

I grab the heavy glass door of the library and heave it open, stepping into the cool air of the lobby. The laughter of three teenage girls wafts over from the seating area that surrounds the coffee shop. One is sharing a phone and they lean in to watch the screen together. I hurry past the information desk where a boy and his mom are borrowing a bright lemon guitar and I navigate past others busily checking out books at the self-service stations that line the lobby. Three squealing preschoolers chase each other towards the rear of the library in the direction of the children's section. I purposefully walk upstairs and head straight to the young adult section. I have only two remaining chapters to read in *Where Sleeping Girls Lie* and have half an hour to find a new book before I need to tackle my math homework. I am reluctant to let go of smart and thoughtful 15-year-old Sade. I've gotten to know her strengths and weaknesses. She's witty and observant yet struggles with the issues of her past and can sometimes suspect the worst of others. She is real.

Rows and rows of bookshelves crammed with colourful spines stretch ahead of me. There are so many books. I slowly make my way down the Z section, scanning the spines and lingering on the titles. I hesitate before reaching for the first book. I always find myself in this same frustrating situation. I pull out *The Sun is Also a Star*. I stare at the vibrant purple, pink, and orange star on the cover. No images of embracing, no images of lips entwined. I open the book and read the short synopsis. Science, facts, not fate, not destiny...I pause. This is real, it might work. Falling in love with a cute boy in New York...I don't want to read about a romance. I exhale. I squeeze the book back onto the crowded metal shelf. Why do teen romance novels always depict the seemingly perfect lives of popular kids, stories full of countless friends and social media followers, too much happiness, love, and endless fun? I reach for a second book, *Eleanor Park*. The short synopsis is romance-free so I pull my phone from my sweatpants pocket and open the Goodreads app. Scrolling through the genre tags, I stop when I reach "romance" and "high school". I slip my phone into my pocket and put the book back on the shelf. I'm never going to be a popular kid in school. Those kids have countless friends, a popular boyfriend or girlfriend, and hundreds of social media followers. Those kids are always wearing the trendiest clothes and have the most stylish haircuts. Instead, I'll be starting high school as the kid who barely knows anyone. I don't have a massive group of friends. I'm uncomfortable whenever someone asks me for Instagram or Snapchat. I'm not that into fashion and I don't care too much about my hair.

Enough. I inhale and turn around. I walk towards the staircase and return to the bustling lobby. I push open the heavy glass doors, stepping into the humid heat of a May afternoon. As I start walking down Queen Street, I become distracted by possible ways to solve the math problem I will return to when I get home.