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—Julia Quinn, author of the *Bridgerton* series

No  
Words

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*Ransom My Heart* (with Mia Thermopolis)

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*Pants on Fire*

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Avalon High series

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Abandon series

Allie Finkle's Rules for Girls series

From the Notebooks of a Middle School Princess series

MEG  
CABOT

No  
Words

A Novel



WILLIAM MORROW  
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*This novel is dedicated to book lovers everywhere.*

## CONTENT WARNING

Please be aware that although this book is a romantic comedy, it does contain depictions of and discussions about sexual harassment, past (off the page) parental death and depression, a brief disappearance at sea, and both threatened and on-the-page violence (in a book characters are reading within this book).



**Little Bridge Book Festival**  
**“Building Bridges Between Authors and Readers”**  
**Norman J. Tifton Public Library**  
**Little Bridge Island, FL**

Dear Ms. Wright,

Greetings from beautiful Little Bridge Island, Florida!

My name is Molly Hartwell and I’m the children’s librarian at the Norman J. Tifton Public Library. As a longtime fan of your middle-grade series, *Kitty Katz*, *Kitten Sitter*, I’m writing to invite you to our library’s first-ever book festival. I think you would bring in an enormous and well-deserved children’s audience.

Although this is our library’s first book festival, the planning for this three-day event—starting next year on Friday, January 3, and concluding the afternoon of Sunday, January 5—has been in the works for some time. This past year we have received our nonprofit status, as well as tremendous financial support from donors who cherish literature like yours.

That’s how we’re able to offer you first-class airfare to Little Bridge Island, a luxury suite at the Lazy Parrot Inn, and a \$10,000 stipend in exchange for you being a panelist. We’d love for you to



do a signing, as well!

Please let me know your thoughts. I'd be delighted to answer any questions you may have, and encourage you to visit our website for details about the festival, as well.

It would mean so much to me personally, Ms. Wright, if you would consider attending Little Bridge's first-ever book festival. I know we're a small town and don't necessarily have the kind of amenities that a lot of the larger festivals you attend might, but we plan to make up for that with wonderful weather and good, old-fashioned charm!

Best,  
Molly Hartwell  
Children's Librarian  
Norman J. Tifton Public Library  
Molly.Hartwell@lbiblibrary.org



## CHAPTER ONE

**Jo Wright:** I just got offered 10 grand to speak and sign at a book festival on Little Bridge Island. Should I go?

**Rosie Tate:** Are you in a financial position right now where you can afford to turn down \$10,000?

**Jo Wright:** You're my agent, you tell me.  
When's my next check coming?

**Rosie Tate:** Not until you hand in *Kitty Katz* #27.

**Jo Wright:** I'd hand in *Kitty Katz* #27 if I could think of something new for Kitty to do. But she's already done it all.

**Rosie Tate:** Kitty hasn't done it all. She hasn't gone to space.

**Jo Wright:** How is a teenaged cat going to get to space?

**Rosie Tate:** You're the writer. Make something up.

**Jo Wright:** I'm having a little difficulty in that area at the moment.

**Rosie Tate:** I've noticed. You've missed your extended-extended deadline. Again.

**Jo Wright:** So basically you're saying I better accept this gig or I'll be broke.

**Rosie Tate:** How can you be broke? Kitty has made millions of dollars over the past seven years, and I just sent you a royalty check.

**Jo Wright:** I know, but I had to buy Justin out for his half of the apartment when he decided to move to LA to pursue his dream of being a screenwriter. By which I mean, play video games all day on the West Coast instead of in my living room.

**Rosie Tate:** I'm glad you kicked the mooch out.

**Jo Wright:** Whatever. At least I got the apartment. And I still have plenty of savings. But they're all in retirement accounts I can't touch until I'm 59½. That's 27 years from now. So I really need some cash if I'm going to get my dad moved someplace warm. He can't spend another winter here in NY. He broke his wrist twice on the ice last year. And since he isn't old enough yet to qualify for Medicaid and has the worst insurance, I had to pay cash both times for his treatment!

**Rosie Tate:** Then I think you'd better say yes to the book festival.

**Jo Wright:** I know, right? But I can't accept the gig, because this book festival is on Little Bridge Island.

**Rosie Tate:** What's wrong with Little Bridge Island? I've heard it's lovely. One of my other authors went there and said the tropical breeze was so inspiring, she wrote two whole chapters a day the entire time she was there.

**Jo Wright:** Well, good for her. But don't you know who lives on Little Bridge Island?

**Rosie Tate:** No, should I?

**Jo Wright:** *1 Attachment*

### Famous Author Buys Private Island in Florida Keys

One of the Florida Keys' most notable—and expensive—estates has finally sold for a cool \$6,000,000. Located just offshore Little Bridge, this unique private island features an opulent eight-bedroom, nine-bath mansion with its own boat dock, white sand beach, and pool, and is now the home of bestselling author William Price. Price, known as much for his reclusiveness as for his internationally bestselling novels of tragic love and loss, had been home-shopping in the area for some time before snapping up the island.

