

Shattered Eye

SHATTERED EYE

Jolijn Baas

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Illustrations: Jolijn Baas

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Things are rarely as they seem.
Happiness can feel like it will last forever.
More often than not, it doesn't.
Sorrow, too, can feel like it will last forever.
More often than not, that doesn't either.

ONE

Just ten more minutes, I tell myself. Ten more minutes and I'll be out of here.

It's not that I want to leave because I don't like college, I love it, but this professor is going on about some play that just doesn't interest me all that much, and it's hard to stay focused.

I started drama school about a year ago after trying and failing at economics, and looking back, I don't even know why I thought that would be for me. Numbers have never been my thing and I'm not planning on starting my own business one day, either.

Drama, however, is most definitely my thing.

Everyone who knows me beyond my favourite colours and foods knows that I love it, acting. I have ever since I played Danny Zuko in *Grease* in secondary school. For a year it was all I could talk about, even after it ended, and I was thrilled when my mum and dad told me two years ago that they had saved up enough money for me to go to drama school in London. To say that I was over the moon would be an understatement, and I'm planning on paying them back every penny someday.

It was scary, leaving Manchester to move to London. *London*. It seemed like such a magical place growing up, and now I live there. It's crazy. I felt guilty at first, leaving my mum after having helped her with my siblings for so many years, but she assured me that chasing my dreams

was most important. Besides, she has my step dad now, so it's not like I abandoned her completely.

He's cool, my step dad. He's my second, actually, after Stephen, my father—I refuse to call him my dad—left us. To be frank, if anyone is guilty of abandonment, it's him. I was just two years old when he packed his bags and left me and my mum to our own devices, and I haven't really been in touch with him since. I've spoken to him, what, three times? If you'd ask me, three encounters in eighteen years is not enough to create some type of father-son bond. Not nearly.

My mum married the man I do call my dad, Dex, a couple of years later. I eventually took on his last name, officially making my father just a combination of letters on my birth certificate.

It wasn't easy for me when my mum divorced my dad, but he's never been out of my life, and now there's Tom, who I like quite a lot, so it's fine. I think that maybe it's harder for my oldest brother and sister, because even though I see Dex as my father, he is theirs biologically, and it's different. The youngest kids, however, have no idea of any of this, and I figure that's a good thing. They'll learn how complicated our sibling bonds are when they're older, but to them it's most likely all the same.

Probably even harder than leaving my family behind, is being without my friends. Most of my mates back in Manchester I've known all my life, and it's just not the same with anybody else. Well, maybe that's not entirely true. I have a friend here, a very good one, actually. We met the first day of college because we were seated next to each other, and both being new in the city and all, we just kind of stuck together. I'm just lucky that he happens to be nice, too.

His name is Odin, and he looks nothing like me. At all. It's not just that he has a more mysterious kind of look, with his black hair, olive skin and dark eyes; it's more in the ways we dress. I like to wear sporty, casual clothes and beanies, while he is more about the boutique kind of style—lots of dark coloured shirts and leather. Shopping for shoes together is the worst, because try finding a decent store that sells both simple trainers and lace up boots.

It's nice that we're kind of in the same situation. Odin comes from Sheffield, which isn't that far from Manchester, as opposed to London, and he's only one year older than me. Why Odin chose to go to drama school isn't entirely clear to me though, because he spends ninety percent of his spare time working on his art.

He rents an apartment in the centre of the city—just like me—and he somehow got his landlord to let him spray paint on his walls, just as long as he whitens them when he moves out. The first time we hung out there together, I was blown away by the scenery. I'd seen some of the drawings that Odin does in his notebooks at school, but the art on his walls was something different. Sometimes when I go there, Odin has to take the plastic sheets off of his furniture before we can sit down anywhere, and I wonder what it's like, living like that. The nice thing is though, that whenever Odin is tired of a painting or he runs out of walls, he just paints part of one white and starts from scratch.

I'd say my apartment is pretty boring compared to his. There are no intriguing self-made paintings on my walls. Just one poster of my favourite soccer player on my bathroom door. I don't keep many photographs, either. Just some of my parents and siblings. I figure my furniture is kind of cool, though. Nothing matches, because I got everything from different stores, but to me that's what

makes the place. There's nothing too bright coloured, either; mostly a soft red and blue, that kind of colours.

