



Essential
Maps ^{for} the
Lost

DEB CALETTI

National Book Award Finalist

for *Honey, Baby, Sweetheart*

This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Other names, characters, places, and events are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or places or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.



SIMON PULSE

An imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division

1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10020

First Simon Pulse hardcover edition April 2016

Text copyright © 2016 by Deb Caletti

Jacket photograph copyright © 2016 by Cultura/Masterfile

All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

SIMON PULSE and colophon are registered trademarks of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases,
please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales at 1-866-506-1949
or business@simonandschuster.com.

The Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau can bring authors to your live event.

For more information or to book an event contact the Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau
at 1-866-248-3049 or visit our website at www.simonspeakers.com.

Jacket designed by Jessica Handelman

Interior designed by Steve Scott

The text of this book was set in Adobe Caslon Pro.

Manufactured in the United States of America

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

This book has been cataloged with the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-4814-1516-3 (hc)

ISBN 978-1-4814-1519-4 (eBook)

Come now, children. . . . You must tell me
all about your adventure. All, all, all about it.
What you thought and what you said, and
how you managed to carry off the whole,
crazy caper.

—E. L. Konigsburg,
From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler

You got a fast car
I want a ticket to anywhere
Maybe we make a deal
Maybe together we can get somewhere. . . .

—Tracy Chapman,
“Fast Car”

Chapter One

Here's the biggest truth right up front: The way Mads and Billy Youngwolf Floyd met was horrible, hideous. Anyone will agree. You will, too. You'll think it's awful. And then maybe beautiful, which is precisely the point. When the story gets sad and terrible, when there are too many mistakes to count, hang on for the beautiful parts. Wait for them. Have some faith they'll arrive. This is also precisely the point: the hanging on. The waiting, the faith.

Now.

This story starts the same way every morning does, during the spring when Mads meets Billy Youngwolf Floyd. She gets into her swimsuit. She rolls her towel into her bag, sneaks downstairs, careful not to wake up Aunt Claire or Uncle Thomas or Harrison. She edges out the front door, making sure Jinx, their cat, doesn't slip past her on the way out. She starts up Thomas's old truck and heads to the reedy bank of the park by Lake Union.

It is early. So early, only weary insomniacs and people catching airplanes are up. Mads was on the swim team at Apple Valley High; for four years they had practice in the steamy old community pool from five thirty to six thirty a.m., and so this is the routine her body still follows. She loved that hour—it had the peace only habits and rituals can give. There was the snap of goggles and the clean burn of chlorine in the air and toes bent over the edge before the plunge. But now the steamy old community pool is gone from her life for good, and so are all the disciplines that keep you from thinking too much. Swim team, orchestra, AP calculus study group—every one of them is finished since she’s graduated, a quarter early, too. Her poor cello seems like the high school boyfriend she was supposed to outgrow but who she still kind of likes.

Look. Here she is, already at the end of the dock, trying to get her courage up. The waters of the lake are much colder than the community pool. The spring Seattle morning is all hues of gray. The sky needs to figure out whether it’s in the mood to turn blue or not, like some people Mads knows who will remain nameless. It smells good by the water, that deep kind of murky, and she inhales a few delicious hits of *beneath*.

A row of ducks paddle by. “Good morning, ladies,” she says to them. They appear to have serious business. She waits for them to pass because she’s a nice person. Then she kneels on the dock, tests the water with her hand. Brr. The waves are choppy and industrious, but not too crazy to swim in. In spite of the gray and the chop, the water is inviting. But it’s keeping secrets, for sure.

ESSENTIAL MAPS FOR THE LOST

She dives in.

The cold takes her breath away. Now comes the payoff, though. Not the dramatic rush of water past her head and body, not the shock of immersion, but the thing she swims for, the thing that arrives after the drama and the shock—the calm. The blissful burble of being underwater, being *away*, the moment of otherworldly quiet just before her head rises for air, before the slash of her own strong arms and scissoring legs. Under there, the needs of other people do not press, and the sorrow that's been her most constant companion floats away. Back home, in the water of the community pool, even on the days Coach King's whistle shrieked and her friends shouted above the surface, her own liquid element was like a sweet dream. She could forget those college applications she'd filled out but never sent, and the face of her mother, Catherine Murray, on all those real estate signs, and, too, the way her mother always wept after Mads's father would call from Amsterdam, or else, became furious enough to hide from, like the time she took the kitchen scissors to the family photographs. Swimming is sort of like running away, and Madison Murray has wanted to run away since the first real chance she had, when she was three and got lost on purpose in the Wenatchee Safeway.