All seven of Price's novels have been adapted into films gross-

ing into the hundreds of millions. The author was not available for comment.

**Rosie Tate:** Oh, HIM. Jo, that was ages ago. No one even remembers it.

**Jo Wright:** It was at Novel Con last year. Everyone in the publishing industry remembers it.

**Rosie Tate:** Well, he's an ass. But of course you should go. You probably won't even see him.

**Jo Wright:** Have you ever even been to a book festival?  
OF COURSE I'm going to see him. I'll probably have to sit right next to him on some dumb panel.

**Rosie Tate:** I don't see how. You write delightful little stories for children about a teenaged cat who has exciting adventures while babysitting adorable kittens. He writes horrible books about heartbroken women who fall in love with arrogant dullards who then thankfully die.

**Jo Wright:** You know at these book festivals they make all the authors go to dinner and cocktail parties with the donors, right? So I'm sure I'll see him at one of those.

**Rosie Tate:** Oh. Well, just say you aren't feeling well and sit on your hotel balcony and write in the

## NO WORDS

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lovely tropical breeze! Only come out to give your speech, do your signing, and collect your check.

**Jo Wright:** No. I don't want to risk it. Can you just contact the organizers before I say yes and see if he's going to be there?

**Rosie Tate:** Of course. You have my word: YOU  
WILL NEVER SEE WILL PRICE AGAIN.

SIX MONTHS LATER





From Will Price, the #1 internationally bestselling author of *When the Heart Dies* and *The Betrayal*, comes a timeless, deeply personal tale of love and loss:

### The Moment

It only took a moment for Johnny Kane to realize that Melanie West *was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen—and also that he could never have her.*

*Because in the next moment, Johnny betrayed her.*

*Now he has to make a choice: admit the wrong he's committed, and live with the sorrow of knowing she could never be his . . . or rewrite both their destinies, and change that moment forever.*

### Praise for The Moment

"An instant classic." —*USA Today*

"At once brilliantly gripping and tragically complex, *The Moment* is Will Price's most important—and intimate—work yet." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"Utterly compelling and emotionally



intense." —People Magazine

"In this, his seventh novel, Will Price has written  
a profoundly affecting work of stunning moral  
complexity." —Publishers Weekly

"Perfect." —Reese Witherspoon

FRIDAY, JANUARY 3





## CHAPTER TWO

Excuse me.”

I lifted my sleep mask to see three teenaged girls standing in the aisle beside my seat. “Yes?”

“Sorry to wake you,” said the girl with the lip ring and nearly waist-length braids. “But aren’t you Jo Wright?”

I wondered how she knew. Especially since I’d scraped my hair into a ponytail—hair that, in my author photo, was loose, sexily mussed, and honey blond.

But that photo had been taken before Will Price had destroyed my life, and I’d adopted my current regimen of heavy black eyeliner, all black clothes, and matching black hair dye.

“Uh.” I lifted the glass from the end of my seat rest. “Yes. Why?”

“I told you it was her, you guys.” The girl exchanged excited looks with her companions before turning back toward me. “You’re going to the book festival on Little Bridge Island, Florida, this weekend, aren’t you? I saw your name on the website.”

“Oh.” I was disappointed to note that my glass contained

mostly only melted ice. “Yes, I’ll be doing a couple panels and signings there.”

I glimpsed a flight attendant at the end of the aisle observing my interaction with the girls with amusement. I looked meaningfully down at the melted ice in my otherwise empty glass.

The flight attendant nodded and slipped into the galley as one of the other girls—this one in exaggeratedly large horn-rimmed glasses—squealed, “I can’t believe it! I can’t believe it’s *Jo Wright*! I used to love your books!”

“Oh,” I said again.

I’ve always wondered how I’m supposed to respond to someone who says that they “used to” enjoy my books. Truthfully, it kind of hurt a little to be told by someone that they “used to” enjoy my work. It was nice that they *used to*, but painful to hear that they no longer did.

Was this how the cast of *Friends* felt every time someone came up to them and told them how much they “used to” enjoy their show? That had to suck.

Although not as much as it sucked to be me, because *Friends* earns a lot more in residuals than the animated *Kitty Katz* television series based on my books ever did.

“Thanks,” I settled for saying, and was relieved when the flight attendant slipped me a brand-new glass of vodka and orange juice, and took away the empty one. “It’s great to meet you. See you when we land!”

Then I took a long sip of my drink—number two, and just as delicious as number one!—and attempted to slide the eye mask back over my face to continue my nap.

“We’re going, too,” said the third girl, this one wearing a leather vest with fringe that reached almost to her knees. “We’re flying all the way from Manitoba just to be at the festival!”

I slid the eye mask all the way back up. Things were getting interesting.

“Wow,” I said. These girls’ parents had to be loaded. Flights from Canada to the Florida Keys in January weren’t cheap. My own, from New York City, had set the festival back almost two thousand dollars. I’d seen the amount on my ticket. “Manitoba. That’s impressive.”

