

Two Sides to Every Murder

DANIELLE VALENTINE

putnam

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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Olivia and Reagan must figure out who is murdering everyone at
Camp Lost Lake before they become victims themselves.

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To Sawyer Rollins

—D. V.

JUNE 13, 2008

7:17 p.m.

Gia North's lungs ached as she tore through the trees. The woods pushed in around her, hiding the cabins and Camp Lost Lake lodge from view. It felt like she was in the middle of nowhere.

It's not too late, it can't be too late, she thought, willing her short legs to move faster. The muscles in her calves screamed.

She leapt from the grass to the hard, packed earth of the trail—

Her foot slipped out from beneath her. She felt a sharp crack through her chin and tasted dirt in her mouth before she even realized she'd fallen.

It was the worst possible time to trip.

She pushed herself off the ground, catching sight of her hands as she did. They were splayed in the dirt, and her fingers, her knuckles, her wrists—every inch of visible skin was covered in blood.

"Get up," she told herself, her voice ragged. "Get *up*, Gia."

She was tired and panicked and terrified, but lives depended on whether or not she found help.

She stood.

Gia, breathing hard, noticed her camera on the ground; it had

fallen out of her pocket and skidded across the path. That camera was probably the most important possession she had right now. The police would want to see the footage she'd just taken. She needed to put it back in its hiding place, where she could get to it later. She glanced over her shoulder, into the woods she'd just run through. Did she have time for that?

Making a quick decision, Gia snatched her camera off the ground and stuffed it back into her pocket, hurrying to her hiding place, past the trees and up the stairs to the camp director's office, stopping at the window. Hands shaking, she removed the faulty piece of trim no one but her knew about, pulled the camera out of her pocket and stowed it in the little hole in the siding, then slid the trim back in place.

She exhaled, relief flooding through her. *There*. At least that was done.

She started to turn back toward the stairs when she noticed something lying at her feet. It was the camp key card she'd been carrying around for the last two days. It must've also fallen out of her pocket when she pulled the camera out again. She leaned over to pick it up—

And froze. From where she was standing, she could see all the way across to the archery range.

It was starting to get dark, but she could just make out the shapes of two figures standing in the field. She was about to lift her arms, to call out to them for help, but something stopped her. Were they arguing? Gia squinted, trying to see who they were. That was the blond hair and tall, broad-shouldered build of Jacob Knight, the camp's archery instructor, but she couldn't tell who the other person was. They were slender and shorter than Jacob—

probably a woman, Gia thought. But there was something wrong with her face. It looked misshapen, old, haggard, with green-tinted skin and long, stringy gray hair, and her eyes were black, sunken, surrounded by deeply lined, rubbery skin, her nose long, hooked, covered in warts—

A mask, Gia realized. The woman's face looked so messed up because she was wearing a mask.

As Gia watched from her perch outside the office, the woman in the mask plucked an arrow out of the nearest target and lunged for Jacob, stabbing him through the throat.

Jacob grabbed at the arrow protruding from his neck, blood spurting through his fingers. A spasm jerked through him. He fell to his knees in the dirt. A moment later, his body crumpled to the ground.

Gia released a choked scream. She pressed her hands over her mouth to muffle the sound, but she was a beat too late. Her voice was already echoing through the woods.

And now the woman was lifting her head. She was looking right at Gia.

No, Gia thought. She turned, grabbing for the office door. Her hands were shaking badly, still slick with blood, and it took her two tries to get the knob to turn.

Before she could throw the door open, Gia glanced over her shoulder. The woman had picked up a bow from the ground and loaded an arrow. She aimed—

The air whistled as the arrow flew, with perfect aim, at Gia's face.

Olivia

I was ten years old when I first heard the story of the Witch of Lost Lake.

It was at Maeve Lewis's slumber party, of all places. That was the year Maeve decided she didn't like me—for reasons I never understood, despite putting a considerable amount of research into the subject—and I could tell something was up within minutes of getting to her house with my overnight bag. She kept shooting me sideways glances, smiling like we were good friends, which, by the way, we *weren't*. Even now I feel a chill straight down my spine whenever I think about it.

