

FRANCES ITANI



Listen!

Good Reads

Chapter One

Listen and Worry

“Listen!” said Roma. “Listen! Keep your ears and eyes open. You have to know what’s going on.”

But she was talking to herself.

She looked out the train window at the night rushing by. When she spoke, her own face looked back at her from the dark window. She travelled by train because she liked to have time alone. She had booked her own tiny bedroom, a roomette, in a sleeping car. During the day, her bed folded up against the wall. In the evening, the bed pulled down. Her roomette also had a toilet and sink. An

hour earlier, she had eaten dinner in the restaurant car of the train. Now, at nine-thirty, Roma was tired.

Four hours earlier, she'd waved goodbye to her husband and their daughter, Katie. Her husband had held Katie up to the train window. Katie had pressed her hand against the glass from outside. Inside the train, Roma had fitted her palm to Katie's. The train had pulled away, and Katie's face had disappeared.

Roma knew that her daughter would be fine. Sometimes, she brought her along on trips. But now, in October, Katie had to stay home to go to school.

The trip would take sixteen hours total. In the morning, Roma would arrive in Montreal. Her sister, Liz, would meet her at the Montreal station. Roma planned to stay with Liz for the next five days.

Roma had taken time off work for this trip. She worked at an outpatient clinic in a small hospital. She also interpreted for deaf patients who came into the hospital. Roma knew American Sign Language—ASL—a language she had learned as a child.

Liz had a special reason for inviting Roma to Montreal. She wanted to introduce her to two friends. The four women would meet for dinner at

Liz's home the next evening. They planned to share some of their stories.

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Because she had little space, Roma undressed while sitting on the bed. She checked the lock on the sliding door of her roomette. She didn't want anyone walking in during the night. The train gave a jerk, and she lost her balance for a moment. She changed into a nightgown and placed her shoes on an overhead rack. Her purse hung on a hook beside the shoe rack. Every bit of space was used in this tiny roomette.

She stretched her legs and wiggled her feet under the covers, hoping to soften the crisp sheets. With two pillows behind her back, she sat up in bed and tried to relax. But she knew she couldn't sleep. She kept thinking back to her childhood. Had she ever had a childhood? Maybe not.

Roma tried to remember her life when she'd been Katie's age. Seven years old. At seven, Roma had duties that her daughter would never have. At seven, at four, even at two years of age, Roma had to be responsible. Her ears had listened for two people because her mother's ears did not hear.