

CHAPTER 1

I open my eyes to the sun shining brightly through my bedroom window. For a minute I am confused. Where am I? What day is it? One of those over-tired confusions that seem to come often lately. The warm sun on my face reminds me of summer; a sweet, warm day to walk barefoot in the grass. Then the heater starts up with a rattle, reminding me of the snow still sitting on the ground and the cold that refuses to break for spring.

The way my pillow billows up softly around my head and my oversized quilt rests heavily over my body should have brought me some comfort, like those times when I would get a cold and have to stay

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in bed, missing school and sleeping the day away. Nothing seems to comfort me any more. I don't seem to feel much of anything any more. I am numb.

The numbers on my clock radio roll over to 6:00 a.m.—the radio blares some new rock song through half-blown speakers. I close my eyes—I'm just not ready.

Footsteps shuffle down the hall, stopping abruptly at my door. A quick rap of knuckles against the wood then Mom pops her head in, and like every school day since preschool she chimes, "Rise and shine, time for school!" And like every time before, I lie in bed and wait for her to repeat this ritual at least three more times before I finally drag myself out of bed.

A familiar song grabs my attention. The strum of an electric guitar followed by an angelic orchestra and the soft voice of Paul Humphrey singing "If You Leave." There's a gentle tingling sensation in my head—a memory, *Pretty In Pink* with Molly Ringwald and Annie Potts, a 1986 classic teen movie. Perry and I must have watched that movie

a hundred times. Although we were born in the 90s, we loved the 80s and everything about it.

Perry. Oh God, Perry...

“That’s us in a few years,” Perry says during the scene of Molly Ringwald and Annie Potts working in the record store, listening to music and gabbing on the phone.

Perry hops into bed with me and puts his arm around my shoulders for a quick squeeze. “Working with my girl, listening to music, doing what we want and getting paid for it. That’s how I see us.”

Perry thinks that it would be cool to work at a music store. Sometimes I think that is his only ambition. Sure, it’s nice to fantasize about working together and having fun, and perhaps that would be a great job to have during the summer; but I have always wanted to go to college and make something of myself. I know

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Perry doesn't have the options I have and I definitely know that with his grades he has no chance of winning a scholarship, so if working at a record store is his dream job, I just let that be.

Most parents would have a problem with their daughter having a boy stay the night. Especially when that boy spends the night in the same bed as their daughter. But my parents know that Perry is special. Since first grade, Perry and I bonded almost instantly. Perry isn't like the other boys. He doesn't like boy stuff. Perry comes from a broken home and at my house Perry is accepted for who he is. I think my parents mostly take pity on him because he really has nowhere else to go.

Perry's mom is nice in those rare times when she's sober, but his dad took off when he was barely out of diapers. His mom often brings men home, some are one-night stands, some stay for a week or so. But none are substitute parent material. Perry is always telling me that his mom would be better off without him. Since she never calls