

UNDER THE SURFACE



SHE'LL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO SURVIVE.
HE'LL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO FIND HER.

DIANA URBAN

ALSO BY DIANA URBAN

Lying in the Deep

All Your Twisted Secrets

These Deadly Games

UNDER THE SURFACE

DIANA URBAN

putnam

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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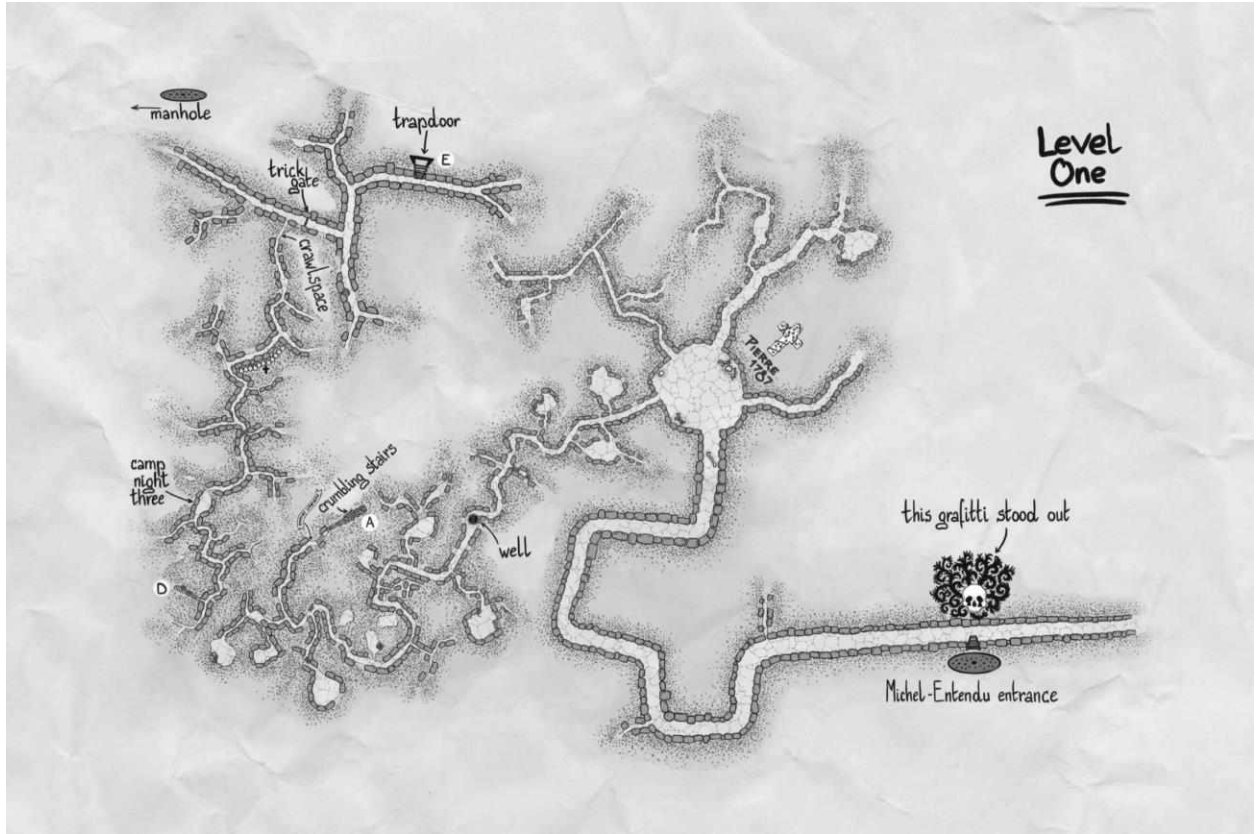
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Inspired by true events

For those lost in
darkness. Have
hope.