And here, in a lake in Seattle, five hours from home, where there is only a kayaker off in the distance and a seaplane taking off against the sky, she is exquisitely elsewhere. She is a fish; she is a mermaid. She lives in a coral castle and wears a seaweed crown. The ticking clock bringing that awful deadline is gone,

gone, carried off on a ripple. Somewhere up there is Harrison's spying, and her own deep sadness, and her profound desire to kidnap baby Ivy. Down here is some centered soul-version of the real her, the one she's not in real life.

Of course, Madison Murray won't feel the same way about any of it, even the water—especially the water—after that day. In some ways, it's a shame. It's a shame, the way you always have to lose stuff to get other stuff.

She swims out until she is parallel with the tall, abandoned smokestacks of Gas Works Park at the other end of the lake. She treads water for a while, floats around on her back and watches the sky, nothing she could ever do when Coach King paced poolside in his blue tracksuit. She has plenty of time. She's in no real hurry. She has come to Seattle to take Otto Hermann's real estate licensing course at the community college, which doesn't start until nine. It goes until noon, and then comes babysitting for the Bellaroses until seven. Back home, she's missing all the end-of-high-school rituals that feel far from her life: the prom and the parties and the ordering of caps and gowns, the group of parents taking photos in her friend Sarah's backyard. But she's not missing other things. She's not missing hauling those open house signs out of the back of her mother's Subaru, setting them up on street corners. Or, even worse: *I can't believe you're going to leave me home alone all weekend. What am I going to do by myself? Fine. Just go. Or You better not have some fabulous time in Seattle and not come back like your father.* The flip side of too much guilt is murderous rage, who knew?

ESSENTIAL MAPS FOR THE LOST

She's having fun out here. Houseboats line the perimeter of this lake, and she sees them upside down. They're cheerful and shingled and they rock and sway. There's also a huge upside-down bridge, with tiny upside-down cars. She flips to her stomach. A woman drinks from a cup while standing at the end of a dock as a dog swims laps in front of her. For a second, Madison wishes she were that woman, or maybe even that dog. He looks like he's having the time of his life.

Okay, that's it. She's had enough. She decides to head back. Pancakes sound good. Swimming makes her so hungry.

Now. Think of this—what if she'd stayed out there just a few minutes more? Or what if she'd gone in just a bit sooner? It can make you believe in the Big Guy Upstairs, even if he seems coldhearted a good lot of the time.

She kicks hard, strokes with a power that would've made Coach King cross his arms and smile. She slows when she nears the bank. It's still deep there, but she begins to feel the slip of reeds by her legs. Mads is used to that feeling, the surprising slide of a slick cordy something past her calves, the quick what-was-that of plant or fish. It isn't anything that makes her uneasy. But after this day, even a long time later, *years*, whenever she thinks of this moment, she will shiver.

She ducks her head again. Her eyes are closed. It's best that way near the shore. Sometimes it's safer not to see.

She feels—well, it isn't a thud exactly, more of a bump, a wrong bump. She knows that—the wrongness—straight off. Her head has knocked against something, something that

gives and then knocks again, and what comes to mind, oddly enough, is a life raft. A tight, inflated life raft. Is she at the dock already? Is this a float, or a buoy? She has an irrational image—that dog from the dock. She and he are colliding. This is his thick, giving side.

But she knows it isn't a float or a buoy. Certainly, it isn't that dog. Nothing she says to herself is true, of course. You always know when you're lying to yourself. Already she can feel the hair twined around her fingers.

Madison rises to the surface, opens her eyes, and sees her. She is so white she almost glows, and her face is vacant and still as the moon in a night sky, and when Mads shouts and flails, she drags the woman's head under. It feels awful to do that, and so sorry, the details are terrible, but it's the truth of this story. Mads's fingers are caught in the woman's hair, and her face dunks and dunks again until Mads untangles them.

