

Watching Alice

WALK ON WATER

DANIEL PARKER AND LEE MILLER

Watching Alice

**WALK ON
WATER**

江苏工业学院图书馆

DANIEL HARKER
AND
LEE MILLER



NEW YORK

WatchingAlice: Walk on Water

RAZORBILL

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Young Readers Group

345 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada, Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia

(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), Cnr Airborne and Rosedale Roads, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand

(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank,

Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Copyright © 2004 Daniel Ehrenhaft and Barney Miller

All rights reserved

Text Design by Christopher Grassi

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

Printed in the United States of America

The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

**WALK ON
WATER**

FROM TOM SINCLAIR TO THE READER

DEAR READER,

This is really hard, so bear with me if you can. I'm still wrapping my head around the whole thing. I'm still overwhelmed, in denial, freaking out, desperate. I can barely even comprehend that you're reading this, that there is, in fact, a "reader." But I'm grateful for that. So I'm going to try to stay as clear and focused as I can. For Alice.

Alice Brown is my girlfriend. Actually, I don't even know if that's the right word. It's not enough. I don't know if there is a word to express it. I don't know anything for certain anymore, except that she's missing.

Alice Brown is seventeen years old. She is a senior at the Peter Cooper School in New York City. She is about 5'7", with clear blue eyes and very straight blond hair. She was last seen wearing tortoiseshell glasses, a green skirt with yellow flowers on it, a black turtleneck, and an old sweater of mine: a tan V-necked cashmere sweater with a monogram of my initials: TJS.

The initials stand for Thomas Joseph Sinclair. I'm a senior at Cooper too. I just moved here from Vermont. I could tell you a hundred other things about me right now—some of it embarrassing, some sickening, some even pretty horrifying—but there's no point. You'll know more about me than you could possibly want to when you're done reading this. You'll know my secret, my past, all of it. Which is fine. I'm so far beyond caring what everyone sees or what everyone knows about me.

All I care about now is Alice. All I care about is finding her.

And if there's one thing you need to understand, it's that Alice Brown is not dead. She is NOT. If someone whispers that to you, then they are lying. If a cop or anyone else tries to tell you that, then they don't know what they are talking about. She is missing. So you people out there reading this—I think you're all I have left. You are my last-ditch effort. I am praying that maybe somehow you can help me find her.

Believe me, I know how crazy that sounds. How can you possibly help me find Alice Brown? You don't know her and I don't know you. You probably don't go to Cooper, and you probably don't even live in New York. And even if you live in the city, what are the odds that you've heard a thing about Alice's story? There was one four-sentence clip in the New York Post about her disappearance; there was a two-second sound bite on Fox News. But nobody pays attention to that stuff anymore. Teenagers disappear all the time. You see a different missing poster Scotch-taped to the window of some bank or some Korean deli every couple of weeks. God knows I've taped up Alice's poster in every single deli, diner, pizza place, or bank that would let me. . . .

But it doesn't even matter if you've seen her picture or not, because pictures don't really tell you anything about her. There is so much more you need to understand. And I think maybe that's the reason these people agreed to publish my journal and Alice's diary. Maybe there really is such a thing as miracles, because these people were actually willing to help me. They believe what I believe: that if we can just get this story out to the general public, then maybe one of you out there can help too. Which is why you are now actually holding a copy of either my journal, or Alice's diary, or both.

Some background: Both of our diaries start before we even met. They both go right up until the very last day I saw her, the last day anybody saw her. All I'm asking is that you read them. Or to be honest, I guess I'm begging. I'm praying that maybe one of you will see SOMETHING in these diaries that I haven't caught, something I haven't noticed, something that might wake the police up and get them moving again. I can't even look through this stuff anymore—I've read it all so many times. But you could be the pair of fresh eyes that makes all the difference.

