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AUTHOR OF THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER
FIREFLY BEACH



The timeless magic of true love, family, and...

SUMMER LIGHT



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Luanne Rice

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SUMMER LIGHT
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For my niece, Amelia Onorato

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SUMMER LIGHT

Prologue

THE LAKE WAS SO DEEP it had no bottom. When it froze, the ice was thirty feet thick. Mountains rose to the north, east, and west, thick snow covering every cliff and pine tree. Just before sunrise, the aurora borealis flashed across the northern sky. Without pausing to look up, the young boy strapped on skates and grabbed a shovel.

The temperature was five below zero. Inside, he had banked the kitchen stove with coal and firewood. The fire blazed, but it wasn't strong enough to warm the house. Martin was always cold, no matter that his mother gave him hot bread for breakfast, that she knitted him thick socks and heavy sweaters to wear.

Outside, the wind stung his cheeks red. It seared his lungs and froze his fingers. The cuts on his chest—new, raw, stitched with black thread—felt like a bear had clawed him, but nothing could stop him. He had school in a few hours, but first he and Ray were going to meet on the lake.

The sun broke over the eastern mountains, cracks of orange light shooting through the trees. Martin glided across the ice, pushing the shovel ahead of him, clearing last night's snowfall: two inches had fallen. Hearing the

scrape of a blade, he looked up the lake and waved. Ray was shoveling fast and hard from his end.

The boys met and passed. As the sun rose higher, they cleared more of the area. Martin pictured the Zamboni at Maple Leaf Gardens, preparing the ice for his father to play. The crowd was cheering.

And now, the great Martin Cartier was about to meet the great Ray Gardner. . . .

They set aside shovels and found the sticks and pucks they had hidden under the old log. Martin's stomach growled. He hadn't had enough to eat last night, and this morning his mother's bread hadn't risen right: The fire had gone out in the early hours, and the stove wasn't hot enough for baking. He had choked down half a slice to please her, trying to ignore the things she was saying about his father.

Martin's stomach rumbled louder, right through his heavy jacket. He knew Ray could hear it—it sounded just like a bear or a timber wolf—and he was embarrassed that Ray would know they didn't have enough money to stay warm or eat right.

"Ready?" Ray asked, pretending not to hear.

"*Bien sûr*," Martin said, grateful to Ray but giving him a deadly scowl, just like he'd seen the centers do it in the pros.

Their sticks clicked, Martin won the puck, and the race was on.

Flying down the ice, he heard their skate blades slashing. Clumps of snow whispered off the pine boughs onto the frozen lake. A family of deer nibbled the tops of tall grass sticking out of the snow. An owl flew low over the ice, chasing a field mouse.

Martin saw it all, even as he concentrated on the puck. The world went on around him, a thousand sights at a time, and all his focus was on the puck. They fought and tripped each other, hooking each others' ankles, hooting with joy.

Martin was superhuman; he had the multifaceted eyes of a praying mantis; he was the greatest hockey player in the world.

Eyes in the back of your head, that's what you need, eh? That's what the real champions have. Martin could hear his father's voice. It was so clear, as if he was right behind him on Lac Vert instead of living it up in California. Driving for the goal, Martin imagined his father watching him now, watching him with pride. He left his best friend in a cloud of snow. He cocked his arm, aimed for the net, scored.

"Martin, what's that?" Ray asked, skating over.

"What's what?" Martin asked, grinning. He grabbed Ray in a bear hug, getting him in a headlock. "I beat you, that's what. Can't you take it?"

"No, that—" Ray shoved Martin away, pointing at the ice.

Drops of red led to one scarlet pool. The blood ran down his legs, over his skates, onto the ice. Bright red, it soaked through the thin snow and skate blade tracks.

"Nothing," Martin said.

"*Merde!*" Ray said.


Fumbling with the zipper, Ray undid Martin's jacket. Martin tried to fight him off, but he was shaking too hard. Ray threw down his gloves and unbuttoned Martin's shirt.

