

FROM THE MILLION-COPY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**WHEN
THE
WORLD
TIPS
OVER**

JANDY NELSON

"SIMPLY THE VERY BEST" SARA BARNARD

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WALKER
BOOKS

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***For my family,
who double as the very best friends,
and
for my friends,
who double as the most amazing family***



*One can live sometimes without living at all,
then all life comes crowding into a single hour.*

Oscar Wilde

*Day by day and night by night we were together -
all else has long been forgotten by me.*

Walt Whitman

*There is another world,
but it's in this one.*

Paul Éluard

Are you looking for me?

I am in the next seat.

Kabir

FANTASIA (NOUN)

fan-ta-sia | \ fan-'tā-zhə

- 1: a composition, often musical, with an improvisational style
- 1b: a literary work composed of a mixture of different forms or styles
- 2: a work in which fancy roves unrestricted
- 3: something possessing fantastical, bizarre, or unreal qualities



**PART
ONE**



DIZZY

Encounter #1 with the Rainbow-Haired Girl

The morning of the day twelve-year-old Dizzy Fall walked into the path of the speeding eighteen-wheeler and encountered the rainbow-haired girl, everything was going wrong. In the divorce with her best friend, Lizard, who now went by his real name, Tristan, Lizard-now-Tristan had been granted popularity, a cool haircut, and a girlfriend named Melinda.

Dizzy had been granted nothing.

They'd been a twosome since first grade, wandering around in each other's innermost secrets, baking through the list of *Pastry Magazine's* most ambitious desserts as well as their mutual favorite activity: surfing the internet for pertinent information regarding existence. Lizard's area of expertise was weather and natural disasters while Dizzy's was all cool things.

Lately those cool things had been stories about saints who rose into the air in fits of ecstasy, Himalayan yogis who could turn their bodies into stone, Buddha, who'd made duplicates of himself and shot fire from his fingers (yes!). Reading about these woo-woo things made Dizzy's soul buzz and Dizzy wanted a buzzy soul. A buzzy *everything*.

Also, recently, pre-divorce, Dizzy and Lizard had kissed for three seconds to see if they'd feel the endorphins Lizard learned about online or the spontaneous internal explosions Dizzy read about in the romance novels her mother kept behind the literary ones on the shelf, particularly *Live Forever Now* starring Samantha Brookweather, which was Dizzy's favorite. Lizard thought romance novels were totally useless, but Dizzy learned so much from them. She wanted the door of her wild femininity

to swing open already, her fiery furnace to ignite, her passion-moistened depths to awaken, and, although, unlike Samantha Brookswether, she'd never seen a real live penis, from these books she knew an absolute ton about stiff members, turgid shafts, and throbbing spears. Unfortunately, however, during the three-second kiss with Lizard, neither of them had felt endorphins nor spontaneous internal explosions.

Anyway, all that morning of the telltale day of the first encounter, Dizzy sat in class and watched ex-best friend Lizard-now-Tristan stealthily texting with awful new girlfriend Melinda, probably about all the spontaneous internal explosions they experienced when they kissed each other at the dance three weeks before. Dizzy had watched it happen, her throat knotting up as Lizard's hand reached behind Melinda's neck right before their lips met. Since that moment, Dizzy, a renowned motormouth, hardly spoke at school and when she did, she felt like her voice was coming out of her feet.

But what was there for Dizzy to say anymore? Her mother had told her once that the great loves of one's life weren't necessarily romantic. Dizzy had thought she had three great loves already, then: her best friend, Lizard; her mom, Chef Mom; and her oldest brother Wynton who was so awesome he gave off sparks. But what now? She didn't know people could stop loving you. She'd thought friendship was permanent, like matter.

After lunch – which Dizzy spent in the computer room learning about a group of people in Eastern Europe who believed someone or something was psychically stealing their tongues – she walked halfway across school to the bathroom no one used. She was trying to avoid passing Lizard-now-Tristan and Melinda, who were always camped out together lately by the water fountain outside the closer bathroom with their hands and souls glued together. Only when she swung open the door, there was Lizard at the sink of the school's one all-gender bathroom.

He was alone at the mirror putting some kind of gel in his new hair,

looking like all the other boys now, not like the Lizard of a month ago with cyclone hair like hers and geek-kid-at-the-science-fair personal style, also like hers. He'd even gotten contacts, so their black ten-ton Clark Kent eye-glasses no longer matched. She wanted the old Lizard back, the boy who'd told her about sun pillars, fog bows, and said, "So dope, Diz," at least five hundred times a day.

The fluorescent lights in the slug-colored bathroom flickered. They hadn't been alone in what felt like ages and Dizzy's chest felt hollow. Lizard glanced at her in the mirror, his expression unreadable, then returned his attention to his hair, which was the color of butternut squash. He had pale skin with scattered freckles on his cheeks, not galaxies of them like Dizzy. Once in fifth grade when lifelong Dizzy tormentor Tony Spencer had called Dizzy an ugly freckle farm, Lizard had come to school the next day with galaxies of his own that he'd drawn onto his cheeks.

Dizzy glimpsed her reflection in the mirror and had the same sinking reaction she always did to her appearance because she looked exactly like a frog in a wig. She couldn't believe this was what people had to see when they looked at her. She wished they got to see something better, like Samantha Brookswether's head, for instance. Samantha Brookswether set men's hearts on fire with her soft silken locks, pouty pillowy lips, and glittering sapphire eyes.

Dizzy settled her plain old unglittering brown eyes back on her ex-best friend, the real version, not the mirror one. She wanted to hold his hand, like they had secretly for years under tables. She wanted to remind him how she used to braid their hair into a single braid so they could pretend they were one person. She wanted to ask him why he wouldn't return her texts or calls or come to his bedroom window even after she threw thirty-seven pebbles in a row at it. Instead, she went into the stall and held her breath for as long as she could and when she came out, he was gone.

On the mirror in black marker was written: *Leave Me Alone.*

Dizzy felt like she was going to blow away.