Maeve waited until we'd all gotten into our pajamas, a dozen tween girls in *Frozen* sleeping bags, then she'd loaded up this fake crackling fire clip on her iPad and told the story of the Camp Lost Lake murders.

"The woods around here have been used as campgrounds for, like, a hundred years," she'd said, looking right at me as she added, "owned by the same family the whole time."

She was talking about my family, of course. Everyone knew the D'Angelis owned Camp Lost Lake. This used to be a badge

of honor, or so I'm told. Years ago, the camp was beloved in our small town. Every local business had the words HOME OF CAMP LOST LAKE proudly printed on its signs, usually along with a WELCOME CAMP LOST LAKERS! banner that hung in its windows or doorway every summer. Once upon a time, the camp was a big moneymaker. Half the residents of Lost Lake, New York, worked there and nearly everyone attended for at least a year. It was most people's first job, their first night away from home, the place where they had their first crush.

At least, that's what my older sister, Andie, told me. Andie's a lot older than me, so she actually got to go, but the camp's been closed since that night back in 2008. Now, most of us only know anything about it because of stories like Maeve's.

"Get to the story already," my best friend, Hazel Katz, told her, and I shot her a small smile of thanks. Hazel's been my ride or die since we were in kindergarten. Even at ten, she didn't tolerate bullies.

"Fine," Maeve said, rolling her eyes. "So there's this story that a witch lives out in the woods. The witch sleeps all day and only comes out at night, and if you happen to be in the woods after dark, she'll kidnap you to use in her *spells*."

At ten, we loved stuff like this. The other girls all squealed and covered their eyes, but I just swallowed. So far, this wasn't too bad. "So, the witch is sort of like the boogeyman?" I asked.

"Totally," Maeve said. "Just like the boogeyman. People think the camp counselors made her up to keep the little kids from sneaking out at night. But then, ten years ago . . ." Here, Maeve lowered her voice. "Those . . . *murders* happened. And people say the woman who did it, Lori Knight, was wearing a witch's

mask when she stabbed her husband through the neck.”

No squeals this time. The group was dead silent. We were young, but most of us had already heard bits and pieces of the story from older siblings or friends. We knew all about how Lori Knight lost it and took on the Witch of Lost Lake persona, donning a cheap witch’s mask and killing her cheating husband, Jacob, with his own bow and arrow. And when she saw that some nosey camp counselor, a teenager named Gia North, had been watching her, she killed her, too.

At first, people thought those were the only two people she’d killed. Until they realized that Lori’s son, seventeen-year-old Matthew Knight, was missing, too. Blood and signs of a struggle at the top of the lighthouse made most people assume he was pushed out the window and drowned in the lake below, but they never did find his body.

Three murders in just one night. This town hadn’t seen anything like it before or since.

“People say Lori *became* the Witch of Lost Lake that night,” Maeve continued. “They think she killed Gia because Gia was misbehaving. She was out in the woods at night when she wasn’t supposed to be, so Lori punished her, just like the witch did to the kids in the story. The cops never caught Lori; she could still be out in the woods today, waiting for another kid to wander back into her camp to kill them, too. But there’s another part of the story, a part not many people know . . .”

“Stop it,” Hazel said, glancing at me. She must’ve already figured out where Maeve was going with the story. I thought I knew, too.

I’d heard the story before. I thought I knew every detail. My mother, Miranda D’Angeli, had been the director of Camp Lost

Lake back in 2008. Lori was her assistant. I already knew my mom was at camp that night, that she'd told the cops she'd seen Lori running from the scene of the crime covered in Gia's blood. I figured that's what Maeve was going to tell everyone.

But Maeve shocked me by adding the part of the story I didn't already know, the part my own mother had neglected to tell me for ten years:

"The trauma of witnessing a *murder* caused Mrs. D'Angeli to go into early labor," Maeve said, smiling right at me. "She had her baby right there, in the Camp Lost Lake parking lot, just seconds after the most gruesome crime this town has ever seen."

A dozen sets of eyes turned to stare at me. Because, of course, I was the baby Maeve was talking about.

