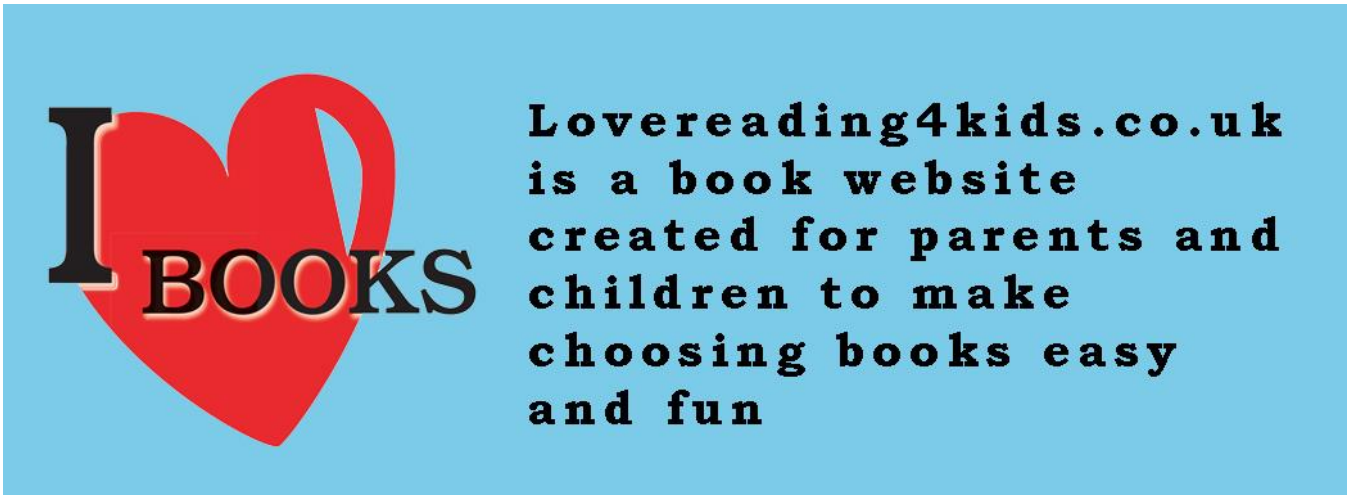


An extract from

Juniper Lemon's Happiness Index

Written by

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The girl in the picture doesn't look any different.

Things you see: brown eyes. Honey hair to the shoulders. Natural eyeliner.

Things you don't: stitches. A neck brace.

The sleep rings hidden beneath her makeup.

I lower my new student ID card. My throat is tight with all the changes I carry, but don't find there. Still, I'm grateful not to wear them like a flag on my forehead: *Ask me about my tragedy!*

There's talk enough without advertising.

Even as I stow the card and cross the cafeteria, I catch two girls sneaking glances at me from a nearby table.

Girl #1: "Do you think she saw it happen?"

Girl #2: "Uh, yeah? She was there."

Girl #1: "No, I mean—" (She lowers her voice.) "The *mo*ment when Camil—"

That's when Girl #2 knocks 1 in the ribs and 1 sees me watching, and both shut up and look quickly away, in opposite directions.

I scrunch Camilla's bag closer. It still smells faintly of her dark vanilla rose spray. I haven't used it all summer because I've wanted to preserve it, to keep its last little proofs of her intact, but today I had a feeling I would need it.

It's hard to keep close a person everyone keeps telling you is gone.

Whispers follow until I duck into an alcove beside the stairs. Alone at last at a tucked-away table, I cross "ID Card" off my Back-to-School Orientation List and resume doodling at the edges. Normally I'd have bounced from this fun house by now, but alas—today Dad had Plans. These involve me "hanging out" with my peers before class starts tomorrow, which is why he left me here to ~~die~~ socialize while he ran errands.

Great Plan, Dad.

I finish a garden of curls and accents around my name, and have just paused to add tallies to

PEOPLE CAUGHT STARING
𝍸 𝍸 𝍸 𝍸 |||

when a backpack crashes down into the chair across from me.

"Oh!" The redhead it belongs to startles when she sees me. "I—I didn't think anyone else would be here. Sorry." Fumbling, she yanks it up again to leave.

