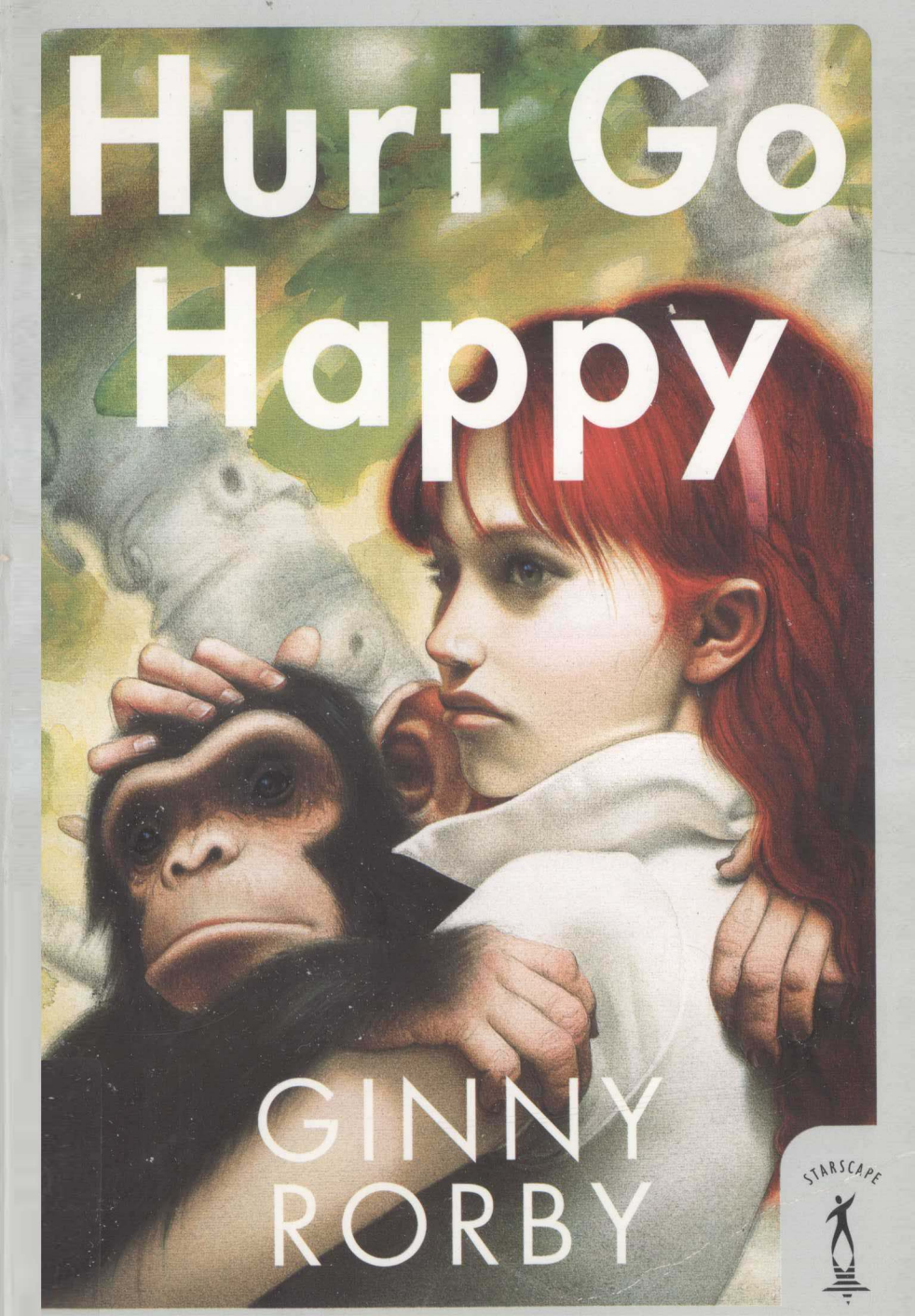


Hurt Go Happy

A detailed illustration of a young woman with long, vibrant red hair and a white high-collared shirt. She is shown in profile, looking off to the side with a somber expression. Her hands are gently cradling a small, dark-furred primate, possibly a chimpanzee or gorilla, which has a sad face. The background is a soft, painterly mix of green and yellow, suggesting a forest or natural setting.

