

orca soundings

SHATTERED

SARAH N. HARVEY

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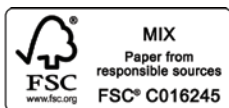
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Summary: After March shoves her boyfriend and he ends up in a coma, she tries to figure out what it means to have a perfect life.



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To Maggie

Chapter One

It was close to midnight by the time I got to the end-of-the-year party at Brad Bingham's place. I had to work late. And then Mom and I argued about me using her car. I won, but barely. She wanted me to promise not to drink. I negotiated her down to a single beer. Like she'd ever know. From down the block I could see the multicolored Christmas lights

the Binghams leave up year-round to light up the backyard and deck. A mindless techno dance mix was blasting out of huge speakers balanced on the living-room windowsills. It was warm for June—hurray for global warming. Most of the guys, and some of the girls, would no doubt already be topless. Brad's parents weren't home. If they had been, they would have been out with the dancers on the lawn. Forming a conga line and passing around a doobie. All of us envy Brad his parents.

I slipped in the side gate and onto the back deck, where the hot tub is. Tyler loves the hot tub. So do I. I had my bikini on under my sundress. I pulled the dress over my head, kicked off my flip-flops and stepped into the light. That's when I saw a slutty tenth grader named Kayla writhing on my boyfriend's lap in the hot tub. She was naked and so was he. His red board shorts were in

a damp heap on the deck, next to her string bikini and an empty vodka bottle. The lights—red, green, yellow, blue—shone on their wet skin. Tyler’s eyes were closed, his neck arched. A small moan escaped his parted lips. Kayla’s back was to me. I always thought it was bullshit when people said they got weak in the knees. I was wrong. I wasn’t just weak in the knees. It felt as if every joint in my body had turned to water. I put a hand out and steadied myself against the fence. I considered picking up the bottle and smacking Kayla upside the head with it. Instead, I took a deep breath, perched on the edge of the hot tub and said, “Hey, guys. Having fun?”

Tyler’s eyes flew open, and he shoved Kayla off his lap. She disappeared for a moment under the hot tub’s foaming bubbles. For a second, I thought about holding her under. Not long enough

to kill her. I'm not insane. When she surfaced, she tried, without success, to cover her breasts and hairless crotch with her small hands. Her nail polish was silver. Tyler, ever the gentleman, tossed her a towel. As she wrapped it around herself, she turned to me and snarled, "So much for your perfect life, bitch," before she ran, dripping, toward the house. She cheats with my boyfriend and I'm the bitch? I picked up the bottle and threw it after her, but she was already inside. The bottle exploded when it hit the back door.

Tyler made a grab for his shorts, but I was way ahead of him. I picked them up and tossed them over the fence into the next yard.

"Not cool," I said. My hands were shaking and my feet felt numb. "Not cool at all. We're done, Tyler. Don't call. Don't text. Don't come to my house."

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Tyler crouched in the hot tub, begging. “Don’t go, March, baby. Let’s talk about it.”

I shook my head. I wanted to leave, but I couldn’t move. Tyler climbed out of the hot tub and wrapped a towel around his waist. I noticed that his nipples were erect. I thought about how the last tongue on those nipples had not been mine. The sushi I had snacked on at work rose in my throat. I swallowed hard as he took a step toward me, whining, “She brought vodka. You know what vodka does to me, babe. It didn’t mean anything.”

I kept shaking my head. Tyler and I had been friends since third grade and going out since we were thirteen. Four years. Neither of us has had sex with anyone else. Or so I thought. Now our relationship was as shattered as the bottle I had thrown at Kayla.

I put my hands up in front of me as Tyler approached. Isn’t raising your hands,

palms out, the universal symbol for “back off”? He should have stopped. But he didn’t. Suddenly I wasn’t frozen anymore. I felt strong. And angry. Angrier than I’ve ever been. His bare, wet chest collided with my palms, and I shoved him—hard. He staggered and fell backward. All one hundred and seventy pounds of him. It was like felling a redwood with a steak knife.

“Timber!” I yelled as he crashed against the hot tub. I waited for him to get up, but he lay perfectly still. I nudged him with my bare toe. Nothing. Nothing at all. I froze up again, I’m not sure for how long. Could have been one minute. Could have been ten. It was just Tyler and me, in a bubble of colored light. I’m not proud of what I did next. I knelt down and made sure he still had a pulse. I’m not sure what I would have done if he hadn’t, but he did. I stood up, put on my dress and flip-flops and used

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my cell to call for an ambulance. I didn't give my name, and I didn't wait for the ambulance to come.

I walked down the rotting wooden steps, shut the gate behind me and got into Mom's Honda. It smelled like her: Trident cinnamon gum and Dove body wash. I love that smell.

I turned the key in the ignition and drove off. I heard the siren. Then the ambulance passed me, its lights blurred by my tears.