Is there someone here more flustered than I am?

"Wait! You don't have to—*Kody*?"

There are only so many people at this school with long red waves.

Called by name, she freezes and turns to face me. "Hi, Juniper."

Kody Hotchkiss. Now there's a girl who looks different. "Kody, you look—wow."

Kody smiles—modest, but clearly pleased. "Thanks. I . . . switched to contacts and started running this summer."

"It shows. I mean, not that you didn't look awesome before; you're lovely, you've always been—"

I stop before I can embarrass myself. Kody grins at my ineptness.

Maybe Dad had a point about that social practice.

"Seat's open if you want it." I gesture at the chair and Kody, still smiling, indulges me. I can't get over the change in her. Forget glasses or contacts; this Kody carries herself.

Confident.

"So," I prompt when she looks comfortable, "what brings you to my hiding place?"

Her smile falters. "Morgan."

I don't have to ask if she means Morgan Malloy: the school bus bully who turned "Hotchkiss" into "Hershey's Kiss" in middle school. There's no way she'd miss her old mark's transformation.

My eyes widen. "Did she . . . ?"

"No, it's just—" Kody closes a fist. "She was ahead of me in the picture line. I thought, if I hung out for a while—"

"Less chance of running into her at IDs?"

Kody nods.

"Well, you're welcome to lie low here with me."

A sigh. "Thanks."

Then: "Who're *you* hiding from?"

"What?"

"You said 'hiding place.' Who're you hiding from?"

Everyone. But mostly—

"Lauren." Lauren is my real fear today: that the one person I actually want to talk to doesn't want to talk to me. Maybe what I'm really hiding from is finding out. "You haven't seen her, have you?"

I shouldn't hold my breath; Lauren has a history of avoiding awkward situations. The last time she was dodging someone—a guy she only dated for a month because she didn't know how to break up with him—we spent weeks taking long ways at school and carrying scarves and sunglasses around for snap disguises.

It had actually been kind of fun then.

"No. But I'll help keep an eye out for her."

"Thanks."

This time, our smiles are sly. Conspiratorial.

Hiders in crime.

"So how long does it take our IDs to print, anyway?" She leans back, but her eyes flick to the table. "You look like you've been here a while."

"Hm?"

I follow her gaze to the doodles on my Orientation List.

"Oh—not that long. I already got mine. I've just been killing time until my ride gets here."

"Cool designs." She leans closer, inspecting something. "What are all these little notes in between?"

The tallies.

"Nothing," I say too quickly. I pull back the sheet before she can read *Number of times I've heard Camilla's name*: 21. *Number of times I've heard mine*: 17.

People who have offered condolences:

0.

"Oh," I cover, gathering my things, "I think I just felt my phone buzz. That's probably my dad. Do you mind?"

"Sure. I mean—" Kody composes herself. "I'll be fine. Don't let me keep you."

"I'll see you around. You really do look great," I add.

Even as I pass her, I feel terrible. Kody did nothing wrong.

I walk toward a row of vending machines, for once today not counting the stares. Would Camilla coming up be such a bad thing? Surely *every*one won't just shut down on me like Lauren has.

When I reach the Diet Coke machine, the least popular in the strip, I have no interest in actually buying a bottle—but I figure I should *look* like I'm considering something, so I get out my wallet and some bills.

"Could I trade you some change for—"

The voice beside me breaks off. I know before I turn that it belongs to—

"Lauren."

We both go cardboard. Lauren sees Camilla's purse on my shoulder and I see that she's holding her phone: not about to answer the text I sent her this morning, or one of the dozens I sent all summer for that matter, but playing Candy Crush.

Even Lauren—the friend who held my hand when I got my ears pierced, who took the fall for me when I dropped her sister's snow globe, who's surprised me with Juniper- and Lemon-flavored candies ever since Morgan called me Cough Drop in fourth grade—doesn't know how to talk to me anymore.

For several long, terrible moments nothing happens; we both just stand there looking at each other. Then a *really* weird thing happens.

"Heeey." Lauren shuffles the last two steps over and hugs me hello.

