

Silver Eyes

Chapter 1

The last time I was in a bank, I was with Adam.

“Mind going in with me, Lee?” he had asked. “I made you waffles this morning.”

“You made waffles this morning because you said last night, ‘I’m going to make waffles this weekend.’ You did not make them to bribe me,” I said. I was ten and already getting into arguments.

“Hey now,” he had replied, hands raised in the air in mock-defense. “Don’t insult the chef or else there won’t be any more waffles for you. C’mon. It’ll be short.”

It was a short visit, just like he promised. And I would’ve gone with him anyway, waffles or not.

The bank we were in was a smaller version of the one I was in now: lots of granite, people in suits working behind the counter.

“Why are we here again?” I asked.

“It’s just sorting out Dad’s will.”

People died in this family.

No, no, no. Don’t think about it. But the memory kept rolling, like when you want to stop a movie but, in the time it takes you to fish out the remote and press the “pause” button, you’ve already see scenes that you didn’t want to see.

“His will?” The word was unfamiliar to me.

“Yeah, people write wills before they die. They want to make sure that their possessions—like the house, jewelry, anything they have—go to specific people. Like... Dad gave you and me the house.”

“He gave me the house?”

Adam turned to face me. “With great power comes great responsibility, Spider-Man. It’s mine first, and then, if you’re nice, I may pass it onto you. So don’t get any funky ideas.”

“Bummer,” I slouched down in my seat theatrically and could almost hear Adam smile.

“You ain’t getting rid of me that easy, Lee-Lee,” he said, as if I actually wanted to get rid of him. “I’m going to be like one of those hundred-and-five year old men that run marathons and makes waffles on the weekends.”

“But you don’t like running.”

“By the time I’m a hundred and five, I might. So, brace yourself. You have at least eighty years of me left.”

“And you’re making me waffles every weekend for the next eighty years, right?”

“Objection. Leading the witness,” he said.

I knew how to answer that one. I remembered trying to keep my face hidden so Adam couldn’t see me smile with pride. Smiling would ruin my comeback. “Objection. Witness is charged with starvation.”

Adam laughed, and I felt lighter, more important, bigger, stronger, funnier all because I had made him laugh. And he said something I couldn’t remember but I could remember the feeling, the laughter building inside of me, hitting my chest as if it were a damn. I didn’t want to laugh, didn’t want Adam to think that he could make me laugh that easily, but he could, and I knew that I wouldn’t be able to contain it for long. Just as I felt as though I was going to crack and going to lose it and laugh right there in the bank, the banker came out of his office and into the lobby and

I missed a step and had to grab onto the railing just to keep my balance. The metal railing was so cold that it hurt my hand. Cold was good. Stay present: cold metal bar, chunks of snow, office door ahead. Don’t go into your mind. Stay out of there. Just for a little while.

And now, here I was, without Adam.

No. Not now. It’s just a meeting—half an hour tops—and then you’ll be alone again, and you can think there. Not here. Keep it together. Come on.

Over the past year, I had gotten really good about not thinking about Adam. I could survive without him. I had learned to do that: at home, in school. Nights were the worst, but I had managed those too. But banks were new. I hadn’t developed any emotional distance from banks. They still reminded me of the last time I was here, when I was with Adam.

I had tried to avoid coming here today. I tried to convince the bank’s employees—over email, over the phone—to let me sort out the problems over the phone. Everyone I talked to said that the family member needed to be present to talk about a trouble arising from the will. I hated wills. They always seemed to have some sort of complications—Dad’s, then Adam’s. They also just reminded me that my family tree was more like a dead bush: Mom’s parents were dead, Dad cut all contact with his because they disapproved of Mom, three family members dead in the past 12 years. Mom with cancer, Dad with grief, Adam in a car accident. He still hated running by the time he died. He was 25.

I pushed open the door. This bank was bigger than the one Adam and I had been in: the floors were marble, the countertops looked granite, there were columns, a fountain in the corner, and no offices in sight. There was a row of men and women, mostly women, in suits on the left side of the room. Remembering what Adam and I had done, I went over.

“Miss Krew?” the receptionist said before I had even opened myself. “Martin MacDonald’s 2:45?”

She looked like someone's favorite grandmother. Or kindergarten teacher. She wore a printed dress, and a pashmina and her glasses, which she had pushed up onto the crown of her grey hair, were on a beaded band that went around her neck.

I nodded. I didn't know what to say so I figured it was best not to say anything. Besides, I had never heard the name Martin MacDonald before.

"You can go right up, dear. Elevator's that way, second floor, fourth door on your right. You can't miss it."

