BAD THINGS HAPPEN HERE

REBECCA BARROW

HOT KEY BOOKS

This work contains themes of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and physical and sexual violence.

First published in Great Britain in 2022 by
HOT KEY BOOKS
4th Floor, Victoria House, Bloomsbury Square
London WC1B 4DA
Owned by Bonnier Books,
Sveavägen 56, Stockholm, Sweden
www.hotkeybooks.com

Copyright © Rebecca Barrow, 2022

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

The right of Rebecca Barrow to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

'The Knife'
Words and Music by Maggie Rogers and Greg Kurstin
Copyright © 2019 Sony Music Publishing (US) LLC, Debay Publishing,
EMI April Music Inc. and Kurstin Music
All Rights Administered by Sony Music Publishing (US) LLC,
424 Church Street, Suite 1200, Nashville, TN 37219
International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved
Reprinted by Permission of Hal Leonard Europe Ltd.

This is a work of fiction. Names, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-4714-1124-3
Also available as an ebook and in audio

1

Typeset by Envy Design Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.



Hot Key Books is an imprint of Bonnier Books UK
www.bonnierbooks.co.uk

Beautiful how
it all pours out,
after dark,
after light.

–Maggie Rogers, "The Knife"

1

Parris, the island where it seems girls go to die.

And like always, Luca is the only one to remember Polly on her birthday.

Luca drives with the windows down, air twisting her curls around her face. Maybe that isn't true. Maybe people do go to Polly's grave, put down flowers that will sit and rot among the headstones. Perhaps they stop to clean off the photograph Polly's mom chose, the one with her hair slicked back in a ballet bun and red-painted lips hiding her braces.

Luca wouldn't know, because she never goes there. That's not where Polly is, to her. It's just a box in the ground and a stone in a place far too somber for a girl like the one Polly was.

It's still early enough that the island is quiet as she drives across it. Not that it's ever busy, really, but the roads are almost completely empty, every light green as she heads toward the bridge.

It rises up into the blue sky, the only way out of this place. Luca doesn't drive across, though, but pulls to the side and turns the engine off. She gets out of the car, the stems of the

orange carnations she brought with her pressed between her palms. Then Luca steps down, beside the bridge, onto the uneven rocky ground where nobody's really supposed to go.

But we did, she thinks.

Her and Polly, climbing down these rocks, so they could reach the water below. That's why she comes here. Or that's mostly why.

Below her the ocean swirls, a calmness to the waves that's unusual for this spot, and Luca throws out the carnations one by one, the bright blooms drifting down and down and down until they meet the water. "There you go, P," she says. "Happy birthday."

Three years she's done this. She brings the flowers, she sits for a while; she starts to tell Polly something that's happening and then stops, because what could she ever say that would mean anything now? *School is shitty. Our favorite breakfast place closed. I realized I was in love with Jada right after you died and I told her about the curse and then she stopped speaking to me.* What does any of that matter to Polly now? What does any of it matter when Luca is alive and she's dead?

She was scared, the first time, to come back. To return to this place where the curse had surfaced. But then she had realized that really, this might be the safest place for her to go. After all, the curse never strikes the same place twice.

So she came, the first year, and the next, and now. And Luca will come back in a year and do it all again, like the ritual can change anything. But it means something to her, to do it. It means something that there's somebody to remember

Polly who really *knew* her. After all, Polly's parents left the island soon after she died. Jada hasn't talked to Luca in almost three years, acts like she and Luca and Polly were never even friends. And everybody else, well, they didn't *know* her, and they don't talk about her. She's sure they have their reasons. Thinking about her is unnerving; they don't like to look death in the face so close. Something like that.

Luca closes her eyes and remembers that last year, that last birthday. Fourteen years old. Polly is fourteen and Luca is seventeen now, will be eighteen in two short months. There was always that distance between them, Luca being born in the long days of summer and Polly coming so much later, arriving in the world during the spring bloom.

She waits there for as long as she can bear. Maybe it's an hour, maybe it's a minute. But when she's done, Luca opens her eyes and looks down at the water again. She kisses her fingers and then holds them out to the air, her only goodbye to the girl she's let down the most.

"I love you," she says, words she never said when Polly was alive. "I'll see you next year."

And she leaves. She's always leaving Polly behind, further and further with each day.