Oh god. This is worse than I imagined.

"How's it going, Juniper?"

How's it going?

How's it *GOING*?

"Good," I answer automatically. "You?"

A breathless nod. "Good."

We stare at each other. Time stretches painfully between us, a gulf of the dozen things we must both be thinking, but leave unsaid. Once it looks as though Lauren might say something, but then she presses her lips together so hard, I think she's cut off her air supply. Oh my god, is she actually turning blue?

WARNING WARNING

AWKWARDNESS AT CRITICAL LEVELS

Employ emergency exit strategies

I open my mouth to say something—"Better grab a free lanyard," "I have to use the bathroom," "YOU KNOW WHAT I THINK I LEFT THE STOVE ON"—but before I can fake a fire or an aneurysm, an actual miracle occurs:

My phone rings.

"That'll be my dad," I gush, gratefully pawing through my bag. "I should—"

Lauren nods. "Of course."

We stare a moment longer.

"I guess I'll . . . see you tomorrow," I finish lamely.

An overwarm smile. "Tomorrow."

I lift a hand goodbye. Lauren does the same, and after more impossibly long fake smiles I turn in mortification. Conversations ended gracefully today: two for two.

When I find my phone, I see the dollars I'm still holding and wince before answering.

"Hey Dad."

"There you are," says his voice in my ear. "I was begin-

ning to think you might actually be having fun in there."

"Ha."

"I'm right out front, Juni. Can't miss me."

"Okay. See you in a minute."

I stash my phone in my jeans and put the money away. But this time, when I drop my wallet back, something crackles in the bottom of the bag. I pry it open to see what.

An envelope.

Curious, I pull it out. Then I nearly drop it, too, because when I turn it over, there are three things that I know in a heartbeat:

1) I didn't put this in the bag.
2) I am holding a letter.
3) I recognize the writing on the front, but not because it's mine.

Because it's hers.

The drive home is quiet. At first Dad asks me questions, but after having to repeat himself and receiving only grunted answers, he eases off, and the strip malls, front yards, and fir trees blur by in silence. Or what would be silence, if it didn't somehow magnify the ringing in my ears.

Once home, I make a beeline for the stairs. Not that Mom is stopping us to chat—even when she isn't "resting" these days, she's not particularly awake—but if I don't open that letter now, I'm gonna burst.

On the way to my room, I pass Camilla's. The door is shut. I don't know who shut it or when exactly. Is it easier this way? The closed door sort of gives the illusion that she is in

there: on the phone, sleeping, playing guitar. That she'll be out in a few minutes for dinner, come downstairs to watch a movie, or barge unannounced into my room, plop down on my bed, and make me watch the latest bad lip-reading or stupid cat video.

Part of me likes that.

Part of me hates it.

Part of me is afraid of what I'd see if her door was open.

I hurry past and shut my own door behind me.

When it's closed, I rip the envelope from my purse.

You

it says, in Camie's buoyant, cursive bubbles.

Goose bumps.

I turn it over. It isn't sealed.

With shaking hands I remove a single, folded page and open it. At the top—

July 4

My throat closes.

The day it happened.

I sink onto my bed and read:

Dear You,

Brevity is the only way to deliver a sting, so here goes—

I've been thinking about what you said and I've decided that you're right: It would be better for both of us this way. I know I could handle the distance, but part of college, like you said, is opening yourself

up to new experiences—and I'd be sealing myself off to those if I kept my heart in a jar for someone I left in high school.

Still, I hate, hate to think of this as a breakup letter, because I hate to think of this as an ending. It isn't an ending; it's the start of another chapter. I don't know what the future holds, but I do know that it doesn't change the past. It doesn't change what we've shared. Your life has touched mine: I'm a better person for having known you, loved you, and been loved by you—and wherever I am in the unknown ahead, you (in the pocket of my heart) will also be.

So call it an end, if you must, but I love you—today, yesterday, and always.

Yours,
Me

I lower the page. Cam was *seeing someone*. Is this what she couldn't tell me that night?

Is this what came between us at the end?

