

The Edge of Everywhen



A.S. Mackey

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of
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**This book is dedicated to Tammy West,
my first Reader, and to every librarian in
small towns and big cities across the globe.
Your contribution to literacy is immeasurable.**

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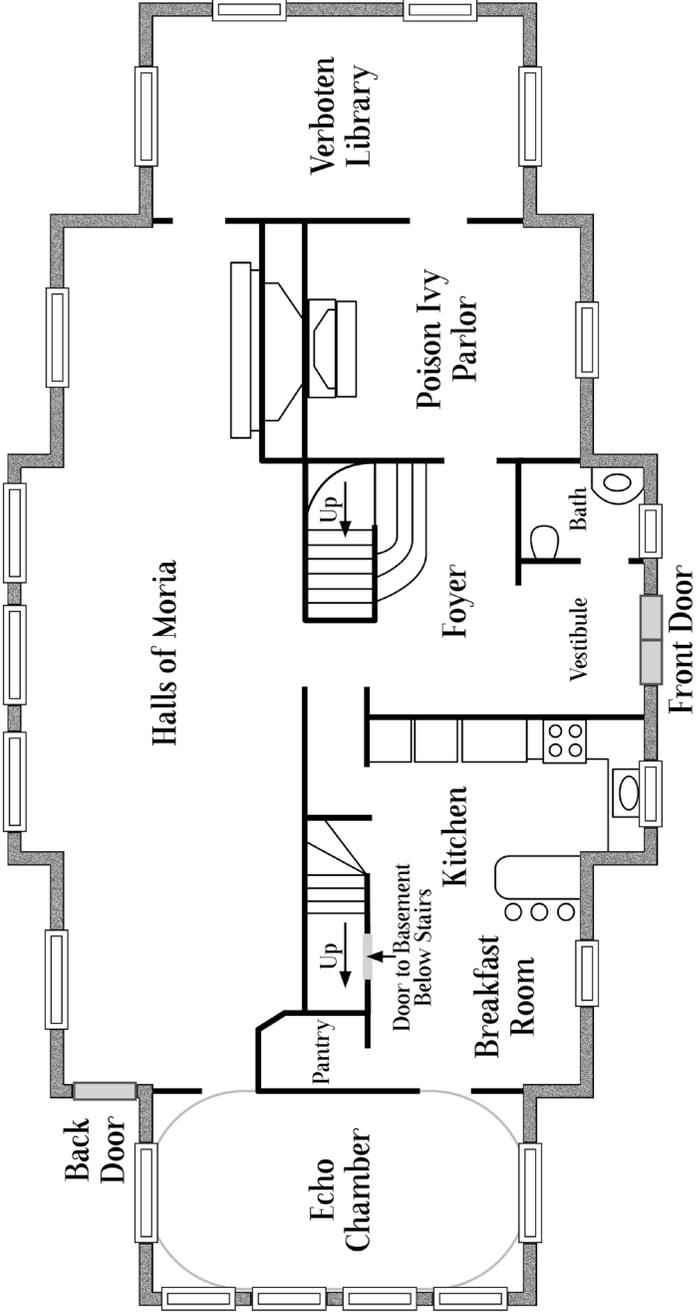
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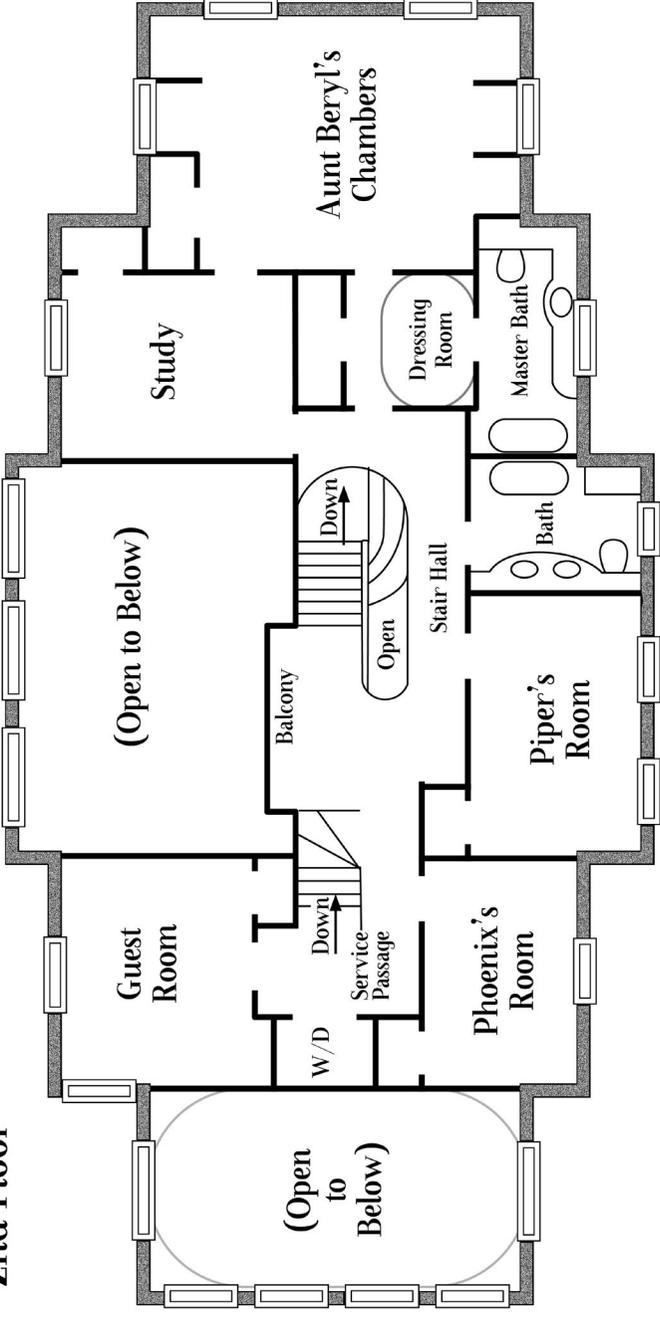
Villa Legere



