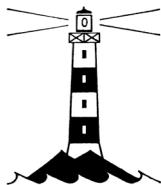


**THERE
WILL
BE NO
MIRACLES
HERE**

CASEY GERALD

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HERE



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I do not want the world to end.

Nobody asked me, though. *Boy you're too young to have an opinion!* They cry and cry each time I offer up a couple cents. Maybe so. Maybe. But if twelve is too young to think, it sure as hell is too young to die.

I guess it won't be *death*. I will simply *disappear*, in the twinkling of an eye, right around midnight on the last night of this world, 31 December 1999, when Jesus Christ returns to set His kingdom up for good and for good reason. Things have really gone to shit since He's been gone. Ever since He got Himself killed for trying to help the weak and poor and scorned around Judea, and since He fled back home to lick His wounds, to spend two thousand years in exile, and since His buddies spread a story in His stead to men and women everywhere, some of whom were so inspired that they, too, wound up hung and shot and flayed for similar transgressions—and *still*, somehow, it seems each day, there are more poor, more weak, more scorned among the earth, myself included, which is why the Son of man is on His way to pick me up.

Just a minute!

Got to find my shoes somewhere in this house where all my space is borrowed, temporary. A little corner of somebody else's closet. Their bed.

Their bathroom sink. Their dinner table. A stranger in the country of my kin, but that's all right. There are many mansions over there and plenty room for me. *Here I come . . .* out the door and down the sidewalk to the long and boxy town car where Clarice sits waiting. She will disappear as well. Must be why her head is bare, why those thick gray curls are washed and set but unadorned, ready for her crown reserved in layaway. Or does she wear no hat tonight simply because it's Friday? I don't know for sure. Don't know anything for sure when it comes to her, my father's mother, or when it comes to my own mother, wherever she is—or when it comes to anybody else who played some role in making this world what it has been for these twelve years. But that's all right, too. He knows it all. *We're on our way.*

The gravel parking lot is nearly full, not even ten o'clock yet. I see a few cars trampling the grass along the wall of naked trees that separates the neighborhood from the church grounds, as my father's father intended. God rest his soul, wherever it resides. He left the church to his offspring. Left the town car to his widow. Left instructions that she keep her parking space up front so we don't have to search at all, just roll right in. *We're here.*

In the sanctuary, someone saved a seat for her. *Scoot over some,* I ask them with my eyes and they scoot, since I'm with her and I'm small. Much bigger than I was when I first entered this sanctuary as a thought of my parents'. Place still looks the same, just like every other sanctuary to me, except for all the red. Woolly fabric, dried-blood red, covers every inch of the floor and the seat of each wooden pew and each armless, high-back chair in the pulpit. There's even a strip of it stitched on the robes worn by the choir members who will sing tonight one final time. Singing now, in fact.

Behind their choir stand is the empty pool, filled once a month for baptisms. They say it takes only one dip in that water and you'll be set for life, *afterlife.* *They* say a lot of things that ain't the truth, so I went back a second time, right after my twelfth birthday this past January, to be sure. I

also decided, a few months ago, to read the Bible on my own—three or four pages a day. But that early stuff was boring and the clock was ticking, so to speak, so I moved on to a timely novel, *Left Behind*, and made it through enough of that to warn you: Never read it. Believe me. Since then, I've tried to talk to God a lot more and to sin a lot less. Had a hard time doing either.

According to the clock nailed to the back wall above the audiovisual control room, where tonight's service is being recorded for some reason, we have only an hour. Whoever is left behind to watch will probably not see me, crunched between old women, but they will see that the place is packed, hardly an empty seat. I could tell you all about the many gathered, who they are, where they come from. But none of that matters anymore. The only thing that counts tonight is where they are *going*, and that's none of my business, being a child and all. Besides, I have my own eternity to worry about.

