



Marli's Journey

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I would like to dedicate this book to my family because, without them, I wouldn't be the person I am today. They supported my writing journey, even though they don't always understand it. I am forever grateful to them and dedicate this book to them.

Marli's Journey

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CHAPTER ONE

I step onto the subway platform, the rhythmic rumble of the incoming train matching the beat of Adele's "Easy on Me" that hums through my earbuds. The world around me blurs as I sway gently to the music, letting each note wrap around me like a blanket. With every step, I lose myself in the music, my heart beating in time with the pulsing crowd. The subway is its own world, but thinking about my sanctuary—the cozy "Brunch and Books" cafe—fills me with a sense of anticipation.

As the train doors slide open, I make my way through the crowd, my dark curly hair dancing with each movement. Once I'm aboard, I find a corner seat, I look out at the cityscape going by, my mind is already drifting to the stacks of books waiting for me. I savor the smell of coffee and pastries mingled with the fresh pages of stories yet read, lifting my senses and pushing my excitement to a new view.

It feels like forever, but the subway finally stops. I jump off and walk a few blocks to my favorite spot, the familiar sign of "Brunch and Books" coming into view. Its colorful energy is flanked by warm,

welcoming windows that invite me inside. I walk in, the jingle of the door announces my arrival. The soft murmur of patrons chatting over steaming cups and the gentle rustle of pages being turned greet me as I walk in.

I scan the shelves. My eyes land on a new release. A novel beautifully bound, titled *On The Come Up*. I'm interested so I grab it and go into my favorite corner spot, sunlight streams through the window, wrapping me in warmth. Time drifts as I lose myself in the story, the outside world fades into nothing.

I didn't realize it, but time went by before I could blink, the sky outside was the soft glow of dusk and I reluctantly closed the book and made my way home. I open the door, the sound of excited barks and chirps fill the air. "Rocky! Sparkle!" I laughed, my heart swelling with joy as my fluffy puppy raced towards me, her tail wagging furiously, while my bright bird flitted around in his cage, he chirped at me.

After a few moments of playful chaos, I kneel to feed Rocky a few treats, rewarding her eager obedience. Then, I swing by Sparkle's cage to offer a few sunflower seeds and whisper sweet nothings to my bird friend. "Hey, Ma!" I call out, I catch my mom in

the kitchen, preparing a simple yet comforting dinner.

“Hey, mini me! How was your day?” my mom asks, coming over to me with a smile.

“Good mom! I found a beautiful book at the cafe,” I reply, excitement bubbles in my voice as I tell her about my day. I head to my room, where I set up my phone to Facetime my two best friends. I thank the universe for technology.

“Hey, birthday girl!” Jolana’s face pops up on the screen, and Mara’s cheerful grin quickly joins.

“I can’t believe your birthday is tomorrow!” Mara exclaims, her eyes spark with excitement.

“I know! I’m so ready for dinner with my ma. She promised something special!” I beam, my mind is already racing with the thoughts of cake and laughter.

“Don’t forget, we’re going to celebrate together soon!” Jolana added, her voice is filled with sincerity.

The three of us talk and laugh, sharing our dreams for the coming year, plans and wishes. I felt grateful for the love and joy that fill my life— this morning was

just one of many adventures awaiting me in New York.

A few hours later

“Who would've thought that a girl like me would double as a superstar?” I sing off-key. I dance as I sing the intro to the TV shows that carried my childhood. I continue to dance without a care until my bedroom door opens abruptly. I turn to face my mom. She stands there laughing at me.

“What are you laughing at?” I ask.

My mom replies, “You think you can dance.” At this point, she's out of breath from laughing. I ask “So what's going on, Mom?”

She replies, “Nothing, baby. I just wanted to check on you; you've been up here awhile.”

“I'm alright, Ma. I'm just vibing.”

She replies with, “Oh, I saw you vibing.”

My mom makes her way out of my room and back downstairs to the kitchen. She's making baked chicken and rice—one of my favorite meals. I go into the kitchen, grab the tub of chocolate ice cream and head back to my room. I hope my mom doesn't notice because, Lord knows, I'm not supposed to be eating in my bedroom. I start singing again as I walk into my

room, "And give you a taste of your own medicine," I sing. I set my ice cream down on my bedside table and start dancing again. Oof, I'm getting tired. I finish my ice cream, which I have been taking bites of as I danced, and I belly flop onto my bed. Sleep consumes me as soon as I touch the bed.

