ONLY LOVE CAN BREAK YOUR HEART

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WALKER BOOKS

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SPRING

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CHAPTER 1

She still wakes me to watch the sunrise.

Not every morning, but often enough. There are so many things we can't do together anymore. But this, we can still do this.

"Reiko," my sister, Mika, whispers in my ear. "Reiko, wake up. We'll miss it!"

My room is already filling with that hazy pre-dawn light that means the sun will be peeking out over the mountains in a few minutes.

"Hurry," Mika says, bouncing on her toes. She's wearing the same yellow cotton dress she always wears. No matter what time it is or what the weather is like. She's always in the same yellow dress.

I groan but get out of bed, pulling on my blue silk robe that is hanging on the back of my chair. I open my window, and then, glancing back to make sure Mika is still there,

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I pop the screen out, and slip out onto the roof of my garage, which is directly below my bedroom.

Mika crawls out after me, and we sit at the edge of the roof, her legs dangling off, mine tucked under me, and watch the sunrise over the mountains. The golden red light turns the palm trees into silhouettes across the desert.

Mika scoots closer to me and rests her head on my shoulder. She's more affectionate in the mornings. Less sassy, more snuggly.

I yawn and put my head on hers.

"I'll never get sick of watching the sunrise," Mika says softly.

"Me either," I say.

"It's like magic every morning."

I nod, watching the sky change color right before my eyes, and then yawn again. "There are few things I'd wake up this early for, but a desert sunrise is one of them."

Mika pulls back to face me, her dark, wide eyes unblinking. "But you'd wake up for me, right? It's not the sunrise that gets you up?"

It's early May in Palm Springs, so the morning is warm, but her words send a chill through me. I wrap my arm around her thin shoulders. "Of course, Mika," I say. "Always."

"Good. Because I'd do anything for you."

This is the truest thing in my life.

And all I can do in return is smile and squeeze her hand.

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I love her so much it makes my heart feel like a balloon that's about to burst. It hurts, how much I love her.

Mika stands, pulling me up with her. She lets go of my hand and tiptoes along the edge of the roof, balancing like a tightrope walker. Then she glances over her shoulder at me with a mischievous grin. "Dare me to jump?" she says, lifting a foot and leaning precariously over the side, arms out like a scarecrow.

"Mika!" I say, grabbing her wrist and pulling her back toward me. Back toward safety.

She laughs. "Oh, come on, Reiko. It isn't that high. You climb higher, right? When you go rock climbing?" Her eyes are curious and hungry. Hungry for a world that she can't exist in anymore.

Because she can't go anywhere with me. Can't even leave our house.

Because my sister, Mika – the Mika I see, the Mika I'm standing next to, the Mika I love with all of my heart, the Mika I'd do anything for – is dead.

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CHAPTER 2

At school, nobody knows I still see Mika.

Nobody knows that I watch the sunrise with her almost every morning.

Nobody knows about the holes inside of me.

I put on concealer, hiding my dark circles. I paint on bright lipstick.

And I smile.

All day long.

In class, I say everything my teachers want to hear. At lunch, I sit with my girls, leaning in to hear the latest gossip about who did what over the weekend or who hooked up with who. I flirt with boys I'm not interested in but who are socially acceptable to flirt with. I laugh and I preen because that's what is expected of me.

I hold my head high under an invisible crown as I glide from class to class, still smiling all the while, and when

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I feel myself about to stumble, I remind myself who I am.

I'm Reiko Smith-Mori. I shine the brightest.

But sometimes I wonder if it will ever be enough.

If I'll ever be enough.

If I can be good enough as one when there should have been two.

I have to be.

The days are melting in the heat, and it isn't even summer yet. When this weekend comes, I barricade myself at home. I give my friends fake excuses for why I can't go to this or that party, and then I tell my parents I've got studying to do. But I'm not studying. I'm in my room with Mika. Trying to be a better sister. The kind of sister she deserves. I put the blinds down to keep the sun out and blast the air conditioner to keep us cool. Not that Mika ever gets hot. We paint each other's nails (I even let her use my expensive nail polish) and play hours and hours of Monopoly.

But by the time Saturday night comes around, I'm itching to get outside. Aching for an adventure. This happens when I spend too much time inside with Mika now. Sometimes the guilt tying me to her gets so heavy I can't move, can't breathe – and then I need to get out. I have to take advantage of every breath I have. To make it count. For me and for Mika.

Tonight is one of those nights.

So even though it is almost two in the morning, I slip

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out of the front door and into my red Jeep. I've never told anyone, but the reason I wanted a Jeep is because it makes me feel like an adventurer. Like someone brave who never needs to be rescued.

I drive, and I drive, on and on, until I get to the edges of Joshua Tree. It's a national park, about an hour from Palm Springs. In the moonlight, the spiky branches of its namesake trees look alien, like something out of a Dr. Seuss book. I've been here a few times before, but tonight it feels like the park is calling me. There's a boulder out here that's great to climb. I feel safe with it, even at night, even alone.

Last year, I started rock climbing, and I love the way it makes me feel: strong, like I could do anything, but also small, like I'm this infinitesimal, inconsequential thing on this earth, in this universe. When your fingertips are gripping rock and there's a long drop below you and the sky up above, you can't focus on anything but being alive. Especially at night.

I park and hop out of my Jeep. My climbing shoes are already on my feet. I just need to attach the little pouch filled with climbing chalk around my waist and I'm ready to go.

The moon is bright enough that I don't even need my flashlight. I go up to my boulder and pat it, the way someone would a horse. "Hi, pretty," I coo. Then I laugh quietly at myself, imagining how my friends would react if they saw me talking to a rock. Everyone expects me to be a certain way, but here, in the dark, on my own, I can be however

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I want to be. I don't have to worry about looking cool or being cool or anything at all. I can just breathe.

"Here we go," I whisper, both to the rock and myself.

My fingers slip into the familiar crevices, and my feet find the almost invisible clefts in the rock, just enough for me to start to climb up. Toward the stars.

The final stretch of the climb is tricky. I take a deep breath, and I swear the night breathes back. Then I swing my legs up, grab hold of the top ledge and start to haul myself up the last bit with my arms. I'm sweating hard and breathing fast.

There is someone here.

Someone on my boulder.

We lock eyes, and the air fissures. In the same moment I find his gaze, I lose my grip. With a small cry, I scramble against the boulder, fingers digging for purchase in the granite, feet slipping out from beneath me.

His eyes widen and he reaches out for me, but he is too far away, and I'm already sliding, and then I'm back on the ground with a thump.

"Shit," I hiss through clenched teeth.

There is a shadow above me and then a voice:

"Are you all right?"

I tilt my head back to see who is talking to me.

To see who is out under my sky, on the top of my boulder.

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