Outside, beyond this sanctuary, are other worries—at least, that's what I heard on television. Some worry the computers will revolt at midnight, unable to comprehend the year 2000. Each machine's rebellion will spark some small catastrophe: Planes, unable to find their way, will fling themselves down to earth—darkened earth, since streetlights will not heed commands to glow past midnight. Dams and sewers will surrender to the water's long-held wish to flow all over the place, all over the people, who will not be warned because the telephones will not connect them to each other anymore. They will have only themselves. Won't even have money, except whatever cash is on hand, since bank accounts will reset to 1900, when everybody was broke. They will be broke again tonight, and hungry, too, as many grocery shelves have been emptied. *Oh, sinnerman*. The worst is yet to come. Plagues. Riots. An atom bomb or two on accident, and more: a lake of fire where each sinnerman and sinnerwoman and sinnerchild (twelve years and older) will swim, ablaze, forever and ever. I might be down there with them if I have not made the right decisions

these twelve years, but there's still time: ten minutes, says our pastor, who's calling us down to the altar so we can pray until midnight comes, until He comes. *Let's go.*

Now we're crowded together in the altar space and in the aisles. Some are sweating—nerves as much as heat. The pastor is sweating most of all, as he should. Seems to me that every time he's laid his hands on some sick parishioner, they've wound up sicker. A few have even died. That can't be a good sign for him, nor for those relying on his intercession, which I'm not. I have seen enough to doubt the holy men, and so I've memorized my own private prayer.

Lord, please take me with You when You come.

That is all I have to ask of God, and I will get my answer soon. It's 11:57 (had to peek back at the clock). Close my eyes, focus on my silent incantation, *Lord, please take me when You come*, listen to the people shout and moan. Louder. Higher. Now the organ's running strong—can you hear it? Feel the sweaty palms grip firm and the eyes clench tight down here at the altar, where one will be taken and one will be left, where wheat and chaff will be torn apart, and the glory will be revealed. *Lord, please take me when you come* in this din of end-time noise, the heat now stifling beneath low-hanging lights, and—in *the precious name of Jesus . . . Amen!* The pastor shouts. It's over.

There's a hand still holding mine—Clarice's, I see, when my eyes re-focus. On the clock I see it's after midnight. And around the sanctuary I see no fewer bodies. Has He come and left us all? No one seems too worried. Same *Happy New Year!* hugs as always, same hymn before the benediction. Outside are the same cars in the gravel parking lot and in the grass, cranking up just fine. No snow. No fire. Not a flicker from the streetlights as Clarice drives away from the church. No panic in the voices on the radio. Above our heads, the planes are flying on, carrying everyone where they hope to go tonight. I'm carried to my mother's mother's house.

Inside, I see that everyone who was missing in the last millennium is still gone. Everybody else is here, awake, boiling black-eyed peas. *Hey y'all* . . . I just want a slice of cake, smuggle it to the room in back where I keep a mattress. On the tiny television, its bunny ears wrapped in aluminum foil, Peter Jennings is right where he is supposed to be, on channel 8, where he will stay for twenty-three hours and ten minutes, to coach the world through its demise. If I understand Mr. Jennings correctly, it has been over for a long time in other places. He speaks to Diane Sawyer in New York, where, somehow, an extra hour has already passed. Charlie Gibson is in London. Barbara Walters, Paris. I like and trust them both a good deal and it seems that they will soon witness the first morning after what was meant to be the final night. I don't understand. Screen cuts to Connie Chung live in Las Vegas, surely high on the list of the damned. Midnight. Fireworks. Kisses. Nothing else. Peter Jennings has never lied to me, and so I have to accept that *I* got something wrong, that *I* am a fool or worse. I mean, how exactly would Jesus have kept coming back again and again, based on the different time zones? Hadn't thought of that. Now that I do, now that it dawns on me how big a joke I am, how sick I made myself with dread and even hope—well, there's nothing left to do but cry. It is over. I'm still here.

I am still here, nearly twenty years later, and will let twelve-year-old me rest now. He had a rough night. Surely would have cried, sitting there at the edge of his mattress, if he had been the type of boy who cried. But he wasn't, anymore. And he did not want the world to end. His world had already ended. He wanted to be *rescued*—the Rapture had seemed an elegant solution: instantaneous escape for him, damnation for his enemies, robes and slippers, plenty food to eat, *and God shall wipe away all tears; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain*. Yes. He wanted some of that. But midnight struck and

the Son of man did not appear, so in the place of Paradise, he had to find a kingdom of this world.