“You know, the Kitty Katz series completely saved my life in grade six,” the girl in the glasses said. “Obviously I know your characters are only cats, but they were *so much more* than cats to me.”

“Lauren loves cats,” the girl with the braids assured me.

It was at this point that I noticed that the guy sitting in the window seat next to me had paused the movie he’d been watching on his phone and was now listening to our exchange. Not to sound like a snob, but he was a bit scruffy-looking for first class—cargo shorts, a Batman T-shirt (*Dark Knight*, not *Lego*, which in my opinion is the best Batman movie, but there’s no accounting for taste), with pale feet shod in flip-flops, along with a goatee.

Goatees are not my favorite, but my friend Bernadette says I’ve got to stop judging men who wear them just because my ex Justin did and he turned out to be a loser.

And of course, we *were* on a flight to the Florida Keys. My seatmate’s scruffiness could be forgiven. Everyone goes

to the Florida Keys for pleasure, not business.

Everyone except for me.

"Jasmine's right," Lauren gushed. "I totally love cats. And reading. The Kitty Katz series was so inspiring to me that I decided I wanted to become a writer myself!"

I raised my eyebrows. "Really? That's great."

"Thanks! In fact, I'm writing my own book."

"She totally is!" Jasmine nodded emphatically enough to send her braids swinging.

"Great," I said, taking another sip of my drink. My *free* drink!

"Girls." The flight attendant approached. "We're going to be making our descent into Little Bridge in a few minutes, so I'm sorry, but I need you to return to your seats."

"Awwww!" The girls were not happy, especially Lauren. "I was going to ask for a selfie."

"Well, you can get one with me at the book festival," I said. "Wouldn't that be better than one here on the plane? The lighting here is not exactly optimal."

"I guess." Lauren continued to look crushed—or about as crushed as a twelve-year-old with perfectly clear skin and rich parents could.

But if Kitty Katz had been her favorite series way back in grade six, Lauren had to be older than twelve. It was so hard to tell how old girls were these days. With all the makeup tutorials out there on YouTube, showing them how to expertly blend bronzer into those hard-to-reach crevices, most of them looked old enough to be in college, or even graduate school.

I felt a prickle of guilt over Lauren's disappointment. She may only have "used to" like my books, but at least she'd liked them once, and she'd recognized me without my festival badge, the one I'd been urged repeatedly to wear in every communication from the library staff, so that I "could be identified as soon as possible" by the festival's volunteers, whom I'd been told would be waiting for me at baggage claim.

"We can do a selfie now if you really want," I said, in spite of all the glares I was getting from my fellow first-class passengers. They didn't like having their sacred space invaded by teenagers from coach.

All of them except Dark Knight, my seatmate. He, I noted, was grinning.

"If you make it quick," I added, for the sake of the unhappy travelers around me.

Lauren gasped with delight and quickly hunched down beside my seat. "Say Kitty Katz," she cried, holding her phone high above both our heads.

"Kitty Katz." I smiled up at her phone. She'd decorated the case with stickers of a Korean boy band. These girls really were adorable.

CLICK.

"All right, girls," the flight attendant said, clapping his hands. "That's *enough*. It's time to go back to—"

But the girls weren't ready to go anywhere.

"Are you doing a panel with Will Price?" Jasmine asked.

I almost choked on the refreshing mouthful of screwdriver I'd just taken. "I'm sorry, *what?*"

"Will Price," Jasmine said. "You know, Will Price, who wrote *When the Heart Dies*? He's going to be at the festival, too."

"Um, no." I shook my head with enough force to cause the end of my ponytail to swat Dark Knight in the shoulder. "Sorry," I said to him, because of my hair.

"No problem." Dark Knight was still smiling, watching my exchange with the girls like it was a lot more entertaining than his movie.

To the girls, I said, "No. I mean, no, I'm not doing a panel with Will Price because Will writes adult novels and I write children's novels. And also, Will isn't coming to the festival."

Jasmine blinked at me with her perfectly made-up eyes. "Yes, he is."

"No, he's not." I smiled at her to show her that I meant her no ill will. I don't usually argue with children—I'm actually rarely around them, except for my super's daughter, Gabriella, who takes care of my cat, Miss Kitty, for me when I'm away. But I had been assured multiple times by my agent on this point, and Rosie was never wrong. "Will Price isn't attending this festival. I know he owns a house on Little Bridge Island, but he's in Croatia right now, on the set of the film of his latest book."

*His latest piece of sentimental garbage* was what I wanted to say, but I didn't, because it's rude to bad-mouth a fellow writer's work (out loud), something Will Price had evidently never been taught, since he'd felt free to bad-mouth my work to one of the most highly circulating newspapers in the world.



