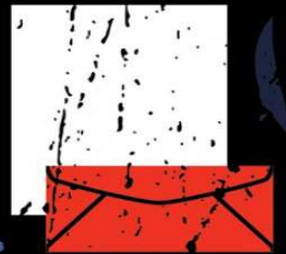


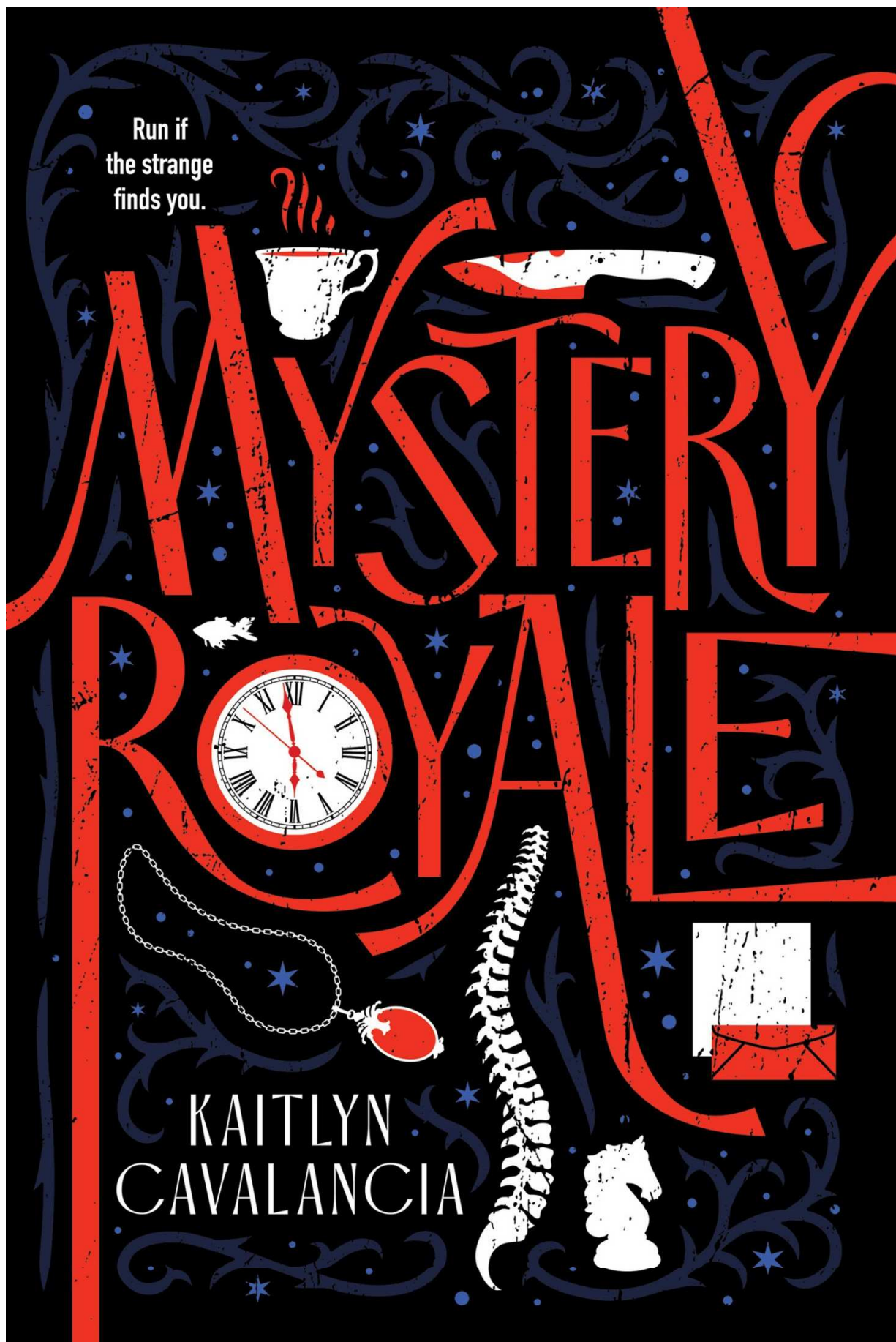
Run if
the strange
finds you.



KAITLYN
CAVALANCIA



Run if
the strange
finds you.



KAITLYN
CAVALANCIA

MYSTERY ROYALE

KAITLYN
CAVALANCIA

HYPERION
Los Angeles New York

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Acknowledgments

About the Author

To my mom, who taught me to dream as big as the stars.