Then came gym. Dodgeball. Hour of terror and dread. She was sweating through her shirt on the broiling field, practicing invisibility, pretending not to notice Lizard huddled with Tony Spencer. Ack. Ick. Lizard the Traitor. Dizzy wanted to burrow into the ground. Why hadn't she thought to make more than one friend in life? But she had no time to contemplate this because Tony Spencer had broken away from Lizard and was charging at her with the ball and a gleaming, cartoon-y knife of a smile. Plus homicidal intent. Her insides plunged. She tried to psychically steal his tongue then cancelled the order because: ew.

A weird embarrassing yip of a noise came from her lips as Tony lifted the ball into the air and then pummeled it into her gut, knocking the breath out of her, the dignity out of her. Then when she was lying on the ground like a gulping, gasping fish, holding her belly where he'd reamed her, he turned around, squatted over her, shoved his sweaty, gym-shorted butt in her face, and farted.

Dizzy's mind froze. No, she begged, make it so this did not just happen to her. Let her hit delete. Hit escape. Power off.

"What color is it, Dizzy?" Tony said with glee because Lizard must've told him about her synesthesia, how she saw scents as colors.

Everyone laughed and laughed but Dizzy focused only on Lizard's horse-neigh of a laugh, laughing like Dizzy wouldn't have eaten a tub of spiders to spare him a second of sadness.

That was what had made Dizzy cry. That was what had made her command her bare, bony stick-legs to run across the athletic field, climb over the fence of Paradise Springs Middle School, and peel through vineyard after vineyard, so that now here she was in a deserted part of town in her gym clothes in the middle of the school day, in a heatwave, wanting to just jump out of her stupid sweaty body and leave it behind.

Because Tony Spencer had done that in her face! In front of everyone!

And Lizard had laughed! At her! God! She'd need a disguise from here on out, a whole new identity. She could never go back to school, that was certain. She'd have to steal her mother's credit card and book a flight to South America. Live in the savannah with the capybaras because Dizzy had learned in one of her online research marathons that capybaras were the nicest of all mammals.

Not hateful like seventh-grade people.

And hello? Synesthesia wasn't even something Dizzy was embarrassed about, like she was her frog-in-a-wig looks, or her nuclear mushroom hair, or her freckles, which colonized every inch of her including her toes, including her fiery furnace. Or the everything. Like how small and concave she was and how she had no hair anywhere exciting yet and how she often felt like a dust particle. Not to mention how scared she was to die or to go to sleep or to lie there in the dark or to leave a room if her mom was in it or to be ugly forever. Or even how much time she *really* spent surfing the internet for pertinent information regarding existence or so many, many things that made Dizzy feel like life was hopping from one private or public humiliation to the next.

She careened down the empty sweltering sidewalk, lost in her mind, not registering the burnt amber scent of the air, nor the shops closed because of the infernal temperatures, nor the sun-scorched hills in the distance, nor the strange creaking quiet because all four streams that ran through Paradise Springs had run dry. She didn't even register the sky, empty of birds who couldn't be bothered to fly with The Devil Winds roving down the valley, causing the worst heatwave in recent memory.

She stepped blindly into the street.

Then, a screeching like the world was splitting in half.

The ground beneath her shook, the air rattled. Dizzy had no idea what was happening.

She turned around and saw the massive metal face of a truck barreling

toward her. *Oh no oh no oh no oh no*. She couldn't move or scream or think. She couldn't do anything. Her feet were encased in concrete as time slowed, then seemed to suspend entirely with the revelation: This was it.

It it.

The End.

Oh, she hoped she'd get to be a ghost. A ghost who baked all day beside Chef Mom at her restaurant, The Blue Spoonful. "I want to come back immediately, please," Dizzy said urgently, out loud, to God. "A ghost who can talk, sir," she added. "Not one of the mute ones, please."

She swallowed, flooding with sorrow, with *so not-ready*. She was going to die only having used up three seconds of the two weeks the average person spent kissing in their lifetime. She was going to die before she fell in love and merged souls like Samantha Brookweather and Jericho Blane. Before she rose up to meet someone's urgent thrust or was burnt to cinders from the frenzy of simultaneous eruptions or any of the other epic sex stuff in *Live Forever Now*. Worse, she was going to die before she ever even had an orgasm on her own – she couldn't figure it out or was malformed; she wasn't sure which.

And this was even worse than all of that: She was going to die before the father she never met – because she was in the womb the night he left – returned. She knew he wasn't dead like some people said though, because she'd seen him once up on the ridge in his cowboy hat, looking like he did in all the photos, except no one believed her about this (except Wynton and Lizard) on account of how she regularly saw those mute ghosts in the vineyard, and no one (except Wynton and Lizard) believed her about that either. Oh Wynton. And her other brother Perfect Miles. Her mother! Panic seized her. How could she leave them? Leave the world? She didn't even like leaving the breakfast table. How could she die before they – Wynton, Perfect Miles, Chef Mom, Un-disappeared Dad, Weird Drunk Uncle Clive – could squeeze together on the ancient red velvet couch in the living room, a happy people-pile with Dizzy smack in the middle, all of

them watching *Harold and Maude* or *Babette's Feast* (her mom's favorite old movies and now hers too). Oh, she hoped everyone would watch those two movies in her memory, in lieu of flowers.

Not that her family had ever watched anything in a happy people-pile or been that happy, period. But now there was no chance of it.

She was going to die before all the chances.

And the really awful part wasn't even that the last thing that happened to her before death was being face-farted by Tony Spencer and betrayed by Lizard. (Actually, forget the old movies – in lieu of flowers, please egg and toilet paper both their houses.) The worst part was she was going to die before anything truly miraculous happened to her in life.

And then something truly miraculous happened to her in life.

Two hands planted themselves hard and strong on her hips. She turned and saw a girl. A bright and shining, shooting star of a girl.

Dizzy lifted her hand to touch the face that was framed by rainbow curls tumbling to the girl's waist, fairy-tale tresses of every color, but before Dizzy could touch the light-struck cheek, the girl spoke, bopped Dizzy's nose with her finger, then shoved Dizzy mightily, and up Dizzy went. Up, up, up. The sky tipping as Dizzy hurled forward out of all thought, out of time and place, landing finally in a splatter of limbs and bewilderment on the hot pavement.

Holy holy holy.

