



TOMORROW
AND
tomokrow



LAUREN EMILY WHALEN
& LILLAH LAWSON



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LILLAH:

For Mom

the original Teresa-Jo(sephine), and the reason I love Joan Jett

LAUREN:

For Abby

May you always rock (but don't read this 'til you're in high school)



PROLOGUE

“A little water clears us of this deed.” — *Macbeth*, Act II, Scene I
“In pop music, you say, ‘you can do what you want to me.’ Rock n’ roll says, ‘I’m gonna do what I want to YOU.’” —Joan Jett

TWO young women stood at the edge of the cliff, the scuffed toes of their heeled shoes hanging over, clinging to each other, eyes squinting in the ever-darkening twilight. A light drizzle had begun to fall, and the moon had disappeared. A moment before, the round moon hung there in the sky like a full pitcher, spilling moonlight across the cool, damp ground, illuminating the reddish cliff and the muted green grass beneath their feet in an effervescent light. Now, the sky was murky and gray, like dirty charcoal.

Below, the fine, cool raindrops—little more than a misting—landed on the sharp, gray rocks and mingled with the blood that

pooled there, thinning it and turning it pink. As the girls watched soundlessly, the puddle turned into a thin stream, collecting on the largest rock—the one that held the body—until it spilled over, mixing with the dark ocean water, running and running off the rock until the rain had gently cleansed it all away.

The girls huddled inside their jackets for warmth, bracing themselves against the cold Scottish wind that whipped around their hair and prickled at their flesh. Beneath them, the thin, light-blue tartan was lifted by the breeze and began to flap, whipping around pale, motionless legs, one laying at an unnatural angle. The wind picked up the strands of reddish hair, hair that had been in want of a haircut only an hour before, but now had no need of such things. A ginger five o'clock shadow nestled against a cheek that would no longer break into a dimpled smile. The wind fluttered an eyelash which once framed a blue iris, but now lay at eternal rest. The hands, scratched and bleeding, piano-fine fingers clutched together as though in prayer, clasped beneath the neck, like those of a sleeping child. A body in repose, at peace.

He was dead. He was surely dead.

And yet... was that a twitch of a leg, or a figment of hope, of imagination?

A jerk, a groan.

Oh god, oh god, oh god.

A new pool of blood had formed, and again it trickled off the rocks to mingle its salt with the salt of the North Sea.

It was a trick of the light. It wasn't real. No body that broken could survive.

The girls simply stared, unable to move—staring at the flapping

blue kilt that seemed to wave like a flag of surrender and the once proud, now sad body shrouded in it, the fine mist of rain dampening their hair, their jackets, and finally their bones, until at last they felt the cold and began to stir, to blink, to realize what must be done.

It would be full dark soon.

Slowly, as though themselves underwater, the girls turned to one another, in lockstep, their legs and feet moving in tandem as though they were one body, one soul.

The dark-haired girl looked at the blonde one with wide, scared eyes. A deer caught in the headlights. Her face pale, her lips even paler, she uttered the words so quietly it was almost as though she hadn't spoken at all.

“Help him...or leave him?”

The second girl reached up with trembling fingers to push a strand of light hair from her forehead, a rivulet running down her cheek that might have been a tear—might have, had the circumstances been different.

Her shoulders convulsed in a shudder, which she held off at the pass and managed to disguise as a shrug. She swallowed hard and took a deep breath, bringing the salt of the sea air deep into her lungs, and spoke, her voice full of resolve.

The rain ceased as suddenly as it had begun, the mist floating away on the cold wind, a wind that felt like a reckoning.

“Leave him.”

A cloud parted, and the moon revealed herself once more, white and cold and full of possibility.

No more words were spoken. The girls turned on their heels in the wet grass and walked away from the cliff with no backward glances.

The stars, their fires extinguished in the dampened sky, were the only ones to bear them witness.

CHAPTER ONE:

A large, stylized black and white graphic of a woman's hair, rendered in a thick, calligraphic font. The hair flows down and outwards. Three small, black fly silhouettes are scattered around the word 'DUFF'.