1st Floor



2nd Floor





Salutations

*May our stories be told,
and may the words have life.*

–Friar Godfried

The day the girl and the boy showed up at my door was like any other. Their arrival is now etched into my spine and has become part of me, just as I have become part of them.

Just as I will become a part of *you*.

Do not worry, Dear Reader. You will become part of my existence, as all my Readers do, leaving chocolate bar smudges or chicken nugget fingerprints on a few pages before returning me to the library shelf. Just to let you know, I am rather averse to honey, because my pages get sticky. And milk can sour into an awful stench if it spills on the cover, but I really don't mind. I was created for *you*, Dear Reader.

You fascinate me.

Ah, I'm distracted from my tale; my apologies. Back to the somber children shivering at my door.

The pristine air of the library was lonely that morning, like much of the estate. Empty of Readers, empty of children. The arrival of two smallish humans was a breath of invigorating air, for I had grown musty of late.

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The frigid wind pressed hard against the outside walls that afternoon. Can you feel it? Wafting from my spine and over the pages of Chapter One, misty vapors curl up to chill your gloveless fingers grasping my cover, vapors that send a shiver down into your slippers. Perhaps you should fetch a blanket for this part. Careful with the cocoa. Marshmallows can be worse than honey if they escape the mug and dribble, sticky, down the side.

That morning some of the frost demanded to be let in through the gypsum and twelve decades of paint and wallpaper. Icy pools of air curled in the hollow spaces near the corners of the library, and the costly Persian rugs looked warm down there on the floor.

Quite a pair, those two. Piper and Phoenix.

What's that?

Well, I couldn't *see* them, Dear Reader. I don't have eyes as you do. But I did see them. I *perceived* them as they stood by the porch. I could feel the heavy thrum of Piper Guthrie's sullen heart as she stood at the door clutching her bravery like a stone in her stomach. Her heart had been ticking for thirteen roller-coaster years, and now it was tough and bruised around the edges, like the heart of the kid picked last for dodgeball six years in a row.

