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DEDICATION TO COME

1 January (FRIDAY)

'The End' were the last two words my mother typed before she died. They were her favourite. Mine too. 'The End' meant she had finished another book. 'The End' meant she had time for me.

Except this time.

Sorry. I forgot: Dear Diary.

4 February (THURSDAY)

Dear Diary

5 February (FRIDAY)

Dear Diary

6 February (SATURDAY)

Meg tells me the Dear Diary thing is the problem. She says I have to write like I'm writing to the friend who doesn't judge. I'd love to say Meg is the friend who doesn't judge, but she respects honesty. And it's not that she's judgey – she's just real. And has lots of 'views'. Like this one on my first diary entry: 'That is literally the most depressing opening to anything I've ever read in my entire life.'

And she would know. Meg's the reader. She's super smart. She's scary too. But just to other people. She reads and reads and reads, and I know nothing, and she knows EVERYTHING. I said that to her once, and she said, 'Yeah, but you travel the world. I'm just a stay-at-home savant.'

Anyway.

'Introduce yourself to your non-judgemental friend,' she said. I'm Ellery Brown. I'm fifteen years old – soon to be sixteen. I have long brown hair and green eyes. I'm five feet six and a half. I am a lover of clothing. And a passionate watcher of Netflix. I have no brothers and no sisters. My grandparents are Max and Lola. They live in Rhinebeck, New York. My aunt is Auntie Elaine. She lives in hotel rooms. I was born in New York, but for the past four years I've lived with my mom in Eyeries village on the Beara Peninsula. In south-west Cork. On the Wild Atlantic Way. In Ireland.

'Don't just write a LIST OF FACTS!' says Megser when I read her my amazing introduction. 'Write about your FEELINGS. Diaries are about FEELINGS.'

I FEEL that I should have given this diary to Meg.

7 February (SUNDAY)

Why I couldn't give this diary to Meg: it was a gift from my Auntie Elaine. She's my mom's sister. Mom died last November.

Why I can't write about feelings: see above.

8 February (MONDAY)

'Then don't write about feelings,' says Meg. 'Just . . . be yourself.'

SERIAL KILLERS ARE BEING THEMSELVES.

9 February (TUESDAY)

I don't write – that's the other problem. My mom was a writer. I feel like everything I write should be **BRILLIANT**. I'm imagining my mom looking down on me going, 'Jesus (literally: she could be talking to him), has she learned ANYTHING?'

So, Mom . . . if you're up there . . . and are able to make out my writing . . . sorry in advance for any grammatical errors/disturbing revelations. One thing: I know you hate swearing, but it's going to be unavoidable at times. How I'll deal with this is not by using asterisks because they're like stars and we both love **stars** too much. And I'm not into writing loads of different symbols, so I'm using these little guys: &&&& because they kind of look like someone shaking their fist.

10 February (WEDNESDAY)

'&&&&'S SAKE!' says Meg.

'AMPERSANDS! JESUS.'

I'm confused about whether to replace 'Jesus' with ampersands there. Because, unlike Mom, Megan is definitely not talking to Jesus. Not just because she's not dead, but because she doesn't believe in him, which I thought would be really awkward when I asked her the question: 'So, where do you think my mom is now?'

But no! Megser goes: 'Your mom is in Shakespeare & Co., Paris, hovering like a fairy in the dust motes, and if you're a customer, standing there flipping through the pages of a book, and you find a sentence that is so beautiful it's painful and you have to raise your eyes to a source that is bigger than your tiny human mind, you will catch her there, glinting. But not like a wispy kind of fairy – she is glinting like steel, like an ad for an advanced razor. Like if fairies were Avengers.'

I SWEAR TO GOD,

Megser believes in *fairies*. Anyway, that answer was pretty cool.

