

Medium copyedit of *Finding the Vein* using Chicago Style.

Chapter 4

July 23

Isaac found himself alone in the cabin for a change after a nature hike ended early. The excursion leader felt sick and sent everyone back without regard for the buddy system as she stumbled off to the infirmary, trying not to puke. So Isaac pulled out his Chromebook to write an email to his parents.

Mom and Dad,

It's a lot of fun here. I don't think you needed to worry at all. We spend a lot of time talking about adoption, and it's made me a little curious about some of the details. I might ask you some questions when I get home. Not a big deal. The food is great, although Mom, you might not approve of all the fried stuff. I'm making friends. Yes, friends! Both guys and girls. We do a lot of sports, although I am not any better now than ever. I am getting slightly more fit, I think. Also, I am very tanned. You might not know me lol. Overall, seriously, you can relax. This was a great idea, thank you for sending me.

Love,

Isaac

Someone's phone made a sound—a pleasant, musical noise, like water dropping onto a tin roof. Isaac ignored it until it happened again. *Ba-loop*. The sound was coming from Paul's bunk. Isaac didn't really want to spy. But was it really spying? It might be an urgent message. *If it looks that way*, Isaac thought, *I'll go find him*. As if to underscore the urgency, it ba-looped again.

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Isaac picked it up and swiped the screen to open it, and for a moment, he couldn't take in what he was seeing. It was a wobbly, slightly blurry video—a girl bending over a table, crushing up a pill, then leaning over to sniff the powder into her nose. And then she fell back, smiling. As she fell, her shirt pulled away from her abdomen so that there was a flash of bare skin. It replayed again and again. By the third time, Isaac understood that he was looking at Sophie.

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Comment [EW1]: Love this change! It feels much more consistent with Sophie's character and logically follows her use of pain medication after her accident.

He shoved the phone away like it was a living thing, some dangerous animal, his heart going a million miles an hour. The horror of it. And that flash of skin—there was a sensation of heat, almost pain, in a part of his body that he generally ignored. He closed his eyes and helplessly saw the image again, imprinted behind his eyelids. *Oh, Sophie*, he thought, *what are you doing to yourself?*

Comment [EW2]: I love this change to the scene as well. I think you did a really wonderful job of capturing the conflicted nature of Isaac's feelings without entering potentially fraught territory. The internal dialogue was a great choice!

Should he tell someone? If so, who? She would hate him, wouldn't she?

Isaac left the cabin and walked fast through the woods to the water's edge. He could hear some of the younger kids playing, so he walked in the opposite direction. Indecisive, he headed toward Tanya Miller's cabin. Without thinking about it, without thinking about anything, he climbed a tree. He chose a difficult one, a pine without branches close to the ground, so he had to throw his arms and legs around the tree and shimmy upward, scraping the insides of his thighs. He almost relished the pain. He reached a branch, pulled himself up and sat.

He could see Tanya’s cabin from there. He reached up to the next branch and climbed a little higher. This was an old behavior and Michelle would not approve—climbing high enough to hide, high enough to get really hurt if he should fall. Tanya was moving about inside. As he watched, Paul came out the door and headed down the path toward C Cabin. Isaac stayed very still, but Paul, appearing tense, didn’t even look up.

Isaac could see the infirmary, too. There was movement behind the windows. He calmed himself by thinking of the nurse inside, who might have been soothing her patient. It would be nice—lying on cool sheets, sipping apple juice. If Isaac fell from here, he’d probably break an arm, at least. Then he would be sent home. His own room; his refuge. A safe place. And a lonely one.

Isaac was not so lost in thought that he didn’t see Tanya walking up to the tree, but it startled him when she spoke.

“That’s pretty high,” she called. “You must have some real skill.”

“Well, you know. Years of practice.” His voice was high and unsteady.

“I hope you won’t fall,” she said. “Can I tempt you down with a cup of tea?”

“I’m not sure that will help.”

“Having a hard day?” she asked. “I am, too. Come on down. Maybe you can cheer me up.”

