



# DOUBLES

JENNIFER LISS



## Chapter 1

# THE PARADE

**Tuesday, 2:20 p.m.**

In the newspaper photo, a crowd of people lined the sidewalk for the parade on Main Street. Some were cheering. Others waved as a marching band passed by. Easton Bell was in the picture. He stood near the center with his hands in his pockets. In the photo, he was smiling.

When he was younger, Easton's parents would take him to the fall parade. That was when they were

still happy and living together. His family hadn't gone this year. Yet there he was, grinning in the photo.

Easton squeezed his eyes shut and rubbed them. When he opened them again, he looked at the newspaper. He was still there. How was he in this photo? It was taken at an event he had not attended. This didn't make any sense.

The teen took a deep breath. Easton hadn't even wanted to look at the newspaper. But he had finished his history test early. Mr. Hollis had told him to take a section of the local paper and relax until the bell rang. Easton usually read his news online, but Mr. Hollis was old school. Grudgingly, Easton had taken the newspaper and headed back to his seat.

That was when he'd seen the photo on the front page.

Mr. Hollis had a strict rule about no phones in class, but Easton couldn't help himself. He hid his phone under his desk. Then he pulled up his calendar. The fall parade had been on October 8. On that day,

he and his mom had visited his grandmother. It was an hour-long drive to her nursing home. They had left late that morning and hadn't come back until after dinner.

"Anna," Easton whispered to the girl on his right. "Look at this."

"I still have three questions left on the test," she whispered back.

"Come on, please," Easton said. "Just take a quick look."

Anna sighed and put down her pencil. She glanced at the photo Easton held up. "Good job, Easton. You made the paper. Now let me finish the test."

"It looks like me, right?" Easton's whisper was getting louder.

Anna raised her eyebrows. "What do you mean *looks* like you? It *is* you."

Easton was about to tell her that he hadn't gone to the parade. He wanted to explain that he'd been at his grandma's nursing home all day. But just then,



the last bell rang. Some students groaned at not having finished the exam. Everyone else began to talk and pack up.

“Whether or not your tests are complete, please hand them in on your way out,” Mr. Hollis announced. Bending over his laptop, the teacher studied his screen.

With shaking hands, Easton quickly folded the newspaper. He made sure Mr. Hollis wasn’t looking. Then he shoved the paper into his backpack. Rushing out of the classroom, Easton tried to make sense of the photo.



## Chapter 2

# COFFEE CAT

**Tuesday, 2:35 p.m.**

Easton grabbed some books from his locker. After that, he rushed to the bike rack without talking to anyone. As he was fumbling with his lock, his phone rang.

Immediately, Easton recognized the number. His heart sank. It was the Tree Frog Inn. That was the hotel where his dad was staying. It had been Mr. Bell's home since summer. July was when Easton's

mom and dad had decided to “take a break.” In protest, Easton refused to add the hotel’s number to his contacts.

“Hey, Dad,” he answered.

“Hi, buddy. How was school?”

Easton could hear typing in the background. Even when Mr. Bell was on the phone, he was always working.

“I took a history test,” Easton said. “It went okay, I guess.”

He could almost feel the weight of the newspaper in his backpack. Telling his dad about it was a fleeting thought. Since his dad had left home, Easton found it difficult to tell him anything.

Mr. Bell cleared his throat. “Well, I’m calling about Friday night.”

Easton clenched his jaw. He knew what was coming. Similar conversations had happened a hundred times with his dad.

“It looks like I’m going to have to fly out for a meeting on Thursday. I doubt I’ll be back by Friday

night.” Mr. Bell sighed, and the background typing paused. “Let’s go out for pizza on Saturday instead. Okay, champ?”

“Whatever.” Easton kicked his bicycle tire. “Sure.”

He hung up and joined the throng of bike riders heading away from school. Of course his dad had forgotten that Friday night was trivia night at their favorite pizzeria. Easton loved trivia night. It really didn’t matter to his dad when they went out for pizza. But it meant something to Easton.

He tried to let his frustration go. What Easton needed to focus on was the strange photo in the newspaper. He had to push the conversation with his dad out of his mind.

Quickly, Easton rode to Coffee Cat. That was where he and his friend Mari met most school afternoons. They played board games and did homework. Easton was a board game fanatic. He liked word games, number games, war games, card games—all of them.

Mari's interests were all over the map. One day, she might build a birdhouse. The next, she would be coding a new video game. Usually, she was up for whatever Easton wanted to do.

Occasionally, he worried that Mari would get bored with him, but that hadn't happened yet. She continued to like him just as he was—predictable and understated. The two had been best friends since second grade.

Sometimes Easton felt like Mari knew him better than he knew himself. He trusted her. So he planned to show her the newspaper. Then she could help him make sense of it.

Inside the Coffee Cat, Sampson was working behind the counter. He wore a bright yellow apron. Retro music was playing. The shop held the scent of roasted coffee beans and steamed milk.

The booth by the window was empty. That was where Easton and Mari always sat. Mari hadn't arrived yet, but that was normal. The ride to Coffee



Cat from her charter school was a little longer than his.

Yet seeing the empty booth made Easton feel uneasy. He didn't know why.

“Hey,” Sampson said, offering his fist for a bump. “Did you forget something?”

Easton stared at Sampson. He did not understand what the man meant.

“You were just in here five minutes ago, right?” Sampson asked. “You got two hot chocolates to go.” He nodded to another barista in a pink apron. “Rachel took your order and rang you up.”

Sweat tickled the back of Easton's neck. “Uh, that wasn't me. I just got here. School just let out.”

Sampson cocked his head to one side. “That's funny. The boy who was just in here sure looked like you. In fact, he looked *exactly* like you.”

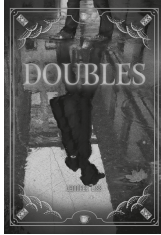
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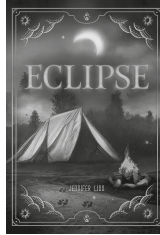
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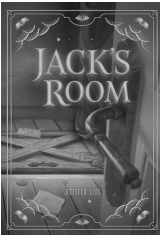
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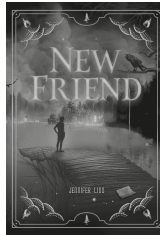
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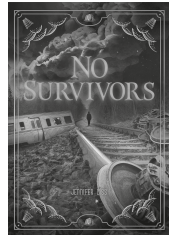
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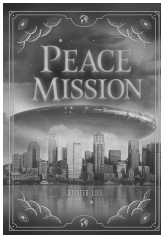
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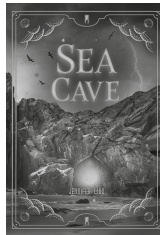
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# DOUBLES

After reading a news story, Easton's world is turned upside down. How could he have been photographed at a parade he never attended? Someone must be impersonating him! Can Easton and his friend Mari track down the impostor and solve the mystery before it's too late?



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