Level
Three

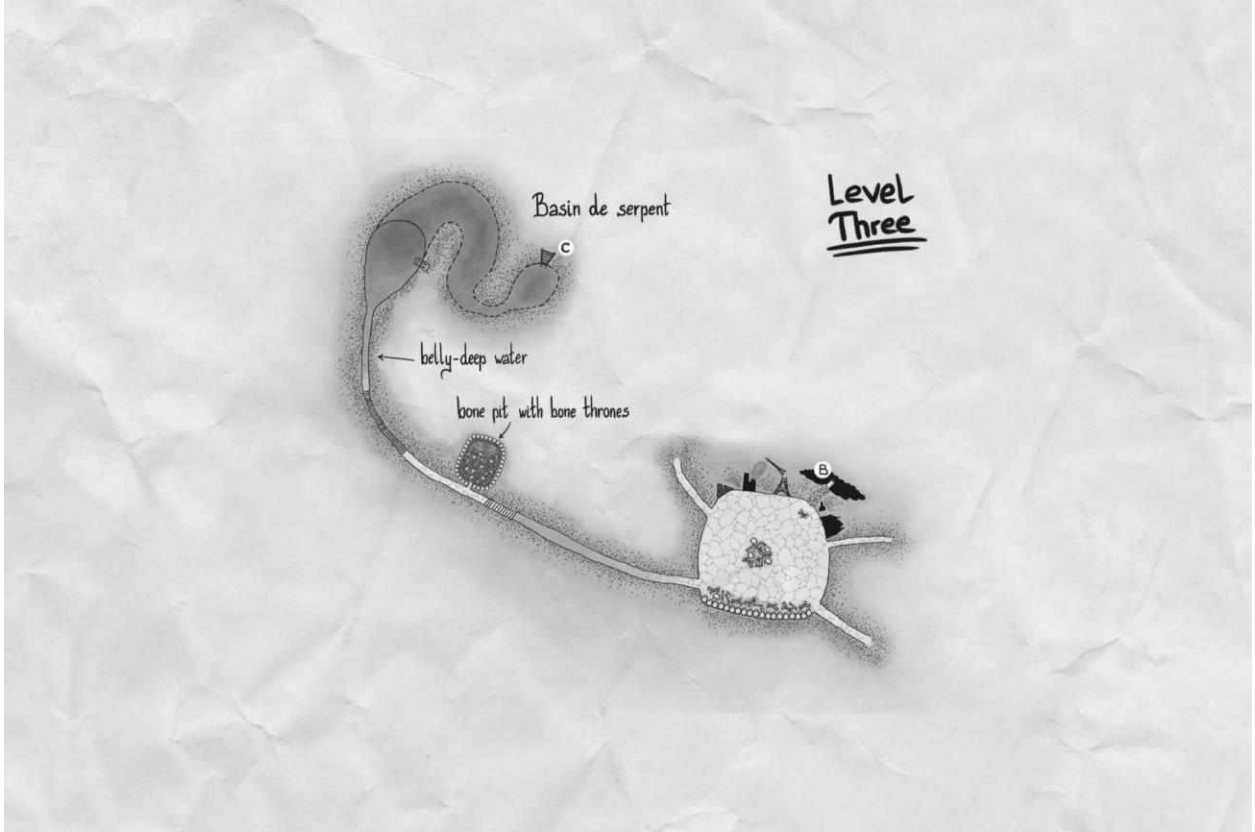
Basin de serpent

C

← belly-deep water

bone pit with bone thrones

B



PROLOGUE

Ruby

I never thought I'd die alone in the dark under the City of Light.

That's what they call Paris. The City of Light. Makes sense when you think of the Eiffel Tower glinting in the sun or sparkling at night over the Seine. Or the vibrant paintings bedecking the palatial Louvre Museum. Or the glittering fashionistas strolling the Champs-Élysées. Or the dazzling boulevards with whitewashed buildings gleaming like pearls against the blue sky.

God, I'd kill for some of that light right now.

As I hurtle through the dark, cramped corridor deep underground, my phone's flashlight makes elongated shadows bounce and bob across the craggy walls like a chaotic, ghostly dance, and I have to stoop to keep my skull from slamming into the low, jagged ceiling.

There's no sign of the others.

Terror claws up my chest, and I try not to think of the crunching noises under my boots, try not to think how it's only a matter of time until my phone runs out of power, until my mouth parches, my stomach shrivels, and my legs give out beneath me. Then there'll be nothing to do but curl into a ball and wait for the darkness to become infinite.