“Give me a minute,” Isaac said. He stared at the branches above and took ten deep, calming breaths, as Michelle had taught him. He counted each breath, concentrating on the cool air coming into his nose and the warm air going out again. By the end of the second breath, he was no longer tempted to let go of the trunk. By the tenth breath he was actually afraid he might fall by accident, and he knew it was time to climb down. Isaac landed without incident on the pine-needle floor.

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Comment [EW3]: To gain a sense of direction here, perhaps include something like, “Through the branches in the opposite direction, Isaac could see...” That way, readers get a better sense of where Tanya’s cabin is in relation to the infirmary and C Cabin.

He and Tanya walked, without talking, to her cabin.

“I’ve actually been meaning to come to you,” Isaac admitted. “I was supposed to. But I’ve been doing fine, so I didn’t bother.”

She didn’t say anything right away. Instead, she made tea, plugging in an electric kettle and getting out cups, spoons, and a selection of boxes filled with tea bags. Isaac picked Constant Comment.

“My mom is addicted to this stuff,” he said. The sharp, orangey smell reminded him of home.

“Mm. I like it too,” she said. “But no caffeine for me this late in the day. I’d be up all night.”

In silence, they watched the tea steep. Isaac thought about telling her what he’d seen. Would Sophie hate him? He was considering the question when Tanya spoke.

“Can I ask? Why were you ‘supposed’ to see me?”

“I have a therapist at home—Michelle. She thought I should probably check in at camp. But I’ve been doing just, like, perfectly fine.”

“Okay. What led you to start therapy?”

“Well, I was bullied kind of big-time at my old school. I’m homeschooled now.”

“I’m so sorry to hear you were bullied. Can I ask what happened?”

“Someone broke my nose in a couple of places, for one thing,” Isaac said, smiling to show he was over it. Because he was, really.

“Oh, that’s terrible. Serious bullying, then.”

“I guess so. But that was a year ago.”

“Has anyone at camp made you feel uncomfortable? Or unsafe?”

“No, not at all. I really like it here,” Isaac reassured her.

“How did the altercation happen? The punch in the nose?”

Stalling, Isaac looked around a bit. Her office was pretty spare. There was a sink and cabinet. Just a couple of chairs, a spider plant. There was a trifold screen dividing the room, probably hiding the door to her bedroom. Or maybe her bed was in the same room. He thought of Paul coming and going. Of her bed, behind the screen. He felt a dawning, awful comprehension, and he knew he couldn't tell her about Sophie.

"Someone had the wrong idea about me," Isaac said. Her face bore an expression of professional compassion, and suddenly he felt angry. "They thought I was a pushover."

July 24, 2:00 a.m.

"Isaac, Isaac!"

Isaac opened his eyes. As usual, he experienced a tiny thrill at awaking in the cabin. It was dark, everyone was asleep, and someone was whispering outside the window. It was Piper, the girl who had cried during the speed-dating workshop. She wasn't crying now; instead, she was grinning and wiggling her fingers at him.

"Come to the party," she whispered. "Shh. Just you."

Isaac got up as quietly as he could, slid into flip-flops, and pulled on a hoodie. He hoped he looked okay, but it was dark and besides, it was the first time he could recall being invited to a party in a couple of years. He ran his hands through his hair and hoped for the best. He glanced at Paul, who looked asleep but tense, clutching his pillow like a life preserver. Hal slept flat on his back, his hands curled on top of his chest. Without sunglasses, his face looked vulnerable. His naked eyelids, so rarely seen, fluttered a bit.

Piper was alone outside. She shushed Isaac silently and gestured for him to follow her. They were headed to the beach path. As they got closer to the water, Isaac heard quiet voices and

Comment [EW4]: Swapping the punctuation here helps to visually represent how Piper might say Isaac's name with increasing volume and urgency to wake him up.

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smelled cigarette smoke. Several people were sitting on logs or on the pine-needle floor. “This is Isaac,” Piper announced. Sophie, three other girls, and one apparent couple looked up with mild interest. The guy—*one of the Pauls*, Isaac thought—nodded at him and said “‘Sup.” One girl quietly plucked a ukulele.

