



**MOVERS  
& FAKERS**

AN ALPHAS NOVEL BY  
LISI HARRISON



**poppy**

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY  
New York Boston

# 1

CHARLIE'S PAP  
SOMEWHERE OVER ALPHA ACADEMY  
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 20TH  
12:46 P.M.

“Ready?” Charlie turned to her copilot in the passenger seat and shot her brows skyward, excitement twinkling in her almond-brown eyes. She still couldn’t believe where they were, strapped into a Personal Alpha Plane, each zippered into a gold Alphas flight suit with an inspirational quote embroidered along the left sleeve.

*Adventure is worthwhile in itself.*

—Amelia Earhart

Allie’s vivid green eyes met Charlie’s. In the light-flooded airplane hangar, they were the exact color of a lime-flavored Jelly Belly. “Can’t we just sit here a little longer?” she pleaded, her voice pinched and wavering. Panic-induced perspiration trickled down her porcelain temples like rain on a sidewalk. Charlie examined Allie’s profile—

ski-slope nose, full rosebud lips, and wide eyes ringed by a perfect fringe of doll-length lashes—and wondered for the millionth time how such a pretty girl had ended up with the confidence of a wet rag.

“No can do, Al. We only have half an hour till class,” Charlie reminded her trembling friend. She scooted back against the squishy silver pilot’s seat and clicked her safety belt shut, the buckle forming a chunky platinum “A.”

The golf-cart-size plane looked like a giant Plexiglas soap bubble—it was perfectly round and totally translucent. Charlie was appropriately bubbly herself. She clenched and unclenched her fists, her hands hovering over the touch-screen control panel like she was Beethoven. She scanned her surroundings, making sure they were cleared for take-off.

All around the launchpad, technicians in white jumpsuits and Brazille Enterprises caps were busy making adjustments to the other ninety-nine PAPs.

“Maybe we could do this another time, then?” Allie asked hopefully, still trying to weasel her way out of the adventure. She ran a hand through her shiny jet-black hair and cocked her head hopefully at Charlie.

Charlie put a reassuring hand on Allie’s jiggling knee. “Don’t you want to be the first Alphas to take one of these babies out for a spin?”

At the elite Alpha Academy, where both girls had

managed to survive a month, doing things *first* and doing them the *best* was everything. After all, Shira Brazille's school for exceptional writers, dancers, artists, and inventors was full of girls who had been best and first their whole lives.

"Of course, but this thing is teeny! My Chanel makeup palette is bigger than this." Allie squirted some Purell into her hands and nervously rubbed them together. She stared out the window at the shiny rows of planes lined up in air formation like marbles in a game of Chinese checkers. "Did Shira really say we could be here?"

"Uh-huh." Charlie gloat-grinned, wiggling her fingers to remind Allie. Her nail polish had turned a shade of revved-up red, perfectly matching her mood. "It's my little reward."

The billionaire mogul had called Charlie into her office last night and grudgingly told her that she'd earned a ride in a PAP for having received the first patent at Alpha Academy. Charlie was on the inventor track at school, and she had just trademarked a prototype for saliva-activated nail polish that changed colors based on the pH levels in a person's mouth. Shira predicted the Lick Slicks line of polish would be a major seller for her cosmetics company, X-Chromosome. Charlie had been overjoyed until Shira congratulated her for "dumb luck" by applying existing technology in a "somewhat clever" way.

Charlie and Shira had a more tangled history than Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook's other cofounders: As the daughter of Shira's former assistant, Bee, Charlie had known the international sensation since she was in diapers. A talk-show host whose ratings rivaled Oprah's, Shira was the CEO of not just Brazille Enterprises but various subsidiary companies, and a household name from Irvine to Indonesia. Over the course of Charlie's life, Shira had become one of the richest, most powerful women in the world. And since day one, she'd also persisted in overlooking Charlie's accomplishments.

"And she said I could bring anyone I wanted. If I'd known you were going to wuss out, I would have picked someone else," Charlie said teasingly.