Unless *they* get to me first.

No. That can't happen. I won't let it.

I turn a corner and slam my back against the wall, then toggle off my flashlight, plunging the corridor into pitch blackness. But hiding in the dark means my friends won't find me, either. I breathe hard, feeling like I could choke on the dank, humid air, and a sob scrapes my throat. I'm screwed. Undeniably, irrevocably screwed. But I can't spiral. Panicking got me into this mess to begin with.

Keeping my spirits up among six million corpses isn't exactly an easy feat. That's how many are entombed down here in the catacombs, their skeletal remains intricately arranged throughout this ancient labyrinth that stretches under the bustling streets of Paris like layers of rotted casserole squished under a decadent crust. My chest constricts, and it's like I can feel the crushing weight of all six million dead.

And that number's high enough, thank you very much.

A low, rasping growl echoes through the passageway. My heart jolts, and I clamp a shaking hand over my mouth to mask my heavy breathing.

But it's too late.

They found me.

Maybe there are worse things than dying alone.

1
Ruby

TWO DAYS EARLIER

“Now’s our chance,” I whisper to my best friends, Sean and Val, under the shadow of the Eiffel Tower. “Let’s go.”

It’s only our first day in Paris—the culmination of studying my ass off in French class and fundraising to death to go on the best trip in the history of ever —and I’m already trying to sneak away from our class.

“Go where?” Sean frowns and glances at our teacher, Mr. LeBrecque, who for some bizarre reason scheduled us to take in the sweeping views atop the Eiffel Tower while delirious with jet lag. He’s gesturing wildly at the engraved names of French scientists and engineers under the first balcony while half the class is verging on a collective collapse and the other’s bursting with adrenaline-fueled giddiness. “To find that bunker.” I look to Val for backup, but she’s stuck in a stupor.

“I don’t think we have time,” says Sean.

“But it’s literally *right there*.”

The secret military bunker I read about—a secret no other travel YouTuber has covered, as far as I know—is supposedly hidden beneath the south pillar. Which I can see from right here, at this very moment.

Not on my laptop screen. Not on my phone.

With my actual human eyeballs.

I asked Mr. LeBrecque earlier if we could scope out the bunker as a class, but he huffed, “I already squeezed the catacombs into our itinerary for you. This whole trip can’t be the Ruby show.” A jab at my channel, Ruby’s Hidden Gems. As much as I respect the snark, it shattered any illusion that my teachers knew nothing of my online endeavors.

And if my teachers know, Dad probably knows, too.

Dad’s not exactly sold on my jet-setting aspirations. But it’s kind of hard to make it as a travel YouTuber when you can’t, you know...travel. If it were up to him, he’d swaddle me for eternity—at least, whenever I’m not nursing his hangovers or waiting tables at his restaurant. He wants me to keep working there while I go to community college, and when I told him Val asked me to backpack across Europe with her after graduation, such a tormented expression crossed his round, bearded face that he looked gaunt. This week’s as much a trial run for him as it is for me and, for once, I’m not the one most likely to fail.

I can’t worry about that now. Not here at the Eiffel freaking Tower. I’ve daydreamed about this moment for too long to worry about anything except how quickly it will become a memory. I need to savor every minute. Film every nook. Explore every cranny. Even if it means sneaking away from our class for, like, 0.2 seconds.

I tug Sean’s jacket sleeve. “Come on.” But Val’s still zoning out.

“Val.”

“Mm?”

“The bunker?”

“Oh, right, sorry.” Val blinks furiously and adjusts her purple horn-rimmed glasses under her black bangs, a sharp contrast to her alabaster skin and vibrant hazel eyes. “Extreme hottie at nine o’clock.” I look, but nobody stands out in the swarms of tourists. Mr. LeBrecque’s facing us again. I groan. So much for that.