To my dad, who taught me how to reach them.

*And to James, my love, who read every word, dried every
tear, and believed even when I did not.*

STOUTMIRE FAMILY TREE

CHESTER R. STOUTMIRE & MARGEAUX W. PAULS

HORACE E. STOUTMIRE &
MARGERIE E. CRATON

NOLA E. STOUTMIRE &
HARRISON P. QUARMS

XAVIER M.R. STOUTMIRE

ZOLAN O. HUMES &
DELIA L. STOUTMIRE

ELIZA R. DOUSBY &
SALVATORE O. STOUTMIRE

CECILIA P. HUMES

LAWRENCE T. STOUTMIRE &
SAFFRON STOUTMIRE

MELORA P. STOUTMIRE-MARKSHIRE
& WARREN C. MARKSHIRE

LYRIC E. STOUTMIRE
WHITAKER L. STOUTMIRE
ELLISON L. STOUTMIRE

QUINBY L. MARKSHIRE
MARTIN F. MARKSHIRE

★ THIRTY YEARS AGO

“Which of these does death fear most?”

The murmurs in the lecture hall fade to an uncomfortable silence. Professor Reivax has a reputation for being strange and unorthodox, but to open his class with death...it feels wrong, especially when the rest of campus is abuzz with sunshine and cheery beginnings.

“Any takers?”

Nervous laughter trickles through the stillness of the dimly lit amphitheater. Most of the images on the projection screen are gruesome—blood-splattered knives, spears exiting several torsos, rotting skeletons stacked in a pile. Scattered between the horrors are a few photos that seem oddly out of place—a yellow Labrador, a portrait of an old woman, a scenic countryside.

“None of them,” boasts a brutish boy in the front row.

Professor Reivax drums his fingertips on the podium. “And you are?”

“John Lane.” Somehow his name alone elicits several fist bumps, like it’s some sort of accomplishment to have the most generic name imaginable.

“Care to defend your answer, Mr. Lane?”

John Lane reclines, crossing his hands behind his head. “Easy, death doesn’t fear anything.”

“I see,” Professor Reivax replies in a flat voice, smoothing a wrinkle in his orange pants.

John Lane's chest deflates.

"Anyone else?"

Several students name various weapons; one shrugs and picks the dog.

"Waste of my time," Professor Reivax mumbles to himself, leaving the students perplexed and waiting for an explanation. He's resigned to moving on when a girl with bright green eyes raises her hand, a timid reach that barely rises above her shoulder.

"Yes, Ms...."

"Esther Merrybright," she says quietly while twirling a curl of dark hair. "The necklace."

"Leave it to the only girl in class to pick the jewelry." John Lane snickers.

But Professor Reivax's blue eyes are suddenly electric. "Where are you from, Ms. Merrybright?"

"Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania."

"Curious," he murmurs. "Tell me, what made you choose the necklace?"

Esther considers the question, surveying the necklace—an amber stone on a simple cord suspended around the neck of a serious-looking woman. She felt drawn to it the moment the image appeared, but like most things in her life that are peculiar and inexplicable she struggles to explain her decision. Studying the portrait, something obvious suddenly jumps out at her. "The outfit and the painting style are contradictory."

A smile tugs at the corner of Professor Reivax's face. "Go on."

"Her dress would have been worn at least one hundred years before that style of painting became popular. It's almost as if she's outlived all her peers"—Esther's voice drops to a whisper—"as if she beat death." She clears her throat and steadies her shoulders. "And the artist highlighted the necklace."

"The shadow," says Professor Reivax, like the words carry tremendous weight. "The necklace has a name."

"Spooky." John Lane cackles. Another undeserved fist bump before John Lane's face reddens and his hands fly to his throat. No sound escapes his gaping mouth as his skin flushes purple.

Esther looks to Professor Reivax, who is eerily calm, expectant almost. He catches her gaze and winks before clapping his hands at the exact moment John Lane lets out a phlegmy cough, air permeating his lungs once more. Goose bumps prickle along Esther's shoulders. It was almost as if...but that would be impossible.

"Just a little exercise," remarks Professor Reivax as he replaces the images with a syllabus. "No need to write any of that down."

But Esther can't help but jot down the name of the necklace. Nor can she get the image of the woman out of her head. A prickly feeling settles beneath her skin, and her heart quickens the longer she thinks about it. Try as she may, Esther Merrybright can't shake the feeling that something's coming.

She just doesn't know how right she is.

She doesn't know that this is going to change everything.