Please just try. Find something in her words or in mine. Keep watching for her face out there. Every reported sighting so far has turned out to be total crap. If you see something or you think of something, then write me, or e-mail me, or post something on my Web site (www.watchingalice.com)—a thought, an idea, a glimpse of her. Anything. Because you have to understand: it's the easiest thing in the world to turn her into nothing. A washed-out poster. A sad little anecdote that only lasts through the appetizers at dinner. Just please don't do that to Alice. Alice is not an anecdote. She is so much more than that. She is, in fact, everything I have. And remember: I'm always here. If you have an idea about Alice, if you have anything to say to me, I'm here.

-TOM SINCLAIR

P.S. The following is a word-for-word printing of Alice's diary up until the very day she disappeared and her words just stopped. So you know, it's actually more of an unfinished letter than a real diary. That's how Alice thought of it, anyway. It's addressed to someone named Chi-Chi, someone Alice never mentioned to me. But it's best not to dwell on who or

what I don't know. So much of it feels like it was written to me, by somebody who knows me better than I know myself. On the other hand, there are parts that are entirely cryptic—passages that I can't even understand. And yet I feel that Alice wants me to understand. She wants someone to figure all this out. Maybe that someone could be you. I'll just say this: Put distance between yourself and her words. Distance might help you find her. I'm praying it does. Being too close to her words hasn't helped me at all.

ALICE'S DIARY

SEPTEMBER 14TH 10:37 AM

Dear Chi-Chi,

I'm trying to think how I should begin here. How about: I'm sorry for the fight we got into last night? No . . . that doesn't quite cut it. How about: I'm sorry for *everything*? I'm sorry for how things have changed so much in the past six months? For how we haven't even been friends since last spring? For how I'm embarrassing the both of us right now with this ridiculous stream of apologies? ☹

That last one was a weak attempt at humor, in case you were wondering.

The truth is, I'm too tired and depressed to try to be funny anymore. See, all last night I was lying in bed—I didn't sleep, by the way; sleep is for people who aren't so ashamed—and I was plotting out this whole huge beg-you-for-forgiveness call or e-mail, literally word for word, when suddenly it hit me: I shouldn't call you or e-mail you at all. I should *write*. I should put pencil to paper.

An old-fashioned letter is always better than an e-mail or a phone call, don't you think? It's truer. That's why I ran out first thing and bought this diary. . . . I was going to buy

stationery, but the thing is, I have so much to say, and it will take so many more pages than a normal letter. . . .

Okay, actually, that's not even true. The *real* reason I'm writing is because I HAVE TO TELL YOU CERTAIN THINGS, AND I KNOW YOU WILL UNDERSTAND THEM because they're related to one big thing that you've *always* understood about me. I wish I could tell you everything, but I can't. It would be too risky. Most of all, I have to protect you . . . but enough said. You'll be able to figure it out. You were always the smart one. ☺

And on a lighter note, a diary is sort of fun, isn't it—you know, in a voyeuristic, reality TV sort of way? I mean, who wouldn't want to see their former friend's darkest confessions and innermost thoughts spelled out in one set of horribly revealing pages? And if you're worried that I've totally flipped my lid, I admit: I'm a little messed up. It doesn't help that Mom, Dad, and Clara have all been pounding on my door, asking me what's wrong and telling me that I never sleep this late on Sunday so something must be wrong, although it's not late at all—and why did I run out of the apartment earlier this morning? Where did I go? What was I doing?

How about, *Buying a diary?* How about, *None of your business?*

But never mind all that. The big news, the reason why I'm so messed up:

I broke up with Carter last night.

It's true. *I broke up with my boyfriend at his own party.* I

broke up with Carter Roy at his own huge, parents-are-out-of-town, summer's-almost-over blowout.

I just had to see the words written down again to believe them myself.

And why did I break up with him? Honestly, I can't even say. My brain keeps flip-flopping. I think: Maybe I made a huge mistake. Maybe I should call Carter right this second. Maybe I should try to work things out. But I know I *can't* work things out. I let things go too far, I let him push me and everyone else around too much, and there are a million reasons why he and I can't see each other anymore. It's over. As much as I wish it weren't . . .

Do you believe me? Probably not. You might be thinking: "Why would Alice Brown dump Carter Roy? She was a lowly geek, a Chem-Bot, and her life became a teen movie when the guy-of-all-guys at school swept her off her feet. Plus after he welcomed her into his tight little Carter & Co., she thought she could ditch all her old friends."

