

"Brimming with surprises and grand adventure. Brave, smart and full of heart, Madeline and Ruby are a breath of fresh air." —Rebecca Stead, Newbery Medal-winning author of *When You Reach Me*

HELEN PHILLIPS



HERE *Where*
the **SUNBEAMS**
are **GREEN**

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are GREEN



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*For my sister, Alice,
brava and bold*

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CHAPTER 1



So here we are in this shaky little airplane high above the jungle, which is kind of (very) scary. On our first flight Roo got the window seat the whole five hours, so she insisted that I get it for the second flight, which is pretty thoughtful for someone who's only nine-almost-ten. But I really should've let her have the window seat this time too. Even though I'm three years older than my sister, she's the brave one who loves flying and other dangerous things. Plus I've been a bit more freaked out in general lately, ever since The Weirdness began. The amazing view is basically wasted on me—the only way I can get through the wobbly ride is by pressing my forehead hard against the window, trying to pretend the jungle below is a huge green trampoline and even if we fell out of the sky we'd be totally fine.

And then—right as I'm telling myself, *Listen, Madeline Flynn Wade, you need to calm down and get a grip*—I see it.

"There it is," I murmur.

"What? What!" Roo yelps. "Where's what?"

"There's the Lava Bird Volcano." I lean back in my seat so she can peek out the window. Dad taught us that not all volcanoes have the classic volcano shape, but this one sure does. It's big and blue and very, very perfect.

"Volcán Pájaro de Lava," Ken/Neth corrects me from across the aisle, where he's sitting next to Mom.

"Volcán Pájaro de Lava," Roo echoes with a perfect little accent, and I'm going, *How come she has that super-great accent when I've been studying Spanish for three years and she's only been studying it for one?*

Just as we pass the volcano, two rainbows jump up out of the jungle and crisscross each other. They truly crisscross each other! Roo unbuckles her seat belt so she can squeeze closer to me and see the rainbows better, and we go "Ooo, rainbows!" and start to feel really, really excited about what we're going to do this afternoon. Well, actually, Roo's been really, really excited all along. She always is. I'm the one who gets nervous about things.

Anyway, Roo and I are gasping and squealing and feeling hopeful until we look across the aisle to make sure Mom is watching the rainbows and instead see Ken/Neth whispering into her ear. It gives me an automatic stomachache. Dad never would have become friends with Ken/Neth if he'd known *this* was going to happen someday. Ken/Neth on an airplane with *Dad's* family, whispering things into Dad's *wife's* ear!

But I liked Ken/Neth too. Back in December when Dad brought him home

for dinner and introduced him as Kenneth Candy (seriously, his last name is Candy), a longtime ecological developer and a newtime friend.

“Newtime?” Roo said, giggling, as Mom sighed and added another place mat to the table. “Is that really a word?”

“Ken’s involved in that fascinating development in Central America,” Dad explained to Mom, pinching her waist in the way that makes her smile. “The one I’ve told you about, remember, that opened a couple years ago? It’s won the World’s Greenest Spa award for two years running. They’re doing revolutionary work in the field of environmental development. It’s the way of the future, Via. And the location is unbelievable—virtually untouched jungle on the flanks of a volcano. An ornithologist’s dream!” Dad paused, and all the enthusiasm drained out of his voice. “Of course, it would’ve been more of an ornithologist’s dream a few years back, before the Lava-Throated Volcano trogon was confirmed extinct.”

Dad *hates* extinction. And he *loves* Central American birds.

“The most elusive bird in the world,” Dad said dreamily as we sat down to eat, “long before it went extinct. Spectacular plumage but so shy—hardly ever let anyone get a good look at it. The females were especially reclusive. Even if you managed to spot a male, he’d never give you a hint about the location of his mate or their nest. They were monogamous, mated for life.”

“*Elusive, reclusive, elusive, reclusive,*” Roo rhymed merrily under her breath, twirling spaghetti on her fork.

Mom looked at Dad, shaking her head. “I still can’t believe they’d build a spa right in the habitat of a rare trogon like that.”

“*Former* habitat,” Ken Candy corrected her, chomping down on a big mouthful of spinach salad. “Extinct”—chew—“is”—chew—“extinct,” he said sadly (or at least as sadly as you can while chewing), almost as if someone from his own family had died. But really it was more like someone from Dad’s family had died, because Dad’s the one who’s the world-class ornithologist, otherwise known as the Bird Guy.

“What’s that place called again?” Mom asked. “The Magma?”