Lately, Alpha Academy had felt more like a maximum-security prison than a school for phenomenally talented girls. Charlie longed to take off and get some breathing room for a few minutes to escape the pressure-cooker vibe. And she knew that once Allie was in the air, she'd feel better, too.

"Okay, okay, fine. I'm not wussing out," Allie sighed. "Let's fly."

"Don't worry. I know what I'm doing." Charlie pulled out her aPod (the glittery rectangle that kept the students of Alpha Academy connected to one another—but not to the rest of the world—and served as a personal remote

control for all of the island's technology). The round portals on either side of the plane squeezed shut with a sucking sound, and a map of the @-shaped island appeared on the control screen in front of her, with a blue dot blinking in the launchpad area.

"That's us," Charlie said, pointing at the dot and grinning. She refastened the bobby pin that held back her shaggy brown bangs and prepared for liftoff.

"Now initiating takeoff," said Bee's smooth British-accented voice.

*Thanks, Mom*, Charlie answered in her head. Usually, hearing Bee's voice was like getting hit on the head with a Nerf bat—momentarily bewildering and kind of unpleasant but not seriously dangerous—but today missing her mother didn't even enter her mind. Today was all about having fun with her new friend.

"If we go down in flames, I want you to know I heart you," Allie said, smiling tightly and gripping the gel-filled arms of her seat hard enough to turn her knuckles white.

"You'll heart me even more when we're airborne," Charlie giggled.

"Now entering air space," Bee informed them as the plane floated smoothly and silently off the ground. Because the carbon-neutral plane ran on a combination of electricity and corn syrup, the cabin was eerily silent; without any jet engine noise, the only sound was the gentle whir of the

climate-control system blowing lavender-scented AC across their foreheads.

“Uhmuhgud.” Allie loosened her death-grip on the armrests and wound her pale arms around one of Charlie’s olive ones, squeezing Charlie like two slender boa constrictors.

“Not bad, right?” Charlie grinned, resting her mocha-brown eyes on Allie before moving them back to the control panel.

“Wow.” Allie smiled, relaxing back into her chair as the bubble floated upward. “This is almost . . . peaceful.” Her green eyes immediately unscintillated, and her lips uncurled from their terrified grimace to their usual puffy O.

“Antigravity technology.” Charlie nodded. “Makes for a smooth ride. Pioneered by NASA for space-testing astronauts. Perfected by Brazille Enterprises for Alpha Academy.” In this case, Brazille Enterprises meant Charlie Deery, but Charlie didn’t want Allie to think she was bragging. And if Shira ever found out how much of the design was actually Charlie’s, she would be sent packing faster than a bachelorette after a rose ceremony.

“Here we go!” Charlie whispered with delight as the top of the hangar cracked open like an enormous plastic Easter egg to let them through. Blinding desert sunlight streamed in through the plane’s curved windshield, and Charlie took out two pairs of aviator shades from a compartment in the armrest, handing one to Allie and

putting the other pair on herself. Shira really had thought of everything.

Just as they were clearing the hangar's octagonal edge, a white camera attached to the ceiling blinked on and angled its lens toward the plane, focusing on them like a personal wink from Shira. *Gotcha!*

"Ugh, there's no escape!" groaned Allie.

"I know," Charlie sighed. "Ah-noying." Ever since Charlie temporarily dismantled the security system to help her bunk-mates meet up with the BBBs (the Billionaire Brazille Boys, Shira's five sons and the island's most forbidden fruit), Shira had added hundreds of new cameras and amped up security. The slightest infraction would send an Alpha home, and Shira was watching *everything*.

"At least she hasn't figured out how to float cameras in the sky," Charlie said, finding the silver lining in their floating cloud.

She gasped as the plane rose higher; the @-shaped island, at the center of a deep blue *faux*cean constructed where the Mojave Desert kissed Nevada, still had the power to impress her, even though she'd helped build the thing.

"Bananas," Allie said. "I can't believe we live here."

"Serious-leh," Charlie said, sounding more and more like her new best friend.

