

MY MOTHER CALLS TO ME FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE stairs, and I pull myself slowly from a deep sleep. It is June. Outside the sky is bright blue and clear. In the distance I can see Central Park, the trees brilliant green against the sky. I was dreaming of Miah.

"Elisha," Marion calls again. She sounds worried and I know she is standing at the bottom of the stairs, her hand moving slowly up and down the banister, waiting for me to answer. But I can't answer yet. Not now.

*Is there a boy?* Marion asked me that fall, when Miah was new. And I lied and told her there wasn't one.

She is standing at the door now, her arms folded in front of her. "Time to get up, sweetie. Are you all right?"

I nod and continue to stare out the window, my hair falling down around my eyes, my pajamas hot and sticky against my skin.

# Chapter 1

JEREMIAH WAS BLACK. HE COULD FEEL IT. THE WAY THE sun pressed down hard and hot on his skin in the summer. Sometimes it felt like he sweated black beads of oil. He felt warm inside his skin, protected. And in Fort Greene, Brooklyn—where everyone seemed to be some shade of black—he felt good walking through the neighborhood.

But one step outside. Just one step and somehow the weight of his skin seemed to change. It got heavier.

Light-skinned brothers—well, yeah—sometimes he caught himself making fun of them. But everybody laughed. Everybody ragged on everybody.