I nodded again. Did I say thank you? Should I thank someone who was just doing her job? I could count on one hand the number of social interactions I had had in the past year and three months. The six months prior, almost every conversation I had revolved around how my brother was such a good man, an angel taken too soon how someone I didn't know or care for was there to talk to me whenever I wanted and how we were all feeling a loss, and so I just started avoiding talking to people in general.

"And don't be worried. His bark is worse than his bite," Grandma smiled, and I attempted to twitch the corners of my mouth up before heading into the elevator.

There was no one else in the elevator, and I took some time to scrutinize my image in the walls, so well-polished that they were reflective. Boots. Jeans. T-shirt. Flannel shirt. Hoodie. Short hair. What about my face? I looked...I looked fine. Neutral. That was good. My eyes were grey in the light. Dad's eyes. Adam's eyes.

No. Stop it. Half an hour. Just keep it together for half-an-hour. Then you'll be alone again. But not now. Not in public.

After Adam left, it seemed like I existed only in relationship to him. So, when he died, I just stopped existing. And then I probably made things worse: when I stopped talking to other people and they stopped talking to me, I faded, devoid of any color that comes from any real-world conversations or interactions. I became a ghost, going through my day. When I lost Adam, I lost myself.

You're okay, you're okay, you're okay, I reminded myself internally as I walked down the hallway. One door. Two. Three. Four.

The door to room 266 was unremarkable. It looked like an office door. Should I knock? If Martin MacDonald was expecting me, shouldn't the door be open? Also, I had never been in a bank whose offices/meeting rooms hadn't been on the first floor. Maybe he was with someone? I should knock. I knocked.

"Come in, Lee."

Lee. Lee-Lee. Silver Eyes. No, I was hallucinating. I had no good reason to hallucinate--I slept my eight hours and ate my vegetables and exercised on a regular basis—but something in the last year had thrown a wrench into my brain. Maybe I had spent too much time alone, too much time in my own mind, and now I was repeating the consequences: I was hallucinating the voice of my dead brother.

The door swung open. I was definitely crazy. My brother was dead. But my brother was standing in the corner of the office. It was not what I had expected: a big, studio-like room that looked

very modern and had some fake plants and lots of glass and black leather. It looked like too big of a room to be enclosed behind such a plain looking door. It also did not look anything like a stereotypical banker's office.

That was proof right there that was I just hallucinating. Had I just spent so much time alone that I had descended into madness, where I was living in some dream-world, consumed by memories, and had willed Adam into existence?

If so, my memory had gone to shit. My brother had black hair. This Adam had brown hair. My Adam wore t-shirts and jeans, except when he was boxing. This Adam had on blue pants and a matching blazer and a white collared shirt with the first few buttons undone.

But it was his voice. I think. Had I really heard it? Or just imagined it? The only way to find out was to ask a question and see whether he answered me.

“Adam?” It was half a question, half tentative, half hopeful. There were too many halves, but there was too many emotions in me right now: Adam was alive. No, Adam was dead. I was dreaming. I was hallucinating. Adam was here. But Adam wasn't going to exist outside of here, of my imagination. It felt like there had never been a time without Adam. But Adam had left. Adam had been gone for over a year.

He looked up at me, but his eyes were wrong too, just like his hair and his clothes and his personality. His eyes were brown, and they shouldn't be. He had my eyes, Dad's eyes, the eyes of his entire family. Depending on the light, they vacillated between aqua blue and silver.

But, besides the eyes—and the scar on his temple—it was Adam.

And, as soon as I knew it was Adam, I came back. The absence of Adam had left me almost non-existent. Adam's return brought me back: not only could I feel something besides grief but my emotions were full color, sharp and vivid, and I could feel myself expanding like the Hulk, full of drive and purpose and spirit and relief. Adam was okay. Everything was going to be okay. Adam was waiting on the other side of a door. I had thought that he would be, a year, three months, and eighteen days ago, when I was sitting in the dark kitchen and heard the knock on the door. I told myself that Adam had just forgotten his keys and had forgotten to call me about it, though he never had forgotten anything before and had never forgotten about me, and he was waiting for me on the other side of the door, waiting to say, “Really Silver Eyes? I thought you had better reflexes than that!” and aim a punch at my shoulder, which I would dunk, and then he'd tackle me to the ground, and eventually he'd pull me off the floor and pull my braid, and we'd get up to make dinner, and everything would go on as it had: just Adam and me.

It wasn't him standing on the other side of the door that day. It was the police with the news of the accident. He had been waiting on the other side of this door all along.