I sensed the birdlike chirp of her little brother's inner clock as well. The one and only Phoenix Guthrie. His ten-year-old heart skipped and twittered, going through its instinctive motions as he stood and waited on the landing with his sister. He wondered again where their mother, Naomi, was, and whether she would be there with peanut butter on the other side of the door.

Peanut butter, straight from the jar. It was the boy's favorite food of all time, and he could have lived on nothing else.

Phoenix knew the presence of Piper. She was here, and he could see her and hold her hand on the rare occasions that he wanted to, like now. Her hand was soft and familiar while

Salutations

everything else around him was sharp, unknown, and bitterly cold. This imposing dwelling was nothing like the trim little cottage in not-as-cold Atlanta where Phoenix had lived from his birth until this raw April morning.

Phoenix missed the presence of his mother, Naomi. He felt her absence like an entire section of suddenly missing teeth, searching with his tongue for the solid mass that was once there and finding only empty craters still raw and in need of healing.

The ghost of a foggy reminder that used to be called Dad drifted in and out of the boy's thoughts as well. Every now and then a sand-covered memory would rise to the surface and then slip away.

The pictures in the boy's laminated flipbook showed these people all in order. His mother, Naomi; his father, Gordon; his sister, Piper; and Phoenix. *Phoenix*.

Who was Phoenix?

Who, indeed?

Phoenix knew who Phoenix was, but he couldn't always tell the people around him.

He began rocking back and forth from the waist as he held his sister's hand. The two children stared at the unfamiliar and massive door in front of them, a door so large that Piper wondered if Hagrid might be about to crash through from the other side.

Ah! Perhaps you didn't expect to see a reference to Hogwarts in my pages. Have you read any of the marvelous *Harry Potter* stories, Dear Reader? I would not be surprised if you had read every last one, and the companion books as well.

I sized up the children as Mr. Greene brought their suitcases inside and placed them on the spotless hardwood floor in the foyer. As they waited for instructions, both Piper and Phoenix allowed themselves a timid glance around the entrance of their

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new home. Shell-shocked into an angry silence, Piper gazed at the unfamiliarity of the ornate arched doorways and the vaulted ceilings and the polished woodwork glaring at her from every surface. The extravagant furnishings shouted, “Don’t touch! Quiet! We do not like fingerprints or children!”

I breathed out their names in a whisper meant only for them.

Phoenix alone heard me. His heartbeat quickened as he looked in my direction through the open parlor doorway. If not for the firm hand of his sister, he would have come to get me from the shelf straight away. Electricity rippled through my spine with the assurance that I had found my next Reader.

Reading would have to wait, however. There was an Aunt Beryl to meet.

Oh! Forgive me; I have failed to introduce myself. My name is Novus Fabula. The pleasure is all mine, Dear Reader.

What’s that you say? Books cannot speak?

On the contrary, Dear Reader. *Quite* the contrary. Books are one of the few things on this earth that truly speak, from the moment the first word is penned until the book’s last Reader has drawn their final breath.

Let me show you.

“Hello, Reader. I am honored to know you.”

Tragedy is sometimes followed by mystery. At least that's what faces 13-year-old Piper and her brother, Phoenix, who has autism. Mourning the loss of their parents, they must move a thousand miles away to live with their insufferable Aunt Beryl. But it is in their aunt's cavernous library that Piper and Phoenix hear a mysterious book calling to them. Its name is *Novus Fabula*, and its story will change their lives forever.

“What's that you say? Books cannot speak?

On the contrary, dear Reader. Quite the contrary.

*Books are one of the few things on this earth
that truly speak. Let me show you.”*

Join Piper and Phoenix in the Verboten Library as they begin an intriguing journey of grief, wonder, and the search for Truth. If you stand with them at the edge of everywhen, you just might discover the story you need to hear as well.

A.S. MACKEY's debut book was a Steno pad full of poems, given to her parents as a gift when she was eight. She wrote her first sci-fi novel at age fifteen (it was horrid), but she honed her writing skills and earned a degree in English Literature from the University of Georgia. Allison and her husband make their home in Florence, Alabama.



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