I read it again. And again, and again, and again. Clearly the letter was meant for someone else—but even so, I see "You" at the top and feel like parts of it are talking to me. *The future doesn't change the past. It doesn't change what we've shared. Your life has touched mine—*

I look up to quell the wave I feel rising in my chest. I can't keep doing this. *School* starts tomorrow. I can't just gallop off and bawl for an hour every time I remember Camilla: the way she piled her hair on top of her head to do her makeup, how she hummed when she did the dishes, or that she always ate cookie dough by the spoonful even after we'd added the eggs.

Suck it up.

I fall back against my bed and stare. It's just been in her bag this whole time. Waiting. I mean, I never thought to *look*; even this morning, when I swapped out Camie's wallet for mine, I just assumed that was all that was in there.

I hold the letter between me and the ceiling. She couldn't have meant to mail it; the envelope was open and unaddressed, much less stamped. There's barely even a recipient—just "You."

But who on earth is that?

The last guy Camie dated (well, clearly not, but the last guy I know about) was Shawn Parker, and they broke up more than a year ago. They'd remained friends—good enough for her to go to his big Fourth of July party—but nothing more. At least, not to my knowledge. Besides, they both graduated in June; she wouldn't have "left" Shawn in

high school. Couldn't have. He, like the boy before him, was the same year as her.

So who else was there?

I grab the envelope again and study it. *You,* it says, a lone word in the blank. *Who are you?* I want to ask it. *How did you know my sister? Why don't I know you?*

What did you mean to each other?

Did you love her?

I trace the letters of YOU's name. If he loved her before . . .

Could he still?

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I wake the next morning with a start. I know it's morning because the light has changed, and there's drool on my pillow, and someone's pounding on my door like the fire department.

"Juniper!" Dad calls from the other side. "Five minutes! You awake in there?"

I groan and twist away from him. Something crinkles and floats off my chest. I open my eyes enough to glimpse my own handwriting and recognize the list I scrawled early this morning:

PEOPLE WHO MIGHT KNOW SOMETHING

1. Melissa
2. Heather
3. Shawn?

Melissa, one of Camie's closest friends, already told me what she knew when I asked her about Camie's weirdness back in June. But Heather—Lauren's older sister and Camilla's *best* friend—said nothing when I asked her the same questions.

Which makes me think that she might actually know something.

"Juni?" *Poundpoundpound*.

"Yeah! I'm *awake*!"

"There's my annoyed ray of sunshine. Four minutes now. Hop to."

"Unnnngh."

Rubbing my eyes, I retrieve the list and stumble out of bed. I spent the better part of last night racking my brain, replaying endless memories for signs of YOU or his identity. How long had he and Cam been dating? Where and when had they met, spent time together?

Why was their relationship secret?

I leave the names on my desk with Camie's letter—and then dress, shove my hair into a choppy ponytail, and grab a jacket.

It's only as I'm lacing up my shoes in the doorway that it hits me: I forgot to do my Index card last night.

Of all the things to space on—

I turn back for it. If I have few physical things to remember Camie by, I have even fewer rituals with which to honor her. Recording positives in my Happiness Index each day is one of my only ways of keeping her alive.

"Juniper, let's go!"

"Coming!"

In a moment I have the whole collection out from under my bed: a slim black shoebox, closed, originally for ballet flats, now for my daily practice. I lift the lid and skip past the Before cards for the numbered After ones. Sixty-three, sixty-four . . .

Sixty-five!

I snatch the offender out. It may be a hole, but at least it's one that I can fix by the end of the day.

"Juniper!"

With a last glance at the letter, I grab my bag, shut the card inside one of my books, and hurry out.

The school year has barely begun when the next hole appears. First bell rings and the trig teacher, Ms. Jacobson, takes roll.

Then it goes like this:

"Juniper Lemon?"

I raise my hand.

"You must be—ah." Her smile falters.

I had thought myself prepared for this. I really had. I mean, some teacher *always* sees "Lemon" on the roster and asks if I'm Camilla's sister. But this year, I figured, anyone that knew Camilla would also have heard what had happened to her. Evidently Ms. Jacobson *had* heard; it just took her a moment too long to remember.

The look in her eyes says everything "ah" does not: I'm sorry.