“Adam.” This time it was a sigh of relief. But, he didn't seem like he was waiting for me. He didn't make any motion that indicated he had heard me. He wasn't even looking at me. Maybe he wasn't okay. Maybe he had hit his head or something and didn't remember who I was, and that's the reason he hadn't come back. No, but Adam knew who I was. He called my name when I walked through the door, and he had called me Lee. That nickname was one only he used, something only he would know.

So, if he knew who I was, he would've remembered where I lived and would've come home.

Unless he didn't want to. Unless he had chosen to leave.

Because if he were here, in full physical health and mental capacity, he could've just as easily come home. If he had wanted to. But the fact that he was here and that he wasn't at home...maybe he didn't want to come home after all. Maybe he had chosen to leave. Maybe he had chosen to leave me.

Maybe he hadn't cared. Maybe he didn't care that I couldn't function: that I had to crawl onto the floor and stay there until time blurred whenever I saw something that reminded me of him: one of his socks left in the dryer. It must've gone through two or three different cycles of laundry before I found it. Maybe he didn't care that I didn't have an appetite and all but force-fed myself the first few months. Maybe he didn't care that I had to celebrate my fifteenth birthday by myself. Maybe he didn't care that I had hit the heavy bag until I had no fight left in me and had collapsed onto the floor in a ball, the black punching bag still swinging merrily around me.

Hit them where it hurts, Lee.

Adam had given me that advice. I didn't think he would do the same thing to me.

But was I really hurt? Not really. Hurt was the feeling that followed me after Adam's death. It was gone, though, like a house after a hurricane, one you can't believe was ever there at all. I wasn't sad or hurt, now. I wanted to hurl myself at Adam, punch him, make him hurt and scream and cry like I did. He had left me? He hated me so much that he had fled.

Well, I hated him too. I was definitely Hulking out right now: angry and ready to fight. I wished only that I could be eight feet tall and 1,500 pounds. I'd take Adam down. And enjoy it. Adam had left me once, he didn't look all that pleased to see me now, and he could leave again in a minute, gone for another year. Or longer.

"Miss Krew," said the other man in the room. He had said only those two words to me, but I already didn't like him. He had made me see Adam again, and, contrary to my feelings about two minutes ago, I wasn't exactly pleased to see Adam. To put it mildly.

Besides, who was this second guy anyway? Some banker? He looked like it. He was wearing a three-piece suit, like Adam, except his was grey, his shirt was white, and he had a dark purple tie. He had a face that I could have analyzed and still wouldn't be able to pick out in the crowd.

Adam once said that he would live to be a hundred and five. We had been in a bank, just like this one. Waffles on the weekends. It became a tradition. I'd waking up, smelling the batter, and hoping Adam had made chocolate-chip ones. Sometimes, he had.

No, don't get near that Pandora's Box. Think about...other things. Neutral things. Homework. I didn't have homework; it was winter break. School. The Bank Manager, who was leaning over his desk, palms resting on its surface, looking at me like he was expecting a reaction. Shit. I hope he hadn't introduced himself. If so, I had missed it entirely.

"...Or, if you prefer to stand, by all means, do so. I want you to be comfortable."

Guess he had asked me to sit. I needed to say something that make it sound like I hadn't just spaced out and missed the socially-appropriate window to sit. Why was I here? The...will? Signing things? Okay. I could work with that.

“Unless the paperwork is dense, I don't think I'm staying long.”

“As you see fit,” he dismissed me. His tone was even, untroubled. Could I rattle this guy? Why did I want to rattle this guy? I wanted to because he was as much of a bank manager as I was, and he had brought Casper the Unfriendly Ghost back and made my life a whole lot more complicated.

So, I sat. I plopped myself down on the modern leather couch in the room and, with just a second of hesitation, put my boots on the glass table in front of me. A steam of melted snow mixed with dirt drooled onto the surface, and I felt my stomach tighten. I had always done what I had done, always been polite. This whole being-a-dick thing was new to me, and it didn't feel that good.

Then I glanced over at Adam, who still hadn't moved. He had come back to the Bank Manager but not to me: his sister. Yeah, I was totally justified.

The Bank Manager didn't look up at me or the mess that I was causing: the little brown stream on the table. It looked disgusting, so I achieved that goal. But this table was too far away from the couch for my legs to rest comfortably. It was meant for people over six feet: people like Adam and like this man, wasn't quite as tall as Adam. I'd peg him at six feet. I put my boots down on the floor. The Bank Manager hadn't noticed. He was leafing through a folder that he had picked up from his desk.