DUFF

“We wanted to shock people because we knew it was gonna blow people’s minds to see teenage girls play sweaty, hard, serious rock and roll. And it did.” —Joan Jett

I was ripped from my mother’s womb.

C-sections happen every day. But according to Granny Devereaux, who’d had one too many glasses of red wine one Christmas, the one that brought me into the world was different. Unplanned, because I wouldn’t come out the regular way. Urgent, because I was in distress, meaning I’d gone to the bathroom while I was still inside and therefore was at risk of poisoning myself (I was *eight* when I heard this). And very, very painful.

They shaved my mom “down there,” Granny recalled, oddly nostalgic considering she was recalling the bald junk of her progeny.

Many drugs, screams, and attempted kicks to the doctor's head later, the medical team cut my mother open. By that time, my newborn self was also screaming and various bodily fluids from my mother splattered the walls. Like a really disgusting Van Gogh painting is how I picture it, yellow and red and brown and vile bile.

Five years before, my sister Elizabeth was born all-natural and drug-free, an eight-hour labor. Four years after, my sister Michelle was also a C-section, nice and scheduled and vile bile-free. But my birth basically set the stage for me, feeling like the odd girl out in the smart, pretty, generally on top O'Brien family of Grosse Pointe, Michigan.

On the night I was ripped out, no one was allowed in the hospital room outside of my dad and various medical staff. Being the stubborn Southerner she was, Granny Devereaux didn't listen to reason and, certain her only child wasn't going to survive the labor, ran into the hospital room to deliver her final words.

Sticking her head in the doorway before anyone could oust her, she yelled in the direction of my mom's hairless vulva, "I just wanted to let you know I love you!"

And my mom screamed back, "Get the fuck *OUT!*"



Seventeen years later, I moved to North Georgia. Just me.

Just like Granny Devereaux's story, it started with a pregnancy. Only this time, it was mine.

"I wish she hadn't told you," I muttered to my mom as we sat in the clinic's waiting room after mandatory "counseling" (a video that wasn't that horrifying considering the alternative).

My mom put down her copy of the latest "lean in" businesswoman

how-to and took my hand, threading her fingers through mine in a way she hadn't done since I was little. "Elizabeth was worried, sweetheart," she said gently. "I know she can be..."

"Bitchy?" I offered.

"*Harsh*," Mom corrected, tamping down a smile. "But she has the GRE and school exams coming up, and she wanted to make sure we were there for you."

"Duffy O'Brien?" A heavyset male nurse in scrubs looked my way expectantly, his deep baritone drawing the attention of terrified girls, younger women, and types who strongly resembled my own mother, all of us awaiting our fate.

Just then, my phone lit up with a message from my friend Julia. *Christine, Brayden, Jordan. And Julia, of course!* With an emoji of a big-eyed baby. Potential baby names from the former friend and born-again Christian who was judging me like crazy.

Squeezing my hand, my mom let go so I could proceed.

Tell Mom or I will, read the text from my older sister Elizabeth. *I won't tell her how it happened, though. Promise.*

Months earlier, out of sheer boredom and on a dare from Julia, who was very much *not* a born-again Christian at that point, I'd signed up for Tinder and swiped right, lying about my age the whole way. Looking back, I wonder if he knew how old I was, if he was practiced in sussing out naïve suburban girls. And really, what do you say about someone who doesn't even ask a person's last name and has sex with her on three different occasions in a car before ghosting her? Nothing positive, that's for goddamn sure.

The sex happened in the spring. In the early summer after I finished my junior year, my period *didn't* happen. In late summer,

frantic, I texted Elizabeth and told her everything. That's when she, in her obnoxious early twenty-something I-know-everything way, gave me the ultimatum. Figuring I had two options, and I was definitely not having a baby, I cornered my mom just after she told my twelve-year-old sister Michelle good night. But she already knew.

Liz was, at least, partly as good as her word; she was still the only person who knew the whole story.

