



**VOX**

*a novel*

C H R I S T I N A   D A L C H E R

# VOX

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*In memory of Charlie Jones  
linguist, professor, friend*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A man named Stephen King once said, “No one writes a long novel alone.” I was ten or so when I first read those words at the beginning of *'Salem's Lot*. They still ring true today.

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To you, dear reader, who will ultimately judge this story. I do hope you enjoy it. Most of all, I hope it makes you a little bit angry. I hope it makes you think.

And finally, to my husband, Bruce, who supports almost everything I do. And who never, ever tells me not to talk so much.

If anyone told me I could bring down the president, and the Pure Movement, and that incompetent little shit Morgan LeBron in a week's time, I wouldn't believe them. But I wouldn't argue. I wouldn't say a thing.

I've become a woman of few words.

Tonight at supper, before I speak my final syllables of the day, Patrick reaches over and taps the silver-toned device around my left wrist. It's a light touch, as if he were sharing the pain, or perhaps reminding me to stay quiet until the counter resets itself at midnight. This magic will happen while I sleep, and I'll begin Tuesday with a virgin slate. My daughter, Sonia's, counter will do the same.

My boys do not wear word counters.

Over dinner, they are all engaged in the usual chatter about school.

Sonia also attends school, although she never wastes words discussing her days. At supper, between bites of a simple stew I made from memory, Patrick questions her about her progress in home economics, physical fitness, and a new course titled Simple Accounting for Households. Is she obeying the teachers? Will she earn high marks this term? He knows exactly the type of questions to ask: closed-ended, requiring only a nod or a shake of the head.

I watch and listen, my nails carving half-moons into the flesh of my palms. Sonia nods when appropriate, wrinkles her nose when my young twins, not understanding the importance of yes/no interrogatives and finite answer sets, ask their sister to tell them what the teachers are like, how the classes are, which subject she likes best. So many open-ended questions. I refuse to think they do understand, that they're baiting her, teasing out words. But at eleven, they're old enough to know. And they've seen what happens when we overuse words.