When I wake up from my nap, it's around 5:30. I brush my teeth and wash my face before I go downstairs. When I walk into the kitchen, my mom is standing by the counter, reading a crime novel. I greet her and she replies "hey Baby" I then go to put myself something to eat. I'm eating the food my mom made when I get a notification on my phone. It's Jolana who texts me; she wants to vent about her boyfriend. I've told her so many times before, and I tell her again: she is worth so much more than a boy who does not respect her. I will continue to tell her my opinion until he changes. I don't understand what Jolana sees in him.

I text her as I eat, asking her how she's feeling. She replies and tells me she feels tired. She says she's tired of waiting for people to notice and care. She is talking about Brandon, her boyfriend. I let her vent and tell me how she feels.

I finish eating and get off the phone with Jolana. I always worry about her and Mara; they are the

closest things I have to sisters, and I'm so happy to have them in my life. But I know I distance myself from them sometimes when I get into one of my moods where I feel crappy and just don't want to talk to anyone or even acknowledge my feelings.

Those two girls are my rocks, one of the very reasons I continue to live happily. And my mom—oh, how much I love her! I appreciate the people in my life so much, and I'm forever grateful for them. But I can't help but wonder what my life would be like if I knew my dad, or even his name or what he looked like. Does he have dark skin like me, or is he brown-skinned? Even the smallest details plague my mind. What color are his eyes? Do I look like him? Is he short or tall? Bulky or slim? I always wonder about him.

Questions about my dad race through my mind. Is he a good person? Is he a bad person? Is that why I don't know him? Why is he not in my life? I can't comprehend why I don't know him. My mom never answers my questions; she always just ignores me and changes the subject.

I don't know; all this thinking makes me tired. I head upstairs, get my pajamas ready, and grab my skincare. I walk into the bathroom and make sure I have everything laid out before I head into the shower. I

grab my soap and washcloth and enter the shower. My soap is antibacterial, but I use a vanilla body wash after; it has the nicest warm scent. It's just comforting! Plus, isn't it the best compliment when someone tells you that you smell good?

I finish up in the shower, get out, and dry myself off. I put on unscented lotion because this is just my night care. If it were my daytime routine, I would have used my warm vanilla lotion. I put some coconut oil on after my lotion soaks into my skin, then I put on my pajamas, which have Hello Kitty all over them—because, duh, Hello Kitty! When I'm done with everything, I rinse out the shower and wipe it down. I walk into my bedroom, and like earlier, I flop onto the bed and let my exhaustion consume me. I need a good night's sleep because tomorrow will be a fun day of birthday celebrations. I can't wait!

CHAPTER TWO

Marli, Marli, wake up, wake up! I hear my mom yell from downstairs. Maybe it would have been much simpler if she called me, but okay. I start to wake up; my mind is groggy, and my eyes are crusty from sleep. It takes me a good twenty minutes to actually leave my bed and make my way into the bathroom to get ready for the day. As soon as I look in the mirror, I realize my hair is all over the place, more than usual, and I remember I forgot to put a bonnet on or even wrap my hair before I went to bed. It's fine. I have to wash my hair anyway because my friend Mara is coming over later to do it for me so it looks nice for my birthday dinner tonight.

It's 7:30 a.m. right now, and Mara is coming over with Jolana at 9:00 a.m. I want faux locs, so we went to the hair store the other day and picked out the hair I wanted along with anything else Mara needed. I put my hair in a bun for now, brush my teeth, and hop in the shower. After I shower, I just put on some gray shorts and a tank top for now.

I go downstairs to fix myself something to eat. I think I'm just going to pour myself a bowl of Cap'n Crunch because I'm too lazy to cook right now. As I'm eating my most delicious meal of the day, my mom walks into the kitchen.

“Hey, Ma,” I greet her, and she replies, “Hey, baby, how are you? Have you done your hygiene and everything yet?”

I reply, “Yes, Mama, I did.”

Honestly, even though we have a good relationship and I love my mama with everything I have, she's just not a talkative person, nor does she come off as lovey-dovey, you know? I finish my cereal and go back to my bedroom to wait for Mara and Jolana to come over. I lie on my bed and watch Netflix while I wait. I'm currently watching "Bridgerton". By the time I finish the episode I'm on, I get a text from the group chat saying they are on their way now, which probably means they'll arrive in another hour or so. I decide to watch one more episode before they come. They call me to let me know they are here, so I go downstairs to get the door for them. I'm honestly surprised they don't just walk in; we are practically sisters at this point. I greet them both with hugs. We are all excited at this point. I love them so much; honestly, I don't know what I'd do without them. We walk up to my bedroom and start talking about Mara's new boyfriend, which pretty much means Jolana and I go on a stalking spree. Who is this boy that has our Mara sprung? We start calling him Broccoli because of his hair; he's got that broccoli haircut. At least he doesn't have the Edgar cut. I washed my hair while I was in the shower. Mara and Jolana help me blow-dry my hair, and then Mara starts installing the hair. The whole process takes about five hours, which is honestly great because I'll take five hours over eight

