

every
soul
a
star

wendy mass



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For Steve, Kathy, and Judi Brawer, with love



“In our world,” said Eustace,
“a star is a huge ball of flaming gas.”
“Even in your world, my son,
that is not what a star is,
but only what it is made of.”

—from *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C. S. Lewis



“Space isn’t remote at all. It’s only an hour’s drive
away if your car could go straight upwards.”

—Fred Hoyle, British astronomer

And when he [the author of the universe] had compounded the whole, he divided it up into as many souls as there are stars, and allotted each soul to a star. And mounting them on their stars, as if on chariots, he showed them the nature of the universe and told them the laws of their destiny.

—from “Timaeus” by Plato (427–347 BCE)

Eclipse:

*from the ancient Greek word ekleipsis,
meaning abandonment or omission*



ALLY



BREE



JACK





ALLY

1

In Iceland, fairies live inside of rocks. Seriously. They have houses in there and schools and amusement parks and everything.

Besides me, not many people outside of Iceland know this. But you just have to read the right books and it's all there. When you're homeschooled, you have a lot of books. I also know how to find every constellation in the sky, and that the brightest star in any constellation is called the Alpha. I know all the constellations because my father taught them to me, and I know about the Alpha because it is also my name. But my family and friends call me Ally.

Okay, that's not entirely true. I don't really have any friends. Not within hundreds of miles, anyway. And it's not because I am unlikable or smell bad or anything like that. In fact, I take a bath every single day in the hot spring outside our house, and everyone knows that the minerals in hot springs make you smell like fresh air all day long.

The fact that we live somewhere with a hot spring outside our house pretty much explains why I don't have friends nearby. Basically, my house is as close to the middle of nowhere as a person can get and still be *somewhere*. Our town is not even on the map. It's not even a town. It's more of an *area*. There's the Moon Shadow Campground that my family owns, where I know every tree and every rock and which foxes are friendly and which aren't, and a tiny general store a mile away, where most everything expired in the last millennium. That's it. The nearest real town is an hour away. Sure, maybe it gets lonely every now and then, but I love it here. I was only four when we moved, so I don't really remember life in civilization, which is what my ten-year-old brother, Kenny, calls anywhere other than here.

It should be pointed out that Kenny's only knowledge of civilization besides our books is based on what he can glean from the ancient black-and-white television at the general store, and since the only show that comes in is the soap opera *Days of Our Lives*, he thinks civilization is very dramatic. And until a few years ago, he thought it was in black-and-white.

Some people might think my parents are crazy for doing what they did — up and leaving their jobs to build a campground in the Middle of Nowhere, USA. But they had a plan. They knew that a decade later, hundreds, maybe thousands of people would travel to this exact spot to be a part of something that hasn't



happened in mainland America for over seventy-five years and won't happen again for a hundred more. And this flock, this *throng* of people, would need a comfortable, safe place to stay, wouldn't they? With hot springs and hot coffee and clean bathrooms and their choice of tents or cabins, and no televisions to remind them of anywhere other than here.

My parents knew that, for one day, our two-square-mile campground would be the only patch of land in the entire country to lie smack dab in the path of the Great Eclipse when it passes overhead. In precisely twenty-two days and some hours from now, the sun will get erased from the sky, the planets will come out to greet us, the birds will stop singing, and a glowing halo of light will flutter like angels' wings above our heads.

Except, of course, if it rains.





BREE

1

I was switched at birth.

There's no other explanation for how I wound up in this family. My physicist parents are certified geniuses with, like, a zillion IQ between them and all these grants to study things like dark matter and anti-matter, which are apparently very different things. My eleven-year-old sister Melanie gets straight *As*, does cartwheels in public, and actually enjoys watching science documentaries on PBS with my parents. I prefer MTV to PBS, and to me, dark matter and anti-matter really means *don't matter*. But as smart as they are, my family members are all rather plain-looking. Not ugly or anything even close, but just sort of plain. Average. Like soft-serve vanilla ice cream in a cup, not even a cone.

I am not plain or average or — god forbid — vanilla. I am peanut butter rocky road with multicolored sprinkles, hot fudge, and a cherry on top. Not that I

would ever EAT such a thing, because it would go right to my thighs.