Or you might be thinking: "The last time I saw Alice, at Carter's apartment, twelve hours ago, she was still going out with him. She was still just as tight with Jason, Jasmine, and Tara. She was also more of a jerk to me than she's ever been. When I tried to talk to her, she blew me off. She was like a stranger. Worst of all, she told me to stop bugging her about visiting Shep at Bellevue. She said in a really horrible way that she would visit Shep when she was good and ready."

And if you were thinking any of those things, you would be right.

Of course, it's presumptuous of me to say I know what you were thinking. Half the time, I don't even know what *I'm* thinking.

Chi-Chi, I know I've said I'm sorry. I have to say it again, though. Because I finally realize what you were trying to tell me all along: I'm not myself when I'm with Carter & Co. It's not just the way I act. It's everything. I mean, I switched from glasses to contacts! Even though they hurt my eyes! How much weaker can a girl get? But until last night, I didn't care. I just rationalized it. I made excuses. I told myself: Everyone plays different roles with different people, right? Everybody at some point tries to be one thing to one person and something else to another. Everybody. And why shouldn't they?

Lately I've been thinking a lot about one of the Chem-Bots' faux Dr. Seuss poems. It's the one we wrote during that all-night cram session at your place last spring. Remember? When we were so slaphappy and sugar-saturated we didn't even care that we were such geeks? This one:

Two colorless drops on a windowpane.

One's chloral hydrate; the other is rain.

Or maybe it's dew; I really don't know.

Maybe I shouldn't have licked them both. . . . D'oh!

Not one of our best, I realize. But in a way, it sums up almost everything that has happened over the past few months, on so many levels. It sums up Carter & Co.—that's

for sure, and I mean *all* of them: Jason, Jasmine, even Tara, but most of all Carter himself. . . . At first glance, they seem brilliant and magnetic and everything I thought I wanted to be. But they have those certain qualities that are invisible to the human eye, those qualities that nobody could even imagine unless they made the closest inspection. . . .

But to be fair, the poem sums up *me*, too, and how I've felt over these past few months. I felt like I was both of those drops. Two different things. I felt I could switch whenever I wanted. And I *liked* being able to switch. It was liberating. I felt like I no longer had to be A or B. I could be all of the above. Sometimes I could still be a Chem-Bot. But every time I was with Carter & Co., I could be something else. I could be glamorous, like a celebrity. It was as if I could magically slip into an evening gown. Off came the glasses! I know, I know: it's beyond silly, but it was still a high, even though the contacts sometimes made my eyes look like two cherry cough drops.

You saw the trouble coming even before I did, of course. You *told* me that I shouldn't wear contacts and that my eyes were getting all puffy and red. And whenever you said that, I got annoyed. *I look better without glasses*, I thought. *She's just jealous*. But when I looked in the mirror, I saw that you were absolutely right.

And you weren't just right about the contacts. You were right about *everything*.

Carter Roy's attention simply went to my head. I just didn't realize the full extent of it. Not until last night.

Speaking of which, you want to hear what happened after you left Carter's party and slammed the door in my face? Carter pulled me aside into the front hall, away from the rest of the party, and said: "Don't worry. You don't need to listen to her."

"I don't?"

"No. And you don't have to visit Shep, either."

I frowned at him. "How do you even know we were talking about Shep?"

"You were shouting, Alice," he whispered.

Incidentally, Jason and Jasmine were standing by the kitchen door, staring at us but pretending not to. Which proves that you were right about something else too. When a girl goes out with Carter Roy, she ends up dating the whole Co. It's a package deal.

"Oh," I said. "Sorry."

Carter smiled. "It's nothing, okay? But don't let her get to you, especially about Shep. You and Shep aren't even friends anymore. It's not your fault he had a breakdown. You have to deal and move on."