or more any day. Who wants to sit in a chair that long? I know Mara and Jolana are tired too. After my hair is finished, I smile and go to look at myself in the mirror. I turn around and hug both of my friends tightly. I do a little happy dance, and I hear my stomach grumble. It's so loud that it makes us all burst out laughing at the sound. We end up ordering some Wingstop. I get garlic parmesan wings, Jolana gets lemon pepper, and Mara gets barbecue wings. We also order some fries. After we eat, we look at the time and see that it's around 5:30, so we go upstairs so they can help me pick out an outfit for my birthday dinner and help me get ready. I end up picking something simple. I wear a yellow sundress with some white sandals. I painted my toes so my feet don't look crusty, and I tie everything together with some small gold hoop earrings and some bracelets. I'm so excited! I'm pretty much ready, so I hang out with my girls until my mom is ready. It's 7:00 by the time we leave to make our way to the restaurant.

We get to the restaurant; it's called Mordello's, and it looks nice so far. We head in and get seated. When we sit down, my mom and I start off with a simple conversation, but then I just blurt out the question: "So, who is my dad? What does he look like? When am I going to meet him? Is he a good person? How did he treat you?" At this point, I'm just rambling. She's used to it, so she doesn't even say anything to me. She just hands me a letter with my name on the front of it. I'm curious but kind of scared; I feel my heart racing, and I could have sworn the table shook a

little. I don't know, but something is telling me that this letter will change everything I know. I slowly open the envelope, and I'm greeted with slightly messy handwriting that says, "Dear Marli," at the heading of the page. I feel like everything is shaking around me at this point. I try to get my bearings and slightly calm down just enough to read the letter. I pull the page fully from the envelope and start to read:

Dear Marli Anne,

From this day forward, your life will change. Things as you know them will no longer be quite the same. My name is Markus Wright. I'm your father. I'm writing this letter 17 years before you read it. I'm writing this letter as your mom is in labor. We come from a long line of magical beings who have the power to harness the elements, and we come into our powers on the night of our 17th birthday. I have the power of Earth, and you, my child, I believe shall harness the Wind. I sense great power in you—power so dangerous it can destroy you if not protected and nurtured. Your mother does not know much; she just knows that you were to receive this letter on your 17th birthday. I had to leave you because I sensed that people were after me, and I needed to protect you. I know if you are anything like me, you will try to find me. Well, my child, please don't try; you'll just end up hurting yourself. I'm not a good man. I'm not meant to be a father, so save yourself the pain and don't look for me. Please, Marli, just stay away.

I don't know how to comprehend what I just read. I'm breathing really heavily; I don't know what's happening, but I feel everything around me shaking. I hear yelling and screaming; the sounds of fear surround me. I don't know what's happening; I'm just so overwhelmed. I feel someone push me underneath the table, and that seems to shake me out of myself. The city is still shaking, but it calms slightly. I feel my mom wrap her arms around me. She says, "It's okay, baby, it's okay," and all I'm doing at this moment is wondering if this is me. If the letter has an ounce of truth, did I just cause an earthquake? Maybe I'm delusional—who knows? Am I crazy? That has to be why I think the supernatural is suddenly real. It's finally happening—I'm going crazy. Mental breakdown and crash-out all in one, apparently. After that disaster that was my birthday dinner, we head home, and the first thing I do is run to my bedroom.

CHAPTER THREE

Once I'm in my room I lock my door. I'm so upset and surprised by what the letter said. It didn't make any sense to me. When I started to cry from frustration everything around me started to shake again. Do I really have powers to control wind and make things shake and blow? My mom knocks on my door saying, "Marli please open the door sweetheart. I know that this is a rough time right now, but we can work this out together. Please open the door Marli. I'm sorry that I had to keep this from you, but I promised your 17th birthday would be the day you found out."

I struggle to open the door while the whole house is shaking. I managed to open it, and as soon as I opened it my mom hugged me tightly. All of sudden the house stops shaking. My mom is still holding me tightly, apologizing about keeping this secret from me my whole life; telling me everything is going to be okay and we will learn how to manage my superpowers.