Would I have told my parents if they *had* asked? Even now, years removed, I don't know. I don't regret my abortion, of course I don't. I was a literal child knocked up by a lowlife. This was my best option, and I took it. And my family supported me through and through. I know that's a lot more than most in that clinic waiting room could say.

I swallowed my pride and my residual anger at Liz, and swallowed the first pill in a small, sterile room while a heavysset male nurse and an older female gynecologist watched, their eyes full of pity I didn't want to acknowledge. "How was it?" my mother, who never even looked at another dude after she met my dad, let alone terminated a pregnancy, asked when I returned. I shrugged. What was there to say?

That night, Mom sat outside the bathroom as I stuck the second pill, to paraphrase Granny, up my down there. At least no one had to shave me. She was ready with everything from maxi pads to hot tea with honey to my favorite homemade chocolate chip cookies in the recovery days after. My dad and Michelle, who had barely put away her American Girl dolls, were informed of the circumstances and reminded that it absolutely wasn't my fault.

Right after I stuck the pill up myself, wincing as I withdrew my fingers, my phone buzzed. More baby names—*Samantha*, *Duke*, *Marie*—from Julia, who, despite ignoring me in school for my *terrible*

choice, held out hope that I'd save my baby for Jesus and myself for marriage. She always did have shitty timing.

I was not prepared for the ensuing depression that came from being pumped full of feel-good early-pregnancy hormones and then... emptiness. I missed more of the first month of school than I attended—my mom would knock on the door gently and peek in, I'd turn away, she wouldn't push and would go to work, having my sister bring me homework I ignored. All while I lay in bed streaming the same three TV shows over and over. And in the meantime, I was craving banana pudding and thinking about simpler times: summers in North Georgia where I caught fireflies and sneaked bites of pie crust and hadn't even heard of Tinder.

Is it any wonder I went to my parents and said, "I need Granny"?



I still had to go to high school.

"But whyyyyyy?" I whined that Sunday night when I arrived in Hiawassee, autumn leaves blooming in the mountains and Granny's house—now my house too—smelling like it always did, of cinnamon and nutmeg and pure goodness. "I could get my GED and work for you full-time at the restaurant. We all win!"

"Your parents and I agreed, honey," Granny said, serving me a second helping of candied sweet potatoes I hadn't asked for but really, really wanted. She was intuitive like that—as the owner and operator of Devereaux BBQ, Hiawassee's go-to joint, she had to be. "You can wait tables on evenings and weekends, much as you want, but studies come first."

Like the rest of my family, Granny didn't judge my abortion—she

was a God-fearing Southern woman who gave to Planned Parenthood regularly and even served as a clinic escort before she shattered a knee—and she welcomed me with open arms and a hell of a first dinner. But like any Southern woman of a certain age, she was sweet as pie *and* stubborn as a mule.

“Don’t you roll your eyes at me, Duffy Kate,” Granny said, using the special combination of my first and middle names like she had since I was born, squalling and bloody and freshly ripped away from Mom. Her gentle smile softened the harsh words. “We all talked about this, ‘member?”

“Yes, ma’am,” I muttered, scooping another mouthful of sweet potato. I swear, this side dish tasted like unicorns and angels and dreams.

Granny reached across the oak table she’d gotten for her wedding, squeezing my hand just like my mom had at the clinic. “I love that you’re here, honey.” The wrinkles around her eyes deepened as she smiled, and I could see the tears at the corners. Her youth, and subsequent marriage to my long-departed Papa, hadn’t been easy either. “But we all want you to finish high school the regular way. You can do it. I have faith.”

Sentimental moment over, Granny stood up and brushed off her hands, motioning for me to help clear the many dishes of fried chicken, sweet potatoes, and greens. We’d have homemade pie and tea in the living room after cleanup, as was tradition. She looked at me. “How ‘bout we set three Hiawassee ground rules?” I opened my mouth to protest—the last thing I wanted was a curfew or something childish like that—and she held up a hand. “No, not like that. Go to school. Come to work. Make a friend. That’s all you gotta do and Granny’ll

be happy.”