Chapter Two

When I got home, I did what I always do when I'm upset: I emailed my brother Augie. He was probably awake, playing online Scrabble or writing an essay. When he first went away to university a year ago, he told me he liked getting my emails. He refuses to text or use Facebook. So I tell him about my life, and he says

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I make him laugh. It's not like writing for school. I do as little of that as I can get away with and still get good grades. Good enough to keep Mom and Dad off my case anyway. Augie's the smart one. I'm the fun one. All my report cards, since grade one, have said pretty much the same thing. *March is very social, and it affects her grades in a negative way.* Augie's report cards said sort of the opposite. So now he has a few really close friends and a massive scholarship. I have three fake IDs, a closet full of designer clothes, and a hot boyfriend. Make that a hot ex-boyfriend.

Hey Augie,

Tonight I caught Tyler banging a chick named Kayla in Brad Bingham's hot tub. I broke up with him. I don't get it. Kayla is a total ho. You know what she said to me? She said, "So much for your perfect life, bitch." For some reason that made me feel like shit, but I'm not

sure why. Is it my fault that he cheated on me? Did I deserve it? What did she mean? I feel like I'm going crazy.

March

I couldn't bring myself to tell Augie about shoving Tyler, or about leaving before the ambulance came. Usually I tell Augie everything. This was the first time I had kept a secret from him. It didn't feel good. I shut my laptop and crawled into bed. My bedroom is huge and painted sky blue with shiny white trim. It's on the top floor under a gable, at the opposite end of the house from Mom and Dad's room on the main floor. You get to my room up a narrow twisting staircase off the kitchen. Augie's bedroom is two doors down, waiting for him to come home for a visit. In between is the guest bedroom. The bathroom across the hall, complete with claw-foot tub,

is cold, even in summer. Mom keeps promising to have it renovated, but she's always too busy.

My bed is tucked into a south-facing nook that is lit at night by the lighthouse near the golf course. There are blackout curtains, but I never use them. The green light washes over me as I sleep. I find it comforting, as if I am being stroked by a friendly alien. When I was little, I used to tell people that when I grew up I was going to be the lighthouse keeper. The lighthouse is automated now, so that career is out. So far, I haven't thought of another one.

I love it when it's foggy and the foghorn sounds every sixty seconds. Mom hates the sound of the foghorn. So mournful, she says. But to me it's like the light from the lighthouse. Reassuring. My best friend, Natalie, hates the light and the foghorn. She always stays in the

guest bedroom if we have a sleepover, even though I have a king-size bed. If it's foggy, she uses earplugs.

After I wrote to Augie, I lay in bed and counted the seconds in between the flashes of light. One-two-three-four-five. It never changes. It was a clear night, so there was no foghorn. Soon the light lulled me to sleep.

When I woke up the next morning, I was happy. For about twenty seconds. Maybe less. However long it took my brain to provide me with a vivid playback of Tyler and Kayla in the hot tub. Someday I'd have to ask Mom or Dad what goes on in your brain right after you wake up. Not today though. Showing interest in their work is dangerous at the best of times. Once they get started, they can't shut up. It's best not to encourage them. My parents, Dr. Richard Moser and

Dr. Yvette Kleinman, are psychologists. Research psychologists, not therapists. They don't listen to people's problems. They study their brains. I won't bore you with the technical details. Basically they study how memories are formed in the brain. They don't care too much about the memories themselves.

For example, most of my friends have great memories of going to Disneyland. My parents don't believe in those kinds of vacations. It's all camping or culture for the Kleinman-Moser clan. Vacation as education. Augie loved the Grand Canyon, the Galapagos Islands, Machu Picchu, the Louvre. But I wanted the Pirates of the Caribbean, Toad's Wild Ride, Indiana Jones. Still do.

"You can go on your own dime," Mom said when I whined about it. "I'm not paying for all that fake Disney claptrap. Where are you going to want to go next? Las Vegas? Climb the fake

Eiffel Tower? Go on a gondola ride down a manmade canal in an artificial Venice?” She was smiling, but I knew better than to argue with her. I have the memories my parents want me to have. Up until now.

I dragged myself out of bed and opened my laptop. There was a new message from Augie in my inbox.

Dear March,

You're not crazy.

It's not your fault.

Nobody's life is perfect. Perfect is boring.

This really is something you have to work out on your own. It's about time. I always said you were a smart girl. Gotta go, March. Give my love to Richard and Yvette. Keep me posted.

August

“Thanks a lot, Augie,” I muttered as I shut the laptop and got back into bed.

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I was exhausted and sad. I wanted to sleep forever. Figuring out my life would have to wait.

Sarah N. Harvey is the author of eight books for children and young adults. Some of her books have been translated into Korean, German and Slovenian, none of which she speaks or reads. Her novel, *The Lit Report*, has been optioned for a feature film. She will not be in it. She lives and writes in Victoria, British Columbia, where she is determined to learn how to salsa dance, study Italian and overcome her fear of flying (in no particular order). For more information, visit www.sarahnharvey.com.