“Welcome to the nicotine-and-wine insomnia club,” Sophie said. She tossed Isaac a tiny plastic bottle that sloshed with red liquid. “Single-serving Oregon pinot noir. My mom hoards these. Help yourself. Lower the old inhibitions.”

Isaac didn’t think he needed his inhibitions lowered. Not yet, anyway.

“No thanks,” he said.

“Smoke, then?” she asked.

“Okay.”

She lit a cigarette in her mouth and handed it over. The filter end was slightly damp from her lips. Isaac inhaled and his chest instantly seized up, on fire; he coughed slightly, trying to expel the smoke without making a scene. Unfortunately, there was a reserve of smoke left in his mouth, which he involuntarily inhaled deep into his lungs, sending himself into a paroxysm of coughing that made everyone laugh.

“Dude,” said the boy. “Don’t cough up a lung.”

“Noob!” giggled Piper. “Try again.”

“I don’t think so,” Isaac said and tried to smile, handing the cigarette back to Sophie, who took it.

“Are you in training?” she asked.

Isaac goggled. Did he look like an athlete?

“Not exactly,” he said.

Comment [EWS]: Is it Piper or Sophie who asks Isaac this question? Perhaps add her name to clarify.

“Well? How come you’re no fun? I thought you might be fun. All the boys around here are so lame,” Piper complained.

“Not all of them,” another girl teased.

“Shut up! Slut.”

“Leave him alone. Isaac bunks with Hal,” said Sophie. “I should have thought of that. Hal will totally notice if you smoke.” She opened the wine and drained it. “Put the empties in my bag,” she instructed the group. “I’m going for a walk.” She looked a little unsteady as she picked her way across the boulders and logs, her right leg appearing to hesitate, just a little, as she made her way toward the boathouse.

“Shouldn’t someone go after her?” Isaac asked.

“Not me,” said Piper. “I need my head, thanks.”

“Go right ahead,” said the boy. As Isaac walked away, he heard him mutter, “Just don’t get your hopes up.”

Sophie was sitting on the dock. “Bye-bye,” she said as Isaac walked up. “Nice knowing you.” But she wasn’t talking to Isaac. She was waving at her flip-flop, which was drifting away on the surface of the lake. He hoped she wouldn’t swim out for it, since she seemed a little tipsy; he waded out to grab it **until the water reached his knees**, but it was too far gone. He took an oar from the boathouse and managed to retrieve the sandal.

“My glass slipper,” she said as Isaac handed it over. “Thank you, kind sir.”

“You’re welcome.”

“No. No, that’s not your line. You say, ‘Oh, it was you I danced with last night. I’ve been searching the land.’”

Comment [EW6]: I added this phrase to help create a clear image of how far Isaac waded out into the water.

“Oh, right,” Isaac said, trying to smile. “I recognize you now. Weren’t you wearing something a little different?”

“Why, yes,” she said. “Allow me to change. Close your eyes. Close them!”

He did. After a few seconds he heard a slight *thunk*, then a splash. He felt his own sandal sliding off his right foot. When he opened his eyes, Sophie was in the water, holding his flip-flop in one hand. A pile of clothing sat beside him. And her prosthetic leg, something he had only ever seen attached to her body, had made the *thunk*. It looked odd and inert, lying there.

Isaac pretended he didn’t see her in the water and just stared at her clothes. “Oh my God,” he said, “Sophie’s been raptured.”

“No,” she said, “I’m a mermaid. See?”

She waggled her one foot in the water like a fin, as if she were a little kid. “Come on out,” Isaac said. “Get dressed. It’s cold.” For a second he thought he’d have to go in after her. But she hauled herself onto the dock with her elbows. He averted his eyes, but in his peripheral vision he still saw her white body in the moonlight, her leg that ended just below the knee. She pulled on her clothes and sat beside him, dripping. They were close enough that the water from her hair landed on his arm, every drop making him shiver—and not from being chilly. She pulled another tiny wine bottle out of her pocket, opened it, and took a lengthy drink. “Cold,” she said.

“Take my hoodie.”

“Thanks.” She let him drape it over her, watching his face. “Does this gross you out?” she asked, gesturing at her prosthesis on the dock.