It’s not like Val to waste chances. She’s an adrenaline junkie who craves—no, *demand*s—attention at all times. Last year when she moved to Starborough, our sleepy suburb north of Boston, she burst into my life like the Tasmanian Devil, dragging me kicking and screaming from my comfort zone. Some of our exploits would give Dad an aneurysm, like breaking into the crypts under Old North Church, white water rafting in the Berkshires, and bribing this cute park ranger to let us camp overnight on Georges Island. But the more daring we got, the more my subscriber count jumped, so after a while I didn’t need much convincing.

And look at me now, instigating the sneakage.

“LeBrecque told us to stick together, anyway.” Sean motions to the twelve other seniors on this trip. We’ve distanced ourselves behind them in a futile attempt to keep them from videobombing my slow pans and zooms, oblivious as worms on wet pavement.

“But getting footage of that bunker would make my video pop,” I argue. “Everyone and their grandma has posted about the Eiffel Tower.” “Not my grandma,” he says, deadpan.

I snort. “You know what I mean.”

“Well, we shouldn’t.”

Val rolls her eyes. “Way to have zero chill.”

Sean crosses his arms. Stick a rulebook in front of him, and he’ll have it memorized in an hour. He’s JROTC and plans to join the military after graduation like his dad, and his towering athletic stature, broad shoulders, faded buzz cut, chiseled cheekbones, and perpetually furrowed brows sure make it easy to picture him in uniform. And picture it I do. Often.

But getting that uniform will take him away from me.

“Now,” Val whispers. “Now, now, now.” Mr. LeBrecque’s gesticulating at the tower again, and I nod, my fingertips buzzing with adrenaline as Val clasps them.

Sean shoots his hand into the air. “Sir?”

“What are you doing?” I squeak, swatting his cargo jacket’s sleeve.

“Mr. LeBrecque, sir,” he says, ignoring me as our teacher turns around. “Sorry to interrupt, but is it okay if the three of us head over there for a minute?”

He motions vaguely toward the south pillar. “Ruby wants to grab some footage.”

Mr. LeBrecque sighs, exasperated, and checks his watch. “Our tickets are for fifteen minutes from now. Be back here in ten.” “Thanks,” Val calls back, already making a beeline for the south pillar.

Sean throws me a lopsided grin and steers me after her by the small of my back.

“Oh, shut up,” I mutter.

His smile widens. “Didn’t say a word.”

He doesn’t move his hand. I don’t want him to. But I speed out of reach anyway.

The electricity between us has been amplifying for months, and now, in Paris, my blood seems to pulse with each fleeting glance, each time a smile curves his lips, like I’m perpetually tripping over a live wire. But I’m terrified to let him touch me, to let those sparks ignite. I can’t risk letting him incinerate my soul.

Because that’s how it would end.

That’s how everything ends.

So I have to keep myself grounded.

As the three of us search for the bunker’s entrance, Sean keeps scouting our class’s position.

“Will you stop?” I motion to the iconic wrought-iron lattice pillars surrounding us. “You don’t get to see this every day.”

His steel-gray eyes flick to mine. “Oh don’t worry. I’m enjoying the view plenty.” Our gaze holds a beat too long, and my cheeks warm despite the chill in the air.

Sometimes he almost makes it seem worth getting scorched.

It’s wild to think Sean used to intimidate me. He’s basically had biceps since birth, and if resting asshole face were a thing, he has it. I could never tell whether he was shy or thought he was the shit until senior year, day one, when Mr. LeBrecque partnered us to make a video in French touring Starborough. We trudged to the grocery store after school to get it over with, timid as deer, but when I hit record, Sean brandished his arms and screamed, “Le boutique est grand et à des bananas,” and I snort-laughed so hard it hurt. We tried to out-outburst each other in French all afternoon and barely had any usable footage to splice into a cohesive narrative, but he managed anyway—an impressive feat, considering. He’s been helping me edit my videos ever since.

“Hey look,” Val calls out, pointing behind Sean. “I think that’s it.”

We hurry over. A cage of rusted green bars blocks a cement staircase descending underground.

“This is it,” I say. “I’ve seen a picture of the door that’s down there.” It’s not visible from our vantage point, but I stick my lens between the bars, against the glass barrier, and film what little I can.

Val slinks under the green railing before the metal door and gives the handle a frustrated shake.

