

**Excerpt from ATLA**

a novel by

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## CHAPTER ONE: THE STREET

Everything he said was interesting, but my dreams weren't memories, so none of it was true. I didn't jump off that roof. I sat cross legged with my head on my hands and stared at his rug. It had long soft fur like a Persian cat. I wanted it to purr, too, and, in a way, it did. As I stared, I heard the purr of pigeons nesting on his window sill.

"I know it's a lot to process. This is all for today," said Seth and then I saw his clean sneakers. He'd chosen the wrong words to comfort me, but all words were probably wrong then. I didn't want to be coddled any more.

"So, what do you want me to do now?" I asked.

I wanted to be alone.

"You can do whatever you want."

I rose to my feet to stand directly in front of him. His eyes were gray and blue like the shadows on icebergs and, when they looked into mine, I didn't let them tell his anything, but I did let his arms surround my body with warmth.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I don't want to be right, but I know I am."

"Can I leave?" I asked and backed out of his embrace. Psychosis emanated from him and urged me to exit.

He giggled like my question shocked him.

"Can I leave? Or are you planning to keep me captive until I agree to do this." My voice was firm.

“Of course, you can leave. I won’t let you do it unless you want to.”

I hid my eyes from his, so his wouldn’t tempt me to cry or smile, and surveyed the room instead. Most of his apartment was white and black. I hadn’t noticed before. It was cold, but bewitching, like orca whales that are selfish, smart and selectively affectionate. Just like him.

“Okay, I’m leaving.”

He just watched me go.

I escaped to the street where I didn’t want to see anything, but I saw everything at the same time. A line of shrinking lampposts, a snowbank, moving hats, wool and cotton scarves smoking, brown and blue hair intertwined, and then car exhaust that alerted me to a red hydrant beneath my feet. No, of the street. The exhaust loomed along it and billowed as cars bore through it and released more. It lingered behind.

There were children in the snow and I dodged them. I was in the snow, too. It was still snowing. Their parents glared at me like I’d just separated them from gold or maybe God, but I couldn’t really see their faces. My eyes were working, but I had no control over them because my mind tapped into their energy source like a backup server. I used its energy to skim through new information and ideas that hadn’t matured and might never, like tadpoles in a pool of rain drying on a mountain in the summer sun. There wouldn’t be space or time for all of them to develop into frogs and continue existing before the pool was gone.

I kept walking half-blind, because I had to move. I lifted my knee and pulled it with both hands towards my chest to stretch my hamstring, preparing to bound forward

and then my eyes regained complete control again. I crossed a street near Seth's apartment, still real and alive. Still in the East Village. I burst into a frenzied run to reach the other side, but tripped over the stem of my heel which landed me on my bare hands and knees next to another hydrant. It was my favorite shade of orange-red. A glove floated in front of my face and offered to help me stand, but I slapped it away.

"I want to be alone!"

I must have yelled this, because the glove dissipated as directed.

When I looked up, the street was empty. I peeled myself off the sidewalk and wiped the blood on my hands onto my red top where no one would notice the stain. When my hands were clean, I realized that no one was there to notice anyway. The cars and exhaust were gone, too. I could hear the snow. It sounded like pine needles would if used as drum sticks. The white dusted pavement of the avenue disappeared in front of me at the horizon line. I wondered how far away that was.

"Lena!" Seth walked toward me up the center of the street. It was still empty.

"Go away!" I meant it. But he kept walking. "I want to be alone."

"Well, yeah... that's obvious."

He stopped to raise his arms up to the sky and looked around him to address the vacant scene.

"This is amazing." It was.

"Go away," I mumbled back at him. I knew he didn't hear me.

“You’re going to freeze.” He was right and began jogging. “I followed you out with your jacket and bag when I realized you left them... You didn’t answer your phone and then I saw you do it. Incredible.”

His granite counter could have fit between us when he stopped.

“And it was pretty epic in that outfit, too, like a superhero.” Seth.

I liked being compared to superheroes.

“This doesn’t make sense,” I said.

“It will, I promise.”