“No.”

“Good. I believe you.”

“Good,” Isaac said.

Comment [EW7]: To soften this command (and the few that follow: “Get dressed.” “Take my hoodie.”) and effectively show that Isaac is nervous during this interaction, perhaps change this to a question or a request. For example, “Why don’t you come out?” Or, in response to her pretending to be a mermaid, he could say, “I see that. But even mermaids get cold, I think. Come on out and get dressed.”

“You don’t seem like a liar. Unlike some people.”

“Glad to hear that,” he said, keeping his tone light. He felt guilty.

“Have you ever done something you shouldn’t have?” she asked. “Because you seem like the most careful guy I’ve ever met.”

“Careful? What does that mean?”

“I don’t know. You just...it’s hard to picture you losing control. Losing your temper, doing something stupid.”

“I’ve done plenty of stupid things,” he protested.

“Name one.”

“Well,” he said, “I did binge-watch the first season of American Horror Story in a single day once, right before Halloween.”

“That’s nothing,” she said. “What about something...something you can’t come back from?”

Isaac had no idea what to say to that.

She leaned back slightly, as if to bring him into focus. Her eyes were brown today, their natural color. Without the colored lenses, her face looked almost unbearably open, almost naked, but he still found it hard to interpret her expression. She turned back to the lake and said, “Sometimes I think my whole life is just me doing one stupid thing after another.”

What could he say? He had seen the video—had seen her snorting drugs, falling back in a blissed-out heap—but she couldn’t know he’d seen it.

“Is there anything,” he asked, “that I could maybe help you with?”

“Let’s see.” Her words were very slightly slurred: *let’s shee*. “I’m in love with someone who wants to do something completely crazy that I can’t talk him out of. I caused something really horrible to happen to someone else I loved. And now there’s this thing with me on the internet

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Comment [EW8]: I swapped the em dash for an ellipsis here to better convey her emotionally charged vocal pause.

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that shouldn't be, which is totally, totally my own fault. No, I don't see how you could maybe help." She stood up. "Just—don't judge me, all right?"

"Too late," Isaac said. He took a deep breath. "I've already judged you. I think you're funny and smart." *And beautiful.* "And hard on yourself. And maybe too easy on...other people."

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"What would you know about that?"

"Well, if there is something out there, and you didn't put it there...if someone is holding it over your head..." *Blame Paul,* he urged silently. But she didn't say anything. "Get out from under him."

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"Have you seen it?" she demanded. "That video?"

"I—" Isaac couldn't open his mouth to lie. He closed it again. "I didn't mean to," he finally said. "It just sort of appeared."

"Isaac. Where. Did it. Just appear."

"On a phone," he replied. "I picked it up to see if it was an important message."

"Whose phone?"

He couldn't say his name. "My counselor's."

At that she pulled on her leg, stood up unsteadily, and nearly fell. Isaac tried to help her, but she said "Don't!" and walked back up to camp. He thought of going after her, but shame kept him pinioned to the dock until the sky began to lighten.

When he finally got up, all his joints stiff, and returned to the cabin, he badly needed to go to the bathroom. The guys were sleeping, but they were starting to toss around in their bunks, and Isaac knew they'd be up soon. His stomach was cramping; it was probably stress. Or maybe that stomach bug.

But it was worse: much worse. This hadn't happened in months; it wasn't supposed to happen. He thought for a moment, trying not to panic. There were things he needed. He didn't have anything.

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It was quiet at the infirmary, too. He didn't want to wake anyone up, but he didn't see an alternative, as the infirmary was locked and the nurse's room was attached. When Genevieve poked her head through the door, she looked sleepy but not annoyed.

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"Sorry! I slept a little late. What's up?"

"I have a stomachache. Can I just kind of hang out here for a while?"

"Sure," she said. She withdrew for a moment and came back with a key. She wore a rather long and voluminous belted bathrobe, which she held closed at the top. "Why don't you just lie down for a bit? I won't go anywhere. I'll just be on this side getting ready if you need something. Bathroom's on the left. Let me make sure it's open." She checked the door, which opened. "Sometimes I lock it from the inside and forget to unlock it. Oh, one more thing." She ducked into her own room and then back into the bathroom. "Okay, all yours. I can have some breakfast sent up later if you're up for it. Or maybe not," she added, seeing his expression. "There's water in that jug and some cups. See you soon."