“No.” Jasmine was holding firm. “Will does have a house on Little Bridge. Well, technically, a *mansion* on a *private island* off the coast of Little Bridge. And he *was* in Croatia filming the movie version of his latest book, *The Moment*—”

“Oh my God.” The girl in the vest looked like she was about to have an out-of-body experience right there on the plane. “You guys. *The Moment* is my favorite Will Price book of all time. When Johnny finally tells Mel the truth—that he’s loved her from the moment he first saw her—and that the reason they can never be together is because he’s the one who—”

Lauren punched her friend in the arm. “Cassidy, stop. God, spoiler alert! Some of these people may not have read it yet!”

Most of the people in the first-class cabin looked as if they had no interest in reading anything by Will Price. Most of them looked much more interested in their alcoholic beverages, and in the girls returning to their seats so that they could finish those drinks in peace before we began preparations for landing and the flight attendant took them away.

“But I guess Will is back, or, like, on his way back,” Jasmine went on, “because he posted to his fans this morning that he wouldn’t miss the island’s first book festival for *anything*.”

*What?*

I closed my eyes. No. This was *not* happening.

Except that it was.

Great. Freaking fantastic. So Will Price was going to be at this book festival. Despite Rosie’s promise, I was going to have to see him—not only see him, but probably be in a

room with him, and even have to talk to him.

*Kill me. Please kill me now.*

"I. Am. So. Excited!" Cassidy's out-of-body experience was turning into divine ecstasy along the lines of Saint Teresa's. "Now I can get my copy of *The Moment* signed! And maybe ask Will to sign my chest. You know he's hetero, right? And single."

"Ugh, gross, Cassidy." Lauren looked offended on behalf of her friend. "He's, like, old."

Cassidy grinned. "Not too old for me."

Great. How super for her.

I, however, was going to drown myself. As soon as the plane landed, I was going to walk out of the airport and fill my pockets with stones and then wade into the ocean and drown myself like Virginia Woolf.

A stern male voice rang out, startling all of us and causing me to fling open my eyes.

"Okay, girls. That is *it*." The flight attendant had had enough.

Ignoring the girls' cries of protest, he shooed them back to their seats, then returned and firmly closed the curtain separating the first-class cabin from coach.

"I'm so sorry about that, Miss Wright," he said to me, sounding like he meant it.

"Oh, please. It's fine." I gave him an It-happens-all-the-time smile and wave.

But of course, it didn't happen all the time. It *used to* happen all the time, but not anymore. Not since so many readers of *Kitty Katz*, *Kitten Sitter*—which at one time had been the

number one bestselling book series for tweens, an animated television series (on cable), and even a feature film (straight to streaming and DVD)—had grown up and started flocking to Will Price’s stupid, depressing books and even stupider, more depressing movies.

I downed the rest of my drink then lowered my eye mask, leaning back against my headrest. What was I worrying about, anyway? I wasn’t going to have to see Will Price. Rosie was right: All I had to do was give my speech, do my signing, maybe take a dip or two in the hotel pool—hey, it was January and below freezing in New York; it was seventy-five and sunny on Little Bridge Island—collect my ten thousand dollars, and go home.

And maybe . . . just maybe . . . I might even try out this famous Little Bridge tropical breeze I’d heard so much about, and see if it gave me the inspiration to write *Kitty Katz* #27.

Everything was going to be fine. Just fine. All I needed to do was have a pawsitive attitude. That’s what Kitty Katz would do. With the right attitude, Kitty always says, everything will be purr-fect!

Right?



## CHAPTER THREE

Wrong.

Little Bridge Island was so small that it didn't have a proper airport, with Jetways that stretched from the arrivals terminal to meet incoming planes so that passengers could disembark.

Instead, we were supposed to climb down a steep flight of metal stairs that airport personnel had shoved up against the door, then walk out onto an active runway.

This would have been charming and even fun, like something from *Kitty Katz #12, Kitty Goes Hawaiian*, when Kitty and her friends went to Meowuai, if I'd checked a bag.

But after years and years of work-related travel, I'd learned never to check a bag, because it so often got lost right before a super-important Kitty-related event. I'd once been forced to speak before a thousand Barnes & Noble booksellers in jeans and a Stay Puft Marshmallow Man T-shirt because that's what I'd been wearing on the plane and my bag was nowhere to be found.

So I always packed everything I needed into a carry-on,

and as a consequence, my carry-on weighed a ton. How was I going to lug it down a rickety, narrow flight of metal steps while wearing stacked heels (because of course I had on my most fashionable pair of winter boots, as it had been snowing when I'd left New York)?

Then, as I stood at the top of the stairs, squinting in the sudden blast of heat and bright sunlight, cursing my impulse to bring a thousand promotional bookmarks for the next installment in the Kitty Katz series (which I hadn't even written yet, so the bookmarks simply said *Don't Fur-get: KK#27, Coming Soon!*), a miracle happened.

"Here, let me help you with that."

Dark Knight tugged my suitcase from my hand.

"Oh, no!" I was shocked. "You don't—"

But before I could stop him, Dark Knight was moving quickly down the steps with my suitcase dangling from one hand as lightly as if it contained only catnip.

