

SECRET SKY

CHAPTER ONE

Can you tell me your name?”
“*Emelynn.*” I closed my eyes to dampen the cresting wave of nausea.

“She’s nonresponsive.”

No, I’m not. I forced my eyes open. The man’s face was a blur. “*My name’s Emelynn,*” I repeated but, oddly, I couldn’t hear my voice.

“Did you find any ID?”

Nearby, a siren wailed. Had it rained? The damp air smelled of worms and wet earth. I lost the fight with my eyelids.

“No, and no sign of her shoes or transportation either. Are you ready to move her?”

“Yes, she’s immobilized and secure. On three . . .”

The world tilted at a dangerous angle. Flashing lights throbbed, breaching my shrouded eyes.

“Female, early twenties, BP’s ninety-eight over fifty . . .” The man’s voice trailed off as I melted into the pleasant reprieve of a quiet darkness.

I liked the soft, fuzzy quality of the darkness. I felt comfortable there, but loud voices and harsh lights dragged me back and dumped me into a boisterous room. The clatter hurt my ears. I desperately wanted to shush these people, but that would be rude. A hazy face pressed in, but my eyes wouldn’t focus. The man behind the face flicked a sharp light in my eye. So . . . inconsiderate.

“Can you tell me what day it is?” he asked, as if I were an idiot.

It’s . . . hmm . . . What day was it? And why couldn’t I move? An overwhelming desire to curl up and go back to sleep tugged at me. The

man finally let me close my eyes. I pulled against whatever held me in its grip, but I didn't have the strength to fight it.

"Let's get a CT scan, spine and head, stat, and run a panel in case we have to go in."

Even though my eyes were closed, the room was too bright—and noisy. A cacophony of electronic beeps, bells and sharp voices assaulted my ears. I wanted to ask everyone to leave me alone, but my voice wouldn't come. They jostled me and I dipped into that blissful darkness again—the one that pushed away all the noise.

The darkness soothed me until the man with the snap-on gloves interrupted the calm again, his sharp light piercing my eye like a knitting needle. "Can you tell me in what city you live?"

Did he think I didn't know? I almost said Toronto, but that wasn't right, was it? Didn't I just move to Summerset . . . or was that a dream? Why was I so confused? God, my head hurt.

"Any change?" he asked.

Was he talking to me?

"No. She's still hypotensive, but stable."

I guess not.

"Pupils are equal and reactive," he said, and then he sighed. "It's been six hours. Do we know who she is yet?"

"*My name's Emelynn,*" I said in defeat, knowing he couldn't hear me.

"No, the police searched the park. No purse, no ID."

"What was she doing in the park at that hour?" someone asked.

"The police haven't ruled out that she might have been dumped there, but she was wearing workout gear so she could have been hit while jogging."

"It would have been late for a jog in the park, wouldn't it?"

"Maybe she works shifts?"

Listening to the conversation exhausted me. Before I could figure out what it meant, the darkness claimed me again. If only they'd let me stay there, but they were relentless with their light.

This time when the stabbing light woke me, the thought that perhaps I was dying flitted through my mind. Was I supposed to go toward the light? Maybe I wasn't doing it right.

When the light retreated again, I slept fitfully and had the oddest dream. It was the dead of night. A powerful storm was gathering strength. Gusting winds blew across the crests of angry waves, creating whitecaps that seemed to glow in the dark. Towering cedars and firs rained needles as they bowed to the wind. The great, crooked trunks of

old arbutus trees groaned and twisted, spewing glossy leaves into the breeze.

And I had a bird's-eye view of it all.

Home was here in the dream, somewhere. I sensed it calling out to me, drawing me toward its warmth and safety. I knew the small cottage so well but couldn't find it. The storm would stop if I could just get inside, but the wind blew me out over the treetops, farther and farther away. And then I was falling . . . falling . . . falling through the night sky, careening out of control, crashing through the tree canopy until that blissful darkness put an end to the terrible fall.