Sliding a finger over the map, Charlie steered the plane higher and headed east. Below them, beneath açai palms,

Joshua trees, and the scrim of wild jungle overgrowth, were the twenty houses where one hundred Alphas slept, studied, schemed, and suffered. Each glass-domed rooftop glittered like a snow globe and sported the signature of a different inspirational woman. They passed Virginia Woolf, Michelle Obama, Oprah, Martha Stewart, J. K. Rowling, Mother Teresa, and finally their own house, Jackie O. Farther out, past Shira's house and the rest of the buildings, gleaming white beaches sparkled against clear blue water.

"Let's cruise lower and see what's happening at the Pavilion." Allie's fear of flying had vanished. Instead she stared openmouthed through the translucent floor of the plane, scanning the ground for Alphas and Brazilles.

"Roger that." It was good to see Allie being enthusiastic about something. Lately, the easygoing songstress had been acting strangely jumpy, like a mouse caught in a trap.

Charlie adjusted the plane's controls and circled to the right, flying past the vertical farm and the Buddha-shaped Zen Center, beyond the harp-shaped Music Hall and the Dionysus dance space dangling high above the jungle like dice hanging from an invisible rearview mirror. Soon the Pavilion rose up in front of them, a skinny oblong structure with white winglike awnings extending from either side, flapping to provide breezy slices of shade. It was lunchtime, and dozens of Alpha girls dressed in matching metallics were lounging around on the shaded lawn.

“Go closer—let’s make sure they see us!” Allie studied the ground below to try to spot the blow-outs and ponies that belonged to their friends. “Does this thing have a horn?”

“Lemme see . . .” Charlie pushed a tiny picture of a bird on the touch-screen controls and the plane made a cute chirping noise. “Guess so!” Charlie waved to the Alphas on the lawn forty feet below them.

“Ariella looks so jealous,” crowed Allie, pointing at the statuesque platinum blonde squinting up at them in awe. Ariella von Slivovitz was a Russian heiress who had revolutionized the art of cake decorating. She did more with spun sugar than Picasso did with paint. Ariella waved back and beckoned to Ingrid Santana to check out the plane. A Frida Kahlo look-alike minus the bushy eyebrows, Ingrid was a budding marine biologist whose remixes of orca whale songs had won a Grammy last year. “And check out Maxine Montrose—our picture’s gonna go viral.” Maxine, a voluptuous redheaded photographer, had already attached a telephoto lens to her aPod and was busily snapping pictures of Charlie and Allie floating above them.

Swooping closer to the building, Charlie spotted a figure sitting on a narrow rooftop balcony. She squinted behind her aviators to try to get a better look. The heat-rippled sky revealed the figure to be male—which meant Brazille.

And he was holding a guitar.

*Darwin.*

*Perfect*, thought Charlie, unable to pull her gaze away from the hazel-eyed, floppy-haired boy in front of her. Darwin was the last person she wanted to see right now. Shira's musically inclined fourteen-year-old son was Charlie's ex, and their past was more checkered than gingham.

Allie squeaked, and Charlie knew she had spotted him, too. Charlie and Allie shared more than a bedroom—they both had a weakness for Darwin's sun-kissed skin, the adorable freckle above his lip, and his habit of chewing cinnamon-scented toothpicks.

But Charlie had given all that up. Shira wanted her Alphas to focus on school, and her sons to date *appropriate* girls. So Charlie had struck the only deal she could: In order to attend Alpha Academy (and stay in physical proximity to Darwin), she had to break up with him, ending a lifelong friendship and sacrificing the only love she'd ever known. Not only that, but she had to give up her mom, too. As a condition of Charlie's enrollment, Shira had forced Bee to resign.

"I'm going to get closer," Charlie said, her voice cracking. She looked over at Allie to see if she'd noticed, but Allie was oblivious, staring moonily at Darwin through twenty, then ten, then five feet of air like her eyes were missiles and he was the target.

Darwin looked up from his guitar, pushing his natu-

rally highlighted waves out of his face and staring through Charlie like she was cellophane. His puppy-dog eyes zeroed in on Allie and fastened onto her like Velcro.

