

t h e
s h a r p
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o f
s i l e n c e

the
sharp
edge
of
silence

CAMERON KELLY
ROSENBLUM

HOT
KEY
BOOKS

This book contains descriptions of sexual violence and self-harm that some readers may find triggering.

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*For Mom and Dad,
who taught me resilience*

I contain multitudes.
—*Walt Whitman*

The
LYCROFT PHELPS SCHOOL

est. 1856

12 Liberty Street

Whitney, New Hampshire 03026

Dr. Griffin Frye
Head of School

Charlotte Tate Foresley
26 Deer Path Rd.
Thornwood, IL 60063

Dear Charlotte,

It is my great honor to offer you admission to the Lycroft Phelps School. Let me be the first to congratulate you on your fine accomplishments as a student and community member in middle school. Our admissions department is extremely selective. We are confident you have the curiosity of mind and exemplary character to thrive here at Lycroft Phelps. Like so many other talented “Crofters,” you’ll discover passions, pursuits, and friendships that will last a lifetime. Enclosed are the enrollment papers and student code of conduct pledge for you and your family to review, sign, and submit by April 15.

Who will you be at Lycroft Phelps? Explore the enclosed Athletics & Clubs catalog. Our offerings include

a broad variety of sports (Boy's Crew won the Northeast Prep School Conference last spring!), performing arts, robotics, a capella, and Young Entrepreneurs to name a few. Dance director Celeste Chu is eager to bring your impressive dance experience to our own Ballet Northeast School, and to help you grow in your artistry.

Since 1860, distinguished Lycroft Phelps graduates have attended America's most elite colleges and universities and gone on to make significant national and global contributions in the arts, sciences, public policy, and business. You're on the path to making your mark, Charlotte Tate Foresley. Congratulations!

Sincerely,

Dr. Griffin Frye, 'Croft '86

M.A., Williams College

Ed.D., Columbia University

dant mentem animumque deducemini ~ Lead with minds and hearts alight

The
LYCROFT PHELPS SCHOOL

est. 1856

12 Liberty Street

Whitney, New Hampshire 03026

Dr. Griffin Frye

Head of School

Maxwell Hannigan-Loeffler

368 W. 67th St.

New York, NY 10023

Dear Maxwell,

It is my great honor to offer you a space at the Lycroft Phelps School as a Founders Legacy Scholar. Congratulations! This four-year scholarship covers all room, board, tuition, and school-related expenses from freshman year through graduation. Currently, we have just two other Founders Legacy Scholars at Lycroft Phelps. Our admissions committee found your exceptional prowess in STEM and numerous awards in math and science highly admirable, and we are confident you are on the kind of trajectory that makes for an exemplary career at Lycroft Phelps and well beyond. I'm sure you'll find nourishing challenges in our new Kessler STEM Center, as well as

leadership opportunities within the department. We want to see you among the network of highly successful Lycroft Phelps alumni one day.

Who will you be at Lycroft Phelps? Explore the enclosed Athletics & Clubs catalog for next year. Like so many other talented “Crofters,” you’ll discover passions, pursuits, and friendships that will last a lifetime here on our beautiful campus. Enclosed are enrollment papers, Founders Legacy Scholarship details, and the student Code of Conduct pledge for you and your family to review, sign, and submit by April 15. Please do not hesitate to call my office directly with any questions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Griffin Frye, 'Croft '86,

M.A., Williams College

Ed.D., Columbia University

dant mentem animumque deducemini ~ Lead with minds and hearts alight

The
LYCROFT PHELPS SCHOOL

est. 1856

12 Liberty Street

Whitney, New Hampshire 03026

Dr. Griffin Frye

Head of School

Quinn Luddington Walsh

2636 Shore Rd.

Southport, CT 06890

Dear Quinn,

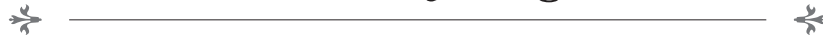
It is my great honor to welcome you to the Lycroft Phelps School. As a sixth-generation legacy, your family is well aware of the value of character education. Who will *you* be at Lycroft Phelps, Quinn?