11 February (THURSDAY)

So, I live in a bird's nest. This drives Meg nuts when I say it. Okay . . .

it's a house, but my living arrangement is called bird nesting. It's the new divorce trend, where the kids stay in the house and the parents take turns living there, like, one week on, one week off, so the kids don't have to keep moving around. Because my family lives in America and I'm still in school here, they decided that I would stay here, and Grandpa and Lola, and Auntie Elaine would do pretty much a month here at a time.

Auntie Elaine is here now. She's so kind. She gave me you, Non-Judgemental Friend, because I think you are meant to be therapy. I think I am meant to fill you with thoughts about my mom.

SO WHY CAN I NOT STOP THINKING ABOUT MY DAD?

Especially because it is so weird to think about someone you don't know.

LIKE, LITERALLY, I HAVE NO IDEA WHO MY DAD IS.

12 February (FRIDAY)

First day of mid-term break! Megser and I go to the community school at the edge of town – Castletownbere (rhymes with 'hair'). We're in fourth year – Transition Year. TY is where you legitimately get to do the least possible academic work of your entire school life but still make a huge effort to do even less. Which is REALLY helped by how beautiful it is when you're staring out the window. The view from most of the classrooms is across the sea to Bere Island and there's this cool lighthouse on the headland and BASICALLY if this was America, the school would have been **BULLDOZED** and replaced by a luxury hotel/gated community. It's amazing it's not some celebrity's European hideaway where no one would bother them because that's not what Irish people do. And especially not Beara people. If you're a celebrity and you come to Beara, which they do (but you probably won't know until they're gone), you'll be treated EXACTLY like the regular human being you've forgotten you are. You do NOT want to come here if fame has changed you. They will cut you down with some razor-sharp Beara wit (but you probably won't realise until they're gone).

Our school is mixed. And here's what you need to know about

Beara boys. Firstly they're not called boys: they're lads.

And I'm not joking — they are almost ALL FIT.

But accidentally fit from hauling things around the place, like boxes or sheep. Oh, and playing football. I forgot sport. But I reject sport and all its works.

It's Gaelic football they play. But it's just called Gaelic OR football. It's like soccer, except you can run with the ball. It's big in Ireland, and HUGE down here. There's a school team, a town team, a county team – Juniors, Seniors, Under-Whatevers. And people are **OBSESSED**. Like people want to watch these games and they really care about the result. Imagine gladiators in ancient Rome. That's people's parents on the sidelines of Gaelic matches.

And whichever team wins, the supporters drive around the place honking horns and shouting out the window and scaring visitors to the area who are like, *WHAT IS THE EMERGENCY? And are these people causing it or rescuing me from it?*

The captain of the boys' football team is Silent Johnny. In Wild Guess Challenge I call him that because . . .

'Allow silence,' is what Mom used to say to me, which seemed really profound and spiritual, until I realised it was her way of getting me to shut up so she could work. Admittedly I STRUGGLE with silence, in that I rush to fill silences like a river rushes to the sea but as if only the river has been struck by a raging storm and it's all wild and splashing up over the banks but the sea is all calm and

GET OFF ME LEAVE ME ALONE.

I don't go near the calm sea that is Silent Johnny, though. Actually he's not the sea – he's the dam built to block you from hitting the sea. He's this blond, massive, muscular, chiselled dam. He is – objectively – ridiculously hot.

13 February (SATURDAY)

Mom **LOVED** Megan. They used to talk about books. And Megser wants to be a writer. I think Megan was the daughter Mom never had. Megan says I'm the daughter her mom never had, because I like make-up and shoes and 'glamour', and Meg would rather 'stand in line at a reality star's book signing' than wear make-up/dresses/skirts/heels/anything involving sheen/

gloss/shimmer. It's not like Megser's mom goes around like that all the time either, but when Susan does go out (with the girls, once a month), she goes ALL OUT. I do her make-up. Meg is always horrified. 'And Mam sells her soul once more.' Then, when she's gone, she'll say, 'Thanks. Mam looks beautiful. She's delighted with herself. She'll have a ball now.'