A different person, not Madison but Madison, is making sense of this. She is crying out and flailing, but her brave and functioning self (*who is she?* Mads wonders) is putting the pieces together: the lake, the bridge, despair. Mads's terrified self tries to get away from this horrible, sickening body, while her strong self, hidden before now, has seen a woman. An actual human being. This is the self that understands things about the water—the way it can swallow you, keep you concealed, maybe forever.

This rational one, she is the person who reaches under the woman's arms and grasps her shoulders, while the other

ESSENTIAL MAPS FOR THE LOST

Madison grimaces and pretends not to feel the cold flesh. Mads is now the lifeguard she was from age fourteen on, at the Apple Valley Estates neighborhood pool. She strokes and tows, strokes and tows that body, the way she never had to in the sparkling cement crater filled with shrieking toddlers in water wings and teenagers showing off.

The woman needs help, the terrified Madison thinks, while the other Madison knows this: She is beyond help. Mads hears a strong, clear voice. She realizes it's coming from inside her: *Bring this woman to shore. Bring her and bring yourself to shore.*

She will. She has to, because the woman, the body, will disappear if they don't make this horrifying swim together.

Madison kicks past the waves with her strong legs. The woman's own legs float and bob against her. Soon the two of them are near the bank, where Mads can stand. There are rocks underfoot; slimy, slippery rocks, and Mads is out of breath. The reeds are waist high, and the body skirts along their surface like a sled on ice. The woman has gotten so, so much heavier now. Mads sees that her body is bruised, splotchy, banged-up purple. She faces the woman's eyes, which she's been avoiding. They stare up toward the clouds as if they can look past them. Whatever has brought the woman to this morning's fate—it disgusts Mads. The woman herself does. Mads is angry with her, for causing this. But Mads's heart is sick and heavy with grief, too.

She hauls the top half of the body onto the bank, as far as she can.

And then she screams.

She screams and screams, the way you do in bad dreams, the way she always feared she might have to someday for a different reason, a desperate-mother reason.

Things happen fast after that. Suddenly, there is a man wearing a tie, and a young woman in jogging shorts, and then the spinning lights of a police car, and then an ambulance. A heavy blanket gets tossed onto her shoulders, and in spite of the sun now showing through the clouds, she needs that blanket, because she is freezing. Her own body is doing tricks—shaking out of control, her knee a strange entity that’s clacking up and down like drumsticks on a cymbal.

“Maddie! Mads!” It’s Aunt Claire, running to where Mads sits on the ground. Somewhere in there Mads called Claire, but she barely remembers that. It feels like she has been there for a week and for a second. There’s the *thwack thwack thwack* of a helicopter overhead, announcing tragedy.

Two men carry a stretcher. The body is on it, covered in a deep-green plastic. There’s the *slam-slam* of doors.

That’s it, Madison thinks. This nightmare, my relationship with that woman, is over.

Of course, she is wrong. She is so wrong. Because traumatic events like this, acts like *that*, spread far and go deep. The water soaks delicate layers; the waves crash and crash again. So many people will break and change and stay changed.

Awful, yes?

Yes.

ESSENTIAL MAPS FOR THE LOST

But don't misunderstand. While, true, this is a story about the horrible things people do (the way hurt people hurt people, if you want to get self-helpy about it), it is more importantly about what happens next.

This is what happens next as she rises from that grass with Claire's arm around her: Madison sees that dog. He is back up on the dock now. He shakes himself off on the woman with the coffee cup, who is watching all the commotion. He sits right down, as if hoping for a treat.

See? Life goes forward. More, much more, will happen after this. Things involving maps and books and true love and tragedy, tragedy like you wouldn't believe. But fine things, too. The best ones.

Even if it might not seem so at the time, even if there is something as horrible as a body and police and cold, life has some beautiful surprises up its sleeve, and don't you forget it.

Chapter Two

Sometimes, Billy Youngwolf Floyd plays real life like it's the video game *Night Worlds*. For example, right then as he's leaving to go to work, Gran gives him a Gaze Attack, which can curse, charm, or even kill. His options? He can avert his eyes from the creature's face, watch her shadow, or track her in a reflective surface. The glass of the coffee table works. It's better than meeting Gran's breaking-and-entering eyes, which are searching around, rifling through his head, hunting for the sign that he'll be the next one to jump off a bridge.

