlive you five times over.*

"How on earth did you girls spot that?" Mom says, leaning over me to get a better look at the alleged road.

"It's Piper, remember?" says Delia, and I can practically hear her eyes rolling back into her head. "It's her superpower."

*My superpower.* I cringe at Delia's words, but she's not wrong. I have a talent that's useless 99.9 percent of the time—an ability to notice what others usually don't. Or, as Dad used to say, I have the devastatingly boring gift of "observation." Mom says I have an eye for detail, but Delia characterizes it the way only a

little sister could: She calls me Eyeball, which is maybe the most disgusting name to give a sibling. Except for Nose Hair. That's the name I've blessed her with. (And you can probably guess why.) I win.

Mom cranks the wheel of the car and rolls us slowly over the crunchy foliage blanketing the road. Tree branches scrape the top of the car, making a spine-rattling screech with every pass underneath one of the old trees' claws.

"Bird," Delia says suddenly from the back seat.

"Bird?" Mom asks.

This time I chime in. "Mom, look out for the bir—"

Mom hits the break. There's an enormous black bird standing in the middle of the road.

"Is it . . . playing chicken?" says Delia, snorting at her own joke, and I hate myself for laughing a little, too, but this enormous black bird is just standing there in the middle of the road, looking straight at us through the windshield like it's daring us to move forward. I'm not sure how much more bizarre this trip can get.

"Just inch up," I suggest. "It'll move."

Yet even as I say the words aloud, something inside of me doubts I'm right. I can't stop staring at the bird—its onyx eyes, its tiny fluff of feathers hooding the top of its slightly hooked beak, its oil-slick feathers pushed tight against its large body. This bird has no intention of moving out of our way.

"Maybe just . . . move around it?" I say when I notice Mom realizing the same thing I am.

"Around it how?" Mom asks, and I see what she's saying. It's

hard to know where the edge of the road stops and the forest starts. Who knows what lies underneath all that overgrowth? It could be a six-inch drop, or some furry animal's habitat. Or some creepy bird's ground nest full of hatchlings.

Mom eases the car in a slow semicircle around the bird, tires crunching over the forest bed.

"Why does that bird hate you?" Delia whispers from the back seat. No one answers. To be honest, I'm not really sure.

Once we're past it, Mom picks up a little speed, glancing one last time in her rearview mirror.

"It still hasn't moved," she says.

"I'm sure it was just protecting its nest," I posit.

"On the ground?" asks Delia unhelpfully.

As soon as we turn left, there stands another huge crow, stock-still in the middle of the road.