Dizzy didn't move for a moment. Um. What had just happened? Her heart was a wild animal in her chest, her face pressed into burning gravel. Was she a ghost? She touched two fingers together. No, still flesh. She tried to lift her head and was met by blur – where were her glasses? She rolled onto her back and a figure, a man, she could tell even without her glasses, not the girl she expected to see, was towering over her, blocking the sun, offering her a hand, and talking a blue streak.

"Close call. Close call. Oh Jesus God. But look at you. Like new. Not a scratch. Thank the lord." He helped Dizzy to shaky feet with shaky arms.

Despite the gravel in her cheeks and palms, the pavement burns on her knees, the pounding in her chest, she was okay. Dizzy wasn't so sure about this man, though, who she thought might be on the road to hyperventilation. He was sweating through his shirt in stained patches, his scent staggering, a pumpkin-orange smell, the color Dizzy associated with men, with men-sweat. Girls and women smelled mostly green. Except not all of them, she now knew. The rainbow-haired girl who'd just saved her life had smelled magenta, like flowers did. "Oh jeez. Oh lord. Oh God," the man said. "What are you, nine, ten? I got a grandbaby your age. Built like a feather just like you."

"I'm a *twelve*-year-old feather," Dizzy said defensively. Because yes, it was annoying to still be asked to be an elf in the Paradise Springs summer parade, thank you very much. She bent down to feel for her glasses, only to realize they were stuck in her hair, which doubled as her personal lost and found. She disentangled them and put them on to see that the man, with his big sweaty friendly mustached face, was, for all intents and purposes, a talking walrus.

The girl, however, was nowhere in sight.

"Okay then, twelve. Stand corrected," the man said. "Whew-y. So glad you're all right. Thought you were a goner."

"Me too," said Dizzy, her mind revving. "I hoped I'd get to come back as a ghost, but I didn't want to be one of the mute ones, you know?" She could feel words, words, words, a tidal wave of them, straining to break out of her like they used to in the good old pre-divorce days. Sure, some people who shall remain nameless thought Dizzy talked too much and should get her vocal cords removed, but those people weren't here, so on she went. "That would be awful. There, watching everything and everyone but unable to talk, to tell people anything, even your name. Like the ones in our vineyard."

"I think you'd be terrible as a mute ghost," the walrus-man said.

"Yes. Exactly." She looked around. "I have to thank the girl, sir. Where'd she go?"

The man made a face that caused his bushy eyebrows to bunch up. "Where'd who go? All I seen is sun, then you standing in it, frozen, looking up to the heavens like some religious statue. And then I'm slamming on the brakes, riding 'em for my life, but the next second you were flying outa the way. You must be some kind athlete, 'cause you really flew. It was a sight."

"So not an athlete. That's my brother Perfect Miles. I hate sports. All of them. I don't even like being outside." She took a breath to slow down her thoughts, which loved to avalanche. "I flew like that because a girl pushed me. Hard too, just shoved me into the air. You didn't see her?" Dizzy looked up and down the street again. No one was anywhere. No tourists. No cars even. The Devil Winds had turned Paradise Springs into a dry, dusty ghost town. "She had all these colorful tattoos of words" – Dizzy touched her arm where the tattoo of the word *destiny* had been on the girl – "and she was *so* beautiful, her face—"

"Just us here, honey. Must be the heat. No one's thinking straight."

Walking home through the vineyards under the burning sun, her sweat-soaked clothes stuck to her, Dizzy couldn't get the girl out of her mind. That magenta smell. The way she'd looked right at Dizzy, eye to eye. "Don't worry. You're okay," the girl had said in a strange husky voice before touching Dizzy's nose with her finger – *bop*. All Dizzy's panic about the oncoming truck had vanished. All Dizzy's panic and uncertainty about *everything* had vanished. Light had been everywhere on the girl, streaming around her head, around those endless rainbow-colored curls, like a halo.

Like a halo.

And then she'd pushed Dizzy into the air.



DIZZY

The next morning, Dizzy was at the breakfast table – alive and breathing air and thinking thoughts and *touched by an angel!* She could barely contain her news, wanted to shout it at Perfect Miles sitting across from her but he had a Keep Out sign up, meaning he was huddled over some novel, like always, his raven ringlets ringletting ravenly around his princely face.

Dizzy and her oldest brother Wynton had no clue where Perfect Miles came from. He was on an athletic scholarship at a fancy prep school three towns away (Wynton, like Dizzy, regularly walked into walls). He was quiet, serious, and scary-beautiful (Wynton, like Dizzy, looked like a frog in a wig and engaged in unserious pillow fights and unquiet screaming contests). He loved to go for runs in nature (Wynton, like Dizzy, loved walls, roofs, snacks in front of the TV).

Also, Perfect Miles was *good*, spent his free time walking three-legged dogs and brushing blind horses at the animal refuge (Wynton was always bad, even got himself thrown in jail a couple weeks ago, and Dizzy specialized in ugly thoughts about her peers). And the cherry on the sundae Perfect Miles would never eat because he didn't indulge in sweets (no comment): He was voted both Class Hottie and Most Likely to Succeed in the yearbook two years running.

Perfect Miles made Dizzy feel especially warty.

She poked his arm. "I saw an angel yesterday."

He didn't take his eyes off his book.

"She saved my life."

Nothing.

"By bopping my nose, maybe."

Nothing.

"Miles!"

"Reading," he said, not lifting his head.

Because Dizzy was the youngest and so small and was now a friendless girl who'd been face-farted, certain family members like Perfect here thought it fine to act like she didn't exist.

"An angel, like, for real, Miles. A super cool one who had tats and everything."

He turned the page.

Dizzy studied his lashy eyes, his stupid Cupid's-bow mouth, his loose, lazy curls that shined and never frizzed (like Samantha Brookswearer's!). The rest of his Class Hottie features. Seriously, how was it she, the face-farted, and Perfect here were part of the same species, let alone the same family?

"The thing is, Miles," she said. "You don't know if today's going to be your last day alive. You could get hit by a truck or an asteroid or a sinkhole could open up right under your feet. It's so harrowing that you have absolutely no control over when you'll die, don't you think? Don't you think it's so hard being mortal?"