"Can't we try to find my dad and ask him about my powers in the first place," I said, "Why haven't I met him before in my life. Can you tell me why?" My mom looked at me with sad eyes. I can tell just by looking at her that she doesn't know the answer to my questions. I say, "I feel a little tired. I think I'm just going to go to bed. Good night mom." She smiled softly at me. "Good night sweetheart and have sweet dreams, everything will be okay" she said before

closing my door. I sat in my room wondering why my dad left. All I ever wanted was for my dad to be in my life. I sat in my room for a couple hours wondering what I should do? What am I going to do with these superpowers? Is anything good going to come out of having superpowers? That's when I decided I was going to go look for my dad.

July 26, 2025 Summer Break

It's the next morning and I start to pack my things for my "top secret mission" to find my dad. I grab a bunch of food of course and some money. I make sure I have my permit and my passport on me. I leave a note for my mom because I don't want her to think I'm missing or something.

Dear Mama,

I decided I'm going to look for my dad and I'm sorry to just up and leave, but don't worry, I'll be okay. I just want to know my dad, and who I am, and what's happening to me. I love you Mama, don't worry.

My first stop is to visit my Aunt Omira; she is the only person I know from my dad's side. Omira is my dad's sister, but the last time I saw her, I was barely five years old. She lives upstate in Albany, so the first thing I do when I leave my house is look up the earliest train ticket to Albany. Some time goes by, and I get off the train and arrive in Albany. I don't

remember where she lives, so I stalk her on Facebook and find her address. I make my way to a small, one-story pale green house with a small garden. I knock on the dark green door. A short, brown-skinned woman greets me. A look of shock crosses her face as she sees me. Without me saying anything, she says, "I know you, child. Come in, and I'll answer the questions you seek, but be warned, you might not like the outcome of your story."

I'm welcomed into her house and asked to sit down. I do as I'm asked, and as soon as I sit, questions fly out of my mouth. "Where do I find my dad? Do you have powers? Why do we have powers? What are you? What am I? I don't understand. Help me, Aunt Omira."

"Shush, child, and be patient as I speak to you."

"Yes, ma'am," I reply, and I wait for her to speak.

"We are blessed by Mother Nature and called upon this earth to help her harvest nature and its elements. The Wright family has been blessed with this gift for ten generations. We have great power, but great power comes with great responsibility. Hear me, child, as I inform you of our legacy. You shall be the most powerful Wright woman seen in generations. Each Wright woman undergoes a journey after her 17th birthday, where your courage and power will be tested. You shall overcome all obstacles to pass this test and complete the journey ahead. On your journey, you'll learn to control the power you hold."

Fear not; Mother Nature shall guide you with the help of your most trusted people. Those you hold dear will help you survive this journey." She continued, "You'll find your father in New Jersey. I have told you all I know. Now, leave, child, and start your journey. Remember, our legacy is in your hands."

I feel all of my emotions crashing down on me, and the house begins to shake. Aunt Omira tells me, as she feels my power, "Child, breathe and overcome." Once I calm down, I leave her house and take out my phone to call Jolana and Mara. I'll need their help if I'm to survive this. I call Jolana first, and she answers, "Where are you? Your mom is blowing up my phone looking for you. Is everything okay? I'll come and get you." I tell her to slow down and I explain what happened. She is skeptical, but she believes me and says, "I'm going to call Mara, and we are on our way. Wait for us, and then we'll head to New Jersey. Text Mara and let her know you are good, and do the same with your mom."

CHAPTER FOUR

I get off the phone with Jolana and start looking up places on my phone. I'm looking for a place to meet Jolana and Mara. I ended up finding a cafe close to Aunt Omira's house. I text them to meet me there and put my GPS into walking mode to start heading to the cafe. As I'm walking I suddenly feel someone watching me, but I just brush it off and continue walking. I look down at my phone for a second and see that I only have five minutes till I reach The Cafe. I keep walking until I'm finally there. I walk through the double doors and head to a corner booth. I scroll through Instagram while I wait for Jolana and Mara. I ordered a frappe because I do not want the manager to kick me out for just hanging out here. I think an hour or so goes by before Mara calls me letting me know she and Jolana are about ten minutes away from my location. A few minutes go by and I hear the cafe doors open and look up to see Mara and Jolana. Mara sees me first and runs at me full speed crushing me in a hug, and Jolana follows right behind her. I hug them both and get ready to tell them what happened. I give Jolana and Mara the run down of what happened on my birthday and the note my father left for me. I fill them in on what happened today at Aunt Omira's house and what little she told me. After I finish telling them everything we decide to go and look for him

starting in New Jersey where Aunt Omira said he was. Jolana drove here in her car so she drove us to New Jersey. We chose to look in Trenton, New Jersey first in our search for him. We chose Trenton because it's the capital of New Jersey and we only have what Aunt Omira told us to go on for information which is pretty much nothing. We are now in Jolana's car, and she is setting the GPS for Trenton. The drive is going to be long; the GPS tells us we will arrive in three hours, so this is going to be interesting. Jolana started driving an hour ago and is getting tired, and we are all starting to get hungry. We see a gas station just before the highway and decide to stop there for gas and to get some snacks. As soon as we pull into the gas station, I begin to feel a strange sensation forming in my gut, and a sense of dread eats at me. Jolana parks the car, and we get out and enter the gas station. I walk down the aisle of snacks, thinking about what to get, but again I feel a wave of unease wash over me. My body shakes slightly, but I ignore it and continue walking around the gas station. When I get to the Slurpees I look at the flavors thinking of which one to get.