The pointy light woke me. "Can you tell me your name?" The man peeled back my eyelids and flicked that damn light.

"Emelynn," I said, relieved to hear the sound of my voice. But the relief was short-lived. My head exploded in agony when I turned away from the light.

As the pain hit a crescendo, I heard him remark "I'm losing her" and I surrendered to the peaceful darkness where pain didn't reach me.

"Emelynn," the man said, the next time he woke me with the flicking light. "Emelynn, don't struggle—we've immobilized your head. Do you know where you are?"

I squinted, straining to bring the face behind the glasses into focus. "The hospital?"

"Good. That's good, Emelynn. I'm Dr. Coulter. You've had an accident."

"What accident?" Car accident? I don't have a car. No, wait, I think I do have a car. Why was this so hard?

"You don't remember?" He pressed his lips into a thin line and furrowed his brow.

I tried, but the dream was all I could think of. "Did I fall?"

"We don't know. We were hoping you could tell us."

"My head hurts."

"You have a concussion. I can't give you anything for it yet. Can you tell me what you were doing in Sunset Park last night?"

"I live there," I said, but that wasn't right either. Why was I so mixed up? Sleep once again tugged at me.

He seemed to share my confusion. "We'll talk again later."

I folded into the darkness, and when it faded, it revealed an airport scene that looked vaguely familiar. I drifted toward a young couple with a little girl and watched as the man leaned in to kiss the woman.

"I love you," he said, pulling away.

My heart stopped when I saw the man's face.

He turned to the little girl and mussed her hair. "Be good for your mother. I'll only be gone a few days."

Oh, god, no. I knew what this was. I had to stop him. "No! Don't go!"

He put his big tackle box on the luggage cart beside the bag that I knew held his fishing rods. "I'll be back Tuesday. Don't forget about those peanut butter cookies you promised me." He smiled down at the girl, then turned and walked out to the float plane tied to the dock.

"No!" I cried, as he ducked into the plane, oblivious to my presence. "Please," I begged. Then someone called my name.

"Emelynn. Emelynn, that's right, look at me. I'm over here." A woman in scrubs moved her face into my line of vision. I blinked up at her.

"It was a dream, that's all, dear. You have a concussion. Your head is braced. Try not to fight it. You were thrashing in your sleep." She adjusted the blankets and checked the IV.

Pain returned with my awakening and ramped up quickly. It wasn't just my head anymore. My entire left side was on fire. A moan escaped my throat.

"I'll get Dr. Coulter," the nurse said, hurrying from the room.

Time crawled while I played a miserable little game of Which Body Part Hurts Most. There was no clear winner.

Dr. Coulter arrived at a gallop. He and the nurse succinctly exchanged statistics at a rapid-fire clip. BP? One oh six over sixty. Urine? Clear. Orientation? Improving. With a clipboard in hand, he checked a number of beeping machines.

"Can you tell me your name?" He put the clipboard down with a clatter and pulled that damn penlight out of his breast pocket.

"Emelynn," I said, as he held my eyelid captive.

"Good," he said, distracted by his light-flicking exam. "Do you have a last name, Emelynn?"

"Taylor," I responded with trepidation. What kind of trouble had I gotten myself into?

He repeated the light exam with my other eye. "Very good," he said, and then he finally saw me, not just my eyes.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"Cliffside Avenue."

He smiled warmly. "Glad to hear you've moved out of the park."

"Excuse me?" My head throbbed in time with the beat of my heart.

“During one of our earlier discussions, you said you lived in Sunset Park. I’m just happy to see that your memory is coming back. What do you remember about your accident?”

“Accident?” I mulled over his question, holding out for some clues. He wasn’t offering any and my dreams were all mixed up with reality. Had I dreamt that I’d fallen through the trees or was that real? My head kept pounding. I drew my right hand up and followed the path of the tube sticking out of the back of it up to a dripping IV bag.

“Late Monday or early Tuesday?” he continued, bringing my attention back to his question.