I don't mean to sound stuck-up, but I happen to be very attractive. My whole life strangers have stopped my mom on the street to say what a beautiful daughter she has. And they aren't talking about Melanie. Granted, you can't help the looks you're born with. I can't help that I'm the tallest girl in my grade, or that I never get pimples, or that my eyes are as blue as Cameron Diaz's. But I make sure to do everything I can to stay beautiful. Every morning I brush my dark brown hair a hundred times until it shines like silk, and if any nails are chipped I fix them with the manicure kit I bought last year at Things of Beauty in the mall. Every night before bed I do fifty sit-ups. I drink bottled water because you only look good on the outside if you're healthy on the inside. My friends and I keep up with all the latest trends, and we share clothes and even shoes sometimes. I worked extremely hard to become one of the most popular girls in my grade, and I work hard at staying there.

Today is the last day of school, and I can't wait for summer. Even though I'm only thirteen and a half, I'm going to be working at Let's Make Up in the mall. I'm only allowed to work two hours a day until I'm fourteen, but that's okay. My official title is "junior consultant" and it's a very important position. When you're a teenager and shopping for a new eyeliner or



lip gloss, you don't want an old lady telling you what you need. You want someone you can identify with. And if a customer happens to think they can look like me just by buying our makeup, then so be it. They buy the makeup, they look better, I get a bonus, and I spend it next door at Hollister. Everybody wins!

My parents, of course, don't see it that way, which harkens back to the whole switched-at-birth theory. They don't understand that while I might not share their goal of discovering what kind of tiny invisible particles the universe is really made of, I still have goals. I plan to work at the mall, get discovered by one of the scouts looking for kids with modeling potential, be on the cover of *Seventeen* BEFORE I'm seventeen, and then make enough money as a supermodel to retire when I'm twenty-five and my beauty is fading. Melanie has accused me of being high-maintenance, but I don't think that's true. I just like things to be orderly and pretty, and I'm happy to give those less fortunate than me tips on how to improve themselves. I like to keep my life uncomplicated. Complicated people get wrinkles before their time.

We all have things to offer the world. My beauty is what I have to give.

And the best thing about being beautiful?

No one (except maybe my deluded parents who don't understand that modeling is a perfectly respectable career choice) expects me to be anything else.





JACK

1

My father has no head.

Well, of course he HAS one, but I've never seen it. All I've seen is about a hundred photos of the rest of his body. A big, roundish guy in suits, shorts, and once even a bear costume. I found the pictures in a shoe box in the back of my mother's closet when I was snooping for Christmas gifts a few years ago. I can just imagine her sitting on the floor of her bedroom, angrily snipping off the heads. I snooped some more in case there was another box with only the heads, but there wasn't. She must have thrown them away.

My mother never talks about my father, who left before I was born. I stopped asking when I realized all it did was make her upset. She said that anyone who would leave his pregnant wife and four-year-old son to go "find himself" didn't deserve another thought. It sure was a terrible thing to do. But it seems to me that my mother is better off alone than

with a guy who has no head and ditched his whole family.

Still, I wonder about him. Even in the bear costume, I can tell I inherited his build. Big and wide, and good for one thing only — playing football. And if I was even REMOTELY good at playing football, I'd be all set. But I can't run across the room without getting winded or a cramp in my side. My second-grade gym teacher told me I had two left feet. For a week after that I would only wear left-footed shoes because I thought he meant it literally. My brother Mike has two normal feet, and no problem running across a field. In fact, he's the star first baseman on the high school baseball team. Luckily he's four years older than me, so we won't ever have to be in the same school again. No way can I compete with him in anything. I gave up trying a long time ago. I also gave up trying to pay attention in class. And trying to get people to like me. It's just too much effort. When they look at me, the other kids just see a big pudgy kid who sits in the back of every class drawing in his art book, or on his desk if the teacher confiscated the book. I don't belong to any clubs or after-school activities either. But not paying attention in class came back to bite me on the butt this year. Failing science class gave me a one-way ticket to summer school. It's humiliating. Having to sit in a stifling hot room with a bunch of my fellow rejects learning for the millionth time what the different types of rocks are called. What



a total waste of time. All I want to do is be left alone so I can read (fantasy and SF), draw (aliens, monsters, and wizards), and conserve my energy so when everyone else is sleeping and dreaming their normal dreams, I can do something that most other people can't.
I can fly.