Well, really all that he—all that *I*—hoped to find was somewhere to call home and some money, US dollars preferably, and, at some point, a spot on the varsity football squad and, soon after that, a beautiful boy to sneak off with on prom night. Nothing more or less than what was offered in the movies. Maybe a little more. I admit that, aside from those basic desires, I also longed for something to believe in. That was greedy. My mistake. I had not learned that *the search for belief is very likely the most violent known to man, not infrequently ending in death or derangement*, but I did learn and I now know. The search has not yet killed me, though I am a bit deranged—and *that* may be the best that I have been in all these years. For I have been so many things along my curious journey: a poor boy, a nigger, a Yale man, a Harvard man, a faggot, a Christian, a crack baby (alleged), the spawn of Satan, the Second Coming, Casey. I have been left once or twice. Been found, too. And every time I turned around, the world began to end again—it's even ending right this minute, I hear. *Three cheers for the end of the world*, if you ask me.

You see, it could be said that I, from my starting place in the valley of *the least of these*, made it to the mountaintop. Not that I set out to do so. Just was afraid and open-minded. Anyway, I'm back. I have not returned with empty hands. No. I have come with urgent news: we must find another mountain, if not another world, to call our own.

And if *they* say this is an unreasonable, impossible thing to request, I will tell them of a village that I heard of not too long ago. The village, somewhere in France, sometime in the seventeenth century, became the site of frequent miracles, according to the peasants there, who were so struck by symptoms of the supernatural that they put down their plows. This, of course, pissed off the local officials. They tried to reason with the peasants, to quell the mass hysteria, to no avail. At last, the officials sought an intervention from the highest power in the land, who sent them back

THERE WILL BE NO MIRACLES HERE

with a sign. An *actual* sign, which was erected in the village square for all to see. It read:

**THERE WILL BE NO MIRACLES HERE
BY ORDER OF THE KING**

Mine, then, is the story of a peasant boy and the king (or a few presidents) and, with luck, God and His miracles or lack thereof.

PART ONE

**Write the things which
thou hast seen.**

The Apocalypse of John

Revelation 1:19

chapter **ONE**

There had been much better days, I promise. At least one. Let me paint a picture—or tell you about one that I still own because I stole it.

The family stands together in a lush Ohio field with a sprinkle of leaves at their feet, and trees, some dying, towering behind them, a small red barn with white lattice beside them. The man, the father, tall like those trees, brown like the bark, is smiling. His mustache wraps around his wide mouth, big teeth. His head is square and strong and on straight, his hair low and wavy. His white shirt and light blue jeans are starched. His hands are larger than most men's hands, better than most men's hands at certain things, which is why they made him famous for some years, some years ago. He clasps these hands around a little girl, eight or nine years old: the daughter. They seem to shield her heart, also covered by a thick black sweater with many colored patches. She looks like she's got good home training: stands at attention, arms at her sides, feet together, no space between the knees. A portrait-perfect smile, cheeks shiny and plump and bronze. There is a thin white ribbon in her black hair—a ribbon likely tied and hair likely pressed by the woman in the portrait: the mother, who stands by the man. Their elbows touch. She holds her head highest of all. She has the biggest smile of all, red lipstick. She has the biggest hair of

all—burnt blonde, parted on the right side, billowing out and down in curls, falling on the shoulders of her white lace blouse. She wears no rings. She rests her hands, nearly balled into fists, skin the shade of sand-castles, on the shoulders of a little boy: the son. Somebody failed to train this boy or else he did not listen. His little legs are turned to the side. His blue jeans are crooked, too. His left arm floats up, away—he may be trying to wriggle away from his mother, or he may believe his arms are airplane wings. Hard to tell. Unclear, also, why his head leans over, nearly parallel to the ground. Because it is so big or because he is so happy? Those enthused eyebrows, the twinkles in his eyes (that might just be a glare on the photograph), a smile so intense that his dimples look like craters on a small brown moon. Maybe God was sticking His pointer fingers in the boy's cheeks. Maybe he was just born that way. Who knows? All we know from this artifact is that this family took one pretty picture together on one fine fall day in 1991 or '92. That they stood together and wore crisp blue jeans and clean white blouses. That they smiled, heads straight or crooked.

See the family. Savor them. Soon, they will be destroyed. They will destroy each other. They will destroy themselves. The world or fate or mysteries untold will destroy them in a little while, for the boy needs to travel most of this journey alone—and if he does not *need* to (which, as the boy, would be my argument), then he *will* anyway.

Not yet.

For now, he's got joy in his cheeks and his mother's hands on his shoulders and his sister at his side and his father running the whole show as he was wont to do. He was Rod Gerald, after all.

