

*Hana and Stella were inseparable friends once, but they hadn't seen each other for a long time. That changed when one day, suddenly and quite unexpectedly, a radically changed but somehow unmistakable Hana reappeared in Stella's life. Hana came to her old friend with an urgent message: neither of them were the people they thought they were, the world was not what they thought it was, everything was about to change forever, and they were the only two people who could ensure that change was for the better.*

*This is the end, and beginning, of their journey together.*

Her hand was the temperature of the air. Stella realized she'd never been with someone like this - that no one had ever been with anyone like this. She did not feel connected to the hand that was holding hers, nor did she feel distanced from it. She was no less that hand than she was her own, than she was the air of the park surrounding them or the floodlights or the bugs.

Suspension. The falling star hung motionless above their heads, crowned in light. Oddly, it calmed her. As they looked up at that bit of rock from nowhere, Stella suddenly felt herself stretching backward and knew at once it was happening. It was though her skin were being pulled through a long corridor of repeating moments in time. Hana's hand was the temperature of the air. They had known each other, somehow, for lifetimes. But never before like this.

"Do you see it?" Hana asked, squeezing Stella's hand.

"I don't know," Stella replied. Hana could have been referring to so many things. Stella saw the moment of her birth resound uselessly, almost silently, off of one thousand years of history and touch every single person, branching signals spreading like the firing of synapses, electric flares in the dark of the skull.

"I didn't think it would be like this," Hana whispered. She sounded afraid. Or concerned? It was unusual to hear her like this. She sounded very young.

"Don't worry," Stella said to the air around them. "I see you."

And she did. Stella saw Hana in all the curves of time: Hana, brilliantly, wildly herself. Mothers, sisters. A thousand people Stella would never know. Hana in apartment buildings, Hana in the trees that line the streets. Whole histories and moments, contradictions formed and resolved, shattered and made whole again, different and the same. Hana tucked herself into the corners of every event Stella passed through, blindly. Never separate, always distinct. Another world comprised entirely of this one, a perfect match. Hana was there.

"What happens now? I didn't plan for this." Hana said.

There was a pleading tone in her voice. The star did not move. Stella felt sure that it would not.

"It all happens now. Don't be afraid."

Stella heard Hana catch her breath and realized she had been holding her own. The air around them shimmered.

"Will I ever see you again?" Hana asked.

"I think so," Stella replied. She realized she had never been afraid. Not really. The stars seemed to shine even brighter then. Hana was in the way she swayed, in the way they all were swaying now. They would see each other again.

"But I won't be me, and you won't be you."

Stella felt that they were floating. Something opened in the rock suspended above their heads. Something was changing. Or, maybe, something was changing back.

"I love you," Hana whispered to the air around them.

Stella smiled. She could feel Hana's heartbeat in her hands. The air was growing warmer.

"I love all of you."