PROLOGUE

SPAIN

It takes three men to pull the body from the water.

It is a man—that much they can tell, but little else. The birds have been at him by then, perhaps attracted by the glinting piece of silver that adorns his tie. But that's only magpies, they remind themselves. *He must have seen three,* one of the men says to the others—a crude attempt at humor, that line from the old nursery rhyme, *Three for a funeral*, echoing in his head. They lift him, startled by the weight. *Do dead men weigh more?* another wonders aloud. Together they wait for the police to arrive, doing their best not to look down, to avoid the empty sockets where once the dead man's eyes rested. They are strangers to each other, these three, but they are bonded now by something deeper than kinship.

Of course, only the first bit is true—the rest I have simply imagined. I have time for such things now as I sit and gaze: across the room, out the window. The scenery changes, but nothing else. I suppose some would call it watching, but I would argue that it is not the same at all—that they are as different as daydreaming and thinking.

It is a warm day; summer is fast approaching. The sun has begun to fade and the sky has turned a peculiar shade of yellow, warning of storms on the horizon. It is in these moments—when the air is thick and hot, *threatening*—that I can close my eyes and inhale, when I can smell Tangier again. It is the smell of a kiln, of something warm, but not burning, almost like marshmallows, but not as sweet. There is a touch of spice, something vaguely familiar, like cinnamon, cloves, cardamom even, and then something else entirely unfamiliar. It is a comforting smell, like a memory from childhood, one that wraps you up and swaddles you and promises a happy ending, just like in the stories. Of course, this is not true. For underneath the smell, underneath the comfort, there are flies buzzing, cockroaches stirring, starving cats gazing meanly, watching your every movement.

Most times, the city appears as a fevered dream, a sparkling mirage that I can just about convince myself was real once, that I was there and that the people and places

that I recall were tangible and not translucent ghosts that my mind has conjured up. Time moves quickly, I have found, turning people and places into first history and then later stories. I have trouble remembering the difference, for my mind often plays tricks on me now. In the worst moments—in the best moments—I forget about *her*. About what happened. It is a peculiar sensation, for she is always there, lurking just beneath the surface, threatening to break. But then there are times when even her name escapes me, so that I have taken to writing it down on any scrap of paper I can find. At night, when the nurses are gone, I whisper it to myself, as though it were a catechism learned as a child, as if the repetition will help me to remember, will stop me from forgetting—for I must never forget, I remind myself.

There is a knock at the door and a young red-haired girl enters the room, a tray of food held between her hands. Her arms are covered, I notice, with freckles, so heavily that the tiny brown flecks overwhelm the pale skin underneath.

I wonder whether she has ever tried to count them.

Looking down, I find a name scrawled across a piece of paper on the nightstand next to my bed and the name nags at me, for although it is not my own, it feels important, as if it is something that I should try to remember. I let my mind relax. It is a technique I have found useful:

trying hard not to think while secretly thinking as hard as I can.

Nothing happens.

"Ready for breakfast?"

I look up, confused to find a strange girl with dark red hair standing just in front of me. She cannot be any more than thirty, so there can only be a handful of years between us. *Redheads are bad luck,* I think. Don't they say to avoid redheads when preparing for a sea voyage? And I think I'll most likely be at sea soon—to Tangier. I feel anxious now, eager to have this redheaded ill omen gone from my room. "Where did you come from?" I demand, angry that she has not bothered to knock.

She ignores my question. "Aren't you hungry today?" In her hand is a spoon full of some gray substance—I reach for its name, but my mind refuses to yield. Angry now, I push it away and instead point to the little slip of paper by my bed. "Put this in the bin," I tell her. "Someone is leaving me notes with nothing but nonsense written on them."

I settle back onto my bed, pulling the covers up close to my chin.

It's summer, I think, but my room suddenly feels as cold as winter.

1

TANGIER 1956

ONE

ALICE

Tuesdays were market days.

