LoveReading

For my sisters:
Maliha and Tamera

First published in the UK in 2024 by Usborne Publishing Limited, Usborne House, 83-85 Saffron Hill, London EC1N 8RT, England, usborne.com.

Usborne Verlag, Usborne Publishing Limited, Prüfeninger Str. 20, 93049 Regensburg, Deutschland VK Nr. 17560

Text copyright © Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé, 2024

The right of Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

Jacket illustration © Aykut Aydoğdu, 2024

Jacket design by Elizabeth H. Clark, additional design by Katharine Millichope

Map by Virginia Allyn © Usborne Publishing, 2024

Photograph of Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé © Joy Olugboyega

The name Usborne and the Balloon logo are Trade Marks of Usborne Publishing Limited.

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

This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogues are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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

Trade paperback ISBN 9781474967549
Waterstones exclusive paperback ISBN 9781836040002

05387/1 FMAMJJASOND/24

Printed and bound using 100% renewable energy at CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY.

FSC www.fsc.org MIX Paper | Supporting responsible forestry FSC® C171272

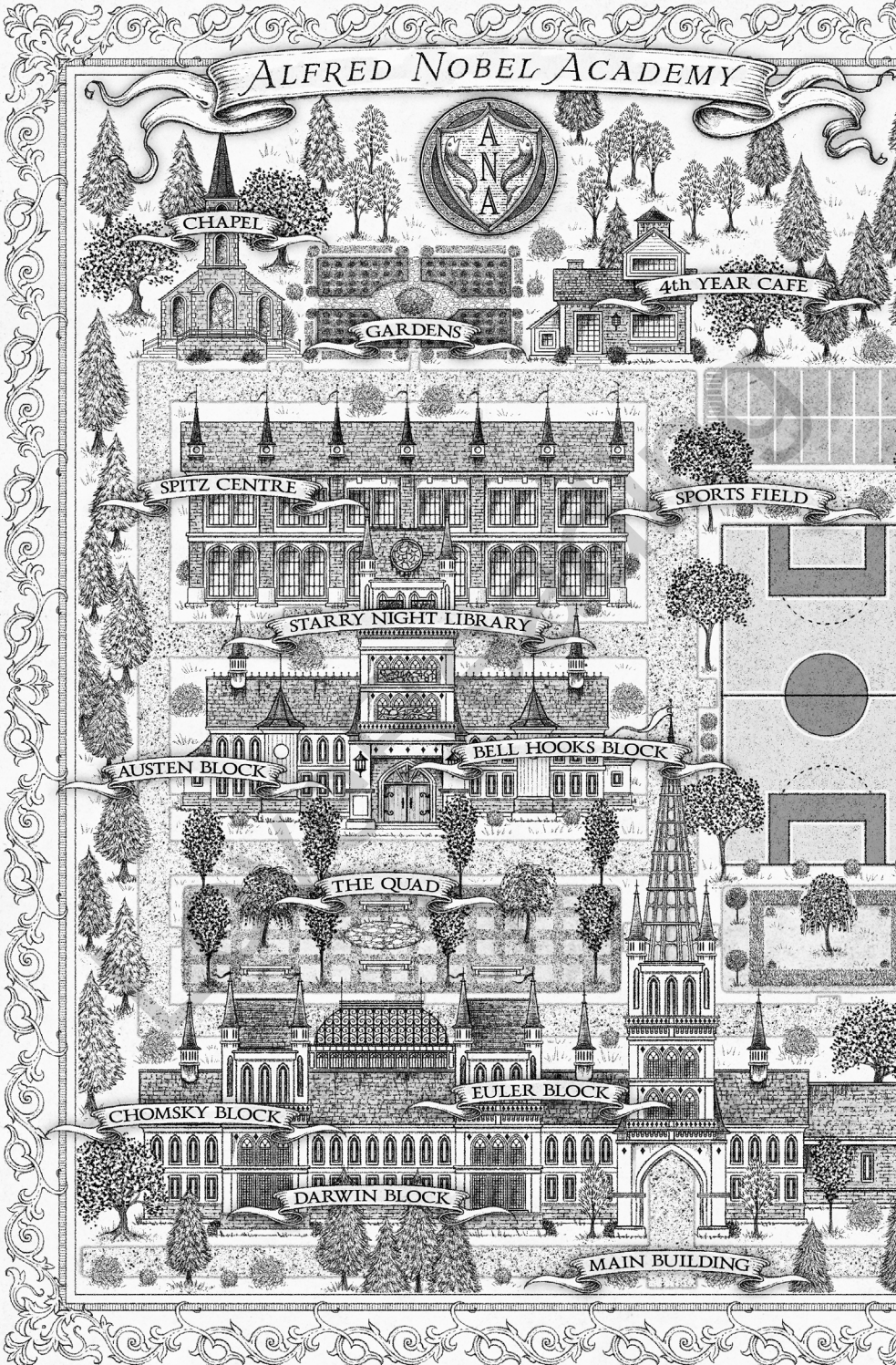
LoveReading

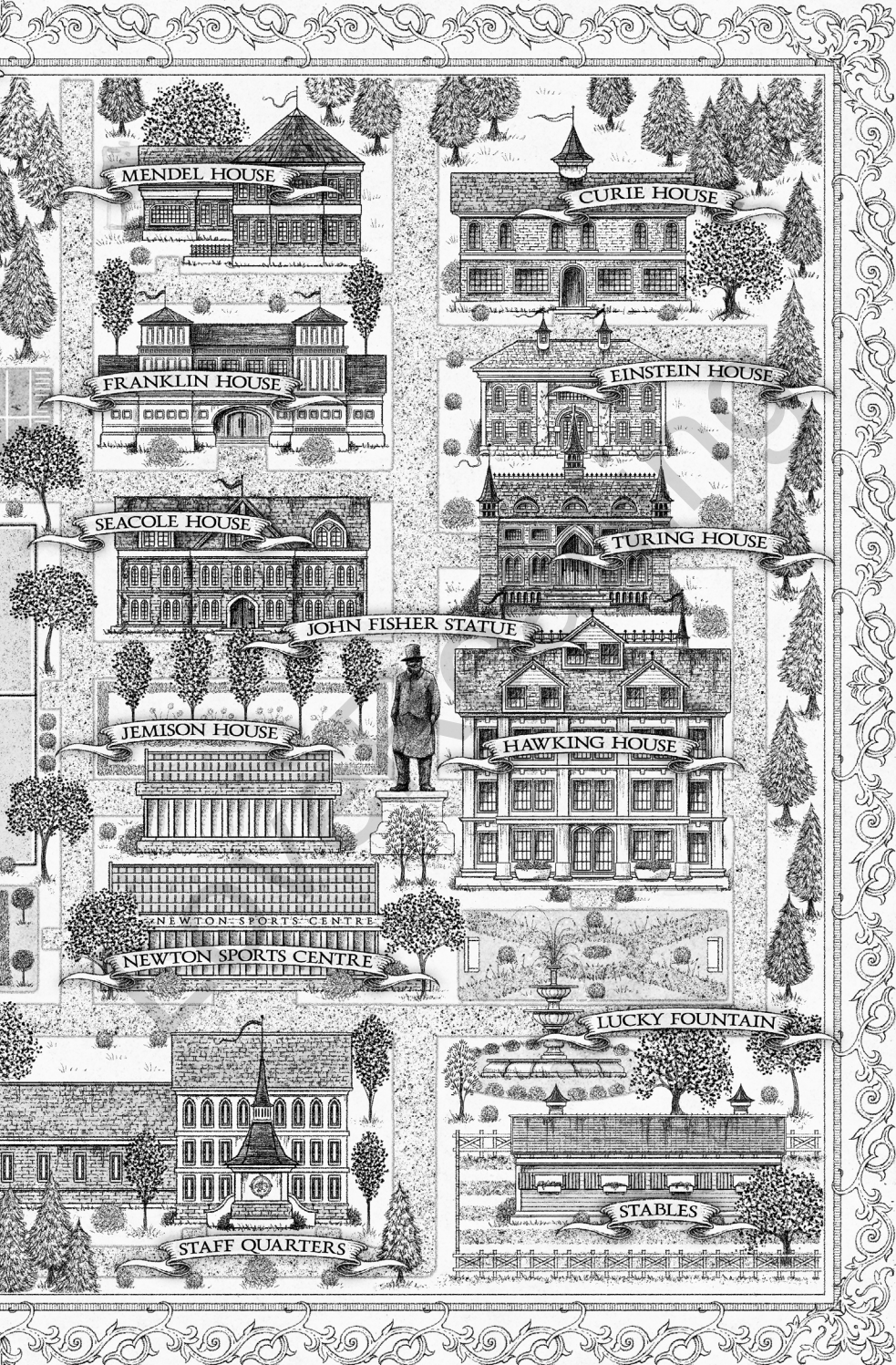
WHERE SLEEPING GIRLS LIE

LoveReading

FARIDAH ÀBÍKÉ-ÍYÍMÍDÉ

USBORNE


ALFRED NOBEL ACADEMY
ANA
CHAPEL
GARDENS
4th YEAR CAFE
SPITZ CENTRE
SPORTS FIELD
STARRY NIGHT LIBRARY
AUSTEN BLOCK
BELL HOOKS BLOCK
THE QUAD
