Terry Farish is the author of the award-winning verse novel *The Good Braider*, selected as a YALSA and *School Library Journal* Best Book for Young Adults and an American Library Association Outstanding Book for the College Bound and Lifelong Learner. She leads literacy programs for immigrants and refugees from around the world with the New Hampshire Humanities Council. She lives in Kittery, Maine.

For sixteen years, it’s been just Sofie and her father, living on the New Hampshire coast. Her Cambodian immigrant mother has floated in and out of her life, leaving Sofie with a fierce bitterness toward her—and a longing she wishes she could outgrow.

To me she is as unreliable as the wind. Then she meets Luke, an army medic back from Afghanistan, and the pull between them is as strong as the current of the rushing Piscataqua River. But Luke is still plagued by the trauma of war as if he’s lost with the ghosts in his past. Sofie’s dad orders her to stay away; it may be the first time she has ever disobeyed him.

A ghost can’t love you. When Sofie is forced to stay with her mother and grandmother while her dad’s away, she is confronted with their memories of the ruthless Khmer Rouge, a war-torn countryside, and deeds of heartbreaking human devotion.

I don’t want you for ancestors. I don’t want that story.

As Sofie and Luke navigate a forbidden landscape, they discover they both have their secrets, their scars, their wars. Together they are dangerous. Together, they’ll discover what extraordinary acts love can demand.

One of my heroes is war photographer James Nachtwey. He said, “If war is an attempt to negate humanity, then photography can be perceived as the opposite of war.” I wrote this novel about war’s aftermath under his spell, trying to humanize, to confirm humanity, with words.

—Terry Farish
Luke and I have plans like deer in winter have plans. The trees are bare. 
The moon is full. We could shelter in place. We could run.

The cabin looks out to the rocky Atlantic coast, and tonight you'd 
think the wind and the waves could wash the very boulders back into 
the sea.

I know Luke has barely seen his family since he came back from 
Afghanistan, where he served with the New Hampshire Army National 
Guard. I have seen his mother's texts. I saw a photo she sent of Luke's 
little sister in a white angel gown in front of a Christmas tree. The child 
has a gleeful gap-toothed grin, her little white-sleeved arms crossed over 
the gown's pink inlay, and curls spiraling from beneath her tiara. She 
holds a sign in crayon letters. I made you pancakes do you remem-
ber me? mandy Sometimes I can hear his mother crying out from her 
texts—lucas, call us day or night—and I feel sad for her.

“What if we go away from here?” I say. “From the ocean.” It's 
early midnight, but the wind gusting makes us vigilant. I look up from 
the edge of the bed, where I sit. Luke paces as if to ensure that he doesn't 
close his eyes.

He says, “That’s most of the country.” I grin, but I begin to shake 
in the night chill of this bare winter rental. He stops. Kicks up the fire 
in the woodstove. Comes to me. Buttons my sweater against the cold. 
To take in each other’s eyes would break us down. His hand pauses at
my hip. I touch his dark hair. We are framed by the window covered in crystals of ice.

If I go, I would leave my father. I see him outlined as simply as a boat on the horizon beside a red ball of sun. My father always says he loves to go fishing to see the red ball of sun rise out of the water.

I get out my phone, and Luke and I check Google Maps for some of the places we’ve pretended we’d go. We sit cross-legged on his squealing bed. Our foreheads touch. We make up stories about us living here, together. We have a cupboard with cereal bowls and a drawer with spoons tucked in each other.

Wherever we are, I know he’ll have the gun.

My shaking is so bad, my teeth tap against each other. I wrap the thin bedspread around us. My dog, Pilot, sleeps by the stove in a knot she’s made of my coat, which she dragged there.

“What do you have against the ocean?” Luke says. His voice is tight but unrushed. I think we are both acutely aware of everything. A flicker of light from a buoy in the distance, when Pilot circles, drops down again. Is it like the talk before soldiers go on patrol? This is a part of him I try to imagine. “You’re a fishing family,” he says. “I don’t understand.”

We’re just telling stories. Now I look at him.

I can’t see the green of his eyes. His face is an outline. I need his voice to hold on to who he really is. But I feel his calm. He always says he’s most steady in chaos. “My mother says I came out stillborn because of a curse from the Pol Pot time. But I took this big gasping breath, and all the Cambodian side of my family was there and they all breathed with me.”

My breath is shallow as I tell this. It aches to breathe.

“I don’t trust the ocean,” I say. “It knows. It’s beautiful and it calls me. It suspects I’m really a stillborn.”

Luke nods. I can make him out now. I cock my head to study his unflinching eyes. I thought this would make sense to him, since he talks to dead people he knew from the army. I touch his ribs beneath the thick yarn of his sweater. “Superstitious fisherman’s kid.” I shrug, pushing my hair off my face. Then I sit still except for my tapping teeth and let the sound of the waves fill my body. He’s lean like a wild dog. We should eat.

If I go, I’ll leave my mother. Since I met Luke, I’ve remembered a song she sang to me when I was little. She sang about a rabbit in the moon, and I became the rabbit in my child imagination, and she became the moon. Later, when I didn’t see her, I remembered her long hair, how I used to twist it in my hands as I made little words and pretended I could sing them in Khmer.

I love you more than the dark loves dawn.
You were sixteen. You sang to me.
We climb above the water while you sing your baby song.

“Couple a loonies,” Luke says over the banging in the wind of the loose cabin window.
“But you’re used to me,” I say.
“Christ help me,” he says.
I say, “Me too.”
We are dangerous. We have warned each other about this. Part of him is stillborn too. “Some things you shouldn’t know.” He often wishes this for me about what happened in his war. We’ve tried to protect each other since we met. But here we are together by the open sea.
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