I loved my granny, and I knew what a big deal it was, her welcoming me into her house full-time for at least the next several months. I could do those three things for her.

Go to school. Come to work. Make a friend.

Fat chance of that last one, I thought when I entered the high school’s main hallway the next morning. It didn’t look that different from my old school. Maybe a little rougher around the edges, but it had the same faintly carbolic odor and ugly linoleum that you only see in institutional hallways. The kids were dressed a little more casually than my former classmates, in worn jeans and hoodies rather than preppy put-together outfits, their voices drawlier, their eyes trying not to bore holes through me, the new girl. This was the type of place where everyone had been together since kindergarten.

Whatever. I accepted my fate as an outsider. I planned to keep my head down and get my diploma and then... I didn’t know, but it would be big.

And then I saw her.

Petite but she looked strong, with broad shoulders and big hands for her size, what Granny would call “small but mighty.” At five-ten, I felt like a gawky giant next to her. She had a funky, layered haircut I’d learn was called a “shag,” most popular in the 1970s. A flannel shirt that looked like it belonged to a boyfriend or an older brother. Lace-up shitkicker boots and a barbell pierced in the middle of her nose. And in the middle of her delicate face, bright blue eyes that fixed right on me.

Turned out, her locker was right next to mine.

“I’m Marian,” she said. “Marian Shepherd. You can call me Marian or Mac, I don’t care.” I didn’t know this girl but I had the gut feeling,

right then and there, I'd see her name in lights sooner rather than later.

"Can I call you both?" Look at me, brand new and already bantering.

Marian/Mac snorted. Like I was being funny, not like I was being stupid. I hoped. Those bright eyes looked at me expectantly. "'N yew arrrrrre..." I could tell she was exaggerating her Southern drawl for the Midwesterner, just like Granny did for out-of-town tourists. Still, a valid question.

I hesitated. I'd always been plain old Katie at school in Grosse Pointe, ever since pre-K when the other kids—including Julia, ugh—thought my real first name was weird. At home, my parents and sisters called me Duffy. Granny had always called me Duffy Kate, in true Southern fashion.

But now I had an opportunity to be someone else, a whole new version of Duffy Katherine Devereaux O'Brien. A fallen angel with a turbulent past, but in a sexy way. And a consistent human who used the same name everywhere. Much less messy.

"Duff," I said, extending my hand. I didn't know if kids in Hiwassee shook hands. Hell, *I* didn't shake hands in Grosse Pointe, but I guess Duff of North Georgia did.

Marian's face lit up, and she took my hand. "Miz Devereaux's girl?" I must have looked confused—it's not like Granny and I had the same last name. She shrugged. "Small town. Plus, my mama works there sometimes. What's your first class?"

"English."

"Mine too." She shouldered her backpack. "Let's go."

What followed over the next few months could easily be a movie montage: the two of us became inseparable. She was a vegetarian, but

Granny always had her famous mac and cheese on hand when Marian visited me at work, which was often. Turns out Granny knew Marian's mom, Annie, pretty well. Small towns, man. Speaking of Annie, she didn't mind if we drank and smoked—pot *or* cigarettes. Marian didn't give a shit about school but was smarter than I was and let me copy if I needed to pass a test or was especially hungover before a paper was due.

Marian helped me bleach my hair from its natural dishwater blonde so it almost glowed—something I'd *always* wanted to do, but as Katie/Duffy, never had the nerve. Pretty soon I even started dressing like her: putting away my bland clearance Gap and stocking up on skinny jeans and secondhand lace-up boots, layering vintage slips over fishnet stockings when I was feeling real fancy. I perfected my thick, black-winged eyeliner (thanks to Annie, actually), had several new holes punched in my left ear at the local tattoo parlor, but left the bright makeup and barbell to Marian.

Granny started calling us “two peas in a pod” and we rolled our eyes and giggled at the cliché, but from the way Marian, who wasn't normally a hugger, put her arm around me and squeezed hard the first time Granny said it, I could tell she was genuinely happy. I was too. As my eye makeup got darker, my mood got lighter and lighter.