EULER BLOCK
CHOMSKY BLOCK
DARWIN BLOCK
MAIN BUILDING


MENDEL HOUSE
CURIE HOUSE
FRANKLIN HOUSE
EINSTEIN HOUSE
SEACOLE HOUSE
TURING HOUSE
JOHN FISHER STATUE
JEMISON HOUSE
HAWKING HOUSE
NEWTON SPORTS CENTRE
NEWTON SPORTS CENTRE
LUCKY FOUNTAIN
STABLES
STAFF QUARTERS

Dear Reader,

Where Sleeping Girls Lie is about a lot of things. It's about the necessity of community and the importance and joy of platonic relationships. It's about the ghosts that haunt us and that we haunt back. It's about the many valid ways we respond to painful experiences.

More than anything, this book is about survival, and as you might notice from the sizeable gap between the release of *Ace of Spades* and the release of this second book, it took me many years to write this in a way that felt like I would be honouring the story, the characters, and any readers who might see themselves in this story. (Also, second books are just bloody hard.)

When asked about whether I write myself into my stories, I always answer that I don't because I'm more of an observer than a memoirist. However, *Where Sleeping Girls Lie* is definitely one of my most personal stories to date. While I have not inserted myself exactly into any of these characters, some experiences and feelings depicted are things I unfortunately relate to deeply. I wanted this book to showcase a main character who lives a full life despite any past traumas, much like I try to, and so in the spirit of this, *Where Sleeping Girls Lie* is not just one kind of story. It is part suspense-mystery, part contemporary romance coming of age, part anti-hero journey.

When I write stories, I'm always writing to specific feelings at the time, as well as people and places. With *Ace of Spades*, I was primarily writing to queer Black young adults attending PWIs and being pulled under by the weight of white supremacy, drowning while feeling unseen and unheard. With *Where Sleeping Girls Lie*, I write to young girls who feel so much anger, and need desperately for someone or something to tell them their rage is important, and

LoveReading

that the capacity to heal from deep wounds is not at all impossible. While writing this book, I kept thinking of Oluwatoyin Salau and women like her who deserve so much more than this world gives them. *Where Sleeping Girls Lie* is my attempt at healing not only some of my own wounds, but helping others to seek out the tools to do so as well.

I want this book to be so many things, but of course, what I want is not as important as what this book might mean to you, and so I ask you to take care as always while reading and I hope you enjoy the characters and the story as much as I enjoyed writing them.

Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé, March 2024

LoveReading

"'If he be Mr Hyde,' he had thought, 'I shall be Mr Seek.'"
—*Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Robert Louis Stevenson

"No hour is ever eternity, but it has its right to weep."
—*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston

Where Sleeping Girls Lie is a work of fiction, but it deals with many real issues including sexual assault, rape, suicide and suicidal ideation, grief, and death of family members (including parents).