“I would introduce you to one of my agents, but I think the two of you already know each other.” He circled around to the front of the desk, so I could see him, free of any shadows. If Adam had the right eyes, his would be grey because he was still in the shadows, but their blue undertones would've come out the second that he was back in the light. But now his eyes were just brown. Was he wearing contacts?

Focus. Bank Manager. Or...not Bank Manager. Whoever he was, he was completely unremarkable: taller than average for a man, brown eyes, brown hair turning grey at the temple. The grey hairs were the only reason I'd guess he was closer to fifty or sixty rather than thirty. Other than that, I honestly couldn't tell. He could have been a really well-preserved eighty-year-old, for all I knew. He didn't offer his hand to shake. Even if he had, I wouldn't have taken it.

“Sort of,” I said. “It's hard to get to know him, though, isn't it?” He's almost...dead quiet.” Regret, regret, regret. Puns were cutsey. I wasn't cutesy. I was trying to be a fortress here: unreadable, impenetrable, letting no emotions escape. They weren't going to catch me vulnerable: Adam and whatever his name... Wait a second. *Agent?*

“I'm sure you could say the thing about many of the others here. For now, though, my name is Martin MacDonald. You may call me Mr. MacDonald or sir. I'll be blunt with you: there is no

will although there is an operational bank downstairs. If you're as smart as Mr. Krew here says you are, you probably would've have already worked out that you are in one of the offices of the FBI: the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

Now I was in a corner. If I didn't contradict Sir MacDonald, it looked as though I was agreeing with Adam and Adam's assessment of me when really Adam had no idea who I was anymore. If I did contradict MacDonald, and tell him that I hadn't really know that I was in the actual CIA, I would prove Adam wrong, but I would also look stupid.

"Think whatever you want." I finally replied. I liked that answer. It was ambiguous enough to encompass both scenarios.

"I would like to think that you've been following the news, Miss Krew. Have you?"

Kind of? I mean, I had Facebook. I didn't post anything, but I saw news stories and statuses and articles people shared.

"A little bit, Your Honor."

"Well then maybe this next piece of news will inspire you. Have you heard of Grant Woods High School?"

"Grant Woods High School." There were a cluster of public schools in Highlands, my town, and the towns around it. Grant Woods was one of the only private schools, but it was a good one: it was known for being academically intense. "Yeah, I know it."

"You're one of the few, Miss Krew. To the rest of the country, Grant Woods is a non-entity, and she..." the lights dimmed as a 3D image appeared directly in front of me, "is invisible."

I leaned back to get a better look at the projection. The girl in it looked to be about my age, plus or minus a few years. She held a textbook in front of her, her backpack's straps were visible on her shoulders, and her long brown hair was pulled into two long pigtails, one pushed back behind her. I couldn't tell whether her eyes were naturally brown-gold or if the fluorescent lights in the hallway just made them appear that way.

"Madison Carlisle," Martin MacDonald said. "She was only thirteen, but she was a sophomore in high school, just like you, Miss Krew. Her teachers described her as happy, intelligent, hard-working, bright, sweet."

I shifted my weight a bit. Teachers used to say the same things about me. Adam would go to my parent-teacher conferences, and I'd beg him for details afterwards.

Now what did they say? Smart. Silent. Spends a lot of time by herself. Doesn't play well with others. In fact, she doesn't interact with others at all.

My thoughts were wandering again. Time to pull them back.

Wait, how did MacDonald even have that picture? It looked like a camera was facing right down the hallway. I know GW was a swanky sort of place, but, at Highlands, that camera would've

been hit by a random basketball or maybe not-so-random basketball by the end of day one.

That wasn't relevant either.

"She made straight As, she had a good group of friends, teachers loved her, she was involved in some community service," MacDonald paused. "And now she's dead."

Well, that was dramatic.

I looked at MacDonald, another player in Adam's and my game of who can show the least emotion. He simply opened his palm and another 3D image replaced that of the dead girl's. This new girl looked the same age, but the way she held herself was completely different; her shoulders were back, her smile almost mocking, her blond hair was loose, but perfectly straight, and her walk was probably a strut. Her eyes were green, bright green like emeralds. They were kind of disturbing actually, her eyes. They looked unnatural. Maybe it was just the quality of the projection.

"This is Isabella Anderson," MacDonald continued. "We believe Madison was killed by her."