Miles started choking on his dry brown rice toast (no comment), then recovered, all without lifting his head from his book.

Argh.

We should all try to be more like Miles, her mother always said. *He never wastes a minute*. Dizzy wasted all the minutes. This was because time went faster for her than other people. How else to explain what happened when she went online? Or looked out a window? Or whatever. She often snoop-read the little note pads Perfect Miles kept in his back pocket and stored in the bottom drawer in his dresser. They used to be full of To-Do lists but recently they'd gone off the rails. A recent item said: *Find someone to trade heads with*.

“I don’t want to die at all,” Dizzy continued, undeterred. “I mean at all at all at all. I want to be immortal. Lots of people say they’d get bored living for millennia or too depressed seeing everyone they love die again and again. Not me. How about you?”

Dizzy looked at Miles expectantly.

He turned the page.

She watched his skin gleam.

She watched his lashes flutter.

She watched him get more perfect.

This sibling thing between them wasn’t working out. They were terrible breakfast companions. Really, she hadn’t spent much time alone with Miles until recently. He never used to come down for breakfast (or dinner, or movies, or spontaneous dance parties, or baking marathons, or screaming contests, or pillow wars) when Wynton was around, which was every day until a couple weeks ago when Mom kicked Wynton out and changed the locks. (Except right this minute Wynton was crashed in the attic because Dizzy had illegally left out keys for him.)

Dizzy knew she was annoying Perfect Miles, figured on a scale of one to ten she was at a seven, but hello? It was annoying to be ignored too. Very annoying. “So, guess what?” she said, giving it one last go. She did have a couple things in her arsenal that could start a conversation with a rock. “You won’t believe this, Miles, but there’s a woman in Pennsylvania who has orgasms from brushing her teeth.” This was from a site she found last night while trying to figure out what she was doing wrong with the whole masturbating thing. Dizzy pretended to brush her teeth with a nearby fork for dramatic effect, wishing it was Lizard she was telling this awesome tidbit. If only.

At a solid annoyance-level of ten, Miles stood – he was so tall now, like having a telephone pole in the family – grabbed his book, and headed out the front door to the porch to brave the heat. The toothbrush orgasmer hadn’t had the desired effect. Perfect’s fun thermometer was surely broken. Still,

Dizzy rose to follow him because she couldn’t help herself, but then she heard the dog stampede and decided to stay in the air-conditioned house.

Miles was a cross-species sensation. If they didn’t close the front door, his bedroom turned into a dog park. She suspected he talked to them like St. Francis did. Dizzy didn’t like dogs. Like why in the world did they put their noses in her fiery furnace? She preferred grazing cows and horses, reasonable animals in distant fields who weren’t perverts. She sat back down, sliced into the warm gingerbread she’d made last night and had now reheated. Steam rose out of it, along with a mingling of cloves and molasses – a cornflower blue that misted into Dizzy’s field of vision as she inhaled deeply and thought some more about Perfect Miles.

When she was little, she used to sleepwalk, even once into Mrs. Bell’s house next door, but Miles’s room was the favorite in-house destination. Night after night, she’d sleepwalk into his bedroom and curl up on the brown beanbag chair under the window. This was how she learned that Perfect Miles cried in his sleep. The sniffing would wake her, and then she’d walk over to him and touch his arm. Her touch always stopped it. But what was strange, stranger even than that, was no matter how dark it was in the room, she could always see him. He never woke up and she never said anything to anyone about it – neither about the crying nor that he kind of glowed in the dark – but often she felt like the real Miles was the boy weeping in darkness, giving off some kind of strange dream-light, not this perfect one who was more like a boarder than a brother.

Sometimes, honestly, Dizzy forgot Miles existed. For her, having a brother was all about her oldest brother Wynton. And Wynton said Perfect Miles was a snob or had a stick up his tight ass or thought he was better than them or was a fucking phony or a ton of other mean things that made Dizzy feel queasy.

She cut into the lavender butter (from Chef Mom’s restaurant) and started spreading it on her gingerbread, watching it melt into the crevices.

“Are you here?” she asked the room, not sure if angels had the ability to go invisible, which would mean her angel could be in the next seat. “If you are, beautiful angel, thank you for finding me yesterday, for saving me. I’d really love to—”

“Dizzy!” she heard, and jumped out of her chair. It was a gruff voice, a man’s voice, but that didn’t mean anything, did it? Angels probably switched genders and ages at will. Or maybe a new one got sent down to her.

“Yes,” she said, putting down the gingerbread. “I can’t see you today.”

“Over here. It’s me.”

Dizzy turned around and saw Uncle Clive at the window motioning for her to come to him. Oh, for Pete’s sake. His head was sideways to better talk to her through the narrow opening of the window that they never could get to completely shut – the house was over a hundred years old – even when the air-con was blasting. “I thought you were an angel,” she said.

“That’s a first. Now listen, I had a dream about Wynton.”

Dizzy walked to the window, opened it wider, and her uncle straightened out. A blast of hot oven air infused with his smell – a cigarettes, sweat, and alcohol combo, the color of rust – assaulted her. His look was Sasquatch. He had a sagging face, and his blond hair and beard were long and straggly, his clothes mismatched and worn, his girth expanding hourly it seemed. He wore a flannel shirt and mud-caked jeans despite the heat. His flushed face glistened with perspiration. Rumor had it, a long time ago he’d been a playboy, but this was hard to imagine. Mom repeatedly warned them to steer clear of their uncle when he’d been drinking, which happened to be always. She said sometimes people break and can’t be put back together, but Dizzy didn’t agree with that. She thought all people could be put back together. Her uncle was lonely. Dizzy could feel it like an undertow when she was around him. And she never told her mother or anyone that she often spied him slipping into their house at night to sleep, curling up night after night on the red velvet sofa like a sad old mountain lion.

Uncle Clive leaned in and said, “In the dream, Wynton was playing violin, except no sound was coming out of it. Then he opened his mouth to sing and nothing. Then he started stomping his feet and no stomping sound. You see?”

Dizzy nodded. “There was no more music in him.”

“Exactly. Knew you’d get it, sweet-pie. It’s a portent. He needs to be careful.”

“I’ll tell him,” she said.

