

LIFE ONE

CHAPTER ONE

"I taught my daughter she could be the alpha. She hates me. I taught my dog I was the alpha. She loves me."

She said that to a very close friend one day at the Hammer Museum in Santa Monica, California. A tolerably hot summer day, the west side of LA always more bearable than the east or valley. The sun beamed into the atrium where she met Mills. They hugged, sat on a bench. Never made it into the exhibit. They just sat on the bench and talked as the hours passed. Well, she talked. And cried.

This was the day her daughter turned eighteen. She didn't get to wish her a happy birthday. Didn't give her a hug, a present, or cake. This day was three years into the three-and-a-half-year period when her daughter, for whom she holds the deepest love, the most perfect, imaginative, open soul with huge blue eyes and even brighter mind, the one human so close it feels as if they share the same body, this was during that time, when her daughter decided she was never going to see or speak to her again. No contact for three and a half years, save the nonstop emails sent to the internet's ether, hoping desperately but never knowing if her daughter was reading them or not. It was a time when it was an effort to move. To keep from crying all day. An effort to stay alive. It was also the time of her most fervent creative inspirations. Where she dug so deep, forced herself to not only keep going, but to make this moment matter. For her. She had to put her pain somewhere.

Until this day, life had been a series of tragedies. A cushy list of traumas leading up to this culminating moment in the museum with Mills. Her kind sympathetic eyes and consoling smile, Mills knows the whole story. Mills has comforted her through each abyss and while she genuinely appreciates the solace, she feels shame every time. Embarrassment over how her life has unfolded despite the potential that she, and everyone else in her life, knows she holds. Her tears begrudgingly fall as she feigns fortitude, her face shoved up against the unrelenting paradox that's been her life, utterly baffled by its sheer absurdity.

Her story isn't a victim's tale. She sees it as a dark comedy told by a soul who holds herself accountable for everything that's happened. We choose these lives for reasons larger than many can understand. She doesn't believe it to be random. She believes each experience, tracing back to being born into her specific family and to her specific mother, have all been a set up for her evolution. Just as yours have for you. Each coincidence, each unexplainable sign, happening with such insanely ridiculous timing, someone must be up there laughing at her. Poking her until she finally wakes up. She can hear it. She appreciates it and has each time. Eventually. Trauma doesn't have to be tragic, it can be funny too.

Obviously, humor isn't the immediate reaction. Plenty of moments sitting in the bathtub with her clothes on. Leaning her forearm a centimeter from the stovetop flame before admonishing her own behavior. Millennia-long minutes where no one would pick up a call or text her back. When the main message from the universe was that she must process alone. But always, after all that

languishing and forced solitude, something would always occur. The poke. A stranger handing her a 'You are beautiful.' card on the subway. A first date gifting a Pema Chodron handbook because they knew her birthday had just passed. The barefoot hippy randomly sitting down at her table in the coffeeshop to tell her the universe has a plan for each one of us. Why do these angels drop in when we need them most? No freaking idea. But they do and with their arrival comes the lesson. We must feel through the sorrow, push through the pain, and process the moment. It's necessary. Pema says so.