



Chapter 1

2006

MY NAME IS LUCY JARRETT, AND BEFORE I KNEW ABOUT THE girl in the window, before I went home and stumbled on the fragments and began to piece the story back together, I found myself living in a village near the sea in Japan. It had been a spring of little earthquakes, and that night I woke abruptly, jarred from a dream. Footsteps faded in the cobblestone lane and distant trains rumbled; I listened harder until I could make out the surge of the sea. But that was all. Yoshi's hand rested on my hip lightly, as if we were still dancing, which we'd been doing earlier in the evening, music from the radio soft in the dark kitchen, our steps slowing until we stopped altogether and stood kissing in the jasmine air.

I lay back down, curving toward his warmth. In the dream I'd gone back to the lake where I'd grown up. I didn't want to go, but I did. The sky was overcast, the faded green cabin—which I'd seen before, but only in dreams—musty and overhung with trees. Its windows were cracked, opaque with dust and snow. I walked past it to the shore, walked out onto the thick, translucent ice. I walked until I came to them. So many people, living their lives just beneath the surface. I caught them in glimpses, fell to my knees, pressed my palms against the glassy surface—so thick, so clear, so cold. I'd put them here, somehow, I knew that. I'd

left them for so long. Their hair stirred in underwater currents, and their eyes, when they met mine, were full of a longing that matched my own.

The window shades were trembling. I tensed, caught between the earthquakes and the dream, but it was just a distant train, fading into the mountains. Every night for a week I'd had this same dream, stirred up by the shifting earth, stirring up the past. It took me back to a night when I was seventeen, wild and restless, sliding off the back of Keegan Fall's motorcycle, apple blossoms as pale as stars above us. I fanned my fingers against his chest before he left, the engine ripping through the night. My father was in the garden when I turned toward the house. Moonlight caught the gray in his short hair; the tip of his cigarette burned, rising, falling. Lilacs and early roses floated in the darkness. *Nice of you to show up*, my father said. *I'm sorry you worried*, I told him. A silence, the scents of lake water and compost and green shoots splitting open the dark earth, and then he said, *Want to go fishing with me, Lucy? How about it? It's been a long time*. His words were wistful, and I remembered getting up before dawn to meet him, struggling to carry the tackle box as we crossed the lawn to the boat. I wanted to go fishing, to accept my father's invitation, but I wanted more to go upstairs to think about Keegan Fall. So I turned away, and in a tone as sharp as broken shells I said, *Dad. Really. I'm hardly little anymore*.

Those were the last words I ever spoke to him. Hours later, waking to sunlight and urgent voices, I ran downstairs and across the dew-struck lawn to the shore, where they had pulled my father from the lake. My mother was kneeling in the shallow water, touching his cheek with her fingertips. His lips and skin were bluish. There were traces of foam in the corner of his mouth, and his eyelids were oddly iridescent. *Like a fish*, I thought, a crazy thought, but at least it silenced the other thoughts, which were worse, and which have never left me: *If I'd gone. If I'd been there. If only I'd said yes*.

Beside me on the tatami Yoshi sighed and stirred, his hand slipping from my hip. Moonlight fell in a rectangle across the floor, and the shades

rustled faintly with the distant pounding surf, the breeze. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the shaking grew stronger. It was subtle at first, as soft as the rumble from the train a moment before. Then my Tibetan singing bowls, arranged on the floor, began to hum all by themselves. My collection of small stones began to fall from the bookshelf, hitting the mats with a sound like rain. Downstairs, something crashed, shattered. I held my breath, as if by being still I could still the world, but the trembling grew stronger, and stronger still. The shelves lurched sharply, heaving several books to the floor. Then, in one fluid convulsion, the walls swayed and the floor seemed to roll, as if some great animal had roused and turned, as if the earth itself were alive, the ground mere skin, and volatile.

Abruptly, it stopped. Everything was strangely quiet. Distantly, water dripped into a pool. Yoshi's breathing was calm and even.