Uncle Clive stroked his beard, searching Dizzy’s face with bleary solemn eyes. “Okay. Good. Come visit soon so we can catch up.” He turned to go. Of course, Dizzy never told her mom that she visited her uncle in the brown house on the hill either. She loved to listen to him play piano and occasionally the trumpet, loved looking at his drawings and photos of cows, loved hearing about his dreams and David Bowie. But mostly she loved when he talked about her missing father, his big brother Theo, which he would do until he invariably got upset and made her leave. Dizzy knew Perfect Miles visited Uncle Clive too. But Wynton never did. Wynton said Uncle Clive had loser-mojo and loser-mojo was highly contagious.

Dizzy watched her uncle tromp across the now dried-up creek that divided the property between his and theirs, then up the hill, making his way willy-nilly through the scorched vineyards he long ago began renting out to other winemakers. Apparently, once, the Fall vineyards and Fall wines were celebrated as some of the best in the valley, but that was before her dad rose from the dead in the hospital morgue (yes!) and then disappeared into the night. Or ran away. Or who knows what happened to him. Dizzy missed him, even though she’d never met him – it was like being thirsty, but always.

She wanted a real father so she could stop secretly pretending Wynton was her dad.

She put her hands on the window, watched as her uncle got smaller and

smaller, trying to think of Wynton with no more music inside him, but she couldn't. It wasn't possible. Other people played music; Wynton *was* music. She dismissed the portent as she watched her uncle disappear over the hill. Then she squinted her eyes, tilted her head, and relaxed her mind in the way she did to see the less sentient inhabitants of the Fall vineyards, using her soul sight.

And ... voilà.

There above the sauvignon blanc vineyard were the kissing ghosts. Two glimmering older men, one dark, one fair, flickering in and out of the morning light. These ghosts were in love and whenever they kissed, they rose into the air. Dizzy wished she wasn't the only one who could see them but long ago stopped mentioning them to anyone (besides Wynton and Lizard). She was sick of hearing about her overactive imagination, which really was a nice way for people to call her a liar or a nut.

Dizzy had long suspected the ghost with dark hair was her great-grandfather Alonso Fall because he looked like the statue on the town square. The only thing was, the plaque on the statue said Alonso Fall had been married to a woman, so Dizzy didn't understand why he was always kissing this other guy in his afterlife.

Still, she was crazy about these two flickering men and wanted to be just like them with someone, except alive and not mute, though perhaps they spoke ghost-language to each other, and she couldn't hear it. She also loved their best friend, an older female ghost who wore men's clothes and ran barefoot through the vineyards, her red hair spun with flowers and billowing behind her like a red river of fresh blooms.

"Hey guys," she called out to the floating men. "Do you know anything about angels?" But of course she got no answer. They were mid-kiss, midair, entwined and enraptured as always.

Their eternity was only each other.

Clippings from the Paradise Springs Gazette:

The Resurrection of Winemaker Theo Fall

Paradise Springs – Was it a miracle or a failure of medical equipment at Paradise Springs Hospital this past Monday? That's what residents of Paradise Springs are asking themselves about the apparent resurrection from the dead of acclaimed winemaker Theo Fall. Fall fell ill suddenly with a viral pneumonia and slipped into a coma last Thursday. He died four days later. The time of death was recorded as 6:45PM. A few hours later, however, Theo Fall was drinking tequila with Jose Rodriguez in the hospital morgue. The two men can be

seen below in the date-and-time-stamped photograph. Rodriguez tells the *Gazette* that he was playing chess with fellow hospital worker Tom Stead on their break when they started hearing shrieks coming from inside from the body bag on the table. According to Rodriguez, Stead ran screaming from the morgue, believing the dead man had come back to life. Stead informed the *Gazette* he will not be returning to his job. Rodriguez unzipped the body bag and welcomed Theo Fall back to the land of the living with a shot of tequila. The County Clinic has retired the heart monitor that hadn't been able to detect Fall's heartbeat and is now asking for donations for a new one.

The Disappearance of Winemaker Theo Fall

Paradise Springs – Beloved winemaker Theo Fall, who recently recovered from a viral pneumonia or rose from the dead (depending with whom in town you talk), appears to have driven away from his family, his home, his town, his award-winning vineyard.

According to a source close to the family, Theo Fall's wife, Bernadette, the chef and owner of The Blue Spoonful, pregnant with their third child, is at wit's end. She revealed to our source that her husband left a note. While she wouldn't share the contents, she did say she was quite certain the winemaker would not be returning to Paradise Springs. The plot thickens, as they say.

The Town Tried to Keep Winemaker Theo Fall

Paradise Springs – Most longtime residents will confirm that entering and leaving Paradise Springs can be a challenge at times. Since their invention, cars have been breaking down for no mechanical reason at the town's edge as if Paradise Springs itself doesn't want certain people to enter and others to leave. Before that, it was horses, refusing to cross hooves over the border, stranding carriages and frustrated riders at the roadside motel and bar, the aptly

named Better Luck Next Time. An eyewitness is now reporting that all four wheels of Theo Fall's truck blew out as he crossed out of town a week ago, shortly after being proclaimed dead of a viral pneumonia. "He just kept driving, seemed like nothing could've stopped him," said local Dylan Jackson, who was on the shoulder changing his tire, suffering a similar fate. "All the world's bad weather was in the man's face. Had a flare going so I saw right into his cab as he flew by. Never seen Theo look like that. He ain't never coming back if you ask me."



DIZZY

Dizzy was back at the breakfast table, mid-bite, thinking how if the angel hadn't saved her yesterday, she wouldn't be here now eating lavender butter on hot gingerbread. Her mother entered the kitchen. "Morning chouchou," Chef Mom said, like she did every morning.

"I don't ever want to die," Dizzy told her mother. "Like ever, so you never have to worry that I'll kill myself."

"Dizzy!" Her mother said her name like this often, like it was an expletive. "The thought never occurred to me." She shook her head as if to shake away the idea. "Until now." Her mother's face was as plastered in freckles as Dizzy's and she also had a frizz bomb on her head, but she didn't resemble a frog and wasn't built like a feather.

