

THINGS
TO SEE
IN
ARIZONA

MARY VENSEL WHITE



CHAPTER ONE

I feel the gentle pull of the pencil across my eyelid. I can't see much, just a reddish glow against black that goes on and on. Crickets are chirping outside, and Rosanna's tart, warm breath is on my cheek.

"Don't forget—" I say.

"The corners," she finishes. "I know. I'm doing the liquid on top."

"I want them like yours." I peek with my right eye. Rosanna is straddling the chair, her chest against the back. Her eyes are perfect, outlined thick at the edges and tapered to the thinnest wings. She's done her eyebrows how I like them, full and dramatic.

"Tuesday," she says sternly. "Close your eyes."

Before I do, I glimpse the sky through my bedroom window. It's Friday, late June, and the Arizona twilights can go on and on. As much as every ounce of my body screams to get out of this desert, I don't tire of the cotton candy

sunsets. Pink, purple, swipes of orange. But the sky can be bleak too, a wishywashy blue with wispy, half-ass clouds. Either way, I'd like to be someplace where the emptiness of the universe isn't always on display. Give me tall trees blocking the sky, some serious, dense clouds, and—please—snow! Up north in Flagstaff, there is snow basically all winter. Lots of snow.

The liquid eyeliner goes on in two cool swipes.

Rosanna blows on my eyelids. "Wait two minutes," she says. "Want a drink?"

I shake my head. "Take it easy," I tell her.

Even with my eyes closed, I can see hers rolling toward the ceiling. I hear the gurgle of liquid as she swallows.

"Let me see," I say.

She scoots over until I have a view of the mirror over the dresser.

"I'm like a raccoon," I say. "An exotic raccoon."

"That's a good thing?"

“Very good.”

She holds out her phone. On the screen is Jax Pierce, lead singer of Brave Colony and a long-time obsession of my best friend, Rosanna Robles. His hair is as messy as always, stringy like kelp if you ask me. He’s thin, with hip bones sticking out above low-rise skinny jeans, and he moves on stage like he’s been electrocuted. I’ve never understood Rosanna’s attraction. If I were going to crush on anyone in the band, it would be the drummer, Justyc, because he’s shy with awesome red hair and always looks a little bit lost. But I seldom if ever have crushes on people I don’t know. I don’t follow Brave Colony on Twitter, post pouty selfies on their fan page, or do the things Rosanna does. I like their music, though, and I’ll follow my bestie to their shows. I’ll even wear their merch for her.

“What does that caption say?” I ask.

She takes the phone back. “The hour of our discontent,” she reads. “Waiting at the Marquee for our best fans to arrive.” Her fingers circle my wrist, squeezing until it hurts. Her eyes are bugging out. “I can’t believe we’re going!” she says for the tenth time tonight. “Are you ready?”

She hops up and down, her black hair bouncing in glossy waves.

I pull my arm back. "Maybe you'll get to meet him."

"Meet him *again*, you mean."

"Um. You grabbed him once, that gig at the park."

Her eyes grow even bigger. "He said 'Hey' to me first!" She finishes her drink and sets the glass down. "Besides, this is different. Only fans who gave to the crowdfund will be at the concert. There wouldn't be a new album without us."

"True."

"I bet the band will come out after the show." She uses her pinky to dab the hunk of gloss at the corner of her lips.

Somewhere in the house, a door closes.

"Your mom's home." Rosanna looks at my cup, still sitting half-full on the dresser. "Finish that, and I'll rinse the cups in the bathroom."

"You can dump mine," I say. I'm the one driving, and my stomach is turning sour. Rosanna's a fan

of sweet vodka mixes—blood orange, watermelon, Bing cherry. She takes mine and drinks what's left in two long gulps. When she sticks out her tongue, the middle is bright red.

I wad up a nearby shirt and throw it, barely missing as she ducks out of the room. I pick up her lipstick, a dark, purplish brown. The color is too much against my pale skin, so I use a lighter mocha shade. I think about the last time we were getting ready together in this room: two weeks ago, graduation. The royal blue gowns seemed to wash the color right off my face, but Rosanna looked stunning. She could put any color on her eyes, her cheeks, her body, and still look like herself.

The door squeaks open, and her head pops in. "We should go. Your mom's in the kitchen."

"I think she had yoga," I say, "or maybe she went running. Her favorite activities these days. Oh, also organizing to save the unborn babies."

"She's still doing that?"

"Yep." I try to mimic Janis's serious voice. "It's a war, Rosanna, and we must do our part in the battles which occur, literally, daily."

“She does not,” Rosanna says.

I try to picture Mrs. Robles, *her* mom, marching up and down Congress Street with a sign, or jogging in short shorts and a visor like Janis does. Instead, I see her padding around the kitchen in her slippers, ready with a plate of sandwiches or sugar cookies. It seems like a cliché image, but honestly, that’s how I usually see her. Mrs. Robles wears a blouse and skirt for her job but slippers around the house. Sometimes I wish Janis could be more like that, instead of intense, busy, and always exercising.

I reach over and pull some of Rosanna’s tangled hair from her long fishnet shirt. She’s also wearing a pleated, plaid skirt and a red bra that can be seen clearly under the top.

“You look like a deranged private school student,” I tell her.

“And you’re my pet raccoon.” She puts her hands on my shoulders and her forehead against mine. “I can’t believe we’re going!”

I can smell the sharp, linen aroma of the Robles family’s detergent, different from the one we use but equally familiar. Suddenly, a warmth spreads behind my eyes, blocking my view like a

curtain. As I watch, Rosanna's face blurs slightly, and then her features morph. Cheeks bulge, hair springs into curls, and the eyeliner is gone from shiny, brown eyes. It's her younger self, I realize, and I remember an old habit, Rosanna's hand up by her ear, touching her earlobe. When had she stopped doing that? After our first sleepover when we were eight? When we had our ears pierced (her second, my first) in seventh grade? On the first day of first grade, we met at the lunch table when Rosanna unwrapped a still-warm tortilla and shared it. I took the string cheese from my box and put it inside, broke the strange burrito in half and handed one piece back to her. That's us.

As the edges of her face grow hazy, I wait for the sighting to pass. In a flash, the older Rosanna reappears—silky hair with a purple streak behind one ear, the beauty mark made with eyeliner on her cheek. She backs away until I can see her in full focus.

“Did I tell you my brother will be there tonight?” she asks.

I'm still in the aftermath. I have no control over these episodes—sightings, as I call them—and

it's never been a big deal. Sometimes I see people as they were in the past or as they will be in the future. Of course, I *knew* Rosanna as a curly-haired girl, but it can also happen with people I don't know at all. I'll see a grocery clerk as a scrawny six-year-old or a guy at school as the old man he'll be someday. Also, sometimes I can sense when a person is having pain. This also comes like a warmth, a vibration. The pain can be current, an arthritic hip or a sprained shoulder, or something remembered, like a vaccination, a broken arm. I can always tell if it's past or present. I've had these sightings and pain impressions as long as I can remember, and although I don't give them a second thought anymore, I know better than to mention it to anyone. People freak out if you say, "Hey, I just saw what you'll look like when you're eighty," or "Wow, that sciatica is bothering you today, isn't it?"