dust

ALISON STINE

WEDNESDAY BOOKS
NEW YORK

1

I saw the dust before the truck, before I could hear its motor. A cloud like a dragon tearing down the road, the dust looked majestic, a plume of brown fire, because the highway was flat. Flat, flat. It spread to a point far off in the horizon, the sky so clear you could see a hawk swirling over the next town.

If there had been a next town.

I paused by the windows of the café. The truck might stop. The driver might come into the café for coffee; Louisa's special was a latte with CBD oil. The truck might need fuel from the gas station next door, which meant my boss would take off her apron and hurry over. There was a chance we might actually get some business for once.

I felt a flutter of hope. I couldn't always hear strangers, and people don't like it when you don't understand them. But I also felt starved of meeting another person. It might go the other way too. The stranger might be kind, speak loudly and clearly, let me see their mouth as they talked.

But the moment passed. The truck came too fast. It blurred past the discount grocery where my mom, Caroline, worked, stocking dented cans on the shelves. It blazed past Louisa's Café and Gas Station, the tiny public library, and the even tinier post office. It continued down the road and far away.

"Thea," Louisa said. "That floor ain't gonna sweep itself."

I looked away from the grimy front windows. That they were grimy was my fault. I was supposed to wash them, and the truck hadn't done me any favors. Dust settled over the glass, stirred up by the truck. Against my legs, my skirt felt heavy.

I had worked at Louisa's Café for a month, a little less than we had been living in the Bloodless Valley. Even so, the dust still surprised me. How it seemed to rise from the ground, skittering over the roads like the tumbleweeds that darted out from nowhere. On our drive out west from Ohio, when the first tumbleweed had hit our truck, I'd screamed, thinking we had hurt something: an animal, a child running into the road. Then the tumbleweed had scattered, broken to bits by the wind.

Tumbleweeds were dry plants, that was all, my dad, Abraham, had said. Dead.

The dust in Colorado got into my eyes, my hair. Sometimes I thought I felt dust in my teeth. I missed rain. I missed coolness. I even missed humidity. I missed my home in Ohio.

My family came to Colorado for land, cheap, advertised along with an old farmhouse in one of the newsletters my dad would read. The newsletters taught him how to live simply, told him to do more with less. Go back to the land, the newsletters urged, with their talk of earthworms for composting,

woodstoves for heat. And so we went back, back to a place we had never been.

A flood had driven us away from our home.

The water coming over the hills then had looked gray, like the silt ponds from the coal mines. It had taken on their color, carried their debris, even fish, to stream through the houses in the lowlands, to stain the walls and leave.

My dad had dreamed the flood before it happened. Dreamed a wall of ashy water swelling over the fields, swallowing them. But he hadn't dreamed what happened next. Our rent was raised. We didn't have insurance. *If you don't own land, you are never free,* the newsletters warned.

So, my dad had a vision of the next place. Our new home would be yellow, dry. It would be far away: westward, sitting at the foot of mountains like a child. Floods wouldn't reach us all the way in Colorado. But *no* rain would.

And we came because we were poor, and this was a place poor farmers went: to the Bloodless Valley in southern Colorado where you could have a parcel of land for almost nothing, the newsletters swore. And what they didn't say: where nothing grew, not without a fight.

In the valley, we had no neighbors. Dust was my company. My sister, Amelia, who was nine. Dogs. Our chickens, which my dad wouldn't let us name, and which Amelia and I had named in secret: Taylor Swift, Billina, Lana Del Rey.

My dad hadn't wanted me to work at the café, either, but we needed the money. Self-sufficiency apparently took a while. So, first my mom, then I, got jobs in town. What town there *was,* little more than the handful of ramshackle buildings the truck had blown past.

"Where do you think he was going?" I asked as I pushed the janitor's broom across the checkered café floor.

"Who?" Louisa asked.

"That truck?"

"Sand Dunes National Park, probably."

"Maybe not," the lone customer at the café said, a man older than my dad, who sat at the counter, staring into a mug Louisa kept refilling. He wore his cowboy hat low, shading his eyes. His hand on the mug handle was creased with lines. "He was driving a little fast for a tourist."

"Where else is there to go?" I asked.

"Lots of places, if you know them."

I cast a look at the man, his dark eyes turned down to his coffee. He took another slow sip. How could I get anywhere? I couldn't drive. My parents wouldn't even let me practice. Colorado wasn't like Ohio where I could walk to town; where I had ridden the school bus for a time, rattling over the hills.