Her mom put her bag on the counter. Dizzy could see the notebook in it. It was her mom's bizarro version of a diary, full of letters she never sent. She said she started doing it after her brother Christophe died when she was Dizzy's age because she needed to talk to him so badly. At first, she only wrote to Christophe, but over time she started writing to everyone, including her dead parents, Dizzy's missing father, and even Dizzy herself. Dizzy acquired this specific intel because she might have snooped looking for her own name once. It was mostly gooey stuff about how much she loved Dizzy even though she was such an oddball and talked too much. She also saw a letter to an apple. And one to a meal Chef Mom had in San Francisco. It was from this notebook Dizzy also learned that Chef Mom made dinner for Dizzy's long-gone father and left it in the restaurant under a heat lamp. Every. Single. Night. Like a total weirdo.

"You know what's occurred to me?" Dizzy said to the weirdo. "Never

leaving the house again so nothing too bad can happen to me. I wouldn't get bored. I could bake and watch movies and shows and do my research. Basically, what I do anyway but without the threat of catastrophic accidents or humiliation by my peers—"

"Humiliation by—? Did something happen? Is that why you really took off during gym yesterday?" After Dizzy's dramatic exit, the school had called Chef Mom at the restaurant, and Chef Mom had called Dizzy. She'd told her mother the heat had gotten to her, but she was fine now that she was home making gingerbread.

"No," Dizzy lied. "Nothing happened. It was just so hot and..." Dizzy blah-blahed until her mother's eyes glazed over. It wasn't the first time Dizzy had broken out of school.

"You can't run off like that, honey," she said. "Next time go to the nurse, okay?"

Dizzy nodded and scooted her chair around so she could better see Chef Mom. Her mother was big and flashy. She wore flowery dresses and high heels when not working. She liked to say she was smashing the patriarchy by not conforming to socio-cultural standards of skeletal female beauty and she had the refrigerator magnets to prove it: *Riots not diets; Never trust a skinny cook; I'm a feminist, what's your superpower?* Dizzy thought her mom was beautiful. Everyone did.

Well-known fact: Dizzy had never, not even for one minute of life, been beautiful and never would be. She had not won the looks lottery. The only people who said looks didn't matter, she noticed, were the beautiful ones like Perfect Miles and Mom. Looks mattered. Hello? What could be more obvious than this? Dizzy figured she'd have to find a mystical, inward-looking boy to merge souls with, one who'd see only her good heart.

Her mother hadn't gotten home until late last night, after Dizzy went to bed, so she didn't know yet. Dizzy hadn't wanted to share such a momentous life event over the phone. "Mom, I have breaking news, amazing news—"

And ... her mother was calling someone, because, seriously, Dizzy did not exist for these people. She wasn't even a dust particle, she was an atom inside a dust particle. "Glad we hired that kid for sauté, what was his name... Right, Felix Rivera," Mom said into the phone in her chef voice. "That dish he made – brilliant. I liked everything about him... Yes, especially the fedora." Dizzy could tell it was Finn, her sous chef. "Okay, let's do this... No, no, get chicory or puntarella instead. Wait, they actually have squash blossoms already? Get 'em... No, not halibut! Coming out my ears! Go for the trout. We'll do..." Dizzy tuned out her mother. She got up and was now standing at the counter making it very clear with her most dramatic facial gestures that she really needed to talk. To no avail. The long-distance shopping trip with Finn went on and on. Dizzy began waving her hands in front of her mother's face, which only succeeded in making her mother turn her back on Dizzy and continue the conversation facing the stove. "A cold soup, not gazpacho. How about the chilled cucumber and avocado. Okay, yes, good idea, we'll do a crudo too. Fine, halibut—"

Dizzy hollered, "Mother, I'm pregnant!"

Her mom whipped around, dropping the phone. "What?" Her face had lost all color. Ack. Dizzy backtracked. "No, no. Not really, of course not, saw that in a movie, but I really have to tell you something."

"Dizzy, how could you do that to me? Seriously, my heart stopped." Both of her hands were now pressed to her chest. "Please don't ever do that again. Promise me?"

"I promise."

Her mother bent down to pick up the phone. "And we've already agreed no sex ever. Remember?" She checked the phone, sighed, placed it on the counter. "I'm assuming the chastity belt is still a good fit? Not too cumbersome under your jeans?" This made Dizzy laugh, which made her mother smile so that her already squinty eyes got even more squinty.

She and Chef Mom were laugh partners. “Okay, so what’s so important, my not-pregnant child? You have my undivided.”

“I saw an angel yesterday.” Dizzy brought her hands to her heart like her mother had, to show how serious this was. “For real, Mom. An angel came to me.” She skipped the part about almost getting run over by a truck and the angel actually saving her life because her mother was always giving her grief about how she didn’t pay attention to the world around her, especially when crossing the street. “I felt something very profound, feel it still, something—”

“You’ve got to be kidding me.” Her mother’s hands took to the air. “It’s the mute ghosts all over again. Then what was it, God himself in your closet?” Dizzy had made the mistake of telling her mom she suspected this one night. “Now an angel. This is what you got me off the call for – Dizzy!” She picked up her cell, punched a number, put it to her ear. “Finn, sorry, my daughter has lost her marbles, runs in the family... Seriously, who the hell needs marbles anyway?” She gave Dizzy a look, said into the phone, “Okay, go on. You know what? I’ll just come. See you at the Lady Luck farm stand in fifteen.”

She ended the call and then wagged her finger at Dizzy. “Do not under any circumstances let your brother in this house, you hear me?”

“I hear you.” Dizzy walked over to the front door, opened it a crack, yelled out to Perfect Miles on the front porch, “Mom says you’re not allowed back in the house! Sorry!”

“Very funny.” She buttoned her chef’s coat. “I mean it.”

Dizzy didn’t like to lie, so she said, “You changed the locks, remember?” A true statement but omitting the detail that Wynton was already in the house, thanks to Dizzy. “Mom, if I die in some fluke accident before we see each other again, know that I don’t forgive you for how you’re treating him. Wyn says he didn’t even take the ring. And anyone can get in a car crash.”