"Thank you so much." I hurried down the stairs to join him on the tarmac, where painted yellow lines directed us toward the tiny arrival terminal. "You really didn't have to do that."

"Well, it's not every day I get to meet a celebrity."

"I'm not a celebrity." Blushing, I took the suitcase from him, yanking on the handle to extend it so I could move it from the path of the passengers disembarking behind us. "I'm just—"

"I know." He jerked what appeared to be a fishing pole and also the case for a ukulele from a luggage cart onto which airport personnel had begun unloading bags that had been gate-

checked. "You're just Jo Wright, author of the Kitty Katz series, and you're here for the Little Bridge Book Festival."

"Yes." I knew he'd been eavesdropping. Well, it had worked out well for me. I nodded at the pole in his hand. "And you're here for a little fishing?"

"Among other things. I'm Garrett, by the way."

"Hi, Garrett."

Garrett and I fell into step with the other passengers along the pathway leading to the arrivals terminal, me wheeling my suitcase behind me. Everywhere I looked, I saw palm trees, and even—yes, there it was, past the private jets parked at the far end of the tarmac—the ocean, smooth and blue and stretching as far as I could see.

I didn't feel like walking into it anymore, though, Virginia Woolf style. Things were starting to look up. Not because of Garrett—although he was pretty easy on the eyes, despite the goatee and the flip-flops.

No. It was because after the cold, stale air of the plane—not to mention the icy winds of Manhattan—the heat and humidity of Little Bridge was a welcome change. I could feel my hair beginning to rise up at the roots in delighted surprise. This was it: the tropical breeze Rosie had mentioned, the one that had inspired that author of hers to write two whole chapters in a day.

And even though the sun was glaring and I was starting to sweat already beneath my leather jacket, that tropical breeze caressing my face, and the scent of seaweed and brine coming from the ocean felt almost . . .

Well, as if I were coming home.

Which was ridiculous, of course. I'm a born-and-bred New Yorker, used to the darkened bowels of the subway and the frigid wind whistling between the skyscrapers. The tropics and I were *not* friends.

As if he were reading my mind, Garrett asked, "First time?"

I had to raise my voice to be heard over the sound of all the airplane propellers that were spinning around us.

"In Little Bridge? Yes. But I've been to Florida before. I've been coming down here a lot recently, looking at senior living communities."

Garrett raised his eyebrows. "Little soon for that, don't you think?"

I laughed. "For my dad. He hasn't been handling winters back home too well lately. I've got to find him a new place before—"

My voice died in my throat. Not because I was envisioning my father's imminent passing, but because we'd arrived at the doorway to the arrivals terminal, just inside of which stood a small, dark-haired woman holding up a whiteboard with my name on it.

Except mine wasn't the only name on it.

I'd been expecting to see the name Bernadette Zhang, a fellow author and friend of mine who'd texted long ago that she'd also been invited to the festival. We'd promised to spend every free moment we had in Little Bridge together, drinking, taking in the sun, and having highly un-literary discussions about other authors we both disliked.

But instead I saw an entirely different name below mine.

WILL PRICE

No. It couldn't be.

"Hey," Garrett said, because I was standing frozen in front of him, blocking the entrance to the terminal. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah." I shook myself. "Sure. Sorry. I'm fine."

"You don't look fine."

"Yeah, I know." I was suddenly way, way too hot in my leather jacket. "I'm probably going to have to kill someone, is all."

Garrett glanced in the direction I was staring, but of course didn't see what I was seeing. "Anyone in particular?"

I shook my head. "Not in the immediate vicinity."

"Well, that's a relief." He laughed.

I wasn't feeling so amused, though. Rosie had promised—*promised*—me that Will Price wasn't going to be at the festival, despite his owning a house—or rather, a private island—off the coast of Little Bridge. Sworn on her soul that she'd checked and *double-checked* with the festival staff.

I'd even scoured the website myself before writing to commit to the event. .But there'd been nothing: no sign of Will Price anywhere on the Little Bridge Island Book Festival page. Zilch.

So what had happened?

Behind me, I heard Garrett murmur, "Um, well, I checked a bag, so, uh, I better go see if I can find it. I'll see you later?"

"Yeah," I murmured back. "Sure. See you later."

I knew I was being rude—the guy had carried my bag for me, after all, and been sweet about Lauren and her friends



and my ponytail swatting him—but I had bigger problems to worry about. What was I going to do about having to share a car with Will Price? Was I actually going to have to *talk* to him? What was I going to say?

Honestly, this was really just too much to ask. It was one thing to have to be at a festival with him. But *ride in a car with him*? No.

Should I just turn around? Maybe I could find the departures terminal and buy a ticket back to New York.

But then I'd lose my ten grand, and I really needed that money. Who knew when Dad was going to fall down again and I was going to get saddled with another gigantic hospital bill?

Oh, whiskers, as Kitty would say. I was just going to have to suck it up.