"Hey, Jolana," I say.

"Yes Marli," she replies back.

"Do you and Mara want Slurpees? They have Shaq-a-Licious Sour Pineapple, Coca-Cola Oreo,

Peach Candy Lemonade, Coca-Cola, Cherry, Blue Raspberry, and Mountain Dew,” I say.

“Oh I could go for a Coca-Cola Slurpee,” Mara says. “I’ll go with peach candy lemonade Slurpee,” Jolana says after.

Then I thought for a second when I saw Shaq-a-Licious sour pineapple. That name made me laugh every time I saw it because it made me remember all the times that me and mom would laugh at that name together because of how nasty it sounds.

“I’m going to go with Shaq-a-Licious Sour Lemonade,” I say.

“Alright then let’s get some snacks and get out of here,” Mara says.

We get some snacks and head to the cashier. Waiting in line, I start to feel that strange sensation again in my gut. I look up at the cashier, and I don’t know if something about him is off, or if it’s just his energy. I try to ignore the feeling I have about the cashier, but I can’t help it. Something about him is strange. As we get closer to the register, the feeling of dread is strong, and my uneasiness about the cashier grows as I get closer. I try to ignore the feeling, but nothing works. We check out and leave the gas station. I can’t

get over how weird I felt being in there. I just ignore it and focus on my mission to find my dad, or honestly, at this point, the sperm donor. We start driving, and about another hour into the drive, something is telling me we have to stop. I tell Jolana and Mara, and we decide to stop at a park and take a break. We are sitting on a park bench when I feel the wind call to me. I know it's weird, but it's as if I can understand. I turn to my friends and tell them I appreciate them, but I have to continue on my own. The journey is now mine, all on my own. I hug them goodbye and tell them I love them. They let me walk away reluctantly, but they understand I need to do this without them.

I follow the wind and the energy of the trees; I follow the call of nature. It leads me into the woods and down a path to my father. I can feel it—this is how I meet him. This is where the nature that surrounds me guides me to him. Minutes go by, time is lost, and my thoughts begin to mix in my mind. I continue walking in the forest for what feels like forever. My feet ache, my body is weak, my breath is labored. I can't breathe. I need to sit down. I walk to the tree closest to me and lean against the trunk. I stay there for a few minutes. I feel the wind pick up. I look up at the sky and see that the clouds have darkened. A bolt of lightning jumps from the sky, and I'm scared. I jump

from my spot, and something within me tells me to run, so I do. I follow my instinct and run for what feels like hours, but is only maybe five to ten minutes at most. I'm out of breath when I stop and get my bearings, and I notice that I'm standing in front of a rustic-looking cabin. It calls to me weirdly, something invites me to go in. I'm starting to get really nervous because usually when this happens in horror movies, people die. And do you know who's not ready to die? Me. I'm not ready to die. I hesitate to go inside. I decided to just stand still feeling energy flowing around me. My body starts to tingle, my head feels as heavy as a car. I feel the wind changing and the smell of thunder rushes into my nose. I pass out.

I wake up on an old bed with a wolf skin blanket. "Ew, this stinks," I say. It smells like a wet dog. I look up to see the moon peeking out and notice a leak in the roof. I look everywhere until I see a small pail in the corner. I put it under the leak where the water is coming from. I almost jump out my skin hearing the door creak open.

"Hey, I didn't mean to wake ya," said a man.

CHAPTER FIVE

The storm outside had been relentless for hours, but it was the storm inside the small cabin that consumed Marli now. The air crackled with energy, a blend of tension, confusion, and anger. I stood facing the man I had known only as a stranger, a figure who had appeared out of nowhere to help me, to teach me about my powers. He had been a mysterious ally, offering guidance, but something about him had always seemed too familiar.

"I know you're upset," he said, his voice strained, as if he were trying to keep the storm inside him at bay. "But I need you to listen."

My eyes burned with unshed tears and my fury was strong. I clenched my fists, the surge of power crackling beneath my skin. I didn't want to listen. I didn't want to hear any more lies.

