

Letters  
to  
Amelia



LETTERS  
TO  
AMELIA

*a novel*

Lindsay Zier-Vogel

Book\*hug Press  
Toronto 2021

FIRST EDITION  
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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Letters to Amelia : a novel / Lindsay Zier-Vogel.

Names: Zier-Vogel, Lindsay, author.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20210222166 | Canadiana (ebook) 20210222212

ISBN 9781771666985 (softcover)

ISBN 9781771666992 (EPUB)

ISBN 9781771667005 (PDF)

Classification: LCC PS8649.I47 L48 2021 | DDC C813/.6—dc23

Printed in Canada

The production of this book was made possible through the generous assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. Book\*hug Press also acknowledges the support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund and the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Book Publishing Tax Credit and the Ontario Book Fund.



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*To Nana and Papa*



# 1

When Grace wakes up, she's confused that the radio isn't on in the kitchen and that the apartment doesn't smell like coffee. She stares at the ceiling and remembers the waver of Jamie's voice, his tone sad, then gentle, then gone. How dare he. How fucking dare he.

Grace throws his toothbrush out while she brushes her teeth, then his soap from the shower, then his razor from the medicine cabinet. She feels pricking at the backs of her eyes, but she can't start crying, not now. *I am packing my lunch. I am pulling a shirt out of the laundry basket. I am getting dressed. I am locking the door. I am ignoring my landlady's barking dog.*

The July heat thickens the air, the humidity clinging to Grace's skin as she locks her bike next to the library—the library that doesn't look like a library, with its concrete edges geometric and triangular. People say it's supposed to be a peacock, and from certain angles, it looks like one, its head jutting out on a long neck, its concrete tail feathers fanning out against the sky. The main library is the body and the tail, but Grace works in the breast of the building—the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, where ivy frames the windows, softening the concrete. This morning there's a streak of bird shit stretching the full height of

the reading-room glass.

She walks up the stairs, her legs like lead. Her phone buzzes in her pocket.

*You've got this*, her best friend, Jenna, has texted. *I'll call you at lunch.*

"Hey, Grace!" Patrick, the resident medievalist, calls out, holding the elevator door for her. He holds out a Starbucks cup.

"For me?"

He nods, handing it to her.

She's pretty sure it wasn't meant for her, but she accepts it, the bridge of her nose burning at his kindness. She coughs so she can wipe her eyes without causing alarm.

"You feeling better?" Patrick asks.

"Yes, thanks," Grace says. She had called into work on Sunday night to say she'd come down with the flu, knowing her boss's voice mail would pick up. She thought about leaving the same message Monday night, but on Tuesday, she got up, got dressed, and left for work. She made it only as far as Harbord Street before she started dry-heaving and stumble-ran back home. She steadied her voice as much as she could and called the library, leaving a message with Patrick, who told her to make sure to stay hydrated and try some toast, or maybe some plain rice.

Grace takes a sip of her coffee and Patrick talks about the class he's planning for the fall. "I could use some help pulling the material," he says as the elevator doors open to the reference desk.

"Sure," she says. "Of course."

Grace had been hoping to sneak in without anyone realizing how late she was—she had pressed snooze when her alarm first went off, then turned it off instead of pressing snooze again the second time—but the other two techs, Jeremy and Abigail, are sitting at their desks.

"Jamie see that double play last night?" Jeremy asks over his computer screen, pushing his red hair out of his eyes. "I still can't believe the Jays lost after all that."



“Yah,” Grace says. There’s a picture of her and Jamie from their trip in June to Saskatchewan on her desk, the bright blue sky radiating behind their smiling faces.

“I think my brother-in-law has some tickets he can’t use if you guys want them.”

You guys. Plural. “Great,” Grace says.

Jeremy beams. He always got along with Jamie. “I’ll email you the dates!”

“Janice was by looking for you earlier,” Abigail says. “She left something on your desk.”

Grace’s heart starts to thud and she sees a pink Post-it from the head librarian next to the stack of indexing Grace didn’t finish last week. *Please come to my office when you’re in*, it reads. Her office? Shit. Grace uses the elastic on her wrist to pull her hair back into a ponytail.

“Janice?” Grace taps on the door frame with one knuckle.

“Grace—” Janice looks up from her computer. Her glasses sit on top of her head, holding back her blunt, grey bob like a headband. “Please close the door.”

Grace’s heart falls to her stomach. She’s going to lose her job. This is it. She missed the last two days and Janice knows she was lying about the flu. She tries to recall how much she has in her savings account, and deducts how much she’ll have to pay her landlady on August 1<sup>st</sup>. She could probably make it a few months, but after that? After that she’d have to fly home to Saskatchewan and live in her mom’s old bedroom overlooking the back field and then what—

Janice gestures to the chair in front of her desk.

“I need your utmost discretion,” she starts, and pulls out a shoebox. It’s old—Grace has learned over the years to date cardboard—the edges are soft, but there are no signs of water damage or mildew. “We found this last week in the shelf read,” she said. “Well, I found it.”

“Oh,” Grace says. Did she miss something in the stretch of boxes and books she was responsible for when they closed the library down for two weeks and looked for missing books and misplaced boxes?