Maeve was probably hoping I'd cry. I cried pretty easily back then, whenever I got a bad grade on an assignment or saw a sad movie, or when someone said something mean to me or anyone else, really.

I managed not to cry that night. I waited until all the other girls got distracted braiding each other's hair and discussing which boys did and did not have cooties, and then I did what I do best: my homework.

I slipped Maeve's iPad off her sleeping bag, and I read all about the Camp Lost Lake murders.

Maeve hadn't been exaggerating. My mother had given birth to me in the parking lot right outside her office while Lori Knight ran through the woods to escape the cops.

After the sleepover, I made Mom tell me everything about the night I was born. I know how far along she was—thirty-seven weeks—and how long she was in labor—two hours. I know

the camp groundskeeper, Henry Roberts, helped deliver me before my dad arrived, and that they couldn't even call an ambulance because Lori had cut the cord to the landline. The only place at camp with any cell service was the top of the lighthouse, and no one wanted to leave Mom alone. I know I was born at 7:37 p.m., after just ten minutes of pushing.

I know everything, every last detail of my birth story.

Or I thought I did.

And yet here I sit, sixteen years after the night I was born, staring down at my phone and grappling with a pretty big gap in my knowledge. I hold my breath as I reread the latest email from the genetic company for the twelve-thousandth time. Particularly the part that reads probability of paternity.

I keep expecting it to change, but it doesn't.

It started with my history class final. The assignment was to "trace your family's ancestry as far back as you can and make a prediction about what their lives would've been like a hundred years ago." I sent my DNA sample to one of those online ancestry places; I planned to pick a region in Italy to focus on once I got the results back. My dad's entire family is Italian, and I was sure I'd find some ancestors from the Tuscan Valley, or maybe Naples or Rome. It was going to be perfect. My schoolwork was always perfect.

Only I couldn't complete the assignment, because my ancestry results came back, and it turns out I have zero Italian in my blood. Not a single drop.

I didn't understand. My name is *Olivia D'Angeli*. We have the actual trunk one of Dad's great-great-great-grandmothers brought to Ellis Island when she immigrated from Sicily two hundred years ago. Every weekend Dad makes a Sunday gravy and

meatballs using my nonna Mia's recipe. Two summers ago, we visited his cousins outside of Genoa. I *know* we're Italian.

I'd written back to the company and calmly explained there'd been an error. The list of regions on my profile were clearly only from my mom's side of the family: England, Sweden, Norway, Wales, etc. It was like they'd left my dad off entirely. They'd invited me to submit again. Which I did. *Three* times.

I only did the paternity test to prove to them that they were still getting it wrong, that there was a mistake.

The results of the test came in this morning.

Probability of Paternity: 0%

The DNA place hadn't made a mistake. *I* had. The man who'd spent hours helping me research my first computer and taught me how to choose a ripe tomato; the man who shares my love of travel documentaries and ethnic food; the man who makes me spin the little globe in his office every year on my birthday, close my eyes, and point to some new, distant place I'm going to travel to once I graduate, *that* man isn't really my dad.

Tears blur my eyes. I want to print out the results so I have something to rip into a million pieces. I want to throw things. I want to scream.

"Olivia?"

I flinch. My dad's voice. No, not my dad's—*Johnny D'Angeli's* voice. I blink a few times to get the tears out of my eyes before I turn.

"You coming down for lunch?" Dad (I'll never be able to think of him as Johnny) asks, leaning in through my bedroom door.

A lump forms in my throat. Does he know he's not my real

father? If he doesn't, the truth will kill him. And as angry as I am, as betrayed as I feel, I refuse to be the one to do that. Not if I don't have to.

I click out of my email account, forcing a smile. "Yeah," I tell him. "Be down in a minute."

Downstairs in the kitchen, I notice an old Polaroid of my mom and dad taped to the door of the refrigerator. In it, Mom's waving her hand at the camera, a tiny purple gemstone sparkling from her ring finger, and Dad's got his arm around her, beaming. They're standing behind the counter of Dad's restaurant, the Lost Lake Diner. He proposed by dropping her engagement ring into her morning matcha latte—which they didn't even have on the menu, but he learned to make just for her. Mom said she was so surprised she spilled the whole cup down her shirt. If you squint, you can see the green stain.