But our life together wasn't all wardrobe and makeup. We donned leggings and boots and went hiking almost every weekend. She pointed out the best fall foliage, and we staged impromptu photo shoots, then tucked into Granny-catered picnics atop Brasstown Bald: North Georgia at its most stunning. I'd *never* hiked before and hadn't pictured cool, tough Marian chugging water as she dodged stray rocks, but she told me it was the most peaceful she felt sober, and then I started to feel it too.

When we weren't at school or working up a sweat and breathing in crisp mountain air on the weekends, we drove into Athens, flashing our fake IDs (hers procured when she was fourteen, mine bright and shiny and bought from a random UGA senior). We didn't drink much because we had to drive back, but the cute college boys and live music, the likes of it I'd never heard in Grosse Pointe, even the clumsiest guitar work like a pulsating heartbeat, made up for it. And the latter ended up changing the course of our lives.

I still remember pulling the bass guitar from a pile of random crap at our fave Athens vintage store on a Saturday. Late afternoon light danced on the smudged glass windows and the instrument seemed to glow. It was missing a string and was pretty banged up, but I swear that bass *winked* at me. Like a dare.

"You should get it," Marian said. I must have given her a "yeah, right" look, because she nodded really hard. "Yeah. I'll chip in if you need it and you can pay me back whenever."

"I literally almost failed recorder in fourth grade," I said. "*Recorder, Mac.*"

She grinned. "So, why are you still holding it?"

I snorted, a twelve-year-old at heart when it came to humor.

"No, really," Marian said. "We can jam. I play guitar."

That was news to me, who currently spent all my time with her unless I was sleeping, and sometimes even then. "Since when?"

"Okay, it was my dad's, and it's in our storage room," Marian said, suddenly finding the toes of her Chucks very interesting. She didn't like talking about her "daddy," I learned real quick. "But he taught me a little bit. And I can learn more." Her bright blue eyes flashed as she looked back up at me. "Seriously. You're, like, fated to play that bass."

“What the hell are you talking about, Mac?”

“Duh,” Marian said. I must have looked confused, because her face softened. “There’s a famous bass player in Guns N’ Roses and Velvet Revolver. McKagan.” A dramatic pause. “*Duff* McKagan.”

By now, I realized I was cradling the instrument like a Madonna in a painting cradling her sacred child. Marian was right. I didn’t want to let it go.

And I didn’t: not when we paid up front (I had just enough tip money scrounged away thanks to Devereaux BBQ’s weekly after-church crowd), not when we indulged in Golden Bowls and Smelts and kept an eye out for famous musicians at The Grit, our favorite restaurant, not when Marian blew up the air mattress in my room and cracked, “You gonna have sex with that thing?”

“Fuck you,” I said with love, stroking the neck of the bass suggestively before turning out the same lamp my mom used when she was in high school. “Tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow,” she replied, a laugh in her voice. Early on, Marian told me she didn’t like the word “goodbye.” I thought it was probably because of her dad, somehow, but the guarded set of her jaw suggested I’d get my ass kicked if I asked. Instead, I suggested an alternative, and it became our goodbye, our good morning, and our good night. A call and response. Tomorrow and tomorrow.

From then on, when I wasn’t at the restaurant, at school, or with Marian, I was holed up in my room with my bass. Marian helped me find YouTube videos, and I taught myself how to read music. She dragged over her dad’s guitar, and we rehearsed in Granny’s garage, just like Dave Grohl, one of our heroes, and generations of musicians before him. And just like Grohl famously said, at first, we sucked. We

really sucked. But as fall kicked into a slightly colder winter (and I horrified Mac with tales of snowdrifts three feet high and parkas that felt like wearing mattresses) we started to suck a little less.

Mac never learned to read music, but as she pointed out, “neither does Lindsey Buckingham,” who we agreed was one of the greatest guitar players of all time.

“And neither does Taylor Swift,” I pointed out, gently poking fun at her music snobbery. Me, I was listening to Taylor obsessively. Her songs weren’t all my style, necessarily, but girl could write a song. And I wanted to learn.

