

PROLOGUE

It's that time of year again. The time the glacier gives up bodies.

The immense mass of ice up there is a frozen river that flows too slowly for the eye to see. Recent victims brush shoulders with older ones in its glassy depths. Some emerge at the top, others at the snout, and there's no way of knowing who will come out next.

It can take years for them to reappear. Decades even. A glacier in neighboring Italy made the news recently when it produced the mummified corpses of First World War soldiers, complete with helmets and rifles.

Still, what goes in must eventually come out, so I've been checking the local news every morning.

There's one particular body that I'm waiting for.



CHAPTER 1

“Hello?” My shout echoes around the concrete cavern.

The familiar red-and-white cable car sits in the bay, but there’s nobody in the operator booth. The sun has disappeared behind the Alps, the sky is pink, yet there isn’t a single light on in the building. Where is everyone?

An icy wind blasts my cheeks. I huddle deeper into my jacket. It’s the off-season, and the resort doesn’t open for another month, so I didn’t expect the other ski lifts to be running, but I thought this one would be. How else are we going to get up to the glacier? Have I got the wrong day?

I dump my snowboard bag on the platform and pull out my phone to check the email again. *Know it’s been a while but are you up for a reunion weekend? Panorama building, glacier du Diable, Le Rocher. Meet at the cable car, 5 pm Friday 7th November. C. x*

C for Curtis. If anyone else had invited me here, I’d have deleted it without replying.

“Yo, Milla!”

And here’s Brent, loping up the steps toward me. Two years younger than me, he must be thirty-one now, and he still has his boyish charm—the floppy dark hair, the dimples—though he looks worn and tired.

He lifts me off the ground in a bear hug. I hug him tightly back. All those cold nights I spent in his bed. I feel bad for not getting in contact

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with him. But after what happened . . . Anyway, he didn't contact me either.

Over his shoulder, sharp peaks loom, in shadow against the darkening sky. Do I really want to do this? It's not too late. I could make excuses, jump back in my car, and drive home to Sheffield.

A throat clears behind us. We pull apart to see Curtis's tall, blond form.

Somehow I expected Curtis to look the same as the last time I saw him. Collapsed with grief. A broken man. But of course he doesn't. He's had ten years to get over it. Or tuck it all away inside him.

Curtis's hug is brief. "Good to see you, Milla."

"You, too." I always struggled to look him in the eye because he was so damned good-looking—still is—but I find it even harder now.

Curtis and Brent grip hands, Curtis's skin pale against Brent's. They've brought their snowboards; no surprises there. We could hardly go up the mountain without them. Like me, they wear jeans, but I'm amused to see shirt collars below their snowboard jackets.

"Hope I wasn't expected to dress up," I say.

Curtis looks me up and down. "You'll do."

I swallow. His eyes are as blue as ever, but they remind me of someone I don't want to think of. There's none of the warmth I used to feel from him either. For him I dragged myself back to the place I swore I'd never return. I'm already regretting it.

"Who else is coming?" Brent says.

Why's he looking at me?

"No idea," I say.

Curtis laughs. "Don't you know?"

Footsteps. Here comes Heather. And who's that? *Dale*? No way—are they still together?

Dale's previously wild hair is stylishly cut, his piercings removed. His trendy skate shoes don't even look skated in. I guess he's been Heathered. At least she let him bring his snowboard.

Heather's wearing a dress—a sparkly black one—with tights and knee-high boots. Must be bloody freezing, even with the Puffa jacket over it. A whiff of hairspray from her long, dark locks as she hugs me.

“Great to see you, Milla.” She must have had a few drinks before she got here, because she almost sounds like she means it. Her boots have a three-inch heel, bringing her to an inch taller than me, which is probably why she's wearing them.

She flashes a ring.

“You guys got married?” I say. “Congratulations.”

“Three years now.” Her Geordie accent is thicker than ever.

Brent and Curtis slap Dale's back.

“Took your time askin', hey, bro?” Brent says. His London accent seems stronger, too.

“Actually, I asked him,” Heather snaps.

The door of the cable car grinds open. A lift attendant shuffles up behind us, black resort cap pulled low. He checks off our names on a clipboard and gestures for us to enter.

The others file past.

“Is that everyone?” I say, playing for time.

The liftie seems to think so. There's something familiar about him.

Everyone else is aboard now. Reluctantly, I join them.

“Who else would there be anyway?” Curtis says.

“True,” I say. There were a few others who came and went, but of our original gang, we're the only five left.

Or rather, the only ones still standing.

A flood of guilt hits me. *She will never walk again.*

The liftie shuts the door. I strain to see his face, but before I can get a better look, he heads off along the platform and disappears into his booth.