Isaac stayed for the morning. While the nurse was busy giving meds, he slunk into the bathroom and locked both doors. It seemed to be the only bathroom in the building, serving the infirmary and the nurse's cabin, and there were towels and a toothbrush presumably belonging to Genevieve. Quietly he looked around, found what he needed, and did the necessaries. Then he went back and lay down in the bed. He listened to the nurse talking with the kids as she gave meds, took care of a couple of twisted ankles, treated a bee sting, and gave ibuprofen to two girls with headaches. He asked for some ibuprofen as well.

After lunch came and went, he was surprised to get visitors: Hal and Nathan.

“You were out all night and now you’re sick,” Nathan said sternly. “Please tell me you weren’t doing something stupid.”

“Oh. No, not at all. I think I just have that bug.”

“Recuperate,” Hal advised. “We missed you at lunch.”

“You missed pizza!” Nathan said.

“But fear not. Nathan and I spent the morning editing the film, and it’s nearly finished.”

“I’ll bring it by later,” Nathan promised. “And don’t forget about the dance tonight. It’s after the campfire. Anything else you need, bud?”

Bud Isaac was touched. “I’m good,” he said.

But in the late afternoon, fatigue won out and Isaac took a nap that lasted until it was dark. When he woke up, everything had changed.

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Chapter 5

July 25, 10:45 p.m.

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Someone was howling. No—sirens. Isaac was in the infirmary, and the lights were off. He tasted the sourness of ibuprofen on an empty stomach and hoped he wouldn't throw up. And he still ached, low in his belly.

Outside, red lights flashed rhythmically, throwing smears of red across the walls. He sat up and pulled back the calico curtain. The lights came from an ambulance parked in front of the lodge, right on the games field where they normally played Capture the Flag and Everybody's It. A jolt of fear displaced the nausea, and Isaac swallowed convulsively. A woman in uniform slammed the back doors of the vehicle and hustled into the driver's seat; the ambulance rolled awkwardly across the grassy field and onto the gravel drive, picked up speed, and started wailing again.

Isaac watched as the campers dispersed, kids pouring from the huge front doors of the lodge. They looked panicky and aimless, like his grandpa's chickens when the collie tried to herd them. Although the ambulance was gone, flashing lights continued to cast a weird pall on their faces—blue and green and pink, emanating from the lodge. Then suddenly, the lights stopped: the dance must be over. He could see and hear some of the older girls sobbing.

There was Sophie. She looked like she was about to collapse, propped up by friends on every side. Then she did collapse, in slow motion, her friends helping her down and shielding her from view. Her mother hurried out of the lodge, running up to the group. But she must have been repelled, as she slowly—reluctantly, it looked like—backed off.

Katie was waving her arms as though to rally the campers, but they ignored her. Ty rolled slowly down the ramp in his chair, raised his hands, and said something. He must have been more effective than his assistant, because people began to separate into groups and move toward Isaac; the infirmary lay between the lodge and the cabins. The sobs and voices grew louder as campers passed by. Isaac heard the words “couldn’t breathe” and other snippets.

“Oh my God—”

“Allergic reaction—”

“Fucking kidding me—”

What the hell had happened? He should go out there, he thought. He should find Hal. He should go to Sophie.

Instead, he pulled the covers up and shivered.

When Genevieve came back to the infirmary, there was a police officer with her. The nurse must have forgotten Isaac was there. His bed was surrounded by a privacy curtain, and when the curtain stirred in the draft, he could just see the two women sitting at Genevieve’s desk. The policewoman wore regular clothes, a loose auburn ponytail, and trendy black secretary glasses—but she had a gun and a badge at her hip. A tattoo emerged from her blouse and snaked up the back of her neck, but he couldn’t see what it was. He stayed very still, not sure if he was supposed to be hearing their conversation, but not willing to miss it.