But I had not been in school for two years.

In Colorado, the town felt as small as a speed bump, buildings spread far apart on the plain, unending road. My mom and I went to the café, to the store that sold damaged goods at a discount to farmers like my dad, and to our home: that skeletal ranch. My parents wanted me and Amelia to *call* it home, even though it didn't feel like it. That was it. My dad didn't even want me to cross the road the café was on. There was nothing for me over there, he said.

And besides, that highway was dangerous.

I glanced at it as I swept. The public library seemed so small, the windows dark. The post office looked like the fake

storefront of a movie set. So tiny, I wondered how there was room inside for an employee and a customer.

Louisa said something. "Don't just _______ that dirt around now."

Something like that. I fought to make it make sense, to order her words, feeling the pressure of not responding in time, which grew heavier with each passing moment. It was too late to tell her I hadn't heard. It would be worse now, more awkward, if I asked her to repeat herself, to fill in the blanks.

I was born half deaf. The left side of me was silence, and I felt I heard about half of the sounds swirling around me. Half I could only guess at, or didn't know I had missed at all. I realized I had not heard something with Louisa, but it took me a moment or two of puzzling out the sounds to make sense of them. Sometimes I never could decode what someone had said. Most nights, I had a headache from trying.

My boss, older than my mom, her hair pulled severely into a black bun streaked with gray, had a habit of looking away when she spoke. She talked as she moved. And she moved constantly, doing over and over the little work the sleepy café seemed to require: stacking napkins under the counter, pushing through the swinging door in back to retrieve something from the kitchen or storage room.

It would have been easier if she had looked directly at me while speaking. I could have seen her lips move. But I had mentioned my hearing to her briefly, only in passing early on. I was quick to reassure Louisa that it rarely caused any problems, and didn't mention it again.

My dad didn't like it when I told people.

I was supposed to just pretend I could hear.

They could after all, everyone else in my family.

I went behind the counter to fetch the dustbin. The man sitting there tipped his hat to me. He was dressed nicely—what passed for nice around here—in a clean shirt with pearly white buttons and jeans with no dirt on them. Everyone wore cowboy boots or high rubber muck boots, I had noticed. Everyone, like this man, kept their hats on inside.

Louisa appeared behind me. I hadn't heard her approach. "Another refill, Sam?" she asked the man.

He pushed his cup away and stood up from the stool. "No, thank you. I should finish my rounds."

"When's your boy coming home?"

"Tonight."

"Planning something special?"

"Grilling _______. You want to come over? I know he'd like to see you."

Louisa shook her head, talking as she dumped the coffee mug into the dirty dish tub. "Oh, no. Ray doesn't want to have dinner with an old woman. You _______ have your time. I'll see him around here soon enough."

Sam stood and stepped carefully over the piles I had swept. But his eyes looked the way my mom's did when she gazed over our long dirt driveway, at the land beyond our farm. It was filled with nothing but a spiky, clumpy weed called sedge. She missed home, I thought. We all did, except my dad.

What was Sam thinking about? And who was Ray? His boy, Louisa had said. The man looked Louisa's age—and he acted like there was another reason he wanted her to come to dinner.

I brushed the piles into the dustbin, then emptied it into

the trash. Every day I swept, and every day the dust came back. I turned to see my mom standing by the door that led to the kitchen and outside. "Ready to go?"

I nodded, untied my apron.

"How's business?" Louisa asked her.

My mom had that look again. "Oh, about the same. Plenty of quiet so I can get a lot done."

"That's one way to think about it."

"Does it ever pick up?"

I knew my mom was worried about losing her job. She had just gotten it. I was worried too. How could Louisa afford to pay me even the little she did?

My boss had been born here. She had a house out back behind the café, rows of photographs taped behind the counter of smiling cousins and nieces and nephews with black hair like hers. She had family. My parents had no one. I had no one, either, no connection to this flat place. If my parents could not get plants to grow in the valley, could not afford to pay for our water from the well, I was not sure we had enough money to go anywhere else.

"When it cools off a bit," Louisa said, "we'll get more tourists coming through. They need snacks and gas, and they've got to stop somewhere." She grinned at me and my mom, like this was a fun joke we were in on.

But it didn't feel like a joke to me.