As a high school quarterback growing up in South Dallas, Rod Gerald possessed two of the fastest legs and two of the steadiest hands in America. They were traits that made him the envy of football players and the prize coveted by big-time college recruiters. Even the legendary Woody Hayes swooped down to South Oak Cliff from Columbus, Ohio, where he presided over one of the

best-oiled, most proficient, and successful football factories in the nation. Hayes wanted Gerald throwing the football for Ohio State University, and he dropped a few \$100 bills in the collection plate of Gerald's preacher father to drive home his point.

Woody got his money's worth, I'd say: convinced that eighteen-year-old boy to leave his mother and his father and his three older brothers and three younger sisters and all the girls who had been shouting his nickname—*Crow!*—from the stands and reading his stage name—*Rod Gerald* (his name was Roderic)—in newspapers since the eighth grade and go to Columbus and cleave to Woody Hayes and become one flesh or nearly with Ohio State football. The journey would cost him at least one of his lives, but for a time, beginning in 1975, it gave him a new one, a better one. His new life made him the second black quarterback in Ohio State's history, took his exploits from the pages of the *Dallas Morning News* to the *Columbus Dispatch* and *Sports Illustrated* and the *Washington Post*, which announced his new nickname: *The Magician, because he vanishes in front of tacklers' eyes*. And on New Year's Day 1977, by magic if not miracle, the boy became a legend. In the first quarter of the Orange Bowl, with Ohio State losing 10–0 to Colorado, Woody called Rod Gerald from the bench, where he had sat out five games with a broken back, and asked him, barely healed, to fix the mess. The boy complied: dazzled 65,537 pairs of eyes in the stands and however many more tuned in to NBC to see the 27–10 Buckeye victory. Was named the game's Most Valuable Player. Number 8 in your programs, number 1 in your hearts. For a time.

Many things transpired in the next decade. Four I can prove: in May 1982 Roderic married Debra West, who as a little girl had also visited his preacher father to be baptized and thereafter to hear him preach. In September 1982, almost too many months early, the newlyweds brought a daughter, Natashia, into the world. In January 1987, on Epiphany, I was born. In March of that same year, Woody Hayes died. Before he passed on,

Mr. Hayes had convinced his quarterback to return to Columbus and finish the degree that, for reasons we will understand soon enough, had been aborted.

I also know that Rod Gerald earned his diploma in 1989, if only because I've looked at the graduation photo many times, if only because I'm in it. And I know that sometime between then and the aforementioned day in '91 or '92, Rod Gerald became a local legend once again: coach of the Dublin High basketball team, coach of the Mifflin High football team, code enforcement officer for the city of Columbus. The same Rod Gerald that you might recognize at the Horseshoe on game day, who might be the answer to your Buckeye trivia question, whose name might be on your Ohio State throwback jersey—and for these reasons, the same Rod Gerald who was, by 1993 or '94, a real pain in my ass.

You see, a great man is an inconvenience as a father, in part because every boy wants to be a man (until it happens), *his own* man, and that is hard enough to do without everybody calling you the *son* of somebody. I envied, in a way, the boys I'd come to know who had been told so often by so many, *Your daddy ain't shit* . . . because for all the things that I could and did and will say about mine, I could not say that he wasn't shit. He was the greatest man that I had ever known, and *his* daddy, whom we'll get to, was the greatest man that *he* had ever known and this was, most likely, the root of all the evil inside each of us. It was also the reason I threatened to kill myself one night in 1994, I'm almost sure. You'd think I would remember the exact date and motive, but all I have left is a clear memory of the method, strangulation, and my final words: *I guess I'll have to kill myself to get some freedom around here!*

I ran through the den to my bedroom, past the only memento displayed in our apartment, a scarlet felt banner with gray script that read *Rod Gerald 1977 Orange Bowl MVP*, and began to wrap the long black cord of my Sega Genesis controller around my little neck as fast as I could,

though not fast enough, because Daddy caught me before I got my freedom and commenced to give me, instead, his long black belt.

He won that skirmish and almost every other, as he was Rod Gerald, a winner. And when he wasn't forcing me to stay alive and I wasn't trying to overthrow him, which only happened once or twice, he seemed to have all the patience in the world for me. Showed me, for example, how to make the bunny ears with my shoelaces and how, instead of tripping a boy in peewee football practice, to put my helmet in the boy's chest and wrap my arms around his waist and drive my legs until his back was on the ground. *Knock his dick in the dirt, Scooter.* Such was the kind of wisdom my second-grade teacher hoped Rod Gerald would offer to her class for Buckeye Day 1994.