I was shocked. I was speechless. Carter is usually a little more sensitive than *that*. But he didn't even stop there. He went on to say that you were trying to lay a "guilt trip" on me because I've grown up and you haven't. He said that people sometimes drift apart. It's natural. So I shouldn't feel guilty that you and I don't hang out anymore. And I definitely shouldn't feel guilty that Shep was institutionalized for emotional problems because it has nothing to do with *me*. He

went on to say a lot more garbage too, but at that point I sort of tuned him out.

He wanted me to stick around so I could hang out with those “cool new people” he met over the summer. Yes, those would be the HUDs, the slimy older guys who showed up before you left . . . and he just kept acting like I wasn’t upset, as if nothing had happened. Why would I want to hang out with twenty-something weirdos who spend all their time slobbering like canines over high-school kids? If anyone was trying to lay a guilt trip on me . . . Whatever. To make a short story shorter: I snapped. I told Carter I didn’t want to hang with his friends anymore. I told him I had my own friends, friends my age. I told him we were finished. Then I left.

Chi-Chi: No matter how I act in public, no matter what happens . . . I want you to know that I’m trying. I swear, I’m trying to fix everything. You, me, the utter mess that is my relationship with Carter. Trust me. I’m doing my best to make it all okay again. But we have an entire diary to get into that. We have all the time in the world. We have all of senior year in front of us.

Oh, and btw—I’ve thrown out my contacts for good. ☺

5:08 PM

Just went to Bellevue to visit Shep. It was . . .

Well, there’s no point in lying to you. I was going to say it was great to see him, but it *wasn’t* great to see him. It was horrible. He has lost so much weight and he’s so pale. His eyes

were glassy and off in some other place, and he was just sitting there on the bed, and there was that awful institutional smell, and he was in his pajamas and I tried to smile at him.

"Hey, Shep," I said lamely. (This was after about three minutes of excruciating silence, during which he said nothing and stared off into space.)

"Hey, Alice!" he exclaimed, bolting upright. But then he sort of wilted and looked confused.

"What's wrong?"

"Uh . . . nothing," he said. His eyes shriveled down into bewildered slits and he ran his hands through his hair—which somehow looked sewer-sludge brown, either because of the dismal hospital lighting or because he hadn't washed it. "There was something I meant to tell you, but I can't remember what it was. Uh . . . it was a question. There was something I meant to ask you."

I tried to keep smiling. The conversation had just started, and already it wasn't making any sense. Chi-Chi: I swear I wanted to smile, but deep down in my heart of hearts I also wanted to bolt as fast as I could. He was just so *damaged*. If there was any trace of his old self, I couldn't see it. And I hunted for it. I held my breath, waiting for him to break into his old dumb shtick of pretending to be "Dad". . . Remember how he used to do that? How he'd pretend that we Chem-Bots were all one big sitcom-style family and since he was the only boy among us, he was the patriarch? "Honey, I'm a little worried about our Alice here," he'd say to you in that dry, deep, voice. . . . But I don't need to go into any of this.

You remember. Besides, you've gone to see him. You've already felt the pain of wanting Shep to be Shep again.

"Maybe you wanted to ask if there was anything wrong with *me*?" I tried to joke. "As in why I haven't come to visit you sooner?"

"No, that's not it," he said, chewing on a fingernail. Either the joke went right over his head or he didn't care.

"Shep—"

"You've forsaken me," he interrupted, with sudden coldness. "You've forsaken the flock, haven't you?"

His dark eyes turned on me and I froze like a statue. The words had just fallen from his mouth with this burst of clarity and anger. The room suddenly felt so cold and empty—just the two of us sitting there in this sea of white. I tried to answer, but I couldn't find the words. I cried a little instead and ran out of the hospital so fast that the security guard tried to stop me but I shook free and I'm the biggest jerk in the world but I can't go back.

7:45 PM

Okay. Calmer now. I'll go back and see Shep. I just want to wait awhile. I'll go when you go. Tomorrow's the first day of school. Everything I wrote still stands. This year, things are going to change.

PROPHET, YOU SAW THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MIRACLE FROM THE MOMENT OF CREATION. I WAS BLIND TO THE TRUTH, AND I WAS BLIND TO THE SIGNS. BUT LAST NIGHT