For further information about these content warnings, please visit: www.faridahabikeiyimide.com/wsgl-content-warnings

LoveReading

The world was silent when she drowned.

The weight of the stars, of the universe and of her mind was like an anchor pulling her closer towards oblivion.

As her lungs caught on fire and her vision went black…

…her heart began to slow.

Her final thoughts lingered, wading through the tangled mess of veins and empty, empty space.

And then she whispered the same words they'd later find on the note she'd left:

"I'm sorry."

LoveReading

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. *I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.*
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm' sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry—

LoveReading

PART I

THE GRAVE OF DREAMS

"Something is rotten in the state of Denmark."
—*Hamlet*, Act I, Scene IV, William Shakespeare

LoveReading

– 1

GO FISH

The night it happened, there was a party.

Though parties weren't unusual for the students of Alfred Nobel Academy, this one certainly was.

Every now and again, there'd be a secret off-campus soirée at a house one of the Senior Hawking boys rented out. Something gossip-worthy would happen, like a third year who'd have one too many drinks and end up making out with his ex-boyfriend in public. Or a fourth year getting so high, they'd forget where they were and would end up streaking around the pool, baring it all for everyone to see.

Then the following Monday, all the shenanigans from that weekend would become the hot topic throughout the boarding school, hushed whispers about the fortunate few floating through the hallways, the classrooms and the dorms.

What made this night particularly strange, though, was what occurred when no watchful gazes or cameras – *to her knowledge* – were there to document:

A girl climbing down from a balcony. Her trembling fingers gripping the handles of the spiral staircase. The night swallowing her cries whole as she stumbled towards the car that was waiting for her.

LoveReading

She didn't dare look back.

Looking back would be acknowledging what had happened.

What she had done.

The grey car was hidden in a corner on the quiet path that led up to the house, blending in with the shadows, visible only to those who knew to look for it.

The click of the car door echoed loudly as she climbed into the passenger seat, shutting the door quickly before anyone could see.

Another girl was settled in the driver's seat, concern carved into her dark features – her short blonde hair styled in gentle waves, rippling across her head, blurring and rippling more with the trembling girl's tears.

"Did you get the—" The blonde girl paused, noticing her friend's tear-stained cheeks. "What happened?" she finished.

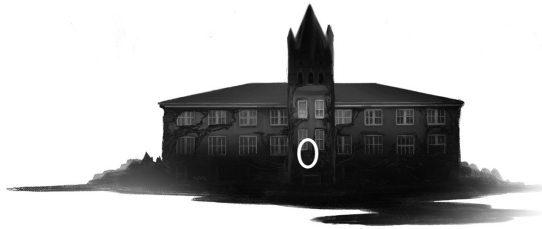
The girl silently wiped her face, avoiding her gaze.

"Sade?" the blonde girl said in a gentle whisper.

Sade finally looked up and stared into her eyes.

"H-he's dead."

LoveReading



0

5 WEEKS AGO MONDAY

NEW GIRL

Sade Hussein was used to being lied to.

When she was seven, she was told that the woman she saw sneaking out of her father's room early in the morning was the tooth fairy and definitely *not* her nanny. When she was ten and she found her mother slumped back in the bathtub, unmoving, with a bottle of pills resting on the ledge – she was told that her mother was taking a very long nap and would wake soon. When she was fourteen, she begged her father to let her go to a normal school and make friends with real kids her age, instead of her only real friend being her maths tutor, who let her sleep during class sometimes. She was told by her father that high school wasn't what it seemed. That it was the furthest from the magic that the movies had led her to believe.

But as the black town car pulled into the gates of Alfred Nobel Academy and the giant castle-like boarding school came into view, neither the rain nor the memory of her father's warning could dull her excitement.

The school looked like a palace.

The brownstone walls, fancy peaks and crisp greenery near the front that seemed to stretch on for miles had captured her attention

LoveReading

entirely. Even the driver's eyes widened at the sight of the enormous building, a far cry from the narrow town house in which she grew up.

A knock on the window pulled them both out of their trance as a man wearing a security uniform leaned over the car.