“La Lava,” Ken Candy said with a spinach-toothed grin. “La Lava Resort and Spa.”

“I love lava,” Roo said. “It’s like the planet’s own hot caramel sauce.”

“So,” Mom said to Ken Candy, “what exactly do you do for La Lava?”

“Oh, mainly just some consultation about ecological development and that sorta thing.” Ken Candy was smiling very brightly at Mom. “I’m based here in Denver but I travel there a few times a year.”

“We need more people like you doing the kind of work you’re doing,” Dad said.

“Well. Who knows. But I sure do love what I do,” Ken Candy said, pretending he wasn’t proud of himself. “And not to talk business at the dinner table,” he continued, “but ... La Lava is seeking an expert ornithologist to help us track and catalog the native bird species, both for the benefit of our more curious guests and to further our green mission. What happened to the Lava-

Throat should never happen again.”

Ken Candy looked at Dad. Dad looked at Mom. Mom looked at Ken Candy.

“Interesting,” Mom said. “Very interesting.”

“It’s quite a dazzling array of avian life out there, lemme tell ya,” Ken Candy added.

“I’m sure it is,” she said.

After dinner Ken Candy pulled some candy from his pockets and offered it to me and Roo. He just so happened to have a mini Snickers (my favorite) and a mini Butterfinger (Roo’s favorite). “Since Candy is my last name,” he explained with a wink. He was nice and also cute, even with spinach in his teeth, and I felt shy. Now I just wish Dad had never met him.

Because look where we are today, Ken/Neth pointing out the airplane window at the rainbows and leaning in too close to Mom to whisper, “Well, that’s an omen if I’ve ever seen one, right, Sylvia?”

“Uh-huh,” Mom says absentmindedly, because she’s thinking about Dad. I can tell.

When Ken/Neth came over to our house back in February, after Mom called him to complain because Dad’s trip had just gotten extended for the first time, he asked us to call him Ken rather than Mr. Candy.

“Like Ken and Barbie?” Roo said, staring down at him between the banisters of our wooden staircase. I was standing behind her, staring down at him too.

“Can I call you Neth instead?” I said. I knew I was being mean, but I was mad and sad about Dad, and he seemed like the best person to blame.

But instead of being offended, Ken/Neth was charmed. He thought I was being friendly.

“That would be great,” he said, looking up at me and Roo. “That would be totally great if you called me Neth. No one’s ever done that before.” It made him feel special, like I was giving him a nickname. So I never call him Neth. Or Ken. Or anything. Except in my head, where he’s Ken/Neth.

Roo can’t sit still in her airplane seat. She reaches over across the little aisle and starts poking at Mom’s arm, asking in a voice that’s way too loud: “What’s an omen? Hey, what’s an omen?”

“*iSeñorita! iSeñorita!*” a woman’s voice crackles over the loudspeaker and says a bunch of words in Spanish. Then, again, “*iSeñorita!*”

“Hey, Roo-by, they’re talking to you!” Ken/Neth says, pulling himself away from Mom’s ear.

The third time Ken/Neth came over was back in March, when Dad had extended his trip for the second time. That day he called my sister Roo, and I had to teach him that only three people are allowed to call Ruby that—I nicknamed Roo when she was three and I was six, so I get to decide these kinds of things. Ever since then he’s been careful. Every time he calls her Ruby I feel proud of myself. I like how he begins “Roo—” and then squirmingly adds the “by.” I also make sure he never calls me Mad, because I only let people call me Mad once I’ve given them permission.

“Huh?” Roo says.

“They’re talking to you, *señorita*,” Ken/Neth tells her. He’s the only one of us who really speaks any Spanish, and it was already bugging me in the airport hearing Mom going, Oh, Ken, what did he say? Oh, Ken, can you translate the menu for us?

The voice on the loudspeaker sounds more and more annoyed, and at the front of the short aisle the flight attendant is glaring at Roo. “They’re telling you to buckle up!” Ken/Neth translates.

“Oh good lord, Roo, you’re not buckled?” Mom shrieks. “Buckle up! Buckle up! Buckle up! Mad, help her! Quick, quick! Hurry!”