In that garage, I started making what would be our first hit.

But we had miles to go before any of that.



I knew Quincy Banks. Everyone did. She was senior class president, a chipper morning announcer in first period over the crackly intercom system, singing the national anthem with a surprisingly deep and sultry voice at pep rallies. Mac and I usually cut those, but we stayed long enough to hear her.

Quincy was strikingly beautiful. Like Disney Princess-Barbie doll beautiful. Like HBO streaming series about angsty teens who are actually played by twenty-five-year-old models beautiful. We’re talking tiny waist, big boobs, muscular legs, ocean-blue eyes, and waist-length blonde hair.

Quincy Banks didn’t hang out with the likes of Mac and me at first. She wasn’t a bitch; in fact, she always smiled and said hi to us in the hallways, even when some of the popular crowd called us freaks stuck in the ‘90s. When I bleached my hair, she told me she’d always

wanted to do that too, but didn't have the guts. And I could tell she meant it.

Mac thought she secretly wanted to be like us. We were, Mac claimed, the cool kids who sneaked into clubs, cut class, and didn't give a shit what people thought. I scoffed and rolled my eyes. What the fuck could *Quincy Banks* want that the two of us had? I wasn't sure we were all that cool.

But after Thanksgiving midterms, Quincy Banks quit her post as senior class president, chopped her waist-length golden hair into a piecey bob, and one day, without explanation, sat down at our lunch table. Soon, she was the third member of our unofficial hiking club and a willing road trip buddy to Athens. It was easy to accept Quincy: she was so genuinely sweet, even cynical Mac was easily won over. She had the nicest car of any of us and soon kept it stocked with popcorn for Marian and Doritos and pretzels for us, with seltzer for all. And she sometimes let Mac and me dress her at the vintage stores we liked, our own life-size, laughing doll. Of course, Quincy Banks looked fabulous in everything.

She didn't speak of her about-face, but she didn't have to. Hiawassee wasn't that big and people loved to talk. Quincy Banks's aunt and uncle were addicts, the messy kind you see on TV specials about the opioid epidemic. When they couldn't get pills, they turned to heroin, and when they couldn't get heroin, they turned to meth. And that's what killed them; not an overdose, but an explosion at a makeshift lab just outside of town.

Quin *did* tell us about one thing. Until her aunt and uncle died, she'd been a casual party drinker, taken the occasional puff of whatever was being passed around, maybe popped an Adderall now and then for

fun. After she got the phone call, she told us she promised herself she'd never indulge again. She wouldn't end up like them.

"So I can be the DD from now on," she said tentatively, fiddling with her bob with one hand while popping a Tater Tot in her mouth with the other. We'd only been hanging out a couple of weeks, and I could tell from the way she wouldn't look at Mac or me that she wanted to be our friend. She needed us.

"Welllllll," I drawled, sneaking a glance at Mac, who nodded. Suddenly, *we* were the ones with the power. At least, I knew that's what Mac was thinking. "We could use a double D." It was more juvenile than funny, but the three of us cracked up.

We were officially a trio. And soon, we were something else. Something bigger.

Mac and I knew from those pep rallies that Quincy could sing like Sheryl Crow and Halsey's love child. Turned out she'd also played percussion in the school band since fifth grade, before dropping that along with all of her other extracurricular activities. She had the skills, the raw talent, and now, the spare time. Not to mention she was even hotter with shorter hair. Edgy, with eyes that were haunted. Big frontwoman energy.

One weekend at Marian's, the three of us found an old VHS tape of Annie's. The movie, *Light of Day*, was about a brother and sister trying to make it in the 80's music scene. As it happened, the star, Joan Jett, was not only a musical legend, but the *reason* Marian had a shag haircut and played guitar.

"We should start a band," Marian said, passing me the bottle of crappy Chardonnay she and I were sharing while the three of us waited for our pizza delivery.

Mesmerized by the raggedy yet clear voice of Mac's idol, Joan Jett, I took a swig as Quincy and I nodded in unison, as if choreographed. "We should."