The picture has been on the fridge since I was born, but I find myself studying it as though seeing it for the first time, noticing all these little details about my mom that I never thought about before. Like the PTA T-shirt she got when she ran the bake sale at Andie's school; the fancy, solar-charging hiking watch she bought herself for her thirtieth birthday; the heart-shaped locket she wore, which contained a picture of Andie as a baby—she added a picture of me, too, after I was born. Even the engagement ring is a little clue about who she is. It's not a diamond but an amethyst, which is her birthstone, because diamonds are too expensive and not always ethically sourced.

I feel my chest tighten. I thought I knew who my mom was, a responsible woman who loved the outdoors and her family, who cared about the environment, who thought of Dad's diner as a second home. Now, those details feel like a costume, like she's trying to convince me and the rest of the world that she's this good person. But how much of it is really true? Is *any* of it true?

"Olivia, honey, is that what you're wearing?" Mom asks. I hadn't heard her come into the kitchen behind me, but the word *LIAR* flashes bright neon in my brain at the sound of her voice. I pull my eyes away from the photo and turn to face her.

I look like my mom. My older sister, Andie, and I both do, which makes sense since Johnny isn't Andie's dad, either; my mom had her right after high school. The three of us are bird-boned, with big, heart-shaped faces. We look like the people in the restaurant who are going to ask you if you could please turn the heat up, it's getting cold in here.

Mom has the same blond hair as me and Andie, but she wears hers in a blunt bob that falls just under her chin. She's short and trim and close enough to my size that we could share clothes if I suddenly developed a taste for Eileen Fisher and artsy clogs. We never had one of those angry, shouty relationships like you see on TV. I always trusted her. She was the person I called to bring me a fresh pair of jeans when I got my period during junior high study hall, and she was the only one I told about my crush on Simon Collins my freshman year or when I accidentally walked out of the general store without paying for my dark chocolate sea salt KIND bar. When she realized I was more into books than the outdoors, she made a point of mapping out the nearest bookstore whenever we took the camper out for the weekend and, in return,

I made a point of taking a break from reading to go on a hike with her every once in a while.

Does Mom know Dad's not my real dad? I wonder. *She has to, right?* I run through the most likely explanations for what happened. Maybe they couldn't get pregnant the old-fashioned way? Maybe they used a donor?

Or maybe she cheated.

The thought turns my stomach. The image I have of my PTA-shirt-wearing, environmentally conscious, outdoor-loving mother breaks apart in my head.

Maybe I don't know her at all.

"Olivia," Mom says my name slowly and a touch louder than usual, like she sometimes does when she's asked me a question a couple of times but I'm too in my own head to hear her.

"Uh . . . you said something about my outfit?" I glance down at what I'm wearing: basic, V-neck T-shirt, jean shorts, cardigan tied around my waist, work boots. My hair's pulled back in the same no-nonsense ponytail I wear daily, except on special occasions. I don't usually give my clothes a ton of thought, and today the only thing I worried about was putting on something I could work in. "What's wrong with it?"

"Andie wants everyone in their Antlers polos, in case of press." Mom's already wearing hers, I notice. I instantly recognize the logo my sister designed for her new coworking space: a pair of deer's antlers curving out of a wreath of twigs and flowers, the word ANTLERS weaving through them in elaborate script. It's cool and classy, like everything Andie does. On the back of the polo are the words: WORK. WELLNESS. PLAY.

"Are you coming with us to the campgrounds?" I ask, frowning. Antlers is taking over the old Camp Lost Lake grounds, the first

time that place has been open to the public since the murders.

Mom smiles. “Just wearing the shirt in solidarity, so your sister knows how much we all support her.”

I give her a thin smile, though I can’t imagine a world in which Andie doesn’t realize how much our family supports her.

Mom’s checking out my boots now. “Maybe think about changing the boots, too,” she adds. It’s the voice she uses when she doesn’t like something but won’t actually come out and *say* she doesn’t like it. Heaven forbid she express a negative opinion.

“They’re *work* boots,” I say, the annoyance obvious in my own voice. “You know, for *working*? You’re the one who’s always telling me how important it is to wear the right gear.”

