



From the desk of  
**CATE KAY**

Note: This is a fictional letter from our main character Cate Kay who wanted to introduce herself.

Dear Bookseller,

Considering how long I've been on the run – shape-shifting identities, living in the shadows – the simple fact of this memoir's existence should be victory enough. And yet, it isn't. There's still this one thought I can't escape: what will the booksellers (yes, the booksellers!) think of everything I've confessed within these pages?

This particular ruminating has surprised me. I didn't have this feeling, this deep pit of nervousness, when publishing *The Very Last* books. Not even the first one. I loved that trilogy, I did, but all my personal details and secrets were hidden, veiled in fiction. Not like here. This book is the real me, written from my perspective as well as from a few select others.

I think, maybe, that spending time with these long-buried memories has made me feel younger, more vulnerable, more like my old self: Anne Marie Callahan.

Perhaps one quick story might explain:

Growing up, my best friend Amanda (you'll read about her soon) and I would occasionally walk to the local bookstore. It was two miles out of town, in a small log cabin atop a hill with partial views of the lake. I remember this one time we went, I planted myself in front of a row of used books, squatting to see each title. Up until this moment, the books I read were always modern, set in places and times I could understand. Something about the familiarity comforted me.

"Good to see you again," came a woman's voice and I looked up and found the shop's owner smiling at me. "Hi," I said, happy for her warm welcome. Then she crossed her arms, squinted, and kindly asked, "How do you feel about a recommendation?"

Truthfully, not good—it was such a risk, trusting someone else's opinion! But I didn't want to disappoint this lovely woman. Thankfully, she did not wait for my answer, simply bent over and pulled a book out by the spine, presented it to me: *THE PILLARS OF THE EARTH*. I took it from her, flipped it over and realized it took place in ... 12th century England?! The opposite of what I usually read.

But, of course, I bought it. And it remains my favorite book of all time.

What I learned that day: the books that you love become the books others love. And I guess the unabashed truth is that I want so badly for this memoir, the realest version of me, to become one of them.

Warmly,

Cate Kay