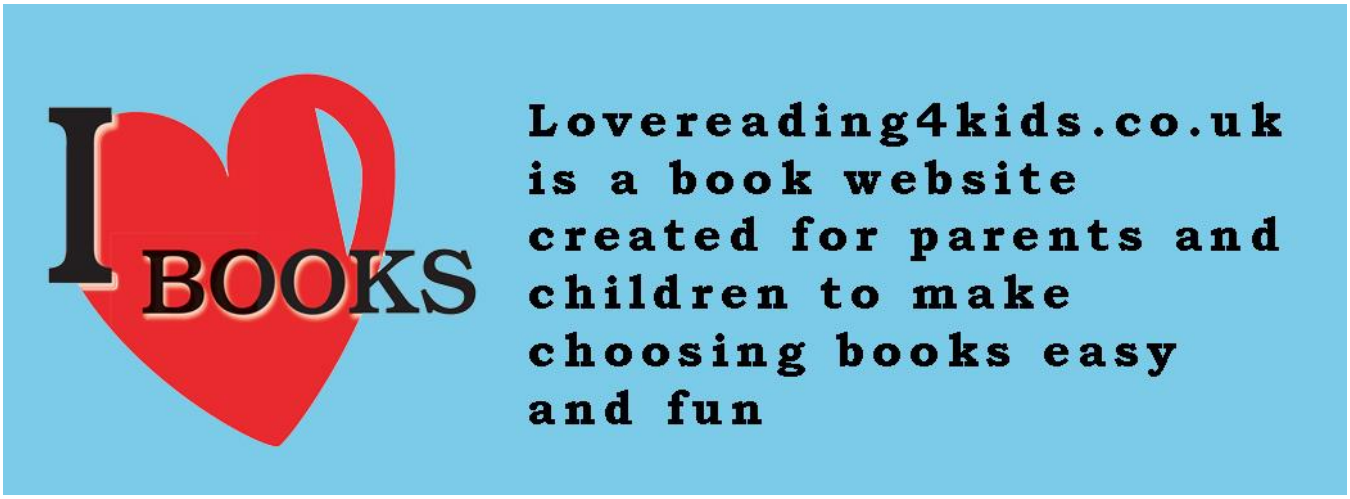

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CHAPTER 1

Sully pulled the thin wad of bills from his pocket and counted. Thirteen bucks. He'd hauled his butt out of bed at six a.m. on a Saturday to make thirteen bucks in seven hours. He couldn't work out how much that was per hour, but he knew Dom made more stacking yogurt and cream cheese at Price Chopper.

The flea market was depressingly empty. Most of the other vendors were parked on lawn chairs, their feet propped on tables. Sully spent enough time sitting in school, so he was standing, arms folded.

The timing of this epically bad payday couldn't be worse. It would have given his mom a lift, for Sully to hand her a hundred bucks to put towards the rent or groceries.

He still couldn't believe Exile Music had closed. Nine and a half years, Mom had worked there. By the end she'd been their manager, their accountant, their everything. But she had no accounting degree; she didn't even have a high school diploma. Where was she going to find another job that paid half of what she'd been making?

Sully took a deep, sighing breath and stared down the long aisle.

A girl around Sully's age turned the corner and headed in his direction. He watched her walk, head down, beat-up backpack slung over one shoulder. There was a swagger to her walk, a little attitude. Or maybe the combat boots, the black gloves with the fingertips cut off, the mass of dark braids bouncing off her back like coils of rope provided the attitude.

As she drew closer, Sully looked at his phone instead of staring. It was hard not to stare.

To Sully's surprise, she slowed when she reached his stall. She eyed the orbs he kept locked under glass, running her tongue over her teeth. She was wearing loose-fitting cargo trousers and zero make-up. Her brown angular face was striking, her take-no-shit scowl a little intimidating. Not your usual flea market customer.

He cleared his throat. 'Anything I can help you with?'

She studied him, squinted, as if he was slightly out of focus. She unslung the bag on her shoulder and knelt out of sight in front of his table.