The cable car lurches into motion. Like me, the others stare through the Plexiglas, spellbound, as we fly over the tops of fir trees, chasing the fading light up the mountain. It's weird to see dirt and grass below. It

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was always snow. I look for marmots, but they're probably hibernating. We pass over a cliff and the tiny village of Le Rocher disappears from view.

Suspended in the air like this, with the scenery slipping past the window, I get the strangest feeling. Instead of rising up the mountain, it's like we're traveling back in time. And I don't know if I'm ready to face the past.

Too late. The cable car is swinging into the midstation already. We step out, dragging our bags. It's colder here, and it'll be colder still where we're going. A French flag flaps in the breeze. The plateau is deserted. Halfway up, the browns and greens turn to white: the snow line.

"I thought the snow would be right down to the valley by now," Brent says.

Curtis nods. "That's climate change for you."

This is the heart of the ski area in winter, with chairlifts and tows going off in all directions, but the bubble lift is the only one running today.

The half-pipe used to be right there next to that little shack. The long U-shaped channel is just a muddy ditch right now, but in my mind's eye I can see the pristine white walls. Best half-pipe in Europe at the time, and it's what brought us all here that winter.

God, the memories. I've got goose bumps. I can picture our younger selves jostling and laughing. The five of us.

Plus the two who are missing.

A freezing gust swirls my hair around my face. I zip my snowboard jacket up to my chin and hurry after the others.

The bubble lift will take us to nearly 3,500 meters. The Diable glacier is one of the highest ski areas in France. The glossy orange cabins hang from the cable like Christmas baubles. Curtis enters the nearest open cabin.

Heather tugs on Dale's hand. "Let's get our own."

"No, come on," Dale says. "We'll all fit."

Curtis gestures. "Loads of room."

Heather looks dubious and I see her point. These little cabins fit six in theory, but with all our bags it'll be a squeeze. It doesn't help that she's brought a bloody suitcase.

Brent folds his tall frame to enter. "You can sit on my knee, Mills. Give us your snowboard bag."

"Dale can sit on your knee," I say. "I'm sitting here."

Heather ends up on Dale's knee, beside Curtis, with me and Brent opposite, bags jammed in around us. Dale looks so strange without his dreads. With his Nordic coloring, he used to remind me of a Viking. Now he looks more like a game show host.

We speed across the plateau. Such emptiness below. I forgot how huge this area is. Walkers hike here in summer and trails zigzag up. It must be beautiful—a mass of Alpine flowers—but all there is to see today is straggly brown grass and rocky scree. No sign of life, not even a bird. The land looks barren.

Dead.

No. Sleeping. Waiting.

Like something else up there. I swallow and force the thought aside.

Curtis's knee bumps mine as we rattle past a pylon. He seems unusually quiet, but I can understand that. If this is hard for me, it must be a hundred times worse for him.

The invitation made no mention of it but it's obvious why we're here. In the news the day before his email arrived:

**BRITISH SNOWBOARDER MISSING TEN YEARS DECLARED
DEAD IN ABSENTIA AFTER LEGAL BATTLE**

The others can't have been any keener to come than I was, but how could we refuse? It's natural that he'd want to commemorate it.

There's snow beneath us now, glowing lilac in the twilight. Far above are the towering cliffs that give Le Rocher its name. The Panorama

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building perches on top, a squat, dark shape hunkered down against the elements.

“So how did you manage this, Mills?” Brent says.

“Manage what?” I say.

“VIP access to the glacier. Private cable car ride and all that. Pretty swish.”

I stare at him. “What do you mean?”

“This is the shut-down period. Can’t be cheap.”

“Why do you think *I* organized it? Curtis did.”

Curtis gives me a funny look. “Sorry?”

What are they playing at? We pull out our phones. The last time I brought my phone up here, I smashed the screen on my first run, leaving a nasty phone-shaped bruise on my hip. After that, I didn’t bother taking it up with me.

I show them the email I received and Brent shows me his. His invitation is the same as mine, except it’s from *M* and there’s a PS: ***Lost my phone. Email me.***

“Here you go.” Curtis flashes his—identical to Brent’s.

I never could read Curtis. Is this his idea of a joke?

The cabin rattles as we pass another pylon and my ears pop. This is where it starts to get steep. We’ve begun the long, long climb up to the glacier.

I turn to Dale and Heather. “What did your invite say?”

Dale hesitates.

“Yeah, same as yours,” Heather says.

“From M or C?” Brent says.

“Um, M.” Heather glances at me.

Why do I get the feeling she’s lying? “Can I see it?”

“Sorry,” Heather says. “I deleted it. But it was just like theirs.”