Sean chuckles. “What’d you expect? If any rando could get in, it wouldn’t exactly be a secret bunker.”

I back up a few feet. “Lemme grab some B-roll, at least.”

Val grimaces. “You sound like my mom. *Honey? Grab me some B-roll.*” She snaps and points, imitating her singsong voice. Her parents have their own HGTV show and cart Val around the country to film in different regions year after year. “*Honey? B-roll.*” Snap and point.

“Sorry. I’ll try to be less triggering,” I say. She laughs, and I kneel to get some of the lattice in the frame and pan across the gate. “Sean, either get out of the shot or look at the stairs.” He’s watching our class like a hawk.

Distracted, he trips over the edge of the gate's frame and barely catches himself on the rail, then tugs down his jacket's hem. "No one saw that." "Oh, they *will*." I tap my camera.

He groans. "Please delete that."

"Mm, I dunno. How much will you pay me?"

He laughs softly, his eyes glinting like the beams overhead until they float down to my lips and linger there.

My blood goes warm and tingly like I just downed a steaming café au lait. I slowly rise to my feet and lower my camera as he steps closer, studying my face like he wants to memorize every detail. Electricity sparks through me, and my breath shudders like the sky ran out of air. "Can I..." he starts.

My nerve endings catch fire. This is it.

Our first kiss.

Under the Eiffel Tower.

It's so cliché, I press my fingers to my lips to keep from giggling. Sean sweeps a hand over his buzz cut and averts his gaze, then shoves his hands into his pockets.

Just like that, the moment's gone.

It's for the best. Besides, I don't want to make Val feel awkward— Wait.

Val's gone, too.

I scan the crowd of tourists swelling under the nearby pillar but don't see her anywhere. Sean sees my expression shift and whips his head toward our class. "It's fine. They're still there."

"Not that—where's Val?"

"Oh." His eyes bounce around, then land back on me. "I don't know."

"Maybe she's trying to find another way into the bunker." Or she spotted something shiny and wandered off, as usual. "Is there another way in?"

"No idea."

He checks his watch. "Our ten minutes is almost up."

"I know."

"I'll tell LeBrecque—"

I catch his sleeve. "Hang on. She must be close." I spin and race to the right, but there's only an old-timey ticket booth under the pillar, and no other doors or stairs.

"Ruby, wait—" Sean tries.

I veer left, expecting to find a gift shop or something around the corner, but there's nothing but a tall plastic barrier. "Dammit." Frantic, I rush into the crowd, weaving through swarms of tourists. "Val!" I don't see her anywhere.

By the time I spin around to backtrack, I realize I've lost Sean, too. Crap.

I heave a sigh, then spot those familiar purple glasses.

Val's talking to some stranger. He's maybe a couple of years older than us, with striking features and tousled chestnut hair that flops across his forehead, and hint of stubble darkens his sharp jaw. Maybe he's the hottie she spotted earlier.

“Val,” I call out.

She finds me in the crowd. “There you are.” Like I’m the one who disappeared.

I grab her arm. “We have to go back.”

“Hang on.” She turns back to the young man.

“Where should we meet later?” My mouth falls open. Before he can answer, I shake my head.

“Nuh-uh. Let’s go.” “But—” Val tries.

“It’s okay,” the man says to Val, his accent clearly French. He brandishes his phone with a wink before disappearing into the throng. She bites back a grin, her cheeks rosy as a ripe apple.

“Did you already give him your number?” I ask.

She mashes her thin lips together, her eyes sparkling mischievously.

Oh geez. She should know better. But I don’t want to pick a fight over this. Confrontation’s my least favorite thing on the planet.

Besides spiders. Spiders suck.

“What?” she says, catching my judgmental expression. “I asked him for recommendations for any off-the-beaten-path sort of spots, and he promised to send me a list. And then—”

“*There* you are.” Sean appears, puffing like he was sprinting hundred-meter dashes through the crowd. He scowls at Val. “What gives?” “Donors,” Val shoots back, then bounds back toward our class.

Sean furrows his brow, mouthing the word *donors* like it didn’t click.

I laugh. “There’s no point making sense of her, honestly.”

