The Luckies

RUMOR HAS IT

BY SARAH MLYNOWSKI &
CHRISTINA SOONTORNVAT

ART BY MADI WONG

NEXT
SCHOLASTIC INC.

Text copyright © 2026 by Sarah Mlynowski and Christina Soontornvat

Art copyright © 2026 by Madi Wong

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, or used to train any artificial intelligence technologies, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Library of Congress Control Number available

ISBN 979-8-225-06649-9 (paperback)

ISBN 979-8-225-06651-2 (hardcover)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 26 27 28 29 30

Printed in India 197

First printing 2026

CHAPTER 1

LEELA

The taxi pulled up the long gravel drive, and Leela Luxenberg silently willed it to turn around and take them back to New York City.

"Here it is," said the driver cheerfully. "Welcome to Grey House."

"It's so pretty!" said Leela's younger sister, Mia. "But the color's more of a grayish blue?"

"The house has its own name," said Leela, then added under her breath, "because that's how snobby our grandparents were."

But really, was the name of their new house any more unbelievable than the name of their new town? When Leela had told her friends in Brooklyn that she was being forced to live in a place called Lost Bluff, Tennessee, they'd absolutely thought she was joking.

If only.

As they'd driven through the tiny center of town a

few minutes ago, all Leela could think of was her old neighborhood: her favorite bagel place, her favorite bodega, the record store, the café/art gallery that brought in cool bands years before they became cool. Her friends were probably getting ready to go to a show there tonight.

"Let me help you with your bags," said the taxi driver as Leela, Mia, and their mom, Sadie, all piled out of the car.

"I have Jelly!" said Mia. "Who's a good kitty?" She scratched behind their four-year-old shorthair's ears. Jelly growled, protesting, and Leela understood how he felt.

"Thank you so much," said Sadie, paying the driver. The sunlight glinted off her engagement ring. Leela frowned. Did she have to flash that thing around all the time?

"Girls, will you head in and start opening the windows?" Sadie asked. "Josh and the kids will be here soon, and I want to air out the place."

"I'll go!" shouted Mia, setting Jelly on the porch and racing inside. Leela followed reluctantly.

Leela's mom had met Josh Laksanadee while she was on a book tour for her latest novel, and they had

fallen head over heels into the world's fastest romance. The first time Leela and Mia had met Josh and his three kids—Alex, who was sixteen; Annie, who was fifteen, like Leela; and Aidan, who was ten—was on an incredibly awkward video chat. Leela's mom had made a joke that with all the little squares on the screen, they looked like the family from *The Brady Bunch*, some old TV show. If Leela had known they actually *would* be combining their families, she would have logged off immediately.

The Luxenbergs and the Laksanadees took one chaotic ski trip together, and then, the next thing Leela knew, her mom and Josh were telling everyone (again, on video chat) that they were engaged.

Leela's mom kept calling it a whirlwind. Leela had other names for it that she kept to herself.

Leela pulled back the heavy drapes as she walked through the rooms at the front of the house: an uncomfortable-looking parlor, a polished dining room, a stuffy wood-paneled office. So many chandeliers, paintings, crystal vases, silver candlesticks, and weird marble statues. It was too big. Too old. Nothing like their cozy apartment in Brooklyn.

Everything from New York was waiting for them,

lined up in boxes in the hallways. Well, not everything. Their mom had packed up and given Leela's father's favorite lounge chair, and most of his clothes, to Goodwill, because he had passed away three years ago and now she was engaged to—and moving in with—someone else.

Leela forced herself to stop thinking about her dad's old things and found the box she had written IMPORTANT on in black Sharpie. She opened it and was relieved to see that her record player and records had arrived unscathed.

"No way!" cried Mia from the kitchen. "Mom, there's a pool in the backyard?! You didn't say that Grandma and Grandpa had a *pool*!"

"Surprise!" Sadie called from the front hallway.

Leela sighed. Why did Mia sound so excited? They never cared about swimming in Brooklyn. She passed by her sister in the kitchen and rolled her eyes at the huge, glistening pool outside.

Maybe Leela should have felt grateful that they'd inherited this big, fancy house with a pool from their estranged grandparents. But all the wealth and over-the-top decor were embarrassing.

In the sitting room, Leela fumbled with a window

latch. "Mom?" she called. "This one's stuck!"

Sadie swooped in to help. "This one was always tricky . . . There!" She looked out into the garden, and a sad expression suddenly flickered over her face.

"Mom?"

Leela was about to ask her mom if she was okay. After all, it must be weird to come back to her childhood home after thirty years away. Sadie had barely spoken to Leela's grandparents in all that time, and the inheritance had come as a total shock after Leela's grandmother died.

But had anyone stopped to ask if *Leela* was okay? Everyone was acting like she should be so excited about the move, not to mention her new family of complete strangers.

A man appeared in the backyard, pushing a wheelbarrow. "That must be Mr. Williams," said Sadie. "He's the caretaker. He and his daughter, Rosemary, live in the cottage on the other side of the property. I should go introduce myself."

Great. More new people to meet. "I'll put my stuff upstairs," Leela said.

"Okay, sweetie, but let's wait till the other kids get here to pick out rooms, all right?"

Leela took the marble steps to the second floor. There was a study, a sewing room—*a sewing room?*—and the primary bedroom, which would be Josh and her mom's. On the third floor were five more bedrooms and two bathrooms. Leela peeked into a yellow-painted room that faced the front yard and the gorgeous mountains beyond. It seemed like the most private one.

"There's a van pulling up outside!" called Mia excitedly.

"That's Josh!" her mom called, and Leela could imagine the flash of the engagement ring from all the way up here. "Leela, come down and say hi."

Leela fought the urge to start crying. She set her box of records in the middle of the yellow room and sat down beside it.

Her life might be completely changing, but that didn't mean she had to run out to meet it face-first.