

PART I:
break away



Berks County, Pennsylvania

The car hits the tree going at least forty miles an hour and I go through the windshield like I've been tossed gently by a hurricane. I land thirty yards away from the car on some bright green grass, barely missing the tree directly in my path.

Everything is black for a while.

When I open my eyes again all I can see are these vivid green leaves floating casually above me, and I wonder for just a moment about their casual ways, trying to understand why certain parts of life just don't care about other parts.

And then the smell hits me.

It isn't gentle like the leaves, but assaulting and violent. It fills my nostrils with the same metallic flavor that fills your mouth when you suck on your thumb after cutting it way too deep, when the blood is dark and black, not pinkish like a party. My head rolls back under me as my chest heaves up, toward the green leaves above me, and I turn my head to the side to throw up. Spitting into the grass and leaning up on my elbow I squeeze my eyes closed as tightly as I can, afraid of what I'm going to see when I finally have to open them. Tears leak out the sides of my eyes, hot and wet on my cheeks. The smell of my parents' blood makes me throw up again and again until there's nothing left and I'm just coughing and breathing hard, my small ribcage ready to break with the pressure.

I stand up and look at the bodies, still trapped in our new car, my mother's skull crushed as if she has fallen from hundreds of feet in the sky and hit the ground with only her head, her bright red hair somehow still shiny where it's not matted with blood. They have both been

thrown through most of the windshield, but the front of the car is so crumpled that their broken bodies are miraculously both in and out of the car at the same time. The car looks like an accordion, my mother's pale twisted arm lying right where some glossy keys might have been, her silver i.d. bracelet and the broken headlight glistening in the summer sun.

I look from my mother's no longer familiar body to my own. Some of my clothing is torn and there's blood all over my clothes and skin, but no matter how I pull at my clothing and check my limbs I can't find any cuts in my skin. My left arm hurts though, and it's twisted strangely. I try to face it forward and it obeys me. It makes a terrible snapping sound and I cry out a little bit, but it stays put when I let go of it and moves like any normal arm. I look up as three big black birds walk around awkwardly in the trees above me. They stare at me as if expecting me to speak to them. I don't.

I start to walk away from the car, toward the road, but I turn back and reach for my mother's arm, gently sliding the silver bracelet off her crushed hand. Under the bracelet there are some small black marks on her wrist that I've never seen before, some tiny circles and a bird. The image pulls on me strangely deep inside for a just a moment before I put the bracelet in the front pocket of my shorts and walk away. The road is dusty and dry and seems extra lonely to me now. I look east, the way we had been driving, the way home, and then turn west and start running.

I always wake up at the part when I'm running. And I never remember where I am for whole minutes before it all comes rushing back.

I'm seventeen, not six. I'm in a home for girls. My parents are dead. My brother Jasper never came to get me. And my name is Bonnie Braverman.

I never scream when I remember these things because I haven't spoken in eleven years.



Washoe County, Nevada

Dragging my mother's body to the car is harder than I thought it would be. She'd never looked like much lying around in that threadbare robe on our worn out couch all the time, so I'd imagined she'd be light, like husks of corn bound together into a person shape. Of course she isn't dead yet, so maybe that's part of the problem.

The good news is that, though it takes me a good half hour to get her out the door of the trailer and into the passenger seat of the car, we live in the middle of freaking nowhere so there's nobody to witness my first bumbling attempt at murder. I try to imagine that if I could see the first murder for any would be serial killer, it wouldn't look unlike my attempt today, stirring up dust and leaving obvious drag marks everywhere. The bad news is that the longer it takes, the more likely it becomes that she's going to wake up from the deadly cocktail I've fed her. I've given her enough botulinum in her daily bottle of Jack to kill a person twice over, but Delia is not a normal person, and I can feel her struggling against me already underneath the paralysis.

