

chapter One



So, I'M SITTING IN MOM'S OLD FORD TAURUS, STARING RIGHT INSIDE HIS HOUSE. I don't even need my binoculars—it's night, and the rooms are lit up. Even in the day you can spy pretty easily because the place is all glass. If you were as famous as he is, you'd think you'd want privacy, but nope. It's like everyone sees him, but he wants to be seen more, more, more. I mean, he lives in the biggest fishbowl ever. Huge, you can't even imagine. *Bowl* isn't really the right word—it's more of a long architectural mishmash of off-kilter squares and

rectangles, set on three hundred spectacular feet of Lake Washington waterfront. That's practically a direct quote from every article ever written about the place, and, trust me, I've read them a hundred times.

Picture the extravagant, glinting lair of a titan in Gotham or Metropolis or Coast City. Yeah, the one that belongs to the brilliant, charismatic scientist of the comics, who's also a conniving billionaire. He's got headquarters downtown, too, in a building that towers over all the others, featuring a beam of neon shooting from the top. The doors spill workers with intellectual-outsider vibes.

He's either the criminal mastermind or the real hero. That's what I'm here to find out. Who is he? Who is he *really*?

Wait. I see him. Do I see him? No, it's only a trick of the light. My heart hammers anyway, battering away in my chest. Hearts get confused about what's real, and sneaking around to discover the truth is a scary business. I try to breathe deeply. If he's the brilliant scientist, then I can only be one person. Okay, she'd never be this nervous, and she'd never be wearing these crappy old yellow leggings and the Oregon Caves T-shirt we got on the one major vacation that Mom and me and my sister, Rosalind, ever took. But that's exactly why I need her. She's my inspiration and my secret power. In that car I close my eyes, ever so briefly.

Pretend you're opening an old comic book, the kind with really cool lettering and bold images colored in cyan and magenta, yellow and black. That's what I do right then. It's the Golden Age of Comics, so usually you only see chiseled superhero dudes, but not this time. This one features a woman. A woman you wish you could be. She's so brave, and stylish, and sexy, and living an amazing life of heroes and villains. Bad guys, good guys, it's all so clear. And, God, she's totally gorgeous in that tight blue-black suit, strong and physical, not afraid of anyone or anything. No one is looking at her and judging, or not seeing her at all and judging. She's just a *force*.

The comic book I envision opening is always the same one: *Miss Fury, Summer Issue, No. 2*, from 1942. On the cover, Miss Fury (in her regular life, Marla Drake) descends into a room with her cape flying. She kicks the shit out of some Nazis, and looks spectacular

while doing it. How can you *not* be swept up? This is the *first* female superhero ever drawn by one of the *first* female cartoonists, June Tarpé Mills. Double inspiration, triple. Miss Fury herself, plus her creator, both of them up in a fight against sinister motivations and impossible odds, and then ... that *art*. Man, I wish I could draw like that. One day I will. Fiction is so great, you know. It saves you. It holds your hand and gives you a kick in the butt. It's there for you, even while you sit in a Ford Taurus outside a billionaire's house.

I open my eyes. The hammering in my heart has slowed. Hey, it's still here, the house made of two thousand nineteen framed panes of glass. I'm still here, too, even if he doesn't—can't, won't—see me.

Get it? *Frame*? 2019? Yep, *that* Frame, the very first, splashiest, most innovative AI art generator ever, released that very year by the splashiest, most innovative tech dude ever, Mr. Charisma himself, Mr. Wild Card, Mr. *What Shocking Thing Will I Do Next?* Mr. Sexiest Man Alive (gross). Mr. *This Billionaire Is Just a Regular Guy* (a *GQ* article headline about him). Mr. *I Created That App Where People Rate Each Other, Then I Created Frame*. Mr. *I'm Making Something New and Life-Altering Right This Minute, But It's a Secret*.