Once again deeply regretting many of my life decisions, especially the one to come to Little Bridge, I wheeled my suitcase toward the woman with the whiteboard. I had to dart and weave between dozens of tourists, all wearing winter coats like me, and all crowded into the tiny arrivals terminal, either trying to rent a car from the single car rental agency or grab their bags from the single loudly cranking baggage carousel.

"Hi." I'd reached the woman holding up the whiteboard. I pointed to my name. "That's me."

"Oh, Ms. Wright!" The woman's face broke into a rapturous smile. "Welcome to Little Bridge! I'm Molly Hartwell, the children's librarian. Thank you so much for coming."

The woman's greeting was so charming that I almost for-

got my hatred of Will Price (almost, but not quite).

"Hi. Please call me Jo. Thanks for having me. It's really great to be here. I hope you weren't waiting for me long."

"Oh, no," Molly replied. "Not at all."

But I couldn't help noticing that she was shifting her weight from foot to foot, and also that she was clearly pregnant. To my untrained eye (except for many hours of watching *Call the Midwife*), she looked ready to pop.

"I'll be taking you to your hotel." Molly's tone was as bright as her dark eyes. "Do you have any other bags to pick up from baggage claim?"

"No. Everything I need, I have right here." I nodded proudly down at my carry-on. If they gave prizes to authors for packing instead of literary content, I would definitely have won them all.

"Oh." Molly looked slightly disappointed, and continued to shift her weight from one foot to another. "I hope you don't mind, but there are two other authors arriving any minute that I thought we could pick up at the same time. It would keep me from having to make three trips back and forth to the hotel. And you know, we are trying to be eco-conscious here on Little Bridge. The authors should be coming through those doors any second—"

Because of my expert packing, I'd been in this situation before. Enough times that I reached out, took the whiteboard from Molly's hands, and said, in response to her surprised expression, "No problem. I'll wait for them. I know you've been here awhile and could probably use a bathroom break."

Molly's cheeks went red. "Oh, no, Ms. Wright! I'm fine! I

don't want you to—"

"It's Jo. And I'm fine with this. Will and I go way back. I'll take good care of him while you're gone."

That's what I said out loud. Inside in my head, I was saying, *Will and I go way back, and if he shows up while you're gone, I'm going to murder him, and when you return from the bathroom, all that will be left of him is a puddle of his own blood, but no one will be able to prove I'm his killer, because I will have so skillfully disposed of his body and gotten rid of all the evidence.*

But of course I wouldn't actually do that, because I'm a Wright: I'd inherited from my very British father's side of the family an almost pathological fear of confrontation. It was because of this fear of confrontation that my father had saved no money for his retirement, and had instead given everything he had to his best friends and fellow bandmates every time they needed to be bailed out of a jam (which was frequently). His generosity was completely admirable, except that now he needed me—or, more accurately, Kitty Katz, to support him (although, again to his credit, he'd never asked me to do so. He'd have sooner withered away from starvation than ask anyone for help).

Always at odds with this, however, was what I'd inherited from my mother's very Italian side of the family: a hot-blooded thirst for revenge.

Molly's face crumpled with grateful relief. "Oh, *thank you*. If you really don't mind—I've been dying to go. The baby seems to be sitting right on my bladder. I'll only be a minute—"

"Take your time." I hoisted up the whiteboard so that anyone coming through the doors from the tarmac would be sure to see it.

At least, that's what I did until Molly turned her back and waddled off in the direction of the ladies' room. Then I lowered the sign and wondered what would happen if I spat on Will's name and wiped it away with my sleeve.

But no. I couldn't do that. I'd only get Molly in trouble, and she seemed like a nice person. She was the one who'd written me the kind letter, offering me the ten grand and gushing over her love of Kitty Katz. I would never do something like that to a fan.

Although it would certainly serve Will Price right if someone, *anyone* out there showed him that he wasn't as universally beloved as he thought he was, and that books about teenaged cats were *just as* important (to some people) as books about whatever his books were about, which I still didn't actually know, because I'd never read one—at least not all the way through. Of course I'd glanced through one or two that I'd happened to spot in airport bookstores during layovers. I'd read enough to see that his prose was accessible. He wasn't *talentless*.

But those endings! My God.

Will insisted in interviews—not that I'd read any of them. Well, all right, I might have skimmed one or two—that his books were tragic love stories. But not romance novels. Oh, no. Definitely not that! Because he was a man, and most male authors of adult books would slit their own throats before admitting they'd written a romance or women's fiction or

even a family drama. Everything they wrote, many of them insisted, was *literary fiction* (unless of course it was sci-fi, horror, or mystery).

So nauseating.

I'd tried to watch *When the Heart Dies* once when I'd been channel-surfing and it had turned up on HBO, but it had been so depressing—the hero died at the end (all of Will's heroes in all of Will's books died at the end)—that I'd had to switch to a *Great British Bake Off* marathon to cheer myself up.