"You're not a stranger," I spat, my voice shaking with emotion. "I know that. I've known it all along, even when I tried to convince myself otherwise. But this... this is too much. You can't just waltz in and start acting like—"

"Like your father?" he finished for me, his eyes darkening with sorrow.

I froze. The words hung between us like a weight neither of us could bear. My heart stuttered in my chest, the realization slowly dawning.

"No." My voice was a whisper, disbelief taking root.
"No, that's not possible."

But he nodded, his gaze never leaving mine. "I am.
Your father."

The world seemed to tilt, the ground beneath my feet suddenly too unstable to trust. I staggered back, trying to make sense of what he had just said. *Your father*. How could he be? My mother had never spoken of him. Not once in her entire life. There had been no pictures, no stories, no mention of his name. He was a ghost in my past, a hole in the narrative of my childhood.

"You're lying," I muttered, shaking my head. "You can't be. My mother never talked about you. She never—"

"I know," he interrupted, stepping forward cautiously, as if afraid I might strike him. "She never did. She wanted to protect you from the truth. From me."

"Protect me?" The words came out in a sharp, incredulous laugh. "From you? All my life, I've wondered why I had no father. Why I was alone. And

now you expect me to believe that you—" I shook my head again, eyes wide with a mix of anger and confusion. "Why didn't you come? Why did you leave me? I had to grow up without you, without any of the answers! And now, you want me to just... accept this?"

"I didn't leave you by choice," he said, his voice filled with a deep, painful regret. "It wasn't that simple. I had to leave. For both of our sakes."

I laughed bitterly, my heart pounding in my chest. "That's the excuse? You had to leave? You think I care about your excuses?"

"No, I don't," he admitted. "I know it doesn't make sense. I know you're angry. You have every right to be. But the truth is, I couldn't protect you if I stayed. I couldn't keep you safe from everything that was after me—after us. Your mother knew. She understood why I had to disappear. But I never wanted you to feel abandoned."

"Then why didn't you come back?" Her voice cracked. "I needed you. I needed answers. Why didn't you come back for me?"

"I couldn't," he said, stepping closer. "I couldn't risk bringing those dangers into your life. I couldn't risk you being taken from me. It was better to stay away."

But I watched you. I kept track of you from a distance. I saw you growing up, I saw the signs of your powers... and I knew you'd need me one day."

My chest tightened, a mix of emotions swirling inside me. Anger. Betrayal. Relief. It was too much to process all at once.

"Why now?" I whispered, my eyes searching his face, desperately looking for the man I could never quite place. "Why are you here now? After all these years?"

He hesitated, as if the weight of his decision was something he could barely shoulder. "Because you're in danger, Marli. The powers you're starting to feel, the things you can do—they're not just a gift. They're a weapon, and there are people who will stop at nothing to control them. To control you."

My breath got caught in my throat. It wasn't the first time I'd sensed something darker lurking just beyond the edges of my abilities, but hearing it spoken aloud made the reality hit with the force of a sledgehammer.

"Is that why you came? To use me?" I asked, her voice small but fierce. "To make me some weapon for your fight?"

"No," he replied, his voice filled with emotion. "I came because I'm your father, Marli. And I want to help you learn how to control your power. But more than that, I want to protect you. From them. From myself, if I have to."

My heart pounded in my chest as the truth began to sink in. This man—my father—was the key to understanding my own powers, to controlling them. I didn't know if I could trust him. I didn't know if I ever would. But in that moment, I realized that I didn't have a choice.

"You'll help me?" I asked, voice trembling. "You'll teach me how to control all this?"

"Yes," he said. "But we don't have much time. The clock is ticking, and there are others who know about you now. About us. We need to move quickly."

I looked at him for a long moment, the storm inside me shifting. It would take time, maybe even years, to rebuild the relationship we had lost, to forgive the absence, the silence, the lies. But maybe, just maybe, we could start again. Not as strangers, but as something more. Something that had the potential to be whole.

"Okay," I said, the word tasting strange on my tongue.
"Okay. Teach me."

My father nodded, a flicker of something like pride passing across his face. "We'll start small. I know you're scared. But you're not alone anymore, Marli. Not ever again."

I closed my eyes, my fists unclenching. For the first time in my life, I felt a strange sense of hope flicker inside myself—a hope that maybe I could finally understand who I am. Not just the girl with strange powers, but the daughter of a man who had never stopped watching over her.

Together, maybe we could face whatever was coming next. And maybe we could begin to heal.

CHAPTER SIX

Being stuck in the cabin for nearly two hours waiting for the rain to pass caused me to grow curious and ask my dad questions, if that's what I should even call him.