SEPTEMBER



1

Thursday Night



QUINN WALSH

✧ *Lower Mid* ✧

I weave between trees—hidden, exposed, hidden, exposed—navigating roots and rocks and earth, spongy with leaf rot. Sprawled between tidy footpaths, these woods are unruly and thirsty, sucking the darkness between grooves in the tree bark and crevices in the rocks. The sky’s at its darkest now—between sunset and moonrise.

So many between.

I’m between myself and myself, I think. I feel my bones but don’t recognize my skin. This strange new self drinks in the power of night. I know what I *was*. I don’t know what I’m becoming. But I know what I need to do. Get Officer Doughty’s gun.

Because Colin Pearce must die.

I take care crossing the spiky skeleton of a fallen pine that ripped right through my running tights and slashed my knee last night. The tree is a landmark, and I know I’m nearly there. Rectangles of light appear through the black lace of leaves. Anderson House, home of LPS Campus Safety, is up ahead.

At the woods’ edge, I stop. Twenty feet of lawn separates me and Officer Doughty. It’s cold for September. My breath is uneven, billowing from my face in ragged blasts. I clamp my jaw and exhale

through my nostrils, not wanting the act of fucking breathing to give me away.

Framed by the lit window, Doughty sits at his desk writing in his log. It's three minutes before eight p.m., and I can practically count off the seconds until he glances at the clock and commences his quitting time routine. Soon he'll walkie his deputy, Safety Officer McPhee, who's buzzing around campus in a pimped-out golf cart, and sign off for the day. He'll lock up Anderson, get in his pickup, and head home.

He closes the log and tips his chin toward the clock, then predictably walks toward the tiny bathroom.

I'm in all black, like Tom Cruise in those *Mission: Impossible* movies Dad and I used to watch. Just like a spy, I dash across the grass and press myself against the shingles of the old 1950s cottage. I peer in the window, opened a few inches. I already know there's only one main room with the desk, a few chairs, and a cot in the corner. A computer monitor with a split screen flips through grainy black-and-white scenes on campus. If Campus Safety had even the smallest particle of a clue, those cameras would point to the darker corners of school. Instead, it's like I'm watching the LPS website virtual tour. All brick and ivy colonnades, white domes crowned in blue, expansive quads crisscrossed by footpaths in pleasing geometric patterns. Does Doughty really believe the bronze Founders Statues of John Lycroft and Erastus Phelps needs a security cam trained on them? Then again, I think, I can use this ignorance to my advantage. Once I have the gun.

The toilet flushes, and the bathroom door creaks. I duck. Doughty's footsteps approach, the wheels of the chair crackle over

grit on the worn wood floorboards, and he rests his knee on the ratty green seat cushion. He's so close I could poke him if it weren't for the wall. A giddy surge of my own power courses through me, and a bubble of laughter grows in my chest, threatening to pop and blow my plan to smithereens.

Stuff it! I tell myself. And the laugh curdles into anger, pooling in my throat, seeping back into the rest of me and settling to a simmer.

Doughty shifts and removes a shoulder holster, normally hidden under his bulky LPS Safety jacket. I doubt most people know Doughty packs heat. Like he'd ever shoot anyone at LPS. But I know. And this knowledge is everything.

He opens the desk drawer. Slides the pistol from its snug leather pocket—gently, reverently, maybe even lovingly. His gun may be the single thing that reminds Doughty what he *could* do if he didn't work at Lycroft Phelps.

In the trees, I hear John Lennon singing, and for a flash I'm five years old, with Dad in the study at home. He's setting the needle onto his vinyl record of the Beatles' White Album. "This is greatness, Q," he says. "Listen." He smiles, closes his eyes. The needle hisses, snaps, and then Dad sings softly with the *doo-doo-doo* part, and opens his eyes at *oh, yeah*. I giggle. He swoops me into the air as Ringo's drums kick in, waltzing me around the room. I want this version of me back so badly I have to blink hard to unsee it and refocus on Doughty.