The slices were deep, and in the rough game, the stitches had come undone. Blood flowed from the criss-crossed cuts. The man had held Martin's neck with one hand, the knife with the other while his father had watched. "Pay," the man kept saying. "Pay, or I'll go deeper."

"What the hell?" Ray asked, looking into Martin's eyes. The air was so cold, their blood froze as they stood there. Ray took off his own jacket and pressed it against the wounds. Martin couldn't, wouldn't talk. He wouldn't tell a soul—not his mother, not his best friend—the details of what had been done to him.

And he never had—not one person—until he met May.

May, his only love. He had told her the whole story.



He could see it now, the way it had been, the thing that had happened, that bright cold morning on Lac Vert. He could see as if it was right in front of him: every ice crystal, every pine needle, the look of wild competition in his friend's eyes. The scene was as clear as day.

Until he opened his eyes. He was lying in bed, sweating and tangled in the sheets.

"Martin, you cried in your sleep," May whispered beside him.

"I dreamed—" he began, then stopped.

"Tell me," she said. He could hear the anguish in her voice, and behind it the deepest love he had ever known. They had met at a strange, vulnerable time in each of their lives, and she had once told him they had specific things to give each other, things that no one else ever could. He was afraid, so afraid, that he had lost the power to give her anything.

"Of the lake," he said.

"What happened?"

"I could see."

May pressed her face against his chest. His scars no longer hurt as they once had, but they felt taut and hard as wire cables. Martin couldn't see her hand as she reached up to touch his face. He couldn't see their room, the window, the pictures of Lac Vert hanging on the wall, his only love lying beside him. He was going blind, and he couldn't see anything, except in his dreams.

Chapter 1

THE PLANE WAS CROWDED. AS the passengers boarded, the flight attendant announced that every seat would be required, that people should stow all their belongings in the overhead bins or under the seats in front of them. May Taylor made sure her and Kylie's bags were out of the way, that Kylie knew she had to stay in her place and not bother the businessman in the aisle seat.

Takeoff was smooth, and the plane climbed through thin gray clouds into the brilliant blue. Until this year, May hadn't flown much—she had never had much reason. But Kylie's doctor in Boston had recommended that Kylie take part in a study at Twigg University in Toronto, with a group of psychologists focusing on clairvoyance and personality disorders.

May and Kylie lived with May's great-aunt in an old farmhouse on the Connecticut shoreline. May loved her daughter more than anything, but as she looked around the plane, she couldn't help noticing all the couples. The white-haired couple sharing the newspaper; the young professionals in his-and-her suits, talking on cell phones; two parents with their teenaged kids across the aisle.

May stared at the parents for a few minutes, wondering

how it would feel to have someone to share the care of Kylie with: to travel with, laugh with, worry with. She watched the woman bend toward her husband, her hair brushing his shoulder as she whispered in his ear. His lips turned up in a wide smile, and he bowed his head, nodding in agreement.

May suddenly felt as if she'd swallowed a fishbone, and she quickly looked down. She had a sheaf of papers from Dr. Ben Whitpen at the Twigg University Department of Psychology to read, reports and observations and recommendations, all pertaining to Kylie. Upon landing at Logan, she would take them to Kylie's doctor on Barkman Street. After that, the long drive home to Connecticut lay ahead. She stared at the letterhead, at the confusing and worrisome words swimming together, and the ache in her throat grew worse.

"Mom?" Kylie asked.

"What, honey?"

"Big men."

Thinking Kylie meant the passenger sitting next to her, May immediately leaned close to Kylie's ear. When Kylie got involved with people, they sometimes got upset. And May could tell by the man's expensive suit, his heavy gold watch, and the fancy briefcase he'd placed in front of Kylie instead of his own seat, that he was one of the ones who might get upset.

"The man's working," May whispered. "Don't bother him."

"No," Kylie whispered back, shaking her head. "In the special compartment—*really* big men. Are they giants?"