“Does Mama know about everything, does she even know you're alive?” I ask after our laughs settle down from my last question. He sighs shakily, seeming like he was hoping I didn't ask that question. After a quiet couple of seconds he replies, “She knows about the powers of course, I was with her for years-” he stops to chuckle, but not a happy one, a more disappointed one.

“When I told her I had to go, she cried in my arms for hours asking where and why she couldn't come, but I couldn't give her a proper answer,” he said with a sad look on his face.

I never understood why Mama never answered my questions about him. I thought it was a little selfish, obviously I didn't say that to anyone, but now that I know what happened I felt selfish for pushing her about him all these years. She didn't answer the questions because she really just didn't know. She

wasn't hiding anything about where he went, she didn't know where he was.

As he looks at me I shake my head and look out the window, not knowing what else to say, but I realize it stopped raining and the sun is coming back up. My smile grew which confused my dad. Jumping up to open the door to show him he started grabbing any necessary items to bring. Walking out the door I realize I should probably check in with my friends so they aren't worried. When I'm about to send the text, my dad speaks up, "There's no service out here, that's why this is one of my favorite places to hide." That makes sense, I think while slowly putting my phone away.

After a couple minutes of walking we came to a stop. There is a circle of logs, targets on some trees and a box full of supplies. My dad interrupted my train of thought, "Are you sure about this?" I look up confused, not knowing if I really am, I mean this power came into my life without any warning. What about my mom, does she know I have this gift? Will I have to go into hiding too?

I feel my body shake at these thoughts. I'm trying to block everything out, but my mind keeps digging further into all these possibilities.

My dad grabs roughly and pulls me into a hug. My dad rubs me and I start coming back into realization of my surroundings. Breathing out harshly one last time I hear things drop around me which causes me to pull away from my dad. The supplies are now out of the box, the box is on the other side of the log and it seems like even the logs aren't in the same place.

“You need to control yourself, your emotions Marli-” my dad pauses.

“What happened?” I whisper not wanting my emotions to take over again.

“I’m sorry Marli, for leaving you and your mother, I know you might be having second thoughts about all this, but no matter what you need me to teach you,” he says.

Any doubt I had was slowly getting put into the back of my head. I stood up straighter and nodded my head confidently, “I’m ready.”

After we finish training my dad brings me to a meadow, and I throw myself on the grass. He had been training me all night with very little breaks, I would definitely be lying if I said I didn’t miss my bed, and my mom, but the training was fun. He asked a lot

of questions about my future plans and mom, it felt like I really did know him all my life.

My dad chuckled lowly, shaking his head in amusement. "Good job kid, hopefully you won't need to use these powers for a while. I have another spot in Pennsylvania we can go to for a while."

My heart stopped and I quickly looked at him confused, "What do you mean go to Pennsylvania, we aren't going back to New York with Ma?" I ask.

"Of course not kid, nobody can know about these powers, and your mom will understand." My dad said these words like he was confused, which confused me even more. He can't just expect me to drop everything in my life that was going on before this to be with him, a stranger. I can't abandon my mom forever.

My mind was telling me to say that, but when I opened my mouth to speak it shut again. I didn't know what to say. "Are you okay, Marli?" my dad asked with worry. "I can't," was the only thing I could whisper.

"That's not fair, you can't expect me to go into hiding like you did, I have a life outside of this." I said with

anger taking over me. Just like before I was blocking everything out, “You expect me to drop everything to go with a stranger and leave my mom just like you did?” The flowers are flowing back and forth and the food and water we brought are now in the air along with the pocket knife my dad had, but I don’t care. I can see my dad’s mouth moving, but I can’t hear what is being said.

“Marli breath, just like we practiced!” my dad yells.

I finally take in his words, breathing in and out. My body is still shaking, but I’m able to calm down a lot.

“I can’t leave mom, I didn’t ask for any of this, I’m sorry.” I say, but it comes out as a whisper. I don’t know what else to say, I don’t want to hurt my dad’s feelings, but I also can’t go with him, it won’t be the right thing to do.

My dad looks at me, “You don’t have to apologize, you did nothing wrong, you’re just a child.” I sigh in relief, happy he’s not mad at me. “So I can go back home, back to normal? But what about the powers, what do I do?” I ask, feeling my emotions rise again.

Dad grabs my hands, “I think I know how to get rid of them, your aunt who lives around here got rid of hers.

I never asked how though. It's about a 15 minute walk from here."