I didn't think I'd care, but I like how it's turned out. It's been almost one and a half years since I moved in there now, and it really feels like my place. When I first moved to London, I thought my mum's house in Manchester would stay my home, but now I actually mean it when I say that I'm going home and I'm talking about my apartment. I think that's quite an accomplishment for a twenty-year-old in a strange city.

Well, it's not that strange anymore, of course, but still.

"Odin," I whisper as I lean to my side. "What are you doing after class, mate?"

"Not now, Sam, I'm listening," Odin whispers back, and *oh right*. I should be paying attention.

I squint my eyes at the words scribbled out on the whiteboard in red marker, but I can't really make anything out, so instead, I shift a little closer to Odin and start copying his notes.

"Mr. Collins," the professor suddenly calls out, and I straighten myself, trying my hardest to make it seem like I wasn't just zoned out for approximately twenty minutes.

"Sir?" I reply.

I've never really liked this teacher, Mr. Lehane. Not necessarily because of how he teaches, but because he seems to have a personal vendetta against me, although I can't remember what I ever did to make him dislike me. If he's picking students for presentations; he picks me. Whenever there's a monologue to be read out; he picks me. I'm still hoping that Lehane will turn out to be like Professor Snape; seemingly mean, but actually trying to help me do better. Although I doubt I will end up saving the world from some dark lord's evil powers.

"Could you repeat what I just said, Mr. Collins?"

See, it's in the way he says it, *Mister Collins*, like my name somehow disgusts yet amuses him at the same time.

I clear my throat, shifting back to the middle of my seat. "I'm afraid I can't, sir," I say as politely as possible.

Lehane leans forward on his desk as he stands behind it, looking up to where I'm sat in the second row from the back. He starts a smile that halfway turns into a frown. "I guess I'll have to repeat it just for you, then. Wouldn't want you to miss our next assignment, now, would we?" His tone is sarcastic, and I look for Odin's eyes from the corners of my own. "Oh, I'm sure Mr. Marsden can't help you," Lehane says. "Most likely too busy doodling, isn't he?" He fixes his gaze on Odin shortly, and I swear he dislikes him too, simply because he's my friend. The teacher's eyes drop as he starts to pace back and forth at the front of the class room, his hands in the pockets of his trousers.

"In short, Mr. Collins," he says, "I expect you all to adapt a book into a play. I'll pick the three best ones and those will be performed at the end of the year."

I nod and swallow, thinking I could do that if only I knew what book to use. With one swift motion Odin raises his hand.

"Yes, Mr. Marsden," Lehane sighs.

"Are we allowed to use comic books?" Odin asks, and of course he does. Comic books are what got him interested in drawing and painting in the first place.

Lehane seems to think about that for a second, and eventually shrugs. "I don't see why not," he says. "Just know that if it's already been made into a film, I will be extra strict. That goes for all types of books, I may add."

Well, there goes *Romeo and Juliet*.

Odin doesn't seem to be afraid of the challenge though, because he nods enthusiastically as he starts writing down

ideas. I lean to my side again to see what he's got so far, and frown.

"How are you going to turn *Batman* into a play?" I whisper.

"Mr. Collins!" Lehane shouts as he slams the palm of his hand on his wooden desk, clearly tired of me.

I am saved by the bell as it rings to announce the end of the class, and I don't bother to reply. Instead, I start wringing my note- and unopened textbook into my backpack.

"You really should pay more attention, Sam," Odin says as he closes his own. "It's a tough class, and I think you're really getting on his last nerve."

"Yeah yeah," I say, shrugging it off. "So, as I was trying to ask you, what are you doing when we get out of this dreadful building?"

"It's not dreadful." Odin shakes his head at me, and I roll my eyes. "But I have to work at the pub. It's Thursday, you know?"

I mentally smack myself against the head, because, yeah, I should be able to remember that. Odin has been working the same days ever since he moved here—sometimes switching shifts to make time to study for his exams—so it really shouldn't be that hard. Just as I open my mouth to apologise for forgetting for probably the thirtieth time—if not more—someone grabs my arm. I turn to see who it is and find Lehane at me side, towering over me.

"Sir," I say again.

"I would like to remind you once more," he says as he drops his hand, "That I am not here for your entertainment, nor as decoration. If on Monday you can't tell me what book you're going to use for your play, there will be consequences, young man."

That's even worse than 'Mr. Collins', 'young man'. I sigh.
“Okay, sir.”

“Understood?” the middle-aged professor spits in my face.

“Understood.”

Lehane nods, and I take it as my get out of jail free card, already swinging my backpack over my shoulder and making my way towards the door.

