

## **one**

Let me tell you about the first time I knew for sure I was in love with Matt Gooby.

We were in church. Reverend Greene was winding down her annual September 11th sermon, saying, “Hold fast to that which is good,” her blond bouffant wobbling as she leaned toward the congregation with a pleading sincerity. “Our eternal home,” she said, “is really only just half a step away from any of us. And the moment when it comes time to take that half step—we can’t know when, obviously—but chances are it might not be pretty. Chances are the timing won’t *feel* right. And, folks”—I loved that she addressed us all like that—“I’m

just trying to be straight with you, but the time to hold fast to that which is good is now. It wasn't yesterday. It's not nine years from now. It's not when we retire. Or when we graduate. It is now. That which is good is now."

Everyone was dead quiet then. Just a few creaks coming up from the saggy wooden pews. I tried not to look around because I got the sense that maybe some people were crying.

"So take the hand of the person next to you." Reverend Greene smiled. "And grip down. Go on, grip down on them hard—it won't hurt 'em!"

A couple of chuckles throughout the sanctuary, the tension slightly cut. Mom, on my right, grabbed my hand so hard my knuckles shot off a popping sound. Then she leaned in close and whispered, "I love you so much, my Tretch." When she pulled back there was some wet left on my face, and I just thought, *Good grief, Mom, don't cry*, and shrugged my shoulder to my cheek to brush it off, planning to make a face at Matt or roll my eyes while I did. Something to show him that I was, you know, over it.

But when I glanced over at him I saw that his eyes were shut *so* tight, like he was determined not to open them. And his left hand was gripping the edge of the pew so hard. *Hold fast*, I thought, and then, *Hold fast because life is fast*, which seemed like a logical conclusion.

That's when he slid his right hand along the edge of the seat, found mine, and squeezed. It sent this gentle buzzing feeling

right up the back of my neck, and with it not a *complete* thought yet, but the *essence* of a thought, the kind that gets lost between bigger, louder thoughts. The kind of thought that's barely louder than a feeling itself.

His thumb slid into the pocket of my hand. Or maybe it clamped down over my throat, square over the Adam's apple. Or maybe it plunged straight into my chest. I don't know. Reverend Greene was inviting us now to close our eyes for a moment and meditate, and like that was the cue, Mom's hand let go, and all around me was the dull sound of hands dropping or being dropped.

Matt's hand did not let go.

I closed my eyes. I felt everyone else on one side of me—my mom, my dad, and my brother. And on the other side—Matt, whose smile with the gap in it made me want to hug not just him but his entire world close to me, who somehow in that moment made me believe that bringing both his and my worlds together could happen, like there wouldn't be any struggle involved.

*You're in love, Tretch*—the thought came to me as Reverend Greene called the meditation to an end, saying, "Oh Lord God, please help us to hold fast to that which is good—which is everything—in this lifetime." When she said, "Amen," I let go of his hand. Physically, I mean, I let go of his hand.

The rest of me held on.