May and Kylie were in the first row, but Kylie was staring through the half-open curtain separating economy and business class. Kylie was right: Several huge guys were sitting up there, talking to a semicircle of pretty female flight attendants. Their strength was apparent in the size of their chests and arms, the breadth of their shoulders. Some of

them had logos on the sleeves of their shirts, and May figured they belonged to some team or other. The women were laughing, one of them saying she loved hockey and could she have an autograph. May, knowing nothing about hockey, turned her attention back to Kylie.

"They're just men," May said. "Not giants."

"Big, though," Kylie said.

"Yes," May said. "Big." She thought of the word "big," of how it could mean so many things. Kylie's father was big—over six feet tall. He was a lawyer in Boston, in one of the prestigious firms with offices in a skyscraper overlooking the harbor—a big attorney. He had seemed to love May until she told him she was pregnant, and then he had told her he was married to someone else—a big problem. He sent her money every month, enough to feed and clothe Kylie—but he didn't want to know their daughter. That made him small.

The Department of Psychology was paying for this flight, with an extra stipend besides. Even with Gordon's child support, life away from home was expensive. Planes, hotels, and restaurants were for other people, vacationers and business travelers with someone to share the trip with. May felt a wave of loneliness.

Listening to Kylie humming beside her, May looked down. She hadn't planned on motherhood, hadn't counted on anything as wonderful as Kylie coming from the worst experience of her life. Kylie was a fairy child, unique and odd but—if May could believe Dr. Whitpen—gifted instead of disturbed. May had been instructed to keep a diary of her visions, a blue notebook she filled with everything Kylie told her and with details May observed.

Right now, Kylie stared at the men up front with growing intensity, her eyes taking on what May called "the glow." She was seeing something. She bit her lip, to keep from blurting it out. Her eyes slid from May to the forward

compartment and back again. Six years old, she was small for her age. Wavy dark hair fell to her shoulders, and velvet brown eyes gazed out from her creamy face, radiant as if lit from within by candlelight.

"Don't, Kylie," May said.

"But—" Kylie began.

"I'm tired," May said. "Look somewhere else. Draw pictures. I'll switch with you, and you can have the window seat."

Kylie shook her head and gave an exaggerated shiver, sliding low in her seat. She stared at the big men up front, her eyebrows knit together with fierce concentration.

"It's a baby one," she said, frowning as she clasped her hands in her lap.

"Kylie—"

As if feeling the intensity of Kylie's stare, one of the hockey players looked over his shoulder. He had the aisle seat, and as he turned May noticed a mischievous glint in his gray-blue eyes. A flight attendant stepped forward to yank the curtain shut. Blocked from view, their conversation and laughter were just as loud. Kylie stared as if she had X-ray vision, as if whatever she had seen was still there, in plain sight.

"Great," came an annoyed voice from the row behind. "Put the Boston Bruins on a plane, and watch the stewardesses disappear."

"They're screwing up the play-offs anyway," someone else said. "The Maple Leafs will finish them off tonight."

"The hell with hockey," a woman said with a laugh. "Just give me Martin Cartier."

"The hell with Martin Cartier," a man growled. "Just bring me a drink."

Kylie seemed oblivious to all the talk. Sitting between her mother and the stranger on the aisle, she was growing paler by the minute. May stuck the papers and her diary into a folder and snapped up her tray table. Her heart felt

heavy, and her chest ached. She watched Kylie stare at the curtain, her mouth moving in silent words.

"Let's switch places, honey," May said, unsnapping her and Kylie's seat belts. "It's springtime down there, and you can see the new leaves. See all those fields? All the trees? We must be over Massachusetts by now. See if you can count—" She paused, lifting Kylie out of her seat and plunking her by the window. Kylie's skin felt clammy, and May's heart was racing. The businessman let out a loud exhalation as May kicked his briefcase out of the way.

"She wants her daddy, Mom," Kylie whispered, clutching May's wrist. "She wants to kiss him."

"Count the barns," May pleaded, pointing out the window, trying to find something to occupy Kylie, take her mind off the hallucination.