When my mom and I stepped outside, the heat hit us. I didn't understand what people meant about dry heat, the warmth of the desert without the humidity back in Ohio. It was still hot in the valley, unbearably so. It felt different, but no less awful.

Colorado had the kind of heat that seemed to get inside you through the pores of your skin. A heat that had a feel, gravelly like sandpaper, from the dirt that would blow, stinging my eyes and mouth. The heat had a taste like stale crackers, sticking my tongue to my mouth. My eyelids felt hot, like fingers pushed into them.

And the heat was only going to get worse—even I, new to the valley as a weed, could tell that. Louisa had a tiny TV on the counter by the espresso machine. She switched it on during slow times and we would watch the news together. A lot of news was about the weather, told in the deep, serious tone of a horror movie.

Maybe Louisa knew some things about me, without me having to say anything. It was a small valley; the arrival of a new family, even on the outskirts, and people might talk. How we girls didn't go to school and wore long dresses most of the time. How we bathed in an old metal trough my mom dragged into the back room. How we didn't even have power out there.

It might have surprised Louisa to learn my family had a TV. We had electricity too once my dad fired the generator up, which he did for a few hours every day to get the AC running, cool the fridge, and sometimes even to watch that TV. But we watched together as a family and only the shows my dad approved of: black-and-white dramas, classic musicals, cartoons.

Louisa let me watch the news. I felt she would have let me watch whatever I wanted—soap operas, music videos, things I barely remembered from before—but I hadn't asked. The news unfolded on the café's small screen. Floods, mudslides, fires, temperatures rising everywhere.

Like here in the valley.

My mom started the truck but left the driver's door open to let the heat escape. She cranked the windows down. "Give it a minute."

We waited as the engine rattled and the air conditioner steamed. After a moment, my mom said it was safe to get in the truck. But the seats still burned my legs as sharp as a slap. The air pouring in from the vents felt warm and stale.

Even the air didn't want us in this place.

We left the AC on and the windows cracked as my mom drove onto the main road, the only road we ever took: Highway 17. The temperature gauge in the dashboard read 103. Hot wind out the windows whipped my face. The road sounds were too loud for me to really hear the radio, and there were hardly any stations, anyway. My mom didn't want to listen to news. She wanted to believe my dad, and that was it, what he told her passing for law.

It was a long drive from the café to the acres of flat, brown earth with an even browner, flat house on them that my parents had bought sight unseen. I knew the trip pretty well by now. There was nothing—so much nothing, I had it memorized. Wire fences bisected fields. There were sections where the fences had bowed or been broken by animals or crashed cars. There were rust-colored gates and telephone poles. Sparse green clouds of brush. And the real clouds, huge and white, stretching endlessly in a sky that always seemed to be blue.

Nothing else until we hit the Alien Watchtower, the viewing platform someone had constructed in the middle of a far-off field. There was a museum accompanying the tower, a

shrine where people left things for the aliens, and a labyrinth. That was what the sign advertised, anyway, a sign in the shape of an alien, pointing the way. I had glimpsed it from the highway only. I was not allowed to see any of it close-up.

But that was it, the only thing to look forward to on the drive home, to break up the landscape. Unrelenting, that's what I would have called it to my friends back in Ohio, Ellee and Angie. If I could have written a letter to reach them. It was hard to convey just how plain and monotonous the valley was, and it felt shameful to admit to my friends how bored and lonely I felt, my mood as flat as the land.

And that was why the snakes stood out.

Most of the trees visible from the road grew far back by the low squares of houses or sheds, the mountains always in the distance like a jagged blue collar. Out here, trees were more bushes than real trees. Scraggly, undergrown. Trees needed water to live.

But two trees, their tops only slightly scorched brown, stood by the highway, behind a stretch of wire fence. Today, something hung from the fence.

On our drive out west, when we had hit the first tumbleweed, I had screamed. Amelia had screamed at the sight of her first prairie dog, thinking it was a stray, that we should stop for it. I shouted now. I couldn't help it. "Mom!"

She tapped the brakes, the truck wobbling on the road. "What's the matter? Are you hurt?"

"No. On the fence!"

She barely looked.

She knew, then. She knew they were there.

"They're snakes," she said.

We were already passing them. My mom had not stopped or even really slowed. I craned over my shoulder to try to see them more clearly. Lashed to the top of one fence rail, two tied on another.

"They're dead. They found them dead," my mom said.

"How do you know?"