Worrying that the drugs will wear off sooner than expected, I pull an old Dodgers baseball cap over her head, covering her eyes so that I don't have to look them. She has a look that can almost kill, and even under the poison it might be enough to at least kill my resolve. But there's no stopping now. If I stop now she'll kill me herself, or worse, live forever, and then I'll never fulfill my destiny. I'm not sure quite when I figured it all out, that Delia has power trapped inside her and that it really belongs to me, but I did. And really? Part of me feels like I've always known it. That's how the power feels, like it belongs to me, that even if it once was hers, it's

mine now. Whatever. I don't know how I know, I just know. It's taken me a while to get up the guts to actually try to take it though.

Delia has more control over her limbs than I'd like by the time I get in the car with her, but she doesn't have much more time if she's going to do anything about anything, so I'm pretty sure it's all going to work out.

But when we get to the spot I'd picked out, I realize I don't have time for my full speech. I'd planned to take a moment at the edge of the cliff, a moment to remind myself that I'm doing the right thing, a moment of introspection if you will, followed by a long speech. I've seen it in some movies and it always seems pretty cool, but the way things are working out I don't have time for anything like introspection. Instead I immediately head to the other side of the car and start shoving her over toward the driver's seat. I'm not sure it matters for it to look like she was driving as nobody is really going to come looking for her, but I figure it might be a good idea, just in case. I grab a big handful of her robe and push with all my might, shoving her toward the left side of the car. She manages to wrap a couple fingers around a chunk of my curlyish dark blonde hair and I scream and pull away from her violently. She takes a little piece of me with her though.

Her breathing is labored. I go to the driver's side so I can look down on her. I put my hands on my hips defiantly. I'll just give her the cliff notes of my speech. "Delia. You are a total failure. As a mother, as a provider, as a girlfriend, as an employee, as a human, and more importantly, as a god. You have been a really crappy example for me, and I only hope that I can go on to the greatness I expect of myself despite the pathetic standards you've set for me," I breathe out a heavy sigh. "Do you have anything to say for yourself?" There's silence except for

her ragged breathing. “Good.” I say, after a long pause. I’ve always thought the best speeches are ones that have no interruptions or counterpoints, so I’m pleased with this result.

It could also be that her tongue is too swollen to speak, which is okay too.

I dodge Delia’s last wildly inaccurate swinging fist as it comes through the open window and then lock her arms down with a click of the seatbelt. I jam a piece of wood between the seat and the gas pedal and slam the driver’s side door, which has a lovely final sound. I lean through the open window and take the hat off her head so that I can kiss her on her sweaty forehead. I toss the cap onto the seat next to her before shifting the car into gear. I barely get my arm clear of it as it takes off for the edge of the cliff.

I stand, hands on my hips, watching the car careen off the cliff, waiting for the inevitable sound of the crash, or the explosion, I’m not sure which I’ll hear first. Strangely, I don’t hear either, because before I have a chance to notice any explosions I’m filled with an incredible fire through my whole body. It’s agonizing pain at first but then a strange warmth takes its place, a warmth that I know I will never have to be without again. A warmth I know I’m right to have killed my mother to get.

I had every intention of burning our old trailer to the ground, but when it comes time to pour the gasoline and light the match, it all seems overly dramatic and less interesting than I’ve imagined it to be. Plus, if I leave everything alone, who knows how long it will be before anything is discovered? Maybe someone will see the flames from the car, maybe not. Certainly nobody will be wondering where my mother is anytime soon. She’s left such a small mark on the world I doubt she’ll be missed by anyone at all.

Maybe I’ll miss her. Sometimes.

I’m only 16; it’s okay to maybe miss your mother sometimes I think.

I stash the gasoline back inside the trailer, lock it up tight and grab my duffel bag off of the dusty ground. I tie the bag to the back of my motorcycle and I put on the helmet, not because I think I need it but because I don't actually have a license and I figure the fewer flames I throw up the better off I am, at least for now. Besides, it's a badass helmet and I look cool in it.

With my helmet on, my long legs straddling the machine, and my new power humming through my veins, I take off into the sunset. This part does feel like the movie, like what I've imagined. I feel like screaming at the sky, telling the world to watch out. Giving it fair warning that Lola LeFever is finally on her own and coming to get it.

The world doesn't stand a chance.