SADNESS: Susan is a widow, and she isn't even forty. Megan's dad died when she was eleven. He was so shy, and so sweet, and Susan and him were ***madly in love.*** Susan is **AWESOME**. After Meg's dad died, she studied law at night, and became a lawyer while looking after THREE CHILDREN UNDER TWELVE. The other two are Megser's little brothers – I call them The Ferals. But not out loud. The Elder Feral is eleven, and the Younger Feral is nine. They were only small when their dad died, and they used to go everywhere with him. And then . . . I don't know what to say. But it sucks. And I think it's the widely accepted excuse for why they are little **&&&&S.**

So, my mom wrote popular fiction. 'Whatever that is,' she used to say. Her first two books were fantasy but no one really bought them. Her first popular fiction book made her a UK, Ireland, European, Commonwealth (no idea) number-one bestseller.

'Not the US, though! You'll have to leave something for the rest of us!' Lola said at the time. Auntie Elaine told me this one night when she was on her nth glass of wine. (She calls every glass of wine she's drinking her nth, which I love.)

'"Us" was not what Lola meant, of course,' said Auntie Elaine. '"ME" is what Lola means . . . always. And actually what she meant by "leave something for the rest of us!" was "I am the American success story in this family. Let ME have ME."'

Lola was a massive soap actress in the US in the seventies and eighties. Like **SUPER FAMOUS.** And then: 'My whole world – bam! Gone! Over!' Yup – she got pregnant. With my Inconvenient Mom. Followed by my Dreamwrecker Auntie Elaine. And, yes, Lola says these things out loud. And SERIOUSLY – she still worked after they were born! But there's no point saying anything because everyone just accepts that Lola is dramatic.

Lola is seventy-four and still ***wildly glamorous.*** Willowy, silver-blonde, yoga-fit. If she's had work done, it's also an American success story.

In the spirit of opposites attract Grandpa Max is ADORABLE. He is ***totally in love*** with – and terrified of – Don't-Call-Me-Grandma Lola. They're married fifty

years this year. Grandpa is this big plaid-shirt-wearing cowboy kind of guy. From Montana. He's got this big head of white hair, and big hands, and a big smile for someone who's abused on an hourly basis. He's like a Labrador who keeps coming back to the owner who hits him on the nose with a folded-up newspaper.

One day, when I was about five, Lola had to go to an audition, so I got to hang out with Grandpa at the tennis club.

'Look! It's Grandma!' he said, and he pointed across the court. It was one of those machines that rapid-fires tennis balls.

Lola loves Grandpa . . . in her own way. I've spent a lot of time with them. Every summer Mom would come to Ireland to write, and I would stay with Grandpa and Lola in New York.

Me and Grandpa are BEST pals. Lola introduced me to mirrors, clothing, make-up, fashion magazines, beauty salons and juices. Grandpa introduced me to mud, horses, card games, *The Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew Mysteries*, *Murder She Wrote*, *Quincy* and *Columbo*. Or as I used to call them: 'faded television shows'. I said that to Grandpa once when I was about nine: 'WHY ARE DETECTIVE SHOWS ALL FADED?' and he loved it so much he told all his friends. MOST of those shows are ancient. *Columbo* is definitely the most famous . . . He's this dishevelled-looking detective in a trench coat who always lures the killer

into a false sense of security by acting all confused, while sneakily pumping them for info, and then – BAM – just when they think he's about to wander off and be harmless some place else, he says: 'ONE MORE THING . . .' Which really means: you'll never wear shoes with laces in them

EVER AGAIN.

XOXO

14 February (SUNDAY)

Does NOBODY get that if they hate Valentine's Day they're actually NOT being different? EVERYONE hates Valentine's Day. The lads all go: 'I don't want to be told I have to be romantic on a particular date.' No – you just don't want to BE romantic. On any date. Even on an actual date.