“What’s with you today? You’re not going to die in a fluke accident,” her mother said, obviously not wanting to get into it with Dizzy about the night Wynton totaled her truck, drove it drunk as a skunk into the statue of Alonso Fall, their great-grandfather, now beheaded on the town square. The bill from the city was twenty thousand dollars, and Wynton had ended up in jail.

“Well, if I do die, there’s my last will and testament,” Dizzy said, pointing to a note she’d left on the fridge this morning. “I thought it important for you to have.”

Chef Mom gave Dizzy a what-planet-are-you-from look, but an amused version. “Chouchou, were you always this odd?”

“Yes,” Dizzy said. “And well-known fact, Mom: Jews totally believe in angels. Your spiritual tradition. Your people.” They didn’t go to temple, but Mom did make Passover seders and on Yom Kippur, she closed the restaurant and fasted. Dizzy always stayed home with her on the highest holy day, waiting for God to arrive, and pretending to fast, but really, hiding behind the refrigerator door when necessary and shoveling in her mouth whatever was available.

Chef Mom rolled her eyes. “Please. No, we don’t. We’re a practical lot.”

“Actually, the Jewish religion is jam-packed with angels,” Dizzy insisted. “I looked it up last night after my encounter—”

“Your encounter!” Her mother laughed. “Dizzy! C’mom. C’est folle!” Only occasionally did French words fly out of her mom’s mouth.

“It’s not folle—” Dizzy stopped speaking because stomping down the steps in his motorcycle boots was Wynton. He had his shades on and his face was broken open in a cockeyed smile showcasing the chipped tooth he got in some fight while in juvie. He had on ripped black jeans and a black T-shirt with the insignia for his band on it: The Hatchets. Hanging from his mouth was an unlit cigarette. He was carrying his beat-up violin case under his arm. He looked like he belonged on an album cover. He always

did. The frog-in-a-wig look worked way better on him, on guys generally, especially musicians.

Well-known fact: Boys got to be sexy-ugly, not just ugly.

“Did I overhear a heavenly messenger visited my Frizzy?” he said, and delight spread through Dizzy like flames.

“Yes, you did!” Dizzy cried. At least one person in this family listened to her, believed her, appreciated her!

“Love it,” he said, putting down his case, tucking the cigarette behind his ear. Then in quick succession, he bear-hugged Dizzy, lifted her like she was made of air, twirled her around singing the Beatles song “Dizzy Miss Lizzy” (her theme music, according to him). In equally quick succession, Dizzy flushed, squealed, cracked up, and then was light-years away from the sad, boring, face-farting, Lizard-less world. One hundred percent Wyntonized in five seconds flat.

Her mother – with whom Dizzy was currently avoiding eye contact because of the whole leaving-out-the-keys-for-Wynton thing – once told Dizzy that it used to be believed a white truffle was made when lightning hit and entered an ordinary mushroom. That’s how Dizzy thought of Wynton – unlike the rest of the ordinary mushrooms like her, he had lightning inside him.

“All right, then,” he said in his rasp as he lowered her to the ground. “‘Bout time we made some inroads with the Almighty.” He mussed Dizzy’s hair. “Be sure to send this angel my way. I need some divine intervention.” He smiled at Dizzy with his whole face, every tooth and freckle and crease. “Been missing you, Frizzy,” he said, and her heart grew a size.

“The angel has long curly rainbow hair and tats everywhere,” she told him. “You can’t miss her.”

Wynton opened his violin case and pulled out some wilted wildflowers. Dizzy could see ants on the petals. Wynton collected flowers as he walked. When he lived at home, there were always hand-picked bouquets dying all over the furniture.

Wynton exhaled, turning his attention to Chef Mom, who was standing at the counter, her cheeks flushed, her eyes burning holes in his head. She was trembling. This was real anger, Dizzy thought, rare for her mother, who kept her cool daily in a chaotic restaurant kitchen. Wynton walked toward her, arms up in a gesture of surrender, the dying flowers in one hand, their spines broken.

Chef Mom looked at Dizzy with a hard expression. “You let him in?” Dizzy pretended she was struck with deafness. Chef Mom turned her attention back to Wynton. “Please stop using your sister’s big heart to get to me. I don’t want you here when I come back from the farmer’s market.” Dizzy tried not to smile. She didn’t know her mother thought she had a big heart. *She* didn’t know she had a big heart.

“I hear you,” Wynton said, reaching into his pocket and pulling something out. Dizzy stood on her toes to see. It was the sapphire and diamond engagement ring! Uh-oh. He *had* stolen it. “I’m sorry,” he said, putting it in Chef Mom’s hand. “Forgive me, okay? I needed a new bow for this gig tonight. I really am sorry, Mom.” Dizzy watched her mom swallow as she gazed at the ring in her hand. She looked like she might start crying. He said, “You were right. I took it but I sold my motorcycle yesterday so I could buy it back from the pawn shop.” Dizzy’s shock was reflected on her mother’s face. His beloved motorcycle?

“Okay,” said her mom, drawing out the word.

“I wasn’t thinking right when I took it.”

“You’re never thinking right – that’s the problem!”

“Everything’s about to change for me, Mom. I’ve been trying to tell you. There’s this guy coming to hear me tonight—”

“Have you heard all this before, Dizzy? Because I sure have. There’s this guy. There’s that guy. There’s a gig. Then there’s my totaled truck. Police at my door—”

“I’ll pay you back for everything. You’ll see. This time it’s different.”

He paused, then smiled the smile that made girls' heads explode.

Her mother sighed in a tired way. "You've gotten away with far too much in life because of that grin, Wynton. There's nothing funny about any of this. I don't want you ending up—"

"Like Uncle Clive?" Wynton said.

"I was going to say I don't want you ending up a vagrant." She began the daily search for her keys. Dizzy saw them on the counter but said nothing. She didn't like when her mother left. She wished her mother had a kangaroo pouch she could just chill inside all day long.

"You fired me, remember?" Wynton said.

"You stole from my restaurant, remember?"

"I needed the money to make a demo."

"And where is that demo?"

"He'll do it," Dizzy said. "He will."

Wynton smiled at Dizzy like a deranged scarecrow. "You see? Frizzy still believes in me."

