

prologue

# lost in a labyrinth

*"There's more to life – always."*

A friend of mine once told me, "There's more to life – always." I like that idea, but I think it could be restated, "Life is never exactly as it first appears." Life changes. It grows and becomes clearer as it moves along. What looks dreamy and romantic from a distance, gradually comes into focus as you draw closer – like a friend you haven't seen for a long time, like a story you're writing from scratch, or like a mountain in the faraway distance.

That's how I felt at the start of my senior year. I was stumbling forward into the vast unknown, unsure of where I was at or where I was going. My summer job in the Boundary Waters had been like that too, but there had always been a path to follow. It might have been rocky and steep, but it always led to the next lake...but not anymore. The incredible beauty of the wilderness was being replaced with a concrete jungle. What had appeared so romantic from far away was being transformed into a mental exercise in sanity.

As I made my way back to school, it felt as if I were entering a massive labyrinth, not consisting of portage trails through the woods, but one constructed of endless sidewalks, cold buildings, and sterile classrooms – all with the intended purpose of trapping me inside. Everything seemed so gray, flat, lifeless, and empty. I wondered how it had come to be like that. Why was I caught in such a tangled mess, such a confusing maze, and such an impossible and hopeless situation? What had I done to deserve such a horrible curse on my life? Why hadn't I seen it coming?

I'd let myself wander off, long ago, in some idealistic state of mind that I once possessed, but gradually lost any hope of regaining. Along the way, I'd become surrounded by life – real life – cold, hard, bitter, confusing, unpredictable, and so much more. Nothing was as it first appeared. Everything had completely changed. Up was down. Right was left. Black was white. East was west. Day was night. Open was shut. Life was death...you get the picture.

With an air of dreamy wanderlust, I'd walked straight into that labyrinth, and early on, I didn't even realize what was happening. I was still flying high from the amazing events of the summer, but as the weeks ticked by, I slowly realized how deep inside that maze I'd allowed myself to be taken. I found myself bumping up against one obstacle after another, feeling my way along in the dark, only to realize that it was just another dead end. I had entered the labyrinth with a sword and a string, but I was beginning to wonder if I even had the strength to use that sword, and if I could actually rely on the string to find my way back out again. What would happen if it were broken? What would I do then?

I didn't know, but that's how I felt about it, and this is a story about how it all started...and ended, hopefully. In spite of the sad situation that I'd gotten myself into, I held on to a sliver of hope that it would get better. Yeah, there's always more to life. At least, that's what they kept saying, and I thought I still believed it, but I was beginning to have my doubts. I hung on to those words for dear life as the darkness slowly closed in around me. Was it just one of those situations in which I was destined to remain stuck forever? Would I ever find my way out? What was I going to do?

To be honest, I had absolutely no idea.