"Old-timers at the grocery store—they told me. It's bad luck to kill a snake. They have to find them _______ way."

"Why are they there?"

It wasn't natural. The snakes had been knotted with rope. They twisted in the hot breeze, against the fence like heavy, dead windchimes.

Now my mom looked surprised. Like I should have known this, like Louisa or someone should have warned me. "It's a superstition," my mom said, "to make it rain."

Dear Ellee,

I hate it here.

2

Everyone came out to see the truck, except my dad. The first few weeks I had worked at the café, I thought my sister just missed me that much. That the dogs did too. But now I felt the truth of it was: there was just nothing else to do out here. Our return to the farm marked the highlight of Amelia's day, the only change in the long hours my sister spent wandering around, trailed by dogs or goats or chickens, or in the dark house, pretending to study.

As soon as my mom parked, Amelia hopped up on the truck's running board. Her long, reddish-brown hair swung straight around her shoulders in two rope braids. Her eyes were as green as I remembered grass being after rain, and her dress was an old one of mine.

"What's the matter?" she said. "You look upset. Did something happen?"

I thought of the snakes. "People are messed up."

"They're not ________," my mom said. "It's just an old wives' tale."

"Whose wife?" Amelia asked.

I couldn't tell her. She loved animals, even if reptiles weren't her favorite. And she wouldn't believe me if I said the snakes had been found already dead, like my mom swore. I wasn't sure I believed it myself.

We were all alone on the farm. If we had neighbors, we didn't know them. We couldn't even see any other houses from our own, except for a small glint of silver on the horizon, which must have been a hanger or garage where no one lived. We were on our own out here, the way my dad wanted. I tried to stuff down my anxiety.

"It's nothing," I said.

I couldn't let my sister see I was rattled. I did a lot of pretending for her.

My mom reached into the back seat. "Louisa sent some day-old treats."

She lifted the package of stale muffins, a Danish or two. My boss always seemed to throw in at least a couple of cookies for Amelia. She had never met my sister, but kept hinting she would like to.

Amelia hopped off the running board. Dogs yipped and swirled around her. The small rusty one, the medium white one, the two big yellows, the fuzzy spotted brown, and the shaggy gray. The dogs we had inherited, all except for the spotted brown dog, Wednesday, who just showed up. The others had come with the land, which had come from the bank, repossessed when the farmer before us couldn't pay the mortgage.

Sometimes I felt bad for him, whoever he was. We had profited off his bad luck. But maybe we had inherited his misfortune too, a curse that came with the deed.

My parents said the property was cheap in part because the house on it was unfinished. Plastic sheeting flapped on the back. Some of the walls inside were just frames. There was a leaning shed on the property, and the remains of a second shed Amelia liked to play on. It was her dinosaur, half-buried in silt. She called the old wood poking out of the ground *bones* and pretended she was going on an expedition every time she went out there, trailed by the dogs.

Amelia always had a strong imagination, and it was not like there were any playgrounds around. No parks. No school that we would ever see the inside of.

Though my parents said they were doing everything for me and my sister—this move to Colorado, living simply, what they called *unschooling*—they never asked us about anything at all. I had started to believe my whole life was just waiting around to be old enough to leave, to make my own decisions, to have a life at all. I was wasting days.

Now I was wasting them in an actual wasteland.

We had two fenced pens. One pen we used for the goats. One we were supposed to use for the chickens, who also had a little wooden coop, but my sister kept letting them out. She said they liked to wander, but that they would never go far. Soon, we would need another pen for the pigs my parents wanted. My dad was building a barn that right now was just a pile of lumber, protected by a tarp in case it rained.

Which it never, ever did.

Two metal doors were buried in the ground behind the

house and shed. My dad said we were not allowed to go near those doors; we could fall inside the storm cellar, a bunker that seemed to open into the very earth. If the storm cellar was anything like the rest of the house, it would be dusty and dim—even worse because it was underground.

Then there were the fields, running alongside and behind the house, fenced but full of mostly nothing. The plants of the fields wilted, their small leaves pale and sandy. We had arrived in summer—too late to plant many crops which needed to be put in the ground early, but my parents hadn't thought of that. Still, my dad was outside all the time, as if he could change things just by standing around.

"Where's your dad?" my mom asked my sister.

She didn't need to answer. He was always in the fields.

My mom said, "Thea, see if your dad wants a treat. And he should drink something."

"He's been outside a long time," Amelia said sagely.