I'm sorry I brought it up.

I'm sorry for your loss.

I'm sorry nothing I do or say can change what is and has been.

My eyes sting and I feel a sharpness under my ribs. I spend the rest of class hating the way Ms. Jacobson, after that briefest moment's silence, just picks up and goes to the next kid on the list—"Darrin Mills?"—as if that tiny hesitation hadn't been there.

As if *she* had never been there.

Another Camilla-shaped hole.

I don't make it to choir.

A funny thing happens after trig: I stop at my locker; I

change out my books; I approach the music room with minutes to spare, but when the doors loom up in front of me, I walk past them. And keep walking.

And walk out.

And when the bell rings, I am sitting on the bleachers by the football field, half curled into my knees.

How can things that aren't there hurt so badly?

For a long time I just sit there in their grip, their collective pressure weighing me down. Then I get out a notebook.

Holes

A sister.
A lined card.
A lover in a letter.
A blank night, a blackout:
the hours I can't remember.

Inside, the bell rings, startling me from the page. Has it been a whole period already?

Sure enough, in moments students are pouring out of 3 Hall. First open campus lunch is always the most popular of the year.

Lauren and I couldn't wait to eat off campus. As freshmen, we'd met at the flagpole on our very first day and then walked over to Pippa's.

"What should we order?" she'd asked when we stood before the menu.

"Something celebratory," I'd replied. "What food can you toast the new school year with?"

The answer, of course, was something toasted. We chose bagels.

"To high school," Lauren had prompted.

"To choir and going for a solo."

"To straight A's so my mom will pitch in money for a Nikon!"

I'd laughed. "Cheers."

We'd then raised our bagels, toasted each other's intentions, and eaten. Last year, we did the same.

This year, Lauren isn't at the flagpole.

I spot her walking instead with two other girls from choir toward a sub shop. One of them shows the others something on her phone and they all laugh.

What gives?

I start to text Lauren before I can stop myself.

> A summer of silence and now—

No no; stop. This isn't how you fix things.

Delete delete delete.

> I'm OK. You know, just in case you were wondering when I didn't show up for my favorite—

Juniper.

I try a different route.

> Lauren, I could really use someone to—

Pathetic!

I hit CLEAR and start again:

> WHAT KIND OF BEST FRIEND ARE YOU???

∞

Finally, I just hold down the backspace until the screen is blank. I know better than anyone:

You never know when you won't be able to take something back again.

Instead of joining the lunch crowd, I exchange my phone for *Great Expectations* and withdraw yesterday's forgotten Index card from it: *65*.

And with the pressure in my chest redoubled, I begin to write.

By fifth period I am counting down the days that remain in the school year.

At least nothing can feel worse than what I wrote on my Index card.

Fortunately, when Mr. Bodily strides into his classroom, he squanders no time on roll call or introducing AP English. Instead he distributes a list of discussion questions and tells us to pair off and start talking.

"Hey . . . Juniper, isn't it?"

I turn in my seat. A boy I don't recognize in flannel and jeans regards me with olive eyes and brows that rise into his front flip.

I pull myself together. "Uh . . . yeah?" *65* peeks out from my book and I nudge it away.

And you are?

"Nate." The stranger sticks out a hand, smiling. "Savage. Resident new kid."

Nate Savage? Call American Eagle. I think this boy fell out of their catalog.

"If you're new here, Nate," I propound as we shake, "how exactly is it that you know me?"

Nate turns his head and squints a little, a sidelong smile like he can't quite decide whether or not I am joking. "I sit next to you in trig."

Oh.

"Oh," I say, unable to think of anything better. "Uh . . . yeah. Sorry. My head was kind of somewhere else this morning."

Nate nods, thoughtful. He reaches into his backpack and drops his own copy of *Great Expectations* on the desk with a thud. "And here I thought you were just ignoring me."

"Ignoring you?" Oh god. How out of it *was* I first period?

"Yeah. I spent two minutes trying to offer you a Tic Tac before I figured you were morally opposed to wintergreen."

"Oh my god, I am *so*—"

Wait. Morally oppos—?

A joke, Juniper. A joke.

