

An aerial photograph of a surfer riding a wave. The surfer is silhouetted against the bright, foamy water of the wave. The background is a vast expanse of ocean with a warm, reddish-orange hue. The overall composition is centered and balanced, with the surfer as the focal point.

KRISTINA
MONINGER

A NOVEL

TWO
LIVES
To Rise

ENGLISH
EDITION
by Forever

BREAKING WAVES

Forever

Kristina Moninger
Two Lives to Rise: English Edition

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to Rise

A NOVEL

BREAKING WAVES

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For Tamia, my little girl

Content note

This book contains sensitive topics that may be distressing to some people.

A detailed trigger warning can be found on page 337.

**Let me see your beauty broken down
Like you would do for one you love**

LEONARD COHEN

Prologue



Ten years earlier

“When was the last time you saw Josephine Blythe?”

“What state was she in?”

“Did someone threaten her?”

“Is there any reason to believe someone may have kidnapped her?”

“How long have you known Josephine Blythe?”

“How would you describe your relationship?”

The Charleston police officer stroked his broad chest. He seemed to mistake my brusque tone and blank gaze as concern for my friend and immediately softened his tone.

I'd answered every question truthfully, like a robot rattling off stored data. But I was just being a good actor. For a moment, I thought I might vomit on the interrogation room's neatly polished table. The tape recorder in front of me flashed red, like a bomb whose detonator had been activated.

But it had already exploded. Josie was gone.

She had been missing for more than twenty-four hours. And all I could think about, all I wanted to know, was whether my secret had gone with her. But I didn't even know what I wanted any-

more—my friend to stay missing along with my secret, or the unbearable truth to come out and Josie to come back.

The officer looked at me questioningly. “The more details you can remember about yesterday, the better our chances of finding your friend.”

Apparently, I hadn’t heard his last question.

A tall, slim woman came in, placed a glass of water in front of me, and subtly handed me a tissue. I left it untouched on the table and wished my soul were as white as the little rectangle in front of me. My head felt heavy. My hands were tense. My skin cracked and dry, like my cheeks. Because I wasn’t going to cry. No way.

“Try,” the officer urged.

And yes, I did try. So hard, I could feel the summer heat my pale skin wasn’t made for. In my mind, I saw Avery looking for Jake—or Josie, or maybe both—standing on her tiptoes, staring toward the bar. I could picture the fine film of sweat on Lee’s forehead, felt the corners of my mouth involuntarily curling into that thin, malicious smile that always appeared when I thought of Josie. I still had the sweet taste of weed on my tongue. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed how the barrier tape swayed slightly in the wind, holding the crowds back from the waves beyond. Later, the tape was torn, as if to tell us: now it’s your turn to be ripped apart. The difference was, I’d destroyed the bond holding me and the girls together already.

Well, no, it wasn’t me. It was Josie. Actually, it was all Josie’s fault.

“What do you mean? What is Josie’s fault?” asked a deep voice.

I glanced up and blinked, realizing I had said that out loud. I didn’t meet the officer’s eyes. Instead, I stared out the low window into the courtyard of the Charleston police station.

“I didn’t say that,” I muttered.

The man sighed and started again. “So you were all together at

the festival, Miss White. And you didn't split up? Who first noticed Miss Blythe was missing? Focus."

Yesterday felt like a lifetime ago. Like it had happened on another planet, to someone else. And at the same time, I was still at the festival, trapped in a parallel universe where Josie was dancing across the meadow, her beautiful face distant and unreadable.

I gasped for air and sat up straight. It was quite possible we would never see each other again. I took another deep breath. "Yes, we were all there. Some of us were dancing, and Josie was at the bar, but at some point, she was gone. I think it was Avery who asked about her first."

"Miss Winter?"

"Yes. Yes, it was Avery, and ... Lee made a strange comment, something like why would Avery be the one asking where Josie was. Since they'd just had a big fight."

The officer raised a bushy, graying eyebrow. He suddenly looked very interested.

I made a mistake.

"I want to go home now. I've told you everything. It looks like she just ran away, doesn't it?"

"I'm not so sure about that, Miss White. You know, in most cases, things aren't what they seem."