Well, now you know whose house I'm staring into right then. I'm hoping (badly hoping, it's sad how much I'm hoping) to spot the great Hugo Harrison himself, or maybe his young, glamorous wife, Aurora, or their little two-year-old tot, Arlo. Or even their dog, Boolean. Boolean is a computer programming term, apparently. It's one of those things you have to keep looking up because it just won't stick in your brain. Boolean: a data result that has only one of two possible values, true or false. No idea. A lot of the stuff in Hugo Harrison's life, same. AI, artificial intelligence, too—my mind can't grasp the facts. What is it, actually? It's nothing and everything. It's hard to tell what's real about it. It reminds me of when we were little and Rosalind insisted on reading the rules of every board game aloud. I'd stick my fingers in my ears and sing, *Can't hear you!* and she'd yell for Mom to make me stop because *it's important, Eleanor!* I just wanted to play. The game was cool, and we'd figure it out.

This is probably hard to understand, but the same thing goes for him. I don't want to hear the rules; I just want to play. The game is

so cool. I mean, just *creating* stuff like that. Ingenious, artistic, world-changing stuff, wow. Being a creator—it seems like the highest calling, you know. It’s a connection we have, too: He invented this whole app to make art, and I want to be an artist. If he’s either the criminal mastermind or the real hero in my personal comic book, I am seriously wishing for hero. The thing is—you can memorize every rule in an instruction book, but you won’t actually know a thing about the game until you’re playing.

I gaze in at the white living room, and I just wait for someone to enter the stage. It’s one way that Hugo Harrison and I are different, for sure, because being seen usually makes me deeply uncomfortable. He’s on magazine covers, and I turn red when I get called on in class. Once, in PE, a kid passed me the basketball during a game and I froze, and my teammates started yelling. After that I made sure to always run around and look busy, far from any actual ball. Private moments of excess attention can be even worse. Like that time my mom and sister decided I needed a makeover, and I had to parade out of my room wearing ripped jeans and a crop top featuring the word *Amore* in glitter. Oh geez. They were trying to be nice, but my insides curl up even thinking about it.

My sister said, *Relax! Loosen up!* and my mom said, *You look great!* but I felt like the baking soda—and–vinegar volcano that never volcanoed. I could hear all the exclamation points they were using, ringing false. They both just looked at me for a moment, and then Rosalind sighed and said, *Oh, Eleanor*, and my mom laughed.

There’s a part of me that hopes that Hugo Harrison and I are more similar than different. A big part. At home I’m always the third wheel.

Wait, wait! There’s a flash of movement, for sure this time. I grab my binoculars. In the car right then, I’m not *Oh, Eleanor*. I’m Miss Fury, in my own frame, concealed in sleek black-blue. Unseen by choice, peering into the windows of my archnemesis, the gold-digging baroness von Kampf. Another great thing about fiction? It states what it is and isn’t right up front. Not the truth, but speaking truth. Doing its best to convince you it’s real, but with your full

knowledge and permission. People shouldn't try to trick us about that, about what isn't real, though of course they do it all the time.

Is it a staff member? The Harrison family likes to keep its household employees to a minimum, in a constant goal to live as "normal" as possible, something that gets mentioned repeatedly in interviews. Normal, meaning not wealthy, which isn't something normal people ever wish for. I'm pretty familiar with the regulars—the chef, Jak DeLario, former head chef of that chic restaurant The Block. Also, the landscapers, and an older woman who's the housekeeper, I'm pretty sure. There's Hugo's executive assistant, Mathew, too, and a few different nannies, who don't seem to stay long. I focus, twist the dials for clarity; wouldn't that be an awesome feature in real life?

Ah, the flash isn't even a person. It's just Boolean. He's one of those huge, beautiful Bernese mountain dogs, the kind that always manage to look tired and hot and overburdened even when it's a cold day. I watch him make his way down the Harrisons' third-floor hall and collapse on the floor, as if it's all suddenly too much to bear. I've had that exact same feeling a thousand times.

I touched him once, Boolean. He felt so good! The Harrisons had a dog walker for a while, this lady named Sahara or Sierra or something like that. I heard Aurora calling out a greeting to her once. An outdoor name that suggested adventure in the vast world when she pretty much just walked around Laurelhurst with rich people's dogs. Remind me if I ever have a baby not to name the poor kid something that she has to measure up to. Sahara or Sierra was the kind of dog walker you'd see in a romantic comedy where she's always getting the leashes twisted up and almost tripping because she's trying to talk on her phone at the same time. In her case, though, she only had Boolean. The point is, she was distracted enough that I could drive down the block, whip out of Mom's car, and pretend I was just walking along from the other direction. Tra-la-la—oh, what a surprise! A gorgeous giant dog! I wanted to start up a conversation, you know, see if I could maybe get some little piece of information.