Sade wound her window down.

"Name and purpose?" the security guy asked her.

"Sade Hussein, student," she said, and followed up quickly with, "It's my first day."

He nodded, then muttered something into his walkie-talkie. "All right. You can go on up, there should be someone waiting for you by the entrance," he told her.

"Thank you," she replied.

The car continued along the path, and Sade tried to take in more of the school surroundings.

Perfectly trimmed rosebushes, evenly cut grass, and wild cherry trees. In the distance she could see rows of beautiful buildings. Old and new.

"I think this is as far as I can go," the driver said, the car coming to a stop in front of the main building.

"How much is that?" she asked.

The driver looked at her through the rear-view mirror. "It's covered, compliments of your father," he said, the last part uttered quickly in a hushed tone, as though just the thought of him could raise the dead.

It was strange how even from beyond the grave, her father still had that effect on people.

It was as though people didn't truly believe he was gone.

The great Akin Hussein, bested by his very own heart. It didn't seem real.

She didn't blame them either – even she felt his presence still looming. Watching her every move like he had always done.

LoveReading

But she knew with absolute certainty that he had to be gone.

After all, she wouldn't be here if his heart was still beating.

Sade gave the driver a tight smile and dug into her purse for some cash. "Here," she said, handing the driver two crisp fifty-pound notes.

He was about to protest.

"I'd feel much better if you took this."

The driver hesitated before accepting the cash.

"Thank you," she said, before getting out of the car, careful not to crease the stubborn material of her black tweed custom Chanel dress.

As the driver unloaded her suitcases from the boot, the main entrance of the school swung open, revealing a tall, skeletal-looking woman with a high bun, pencil skirt and a severe expression carved into her face.

"Sade Hussein?" the woman called out sharply as she approached the car, pronouncing both her first name and last name wrong: *SADIE HOO-SEN* instead of *SHAH-DAY HOO-SAYN*.

Sade noticed the woman eyeing her clothes with a disapproving look, grimacing at her shoes.

"It's *Sade Hussein*," Sade corrected, realizing only after saying it that that was probably a mistake. From her years of watching shows and reading books about high school, teachers rarely seemed to like being told they were wrong. Unlike her tutors, who always rewarded her tendency to be nimble-witted, this woman did not look pleased.

"You're late," she told her.

"Sorry. There was traffic on the way—"

"Four weeks late," the woman interrupted.

Sade said nothing to that, despite the reasons for her lateness boring a hole into her skull and weighing her shoulders down. She had a feeling the woman wouldn't care for her excuses, justified or not.

"There are rules, Miss Hussein, that every student is expected to

LoveReading

adhere to. I'm not sure how things were at your last school, but here we do not accept tardiness, nor do we accept turning up on your first day dressed out of uniform. Please let this be the last time you find yourself…in traffic," the woman said, the veins in her neck purpling. She paused, as though waiting for Sade to speak up, but then carried on when only silence followed. "Your parents should have received all the documents and passed them along to you…and yet your house form is incomplete. We'll have to sort this all out today and you will most likely miss classes, falling even further behind. I expect you haven't done any of the reading to catch up either, seeing as you couldn't even complete the basic task of dressing properly for your first day of school. Seriously, did your parents not—"

"They're dead," Sade said coolly, interrupting her this time.

The woman looked uncomfortable. "Sorry?" she asked, as if it wasn't already clear.

"My parents – they're both dead. My mother died when I was ten and my father died a month ago, a few days before I was meant to start here. I was told it wouldn't be an issue and that it would be in my file. I assumed you would have read it – my apologies for making that assumption," she replied with a forced smile.

The driver awkwardly cleared his throat. "I have removed all your luggage from the boot, miss. Would you like me to transport your suitcases to your dormitory?" he asked her.

Sade's gaze moved from the woman's shocked expression to the driver's uneasy one.

Alongside her father's multi-million-pound estate, Sade had also inherited the burden of grief and the awkwardness that came with it.

"How much for you to move my bags?" she asked him.

He looked even more uncomfortable. "It's fine, miss, compliments—"

Sade's voice became unsteady. "How much?"