Nate's smile winds into a grin. In spite of everything that's happened today, I feel myself starting to laugh. And not a graceful laugh, either: several flatulent bursts that drag into a snort so ridiculous it makes Nate laugh, which makes me laugh even harder in turn.

Both of us are holding our stomachs when Mr. Bodily approaches.

"What's so funny over here?"

Nate and I look at each other.

"Are you *kidding*?" Nate wheezes, stepping in and slapping his knee when I am helpless to reply. "Pip's crash course in table manners. Herbert is like . . . a passive-aggressive Queen of Genovia!"

"Queen of Genovia?" Mr. Bodily raises his brows.

"You know—*The Princess Diaries*? Julie Andrews ties

Anne Hathaway to her dinner chair with a scarf?" Nate mimics her stretch for the salt and I cover my mouth. "This Dickens guy should've done stand-up."

"A modern comparison." Mr. Bodily nods appreciatively, then circles around and slides into a neighboring desk. "It is *refreshing,* Mr. Savage, to hear this classic framed in pop culture references. An idea for your first paper, perhaps?"

"Uh," Nate laughs, but his mirth shrinks back a little.

Bodily smiles. "Kidding! Who talks papers on the first day of class? I may not grade on a curve, but I'm not *that* evil."

I'm not sure which is greater: Nate's relief, or Bodily's amusement at it as he gets up and jaunts to the next table. Camilla mentioned a zany student teacher once; I wonder briefly if this is him. The thought warms me. Sharing things my sister once experienced makes me feel closer to her now.

For once, I realize, I don't mind the idea of living in her shadow.

After school is the Club and Activity Fair, a lunchroom maze of balloons and poster boards rigged up by Fairfield's clubs and sports teams to recruit new members. I don't normally go because I already have musicals and choir, but I don't know if I'll ever feel like singing again, let alone for a year and a grade. I need a new activity, and besides that, a new cause to fill my free time: Dad cut me off from volunteering last week, saying that now that summer's over, I'd need to focus on school. No more picking up whatever open shifts I could grab at the animal shelter.

At least *they* didn't mind my enthusiasm.

At the head of the stairs from 2 Hall, I stop to survey the

scene before me. I don't scan for long before I spy a row of flags: International Club. Last year it would've been Camie sitting behind them, handing out tickets to the latest foreign film downtown and chatting and laughing with people. This year, it's Lawrence Torres, a computer geek with turquoise frames and a gift for picking up languages—among other things.

"Excuse me, are you just gonna stand there all day? *Some* of us have lives to get on with."

I step aside, speechless, for Morgan Malloy. Camie always stood up to Morgan when she saw her bullying someone, especially on the bus we all once rode together—once turning her insult around so fast that the whole bus laughed at her for three stops, and again when Morgan got off.

The bully got her license after that.

She's also hated Camie since.

"Thanks," Morgan sneers as she passes.

I scowl after her. Ironically, it's only because I'm grumbling at her back that I see her take a box to the yearbook table—across from which I discover what may be the only unmanned, unattended display in the cafeteria.

General Student Booster Club.

A hole.

I cross over to it, immediately drawn to the sparse display board. On it are pictures from different cause-supporting events: students making cookies for the bake sale, posing with scavenger hunt clues around town, decorating the gym for the annual Shaker. Half the photos look like they're from the eighties, which makes sense considering Booster is about as popular today as pickled beets or Monday pop quizzes. I wonder how long it's been since they've even had someone to run the table.

Booster, an oversized font declares. *We put the "fun" in fund-raising!*

The only other text, apart from a few scribbled captions, is to say that officers will be elected in Mr. Garcia's room, A-23, at 2:45 this Thursday.

And to help yourself to a *Lucy Killman* bookmark ↓.

I follow the arrow down to the table. A spread of shirtless boy in skintight pants greets me, obscuring the few shots actually of Lucy. Gah! Staff has even resorted to ab-tastic movie swag. If they need the six-pack and smoky eyes of actor Rush Hollister to sell Booster, they must really be desperate.

But the bigger the ruin, the bigger the fix-up.

This could be a real chance to make something better.

