

Albuquerque starts at the base of the Sandia Mountains and goes west all the way to the Rio Grande. It's four years and three months ago, four years and two months before I believed in ghosts. I'm on my way for my interview at the Doves Forge Academy. The school is in the New Mexico National Bank building, the tallest building in New Mexico. It's four hundred yards from where my father and I live, so I have to walk around the block three times in order to make sure that I'm late. My father's idea of raising a child is to recite mantras.

JACKSON. Life can be managed one clear, achievable goal at a time.

(And now we move into the scene:)

GARBIELA. I'm not going to apply.

JACKSON. You miss a hundred percent of the shots you don't take.

GARBIELA. I have *zero* chance of getting in.

JACKSON. The only real failure is the failure to try.

GARBIELA. They don't even have a theatre program.

JACKSON. Of course they do. You're only pretending you don't want to go to the interview. You want to see what it's like.

GARBIELA. That's not a good enough reason.

JACKSON. I want to see what it's like. Memorize it for me. And take this.

(He hands her a piece of paper.)

GARBIELA. Seriously?

JACKSON. Get it signed.

GARBIELA. *(To the audience:)* The only thing you need to know to understand this story is that, all my life, I've had nightmares in which a voice says:

SFX. You're burning up.

GARBIELA and SFX. You're burning up.

GARBIELA. *You're burning up.* *(Beat.)* In the dream, I'm looking up at someone, and I feel sick. Nauseous. That's what wakes me up. I've never told anyone about these nightmares because I don't wake up frightened; I wake up feeling guilty, as though I've done something terrible.

I push through a heavy glass door into the lobby. To the right, people wait in line for a teller, bankers open accounts, consider loans. The elevators are to the left, except one: Straight ahead, beyond the bank

lobby, I see an elevator marked "Doves Forge." It's huge and it's already open. Empty. I enter. And the doors close.

(With a HISS.)

GARBIELA. *(To the audience:)* And . . . And nothing happens. There are no buttons.

(She speaks to what must be a security camera.)

GARBIELA. Hey! I'm here for an interview! *(Beat.)* I NEED TO BE TRANSPORTED UP TO THE SCHOOL! *(Beat.)* Please?

(The elevator starts abruptly. WHOOSH.)

GARBIELA. Twenty-four floors.

(While GARBIELA is in the elevator, the Doves Forge Academy—students and all—materializes around her. DING.)

GARBIELA. *(Awe:)* It's nothing like what I pictured. It's beautiful and warm. Wood paneling, leather armchairs, floor-to-ceiling windows that look out over the Sandias. There's a moment when it feels like I belong here. But it's just a moment.

(FANTINE enters. Excitement is FANTINE's at-rest state.)

FANTINE. Hi!! Hello hello, I've been expecting you.

GARBIELA. Hi.

FANTINE. I'm going to be your guide. My name is Fantine, like in *Les Misérables*. The book not the musical.

GARBIELA. The musical is based on the book.

FANTINE. What do you think so far?

GARBIELA. Wow.

FANTINE. I like you already. The architects, Myer and Wombley, wanted to show that the whole experiment could work, that you could put a school twenty-four floors high in the air and still make it feel like a school. They wanted everything to feel warm, and safe. Of course as we know, that didn't work out. But it's safe now. We occupy floors twenty-four through twenty-eight. Floor twenty-nine, though technically part of the school, is still off-limits. It used to be the theatre. The carpeting is controversial. The pattern is called Rust and Willow. Some people hate it, including me.

GARBIELA. I like it.

FANTINE. Me too. I was testing you.

(A moment of happiness for FANTINE.)

FANTINE. You smell like you've just been ironed.

GARBIELA. *(The mild mortification of being told you can be smelled:)* It's a laundry soap my dad likes.

FANTINE. I do too. When you come here, if you need a best friend, or a practically best friend, you can just come to me if you want. We could tell each other secrets and bump against each other when we walk down the halls. *(Beat.)* Nobody would have to know.

GARBIELA. I'm not going to get in.

FANTINE. Yes you are. When you do, I can tell you about every student, and which teachers are nice. They're all nice except the sophomore Spanish teacher, Ms. Collister. She's a stone wrapped in a blowtorch. And I could tell you which clubs to join and which ones not to join. They have archery, and film studies, and there's really only one you shouldn't join. Are you even listening to me?

GARBIELA. Which one shouldn't I join?

FANTINE. There's a Pretend Fantine's Not Here Club.

GARBIELA. There is not!

FANTINE. Sometimes. Please don't join it.

GARBIELA. Of course I wouldn't join it. If I got in, I would love to be your best friend and I wouldn't be a good fit for that club. But I'm not going to get in.

FANTINE. Let's start in the library. There's a wall of books about self-esteem.

(From off, there's a pained yell.)

CARA. *(Offstage:)* HELP ME! It's freezing me!

(CARA bursts in! Here—and every time we see her—CARA holds a large feather duster. But all we know about CARA at the moment is that she's fleeing from pain. It's a pain that started inside her—her whole body felt like it was freezing—and that she instinctively tried to run from. GARBIELA's impulse is to help.)

GARBIELA. What's the matter?

CARA. It was freezing me!

GARBIELA. I don't understand.

(RILEY, the calmest person alive, glides in.)

RILEY. Cara, stand still for a moment.

(She does. Just the sound of RILEY's voice calms CARA.)

RILEY. Are you feeling it right now or did it stop?

(It might take a moment for CARA, shaken, to realize:)

CARA. It stopped.

RILEY. You think it was The Chill?

CARA. For sure it was. It's worse than they say.

GARBIELA. What's happening?

FANTINE. It's The Chill.

GARBIELA. What's The Chill?

RILEY. *(To CARA:)* Come on. Let's get you to the nurse's office.

CARA. *(As she exits with RILEY:)* I'm still shivering.

FANTINE. It started about a dozen years ago. The first girl it happened to, Freya McSlane, described it as—

(FREYA MCCLANE appears . . .)

FREYA MCCLANE. A heart attack crossed with an ice storm.

(And she disappears.)

FANTINE. People thought she was making it up. But it happened to other people, and it keeps happening. I hope this hasn't changed your desire to come here.

GARBIELA. It hasn't. Not a bit. *(To the audience:)* Life can be managed one clear, achievable goal at a time. My clear, achievable goal at the moment is to not get in to the Doves Forge Academy.

(GARBIELA is being interviewed by MR. AMICUS, who takes his gatekeeper status seriously. He's browsing a file, puzzled by its lack of achievement.)

AMICUS. So. Gabriela Nettles.

GARBIELA. Garbiela. It was a typo on my birth certificate but it stuck.

AMICUS. I'm looking at your file. I know a fair amount about you. What do you know about us?

GARBIELA. Almost nothing. That's why I'm here.

AMICUS. You didn't do any research.

GARBIELA. I couldn't be bothered.

AMICUS. And you were thirty minutes late.

GARBIELA. Well, technically fifteen.

AMICUS. Your appointment was for ten o'clock.