LoveReading

The driver kept quiet, and Sade sighed heavily before digging into her purse and handing him a cluster of twenty-pound notes this time, not bothering to count.

She turned back to the woman, her smile faltering. "Where do I get a uniform?"

The inside of Alfred Nobel Academy was even more beautiful than the castle-like exterior. It was like stepping into a daydream.

Sade's eyes wandered as she stood in the entrance of the main building, taking in how flawless it all was. The hardwood floors; the tall, rounded glass windows; the ceiling that had paintings of what she thought were angels, but upon a second glance, wasn't so sure.

She felt as though she had just stepped into a museum instead of what was to become her home for the next two years.

It looked exactly like the pictures she had seen online.

"Right." The woman – who she had since learned was the school's matron and was named Miss Blackburn – interrupted her thoughts.

"You can go into that room there to fill in the house form. The form contains a simple selection of questions that will assess you on your needs and the best environment for your living at ANA. Try to answer as truthfully as possible. We take this very seriously and it is extremely rare that we allow transfers to other houses – not that we get many people wanting to transfer. The form is very comprehensive, and usually incredibly accurate."

Sade had read up on the school's houses. All eight of them: Curie, Einstein, Hawking, Mendel, Franklin, Turing, Jemison and Seacole. Each house seemed to serve a specific purpose and in turn had students who fitted that purpose. There was the house for academics, the house for sports prodigies, and so on. She wondered what house she'd be sorted into.

LoveReading

Miss Blackburn led Sade into the room with a single walnut-coloured desk, a booklet and a number two pencil. There was a door behind the desk, labelled SECURITY ROOM.

"When you're done, knock twice on the wall, then slide your form through the slot over there. It will be marked, and I'll bring you a uniform once the test results are back. It shouldn't take long. Any questions?" Miss Blackburn asked, passive-aggressively blinking at Sade.

Sade shook her head, despite feeling like she was in some kind of weird dystopian novel whereby the form was actually a test meant to determine her entire future or something. She placed her shoulder bag on the ground.

"Good," Miss Blackburn said, smiling tightly.

Sade took a seat at the desk.

Miss Blackburn turned to leave, then paused at the door and looked down at Sade's paper then back at her face. "Choose wisely," she said before leaving, the door slamming shut behind her.

Miss Blackburn was right; the form took no time at all – though the questions were *very* strange.

There was a question that asked whether she preferred rainfall or sunshine, which didn't really make much sense to her. After all, it wasn't as if they could control the weather of the dormitory she was assigned. Another question had asked her if she preferred large windows or small ones, and another asked her to select her favourite woodland creature.

When she was done, she knocked twice, then slipped her test through the gold slot in the wall, swearing she felt a strange tug from the other side. When Miss Blackburn had told her it would be marked, she assumed she meant by a computer of some sort.

LoveReading

But the tug felt human, and Sade wondered whether there was a little old lady they kept behind the wall to do nothing but mark these forms. She wouldn't be surprised if there was. Because while beautiful, something felt off about Alfred Nobel. Perhaps it was that everything was *too* flawless.

Sade was used to luxury, so she knew that wealth came with an abundance of secrets. She could bet that Alfred Nobel Academy had a lot of them. Buried six feet under, beneath the perfectly trimmed rosebushes by the entrance.

A knock sounded and Miss Blackburn stepped back into the room with what Sade assumed was a folded uniform in her manicured hands.

"I have instructed your driver to take your things to your room," Miss Blackburn said. "I guessed your size," she continued, handing Sade the uniform, "but if you need something tailored to your tastes, you can go down to the school shop once you've settled in."

Sade eyed the clothes in front of her. The uniform seemed to be comprised of a lot of black. Black skirt, black jumper and a black tie. It looked more like funeral attire than anything else.

"Thanks… Do I have to wear it now or can I change into it later?"

Miss Blackburn's gaze burned into her. "It's up to you."

Sade had a feeling that Miss Blackburn wanted her to change immediately, clearly still offended by her lack of proper attire. She wasn't sure what was so offensive about a tweed dress and laced Doc Marten boots.