Those bits of information ... It sounds pathetic, but they mean so much. They really do. I can relish a tiny detail same as a chocolate, savoring it as it slowly fades. Like that time a kid in my class bragged that he saw Hugo Harrison at Whole Foods, buying only a mango and a bar of avocado soap. This is embarrassing to admit, but I even went to Whole Foods and looked at the avocado soap to try to guess which kind. I mean, there were, like, six varieties, which is one of those things people from the pioneer days would find unbelievable. I find it pretty unbelievable now, to be honest. But I even picked them up, the white box with the artistic image of the avocado, the green box with no avocado, the cream box with the avocado line drawing, the box-less avocado soap stacked on the table with all the other scents, vanilla and papaya and mint, sitting there so creamy and smooth you want to bite them.

She was on the phone, though, the dog walker, distracted as they waited for a *Walk* sign. My hand sank into Boolean's fur. He *was* a mountain, and his fur was the thickest thicket, and his eyes looked at me soulfully. They offered me kindness, because dogs, by some miracle, stay pure of spirit, and can't give a shit about status. We sort of had a moment. I gave him love straight through my eyes, and he gave it right back. Possible values, true or false—Boolean is true.

The binoculars are supergood ones, expensive. I spent a lot of money on them last summer, when I first started watching Hugo Harrison. I had to use a lot of my savings, but they're worth it. I can see the mountain of Boolean inhale and exhale, and I remember the feel of him, because hands have their own memory. I watch his eyes close. His bushy eyebrows fold together in a troubled *V*. I wonder if he's dreaming of home. Of Bern, or of someone's rec room where he was born. I wonder if he's as confused as I am about where he came from and where he truly belongs.

It's cold in the car, and it's getting chilly enough in here that I'd better go home or I'll have to turn on the engine to warm up. We're having an unexpectedly chilly spell for late April. Global warming, it's overwhelming to think about. I even brought my fingerless gloves that Rosalind gave me. She said they're stylish, but they suddenly

seem ridiculous, like a lot of objects that aren't whole but you pay good money for anyway—jeans with premade tears, doughnuts, crop tops that say *Amore*. It's getting late, and sitting there in the dark with the motor running, and in a car like this, outside of Hugo Harrison's house—someone might call the police. I've wanted to do it myself, those times I've seen that guy sitting in his truck watching this same house, because what are you up to, dude? In a comic, when the police arrive, it's an exciting moment of old-timey black-and-white cars surrounding the place, exclamation points galore. In real life, it would just be terrifying.

I put the binoculars back in their little pouch and zip them in. I picture the word *Zip!* in an energetic font. I imagine sketching those words, and for a moment I think about the beautiful, individual personalities of fonts—quiet or bold or elegant. Just as quickly, I'm aware that these are the kinds of thoughts my mom and sister tease me about when I say them out loud, so I've pretty much stopped. When I try to explain how a city skyline can look both menacing and reassuring, depending on how it's drawn, or how thrilling it is when good trumps evil on a page since it's such a lie in real life—they look at me like I'm from another planet. Two different planets under one roof are a lot of planets.

I'm about to leave when something unusual happens. A truck arrives. It drives around to the service entrance, where I can't see anything. But, whoa, lights are coming on, too. More lights. Boom, boom, boom—like a Broadway show about to start.

What is going on? There's a sudden flood of commotion. The front door opens, and several young women come out. They line the front walk with votives and light them. Incredible. *Magic*. Inside, it's as if a flower is blooming, or lots of flowers—everything opens, brightens. My eyes blink from the beauty. Actual flowers whoosh in, too. Arrangements on tables, and more outside. Even though the backyard is hidden from here, I know what it looks like. If you rent a kayak at the UW campus, you can see it from the lake. I only did that once, because, kayak. Let me tell you, if you put too much weight to one oar, you just go round in circles. This is both a life truth and a kayak truth.