“I’m sorry to tell you this. As you may have expected, Paul Anderson didn’t make it,” the officer was saying. Her voice was very calm. Isaac felt as though his heart might stop, but instead it started pounding faster, sending the blood whooshing up into his brain. He could actually hear it behind the words the policewoman was saying: the paramedics did everything

Comment [EW10]: I removed the page break here since other scene breaks don’t require one.

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they could, *whoosh*, no one was blaming the nurse, no one was blaming anyone, *whoosh*, it was important to gather information about how this had happened, *whoosh, whoosh*. He closed his eyes, feeling sick.

“But the police,” Genevieve was saying. “Why?”

“It’s routine when there’s an unexplained death, especially when it’s a young person,” the officer said.

“Unexplained? But do you mean that it wasn’t—I mean, you do know what happened? He had an allergy. Peanuts.”

“I understand.”

“But we didn’t allow any at camp. No peanut butter, granola bars, nothing. There are several kids with the same allergy, but Paul’s is the most serious. Was. Oh God, I need to find my daughter. She’ll be devastated.” Genevieve’s voice shook.

“This won’t take long. Just tell me exactly what happened as best you can.”

“I can’t stop seeing his face,” she whispered. “He was trying so hard to breathe. I gave him an EpiPen, but it didn’t seem to do anything.”

“You’ve given one before?”

“Many times. I work in a pediatric emergency room during the year. I know what I’m doing.” Genevieve sounded defensive.

“Has it happened before, at camp?”

“Yes—not with Paul, but another camper last year, someone else with a peanut allergy. It worked immediately. I’ve kept one on me ever since. But he had his own, too. He had already used it.”

“Could they have been expired?” the cop asked. “Or gone bad?”

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Genevieve shook her head. “I logged them in just a few weeks ago, checked expiration dates and inspected them. All of them, including Paul’s.”

“I’ll need to take them anyway,” the cop said.

“Oh...okay. But I don’t have them anymore, I don’t think.”

“Where are they?”

“I don’t remember what I did with them.” She patted her pockets, then Isaac heard her get up and walk to the counter. Something rattled in a plastic bucket.

“They’re not in the sharps container. I must have left them in the lodge. Or maybe someone picked them up.”

“We’ll find them,” the cop said. “Did Paul take any medication?”

“He’s—was—over eighteen, so he kept his own meds. But it should be on his form.” The drawer slid out with a metallic click, and Isaac heard the sound of papers being shuffled. “He had an inhaler to use as needed, and allergy medicine, cetirizine. Paxil, ten milligrams at bedtime. That’s an antidepressant.” Isaac was surprised to hear that. Paul was a regular guy, good looking, and he had Sophie, he thought. He didn’t seem like the kind of person who should need antidepressants. But you never knew.

“Was he depressed?” the cop asked.

“It says he took it for anxiety. Social anxiety.”

“Did he seem depressed? Or anxious?”

“He seemed...perfect.”

Isaac couldn’t see her face, but in the pause that followed he could tell the officer found this a strange response.

“Perfect?”

“Perfectly happy, content, whatever. Not depressed. What does that have to do with it? This was terrible, but why...I mean it’s obviously an accident, isn’t it? You can’t think he did it on purpose?”

The other woman said, “Maybe you could just run me through the day. What did the campers do? What did you do?”

Genevieve took a shuddering breath. “Okay...well, breakfast is at eight. There are morning meds before and after. I usually eat later because some of the kids need to take their meds with food.” She went on to describe the camp routine.

“And in the evening?”

“Dinner, a talent show. Some kids have night meds. They had a dance tonight so I was up at the lodge to make sure they got them—oh God, they’re still up there! I need to get those meds. I know some of the kids missed their doses. For a lot of them it doesn’t matter, but there are a few who can have seizures if they miss a pill.”

“I’ll walk up there with you. And here’s my card. If you think of anything else, please give me a call.”

The lights went off abruptly and the door banged shut—a startling sound in the quiet, even though it always banged like that—its hinges were screwy. Isaac lay back and listened to the blood pounding its way past his ears. He thought about Sophie’s fury when she left him at the dock the night before. He hoped he was wrong.

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