When she reappeared she was clutching a sphere – a Forest Green. Enhanced sense of smell. Sully didn't have to consult the book to know it scored a three out of ten on the rarity chart. Retail, he could easily get six hundred for it.

'How much?' she asked, holding it up.

His heart was hammering. This one deal could make his whole weekend. 'Wow. You find that in the wild?' She didn't strike him as a collector or an investor.

She nodded. 'It was caked in mud. I thought it was an Army Green.' Which was a big fat one on the rarity chart.

Resistance to the common cold. Sixty bucks.

'Man, you must have died when you cleaned it off.'

'How much?' she repeated, with the slightest of nods to acknowledge his comment.

Sully tried to remember how much cash he had on him. Two fifty? Maybe two seventy. Usually that was more than enough, because who brought a Forest Green to a flea market?

His gaze flicked between the Forest Green and the girl's face. 'Two fifty?' His voice rose at the last minute, making it sound more like a question.

The girl chuckled, bent to pick up her pack. 'I can get three twenty-five from Holliday's.'

Sully flinched when she said 'Holliday's', but to her credit, she said it like it hurt her mouth.

'Hang on. I can go to three fifty, but I can't get you the last hundred till tomorrow.' He'd have to borrow it from Dom.

The girl put a hand on her hip. 'I'm sorry. Did I give you the impression I thought three twenty-five was a fair price? Let me rephrase: even the bastards over at Holliday's would give me three twenty-five.'

Sully laughed in spite of himself. They *were* bastards. The brand-new store they'd opened in Yonkers was a big part of why Sully's earnings had taken a nosedive. And Alex Holliday himself was more than a bastard. Sully squelched any thought of Holliday before that particular train of thought could start running down the track.

He did some quick calculations. This girl could list the Forest Green on eBay and get at least four fifty. Minus eBay's cut, that would leave her with about four hundred.

'OK. Four twenty-five.' Two hundred dollars profit. He

could definitely dance to that tune.

The girl scowled, opened her mouth to counter. Sully raised his hand. 'Don't even try to tell me that's not a fair offer.' He looked her in the eye. 'We both know it is.'

She held her scowl a second longer, then broke into a smile. It was a terrific smile, complete with dimples. 'You got me. Four twenty-five.'

He pulled the cash from his pocket, started counting it out. 'Like I said, I can give you two fifty now, the rest next Saturday.'

The girl's eyebrows came together. 'I hope you're not thinking I'm going to give you this marble now. If you'll have the cash next week, I'll come back with the marble then.'

Sully licked his lips, which were dry as hell. If she left, there was always a chance she wouldn't come back. It had happened before; it was never a good idea to give people time to find a better offer.

'Look, I'll give you a receipt. I'm good for it; I'm here every weekend.' Sully spotted Neal across the aisle, unpacking used DVDs from a cardboard box. 'Neal!'

Neal lifted his head. He was wearing Ron Jon sunglasses despite being indoors, in a cavernous room that was not particularly well lit.

'Can she trust me?' Sully asked, holding his palms out.

Neal stabbed a finger in Sully's direction. 'You can trust that man with your life.'

From the next booth over, Samantha shouted, 'And that's the truth!' and crossed herself. Samantha was Neal's wife, so her testimonial was somewhat redundant, but the girl with the Forest Green didn't need to know that.

Sully turned back to the girl. She folded her arms. 'I wouldn't trust my *grandma* with that kind of money.'

'Hey, Sully?' Sully hadn't noticed the kid hovering at the corner of his booth. He was twelve or thirteen, Indian, holding a replica sphere – a Cherry Red. 'Would you sign this?'

'Sure.' Sully reached for the replica and a Sharpie the kid offered, feeling a flush of pleasure that the girl was there to witness this.

'You sure you can trust me with this?' Sully asked as he signed.

The kid laughed.

Sully blew the ink dry, tossed the kid the Cherry Red, said, 'Thanks, man. Thanks for asking.'

'What was that about?' the girl asked, motioning towards the kid, who was disappearing around a corner.

Sully held out his hand. 'David Sullivan.' When the girl only looked at his hand, he added, 'I'm the guy who found the Cherry Red.'