GINNY
RORBY

STARSCAPE



Hurt Go

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HURT GO HAPPY

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Joey was watching the man's mouth, waiting for him to say something, when she saw small but very long, dark fingers reach up and curl into his hand.

The man stepped aside. At the height of his knee, a big-eared, amber-eyed face peeked around at her from behind his legs.

Joey gasped. "A monkey."

The old man shook his head, then made the letter "N" with his right hand and snapped it sharply. NO. NO. "She's a chimpanzee."

For a second, Joey thought the chimp was clutching a stuffed toy, but when it opened its hand a gray kitten scampered away and jumped off the deck. The chimp brought two fingers to its eyes, then stretched the V toward Joey.

"She is saying 'I see you,'" the old man said, and made the same sign.

I-SEE-YOU, Joey signed back, then grinned.

To Belinda, John Hopkins, Lucy,
and a dead dog

The American Sign Language Alphabet



a



b



c



d



i



j



k



l



m



n



o



p



q



r



s



t



u



v



e



f



g



h



n



o



p



q



v



w



x



y



z



5



6



7



8



9



Chapter One

February 1991

Fort Bragg, California

The vibration of someone moving through the house woke Joey. She opened her eyes with a start, her heart racing. The room was pitch black, but it was getting light outside. She could see the dim outline of the deck beyond her sliding glass doors and the redwood tree that grew beside it. *It's just Ray.* Her heart slowed.

The blank face of her digital clock showed that the electricity was still out from the storm of five days before. Even Joey, who was *nearly* as deaf as a post, had heard the explosion of the transformer on the pole in the yard that made her mother flinch and her brother clap his hands over his ears a moment before the lights went out.

They weren't alone; the winds had gusted to eighty-five miles an hour, knocking the power out along the entire coast, and they were sealed off. A mudslide to the north had covered the

route to Leggett, and the Navarro River was out of its banks and over the south road to Cloverdale. Downed trees blocked the other three coast-to-inland roads. Only someone like her stepfather Ray, with a knowledge of the web of logging roads that lay across the mountains, could have gotten in or out.

With the pattern of getting up for school broken, Joey couldn't remember what day it was. *Wednesday*, she thought. *No. It's Thursday.* Last night they'd gone to Fort Bragg for their first good meal in days. All the meat in Safeway's freezer had defrosted, but instead of pitching it, the employees barbecued every scrap and invited the town. She still felt full, smiled, and wondered vaguely why Ray was up so early—a logging-truck driver with no logs to haul—before she rolled over and went back to sleep.

When she woke again it was light. She turned to look out the sliding glass doors beside her bed and brought her hand from beneath the covers to brush her hair from her eyes. Her left thumb was damp and wrinkled. It had been so long since she'd awakened to find her thumb wet that she'd lulled herself into thinking she'd finally outgrown sucking it. She grabbed it with her right hand and squeezed it over and over like a sponge.

For the first time in five days, sunlight slanted through the trees along the trail behind the house, though raindrops still clung to the redwood leaves, sparkling like Christmas lights. She lay and watched them, waiting for the wrinkles in her thumb to disappear so her mother wouldn't know she had started again. She tried to remember what she'd dreamed that had made her anxious. That's what the county psychologist had told her to do. Face her fears. Don't let them burrow in.

A breeze brushed the redwood leaves but the raindrops held on. She imagined herself as small as a drop of water falling from the sky, thinking herself a goner only to be saved at the last moment by a spiky green finger. She stared at one drop in particular, as if guarding it, until a rougher breeze knocked it loose to shatter on the deck.