TWO

It's raining. Autumn has barely begun and it's raining and it's cold. So much for global warming.

I wave my hand at Odin as he disappears in the shower of raindrops, and then pull my beanie a little lower on my head, making sure it covers my ears properly. I pull the collar of my jacket up higher around my neck and start to move through the cold wetness, trying to come up with a game plan.

I need a book, and I need it before Monday. Considering I'm not planning on spending my weekend wading through shelves and I don't own any books except *Cooking For Dummies*, I think I should go to a library and that I should go today.

It isn't until I've found the nearest one on the city map at a bus stop that I realise that I don't own a library card. I consider buying one, but since it's highly unlikely that I'll use it more often than this once, I drop that plan and start to form plan B.

And that is... a bookshop. Where can I find a bookshop?

I press my back against the glass of the shelter, shielding myself from the rain that's blowing in. After wiping my hands dry on the bit of jeans that is covered by my jacket, I take my phone out of my pocket and open Google.

The big, commercial bookshops aren't going to work, I decide. I've visited two, but found nothing that could help

me. Literature just isn't what it used to be anymore. Not that I would know, I haven't read a book in years. Maybe that's the problem; I don't have the slightest clue what books are on the market these days, so I have no idea what I'm looking for, either.

Just as I'm making my way home, shivering at the cold touch of the rain against my cheeks, I stumble upon a small, cosy looking bookshop in the alley I cross to school every day. Apparently it's called Shelves. Simple, but effective. How could I not have noticed this place before? It's exactly how I imagine a bookshop should be; not wide and clean with books laid out on tables, but the aisles almost too small for two people to pass, and the books standing side by side on shelves, alphabetised by authors rather than organised by selling numbers.

A bell rings as I open and close the door, and the place smells surprisingly nice. It shouldn't be *that* surprising, because it fits the way the store looks, but after the two modern ones I just visited, it is. I can't describe the smell—perhaps it's a mixture of old books and candles. The light in the shop is just right, and I look around for a bit, wondering where to start. I spot a couple in the corner who are much more focused on each other than the books, and I pull a face before turning in the aisle on my left.

I browse the crime section for a while, thinking that might be interesting, but I realise that performing a forensic investigation on stage is going to be hard, and move on. The fantasy section doesn't offer many answers either. I'm staring at the romantic novels when I let out a loud sigh.

“Looking for anything in particular?” a voice asks from behind me.

I turn around to find a black haired girl looking at me, books stacked in her arm and blue eyes twinkling as she

smiles. She's a bit shorter than me, and her knitted sweater hangs loosely around her torso, thin wrists peeking out from under her cuffed sleeves. I can't help but look down at her skin-tight black jeans, and I clear my throat before I smile back.

"To be honest with you, I don't have the slightest idea what I'm looking for," I say, and the girl puts the books down on the table behind her.

Casually leaning her side against the bookcase with her arms crossed over her chest, she says, "You must have a reason to be here, though. Come on, let me help you. What do you need?"

Unless she's a really good actress, I don't think she's being the typical pushy salesperson, but she actually wants to help me, and I like it. I also like that her cheeks show dimples when she smiles.

"Yeah, well," I say. "I have to adapt a book into a play, for school. So I guess I'm looking for a book. To adapt into a play."

Really...?

"I see," the girl says. She nods—still smiling—and she's pretty much radiant in the dim light of the store. "Wouldn't it be easier to use a book that you've already read? So you don't have to get to know the story first, I mean."

"That would be easier," I agree as I mimic the girl's stance, "But that would require me having read one, and I don't think *Harry Potter* is going to do the job."

The girl laughs at that, and it's a light happy laugh, just like how she speaks. "Not a big reader, then?" she asks, and I shake my head shyly.

"Not really, no." I admit.

She nods again, and as she turns her slim body to lean her back against the bookcase now, her arms drop to her

sides and the name tag on her chest becomes visible. Apparently her name is Amy.

Amy.

I let it run through my mind a couple of times, as if trying to see if it fits her—which it does—but also to memorise it, and I'm not entirely sure why.

"That's a shame," Amy says as she grins, dimples on full display. "What kind of book should it be?"

"Could be anything. My teacher did say that he'd be extra strict on students who pick one that's already been made into a picture, though."

"Ah, so no Shakespeare, then."

I raise my eyebrows at that, but Amy doesn't seem to notice the slight movement.