The lights clicked back on, the projection dissolved, and Martin moved behind his desk. "Grant Woods, for reasons that are not hard to imagine, kept this incident private. They said Madison had diabetes, which she did. But that didn't kill her. We're sending you undercover. Your name is Mikayla Simmons. You're a newly-enrolled sophomore in Grant Woods," he was speaking matter-of-factly, but quickly, like a king making rapid-fire plans for battle. "Mr. Krew is already enrolled. He has been since about this time, last year. He plays ice hockey. He is a senior. He goes by Nick. You and he will not have many classes together. Homeroom. Latin, perhaps. Your schedule is in the file I've prepared for you."

The fuck? I had not signed up for this. "Excuse me?"

"You have skills already so we don't need to waste time training you. Your transcript and teacher reports imply that you have the intelligence to be both a student and an agent, and you are the same age and class year as both Miss Anderson and Miss Carlisle."

"I'm flattered. And you're kidding me."

"I'm not."

"You want me to join you and, and..." Don't say his name. You did and look how weak it made you sound, like you couldn't function without him. You can function without him. Make sure he knows. "...Deadhead over there to flush out a murderer? No thanks. I already have a school and..." Well, I didn't have a lot of friends there, but MacDonald didn't seem to know that. "...and a life. I don't need to be part of some Murder Mystery party."

"If you succeed in helping, then you can return to your old school."

"Or I could just not leave at all."

“It is your choice, Miss Krew. Either your school or your house.”

Was he...was he blackmailing me? The FBI would stoop to blackmailing? I raised my eyebrows.

MacDonald took that expression as encouragement to keep talking. “You are currently a minor living illegally without a guardian.”

Oh shit. He was blackmailing me. And he was going all out.

The day of Adam’s funeral, one of his “coworkers”—a fat man whose rheumy eyes, runny nose, and perpetually sweaty forehead had disgusted me at first sight—offered me the chance to live somewhere else, maybe with a foster family with kids my own age. Or we could ask my Aunt Ivy. She attended the funeral. We might ask her. I refused. The house I lived in was too big for me alone, but it was Adam’s and my house, and I wasn’t leaving it. The fat man had tousled my hair and exhaled, like I was causing him great pain, but he informed me that he would be acting as my new official guardian on behalf of Adam and helping me with all legal and financial matters. I took his card and tried to forget Adam’s nickname for me as if goading him to come back.

I ended up doing a lot myself: making a budget, checking the utility bills religiously every month. Grocery shopping. Cooking. I was fine. I knew how to take care of myself. But now MacDonald was trying to take that independence away from me. If I refused, he would put me at the mercy of someone else. No home. No family remains. No Dungeon.

If I did take the offer...then what? I would be left alone, for the most part. I could get in and get out and go back to my life with...Nope. No Adam. Adam wasn’t in my life anymore. But he would be in Grant Woods. He had been there for...what? About a year? And he didn’t seem to have made any progress. If I enrolled in Grant Woods and flushed out this killer, I would have the chance to one-up my brother. I should not uproot my whole life because of some petty desire to give my brother the finger. But I should also not uproot my whole life because I had refused this one offer.

“Are you suggesting that maybe I should blackmail Isabella? Take some tips from the pros?” I asked casually.

“With what authority, Miss Krew?”

Checkmate. I was checkmated. The FBI was going to use me but not give me any support in return. “And what if...”

“What if your tongue gets the best of you and you let it slip for whom you are working and this address?”

That wasn’t my question, but it was a good one. “Sure. Let’s say that.”

“Then you will have no choice. You will be removed from both home and school and sent elsewhere. You do not have the credit or the resources that we have, and you most certainly do not know how to hide yourself.”

Hide? Oh, I could fucking hide. I could be Bella's best friend, and she wouldn't know. MacDonald may think that I didn't know how to hide, and yet, I had spent this entire conversation sealing my emotions inside my fortress.

"I'm not making any promises."

"I need your word now. And your signature, Miss...Simmons." A new identity. I had kind of taken a new identity a year ago: someone who was self-sufficient who didn't need her brother to take care of her or her friends to leave her. Becoming Simmons instead of Krew shouldn't be that difficult. "We've had our best software engineers build you a sizable social media presence: photos, vacation, parents. If you accept our offer, we'll active them and make it seem Mikayla Simmons has always existed."

"Go ahead," I said with a shrug.

MacDonald nodded curtly and the door opened. "Stop by the front desk on your way out. They will all the information you need and all the information we need from you."

I stood up, flickered my eyes over at my comatose brother, and made way for the door. "You'll find that you'll be working alongside one of our top agents," MacDonald called after me. "He covers his tracks better than anyone I have seen in years. Perhaps you'll be the one to challenge your brother."

I turned around in surprise, but, just as I was trying to think of something to say, the door swung shut, sealing me from MacDonald and Adam. "It was nice meeting you too," I muttered.