Joey examined her thumb. It was nearly back to normal. *Why do I do this?* she wondered again. *I'm safe—in my own room.* Her own room. Since his birth, she'd shared the front bedroom with Luke. Then, four months ago, the builders had finished the second-story addition and Ray and her mother moved upstairs. Their old room, with its view of the creek and the forested canyon, became hers.

Before she'd lost her hearing, she'd loved the whisper of wind through pines, and since she had no way of knowing how different it sounded in a redwood forest, the sight of branches swaying re-created that sound in her mind. Even after six and a half years of deafness, she sometimes awoke expecting her hearing to have returned, like her sight, with the dawn.

Joey wasn't totally deaf. The doctors had told her mother that she'd lost about 70 percent of her hearing, leaving her able to hear lawn mowers, chainsaws, horns honking, sirens, her brother's wails when he was hungry and his shrieks when he was hurt. All other sounds were lost. Still, over the years, she'd gotten used to the silence, and liked it in many ways. She did miss the quiet rhythm of normal conversation, birds singing, and music. Listening with her eyes always reminded her of Smiley, the nickname she'd given her nurse in the hospital because of the yellow smiley-face button she wore. On the day

Joey's mother told her she was deaf, Smiley had made it seem like a gift, promising Joey that she would always keep the memory of certain sounds—phantoms, she called them—like her mother's voice, rain, and the wind through pines. Smiley said she could attach those remembered sounds to whatever she pleased, even to silent things like leaves falling and butterflies.

She lay for a while with her thumb jammed into her fist and watched the music of the tree limbs swaying until she was jolted by the slamming of the door to the bedroom she used to share with her brother. The house would soon shudder and tremble with the energy of a two-and-a-half-year-old.

Joey stretched and yawned, pulled the covers to her chin, and hugged herself. The air in her room was frigid because she never used the heater, even when the power was on. She hated the feel and smell of electric heat. She preferred socks, long-johns, and piles of warm blankets no matter how cold it got. Unheated air helped her fight down the memory of rusting, over-heated trailers or bare-bones apartments sweltering in the middle of winter.

Though she liked to sleep in a cold room, she didn't like getting up in one. She scooted out of bed, jerked the spread up to cover the pillows, then darted into the woodstove-warmed hall with her shoulders hunched and her hands clamped in her armpits. She glanced down to see if the light was on in the bathroom, then remembered the power was out and opened the door slowly, in case someone was there. A candle burned in the wall-mounted candleholder her mother had bought the last time the power went out.

"Hi," she said, when she came into the kitchen from brushing her teeth with bottled water.

Her mother turned from the little two-burner Coleman stove and smiled.

"Where's Luke?" Joey asked, then watched her lips.

"Outside peeing on the roses."

"How come?"

"Ray told him it keeps the deer from eating the garden. As soon as you went into the bathroom, he grabbed his crotch and ran outside."

Joey laughed. "Is that true about the deer?"

Her mother shrugged. "Who knows?"

"Is the power still out in town?"

Ruth nodded. "Except what's on the mill's circuit, the hospital, and the harbor."

"Where'd Ray go?"

"Up there somewhere," her mother said, pointing with the spatula in the direction of the hill behind their house, "splitting firewood. Pancakes?"

"Yes, please." Joey caught Luke's arm as he came in and kissed the top of his curly blond head.

"Ick," he shouted, giggling and squirming to free himself.

"But I love kissing you," Joey crooned and swung him off the ground to smooch the back of his neck.

When she put him down he whirled and stomped his foot. "No kisses," he hollered.

Joey pretended to get the urge again and chased him a few times around the sofa.

Her mother waved to catch her attention. "Will you get ----- outside to ----- toilet with?" her mother asked, but mid-sentence she had looked down to check the underside of the pancake she was cooking.

"What?" Joey said.

