

# One

**I'VE MADE IT** to most of my appointments with Dr. Rosa Flores. But I missed the last one. I'm here now, sitting in her cozy office. It's in an old brick building with tall windows, and the decor has the feel of an old-fashioned porch. There's a pair of plump overstuffed chairs, the sort you sink into. The colors are green and cream, and the pictures on the walls are vibrant abstracts. I'm studying the flowered curtains at the window. Anything to avoid her watchful gaze.

“Has there been any change, Julie?” she asks.

She wants to know if I’ve been leaving my apartment. Seeing people. And the biggie: have I remembered the accident? I shake my head.

Dr. Rosa nods. “Okay. But you’re here again today. And that’s good. I know it takes a lot of effort.”

As pathetic as that is, it’s true. It takes every scrap of willpower I’ve got to come here. It’s not that I’m afraid to leave my place. Not exactly. I just don’t want to. It doesn’t feel like there’s any point. Nothing will change.

“Are you eating?” she asks.

I glance over and feel the warm concern she radiates. It fills the air around her. She’s older, a small woman with thick black hair pulled into a soft ponytail. I shrug and reply, “Enough.”

“Good. Is there anything at all you’d like to share with me?”

I despise that question. No, there is nothing I’d like to share. Not because I’m especially private, but more because there really is nothing.

When I don’t reply, she asks the next question. “Are you sleeping?”

“Not really,” I mutter. As in I’m still afraid to sleep. Still having the nightmares. Every night I’m chased down dark roads by a faceless man in black. He wields relentless terror.

“Julie?” Dr. Rosa leans in toward me. “I’d like you to consider a new treatment. It’s not a medication. It’s something that will take a strong commitment from you.”

I shoot her a wary look. “I’m not trying the art or yoga classes again.”

“Fine. Because this is something quite different.” She pauses, watching me closely.

“I’d like to prescribe a companion animal for you. A cat perhaps. Or a dog.”

I stare at her. “You want me to get a pet?” I feel something as I say this. It’s a shimmery feeling I haven’t had for so long, it takes me by surprise. It might be actual interest. But the shimmer swiftly dies. “My building doesn’t allow pets.”

Dr. Rosa raises her brows. “That may be their general rule. But by law, they have to allow an emotional-support animal.”

“They do?” The shimmer of interest is back. “Are you sure?”

She grins. “They do if the animal is prescribed by a doctor. Like me.”

I feel something unfamiliar happening to my face.

“Julie,” she says, laughing. “You’re smiling!”

It’s true. But the smile fades as I resume studying the curtains. “I don’t know. I’ve

never had a pet of my own. What if I can’t look after it?”

“But what if you can?” she asks. She quietly waits while I absorb that. Eventually she says, “Listen, Julie. I don’t want you to make a decision yet. All I’m asking is that you think about it.”

I nod. “Okay. I can do that.” I don’t remind her that even thinking is hard sometimes. But this? At least I *want* to think about this. That’s saying something.

And I do think about it. On the drive home from Dr. Rosa’s office it suddenly seems there are people walking dogs everywhere. There’s a large black one with silky, wavy fur. It almost floats alongside its owner. There’s a bulldog, mostly white, built low to the ground. Its thick legs are bowed, and its broad wrinkled face grins as it lumbers along the sidewalk. At a traffic light I look up and notice a calico cat watching from an apartment window.