“I don’t know how you deal with it.”

My heart sinks. Sean and Val have never exactly been close—if anything, they’ve been sniping at each other more than usual this past month. I’d hoped they’d finally bond on this trip. That’s looking unlikely.

Mr. LeBrecque is lecturing our class in French as we reunite with them, oblivious that our little excursion went awry. On the other hand, Mrs. Williams, our librarian who volunteered to chaperone, gives us exaggerated side-eye as she hands us our tickets. She’s cool, but I’d consider ourselves warned. Oops.

“Thanks to the tourist traffic, this is a hot spot for pickpockets,” says Mr. LeBrecque. Cool tidbit. I start filming. “Who remembers what I said on how to avoid becoming a pickpocket’s mark?”

Olivia Clarkson, as always, is first to shoot her hand into the air.

Mr. LeBrecque, as always, picks someone else. Even our teachers don’t think she needs any more validation that she already knows everything.

But my gut curdles when he calls on Selena Rodriguez instead.

Salutatorian. Future astronaut. Queen bee.

Girlfriend of the queenier drama club star. And my nemesis.

She wasn’t always, though. Until last spring, we were brooding besties, preferring stargazing over parties and NPCs over real people. We joined the swim team to pad her

resume for college apps and chose swimming because you don't have to talk to anyone while holding your breath. I'm pretty sure she's faking her entire personality at this point, because you can't suddenly become an extrovert.

"Don't be loud, rowdy Americans," Selena recites in perfect French. "Don't keep your wallet in your back pocket. Keep your bag..." Good, she forgot the word for *zipped*. "Er...be vigilant in crowds and on escalators." Sean scoffs, muttering to me, "Our class is toast."

Kyle drifts into my shot, staring at his phone, eyes shadowed by his Red Sox hat, proving Sean's point. We exchange a muffled laugh.

As Mr. LeBrecque herds us in line for the glass elevator that'll take us to the first level, Val loops her arm through mine. "God, that guy was hot," she whispers so Sean can't hear. Olivia's jabbering his ear off, anyway.

"I'll give you that," I whisper back.

She smirks. "He invited me to a party tonight."

"That was fast."

She releases my arm to brush back her glossy, shoulder-length hair and sets a hand on her hip. "Can you blame him?" "Oh, get over yourself." I shove her, laughing. "You'd never be allowed to go."

"Obviously. We'll have to sneak out."

I gape at her. "No way."

She quirks her brow. "I snuck to that bunker with you." "We didn't— That's different."

Her smile dissolves. "Why?" Even if Sean hadn't asked permission, slinking a few feet to the south pillar wouldn't put us on an early flight home. "You know why."

My voice rises. "If we get caught sneaking out at night—" "Shh." She glances around, but nobody's paying us any mind. Except for Selena.

Her eyes bounce away, but they've already plunged daggers into my chest. Twelve years of friendship down the drain over one fight. One mistake.

My mistake.

Guilt sours my stomach. It's my fault the girl I'd considered a sister is now my archenemy. I can't let that happen with Val, too.

I sling my arm through hers again and force a bright smile onto my face. "Let's talk about this later, okay? I can't believe we're really *here*." I squeak for good measure, and a genuine shiver of glee rushes through me.

Val's demeanor shifts, too, and she gives my arm a giddy squeeze.

Hopefully we won't have to talk about this later. Hopefully she'll forget that French guy altogether.

Otherwise I'll have to put up a fight, because there's no way I'll let either of us screw ourselves out of a week in Paris over one night of partying.

2
Sean

Val's hiding something.

As our class trickles into the lobby to head to Saint-Michel for dinner, she, Ruby, and I wait in line for the maître d' so I can report my hotel room feels like a furnace, and she's been texting someone nonstop. That's not weird on its own—it's how she keeps angling her screen away from Ruby whenever she gets close.

A small thing, maybe.

But after the crap she pulled at Olivia Clarkson's birthday party a few weeks ago, I don't trust her.

She wasn't so bad when she first moved to town. She's spunky and has a zany sense of humor, but then she put her daredevil antics on full display, and I'm not a fan. Then, the party. I don't know what the hell she was thinking.