“I’m sorry, I don’t remember,” I said, distracted now. “How long have I been here?”

“You came in on a 911 call at”—he checked the notes on the clipboard—“oh-one-thirty on Tuesday.”

I tried to process the information.

“That’s one thirty in the morning. You were found in Sunset Park. Do you remember why you were in the park at that hour?”

“The park is right beside my house.” I tried to recall the details that would make sense of this scenario, but they escaped me, and the pain made concentration difficult. “I don’t remember.”

“Okay. Let’s give it a few more hours. Memory loss isn’t uncommon with this type of brain injury. It may be temporary.”

“*May* be?”

“It’s still early. We need to give it more time.”

“It feels like I’ve been here for days.”

“I’m sure it does. We’ve been waking you on the hour since you arrived. It’s standard procedure for concussions. Unfortunately, your blood pressure is still too low and you’ve been unconscious more than not during your stay here in the ICU, so we’re not done yet. How’s your pain?” he asked. “On a scale of one to ten.”

“Nine hundred,” I said, closing my eyes. “What happened to me?”

“I don’t know, but it was particularly hard on your left side.” I heard him pick up the clipboard again. “You’ve got ten stitches in the back of your head plus seven or eight in your left ankle, and a whole host of contusions and abrasions, including some nasty-looking road rash on your face, but I don’t think it’ll scar.” He flipped up a sheet of paper. “There’s no evidence of sexual assault, but you sustained an injury to your kidneys. The blood has already cleared from your urine, so we’ll remove the catheter in the next few hours.”

I heard him set the clipboard down on the table again, and I opened my eyes when he took my hand. “I can give you something for the pain,

but I'm afraid it won't help much," he said. "It's important that we're able to rouse you at regular intervals for the next six hours. Do you think you can hang in there?"

"Do I have a choice?"

He gave me a crooked smile. "I'll order your meds and check on you in a few hours."

The nurse returned with a needle and stuck it into the IV line. "I'll wake you in an hour."

A thick fog rolled in around me. I dreamt again, but not of the family at the airport or the terrifying fall through the tree canopy.

... I was nine or ten years old and beachcombing with my father. He had that tool in his hand, the one he used to break open fist-sized geodes searching for the crystals hidden inside. When I got close, he called to me and turned over a flat piece of shale. He laughed as I shrieked and ran away from the tiny crabs that scrambled to find fresh cover.

My heart quickened as the nurse woke me and the memory faded. She assured me it had been an hour. When she left, the thick fog came back, pulling me under.

... A blonde-haired woman in a wide-brimmed hat whispered my name. She held her hands palms out, inviting me to a game of patty cake, and I lifted my hands to mirror hers. She spoke in a quiet voice, repeating a haunting refrain while keeping watch over her shoulder, and when shadows approached, she vanished.

The nurse woke me again. I had dipped in and out of fog so often that my perception was all mixed up, making it difficult to sort out what was real and what wasn't. "What time is it?" I asked.

"Just after six in the morning," she said, pumping up the blood pressure cuff. "Wednesday." She paused to listen to her stethoscope. "You're in the ICU, and I'm happy to report that your blood pressure is improving." The Velcro made a ripping noise as she removed the cuff.

"Good morning, Emelynn," Dr. Coulter said, as he crossed behind the nurse to retrieve the clipboard. "Your vitals are looking better. How's your pain level?"

"It hasn't improved with time," I said, forcing a smile.

"Have you remembered any more details about your accident?" His expression was hopeful.

"No," I said. The lie came easily; I was good at lying. I'd been hiding my secrets for a long time.

Dr. Coulter raised his chin and glared down his nose. "Well, keep trying. You're out of the danger zone, so I'll give you something more

for the pain now. Maybe you'll remember more after you've rested." He frowned in disappointment as he left my room.

He didn't believe me, but he didn't press me either, which was a good thing: I could fill the room with what I was withholding. Because unfortunately, I now remembered all of it. Every last detail.