

Aristotle
and
Dante Dive
into
the Waters
of the
World

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*Amanda, I see the rising of the sun
and think of you. Sometimes I hear
your laughter in the room and hear you
say: "You're crazy, Uncle Ben."*

*This book is for you. I adore you—and
always will.*

EVERYWHERE I TURNED, EVERYWHERE I went, everybody had something to say about love. Mothers, fathers, teachers, singers, musicians, poets, writers, friends. It was like the air. It was like the ocean. It was like the sun. It was like the leaves on a tree in summer. It was like the rain that broke the drought. It was the soft sound of the water flowing through a stream. And it was the sound of the crashing waves against the shore in a storm. Love was why we fought all our battles. Love was what we lived and died for. Love was what we dreamed of as we slept. Love was the air we wanted to breathe in when we woke to greet the day. Love was a torch you carried to lead you out of darkness. Love took you out of exile and carried you to a country called Belonging.

Discovering the Art of Cartography

I wondered if Dante and I would ever be allowed to write our names on the map of the world. Other people are given writing instruments—and when they go to school, they are taught to use them. But they don't give boys like me and Dante pencils or pens or spray paint. They want us to read, but they do not want us to write. What will we write our names with? And where on the map would we write them?

One

AND HERE HE WAS, DANTE, WITH HIS HEAD RESTING ON my chest. In the stillness of the dawn, there was only the sound of Dante's breathing. It was as though the universe had stopped whatever it was doing just to look down on two boys who had discovered its secrets.

As I felt the beating of Dante's heart against the palm of my hand, I wished I could somehow reach into my chest and rip out my own heart and show Dante everything that it held.

And then there was this: Love didn't just have something to do with my heart—it had something to do with my body. And my body had never felt so alive. And then I *knew*, I finally knew about this thing called desire.

Two

I HATED TO WAKE HIM. BUT THIS MOMENT HAD TO END. We couldn't live in the back of my pickup forever. It was late, and already it was another day, and we had to get home, and our parents would be worried. I kissed the top of his head. "Dante? Dante? Wake up."

"I don't ever want to wake up," he whispered.

"We have to go home."

"I'm already home. I'm with you."

That made me smile. Such a Dante thing to say.

"C'mon, let's get going. It looks like rain. And your mother's going to kill us."

Dante laughed. "She won't kill us. We'll just get one of her looks."

I pulled him up and we both stood there, looking up at the sky.

He took my hand. "Will you always love me?"

"Yes."

"And did you love me from the very beginning, the way that I loved you?"

"Yes, I think so. I think I did. It's harder for me, Dante. You have to understand that. It will always be harder for me."

“Not everything is that complicated, Ari.”

“Not everything is as simple as you think it is.”

He was about to say something, so I just kissed him. To shut him up, I think. But also because I liked kissing him.

He smiled. “You finally figured out a way to win an argument with me.”

“Yup,” I said.

“It’ll work for a while,” he said.

“We don’t always have to agree,” I said.

“That’s true.”

“I’m glad you’re not like me, Dante. If you were like me, I wouldn’t love you.”

“Did you say you love me?” He was laughing.

“Cut it out.”

“Cut what out?” he said. And then he kissed me. “You taste like the rain,” he said.

“I love the rain more than anything.”

“I know. I want to be the rain.”

“You *are* the rain, Dante.” And I wanted to say *You’re the rain and you’re the desert and you’re the eraser that’s making the word “loneliness” disappear*. But it was too much to say and I would always be the guy that would say too little and Dante was the kind of guy who would always say too much.