"Yes, ma'am," I said.

I walked behind the house, a couple of the dogs following me. There were so many, Amelia had decided to name them after days of the week. We had six, every day except Saturday. Amelia said she was saving that name for last, for when a new dog decided to join us, because it was her favorite day.

Weekends used to mean something. Sundays made me nervous, knowing I had school the next day, and probably homework to complete at the last minute. But what I wouldn't give to feel that again, I thought, the apprehension of waiting for the bus, going into the loud and crowded building. To feel the ordinary nervousness of getting an answer wrong or missing something said in class or in the hall. I barely remembered

what that was like, being in a crowd, being one of many in a classroom.

I didn't want to tell Amelia that I doubted Mom and Dad would let us take in another dog. Even if we only fed them scraps and the generic dry food my mom could get for free once it expired at the store, the dogs still needed water.

Water cost money.

I was trying not to get too attached.

It was an hour's drive to a well. We hauled the water from it in a big plastic tank in the bed of the truck. Then we filled the cistern back at the house, where it was pumped inside. The generator powered the hot water heater. Otherwise, we would have to heat water on the cookstove, which took forever. Amelia and I couldn't take baths whenever we wanted, and we had no shower, just that dented tub. So much water went to the chickens, the goats, the dogs, and the crops. The land lapped up the water, greedily. And still the plants looked small.

My dad stood in the fields. All around him, the plants were scrubby, smaller than they should have been. Dirt showed through the rows. My dad looked still as a scarecrow, hands on his hips, gazing away from me. In the distance, the mountains seemed calm and endless. When my parents had first said *Colorado,* I thought they meant mountains. But the valley was dry nothingness. *Bloodless* was right. It was a trick, how close the mountains seemed, how huge. I felt we would never go there, never see their trees or snow.

"Mom wants to know if you're hungry," I said.

I tried to keep my interactions brief. I didn't really talk to my dad unless I had to, unless my mom made me. Things had

never been great between me and my dad, but since the move, they had only gotten worse.

"Louisa sent some baked goods," I added. "Mom says you should have some water, at least."

He shook his head and glanced at me finally. "Shouldn't waste ________."

Since the move, my dad had started drinking beer. It was strange to see the tall bottles in the generator-powered fridge. Before, my dad drank only on special occasions: Christmas, his birthday. My mom never drank at all. But now, he said beer was cheaper than soda, less precious than water.

"Do you want a beer then?" I asked.

I'd said it to try to hurt him. Even a simple conversation was useless, like trying to find a spring in the woods. My dad had changed everything about our lives—and changed himself too. In Colorado, he spent more time alone. His rules got even stricter. We had to go to bed earlier; we couldn't use the generator in the evenings. He yelled at me all the time about listening.

But he was the one who never heard.

He rubbed his face, his hands making his cheeks more dirty. "I'll come in. How was work?"

"Fine."

A truck almost stopped but then didn't. Someone named Ray is home.

He started walking to the house. Behind him struggled the barley and potatoes, butted with white-flowered heads of buckwheat. My dad called them *volunteers,* crops we hadn't planted and weren't sure what to do with. Nearer the house,

only the beans seemed to be flourishing, creeping up the stakes we had stuck in the ground. Their thick green vines reminded me of the dead snakes.

How long before the old-timers took the snakes down, before they realized their superstition hadn't worked? The clouds were stubborn white and bone-dry. It was such a joke: perfect weather—if you didn't mind the heat and if you didn't need to farm.

I hurried to walk in step with my dad. I kept him on what I called my good side, the side I could hear. He didn't like it when I misheard or missed something. He liked it even less when I reminded him. My mom said he just didn't like to think about it, that it made him sad.

But I could tell I made him angry too.

"If you want me to check the long-term weather forecast, I could at the library," I said.

"I can check the weather on my phone just fine."

He had a phone. Amelia and I didn't.

"I don't want you at _______ library," he added.

"But I could research why it's so hot, so dry." We had no internet on the farm, no way of knowing. "If people are doing anything. Maybe there are farmer meetings." I knew there were—Louisa had told me—but my dad might be more likely to attend if he thought we had discovered them ourselves.

"I have all the people I need to talk to _______ here," my dad said, patting my arm and trying to smile. His smile looked forced, and his hand left an imprint of dirt on my arm. "My family."