'I know who David Sullivan is.' She sounded annoyed. 'A millionaire for ten minutes, until Alex Holliday's lawyers stopped payment on the cheque. Tiny Tim ripped off by New York's favourite billionaire.'

The words stung like hot sauce on a wound, but Sully couldn't deny she was just stating the facts without any sugar-coating.

She held the Forest Green by her ear like a shot-putter. 'Moving on. We got a deal? I'll see you Saturday?'

'Tell you what.' Still trying to shake off her words, Sully took out his key ring, unlocked the display case, and pulled out his two most valuable spheres – a Lemon Yellow (grow an

inch) and a Slate Grey (singing ability). Both were rarity level two; together they were worth about two sixty. 'Take these as collateral. They're worth way more than one seventy-five. I'll trust *you*.'

She considered, looking down at the spheres, then back up at Sully. She scooped the spheres out of his hand and stashed them in her pack. After exchanging numbers in case one of them couldn't make it next week, Sully counted the cash out on the table. She stuffed it in her back pocket and, finally, pressed the cool Forest Green sphere into his slightly sweaty palm.

'See you next Saturday,' she said, and turned away.

Sully watched her go, her wrists flicking as she walked.

'Hey,' he called after her.

She turned.

'What's your name?'

She smiled. 'Hunter.'

'As in, marble hunter?'

She pointed at him. 'You got it.'

'Maybe we'll do more business in the future, then?'

Hunter nodded. 'Works for me if your offers are straight.'

Sully nodded. 'See you Saturday.'

When Hunter was out of sight, he held the Forest Green up, rotated it, admiring.

'She's a beauty,' Neal called over. His buzz cut always seemed wrong to Sully; his bright, open face just cried out for long, surfer-dude hair.

'I nearly choked when she pulled it out. I've never had a Forest Green before.'

'I wasn't talking about the marble,' Neal said, laughing.

Sully grinned but said nothing. She was fine, no doubt about it, but not his type. Too serious. Sully liked to laugh.

'I met my first wife at a flea market.' Neal put his hand on top of his head. 'She was . . . dazzling. Long auburn hair, freckles dusted across her cheeks.'

'You do know I can hear you, right?' Samantha called from behind her table, which was covered in tarot cards, crystals, incense.

Neal acted like he'd been jolted out of a trance. 'Sorry.' He grinned at Sully. 'Did I say dazzling? I meant frumpy. Face like a Mack truck. Anyway, back then I was selling Grateful Dead memorabilia—'

'And pirated concert tapes,' Samantha interjected.

Sully laughed. 'The Grateful *who*?'

Neal didn't take the bait. He knew Sully knew who the Grateful Dead were, because he'd lent Sully one of their CDs. He also knew they put Sully to sleep.

Samantha crossed the aisle and, without a word, set a sandwich wrapped in tinfoil on Sully's table. She always made an extra for him.

'Thanks, Samantha.'

She patted Sully's shoulder as she passed.

Sully munched on a homemade meat loaf hero as Neal went on with his story. Sully wouldn't want to trade places with Neal, but he had to admit the guy had led an interesting life. Well into his sixties, he'd never had a real job with a steady pay cheque. He and Samantha lived in a little camper that Sully knew well from the many times they'd invited him to hang out after the flea market closed.

After ten years of sharing an apartment with his mom,

Sully'd had more than enough of living in cramped spaces. As of last Tuesday, they were in danger of losing even that. If something didn't give, by summer they'd be living in the basement of his weird uncle Ian's house in Pittsburgh. That couldn't happen. It just couldn't. Sully's friends were in Yonkers; his life was in Yonkers.

He tossed the Forest Green in the air and caught it, relishing the hard, perfect smoothness as the sphere slapped his palm. It was a start. Later, he'd call a few of his regular customers and see if anyone was interested in it. If not, he'd put it in the display case. It wouldn't be hard to sell. The values on the rarer spheres just kept rising, and Sully kept his prices ten or fifteen per cent below the big retailers'.

They'd get through this; they'd keep the apartment. In two years he'd graduate from Yonkers High with Dom by his side.