The thump of his pistol against the wood echoes in my gut. My temples pulse. I'm weak and jangly at once.

He's hanging his holster on a wall peg and locking the drawer, opening another one and dropping in the keys. Hardly a foolproof

safeguard, but in his defense, he suspects nothing. And I'm invisible, so we'll give him a pass on this misstep.

I press myself flat again as he shuts the window. I hear him latch it, and the lights dim. He's about to walkie Deputy McPhee. Even through the glass, I hear the fuzzy voice: "Hey, boss." My opportunity.

I silently dart around the back of the building to the other side of the porch, almost as if I'm flying. I think, *Wait, I am a ghost*. But, no, I've bitten my cheek and can taste blood when I press it with my tongue.

I pick a fat tree as close to the porch as I dare. Last time I was too far. Tonight I'll see that alarm code he dials to lock up. Doughty steps outside, closing the door behind him. He pokes buttons, which I know to be in a three-by-four array, like a phone pad. All I have to do is memorize the pattern. I stare as hard as I can.

Blip. Blip.

Three-three . . .

Bleep. Bleep. Bleep. Blip.

Nine-seven-nine-seven? Or six-four-six-four?

Doughty spins my way, heading for the pickup. Shoes crunch the path. The truck door opens. Slams. Engine turns over. Light floods the woods around me. The tires grind, spit gravel, and headlights swivel away.

Then silence. I'm alone.

He could forget something and come back. So I wait, leaning against the tree. An asymmetric moon rises from the hills behind Lake Edith. It tosses pieces of itself onto the water, and the lake

wears them like sequins. *You don't need to make yourself beautiful for this place, Edith*, I say in my head. *You're too good for them*. I'm motionless until the moon shoves off the hilltops, launching itself into the blue.

I move to the door. My gloved hand hovers in front of the keypad.

I tap: 3-3 . . . 9-7-9-7. I don't hear any unlatching sound but try the knob just in case.

Nothing. "Shit."

I stare at the numbers, willing them to reveal the code to me.

Haltingly, I push 3-3-6-4-6-4. I shake the knob. Again, nothing.

Inky, liquid shadows shimmer at the corners of my eyes. The numbers vibrate. I swear he dialed that pattern. I *know* it. Maybe the 3-3 was 6-6. I've got one chance left, assuming that the alarm will auto-lock—or worse, start blaring—if I try a fourth time.

6-6-3-1-3-1.

Silence.

The knob doesn't move. I throw my head back, about to yell *FUCK* as loud as I can when I see a bunch of kids coming up the hill from the lake. "*Fuck!*" I whisper instead, and duck behind the fat tree.

It's guys. One of them says something. I can't make out specific words, but it must have been really sick because the others laugh in that way when they know they're not supposed to. First Years, probably, so new to campus they don't dare *not* laugh. My throat clamps tight, and for a second, I think I might barf.

No, I tell myself.

When they're out of range, I contemplate trying one more time. I simply can't risk a blaring alarm. I'm sure I could get away now, but they'd double down on precautions—which are stuck somewhere in the 1970s, right where I need them.

I stare at the charcoal sky as my staccato huffs of breath vaporize above me. I'm done here for tonight. From the trees, two bats dart in a quick, pointy dance to starry music only they hear, and I feel so devastatingly alone that I could lie on the ground. Go to sleep and never wake up. The bats vanish. A tear rolls down my cheek. I swipe it away.

I fish my AirPods from my coat pocket. The opening to “Gimme Shelter” by the Rolling Stones washes over me like a filmy dream, waking every cell on its way. The bongos find my heartbeat.

Ready again, I flit, bat-like, back into the company of trees, my shadowy secret keepers.