

# EDEN SUMMER

*Liz Flanagan*



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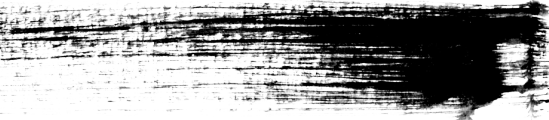
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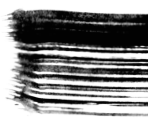
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# CHAPTER ONE



8:00 a.m.

That morning I have no clue what's happened. No inkling. No foreboding. Zilch. I must be the opposite of psychic, 'cause I'm actually almost happy.

Mum's radar picks up on it straight away. "Good to hear you singing again, Jess," she says as we wait for the kettle to whistle.

After breakfast I hug her and tumble out into the blue-and-gold morning. Warm, but with proper cold hiding in the shadows ready to ambush you, warning you that summer's nearly done. I love September, always have. The air is crisp, with that first bittersweet scent of autumn. It smells of hope, new pencils and fresh starts.

I put my earbuds in and start my favorite playlist as I hurry down the hill. Town's all laid out in the sunshine like a tourist website inviting you to visit Yorkshire: the tall skinny houses, rows and rows of terraces, clinging to the crazy gradient.

I make myself late 'cause I keep stopping to take photos on my phone: backlit leaves, tangled weeds all dried and seedy, reflections in the canal. Art is the only class I really care about and I'm looking for something to spark the next project.

I have to run for the bus, but I still get a window seat on the top deck, cocooned in warmth. I lean my head on the glass and half close my eyes. The music is a ladder and my mind climbs it slowly, enjoying the view from up there. I barely see what's actually through the window—the familiar hills, flung wide like a dancer's skirts; the farms dotted high along spreading contours; the wooded ravines; and the houses tucked into the valley bottom or ribboning along this road, this crazy overcrowded road that we're all addicted to, 'cause it's the quickest way out of this place.

In the next village, I get off the bus at the stop nearest school, and that's when it happens: The morning's golden bubble shatters like glass.

I see my best friend's mum. Eden's mum, Claire. Her car is pulling out of the side road, barely three feet away. Her face is gray, and her ponytail is coming loose. I've never seen her without makeup before.

Claire should not be driving 'cause she can hardly see: Her face is crumpled, dripping with tears as she grips the wheel. I've seen Claire cry before, but this shocks me to a standstill.

Someone bumps into my back and barges around me. I clutch at the brick wall to my left for balance because the world is tipping sideways.