Mom’s way more scared of small planes than I am. But Roo’s not scared at all. Roo isn’t scared of anything. She’s not even scared of The Very Strange and Incredibly Creepy Letter, which she’s pulling out of her little backpack now that I got her buckled. It’s the last thing in the world I want to see because it’s the thing I’m most scared of, the thing I’ve been most scared of ever since we got it in April. The Very Strange and Incredibly Creepy Letter is what I call the last letter Dad sent from La Lava before he stopped contacting us at all. That’s when The Weirdness began. After that we didn’t get any more letters or phone calls or emails from him. For a while Mom kept sending emails, kept leaving voice mails at La Lava Resort and Spa. For a while I kept writing letters. Roo, of course, never stopped sending coded notes to Dad. But all we got in return were phone calls from some official person at La Lava, informing us that Dad was deep in the jungle and out of contact, and that he was doing very important work about which he felt very passionate, and that he sent us all the love in his heart and would be in touch soon, and was very sorry to keep extending his trip this way.

“All the love in his heart?” Mom repeated suspiciously.

“Indeed,” said the extremely calm and beautiful voice on the other end of the line, which I know because Roo and I snuck upstairs to listen in from the phone in Mom and Dad’s bedroom. We were dying to figure out more about The Weirdness. Roo said I had to start thinking like a detective. I said what about her, didn’t she have to start thinking like a detective too? And Roo said she already did, obvi.

The voice on the phone was a woman’s voice, and it had some kind of slight accent but I couldn’t tell what kind. Actually, even though it was a calm and beautiful voice, it was also kind of a chilly voice. And what the voice from La Lava said *was* suspicious, because Dad would never say something like “All the love in my heart.” He’d say, “I love you with all the bananas in my brain” or “I love you like a chair loves a table.” But he would *never* say “All the love in my heart.”

“I’m paraphrasing, of course,” the voice said in its flat, elegant way, and then added, “Dr. Wade sends his regrets that his greetings to you can’t be more personal.”

We were used to it, sort of, because sometimes Dad went to look for rare birds out in The Middle of Nowhere so he could track them and count them

and study their behavior and stuff. Then we'd have to wait a little while for him to get somewhere where he could call or email or even just mail letters. We missed him but it was okay because, as Mom always said, Being the Bird Guy is Part of What We Love Him For, Right, Girls?

But. It had never been like this before. It had never been seven months away from home and three months without contact. It had never been The Weirdness. It had always been a month at most. A month was no problem. A month we could do. When Dad headed off to La Lava and said it would just be a month, we didn't think it was such a big deal.

I feel stupid now, that we just said goodbye and let him go and didn't even worry.

And as Roo smooths out The Very Strange and Incredibly Creepy Letter on the folding airplane tray table, I refuse to look at it. I don't want to see the way Dad decorated the page with badly drawn flowers and vines as though he's a little girl (Roo and I can both draw way better than that). I don't want to read the bizarro poem that makes absolutely no sense. I don't want to think about it at all, so that's what I'm doing. Not thinking about it.

Roo strokes the letter and bites her tongue in the corner of her mouth that way she does, then opens up her code notebook and writes a few things down. She's been trying to break the code ever since we got the letter.

The code, I've sometimes wanted to scream at her, is that there *is* no code! The code is that Dad has gone completely, 110 percent, totally, absolutely, *thoroughly* (Dad's word) CRAZY. Okay?

I used to be a tiny bit jealous of Roo and Dad's code thing. Pretty much as soon as she could read, Roo started to make codes. Dad got her the *Super Little Giant Book of Secret Codes*, and *Codes, Ciphers, and Secret Writing*, and the *Top-Secret Handbook of Codes*. I'm not really into that kind of thing. I'd rather just read, you know, books with stories. Like the ones Mom always brings home from her job at the library. But Dad and Roo had their code thing, just the way they had their bird-tracking thing, and whenever Dad was out of town he'd send us coded letters for Roo to crack. First it would be not too hard, like flipping the alphabet, so that you'd write Z when you meant A, and Y when you meant B, but then it got more and more complicated and I lost track of it, and I had a small feeling of, Hey, what about me?

Back in January, when Dad first went to La Lava, before The Weirdness, Roo didn't have too much trouble breaking Dad's codes. Those first few letters were exciting. He wrote that he was going to bring us lots of presents from the rain forest—rare extrasweet nuts and raw chocolate bars and pretty little animals carved from jungle wood. He wrote: *Madpie & KangaRoo & Mama Bear, I have some REALLY GOOD NEWS! But it's a big secret, so BE PATIENT!* Madpie—sort of like the bird—and KangaRoo. That's what Dad liked to call us. Another good thing to not think about. Anyway, nowadays I'm not at all jealous of Roo. I'm just glad I'm not the one who's obsessed with the freaky letter from Dad.

I pull out my poetry notebook, which I've been using a ton ever since I