"You okay?" Gran asks.

"Sure."

In the reflection, he sees the old woman staring at him, but he also sees his own face. It surprises him, because it looks young. It *is* young—nineteen. After everything that's happened, though, he feels thirty at least, and some days, fifty-sixty.

"I don't have to send you to a bunch of doctors, too, now do I?" Gran says.

ESSENTIAL MAPS FOR THE LOST

Billy shakes his head. That's one kind of magic he's lost belief in over the years. Doctors or no doctors, medicine or no medicine, his mom was sad and then okay, sad, okay, always coming back to sad. *Sad* sounds almost soft, but it wasn't soft. It was aggressive and mean. It was a gas leak that felt suffocating, when usually they were fine, great, making their way together. He feels bad thinking that: *suffocating*. He shoves the word away, imagines them watching the Hobbit movies together instead. He was still little, so she'd hide his eyes at the gory parts, but he'd peek through her fingers.

"Just as well, because look at all the good those shrinks did." Gran gestures toward the urn on the fireplace.

"Jesus, Gran!"

"What? Do you know how much money I paid those people? She had to have the last word. She always did."

"Gran, come on." She's lucky she's old, or she'd be on her ass! He used to think his mom was too sensitive about things Gran said, and he didn't get why Mom just couldn't move past the stuff from her childhood, stuff she told him about, like how Gran would yank her head backward by her ponytail when she didn't listen, or practically rip her arm from her socket when she asked for something in a store, or how when she was six, she waited for Gran for hours after school, crying and scared, because Gran wanted to teach her a lesson about being late. But shit, his mom was right. Gran won't even give her a break now that she's dead.

"Come on'? Come on, what?"

“*You’re* the crazy one. You should go.” He makes it sound like a joke, because Gran can’t stand being criticized. No one fucks with her. Depression doesn’t even fuck with her. *Stop sitting around feeling sorry for yourself*, was what she used to say, like Mom’s sadness was some kind of moral failure. Can you imagine being depressed and then being judged for being depressed? Who’s crazier, anyway: people who struggle honestly, or the people who act like they never do?

“I worry about you, is all, Buzz.”

His nickname plus Gran’s small, tired eyes give him a weird stabbing in his heart. You know, a love stab. He instantly regrets his mean thoughts. She’s about the only one he has left in the world. Gaze Attacks—they doubly affect ethereal creatures, even if that’s a shitty, unfair rule. If Billy is anything lately, he’s an ethereal creature. They can exist on the material plane, but everything there is gray and dim and ghostly. Only a magic missile can break through their walls. The most important thing about them, though, is that they do not fall.

“Don’t worry. I’m okay.”

Of course he’s not okay. He’s coping better, but the storm system still sits off the coast, waiting for the right temperature or unstable airflow. He watched that in a show about cyclones. It was more interesting than you’d think.

He gives Gran a hug good-bye. He can’t stand to be an asshole. When he grabs his keys, Gran’s old dog, Ginger, gets excited and hops around. “I gotta go. Sorry, Ging, you’ve got to stay and babysit the old woman.”

ESSENTIAL MAPS FOR THE LOST

“Never mind, smart aleck. See you later.”

“See you.”

He’s taking off a little early, because there’s someone he’s got to pick up before work. He leaves Gran’s houseboat and walks up the ramp that connects the dock to the parking lot, and he gets in his mother’s black truck. The SUV has seen better days, but it’s still fast. It has *get-up-and-go*, as his mom used to say. She used to love that truck. *A car is your own little capsule of freedom*, she said. He wanted a car of his own, but he didn’t want it this way. He’d been saving up, and now he just has a bunch of money. It isn’t have-to money anymore. It could be dream-money. If he tells anybody his dream, they’ll think he’s nuts. They probably think he’s nuts anyway, after what his mother did a couple of months ago, but dreams seem extra important when life as you know it can be gone in a second.