The fireplaces turn on, with their long rows of blue-orange flames. Candles are lit. More light! Platters of food, tiers of food, baskets and bowls of food appear. Arlo speeds past stark naked. Boolean is up and about again and tries to snatch a canapé. I say *canapé*, but I'm only guessing. I've never had a canapé in my life, unless you count the crackers and cheese from the annual holiday party Mom gives as branch manager of Heartland Bank. She's worked there since she was nineteen, so long that she's now the boss of her old friend Allison, who operates the drive-through. You may remember Heartland as the bank that got into trouble a few years ago for selling account data. You may also remember that an anonymous person changed the signs of all twenty local branches to read *Fartland*, and they stayed like that for weeks. Still, Mom remains fiercely proud of their *unparalleled customer service*.

Aurora's white Aston Martin arrives and then disappears around the curved drive toward the garage. Sometimes she just (*just*, haha) drives their Land Rover, especially when she heads to places like the Green Lake pool. Another thing about the Harrisons—you always read how much everyone loves him, but, man, people sure do dislike her, maybe Mom and Rosalind most of all. We're required to *hate* her. We used to hate Hugo's first wife, Susan, but now we really hate Aurora. I don't even want to say the words my mom uses for her, in that hard and bitter voice. People online are also downright vicious about Aurora, sometimes even in the comments on her own site. Is this why they go through so many nannies? Because they hate her, too? It's just another Harrison family mystery that keeps me hooked, same as a good series. I have so many questions, like why Aurora even goes to the Green Lake pool when they have an indoor and an outdoor pool at the house. I know she goes there because I followed her a few weeks in a row, just to see where she goes on a regular basis.

Whoa. Here she comes now, walking along the glass hallway. She's in a breathtaking green column dress, something the baroness would wear, for sure. In my personal version of Miss Fury, our archenemy, Aurora, is most definitely the evil, gold-digging Baroness von Kampf, who steals the heart of Marla Drake's former boyfriend

(close enough) and has his kid, a kid who Marla tries to adopt when the baroness mistreats him. The point is, she's a glamorous-but-evil bitch lady, with luminous, flowing hair that covers a swastika on her forehead. Perfect. I mean, look—Aurora is pure shimmer in those gold heels. Her blond hair even spills down like a waterfall, swooping across her forehead. She's only twelve years older than I am, twenty-eight, but she's living a life that's eons away from mine.

A party. A party!

I'm so glad I didn't leave!

Wow—all of it ... This is no small hoarded detail, no overheard avocado soap, no Amazon delivery, or six champagne bottles in the recycling bin, with one snatched cork hidden in my sock drawer. This is an abundance of detail, as abundant as that food, and just as nourishing. Flowers, orchids! So many orchids! Arlo, now in sleeper-pajamas that look charmingly like a suit! (I think charmingly? Him with his sweet, satiny hair—the bow tie carries the strain of forced cheer, even though it's only printed on.) The thump of music begins.

My cell phone buzzes. It's my sister's old one, a Christmas present from her ex-boyfriend Niles, and the screen is cracked, but whatever. It's her calling, too, probably because I've ignored her three frantic texts. I should have had the car back a good hour ago, and she's supposed to be hanging out with friends. It's Friday night, after all. A time when most people our age (well, Rosalind's finishing her freshman year at Shoreline Community College, and I'm in my last quarter of junior year at Roosevelt High) are out doing something besides sitting in a car and snooping on strangers.

I ignore her. Maybe they'll worry, Rosalind and Mom. I have the sort of ungenerous thought that makes you sure you need to work on being a better person: *Let them.*

Cars are arriving now. Guests! It's silly, but I feel elated. It's electrifying, even if that party is in there and I'm out here. I want it all, I do. I admit it. Just to be in all that light. Part of it. The driveway fills, and then the street. Cars fit into spaces around me, headlights circling, and I pretend to do important things on my phone to look innocent, probably one of the most-often uses of cell phones in general. I sneak glances at the couples, outfitted in

stunning dresses and chic suits. The front door opens and shuts and opens.