"I believe in you, Wynton," said Mom. "You could've asked me for the money instead of—"

"Oh!" Dizzy blurted, interrupting. "Uncle Clive wanted me to tell you. He dreamt you were playing violin, but no sound was coming out."

"What?" Wynton's face darkened.

"He dreamt there was no more music inside you. He said it was a portent..." Dizzy's voice trailed off. She realized she shouldn't have mentioned it. Her mother often told her she had to learn to read a room before blurting things out. It was clear the room didn't want to hear about this portent.

Wynton's eyebrows furrowed. "I hate that. Don't tell me that. God, I hate when he dreams about me." He rubbed his eyes with his hands. "The last thing I need today is a hex."

"There's no such thing as hexes. Hexes *or* angels. What's wrong with you both? Really, why can't you two be more rational?" Chef Mom said,

not adding *like your perfect brother Miles* but Dizzy heard it anyway. She assumed Wynton did too. It was amazing how many things people said to you without actually saying them. "And Dizzy, I told you to steer clear of your uncle Clive when he's not on the wagon, and he certainly isn't these days." Her mother spotted the keys hiding behind the espresso maker, grabbed them and her bag with the notebook in it.

"You'll see, Mom," Wynton said, returning to the table where he'd left his violin case and opening it. "You'll see this time." He lifted the instrument out. The violin gleamed. He held up a bow for them. "My whole damn motorcycle for this guy. Listen." He swiped it across the strings. "Have you ever heard tone like that?" He played some more. "Did your angel talk sweeter than that? No, she didn't."

"You sold your motorcycle for that bow?" It was Perfect Miles. He stood at the front door, looking different than he had earlier. His eyes were cold, his jaw tight, his body tense.

"I did." Wynton looked at the bow admiringly and started polishing it with his shirt.

"Excellent," Miles said, and before any of them knew what was happening, he jumped the red velvet couch and leaped over the coffee table. He was heading straight for Wynton like a mad bull.

"Miles!" Chef Mom shouted.

Dizzy hollered, "Angel! Come now!"

That made Wynton laugh as he put his arms up over his head to shield himself from Miles's assault until he realized that Miles wasn't coming for him but for the bow in his hand. "No fucking way," Wynton said, maneuvering the bow behind his back to protect it, but he was too slow. Miles grabbed the end of the bow right out of Wynton's hands, breaking skin as he did so. Dizzy saw blood pearl in a line on Wynton's palm.

Miles hopped back, graceful as a gazelle, bow in hand, and without hesitating, Perfect Miles broke the bow in half over his knee like it was

a twig, then dangled it in the air, before dropping it on the floor as he bolted out the door.

At the far window where Uncle Clive had been, Dizzy saw the three ghosts. The two men (no longer kissing) and the redheaded woman. They had woeful worried expressions on their dead faces.

Dizzy would wonder later what might've been different had she not left a key out for Wynton, had he not been in the house that day.

She'd always wonder if everything that happened to him next was her fault.



Dizzy's Last Will and Testament (posted on fridge):

To Whom It May Concern,

In the event of my unforeseen death, please serve at my memorial: mini black truffle soufflés, thyme gougères, butternut squash tartlets with fried sage, and brioche toasts with gravlax, crème fraîche, and caviar (don't skimp on the caviar, Chef Mom).

*For dessert: mini chocolate-raspberry soufflés so everyone falls in deep endless love, like Samantha Brookweather and Jericho Blane in **live Forever Now**.*

*I want Wynton to play calypso music on the violin and everyone to dance in the vineyard in the moonlight. After that, please watch **Babette's Feast** on the red velvet couch in a happy people-pile.*

Good luck, world. I will try to come back as a ghost who talks.

Sincerely yours,

Dizzy Fall



*From Bernadette Fall's
Notebook of Unsent Letters:*

Dear Dizzy,

It's been so hard keeping this secret from you, but all will finally be revealed next week. Okay, my chouchou, are you ready? Drumroll ... I'm putting the dessert you made for me on the menu! (I remember my first dish that went on my parents' café menu. It was a sour grape and taleggio galette. A life-changing moment for me.) They'll be called "Dizzy's Pansy Petal Crêpes with Lavender Cream" unless you have something else you prefer. I already told Finn to track down a half pound of fresh pansies.

Only question: Is Paradise Springs ready? The other day you were going on (and on and on and on and on, dear girl) about the history of airborne people (as one does!) and mid-spiel you started calling them air-walkers. Ha! Well, that's what your dessert did to me, turned me into an air-walker. I'll expect nothing less than the whole dining room levitating off their chairs upon finishing your crêpes.

Cannot wait until next week. You are my favorite child on earth.

Chef Mom



Dear Theo,

Dreamt of you again last night. We were spooning, your arms tight around me. I could feel your breath on my neck, your hand on my hip. Your thoughts in my head. Your soul in my body. Love ripping through me all night like a storm. Desperate heartache ever since. Been telling everyone at the restaurant I have allergies to explain the tears.

When I made your nightly meal this evening, my goal was to get the dream on the plate:

Starter: Steak Tartare with a Smoked Quail Egg and Tamarind Dressing – ecstasy

Main: Duck Confit with Roasted Garlic Sauce and Pommes de Terre Sarladaises – safety

Dessert: a Gâteau Marjolaine – my new recipe, the almond meringue is light and crisp, the dark chocolate ganache robust, the hazelnut buttercream, preposterously rich and velvety, then the fountain of sauce anglaise poured over it – it will kiss every inch of your mouth

Paring: Sage Farms Private Reserve Cabernet – pure joy, you lucky duck

Miss you like the earth misses rain.

Bernie

"I AM FERVENTLY IN LOVE WITH THIS
BRAVE, FUNNY, TENDER, EXUBERANT
BEATING HEART OF A BOOK."

BECKY ALBERTALLI

Welcome to Northern California wine country,
home to the Fall siblings. Years ago, their
father mysteriously disappeared, cracking
the family into pieces. When an enigmatic,
rainbow-haired girl shows up, it sends the
lives of brothers Wynton and Miles and their
sister Dizzy into tumult.

With rivalries, family curses and love stories
within love stories, this is the intricate,
luminous tale of a family's complicated past
and present. And only in telling their stories
can they hope to rewrite their futures.



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