The storm has passed so we immediately leave the cabin and begin the walk. As we slowly walk up the porch steps my dad does a weird knock on the door. We can hear all movement stop inside the house, and quiet footsteps reach the door. My dad knocked the same weird way again. This time the door came flying open.

The lady who, I'm guessing is my aunt, pulled him into a tight hug, "Where the hell have you been, I thought you were dead," she cried. After a couple minutes of silence my dad pulled away, "This is Marli, my daughter and we need help, Tina." I awkwardly wave my hand, but quickly get pulled into a tight hug. "I haven't seen you since you were a baby, you've gotten so big- wait, how old are you-" she looks at my dad, "-is that why you came?" she asks. My dad scratches the back of his head and sighs, "She doesn't want this lifestyle, just like you didn't Tina. This is her only way out."

"Come inside," Aunt Tina says quietly.

Me and my dad sit down at the table in silence, waiting for Aunt Tina. After a few more seconds she

finally walks back in with a medical needle in her hand. All of her movements are slow and her face shows pity, maybe, which worries me because I thought this would be simple.

“This is the little I have left from when I got rid of mine. Since this wasn’t made specifically for you Marli, there are repercussions. If you take this you won’t have your powers, but you also won’t remember anything from when you did have them,” she says slowly, like she needs me to understand and think carefully about my decision.

I don’t want these powers, but if I get rid of them I won’t remember the little time spent with my dad. I make eye contact with my dad and he lets out a sad sigh, “You need to get rid of them Marli, it’s what is best for you. You have a bright future and if you keep them, then your plans will be gone.”

I need my dad, I can’t lose him, again, I just got him back. I slowly shake my head, “No, we can make this work, we can get mom and she can go into hiding with us, or we can act like we don’t have powers and live a normal life-” my dad cuts my rambling off by hugging me. “I love you, Marli, no matter what, and I’m sorry this had to happen to us. I know you won’t

remember this when you wake up, but I will, and I'll forever be with you, Marli."

That was the last thing I heard before everything went black.

I jolted up from my bed breathing heavily, the dream I just had was so weird, but so real. I slowly get up and see a polaroid of me and the man that was in my dream smiling in a meadow.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Analese Hernandez is a Sophomore at Crosby High School. She participated in writing this book during her freshman year. It was an interesting experience for Analese because she was the only Freshman in a class full of upperclassmen. She rose to the occasion though and enjoyed writing this book with her classmates.

Evera Andoni is a Senior at Crosby High School. She is from Waterbury, Connecticut, and has lived there her whole life. She would like to further her education after high school. Her high school and overall life has had its ups and downs, but she is proud to say that writing this book with her classmates was an up. She enjoys writing, so this was definitely something she would like to do again in the future.

Maya Valderrama was a Junior at Crosby High School when she wrote this book with her classmates. She is now in her Senior year of high school. She enjoyed this writing experience and has an exciting story to tell about teamwork and overcoming obstacles as she works on writing her college essays.

Stoke Abutu has always had a passion for writing. He has written several short stories on his own. He was a Junior at Crosby High School during this book writing

process and is currently a Senior. He is very hardworking, often working multiple jobs at once or jobs with late hours. He appreciated this writing outlet.

Vanity McCord has since moved to North Carolina since participating in this writing process. She loves to spend time with her family and her dog.

A Message from



CEO Josh Shelov

When I was in elementary school, I was a creative kid who felt, deep down, that I didn't have a creative place to play. The activities that were open to me were, basically, sports. Sports were where the peers and parents went, after school every day, delivering the kind of validation that only transpires when an entire community mobilizes around an activity.

After a 25-year career making films in Hollywood, I created Written Out Loud to give creative kids the exact same team- and community-oriented validation that young athletes receive. Written Out Loud delivers elite instruction, mentorship, and fellowship - combining Hollywood storytelling techniques with Ivy League-caliber instruction and Silicon Valley-engineered program delivery. Our unique group-storytelling approach is revolutionizing how kids learn to write, transforming even reluctant readers into joyful writers — and, yes, published authors. Not only does Written Out Loud develop kids' storytelling skills, but it also provides them with

a safe and inspiring space to grow their courage, empathy, and self-confidence.

Following our appearance on Good Morning America, Written Out Loud is now partnering with schools, districts, families, homeschools, and organizations nationwide. We've successfully delivered our program as an afterschool program, an in-school ELA partner, and as a summer and spring break day camp, depending on your needs.

"At Written Out Loud," said one of our students, "I'm more myself than anywhere I've ever been." We would be thrilled and honored to provide this same outcome for the children of your community: to create the kind of space that so many creative kids need deep down.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joshua Shelov', with a large, sweeping initial 'J'.

Joshua Shelov
Founder & CEO