I turned and shook his shoulder. He opened his eyes slowly. These little earthquakes left him unfazed, though that season there had been hundreds of tremors, sometimes several dozen in a day, many so tiny they were noted only by seismic machines; others, like this one, strong enough to wake us.

"Earthquake?" he murmured.

"Yes, a big one. Something broke downstairs."

"Really? Well, it is over now. It's quiet, no? Let's go back to sleep."

He closed his eyes and pulled me close. His breathing quickly grew deep and regular again. Through the half-open window, beyond the roof of the house across the street, I glimpsed the scattered stars. "Yoshi?" I said. When he didn't answer, I slid out of bed and went downstairs.

The aloe plant had fallen from the kitchen windowsill, and its pot had shattered. I put water on to boil and swept up the scattered dirt and glass and broken stems. Probably Japanese housewives were doing the same thing all up and down the street, which made me feel uncomfortable and faintly bitter—clearly, I'd been without a job for far too long. I didn't like being dependent on Yoshi, having no income or meaningful work outside the house. I'm a hydrologist, which is to say that I study

the movement of water in the world, on the surface and beneath the earth, and I'd been doing research for multinational companies for nearly half a decade by the time I met Yoshi in Jakarta. We'd fallen in love the way it is possible to fall in love overseas, cut off from everything we'd known, so the country we inhabited was of our own making, really, and subject to our own desires. *This is the only continent that matters*, Yoshi used to say, running his hands along my body. *This is the only world that exists*. For a year, then two years, we were very happy. Then our contracts ended. Before I found work, Yoshi was offered what seemed at first like the engineering job of his dreams. That's when we moved to Japan, which had turned out to be another country altogether.

I poured myself a cup of tea and took it to the front room, sliding open the shutters and the windows. Night air flooded in, fresh and cool. It was still dark, but the neighborhood was already stirring; water splashed and plates clattered, near and far. Across the narrow lane the neighbors spoke softly, back and forth.

The house shook lightly with the surf, then settled. I sat at the low table and sipped my tea, letting my thoughts wander to the coming day and our long-planned trip into the mountains. In Indonesia, that other country, Yoshi and I had talked of marriage and even of children, but in those vague fantasies I'd always had satisfying work, or I'd been content to study Japanese and flower arranging and to take long solitary hikes. I hadn't understood how isolating unemployment would be, or how much time Yoshi would end up devoting to his own work. Lately we'd been out of sorts with each other, arguments flaring up over nothing. I hadn't realized how persistent the past would be, either, catching me in its old gravity the minute I slowed down. After three idle months in Japan I started teaching English just to fill my days with voices other than my own. I took my young charges on walks, pausing by the sea to teach concrete nouns: *stone, water, wave*, yearning for the days when I'd used those same words with ease and fluidity in my routine work. Sometimes I found myself saying wilder things, things I was sure they could not understand. *Dinosaurs drank this water, did you know that? Water*

moves forever in a circle; someday, little ones, your grandchildren may even drink your tears.

Now, weeks later, I was beginning to wonder if this would be my life, after all, and not simply a brief interlude in the life I had imagined.

Across the room, tiny lights flickered on my laptop. I got up to check e-mail, the glow from the screen casting my hands and arms in pale blue. Sixteen messages, most of them spam, two from friends in Sri Lanka, three others from former colleagues in Jakarta who'd sent photos from their hike in the jungle. I skimmed these messages quickly, remembering a river trip we'd taken with these friends, the lush foliage along the banks and the hats we'd fashioned from water lilies to block the fierce sun, filled with longing for the life Yoshi and I had left.

Three sequential messages were from home. The first, from my mother, surprised me. We were in touch quite often and I tried to visit once a year, even if briefly, but my mother used the Internet like an earlier generation had used the long-distance telephone: seldom, succinctly, and only for matters of certain importance. Mostly, we talked on the phone or sent slim blue air letters, hers posted to wherever my nomadic life had taken me, mine landing in the mailbox outside the rambling house where I'd grown up, in a village called The Lake of Dreams.