Not just for me, but for the entire city, the Rif women parading down from the mountains heralding the start, their baskets and carts overflowing with fruits and vegetables, their donkeys flanking them on either side. In response, Tangier came alive: crowds emerged, the streets flooding with men and women, foreigners and locals alike, pointing and ordering, arguing and bartering, exchanging coin for a bit of this, a bit of that. The sun seemed somehow brighter on these days, hotter, the scorch of it burning the nape of my neck.

Standing at the window now, looking down upon the swelling crowds, I made the silent wish that it was still

Monday. But then, Monday, I knew, was always a false hope, a false comfort, before Tuesday would eventually come again and I would be forced to stand in the chaos swirling below me. Forced to stand before the impressive Rif women, adorned in their bright colors that caught and fought for attention, their eyes evaluating my own drab, ordinary dress that could not measure up, and seized with a sense of worry—worry that I would pay an exorbitant price without realizing it, that I would give the wrong coin, that I would say the wrong words, that I would make a fool of myself and they would all laugh and it would be evident what a mistake I had made in coming here.

Morocco. The name conjured up images of a vast, desert nothingness, of a piercing, red sun. The first time I had heard John mention it, I had sputtered and coughed on the drink he had pushed into my hand. We had met at the Ritz in Piccadilly, and only at Aunt Maude's insistence—which I could feel in those weeks after I returned from Bennington College, pushing, a headache that I could never quite manage to escape. I had been back in England for only a few months, had known John for less than that, but in that moment I was certain I could feel it—his excitement, his energy, filling the space around us, pumping through the warm summer air. Leaning in, eager to grasp it, to hold it, to claim some of it for my own, I had let the idea settle between us. Africa.

Morocco. A few weeks earlier I would have balked, perhaps a week later I would only have laughed—but on that particular day, in that particular moment, listening to John's words, to his promises, his dreams, they had felt all too real, all too attainable. For the first time since Vermont, I found myself *wanting*—I didn't know what exactly, and I suspected in that moment that it might not even be the man sitting before me, but wanting something, all the same. I had taken a sip of the cocktail he had ordered for me, the champagne already warm and flat, feeling the acid on my tongue, in my belly. I had reached over, before I could change my mind, clasping his hand between my fingers.

For although John McAllister was certainly not what I had once dreamed of for myself—he was loud and gregarious, brash and oftentimes reckless—I had found myself reveling in the opportunity that he had presented: to forget, to leave the past behind.

To not think each and every second of the day about what had happened in the cold, wintry Green Mountains of Vermont.

Over a year now, and it was still cast in a hazy fog that I could not seem to work my way out of, no matter how long I tripped through the labyrinth. *It's better that way,* my aunt had said afterward, when I had told her about the

vaporous sheen my memories had taken on, how I could no longer remember the details of that horrible night, of the days that followed. Leave it in the past, she had urged, as if my memories were objects that could be packed away in boxes secure enough to ensure they would never let loose the secrets held within.

And I had in a way, had shut my eyes to the past—had opened them to John, to Tangier, to the blazing sun of Morocco. To the adventure that he had promised—with a proposal and a proper ring, though not an actual ceremony, just a signed slip of paper.

"But we can't," I had protested at first. "We hardly know one another."

"But of course we do," he had assured me. "Why, your family is practically related to my family. If anything, we know one another too well." He laughed, flashing me that wicked grin.

There would be no name change—I was adamant on that point. It felt important, somehow, to retain some part of myself, my family, after everything that had happened. And there was something else too, something I had a harder time explaining, even to myself. For although my aunt's guardianship would technically dissolve upon my marriage, she would still retain control of my financial trust until I turned the age of twenty-one, at which time

my parents' estate would at last be released into my own name. The idea of being doubly covered seemed entirely too daunting, and so, when I reached for my passport, it was still Alice Shipley written there.

