

THE
REVELRY

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ONE

I am a girl from Ember Grove, and these are my woods.

I grew up with the dark woods as my playground. Hide-and-seek among the trees. Play pretend on the lakeshore. I know every root and bramble, thorn and stone.

But there are parts of the woods I would never go to alone.
Tonight is different.

Tonight is the Revelry.

Tonight the woods are ours for the taking.

The Revelry is more than a party. The Revelry can change your entire future.

Ember Grove is a town fueled by rumors and superstition. Of our local myths and fables, the Revelry is the most important of them all.

It's said that at the Revelry you discover your destiny—and find out if Ember Grove will let you go . . . or keep hold of you forever.

I, Bitsy Clark, am going to get out. Like my brother, Harvey, did. He's at Cobalt University down the coast. We don't hear from him much—when people leave, they don't tend to come back, even to visit—but I think he's happy there.

Who wouldn't be happier away from our small town, where secrets and success battle for space? Where the woods listen to every whisper?

Where one party can change everything?

The events of each Revelry are a closely guarded secret, kept between that year's attendees. Nobody talks about their Revelry; there are no photos, no official guest list, no proof of anything that happens. Of course whispers slither out, rumors spread, and stories from Revelries gone by turn to town legend. Like one year, flowers supposedly bloomed between kissing couples all night long. And then everyone started to believe that when you have your first kiss, and it is with someone who likes you back, something green will grow. Amy agonized over this one, because she lives in an apartment with no green space at all, but then, the week after she kissed Mark Lee during spin the bottle, a little dandelion sprout appeared on her windowsill. A Revelry rule that spilled out into town and lasted longer than one night. It happens all the time.

The Revelry is meant to be for just the graduating high school class, no exceptions. It happens every year, almost by magic. All the adults turn the other way, as if it's not for them to worry about. Everyone in town knows when it is,

and even though there are whispers of what *could* happen, what *has* happened in years past, what *will* happen, nobody tries to stop it. Trying to stop the Revelry would be like trying to stop the seasons from changing. It is as much a part of Ember Grove as the woods themselves.

This isn't my year. I'm sixteen and shouldn't be going for another two summers . . .

Apparently Amy has other plans.

Amy's my best friend. She has been since she moved to Ember Grove eight years ago, when we were eight, and our own Revelry felt like a lifetime away.

Just like Ember Grove doesn't like to let go of its inhabitants, it doesn't always welcome new ones. But I saw this new girl, standing in front of the class with her head high and secrets clutched tight to her chest, and I knew I wanted to be her friend. So I grabbed her hand and pulled her deep into Ember Grove. She'd never belong like I did, of course, but I did everything I could. I showed her the woods, showed her the town, made sure she felt welcome. Made her an Ember Grove girl in everything but birth.

The night I told her about the Revelry, we were sleeping in a tent out in the apple orchard behind my house. The only light was from my little flashlight, propped up at the front of the tent by our feet. It was cold, colder than it should have been for a summer night.

I told her about the Revelry the same way I told her the story about Mrs. Glen found dead on her porch, surrounded

by nine snowy owls. In a hushed voice, awe and fear mingling in my voice, I told her everything I knew about the magic party in the woods, which wasn't much, just stolen whispers and indirect references.

Amy became obsessed.

Ever since, she's tried to find out what day it falls on, exactly where it happens, and *what* happens. All we know is that it's near the end of summer, before the new school year starts.

And that it's in the woods.

Once, when we were around nine and still having sleepovers in the tent in the apple orchard, we saw people stumbling out of the woods at dawn. Two girls were laughing high-pitched, almost hysterical giggles, but one boy . . . I could have sworn he was bleeding. And the strangest thing was they were all wearing wings. Costume wings, the kind you slip over your shoulders and the fake feathers molt in minutes. But as they came out of the woods, for a moment I thought their wings were real. In an instant, we *knew* these people had come from the Revelry. We watched them in silence, waiting for a hint, a clue to what had happened.

But they didn't notice us at all.

A girl disappeared that year. Florence Lonsdale. She went to the Revelry and never came back. But nobody talked about where she went. About what had happened. Or if they did, we never heard a word.

The next year, the Revelry happened again. Like it always does.

This year, Amy is determined to go. She's been set on this since the seasons changed, even though it isn't our Revelry, even though she knows that wanting to isn't enough.

I keep telling her this and I'm ready to tell her again one afternoon at my house, but then she pulls out her trump card.

"I've got an invite." Amy holds out a small white card cut from thick, expensive paper that smells like the woods. It's the first time, ever, that she's known something about Ember Grove before me.

"That isn't how they do it," I scoff. But I'm not sure. Maybe it is.

"We might as well try," she says, giving me a sly smile. "Unless you're scared."

"I'm not scared," I say quickly. "But someone's playing a prank on you. No way is that legit." But still. I take the invite out of her hands like it might go up in flames at any moment.

Embossed on one side it says:

Your Presence is Requested at

THE REVELRY

Dress code: Decadent Dionysian Bacchanalia

Location: Lake Lost

Time: Midnight

On the other side, tomorrow's date is handwritten in gold ink, as fine as lace. I delicately run my fingers over the writing, as if I could magically tell who had written it by mere touch. My fingers come away wet and flecked with gold—the ink still isn't dry. My heart begins to hammer in my chest.

"Where did you even find this?" I ask. "Did you write the date?"

Amy's grin widens. "Of course I didn't write the date. And as for the invite itself, I found it."

"Where?" I demand.

"By the Founder's Fountain," she says.

I don't know why, but I shudder. "Even if it is real, it isn't for you," I counter. "It isn't for us. Invite or no invite, we can't go." The very thought makes my skin feel tight. If you find a set of keys on a lawn, you don't get to let yourself into a stranger's house, sleep in their bed, and put on their clothes.

"Can't we?" Amy deftly grabs the card out of my hands and waves it in front of my eyes like a magician doing a trick. "Come on, Bits. It's the Revelry."

Exactly, I want to say. She doesn't get what a big deal it is to sneak into a Revelry that isn't your own. What the consequences might be—even *I* don't know what could happen.

There are so many unwritten rules that thread their way through the lives of everyone in Ember Grove. Pull at one and everything might unravel . . .

But. The idea has sunk its teeth into me—and Amy has a magic of her own, a way of always getting what she wants.

Whether I go or not, Amy will—and there is no way I'd let her go without me. I'd die of jealousy if she experienced a Revelry before I did.

I let out a long breath, a smile spreading across my face.

Amy knows she has me then. "It's time for some new traditions in Ember Grove," she says. And her smile matches mine.