

# The Incurrrible Dreamers

-a novella-

by

Jade Heasley

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This book is dedicated to all of the Incurable Dreamers.

You know who you are.

"It's not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or how the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who at best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."

-Theodore Roosevelt

## CHAPTER ONE

Meredith grabbed her long black coat and hastily threw it on, ripped her key ring off the hook, and locked the door behind her. The only thing she could think of was escape. She didn't care that it was the middle of the night, that she was alone, or that she didn't have her cell phone with her. She tore out of her apartment, not sure of where she was going or why.

A storm raged in her mind. She quickly walked the length of the block, angrily trying to escape the stress. She vaguely wondered what the point of bolting out the door after midnight was, but didn't care enough to figure it out. All she knew was that the cream colored walls of her apartment were suffocating her.

She walked at a clipping pace for some time, but eventually she began to slow with melancholy. The night air was crisp and the only sound was her footsteps softly treading on the sidewalk. As she walked along the endless labyrinth of sidewalk, the quiet began to calm her nerves. Maybe she was in a losing battle against the whole world, but at least the cool of the night was providing somewhat of a temporary shelter. Meredith walked with her head down, but at one point she looked to the sky and saw that it was dismally black; the moon was gone. *No stars up there to wish on tonight*, she thought bleakly.

Meredith walked past an old-fashioned clock on a cast iron post, but she didn't pay any attention to it. The clock gave the time as 12:34, but time was of no concern to her that night. She had left her apartment with stress-induced heartburn and an excruciating tension headache but the walk was starting to serve its purpose, she was finally getting tired. Meredith reasoned that even though she would be getting to bed extremely late she might actually get some sleep, something that she hadn't seen much of over the course of the last few nights.

She noticed that there was a light up ahead, shining from some unseen street lamp that was hidden in an alley. Meredith figured she would walk to the edge of the alley, turn around

and head back home. By the time she got to the edge of the alley she noticed that there was a bench underneath the street lamp.

## CHAPTER TWO

The empty bench looked strangely inviting. No one was in sight and the alley was completely silent. In her weariness Meredith decided to sit down and think for a few minutes.

She walked past the green painted streetlight, its cast iron detailing remarkably well preserved for how old the lamp must have been. Meredith sat down on the black cast iron bench with a wooden slatted seat and drank in the sweet quiet. It wasn't until she sat down that she realized how exhausted and depressed she was.

"I've never seen you here before," a man's voice said from somewhere behind her.

Meredith nearly jumped out of her skin. The reality of her situation, where she was, and how stupid it was to go out walking aimlessly in the middle of the night hit her like a ton of bricks. Meredith's heart rate soared, her throat grew tight with panic. She didn't even have her cell phone. No one had a clue where she was, there was no one else within earshot. She was now completely at the mercy of the man that was walking up behind her. *If he's carrying a weapon, I'm done for*, she thought in horror.

In spite of it all, Meredith was determined not to show the slightest sign of fear. She subtly slipped her hand into her coat pocket and grasped her key ring and threaded the sharp points of the keys between her fingers, creating a row of steel spikes. It wouldn't be a match for a weapon, but if he was unarmed she knew she could inflict some serious damage to his eyes. Meredith had never had to defend herself before, but she knew that she could if she needed to.

She discreetly glanced over her shoulder and saw a middle-aged man with gray hair. His expression was somewhere between slightly quizzical and a worn-out smile. It wasn't a welcoming smile, but nonetheless a faded hint of smile that seemed to faintly brush itself around the corners of his melancholy mouth.



Inexplicably, Meredith suddenly calmed down because she somehow instinctively knew he didn't have the vaguest intention of hurting her. Maybe it was the fact that his most striking facial feature was weariness. Meredith felt the tension in her spine lessen and she quit grasping the key ring.

The man slung his gray suit jacket on the back of the bench and walked around to the front of the bench and flopped onto it as carelessly as if it were his own couch. He obviously didn't mind if he wrinkled his jacket since he partially sat on it. He loosened his already loose red necktie and had the sleeves of his white dress shirt rolled up to his elbows.

Regardless of what her instincts were telling her, the usually outgoing Meredith didn't care to strike up a conversation with a strange man in an alley in the middle of the night, even if he was seemingly harmless. As emotionally exhausted and battered as she was, she tried not to sound annoyed as she replied dryly, "I'm not really from around here. I'm just sort of strolling through."

She was surprised and slightly offended when he let out an amused snort and asked, "Didn't anybody ever tell you this is a dead-end street? If I didn't know any better I would think that you ended up in the wrong place by accident." He smiled at her good naturedly, which irritated her all the more.

Fighting the sarcasm that had found its way to the edge of her voice she asked, "What makes you assume I came here on purpose?"

