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opening extract from

What I Saw and How I Lied

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published by

Scholastic

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Chapter 1

The match snapped, then sizzled, and I woke up fast. I heard my mother inhale as she took a long pull on a cigarette. Her lips stuck on the filter, so I knew she was still wearing lipstick. She'd been up all night.

She lay on the bed next to me. I felt her fingers on my hair and I kept sleep-breathing. I risked a look under my eyelashes.

She was in her pink nightgown, ankles crossed, head flung back against the pillows. Arm in the air, elbow bent, cigarette glowing in her fingers. Tanned legs glistening in the darkness. Blonde hair tumbling past her shoulders.

I breathed in smoke and My Sin perfume. It was her smell. It filled the air.

I didn't move, but I could tell she knew I was awake. I kept on pretending to be asleep. She pretended not to know.

I breathed in and out, perfume and smoke, perfume and smoke, and we lay like that for a long time, until I heard

the seagulls crying, sadder than a funeral, and I knew it was almost morning.

We never went to the hotel dining room now. They knew who we were; they'd seen our pictures in the paper. We knew they'd be saying, *Look at them eating toast – how can they be so heartless?*

I rode a bike down to the beach instead. In the basket I had a bottle of cream soda and two Baby Ruths. Breakfast.

The sky was full of stacked grey clouds and the air tasted like a nickel. The sun hadn't had time to bake the wetness from the sand. I had the place to myself. Me and the fishermen. Peter and I had watched them surf-casting together. One day, one of them had brought him home.

When Alice fell down the rabbit hole, she fell slow. She had time to notice things on her way down – *Oh, there's a teacup! There's a table!* So things seemed almost normal to her while she was falling. Then she bumped down and rolled into Wonderland, and all hell broke loose.

I'd noticed things on the way down, too. I'd seen it all – the way he took off his hat, the way he lit her cigarette, the way she walked away, her scarf trailing in her hand. Flower petals and a pineapple vase.

Now I had to look at it again. This time without me in it, wanting things to go my way.

So I've got to start from the very beginning. The day before we left for Florida. Just an ordinary day.