Why did Will Price need a ride from the airport anyway? He lived on Little Bridge. Where was he even coming from? Were Lauren and her friends right? Had he really left the set of his latest movie to come to this book festival? Was he so controlling that he couldn't allow a book festival in his own town to take place without him being there?

And if so, why couldn't he take an Uber or a taxi or a limo or whatever entirely too highly paid authors like himself rode around in? Why did he need one of the book festival volunteers to drive him in the author bus or van (which, in my experience, was undoubtedly what would be transporting us)? Why couldn't he—

BOOM.

The automatic doors to the tarmac parted and there he was, like some kind of god, the sun casting a golden halo all around him. Will Price, in the flesh.

BAM! My heart ricocheted off the back of my ribs.

Really? The mere sight of him caused my heart to skip a beat? Why? WHY? I didn't even like him. He was just a

man, a stupid man who wrote even stupider books.

The only reason my heart did the dumb *BAM* thing was because this was the first time I was seeing him (in person, as opposed to the million photos of him that I could not seem to escape, that appeared all over social media and the copies of *People* my dentist kept scattered around her office and in-flight magazines and even, unfortunately, *Library Journal*, since less discerning librarians were bonkers for him, too) since The Incident.

Unfortunately, he looked just as good now as he had then.

It was easy to spot him in the crowd, not only because of the golden light that seemed to encircle him, but because of the way the crowd appeared to part for him, too, as if everyone sensed they were in the presence of greatness. This might have been because Will stood about a head taller than most of the other passengers, and that wasn't even counting his mass of thick, curly, dark hair, which was looking more unruly than usual. Wherever he'd been, he had apparently not had easy access to a barber, much less a razor, since he was sprouting four or five days' growth of dark facial hair.

He was peering down at his cell-phone screen as he walked, a large backpack slung over one of his ridiculously broad shoulders. He did not, I had to admit, look like either a multimillionaire or a backstabbing bestselling author, in his gray T-shirt, jeans, and Timberlands.

What he looked like was a god, and every woman—and even some of the men, probably—in that terminal knew it.

That was the thing about Will Price, though: those good looks of his were deceptive. They'd managed to fool many,

many people into thinking he was a sweet guy—a guy like the heroes he wrote about in his books, who lived only to adore and worship women . . . until he killed them off in some tragic freak accident, leaving the heroine brokenhearted but “stronger for having known what real love was.”

Barf.

And now Will’s good looks were fooling Lauren and her friends. I could see the girls clustered around the single baggage carousel with all the other passengers, waiting for their luggage to arrive.

But the second Will walked by, Lauren’s head popped up from her phone’s screen as if she had some kind of hot-male-celebrity-author radar. I saw her eyes widen, then her thin shoulder blades raise as she sucked in her breath.

*“Will!”*

The next thing I knew, all three girls were swarming him, Cassidy—the one who wanted her chest signed—shrieking the loudest of all.

“Will, Will,” she cried. “Oh, Will, I’m your biggest fan! Can I get a selfie with you?”

“Uh.” Will looked up from his phone screen. Now he stood—those dark eyes shaded by lashes that were wasted on a man—looking confused and startled, as the teens jumped around him. “Um—”

“We’re here for the book festival,” Lauren declared. “We’re going to go to every single one of your events!”

Will seemed about as thrilled as if she’d just informed him that she was an oral surgeon about to give him a dental bone graft.

“Oh,” he said. “That’s . . . brilliant.”

And of course he said *brilliant* instead of *great*. Because, as if Will weren’t hot enough looks-wise, he was also from some small, picturesque village in England somewhere, and had an accent I’d heard more than a few women (and men) swoon over as “the sexiest author voice ever.”

“Such a shame,” someone in publishing had once lamented to me, “that Will Price doesn’t narrate his own audiobooks! We’ve asked and asked him, but he won’t do it. He says he hates the sound of his own voice. Can you imagine? He’s so modest!”

No one had ever asked *me* to narrate my own audiobooks. I had offered many times, feeling pretty confident that I could do a good job, seeing as how kids seemed to love it at school visits when I read *Kitty Katz* out loud. I even did different little voices for all the characters: a high-pitched one for Kitty and a low-pitched one for her boyfriend, Rex Canine, as well as the popular “Kitty Katz claw” hand salute that symbolized pawsitivity. I was *good*!

I had, however, been gently but firmly told by my publisher that it was better to “leave such things to professionals.”

Unless you were Will Price, apparently, with a deep, manly voice and a British accent that pronounced *butter* like “but-tah,” as in “buttah wouldn’t melt in his mouth.”

Barf again.

“Can we get a selfie?” The girls crowded in around Will, their cell phones raised like battle axes. “This is so cool!”

Will was wincing those dark, expressive eyes of his as if



he were in pain. He was evidently not usually met in airport terminals by throngs of adoring teenaged fans . . . or at least, not his hometown airport terminal.

And poor Will! There was no publicist nearby to stop the assault. Certainly this hadn't occurred to the girls' mothers—who I assumed were the attractive, well-dressed women standing nearby, their own phones raised in amusement to film their daughters leaping around their favorite author. They weren't doing a thing.