Val notices me watching and dims her screen. "Maybe there's someone else who can help?"

"Chill." Ruby shifts her focus back from the drama club kids congregating near the door: Aliyah, Lisa, Alex, and Kyle. Selena's there, too, holding Aliyah's hand. "There's only one person ahead of us."

"Yeah, but we're leaving soon," Val whines, bouncing on her toes.

"Says the one who hogged the bathroom for an hour," Ruby teases, running her fingers through her damp blond waves to shake out the moisture. Val chuckles.

"Sorry. There was, like, no counter space." "Don't worry," I assure Ruby. "Your hair looks great."

"Yeah, the *drowned squirrel* look is super in right now." But her cheeks go pink. I notice that happens whenever I compliment her, or whenever I so much as look her in the eye lately. It makes my heart go bananas. I point at my buzz cut. "Hey, better than bald squirrel."

"Ha!" Ruby runs her fingers over the shortest strands near my nape. "More like fuzzy squirrel." She yanks her hand back and blushes harder.

Yeah. At this point, I'm 99.999 percent sure she likes me back. But whenever I try to hint at taking things further, she scurries away. Like earlier at the Eiffel Tower—God, I thought that was gonna be it. I could practically see the sparks sizzling between us. But I don't want to push it or do anything to mess up our friendship. I'll wait however long until she's ready.

Finally, the maître d' waves me forward. "Bonjour, comment allez-vous?"

"Je vais bien—"

"Vous avez déjà votre clé, non?" she interrupts, crinkling her forehead. *You already have your key, no?*

"Oui, madame. Je suis allé dans ma chambre mais j'étais trop chaud." *Yes, ma'am. I went to my room, but it was too hot.*

Her eyebrows arch as she stifles a snicker. I throw the others a look. Val seems nonplussed, but Ruby covers her mouth like she's suppressing a laugh.

"What?" I ask.

"Uh..." Ruby lowers her hand, revealing her rosy cheeks. "I think you told her you went to your room but you were too horny." Val lets out a loud caw.

Blood drains from my face so fast I'm shocked it's not pooling at my feet. The last thing I want is to make Ruby or this woman or anyone else feel uncomfortable.

"Oh, God, I'm sorry," I tell the maître d', mortified. "I mean, *désolé*..."

The maître d' smiles kindly. "You meant *mais il faisait trop chaud*, yes?"

"Yeah," I croak. French has never come easily to me. I'm not one of those people like Olivia who can absorb information like a sponge. I had to study real hard to make the cut for this trip. Only the fifteen seniors with the highest French GPAs got to go, and I couldn't miss out on a chance to see Paris with Ruby.

"The look...on...your face!" Val howls.

I pretend to laugh along, but inside I'm dying of death.

Ruby flicks Val's arm. "Get over it. You're one to talk, anyway. You totally cheated on the French midterm—" "Shhh." Val clasps Ruby's wrist, but instead of denying it, she succumbs to a fresh fit of giggles.

"I'll have maintenance take a look," the maître d' assures me. "What is your room number?"

After she picks up the phone to place the call, Olivia wanders over from the group of drama kids. I bet she heard everything. I noticed her trying to catch my eye earlier, but I've felt awkward around her ever since that damn party. "At least you didn't say *je suis bon* instead of *je vais bien*," she says cheerfully. "That means *I'm good in bed*."

I cringe. "Is that really much worse?"

"No." Val wipes her eyes. "No, it's not."

Ruby throws me an apologetic look, still blushing, which ups my humiliation tenfold. I take a calming breath, trying not to let Val get under my skin. But in this moment, I wish she never moved to Starborough at all.

3 Ruby

It's been over an hour since we got back to the hotel from dinner, and I only just noticed my wallet and camera are gone.

Gone.

I may or may not be on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

The camera cost me six months' worth of tips, but it's the wallet that has me breathing in short bursts as I paw at the bottom of my purse with shaking fingers. Nothing. I flip the bag upside down and shake its contents onto my bed: lip gloss, a stretchy headband, a hair tie, a pocket-sized notebook, a packet of almonds, and a few Métro tickets. All useless