No, they weren't. And nothing would ever be the same again.

If Josie could disappear, then so could *it*. It had to.

1



“A woman has been found at Moss Lake.”

Odina’s words sink through the quicksand of my barely awake brain, unable to stick, muffled and distorted by fear, lost and scattered among other thoughts. A glance at the alarm clock on my bedside table tells me it is just after five in the morning.

On the other end of the line, Odina waits patiently for me to respond. All sorts of memories are racing through my mind in no particular order—the interrogation at the police station, Josie’s green hair, our argument in the bathroom at the Seasons. Out of the blue, the name “Kirsa Jensen” pops into my head. She disappeared while out riding, and eyewitnesses reported seeing her talking to a man in a white car. The similarities to Josie’s disappearance are striking, even though the cases have never been connected. Every time I get into my white Mercedes, I think of those two lost girls who never reappeared.

“Can you say that again? I’m not sure I followed.”

Odina groans. Not impatiently, more like it causes her great pain to have to repeat the sentence. “A female body has been found at Moss Lake.” After a brief moment of silence, she adds, “It might be Josie.”

The weight of old guilt sits on my chest like a massive concrete

truck, my legs too weak to lift the weight of my body out of bed. All the missing person cases I've followed over the years, all the blogs I've read, all the testimonies from relatives I've devoured. None of it prepared me for this moment. Because if I'm honest, I always assumed Josie would simply remain missing. Like Kirsra Jensen, Ruth Wilson, Kristin Smart, Conny Converse ... The idea that Josie might have been found, dead in a muddy lake, seems like the trailer for a morbid horror movie, not the way-too-brutal reality.

Odina and I both just breathe into the phone for a while, so many unspoken questions between us. I suspect Avery already knows. Ever since she arrived on the island and stirred things up, she and Odina have rekindled their friendship. Does Lee know, too, all the way in Hawaii? Is it necessary for our friend group to come together over this terrible event? If it really is Josie's body, is the past finally buried for good?

"Where are you?" I ask and stare at my white knuckles. All the white things around me—the shiny chrome, the polished tiles, the streak-free windows—are suddenly too bright. Too clean. It isn't fitting for a moment like this.

"Avery and I are going there." She doesn't ask me to go with her.

Nevertheless, without hesitation, I say, "I'm coming with you."

It's not an offer, but a statement. One I want to take back immediately. What would I be doing there?

"Good," says Odina, and we both hang up. And probably simultaneously breathe out in relief.

I don't *have* to go with her. I don't even want to. No one is forcing me to drive across the bridge to the offshore islands and visit that cursed lake. But I will.

As if on autopilot, I walk into my dressing room, pull out a

blouse and some jeans, slip into them, and grab the car keys. I activate the alarm system, set the air conditioning to 64°, and close the door behind me. Outside, a cool breeze brushes my skin. I should have put on a jacket. I consider turning around but decide not to. It's so early that the morning fog hasn't lifted yet. It stretches like a delicate veil all the way to the beach, where it becomes one with the sea and the clouds, an endless nothingness of deep blue. Behind it lurks a warm, sunny day.

On the stairs leading to the carport, I have to hold on to the railing. My thoughts are as foggy as my surroundings, jumping back and forth between then and now. Between a disastrous evening, and this life I've settled into since. I stop, turning the keys over and over in my hand. I'm about to go back inside when the image of a large, broad man with a dark mustache and tinted glasses appears in my mind. I want to scream but manage to suppress the urge by pressing the car keys so tightly into my palm that I can't think of anything but the pain for a moment.

Then the previously repressed memory is gone, along with the impulse.

I reach the carport, legs trembling, and climb into my car. I manage to start it on the third attempt and slowly pull out of the driveway.

And promptly stall the engine.

"You're up extra early today! I was just about to get started," I hear my new neighbor call out cheerfully.

There are days when I hate driving a convertible.

To be precise, I've hated it for two weeks, ever since Preston Anderson moved into the run-down beach house next door. I don't want to look at him, but I turn my head just enough to see he's leaning against the rickety, rusty gate of his garage, which he's