"I just think someone might be able to help—"

"I said no, Thea. I don't want you in that library. On the

internet, filling your head with garbage. Spending too much time on screens. You go to work and home, that's it."

"Yes, sir."

The internet was garbage. TV was garbage, unless it was a show my dad picked. Public school was garbage. Only at home could we be free. My mom would teach us what mattered: math, reading, and the important skills, survival skills like cooking, growing food, and running a farm.

But how good were we at running a farm? Back home, we had a small but healthy vegetable patch so fertile we sold at the farmers' market and gave the neighbors extra. The earth was rich and old there. The land, green from all the rain. Mist rose from the hills in the morning and the ground steamed.

Until the flood came, when it disappeared under a lake.

But in Colorado, my dad was trying to do more, so much more, with less. That was what the newsletters promised, after all. The land in the Bloodless Valley seemed like such an opportunity, my parents said, the chance of a lifetime. Almost as far as we could see belonged to us, my dad liked to say.

What good was that if all we could see was barren, dry land?

No trash service came out here. We hauled our trash to a dumpster off the highway. There was no recycling, either, though we repurposed as much as we could. My mom, Amelia, and I turned metal cans into planters, milk jugs into birdfeeders. But for all my mom's resourcefulness, we had not been able to sweep all the dirt from the house, to clean the months—maybe years—of grime from the floors and walls. It stuck, that dirt. It stuck to us.

My dad mumbled something, and when I looked questioningly into his face, he didn't repeat himself. Instead, he

got angry. He glanced away from me—he must have known I hadn't heard him—and said, "Go help your mother." He veered off to wash up, toward the bathroom at the back of the house.

I didn't understand why my mishearing made him mad. I hadn't asked him to repeat himself; I hadn't said anything. I had only looked at him. My mom never stormed off in a huff like my dad did. Louisa didn't scold me if I missed something she or an actual customer had said.

"I suspect some of my hearing's going as well," she had admitted when I told her my first week at the café. "Though of course it's different for you."

How was it different? I wouldn't know. I had never met another person like me, a *young person,* as Louisa called me, who couldn't hear too.

But Louisa, I had noticed, despite often forgetting to look at me when she talked, touched my arm gently when it seemed like I hadn't heard her. She never approached quietly—I had been startled often by my parents when I hadn't sensed them. When had Louisa learned to do these things?

And why can't my dad? I thought as he banged into the house. The screen door rattled in its frame. That door, like most of the house, wasn't attached very securely. One strong slam and it might fall off.

Nothing was what we thought it would be: the house, which my parents had only seen from pictures before buying, the baked-dry land. The farm seemed unfriendly, like it would always be a stranger. I didn't want to call it home. And my dad was angry all the time. Even the sky seemed to annoy him. It hardly ever changed. It never gave him what he wanted.

I glanced up at it reflexively as I went around the house. I had learned the valley sky usually held only a few clouds, if that. It was bright blue, clear, and constant as a heartbeat. The sun hurt my eyes—it was always out.

But not this afternoon.

Clouds obscured the sun, more than I had ever seen in the valley. A strange, hazy light fell over the yard. And as I watched, the clouds started to change. They moved, boiling like water. The sky turned from grayish blue to brown. Then the wind picked up. It felt different in a way I couldn't explain. I just knew it was off, wrong.

My mom opened the front door of the house. Amelia stood behind her, my sister's eyes white. "Get inside, Thea," my mom said.

She widened the door, and the wind came from behind me, pushing with a howl like coyotes from the woods back home. Hair whipped my face. The gates rattled on their pens. Bits of the house that were loose, shingles and the siding, banged loudly like dishpans crashing.

The clouds had darkened. The deepest tips of them seemed to reach down from the sky, fingers of the storm trying to find us, grab us. Across the highway, I saw a wave of yellow and brown. It swept across the road, coming diagonally and fast.

Dust.

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

First published in the United States by Wednesday Books, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group

DUST. Copyright © 2024 by Alison Stine. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. For information, address St. Martin's Publishing Group, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

www.wednesdaybooks.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data **(TK)**

ISBN 978-1-250-87873-1 (hardcover)
ISBN 978-1-250-87874-8 (ebook)

Our books may be purchased in bulk for promotional, educational, or business use. Please contact your local bookseller or the Macmillan Corporate and Premium Sales Department at 1-800-221-7945, extension 5442, or by email at MacmillanSpecialMarkets@macmillan.com.

First Edition: 2024

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1