I swing my backpack off a shoulder, shuffle out some books for my planner and a pen, and mark down *A-23, 2:45* on my calendar.

I'm about to put it all away when a loud series of *POP!*s makes me jump and spin around. At a distant table, box cutter poised where three balloons used to be—

Brand Sayers.

Brand Sayers: a senior everyone at Fairfield knows by name, if not acquaintance. Hobbies include arson, destruction, detention, and his band. There are only two things in the world Brand Sayers cares about: his electric guitar and his haircut, short sides with messy bangs across his forehead like a bird's wing. Everything else is kindling and knife-fodder.

Exhibit A: the spent balloon skins he's now plucking from his jacket.

As if he senses me watching, Brand looks up just then and catches my eye.

Then he tosses his tawny hair and smirks at me.

Smirks.

At *me*.

I'm so thrown, for a moment I lose sight of what I'm doing. I walk straight into another kid, and both our books and papers go scattering across the floor.

"Oh my gosh—"

I stoop to help the stranger pick up his things. First I see the copy of *Great Expectations,* and then, as I reach for it, "wintergreen" on a box of breath mints.

"You change your mind about those Tic Tacs?"

My gaze hits a familiar smiling face.

"Yes," I answer, the apology dropping from mine, "because the only way to improve a flavor as hopelessly offensive as wintergreen is to drop it on the floor of a high school cafeteria."

"Oh-ho!" Nate takes his dictionary-sized novel from me, clutching it with raised brows. "Watch out, Charles—a fellow comedian!"

I catch his eye and grin.

"Hey lovebirds."

We look up. Brand Sayers, apparently finished with his work on the far side of the cafeteria, now leers over us from the GSBC table, a cluster of balloons in one hand, box cutter poised to puncture them in the other. He looks from Nate to me, lips curled.

"Get a room."

And then one, two, three; the trio he is holding is a bouquet of wilted plastic.

"What is *that* guy's problem?" Nate asks when Brand takes up a tune I recognize—something by Queen—and moves away.

I shrug.

"Hey," a new voice prompts behind us. "Are you okay?"

I turn, expecting a teacher—someone following Brand's trail of destruction.

But the hand that extends to Nate belongs to somebody else.

"Let me help you up," she insists.

With a side glance at me, Nate takes it.

"I'm Morgan, by the way."

"Nate." He collects the last of his books and offers me a hand up in turn. Morgan frowns as I accept.

"Are you looking for a club, Nate?"

"Think I might've found one, actually." He nods at the barren Booster board.

Morgan scoffs. "Booster?"

"*You're* applying for something, right?" Nate turns to me, ignoring her question. Morgan's face goes crimson.

"'Apply' might be a generous word for it . . ." I chew back a smile as I indicate the sign and lack of forms to fill out.

"Is this the application?" Nate lifts one of the bookmarks and tilts it from side to side as though Rush's abs are holographic. "If so, count me *in*."

Beside us, Morgan glances darkly at me and mutters something like "Lost cause," and then returns to the yearbook table.

Nate looks relieved. "Geez, I thought she'd never leave. Did you get all your books?" He nods at the haphazard stack in my arms.

"Think so."

"Good."

Nate's thousand-watt grin returns, lighting up the room.

It's hard to bask in that brightness and not be affected.

Beyond us, Brand Sayers still floats from table to table, dispatching balloons in time with the melody of "Don't Stop Me Now."

I swear he looks at me right where the song should say *you*.

Despite my best efforts to be quiet, I have barely locked the front door and started up the stairs when Dad sticks his head out of his office to greet me.

"What's the score?" he calls up at my back.

The score. Like "the weather," "the verdict," and "the report," this is one of Dad's many euphemisms for asking how I'm doing these days. I'd only started rating "Happiness" on my daily cards sarcastically, but now that Cam is gone, that 1–10 number makes it easy for Dad to check in on me without upsetting anyone.

I reflect on the day's events. "Three."

"Three," he repeats. Even though I haven't turned around, I can hear the rise, the note of interest in his brows.

Then, perhaps deciding not to push his luck, Dad says, "Welcome home," and retreats into the study.