Lucy, I was in an accident, but it was minor and you are absolutely not to worry. Take any news from Blake with a grain of salt, please. He means well, of course, but he is being overprotective and kind of driving me crazy. I'm nearly sure my wrist is sprained, not broken. The doctor said the x-rays will confirm one way or the other. There's no need at all for you to come home.

I read this message twice, imagining my mother at her solitary kitchen table, somehow injured. Though it wasn't fair—nearly ten years had passed and we had all moved on, at least on the surface—I felt myself drawn back to the summer after my father's death. We'd gone

through our days doing the usual things, trying to create a fragile order. We made meals we hardly touched, and passed in the halls without speaking; my mother started sleeping in the spare room downstairs, and began to close the second floor down, room by room. Her grief was at the center of the stillness in the house, and we all moved carefully, so quietly, around it; if I allowed myself to weep or rage, everything might shatter, so I held still. Even now, when I went back to visit I always felt myself falling into those old patterns, the world circumscribed by loss.

The next e-mail was indeed from Blake, which alarmed me. Blake spent his summers living on his sailboat and working as a pilot for the cruises that left from The Lake of Dreams pier every two hours; he spent his winters in St. Croix doing much the same. He liked Skype, and twice he'd flown across the world to visit me, but he didn't like e-mail and almost never wrote. He gave more details about the accident—someone had run a stop sign, and he described my mother's car as totaled—but he didn't sound overprotective to me, just concerned. It was my cousin Zoe who sounded a little out of control, but then she always did. She had been born when I was nearly fourteen, and she was so much younger than the rest of us that it sometimes seemed she'd grown up in a completely different family. Her older brother, Joey, was about my age, heir to the family name and the family fortunes, and we'd never gotten along. But Zoe, who was fifteen now and adored the Internet, found my life amazing and exotic, and she wrote frequently to relay dramatic events from high school, even though I seldom wrote back.

It was nearly dawn. I got up and went to the window. Outside, the cobblestones were brightening to gray, wooden houses emerging from the night. Across the street, a subdued rattling of pots jarred me from my thoughts, followed by the sound of water running. Mrs. Fujimoro came out to sweep her walk. I stepped out onto the patio, nodding good morning. Her broom made such firm strokes—swish, swish, swish—that until she paused I didn't realize the earth had begun to rumble again. It was ordinary at first, a large wave hitting the shore, a truck

passing down the street—but no. I met Mrs. Fujimoro’s gaze. She caught my hand as the shaking extended, began to swell.

Leaves quivered and water trembled in a puddle. A tiny crack appeared below the Fujimoros’ kitchen window, zigzagging to the foundation. I held her hand, staying very still, thinking of my mother’s accident, of the moment she realized she could no more stop the car from smashing into her than she could alter the progress of the moon.

The tremor stopped. A child’s questioning voice floated from the house. Mrs. Fujimoro took a deep breath, stepped away from me, and bowed. She picked up her broom. Her expression, so recently unmasked, was already distant again. I stood alone on the worn cobblestones.

“You turned off your gas?” she asked.

“Oh, yes!” I assured her. “Yes, I turned off the gas!” We had this exchange often; it was one of my few phrases of perfect Japanese.

Yoshi was in the doorway by the time I turned, his hair tousled and an old T-shirt pulled on over his running shorts. He had a kind face, and he gave a slight bow to Mrs. Fujimoro, who bowed in turn and spoke to him in rapid Japanese. Her husband had been a schoolmate of Yoshi’s father, and we rented the house from them. On the rare occasions when Yoshi’s parents visited from London—his mother is British—they stayed in another flat the Fujimoros owned around the corner.

“What were you talking about?” I asked when Yoshi finally bowed again to Mrs. Fujimoro and stepped back inside. He’d grown up bilingual and moved with fluid ease between languages, something I both admired and envied.