And at first I had told myself that Tangier wouldn't be so terrible. I imagined days spent playing tennis under the hot Moroccan sun, a team of servants to wait on us hand and foot, memberships at the various private clubs throughout the city. There were worse lives to live, I knew. But then, John wanted to experience the real Morocco, the real Tangier. So while his other associates hired cheap Moroccan help and their wives spent days languishing around the pool or planning parties, John eschewed it all. Instead he and his friend Charlie went gallivanting around the city, spending hours at the hammam or the markets, smoking kif in the backs of cafés, always trying to endear themselves to the locals rather than to their fellow coworkers and countrymen. Charlie had been the one to convince John to come to Tangier in the first place, plying his friend with tales of the country: its beauty, its lawlessness, until John was half in love with a place he had never seen. And I had done my best in the beginning, going with him to the flea markets for furniture, to the souks to shop for supper. I had sat in the cafés beside him and sipped café au laits and tried to rewrite my future in

the hot and dusty city that he loved at first sight but which continued to elude me.

But then, there had been the incident at the flea market.

Amid a frenzied collision of sellers and stalls, of antiques and junk piled haphazardly, one careless layer after another, I had turned around and John had been gone. While I was standing there, strangers passing me, jostling me from either direction, my palms growing clammy with the familiar beginnings of anxiety, shadows had played at the edges of my vision—those strange wispy apparitions that the doctors had whispered were only manifestations but that to me felt real, visceral, tangible, so that they seemed to grow, until their dark shapes were all that I could see. In that moment I was struck with the notion of how very far away I was from home, from the life that I had once envisioned for myself.

Later, John had laughed, insisting he had only been gone the space of a minute, but the next time he asked me to go out, I shook my head, and the time after that, I found another excuse. Instead, I spent hours—long, lonely tiresome hours—exploring Tangier from the comfort of our apartment. After the first week, I knew how many steps it took to get from one end of it to the other—forty-five, sometimes more, depending on my gait.

Eventually, I began to feel John's regret looming above

us, growing, our exchanges limited to matters of practicality, of finances, my allowance our main monetary support. John was bad at money, he had once told me with a grin, and at the time, I had smiled, thinking he meant that he didn't care about it, that it wasn't a concern for him. What it really meant, I soon learned, was that his family's fortune was nearly gone, just enough remained to keep him well dressed, so that he could play at pretending to still claim the wealth he had once had, that he had been born into and still felt was rightfully his. An illusion, I soon realized. And so, each week I handed over my allowance, not really caring, not really interested where the numbers disappeared to in the end.

And each month, John continued to vanish as well: into his mysterious city that he loved with a fierceness I could not understand, exploring her secrets on his own, while I remained inside—my very own captor and captive.

I glanced at the clock now and frowned. It had been only half past eight the last time I had checked, and now it was ticking steadily toward noon. I cursed and moved quickly toward the bed, toward the outfit I had laid out earlier that morning, before I had lost all the hours in between. For, today, I had promised John that I would go to the market; today, I had promised myself that I would try. And so I

looked to my costume, such as it was, the semblance of an ordinary woman about to do the week's shopping: stockings, shoes, a dress that I had purchased in England just before moving to Tangier.

Pulling the dress over my head, I noticed a slight tear on the front, at the bit where the lace met the collar. I frowned, bringing it closer to my face for inspection, trying not to tremble at the sight of the damaged material, telling myself that it was not a sign, that it was not an ill omen, that it did not mean anything at all.

The room felt too warm then, and so I stepped out onto the balcony, needing, in that moment, to be free of its imposing walls. Closing my eyes, desperate for any hint of a breeze, I waited, but there was nothing, except the still, arid heat of Tangier as it bore down on me.

A minute passed and then another, and in the quiet, listening to the rise and fall of my breath, I became aware of the peculiar sensation of being watched. Opening my eyes, I cast a hurried glance toward the street below. There was no one. Only a handful of locals making their way to the market, their steps rushed, the hour when the market would end slowly approaching. "Pull yourself together," I whispered, heading back into the safety of the flat. Despite these words, I closed the windows firmly behind me, my heart pounding. Glancing at the clock, I saw

that it was now half past one. The market could wait, I told myself.

It would have to, I knew, my hands shaking as I tugged the curtains closed so that not even the tiniest trace of sunlight could filter through.