"I could tell by the way you were walking. The defeat in your eyes that's bordering on surrender. The depressing cloud of gloom that's following you," he answered.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Meredith asked, not caring if she sounded rude. She was becoming aware of how tired, lethargic, and exhausted she was. She felt her body conforming to the shape of the bench.

The man observed, "You're tired, defeated, and you've given up. That's how we all came to be here."

Meredith stared at him incredulously, but he didn't seem to notice. He leaned over and picked up a rock and began to carve some initials into the bench. She wasn't sure of what to say or even what to think of the seemingly peculiar stranger. He looked like he could be running a major corporation, but he acted more like a hobo.

She then noticed that someone else was coming towards them. A tall, slender, elegant woman silently walked in front of them and stood beneath the ring of light that was cast by the street lamp. She took a leisurely drag on the cigarette that was held by a long, black holder. The woman was wearing a black beaded cocktail dress; long, black gloves, and an impressive pair of leather stilettos. She carried herself like royalty. The woman nodded to the gray-haired man and said, "Simon."

The man nodded back and said, "Elise."

Elise leaned her back against the cast iron pole of the street lamp. One foot was planted firmly on the ground, the other was balanced on the base of the lamppost. It was obvious that she had stood beneath the street lamp many times before.

Elise took another drag on her cigarette and said, "Looks like we have ourselves a new friend." She asked Meredith, "Did Mr. Manners know enough to introduce himself?"

"I'm Simon," said the man.

Elise formed a knowing grin around her cigarette holder, amused at Simon's oversight. She asked, "What's your name, honey?"

"I'm Meredith. And you are?"

"You don't know who she is?" Simon asked in genuine surprise.

"I'm sorry, no. Should I know you?" Meredith asked the woman.

Simon said, "She has one of the most recognizable faces in the world."

Meredith looked puzzled.

“Never mind, Simon. That was a long time ago. And as we all know, time marches on,” the lady said with slightly defeated certainty.

Simon told Meredith, “She’s Elise Bayonne. The actress.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Miss Bayonne,” said Meredith, who was wishing she would have heard of Elise Bayonne before.

“You can call me Elise, honey,” the lady said. “Nearly everyone has called me Elise since 1922. Before that I was Amelia Strummins. The studio changed my name into something that was a little more ‘Hollywood.’”

Meredith was so stunned by the woman’s claim that she barely managed to sputter, “1922!?”

Elise said to Simon in a humored tone, “I don’t think she believes me.”

Simon remarked casually, “I always tell you not to start off by giving dates.”

Elise nodded thoughtfully and said, “Maybe she’ll believe you. Tell her your story.”

“Ever heard of The Crystal Clear Radio Corporation?” Simon asked as he pointed to the initials “CCRC” that he had scraped into the wooden slat of the bench.

Meredith shook her head, “No, I don’t believe so.”

Simon shrugged and grinned, “That’s okay. Neither has anyone else.”

Another person came into view. He was a young man, wandering aimlessly on the far side of the alley. He pulled a bottle wrapped in a paper bag out of his jacket pocket, took a sloppy swig, capped the bottle, and shoved it back into his pocket. He’d been drinking quite a lot that night, but he wasn’t drunk. He was wishing he could just get wasted quickly and forget his misery. One look at his face and it was obvious that the young man was bewildered, ashamed, and very deeply permeated with melancholy.

Elise waved to him, Simon turned around to wave to him as well, and Meredith silently watched the tortured young man who appeared to be a human shipwreck. He gave a slight wave

back to them as he strolled to the end of the alley. His glassy, bloodshot eyes were staring off into the distance, looking to some faraway place that was once very familiar to him. He took the bottle and swallowed its contents once more. He returned the bottle to his pocket, turned around, and walked back into the black depths of the alley where he had come from.

“Nicholas doesn’t look as drunk tonight as he usually does,” Elise observed.

Simon told Meredith, “He’s a brilliant man. Brilliant writer. But his drinking got out of hand and his wife left him. He was working on a book that could be the greatest masterpiece of its time, something that could have been studied at universities for years to come. But he quit the manuscript after his wife gave up on their marriage. He’s been completely hung up on the bottle ever since.”

“Evenin’, folks,” said a voice from behind the bench. A young man about twenty-nine or thirty had joined them. He looked down at Meredith and said sympathetically, “You look awfully young to be here, darlin’.”

Elise blew a smoke ring and said, “That’s funny, George, I believe that’s what I told you when we first met.”

George nodded regretfully, “I was too depressed to go back, but now it’s too late,” he said with a shrug and a sigh. He looked at Meredith and said, “Go back while you still can.”

Meredith shrugged and said, “I can go back whenever I want. I just want to sit for awhile.” The wooden bench was growing more and more comfortable.