“Oh, she was telling me about the Great Kanto Earthquake in the twenties. Some of her family died in it, and she thinks that’s why she gets so afraid, even in the little tremors. She’s terrified of fires. And she’s sorry if she startled you by taking your hand.”

“It’s all right,” I said, following Yoshi to the kitchen, picking up my empty cup on the way. “The earthquakes scare me, too. I don’t know how you can be so calm.”

“Well, they either stop or they don’t. There’s not much you can do, is there? Besides, look,” he added, gesturing to the paper, which of course I couldn’t read. “Front page. It says an island is forming underwater, and then everything will improve. This is just a release of pressure.”

“Great. Very reassuring.” I watched him add water to the tea, his movements easy, practiced. “Yoshi, my mother was in an accident,” I said.

He looked up.

“What happened? Is she okay?”

“A car accident. Not serious, I don’t think. Or serious, but she’s fine anyway. It depends on whose story you read.”

“Ah. That’s really too bad. You’ll go see her?”

I didn’t answer immediately. Did he want me to go? Would that be a relief? “I don’t think so,” I said, finally. “She says she’s okay. Besides, I need to find a job.”

Yoshi fixed me with the kind expression that had once drawn me to him and now often made me feel so claustrophobic: as if he understood me, inside out.

“Next week, next month, you can still look for jobs.”

I glanced out the kitchen window at the wall of the house next door.

“No, Yoshi. I really don’t want to put it off. All this free time is making me a little crazy, I think.”

“Well,” Yoshi said cheerfully, sitting at the table. “I can’t argue with that.”

“I’ve looked hard,” I told him tersely. “You have no idea.”

Yoshi was peeling a mandarin orange in a skillful way that left the skin almost intact, like an empty lantern, and he didn’t look up.

“Well, what about that consultancy—the one on the Chinese dam project on the Mekong? Did you follow through on that?”

“Not yet. It’s on my list.”

“Your list—Lucy, how long can it be?”

Now I took a deep breath before I answered. We’d been looking forward to this hike in the mountains for weeks, and I didn’t want to

argue. “I’ve been researching that firm,” I said, finally, trying to remember that just hours ago we’d been dancing in this same room, the air around us dark and fragrant.

Yoshi offered me a segment of his orange. These little oranges, *mikans*, grew on the trees in the nearby hills and looked like bright ornaments when they ripened. We’d seen them when we visited last fall, back when Yoshi had just been offered this job and everything still seemed full of possibilities.

“Lucy, why not take a break and go see your mother? I could meet you there, too, after this business trip to Jakarta. I’d like to do that. I’d like to meet her.”

“But it’s such a long way.”

“Not unless you’re planning to walk.”

I laughed, but Yoshi was serious. His eyes, the color of onyx, as dark as the bottom of a lake, were fixed on me. I caught my breath, remembering the night before, how he’d held my gaze without blinking while his fingers moved so lightly across my skin. Yoshi traveled often for his job—an engineer, he designed bridges for a company that had branches in several countries—and this trip had seemed like just one more absence to add to all the others. How ironic if now his job became a way for us to reconnect.

“Don’t you ever want me to meet her?” he pressed.

“It’s not that,” I said, and it really wasn’t. I picked up the empty orange skin, light in my palm. “It’s just the timing. Besides, my mother’s condition isn’t serious. It’s not exactly an emergency situation.”

Yoshi shrugged, taking another orange from the cobalt bowl. “Sometimes loneliness is an emergency situation, Lucy.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that lately you seem like a very sad and lonely person, that’s all.”

I looked away, blinking in surprise as my eyes, inexplicably, filled with tears.

“Hey.” He touched my hand; his fingertips were sticky. “Look, Lucy,

I'm sorry, okay? Let's not worry about this. Let's just go up to the mountains, like we planned."

So we did. It was muggy near the sea but grew into a high, bright, sunny day as the train switchbacked up the mountain. In early spring, plum trees and cherry trees had blossomed against this landscape, blanketing the ground with white petals, and my vocabulary lessons then had been like poems: *tree, flowers, falling, petals, snow*. Now it was late enough in the season that rice had risen from the watery land near the sea, but in the mountains, spring lingered. The hydrangeas were just beginning to bloom, their clusters of petals faintly green, bleeding into lavender and blue, pressing densely against the windows of the train.

