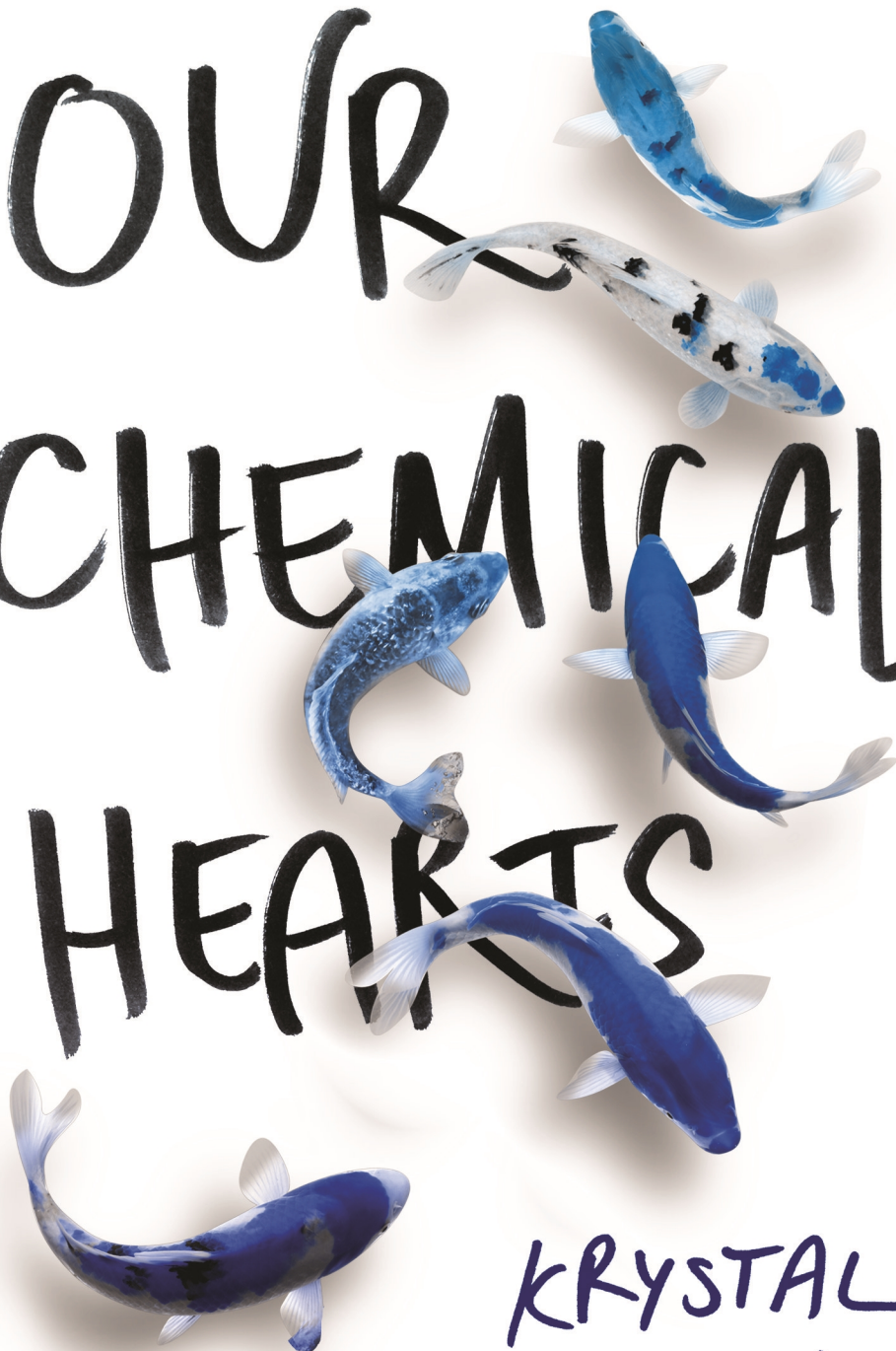


OUR
CHEMICAL
HEARTS



KRYSTAL
SUTHERLAND

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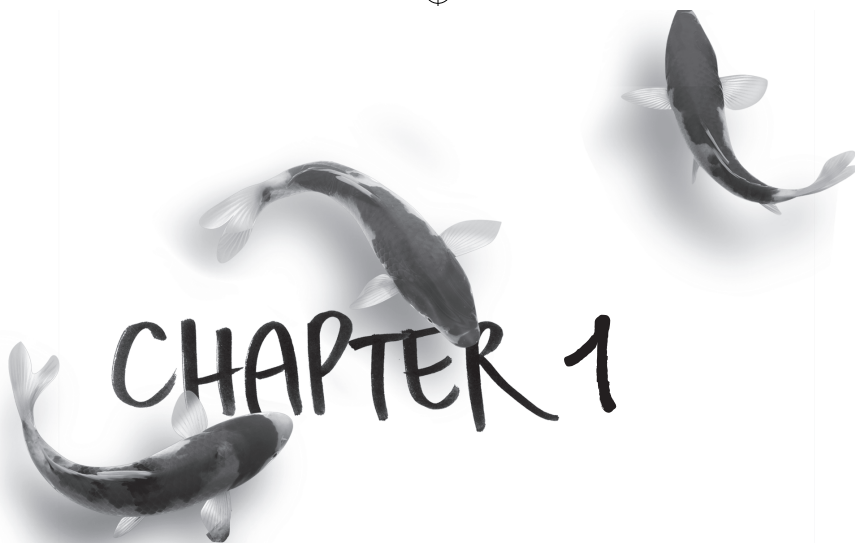
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I ALWAYS THOUGHT the moment you met the great love of your life would be more like the movies. Not exactly like the movies, obviously, with the slow-mo and the hair blowing in the breeze and the swelling instrumental soundtrack. But I at least thought there would be something, you know? A skipped beat of the heart. A tug at your soul where *something* inside you goes, “Holy shit. There she is. Finally, after all this time, there she is.”

There was none of that when Grace Town walked into Mrs. Beady’s afternoon drama class ten minutes late on the second Tuesday of senior year. Grace was the type of person who made an impression on any room she walked into, but not for the kind of reasons that generate instant and undying affection. She was of average height and average build and average attractiveness, all things that should’ve made it easy for her to assimilate into a new high school without any of the dramatic tropes that usually inhabit such storylines.



But three things about Grace immediately stood out, before her ordinariness could save her:

1. Grace was dressed head to toe in guys' clothing. Not the tomboy, skater-girl kind of look, either, but legitimate dudes' clothing that was way too big for her. Jeans that were meant to be skinny were held on her hips by a belt. Despite it being only mid-September, she wore a sweater and a checkered shirt and a knit cap, and a long leather necklace with an anchor on the end.
2. Grace looked unclean and unhealthy. I mean, I'd seen junkies that looked in better shape than she did that morning. (I hadn't really seen that many junkies, but I'd seen *The Wire* and *Breaking Bad*, which totally counts.) Her blond hair wasn't brushed and was badly cut, her skin was sallow, and I'm almost certain if I'd smelled her at any point during that day, she would've reeked.
3. If all this wasn't enough to really screw over her chances of fitting in at a new high school, Grace Town walked with a cane.

And that's how it happened. That's how I first saw her. There was no slow-mo, no breeze, no soundtrack, and definitely no skipped heartbeats. Grace hobbled in ten minutes late, silently, like she owned the place, like she'd been in our





class for years, and maybe because she was new or because she was weird or because the teacher could see simply by looking at her that a small part of her soul was cracked, Mrs. Beady said nothing. Grace sat on a chair at the back of the black-walled drama room, her cane resting across her thighs, and said nothing to anybody for the entire class.

I looked at her twice more, but by the end of class I'd forgotten she was there, and she slipped out without anyone noticing.

So this is certainly not a story of love at first sight.

But it *is* a love story.

Well.

Kind of.