Her radio station comes on. That station hurts his stomach. He isn’t going to change it, though. He longs for more of anything she loved. He already knows all the lines of the Eagles songs, and the Doobie Brothers and Simon and Garfunkel ones, all the la’s and oh’s of crazy old nights and bridges and black water. He pictures her singing to the radio with the windows rolled down. He used to pretend it was bad singing, and plug his ears and make a face, but it secretly made him happy, seeing her just being herself like that. She’d say, *I know, it’s too beautiful to stand*, and sing louder.

It’s a good memory. Still, he gets so mad, driving that car.

Once, he pounded the steering wheel and screamed that one word, the only word, over and over. *Why*. But he feels close to her here. The her that was her real self. He slept in the car one night, but it worried Gran when she woke up and he wasn't in his bed.

Billy pulls out of the lot. He drives past the Fremont troll and goes up the hill, heads to his and his mom's old neighborhood. There's a FOR RENT sign on the house, he sees. Jesus! He barely just got their stuff out of it! His stomach clenches up again. He feels sick. It's a cross between a throw-up feeling and a crushed-soul feeling. God, he hates that! *Focus*, he tells himself. He has a job to do. That asshole Mr. Woods always lets Lulu out right around then. It's going to be easy, as long as Lulu doesn't flinch and hide at his outstretched hand. That's what happens to them after a while.

He parks in his old driveway. If Mr. Woods spies the car, he'll think Billy is just bawling his eyes out inside or something. He spots Lulu cowering in the corner of the garden. No problem.

Billy gets out. And that's when he sees her. Sees her again. That girl, parked on his street in that truck. The truck needs paint, bad. It has big bald spots of primer. Come on, get it fixed up! A truck like that deserves some respect. He knows shit about cars, but he knows that much.

The girl—her hair is shiny. He noticed this before. She has very white teeth; he can see them even from that distance. She's the kind of girl who smells good. She's all scrunched

ESSENTIAL MAPS FOR THE LOST

down, pretending she's doing something innocent, like checking her phone. What *is* she doing there? He's seen her before, the day he moved his and his mom's junk out of the house.

Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah, of course. You know why she's probably there? That guy, a few houses down. It's got to be. Billy forgot all about him. Some senior; goes to one of the private schools. Blanchet? One of those Catholic ones. A real douchebag. Girls like that always have a thing for boys like him. He probably hurt her, just as she always suspected he might, and now, after proving her right about herself, she can't let him go. This is how it plays. He knows that particular story too well.

J.T., he suddenly recalls. J.T. Jones. What is it about assholes with initials instead of names?

The girl is going to be a problem, though. Usually, the idea is, make it natural, do this in the broad daylight, but not when you have a witness. He's going to have to act natural, is all. He'll use an Ability Modifier from Night Worlds, probably Charisma. He'll make her think this is the most regular thing ever. He'll be calm, smooth, decisive.

His heart is beating a hundred miles an hour, but ignore that. He could be in a movie, he thinks, 'cause he's precise as a laser, cool as a blade. Lulu is one of those cute little white dogs, so she's an easy one. He scoops her up in one clean arc. He sprints like a sharp breeze. He doesn't even look at the girl. What girl? Here's hoping she moves on to a better guy and forgets that douchebag once and for all.

Lulu is excellent in the car. She turns a circle on the passenger seat and falls asleep, as if she can finally rest. Here's hoping she moves on to a better guy and forgets that douche-bag once and for all.

Billy pulls into work. Heartland Rescue is noisy as hell and stinks a lot less than you'd think. He loves this fucking place with all his heart. He carries Lulu under his arm and then sets her on the counter.

"Billy," Jane Grace says, and runs her hand through her short hair. "Not again."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Billy says.

"Where did you get this dog?"

"Found it. Lost. Walking around lost." Lulu's tags are in the pocket of his jeans.

"Lost."

"Uh-huh."

"Just walking around lost."

"That's right."

"Okay." She sighs. "Fine. What should we call her, do you think?"

Heartland Rescue always names their animals, and never ever puts them to sleep.

"She looks like a Lulu to me," Billy Youngwolf Floyd says, and then Lulu winks at him, the way dogs do sometimes. He swears it wasn't an accident. He knows a real wink when he sees one.