Oh my God, it's amazing. I've lost track of time entirely. When it's safe (and, uh-oh, my phone is buzzing like mad now), I lift my binoculars again. I see him, Hugo Harrison. He's easy to find. Just look for the center of the hive, the spot where a ray of light seems to almost emanate, the center point, the source of a vibration. His company's name is *Psyckē*, meaning "the spirit, the breath of life, the essential, invisible animating entity." Imagine what God is giving Adam in that painting on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, where their two fingers almost touch. Hugo's definitely God in this scenario, but he's also the thing, the energy, that God is giving. He's the creator, creating, and it's awe-inspiring. In spite of everything else, it just is. Wild dark hair, thick untrimmed beard, dancing eyes, big nose, eccentric clothes—striped pants, a flowy shirt, a pair of heavy-framed black glasses he might not even need, another mystery, who knows. Boots with red laces, an unkempt appearance that says I may or may not have showered for you, but you have definitely showered for me.

I circle my binoculars away from him, even though it's like pulling a magnet away from a magnet. I search around for someone I know (as if I'm actually at that party, right, looking for a familiar face) and am relieved to see Mathew, Hugo's executive assistant. He looks like a Hollywood agent, the way I'd imagine one, anyway. Trim, handsome, harried, wearing those short pants without socks that somehow have become fashionable, no idea.

But wait.

Wait, wait, wait! Wait just a minute here.

Oh *shit*.

Oh my God! My body floods with anxiety. No, *alarm*. Oh no, oh no! What should I do? Should I do something? I need to do something. Talking with Mathew ... Well, not really talking, but more like hovering around the edges of a group that includes Mathew, is someone else I know. Not *know*, but he's a familiar face, all right? That guy in the truck, the one I've seen watching the house a few times, same as *I* watch the house. No, correction. NOT as I watch

the house, because I'm innocent, and we have no idea what he is. He's young. Maybe Rosalind's age or a little older. I've never seen him up close, so who knows. But what I do know—he sits there and watches, lurks. He could be dangerous. I mean, why would he do that, just hang around like that, spying? Besides *my* reason. This guy, I'm sure he's up to no good, and now he's *in the house*.

I need to act, but what do I do? Call the police and say, *Hey, I'm a stalker reporting a stalker*? Even though *stalker* is a very, very wrong word for me. That guy, though. He's *right there*. He's, like, a few feet from Hugo Harrison, and there's no telling what he's planning. My mind is just spinning, my stomach all clenched, because what if something bad happens as I just sit here and watch?

What would Miss Fury do?

I imagine her again—Miss Fury, with her confidence and style. As superheroes go, this is important: She doesn't have any actual powers. No special skills, aside from her fashion sense. No wild backstory involving an emergence of some incredible ability. She's just all the things you want to *be*, that *I* want to be: smart, and observant, and unafraid, yeah. She's things *other people* want me to be, too: stylish, as I've mentioned, so much so that she has her own paper doll in the back of the comic, with a wild wardrobe of cutout clothes. She's decisive, and furious—it's her actual *name*. My best friends, Arden Lee and Clementine—they're always saying I should maybe be angrier.

Miss Fury would scale the Harrison house, sneak through a window, tackle the intruder. She would whip off his mask (he's not wearing one, but whatever) and discover his true identity. She would fix this, is the point. She would make what's wrong right, what's confusing clear, what's dangerous safe. She would be bigger than bad.

I, however, am not bigger than bad. My paper doll would have this T-shirt, these old leggings, and my fury is a seed underground. I'm afraid I'm about to witness something horrible, something I can't do anything about. That's one of the best things about Miss Fury. She has control over stuff that people don't have control over in real life

—bad guys, evil. What a joke to believe that anyone has control over those things, but what a comfort, too.

I hate myself for this, but I can't watch. If that guy, what, pulls out a poison dart or something and sticks it into Hugo Harrison, I don't want to see it. I'm just a girl in a car fighting a sense of dread. This is real, not ink on paper.

When I start the car, failure surrounds me, cold and heavy. I drive away from the lights and the celebration, from the drama and even the possible danger, and there's this sense, you know, that I'm more alone than I've ever been in my life.

Maybe this is just how you feel when you could be living in that very house you're driving away from. When you could, at this very moment, be at that party, whispering to Aurora about the odd guy you've seen outside. When, at the end of that hopefully safe and contented night, you could step over that big dog and head down the hall, kissing little Arlo good night before heading to your own room. When they could all be people in your life that you love, and not villains, not archenemies.

When the thing you should maybe be angrier about is that Hugo Harrison is your father, but you only watch him through 2,019 frames of glass.