

AIDAN CHAMBERS

Winner of the Michael L. Printz Award

DYING TO KNOW YOU



A NOVEL

ALSO BY AIDAN CHAMBERS

The Kissing Game

This Is All: The Pillow Book of Cordelia Kenn

Postcards from No Man's Land

The Toll Bridge

Now I Know

Dance on My Grave

Breaktime

FOR YOUNGER READERS

The Present Takers

Seal Secret

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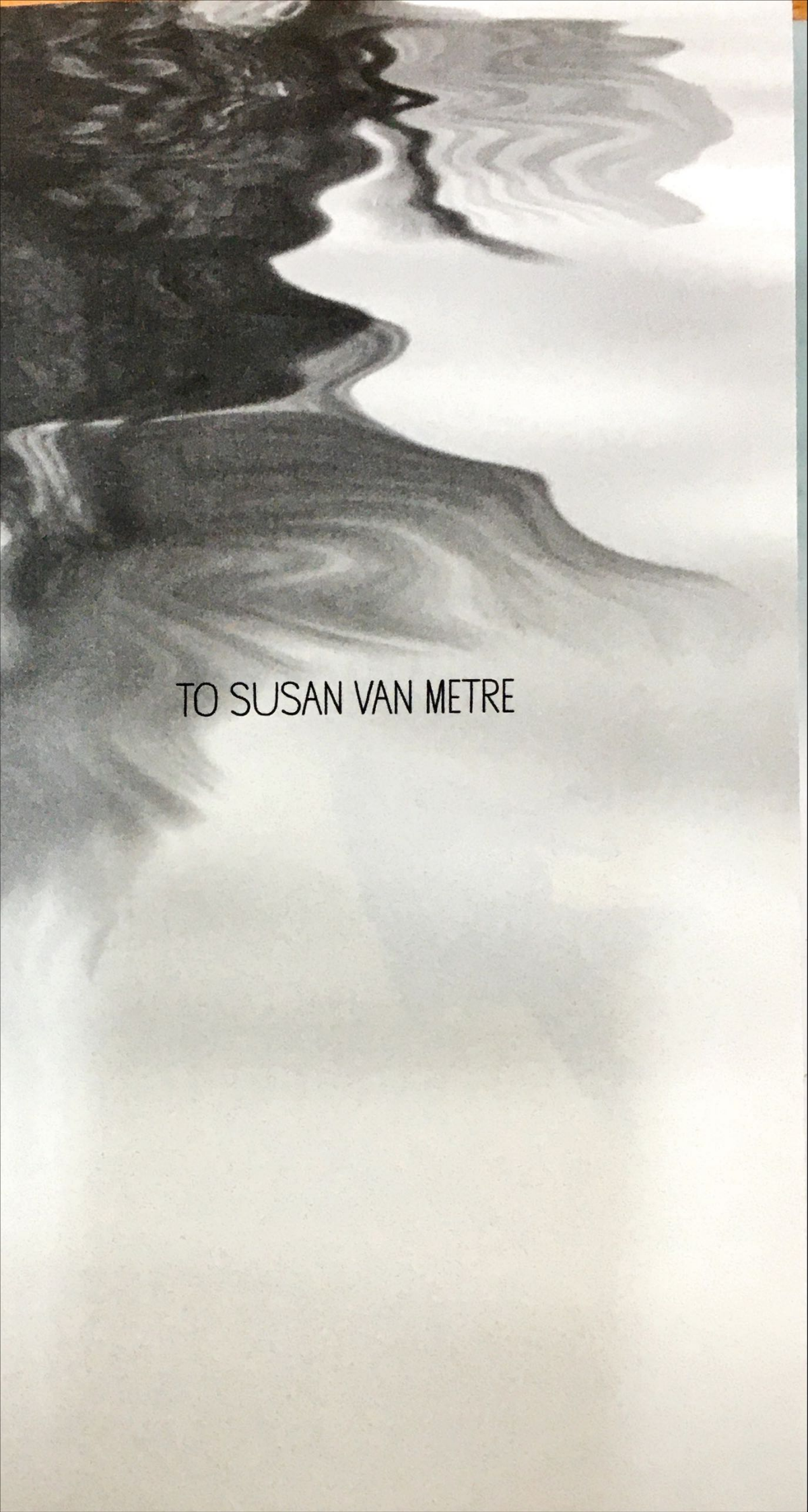
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TO SUSAN VAN METRE

one

"COULD I TALK TO YOU?"

"Why?"

"You're a writer?"

"And?"

"I need your help."

"You see the sign on the door?"

"Yes."

"What does it say?"

"No visitors without appointment."

"Have you an appointment?"

"No."

"Then I suggest you make one."

"Could I make an appointment?"

"When for?"

"Now."

I couldn't help laughing. Anyway, there was something about him, an indefinable quality that instantly appealed.

"What sort of help do you want?"

"With my girlfriend."

"I don't know anything about you, never mind your girlfriend."

"I can explain."

"Young man. I'm seventy-five. Happily married for over forty years. What would I know about girls these days?"

"You write about them."

"You've read my books?"

"No."

"So how do you know?"

"My girlfriend told me. She's a fan. And I looked you up on the internet."

"Really? Well, at least you're honest. But in any case, the girls in my books are fictions. I made them up. They don't have minds of their own. Real girls do."

"The help is just for me, really. Not my girlfriend."

"Look, if we're going to continue this conversation, which it seems we are, you'd better come inside."

Rooms are a fixed size, which can't be altered without pulling down walls and building new ones. They should be unchanging in shape and proportions. But sometimes they do change depending on who's in them.

I led him into the sitting room. He was tall, well built

but not bulky, not overbearing. I was surprised, because the room didn't shrink as it usually did when visitors came in. It got larger.

When we'd sat down, he on the edge of the sofa, leaning forward, elbows on knees, eyes looking at his hands clasped as if in prayer, me in the armchair facing him, I asked again how he thought I could help.

"My girlfriend wants me to write about myself," he said.

"And?"

"About myself. Inside."

"What? You mean your feelings?"

"My inner secrets, she said."

"Why?"

"She quoted something at me."

"Can you remember it?"

"How can you call them friends when they do not know their mutual feelings."

"That's good. Did she say who said it?"

"Aristotle."

"Aristotle? She's read Aristotle?"

"No idea."

"Maybe she picked it up from the internet."

"She does read a lot. She'd like it here," he added, looking at the shelves of books.

"How old?"

"Seventeen."

"She's some girl, if she's read Aristotle."

"Well, yes, she is."