"Any more questions?" Miss Blackburn asked.

Sade nodded. "I have two. Which house am I in?"

Miss Blackburn stood up straight. "Ah yes, you're in Turing House."

As she had with the other houses, Sade had read up on Turing House briefly. It had been described as the house for the jack-of-all-

LoveReading

traders, students with no particular special interest in any one subject; sister house to Seacole; and unlike most of the other houses, Turing had produced the least famous alumni.

How exciting, she thought.

"Turing, like the scientist?" Sade asked, wanting to sound interested. She remembered the tragic story of Alan Turing, the queer scientist, from one of her history lessons on World War II.

"Yes. As are all the other houses – named after scientists, that is. You'd know that if you had read the booklet. But what is your other question?" Miss Blackburn asked, obviously still holding a grudge over the fact that Sade hadn't come prepared. Which wasn't exactly true. She had looked up the things she thought would best serve her purpose here, but had clearly missed the mark on the things Miss Blackburn deemed pertinent knowledge.

"Could I get a tour of the school? I don't want to get lost," she said.

"Of course. Your house sister will be showing you around – she's outside waiting for us."

"House sister?" Sade questioned.

Miss Blackburn nodded. "You're assigned a house sister and house brother – in your first year, usually, but since you're a late arrival we've had to assign you some last-minute house siblings." Miss Blackburn must've noticed Sade's confused expression because she added, "It's tradition. Normally a student in the year above you takes on the responsibility, but in your case, you've been assigned someone in your year – conveniently, she's also your roommate so I'm sure the two of you will be well acquainted by the end of the term."

Sade blinked at that. She had never shared a room before. "Is this optional?" She'd already grown accustomed to her status as a tragic orphan at the ripe age of sixteen and wasn't looking for any new family.

LoveReading

"No," Miss Blackburn answered sharply. "As I said, it's tradition. I've assigned you someone from Hawking House to be your house brother. He's in classes for the rest of the day but I'll make sure to introduce you both sometime this week."

Traditions. House siblings. Sade still wasn't feeling the idea of a forced family. This was starting to seem less like boarding school and more like a weird cult. Though, maybe this should have been expected given that the school motto was literally *Ex Unitate Vires*, which translated to "In Unity there is Strength".

A very cultish-sounding slogan if you asked her.

Miss Blackburn spoke again, probably sensing her continued confusion. "It can be difficult adjusting to boarding school. House families are one way we ensure our students have a support system during their four years with us. Seeing as you're in your third year, and this is your first time attending a boarding school, I think it would be rather beneficial. Elizabeth is outside waiting for us."

Sade picked up her shoulder bag and draped the uniform over her arm before following Miss Blackburn out into the hallway, now littered with students. Sade noticed their identical black uniforms and their different-coloured ties as they rushed past her.

"Sade, this is your house sister – and roommate – Elizabeth Wang. She will be showing you around and answering all your burning questions," Miss Blackburn said, gesturing to the pretty, dark-haired girl in front of her.

Sade took in the girl's somewhat dishevelled appearance. Her smudged eye make-up, her chipped black nail polish, and the solid rips along her tights. The girl watched her too, a strange expression slowly creeping onto her face as she stared at Sade.

It was as if she had seen a ghost.

"Hi," Sade said with a friendly smile.

"Hello?" Elizabeth replied after a moment's silence, still regarding

LoveReading

her strangely. There was a subtle inflection at the end, as though her greeting was also a question.

"See, you're already off to a great start," Miss Blackburn said without an ounce of enthusiasm or care in her voice. "Sade, please drop by the reception after dinner to collect your welcome pack and house key. Ms Thistle will be there to give it to you. I didn't have time today to put it together before your arrival."

Sade nodded, adding this to her mental list.

"All right then…quick tour?" Elizabeth finally said, her face relaxing now and her clear Irish accent vibrating between them. She seemed to have snapped out of whatever had overtaken her.

"That would be great," Sade replied, feeling Miss Blackburn's gaze still burning holes into her dress. "But if it's okay, I think I'd like to change into my uniform first."

LoveReading