We hiked to an open-air museum beneath a canopy of cedar trees and ate in a mountain village built on the rim of a dormant volcano, and our talk was easy, relaxed, and happy, like our best times together. It was nearly dusk by the time we reached the *rotomboro*, an outdoor hot springs, and parted at the door. The changing room was all clear pine and running water, tranquil, soothing, and almost empty. I scrubbed carefully from head to toe, sluicing warm water to rinse, walking naked to the rock-lined pool. The air was cool, and the moon was rising in the indigo sky. Two other women were lounging against the smooth stones, chatting, their skin white against the wet gray rocks, their pale bodies disappearing into the water at the waist. Their voices were one soft sound; the trickle of water from the spring, another. Farther away, from beyond the wall, came the splashing and the voices of the men.

I slipped into the steaming water, imagining the patterns of underground rivers that fed these springs, thinking how everything was connected, and how our lives here had grown from such a casual decision made during my first weeks in Jakarta well over two years ago. I'd come back tired from a week in the field inspecting a canal system, and I dropped my suitcase on the cool marble floor, imagining nothing beyond a shower, a plate of *nasi goreng*, and a drink. My housemate, who worked at the Irish embassy, was leaving for a party and invited

me to go, promising good food and better music. I said no at first, but at the last minute I changed my mind. If I hadn't gone, Yoshi and I would never have met.

The party was in a large house that buzzed with music and laughter. I wore a dark blue silk sheath I'd had made, a perfect fit and a good color for my eyes, and for a while I moved through the rooms, laughing, talking. Then I passed a quiet balcony and, on an impulse, slipped out for some air. Yoshi was leaning against the railing, gazing at the river below. I hesitated, because there was something about his stance that made me wish not to disturb him. But he turned, smiling in that way he has where his whole face is illuminated, warm and welcoming. He asked if I wanted to come and watch the water.

I did. I crossed the tiled floor and stood beside him at the railing. We didn't speak much at first, mesmerized by the swift, muddy currents. When we did start talking, we found we had a lot in common. In addition to our work and love of travel, we were the same age, and we were both allergic to beer. Our conversation flowed so swiftly that we didn't notice the people who came and went, or our empty glasses, or the changing sky, not until the monsoon rain began to pour down with tropical suddenness and intensity. We looked at each other then and started laughing, and Yoshi lifted his hands to the outpouring of the skies. Since we were already drenched, there seemed no point in going inside. We talked on the balcony until the rain ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Yoshi walked me home through the dark and steamy streets. When we reached my house he ran the palms of his hands across my cheeks to smooth away the water, and kissed me.

At first it was easy enough to keep the relationship from gaining traction. I'd had enough of the transitory, long-distance love affairs that happen inevitably for people who travel so much. Then the rains began again. They came early that year, and with an unusual ferocity, overwhelming the city's open canal systems and flooding the streets. Much of Jakarta was low-lying and susceptible to water, and the sprawling development around the city—a loss of trees and green spaces—had

left few places to absorb the rain. The water rose, and rose. One morning fish were swimming in the flooded lawn, and by noon water was five inches deep in the living room. My roommate and I watched on the news as the flood washed away cars, the fronts of buildings, and an entire village of 143 people.

As the water began to recede, Yoshi and two coworkers organized a cleanup at an orphanage. He picked me up in an old Nissan truck he'd borrowed and we drove through the drenched and devastated city. The orphanage grounds were awash in mud and filled with debris. It stank. We worked all that day and all the next, and Yoshi was everywhere, shoveling mud and orchestrating volunteers. Once, he paused beside a boy in a worn red shirt who stood crying in the mud, then picked him up and carried him inside.