"What's your opinion on Greek tragedies?" she asks instead, the words coming out of her mouth like rain on a summer's day; soft and warm.

I shrug. "Don't really have one."

"Okay, wait here," Amy says before she walks away and turns the corner, out of my sight.

This is awkward, I think to myself. *This is so awkward*. Couldn't I just have looked online for a book, so that I didn't have to stand here in front of this fairly attractive bird and make it blatantly obvious that I have no clue whatsoever what I'm doing? The only consolation is that I know that I look quite good with my brown fringe peeking out from under my beanie that is just the right shade of red to make my grey eyes light up.

Amy's face is still all smiles and dimples when she returns with a book in her small hands. It seems to be old and it's not too big, and I don't think I've ever seen it before.

"So," Amy says as she leisurely flicks through the pages without really looking at the text. "It's part of one of the

most tragic of all Greek tragedies, if you ask me, but interesting nonetheless. Ready?"

I nod breathlessly and just blink occasionally as I listen.

"Okay, there's this woman, and her husband is away to fight the battle of Troy—you probably saw the movie. Anyway, while he's away, she starts this affair with her husband's cousin, yeah? But when her husband returns, she and her new lover decide to kill him, which doesn't fall too well with their son, obviously. Oh, that's Orestes, by the way, hence the title, *The Oresteia*. Orestes kills both his mother and her boyfriend with a little help from his sister, which the Erinyes, whose duty it is to punish him for this act, haunt him for. Eventually Athena—you know, the goddess—stops them from killing him and sets up a proper court hearing and everything, and that's basically where our legal system was founded. Interesting, isn't it?"

I am at a total loss for words. Just twenty minutes ago I was wandering the streets of London, drowning in self-pity as the raindrops seeped through my clothes because I was sure I'm a complete failure since I seem to be clueless, and now I'm standing in front of this strange girl who just confirmed that I am.

"That is quite interesting, yes." I just manage to get the words out through my dry throat. I feel stupid, because I don't have a smart answer about said legal system, or anything that Amy just mentioned. And is it bad that I didn't know that Athena is a goddess?

"You can just tell me if it's not your cup of tea," Amy says, blissfully unaware of my embarrassment, "But I think it's worth a look."

She holds out the book, and I accept it with a slightly shaking hand. I'm not sure what my cup of tea is, to be honest, so I might as well just give it a try. Family

members killing each other off. Sounds entertaining enough.

"I could give you my number, in case you have any questions," Amy says out of the blue, and I freeze. She seems to do the same as she realises what she just said, panic rising on her face and flushing her cheeks red against her pale skin. "Unless you think that's weird, of course," she adds quickly. "I mean, you could just come back here, since that's basically what I'm being paid for. Answering questions, I mean. About books."

I allow myself to breathe again as I realise that I'm not the only one here who's embarrassed. I watch Amy as she just looks at the floor, kicking her beige Converse shoes against the dark carpet as she waits for my reply.

"Do you always talk this much to costumers, Amy?" I ask, and I force myself to smirk to make this situation—whatever it is—a little less awkward.

Amy looks up quickly and shakes her head, her cheeks still flushed. "No, I— Wait, you know my name?" The panic has reached her eyes now too, and they widen in shock.

"Unless you stole that name tag, I suppose I do," I clarify pointing to the little plastic sign on her chest.

"Oh, right."

"But yes," I hear myself say before I've taken the time to properly think this over. "Your phone number might come in handy sometime. If I have more questions. About books."

Oh God, oh God, oh God.

I'm not exactly new to finding a girl attractive, but I've never really flirted with one until now, if that's what this is. Glances from across the room, sure, but it's never gotten to the point where we exchanged phone numbers. I usually just let girls take initiative. There's this girl I used to like in secondary school, called Emily, and we used to hang out

quite a lot, but that was it. I had just assumed that she didn't like me like that, and when she hinted with a hopeful look that that might not have been the case, I didn't have the guts to do anything about it. There. That's how Sam Collins handles that kind of situation—or I basically don't handle them at all, because that way I can't get rejected and hurt. I might act tough and throw around some slang whenever I can—especially around Odin—but the truth is that I am quite shy and get called cute way too often. And I still giggle at the age of twenty. So, me accepting this strange yet attractive girl's phone number is in fact quite the accomplishment, thank you very much.

“Do you, um,” Amy says as she clumsily runs her hand through her long hair, and stops to clear her throat. “Should I write it down, or put it in your phone? I don't know what you want.”

What I want. That's an interesting point, actually. What do I want?