On Buckeye Day, kids at Prairie Norton Elementary School, and no doubt kids all the way up in Cleveland and down in Cincinnati, learned to consecrate themselves to Ohio State. We wore necklaces made of buckeye nuts and Buckeye T-shirts, and the lesson plan was adjusted to teach Ohio State football instead of cursive or whatever else they taught in elementary school in those days. An actual Buckeye's presence would be divine. I asked Daddy when he got home from work and he said what he often said about things he was going to say no to: *We'll see, Scooter. We saw.*

He instead sent one of the VHS tapes of Ohio State football that were stacked under the television in our living room—only one of which I had seen, and only then for a few short seconds because when I pressed *play* I was met with the grainy image of a long-haired, bare-shouldered woman violently sucking what I was almost sure was a penis, except that it was far too large to be real. Mama, from the kitchen, had cried out with that noise she made that sounded like a muffler backfiring—*ugh, Roderic!*—and rushed over to switch off the TV. I hurried into my room without asking any questions. Let her off the hook. I figure that's why she didn't fuss when I was caught with the back massager in my underwear a few months later.

We had that kind of understanding, my mother and me, even though I did not understand so many things about her. Didn't understand, for example, why she went to a beauty convention for a whole year, and why she and Daddy sent me and Tashia to Dallas that year instead of bringing us along to cheer her on or just hang out. You hardly ever understand the most important things until it's too late for the understanding to do anybody any good. Since I was only five at that time, I reasoned that my mother was beautiful enough to need a year or more to convene re: her beauty and that was *okay* as long as it didn't take forever, which it didn't. Tashia and I went right back to Columbus and Mama was still beautiful and I didn't ask any questions then, either, because I was six and then seven and had other things to think about—and besides, my mother never made any sense to me and that's what I liked about her.

Every other adult seemed desperately committed to making sense. They were all headed somewhere in a hurry, and on their way they always had to tell me that I didn't have my shirt on right or that I needed to lotion my ashy knees, that I was talking too much, too loud, or not correctly, that I had better stay out of their high heels, that I needed to put on deodorant, that I had to either come inside or go outside but *choose* because I was wasting the air-conditioning and running up the electric bill.

Mama was the only person I knew who didn't do any of the stupid stuff grown people were doing all the time. She didn't wear clothes around the house if she didn't want to (in part because she stood before the bathroom mirror for hours each day), and she didn't eat her vegetables, and she didn't laugh at jokes if she didn't understand them, but sometimes laughed when no joke had been told. She gave me bologna for breakfast, and melted cheese and sugar on my toast instead of spreading jelly, and told me *Take some Tylenol, baby!* when I said I had a stomachache. And when I split my eyebrow open flipping in the bed she didn't scold me, just laid my bleeding head in her lap to feed me peanut butter on our way to the hospital. And

when I almost drove her car into the front door of the Drug Emporium, she yelled at the security guards instead of me. And when Daddy said I could not listen to Boyz II Men, she went and bought the tape herself. I'm not saying she was perfect, just that I sure benefited from her imperfections. Maybe that's what magic is: a useful mistake. Otherwise it's just a bad decision, which is what I thought my daddy made with the tape he sent for Buckeye Day.

I was sitting in Ms. Baughman's dark room in pure bliss, swinging my little legs—not because I was finally witnessing Ohio State football but because the greatest days of primary school involved a metal cart with a TV on top and a VCR on the shelf below—when Ms. Baughman stopped the tape and turned on the lights. *Man, what if somebody dubbed over the football game with that woman?*

It wasn't that. Ms. Baughman had stopped the tape early because the footage Daddy had chosen to send was of the 1978 Gator Bowl match between Ohio State and Clemson, which had also ended prematurely. Seconds after Ohio State's quarterback (the one who replaced Rod Gerald) threw a ball directly into the arms of a Clemson linebacker to seal a Buckeye defeat, Woody Hayes retaliated by punching said linebacker in the throat as he ran to the Ohio State sideline. *You SOB, I just lost my job!* Woody was reported to have yelled at that poor boy from Clemson, who for all the money in the world would not have bet that his place in college football history would be secured by taking a sucker punch from an old man. Woody's career was, in fact, over. So was Buckeye Day.

