

## OPENING CREDITS

It was on Lucas's birthday, when he was least expecting it, that his first love made an appearance inside the home he now shared with his girlfriend, Stephanie.

"Well, open it!" Stephanie said, handing him a gift. Under the wrapping paper was a hardcover coral book with the title spelled out in bright yellow script: *The Compendium of Forgotten Things*. Lucas thumbed it open. The pages held a collection of places that had almost faded away. One story featured a pinball bar in a lost desert town; the next, a miniature museum devoted to antique postcards. The style of the writing was familiar. "What is this?" Lucas asked.

"It's by a new author," Stephanie said. "Ellie Marshall?"

Needles pricked Lucas's palms as his hands flew to the back flap. Ellie grinned at him above her author bio, wearing gold earrings shaped like tiny castles. God, she was beaming. The havoc she'd caused in his life had served her well.

"Like it?"

"Yeah." He tried to sound casual. "Yes. Yeah. Yes." He needed to ground himself. No good would come from revisiting the way Ellie had broken up with him—or the way she hadn't, rather. One moment, he'd rented a roller rink to throw her an 1980s themed birthday party. The next morning, she slipped away. All of her was gone so easily—the citrus and herb smell of her sheets, her unbelievable writing that she read to him with her stomach pressed against her chair, and the scattering of matchboxes she never used because she liked candles conceptually but didn't trust herself around them. As he skimmed the pages, one of the lines stopped him in his tracks.

"A first love is about finding yourself," it read. "A second love is about sharing the self you found with someone new." His frustrated sigh came out too loud.