*Ouch.* Charlie blinked hard. When would her tear ducts get the memo that she and Darwin were yesterday's news?

The extended memo was that lately, Darwin and Allie had been hanging out. As recently as a couple of weeks ago, it had made Charlie crazy. But slowly, she'd gotten used to it. Sort of. And Allie had become a good friend, which was the most important thing.

"Hi Darwin," Allie sighed. She pressed a pale slender hand against the windshield, and Darwin put his hand up to mirror hers. Allie looked forlorn, as if she were separated from Darwin by an ocean and not just a piece of Plexiglas. Ever since the night Allie and Darwin met up in the underground tunnels and Shira had nearly busted everyone, she'd been laying low, unable to see him.

Charlie felt a tickling stab of jealousy in the pit of her stomach, but the knife was duller than it used to be. Mostly, she just felt sad.

Darwin's lips drooped like a wilting flower arrangement as the plane shifted a few inches away in a gust of wind.

"You miss him, huh?" she asked Allie, pulling the plane back up just as a rooftop camera blinked in their direction. Charlie's boiling jealousy of Allie had cooled and was quickly being replaced by concern. Ever since Shira

had gone camera crazy and made the island into her own personal version of *Big Brother*, Allie had seemed so low—almost lost. Charlie glanced at Darwin one last time before arcing the plane away, but his eyes were already as lifeless as the buttons on a Raggedy Andy doll.

“Uh-huh.” Allie sighed, shrugging her shoulders in defeat.

“It’s tough being at a new school with new people and then—”

“The cameras!” wailed Allie, covering her face with her hands. “I feel like I’m being watched every single second!”

“You are,” said Charlie, tucking a long mahogany strand of hair behind her ear.

“And Darwin keeps texting, but what can I do?”

“Nothing. You’re right to be careful. Shira’s dying to kick more of us out.” A brooding silence wrapped around them like a sleeping bag as Charlie thought about it more. Her nomadic childhood as part of Shira’s entourage had given her a lot: world travel, brilliant private tutors who nurtured her love of math and science, access to all of Shira’s amazing resources and technology, and of course the chance to bond with Darwin. But being a part of Shira’s entourage had deprived her of a lot, too: Charlie had never lived anywhere long enough to have a place that felt like home, and she’d never had a chance to form anything but the most shallow connections with other girls.

Cruising the plane over the lightbulb-shaped lab where she did her experiments, her heart revved a little faster. The recycled glass building shot up from the jungle like a giant albino mushroom. It was where she felt like she belonged. She squinted through the semi-opaque white walls and smiled when she saw Dr. G, her lab mentor, bent over some slides of her latest project, a spray-foam that dried stronger than cement. With any luck, the foam would be used to build houses for the world's poor. If she had the lab as a home and Allie as a best friend, Charlie would survive here—maybe even flourish. Even without Darwin.

She stole another glance at Allie, who looked lower than the ocean floor. Charlie tried to imagine how she would feel if the situation were reversed. What if Darwin had broken up with *her*? She hoped he would want her to be happy, to move on.

It was crazy, but Charlie realized she *wanted* Allie and Darwin to be together now. Life at the Academy was more competitive than Olympic figure skating, more stressful than the PSATs. Succeeding here could turn you from ordinary to infamous, from mousy to magnetic, from Lisa Simpson to Jessica Simpson. And surviving here was way more likely with a friend on your side.

If Charlie couldn't be with Darwin herself, then at least she could find a way to make her best friend and her boyfriend—or, rather, boy “friend”—happy.

“Let’s take her in,” she said. Charlie pushed the Twizzler-shaped icon on the PAP’s touchscreen and Bee’s voice acknowledged her selection as the plane angled through the crystalline sky. “Now preparing for landing. We hope you enjoyed your flight on Alpha Airways.”

“Roger that,” said Allie, pasting on a brave smile.

Soon, if Charlie had anything to say about it, Allie would have something real to smile about.

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