"Oh, but she'll leave—" Kylie started, sounding sad. She swallowed, looking into May's eyes. May could almost watch her willing herself to obey, to stop whatever vision she was having and act like a normal child—count the barns or sing her ABC's or look at the Berkshires or ask to be taken to the bathroom.

Kylie had started seeing angels when she was four. She went to nursery school and realized that she was the only child there without a father. A month later, her beloved Great-Granny—May's grandmother Emily—died of a heart attack. Then, one fall day, on a hike around the Lovecraft Wildlife Refuge, the two of them had come upon a body hanging from a tree branch. All rags and bone, the skull had grinned down like a decomposing witch. The police later identified it as the body of a drifter, Richard Perry, who had committed suicide.

Suddenly Kylie had started talking to herself. She would call out in her sleep, cry all day at nursery school, speak in unknown tongues to people May couldn't see.

The psychologist May had eventually taken her to had remarked on the timing: that Kylie had begun having visions

right after Emily Dunne—Kylie's great-grandmother, solid presence, rock of the family—had died. At the same time, Kylie had come to realize she was essentially fatherless. She felt abandoned by most of the adults in the universe, the doctor said. Seeing the dead body had been her breaking point, the catalyst for seeing ghosts. She wanted a family, and the visions provided that.

May could understand. Having grown up in an extended, loving family, *she* wanted family too. Besides, she worked in the most charmed profession in the world, with a legacy of magic from her grandmother and great-aunt.

But what if Kylie was schizophrenic, and not clairvoyant?

"She'll go," Kylie whispered, holding her mother's wrist, "before she gets to kiss her father. She'll leave if I don't pay attention—"

"Kylie," May whispered, her voice breaking. "Let her leave." If she wasn't so exhausted, frustrated, scared, and alone, she told herself, she would stand firm and tell Kylie in no uncertain terms that there was no one there, no one wanting to kiss her father, no baby angel hovering over the seats in business class.



Martin Cartier had his legs stuck out in the aisle, and every time one of the flight attendants passed, they braced themselves on his seat back as they stepped over. Two hours into the flight, he was being a jerk, blocking their way, but he couldn't help it. He had tried sitting slouched, straight, and sideways, but any way you cut it, the plane was too small.

Not just because of his size, which was considerable, but because of his energy. His mother always used to say he had a blizzard inside him, and Martin thought that might be true. He felt as if he'd swallowed a killer wind,

with enough power to flatten cities and bury towns, that if he used it on the ice, he could destroy the other team. Martin's energy flew out his elbows and hips, slamming his opponents into the boards, bloodying the ice and sending people to the hospital.

Right now, the energy made him squirm in his seat. He felt prickles on his scalp, and once again he looked around. The flight attendant had closed the curtain, but peering through a crack, he saw the little girl staring at him, her pretty mother bending over to whisper something in her ear.

He played defense for the Boston Bruins, and they called him "the Gold Sledgehammer." "Gold," because of the name Cartier, and "Sledgehammer" because of the obvious: He always won his fights. He'd been named an All-Star ten times, won the NHL MVP twice, led the league in scoring twice. He was a tough and stalwart defenseman, winning the Norris Trophy two years running as the league's best blue-liner.

He wasn't mean, but if he drew aggression, he packed heat in his stick and fists. Fearless to his bones, he attacked back fast. He was known for drawing the opposing team's leading scorer into the fray, bloodying him, and getting him sent to the penalty box. Wherever Cartier played, fans came in droves.

"Um, excuse me . . ." a female voice said.

Martin looked up. An attractive passenger was standing over him. She wore an elegant black wool suit with black lace showing under her jacket, and she had perfect legs in sheer stockings. High heels. White-blond hair curved over her long-lashed green eyes, and her lipstick looked red and wet.

"You're Martin Cartier," she said.

"*Oui*," he said. "That is true." It was only April, and already she had a tan. She wore large diamond stud earrings; the heavy gold chain around her neck had smaller