When he brought me home at the end of that second day, the skies opened again. Running from the car, reaching for my house keys, I slipped and grabbed a mango tree to keep from falling. A cascade of leaves and twigs showered down, scattering seeds and pollen, desiccated stems. I was already a mess from cleaning. Yoshi took my arm and we fumbled our way inside. *You're shivering*, he said, *come here*. We let our wet clothes fall by the steaming shower. *Close your eyes*, he said, stepping behind me, the warm water pouring over us, and then his hands were moving in my hair, working the shampoo through every strand, caressing my scalp, massaging my shoulders, the cold and grime draining away, my tension and uncertainties draining away. My arms eased under his touch, he held my breasts like flowers, and I turned.

And now we were here, all these days and miles away, Yoshi's voice, his laughter, drifting over the wall that divided the hot springs pool. I slid deeper into the water, resting my head on the damp rocks. My limbs floated, faintly luminous, and steam rose; the women across from me chatted softly. They were mother and daughter, I thought, or sisters born years apart, for their bodies were similar in shape, and their gestures mirrored each other's. I thought again of my own mother, sitting alone in her house.

Lately you seem like a very sad and lonely person. The comment still smarted, but I had to wonder if it was true. I'd left for college just weeks after my father died, numb but determined to escape the silence that had descended on the house like a dark enchantment. Keegan Fall had tried again and again to break it, but I'd sent him away harshly, two times, three times, until he stopped calling. In the years since, I'd moved—from college to grad school, from good jobs to better ones and through a whole series of romances, leaving all that grief behind, never letting myself slow down. Until now, unemployed in Japan, I had paused.

One by one, the women stepped out of the pool, water dripping onto the stones, causing little waves. I remembered my dream, the faces just beneath the surface of the ice. My father used to tell me stories where I was always the heroine and the ending was always happy. Nothing had prepared me for the shock of his death. He had fallen, it was determined in the autopsy, and hit his head on the boat and slipped beneath the water, a freak accident that could not fully be explained, or ever undone. His fishing pole had been recovered days later, tangled in the reeds at the edge of the marsh.

I left the pool and dressed, but Yoshi wasn't outside yet, so I started walking idly down a path of stones alone. It followed a narrow stream and opened into a pond, as round as a bowl and silvery with moonlight. I paused at the edge. In the darkness on the other side, something stirred.

Not for the first time that quake-riddled day, I held my breath. A great blue heron stood in the shadows, its long legs disappearing into the dark water, its wings folded closely against its body. Then the pond was still, gleaming like mica. Another, smaller heron stirred beside the first. I thought of the two women in the spring, as if they had stepped outside to the pond and been transformed into these silent, beautiful birds. Then Yoshi called my name, and both herons unfolded their wide wings and lifted off, slowly, gracefully, casting shadows on the water before they disappeared into the trees.

"Lucy," Yoshi called again. "If we hurry, we can catch the next train."

The heat closed in as we lost altitude, and the hydrangea blossoms

against the windows grew older and more ragged, as if the slow, incremental season had been compressed into a single hour. By the time we reached our stop by the sea, the blossoms had disappeared completely, leaving only glossy foliage. We walked home along the narrow cobblestone lanes. Crickets hummed and the ground shook slightly with the surf. Twice, I paused.

“Is that the sea?” I asked.

“Maybe.”

“Not an earthquake?”

Yoshi sighed, a little wearily, I thought. “I don’t know. Maybe a very little one.”

A vase of flowers had tipped over on the table. Several books were scattered on the floor. I wiped up the water and gathered the petals. As I stood, there was a single quick, sharp jolt, so strong that even Yoshi reacted, pulling me into the doorway, where we stood for several minutes, alert again to the earth, its shifting, trembling life. I was so tired; I dreaded the night ahead, with its earthquakes and its dreams. I dreaded the next day, too, all the little disagreements flaring out of nothing, and the silence that would press around me once Yoshi left for work. I thought of the herons at the edge of the pond, spreading their dark wings.

“Yoshi,” I said. “I think I will go see my family, after all.”