Ms. Baughman tried to wrap the fiasco in a noble message nobody was listening to:

See, kids, we have to keep our tempers under control, right?

Yes, Ms. Baughman! as we swung our feet or dug in our noses or searched for some residue of Fruit Roll-Ups in our book bags.

I could do all types of psychoanalysis to try to figure out why Daddy sent that tape instead of coming to my class. Maybe he couldn't leave

work. Maybe it seemed a clever way to get back at Woody, who had cost him *his* job as starting quarterback. Maybe he was simply tired of being Rod Gerald. He'd already attempted to offload the name to me, and would have succeeded had my sister not already been, at four, the wisest person in the family.

Daddy's idea was that I become Roderic Alan Gerald, Jr. My mother protested, since she wanted me to carry her name instead: Debra Ann would become De'Brian, in keeping with the 1980s trend of naming kids with no thought to the price they would later pay in school, job searches, or self-esteem. At a stalemate, they turned to Tashia, who offered: *Call him Casey*. She borrowed the name from a soap opera character, Dr. Casey, a woman. I don't know what she was trying to say.

Tashia got her wish and rightly so. I had been her baby as much as Mama's and Daddy's, my aunties told me. When I asked what was wrong with Tashia's back, why she had a brace that she was supposed to wear but didn't, they reminded me it was my fault. I had been so big—*chile, you were so BIG*—that Tashia, still in pigtails, newly robbed of two front teeth, had to lean—*chile, she was almost leaning on the floor!*—just to keep me balanced on her hip. My jowls were fat and my eyes drooped, but my grip was firm like I'd been holding on to my sister since before I even existed. In the pre-thoughts of our mother's womb I had known her, had found her message left behind for me: *Don't worry, I'll be waiting for you*. I don't mean to say she was born just to serve my needs—I really am working to be a good feminist, which is very serious business—but that if she had not been born I would not have my name and she might not have those rods in her back to keep her spine from breaking and we would not have learned so soon to hold on to what we had even if it was too heavy.

By Buckeye Day 1994, Tashia seemed eager to let me go or at least not speak to me too much, even though we lived under the same roof and shared first a let-out couch and then a waterbed and then, finally, a room

with twin beds that Daddy came to sit on every night and pat us to sleep. And so I had to imagine what she was like through other people. Some days I thought she was Brandy Norwood—a wholesome girl with skin the color of the chunks in Blue Bell buttered pecan ice cream, sitting in a swing in the park with dookie braids singing to a boy:

I want to be down

I want to be down with you

Other days I thought she was Lauryn Hill in *Sister Act 2*—same skin, same braids, same voice in sometime-service to God, same funky attitude with the authorities, even her father, her favorite person in the world. She was his favorite, too, except for one weekend morning when, lying on Daddy's chest to read his daily planner, I watched him take out a ballpoint pen, put a tiny blue star next to the date, and write, mouthing the words just so I could hear: *Casey will be more successful than his sister, because he listens.*

She must have really pissed him off that day. But a day often comes when a girl stops taking shit from anybody, and I'm glad hers had arrived. Otherwise I would have been sitting up dead at the hands of my neighbor-friend's younger brother, who was the only white person to ever call me *nigger* to my face, or the American Indian boy a few doors down whose fingernails were almost as long as his hair, which I tried to pull once, before he slashed me. Would have been, in other words, a casualty of the Thumbleweed Drive Race Wars of 1994.

These battles broke out every few months. I'd be leaning against the back of Daddy's black Ford Probe, scratching the paint off, or walking from Ms. Wonderlich's apartment across the way with a stale sprinkled sugar cookie in my hand, or digging for a rock that had some gold inside, and I'd hear the cry:

Race war!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The fleck of paint flits away, the sugar cookie is crushed under a shoe,

the empty rock is folded into my fist, and I call for Tashia, just like the Indian boy calls for his sister, and the white boy calls for his big brother, and we run, all of us, to a spot that the universe has preordained as the place of bloodletting, where we will pay for the sins of our fathers and forget that we are friends and ignore the fact—if only for a short moment of suspense in that time of day when you no longer have to shield your eyes to watch the sun—that, aside from Tashia and the little Indian, nobody knew how to fight.

Tashia knew it all: what my name should be, how to fight, how to sing, that I liked her best friend's sister without me even saying a word. And I assumed she knew why, one day in 1995, Daddy packed up all the family's stuff and said that we were going back to Dallas. Going *home*.