I think about the question at hand on my way home, but the answer doesn't come to mind. As I'm walking behind an old couple who leave no space on the sidewalk for me to pass, all I want is to be someplace warm and dry. That would be a very short term answer though, and I'm trying to figure out what I want long term. It's strange, because I don't think long term. Not even my decision to go to drama school was one where I took my future into consideration, not really. Acting is just something I like to do, and I have the opportunity to do it in The Big City, so why not?

What's even stranger, is that as I turn my key to open my front door, I realise that I'm wondering what I want from Amy—and even more, what Amy wants from me. Were her intentions just friendly and helpful, or was there something else behind her actions as she scribbled down the digits of her phone number?

I don't know, and I decide that I don't care. It was just a strange encounter with a person who was very eager to help me, and who's just really good at her job. That's it. Nothing more.

THREE

Three days later, I unwillingly realise that I might have to re-evaluate that decision. I broke my promise to myself to not pull up Amy's number until at least four days after we met the same night I made it. After I got home and neatly placed my just-purchased copy of *The Oresteia* on my coffee table, I curled up on my couch with a plate of reheated pasta, only to find that I wasn't paying any attention to whatever was on the telly. Halfway down what I realised was a talk show, I figured out why I was so distracted.

Amy.

We had met maybe an hour before that, and she had already taken over my mind. I didn't know what it was about her that kept occupying my thoughts, but it must have been something.

That just isn't like me. I've only ever had one serious girlfriend, and even before I figured out that the reason why I didn't feel like being with her, cuddling her, or sleeping with her every second of every day like all my friends who had girlfriends did, was that I wasn't in love with her, I had never spent even as much as five minutes staring at a TV screen thinking about her.

So it's unnatural to me, and I told myself that it would pass soon and that I'd forget about the very existence of Amy within hours.

Since the woman on the television couldn't keep my interest for longer than two minutes and neither could anything else that was showing, I decided to start reading my book.

I hadn't even made it past the first killing when I sighed, threw the book aside and grabbed my phone. There just wasn't any use in denying that I wanted to talk to Amy, and I felt as though my mind would stay a resemblance of pudding until I did. My thumbs hovered over the touchscreen for approximately five minutes—okay, ten—until I typed out three words;

Me: Hi, it's Sam.

Short, to the point, and the beginning of a conversation that still hasn't ended three days later.

We haven't talked about the book once, unless you count Amy's first message back in which she asked if I had any questions about *The Oresteia*. I don't have any questions about the book, because I haven't read it yet, and I have far more interesting things on my mind. I do have a lot of questions about Amy though, and fortunately she's been keen to answer all of those that I've been brave enough to ask.

So far I've found out that Amy isn't an original Londoner either, and that she is indeed younger than me. She is eighteen years old and moved out of Kidsgrove about seven months ago without a plan apart from her staying place, which was at first the couch of a relative. It took her three weeks to land the job at the bookshop and to find an apartment that she could afford. It turns out she doesn't live too far from me, just a couple of streets away. I'm not sure if that's a comforting thought or if it makes me want to run back to Manchester as fast as I can.

There is something about Amy that intrigues and attracts me, but she also scares me. Not that there's anything scary about Amy—she is one of the nicest people I've ever had the pleasure to meet—but it's the way she makes me feel that scares me.

I like her, there's no doubt about that, but even though I cheered a little 'yay' when I read that she is single, I don't know if there's any use in hoping that she might like me back.

See, this is why Amy scares me. I wish that I was one of those people who could talk to someone for ages without having to know what the other person wants from them. You know, casual contact. Usually I walk among those people, but that's only because I haven't liked anyone in forever.

But I do like Amy, and it's making me paranoid. Sometimes we text for hours without me reading much into it, just enjoying the conversation, and then it all changes with one sentence, a word or even a single letter. Amy has this habit of ending random messages with random X's. I secretly hope that it actually isn't a habit, but something she does on purpose to get a point across. What Amy probably doesn't know, is that after receiving one of those X's, I spend minutes trying to decide whether I should send one back, or even up the ante and send two. It's needless to say that so far I've sent none.

Amy's address isn't all I've learned about her, though. She applied for the job at the bookshop because she in fact loves to read, and has done so ever since she could tell letters apart and form words with them. A perk of working there—or at least it's a perk from Amy's point of view—is that she can read books whenever there aren't many costumers around, and she sometimes even gets to take new novels home to read to be able to give good advice.