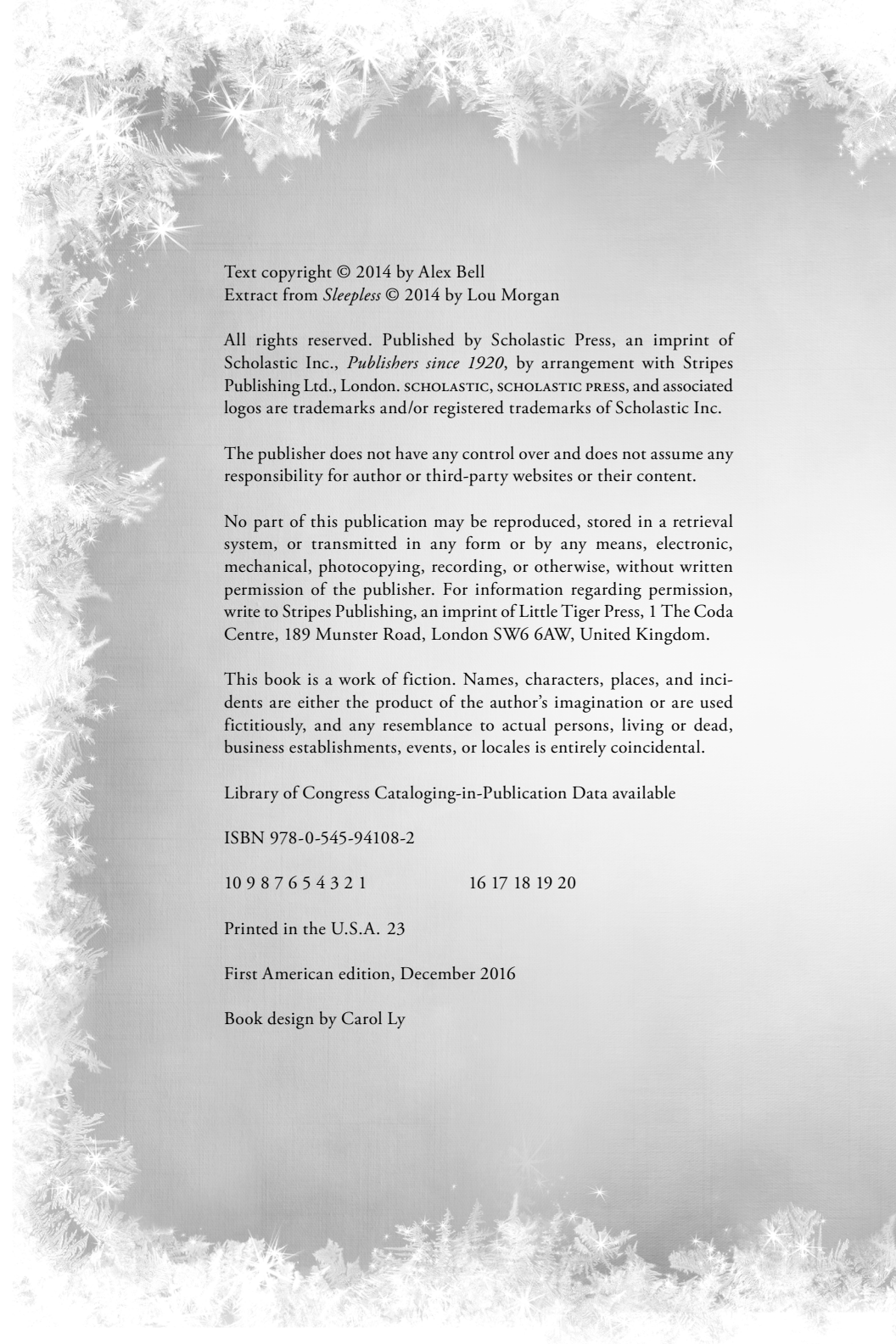


# frozen charlotte

ALEX BELL



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## ONE

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*Now Charlotte lived on the mountainside,  
In a bleak and dreary spot.  
There was no house for miles around,  
Except her father's cot.*

When Jay said he'd downloaded a Ouija-board app on to his phone, I wasn't surprised. It sounded like the kind of crazy thing he'd do. It was Thursday night and we were sitting in our favorite greasy spoon café, eating baskets of curly fries, like always.

"Do we have to do this?" I asked.

"Yes. Don't be a spoilsport," Jay said.

He put his phone on the table and loaded the app. A Ouija board filled the screen. The words YES and NO were written in flowing script in the top two corners, and beneath them were the letters of the alphabet in that same curling text, in two arches. Beneath that was a straight row of numbers from zero to nine, and underneath was printed GOOD BYE.

“Isn’t there some kind of law against Ouija boards or something? I thought they were supposed to be dangerous.”

“Dangerous how? It’s only a board with some letters and numbers written on it.”

“I heard they were banned in England.”

“Couldn’t be, or they wouldn’t have made the app. You’re not scared, are you? It’s only a bit of fun.”

“I am definitely *not* scared,” I said.

“Hold your hand over the screen then.”

So I held out my hand, and Jay did the same, our fingertips just touching.

“The planchette thing is supposed to spell out the answers to our questions,” Jay said, indicating the little pointed disc hovering at one corner of the screen.

“Without us even touching it?”

“The ghost will move it,” he declared.

“A ghost that understands cell phones? And doesn’t mind crowds?” I glanced around the packed café. “I thought you were supposed to play with Ouija boards in haunted houses and abandoned train stations.”

“That would be pretty awesome, Sophie, but since we don’t have any boarded-up lunatic asylums or whatever around here, we’ll just have to make do with what we’ve got. Who shall we try to contact?” Jay asked. “Jack the Ripper? Mad King George? The Birdman of Alcatraz?”