Ruth faced her. "Sorry. Will you get a bucket of water from the barrel outside to flush the toilet with? And finish helping Luke dress, okay?"

"Are you going somewhere?" Joey asked.

"I told you. The radio said the power's on in the harbor. I'm going to work." She flipped the pancake. "Could get busy."

Her mother had been a waitress at the Old Dock Café in Noyo Harbor for nearly six years. In spite of having met Ray during her second week on the job and marrying him six months later, she wouldn't quit. Joey's stepfather drove a logging truck for Georgia-Pacific, which had a big mill in town. It was a pretty good job, though there was always the threat that he'd get injured again or laid off. Her mother used that as an excuse to keep working, but Joey knew it was because having a job, any job, was her mother's safety net. She would never risk another four months like their first four months in Fort Bragg.

When they arrived from Reno six and a half years ago, the job she'd been promised was gone. The money they'd saved, hidden in the belly of Joey's teddy bear, bought them a month in a cheap motel on a back street in the center of town. It ran out three months before the owner of the Old Dock Café took pity and gave her a job. For that length of time, they had lived in their car, eaten one meal a day of handouts from local restaurants, and depended, for their safety, on the community of other homeless

people. Her mother had sworn then that nothing short of losing both legs would get her to quit the job that had seemed like a miracle then.

Eating meals cooked on a Coleman stove reminded Joey of those days, but she smiled when her mother slid a huge pancake onto a plate and handed it to her. Joey got a knife and fork out of the drawer and the carton of milk from the ice chest in the middle of the kitchen floor. What was left of the perishables from the refrigerator were on ice in the cooler.

Her mother waved again for her attention. "Pretty day," she said. "What are your plans?"

Joey shrugged. "I don't have any. Want me to watch Luke?"

"I don't think so," her mother said.

Joey didn't bother to watch her answer. She knew what her mother would say. She'd never let her babysit. Not for a quick run to the store, not even last winter when paramedics took her to the hospital for stitches after she missed the kindling she was splitting and drove the ax through her shoe. She'd called a neighbor to watch him then had waited, bleeding and in pain, for the ten minutes it took the woman to get there before dialing 911.

It seemed to Joey that her mother treated her as if she'd stopped aging when she stopped hearing. "Do you think I might lose him or something?"

"I don't want to talk about it. You know why."

"Yeah. Right." *Too young, instead of the truth—too deaf.* Joey accepted a second pancake. "Maybe I'll ride my bike to the beach." Knowing what her mother would say to that idea, she drew a happy face on the pancake with syrup to miss her objections, but looked up too soon and saw, "----- sea is too rough."

The rough sea was why she wanted to go. She'd never heard the sound of the ocean and she thought it might be loud enough today.

Ruth tapped her shoulder. "Did you hear me? I said I'd rather you not ride your bike today. There may still be lines down and the sea is too rough."

"Mom, I'm thirteen and a half. I won't cross a downed line and I won't go too near the water."

"No bike. No beach," her mother said. "How about looking for mushrooms for me?"

Joey gave up with a shrug. "To eat or for dye?"

Her mother boiled certain mushrooms to make a dye for wool with which she knitted sweaters, caps, and scarves.

"Both would be nice. There should be pine spikes on the hill and oyster mushrooms on that old alder by the creek."

Joey only nodded. Her mother had taken a mushroom-identification class at the college two years before. The two of them had gone hunting after every rain that winter until she had taught Joey nearly everything she'd learned. They'd even made money selling oyster mushrooms and chanterelles, enough to buy Joey a used bike, which, to this point, she'd been allowed to ride only on the logging trails in the state forest across the road from their house.

While her mother dressed for work, Joey gave some thought to ignoring her this time and riding to the beach anyway, but after Ruth left, she chickened out. Even if nothing happened, she wasn't good at deceiving her mother. The link between them had grown intuitive. If she went, Ruth would know.

Joey did the breakfast dishes with rainwater from the bar-