I follow his lead, returning to my room and my list from this morning.

From: Juniper Lemon
To: Heather Han
Subject: favor

Dear Heather,

How is Oregon State? I hope you're liking college so far!

I, uh . . . found something that suggests Camie was in a relationship with someone. For a while. This may be what I was asking you about in June, when I thought something was up with Cam, but do you know anything about that? I think she would've wanted whoever she was seeing to have what I found, but I can't give it to him (or her—assuming "him" based on her dating history) if I don't know who they are.

Please, Heather. If I could just know enough to pass it on to the guy (girl)—or maybe give it to you to deliver?—you wouldn't even have to tell me who it was. This might be the last thing I can do for Cam. You don't know what that would mean to me.

Thanks,

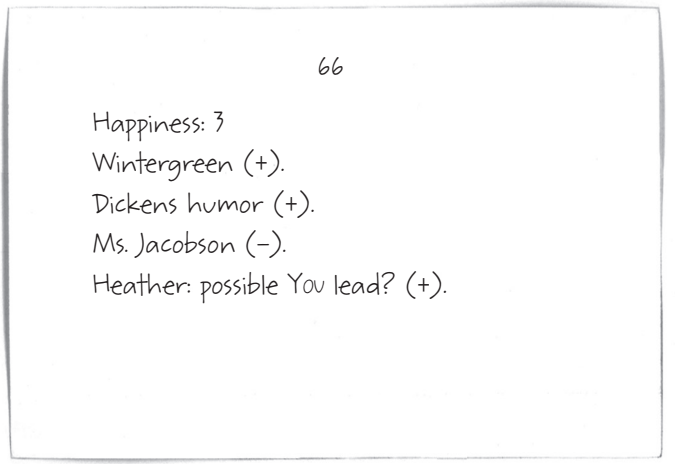
Juniper

I spend an hour debating whether or not to ask about Lauren in the message. In the end, I decide against it. This is about my sister, not Heather's; I don't want any weirdness with Lauren to be a reason for Heather not to answer me.

I suck it up and hit SEND.

When I lean back in my chair, it's already dark out. Guess I'd better do today's Index card before I forget like yesterday's.

Sliding out the box from under my bed, I tick back to *66*, pull it, and begin my list of highs and lows for the day:



Then I hold the card out to review.

66. It's been *sixty-six days* since I stopped dating my Index cards, and started numbering them. Or rather—since I numbered them all. I used to date them as I went, but after the accident, "July 5" didn't feel right for a heading; it suggested that nothing had changed. So I started counting, and labeled every last card in the box to remind myself what had.

Cam would not be pleased that I'm using the cards to mark the days since her death. She'd see it as the ultimate negative, a kind of counter to what the Index was supposed to even be. Then again, she knew I was no Ms. Optimism; I've included negatives in my entries almost as long as I've been keeping them. If Camie was queen of the bright side, I'm the un-sugared plum fairy: champion of reality, dosing bad with good. Sometimes unsweetened means raw, but isn't it more truthful that way?

I could be counting just negatives.

All at once I feel worn through—like all the things that

don't show on my face have been gnawing at my bones from inside.

Returning to the box, I sort back through the cards to put *66* away—only to realize at *64* that I still haven't filed yesterday's.

For the love of—

I unzip my school bag, heft out the Dickens tome I put it in, and open to the very back.

Except, when I get to the space between the final pages and the hardback cover, the card I took to school this morning isn't there.

It.

Isn't.

There.

Okay; no problem. I probably just tucked it in somewhere else.

But a page-by-page inspection, and then a rapid flip-through, and then a shakedown by the spine reveals that not only is *65* nowhere within chapters 58 or 59; it is nowhere inside the book.

I check my backpack. One by one I fly through my other books, panic clawing up my throat. Nothing. Not in my binders. Planner. Notebooks. When there are no books left I wrench my backpack open wide and plunge my hands into the bottom, groping, and finally lift it by the straps and dump it onto the bed. Pens, pencils, makeup, keys, and a pouch with change tumble out in a heap.

But no index card.

I drop the bag with the rest of the mess, reeling.

Suddenly I'm not very tired anymore.