I supposed that if Molly the librarian had been there, she'd have stepped in to intervene. But she was still occupied in the restroom.

Honestly, though, how was what was happening to Will so terrible? No one was telling him that they *used to* love his books. No one was saying that he *used to* be their favorite author. He should have been happy that he even had fans, given how deeply unsatisfying his books were.

But of course he didn't realize this, because he was Will Price.

"I really think we ought to save the selfies for the festival, don't you, girls?" he asked in the condescending tone of voice people usually reserved for toddlers or golden retrievers.

"Noooo." The girls kept snapping away with their phones. "Just one more?"

He looked so uncomfortable and dismayed that I couldn't help laughing out loud. This was almost as good as if I'd wiped his name off the whiteboard.

Unfortunately, laughing was a mistake. Because somehow he'd heard me—don't ask me how, considering the din in the

terminal, with the clanking of the baggage carousel and the excited buzz of the rest of the passengers snagging the keys to their rental cars—and looked my way.

That's how I was able to witness the exact moment that Will Price recognized me—despite my hair color, which I'd changed so dramatically since the last time we'd seen each other.

And that's how I saw those dark eyes go wide as his gaze went from my face to the whiteboard and then back again.

That's when his skin, beneath the days' old beard, went pale, and the heavy backpack he'd been carrying slid off his shoulder like he'd lost all muscle control. It landed with a solid *thunk* on the terminal floor.

Wow.

Well, I'd expected him to feel *something* upon seeing me again. A little embarrassment, maybe (if he actually had any feelings, which, after what he'd done to me, I'd always doubted).

But *this*? He looked like he'd seen a ghost.

"Er," I heard him say, his gaze still riveted to my face. "Listen, girls. I don't have time to chat right now. I have to—"

Go? Do you have to go now, Will? Oh, why is that? Because the woman whose work you maligned to the *New York Times* is standing in front of you holding a sign with your name on it and you're too much of a coward to go up to her and say you're sorry? Is that why? How purr-fectly claw-ful for you.

But to my surprise, he didn't head for the exit. Instead, he took a step toward me—

“Will? Oh, Will, *there* you are!”

I raised my eyebrows as a lithe blonde tore through the crowd, then launched herself at Will. Dressed in a barely there white bikini over which she’d thrown a pair of cutoffs and a gauzy red beach cover-up, she hit Will like a rocket.

“Will!” she gushed as she wrapped her sun-bronzed arms around his neck and her endlessly long legs around his waist. “I’m *so* sorry I’m late!” Surprisingly, she had a British accent, too. “I’ve got the car parked right outside. Are you ready? You didn’t check any bags, did you?”

“Uh, no. No, Chloe, I didn’t.” He attempted to peel the girl off him, looking, oddly enough, kind of irritated to see her. Which was weird, since most men I know don’t mind when beautiful blond girls wearing very little show up at airports to throw their arms around them.

“Great!” Chloe, her sandaled feet back on the ground, reached for the gigantic backpack he’d let fall to the terminal floor. It so figured that Will Price would let a tiny slip of a girl like that carry his bag. What was she, anyway, his assistant? Girlfriend? I guess Cassidy was wrong, and while hetero, Will wasn’t single after all.

Although I noted with cynical interest that they did not kiss hello, even though he’d been away long enough to grow a partial beard. He’d probably been warned by his media consultants not to kiss any of his romantic partners in front of fans. It would spoil their dreams that he was available.

“Come on,” Chloe said, tugging on his arm. “I’m double-parked. We’ve got to go.”

“Oh.” He threw me one last look. “Er, thanks.” To the girls,

who were already raking Chloe curiously with their gazes, wondering who she was and why she was taking their darling Will away from them, he said, “Sorry, that’s got to be it for now. My ride’s here. I’ll see you at the festival, though, right?”

The girls cried, “Awwwww,” in disappointment, but quickly recovered and began waving enthusiastically at their literary idol. “Bye, Will!” “See you tomorrow!” “I’m going to buy tons of copies of *The Moment* for you to sign for all my friends!”

Then a very uncomfortable-looking Will was swept from the terminal by the sweet, lovely Chloe.

What was *that* about? Why was *he* feeling uncomfortable? He hadn’t felt uncomfortable bad-mouthing my writing. Why should he feel uncomfortable now, seeing me in an airport holding a whiteboard with his name on it?

“Was that him?”

I turned and saw a familiar figure at my side.

“Oh, hi, Garrett.” In addition to his fishing pole and ukulele, Garrett was carrying a giant duffel bag. Unlike me, he didn’t seem to suffer from lost-checked-bag syndrome. “Was that who?”

“Will Price. I didn’t think *he’d* be riding on the author bus with us.”

I turned to stare at him. “What do you mean *us*?”

He pointed to the name beneath Will’s on the whiteboard I was holding—the name I hadn’t noticed because I’d been too wrapped up in my loathing of Will Price. “That’s me.”