To be fair, I’m pretty sure she was talking about being sure to wear hiking boots that fit correctly and appropriate helmets and protective equipment when playing sports. But I feel like starting a fight.

Mom folds her arms over her chest, seeming confused by my tone. I don’t usually argue with her. I’m a pretty typical people-pleasing perfectionist. I’d do anything for a metaphorical gold star.

“Honey, is something wrong?” she asks. “Are you feeling okay?”

I’m about to continue our argument when a crunch of tires in our gravel drive cuts me off. Mom’s eyes light up. “Andie’s here,” she says, clearly relieved for a natural end to the great work boot argument of 2024. “Hurry, go change.”

I dig around in my closet for a few minutes, not even looking for my polo, just pulling clothes off racks, letting jackets fall to the ground, throwing shoes. I need to work my frustration out.

I should go right back downstairs, confront my mom, and make her tell me the truth. But she's already lied to me my whole life. She lied on my *birth certificate*, which . . . I don't even know if that's legal. And she probably lied to my dad, to Andie. Why would she tell the truth now?

No, if I ask my mom who my real dad is, she's just going to lie some more. She'll do it with a smile on her face while pretending to examine her trim, neatly manicured nails. I need proof. I can already hear how she might explain the DNA test away, telling me I used the wrong strand of hair—which is impossible. I got the hair from my dad's mustache comb, which no one else uses. I want the whole truth. No matter how painful it is.

I'm still in my head, running through the possibilities, when I walk in on my sister and mother in the dining room. They're hugging and . . .

I frown. Wait . . . are they *crying*?

Holding my breath, I duck behind the wall that separates the front hall from the dining room so I can observe without being super obvious about it. Andie's thin shoulders are shaking, her dark under-eyes stark against her pale skin, like she hasn't been sleeping much. She isn't making any noise at all, which is how she cries when she's really upset, big silent sobs like she's keeping all the pain locked up inside. Mom has her arms wrapped tight around her shoulders, a single tear rolling down her cheek, carving an unseemly line through her normally flawless, understated makeup. Andie's dog, Pickle Rick, is sniffing around their heels, whining a little, clearly stressed by their distress.

I feel a chill on my skin, watching them. We're not a family that cries. When I was in the middle of one of my preteen crying

bouts, I distinctly remember my mom pulling me aside and telling me I needed to calm down, that tears made people uncomfortable. She even let me use her handkerchief to dry my eyes. It was so beautiful, silk and floral and gossamer thin. I remember thinking it looked like it had never been used.

Something's up. I'm starting to wonder if I should back away quietly, pretend I never even saw them, but Pickle Rick catches my scent and turns, yipping as he trots up to me.

My mom pulls away from Andie, swiping the mascara from her cheeks. "Olivia," she says, laughing like I've just told a joke. "I'm sorry, baby, I didn't see you there."

Pickle Rick has his front two paws on my legs now, asking to be picked up and snuggled. I scoop him off the floor and give him a scratch behind the ears.

"Is everything okay?" I ask. I direct the question to my mother, but I'm staring at the back of Andie's head. Andie keeps her hair shoulder-length, like mine, but she flat irons it so it's pin-straight, the bottom edges cutting a sharp line across her shoulder blades.

"It's nothing," Mom says, touching Andie's cheek. "I'm just so happy to see my baby again, that's all."

"Oh," I say, frowning. It's not just tears that our family doesn't do. We all love each other and we're pretty close, but this outburst of emotion is unusual. Mom's way more likely to make a joke than sob when she's overcome. She didn't even cry when Dad proposed; she broke into laughter.

This is weird.

I keep staring at the back of Andie's head, willing her to look at me. When she finally does, her eyes are bone-dry, and there's not a hint of red on her cheeks. There wouldn't be. Andie's an expert

at appearing cool and collected, no matter how she feels below the surface. My whole life, she's been the model for how a "good girl" acts: effortlessly perfect.

"You ready?" she asks.

"Uh, yeah," I say. "Just let me grab a granola bar. I forgot to eat lunch."

"Okay! I'll be out in the car."

Back in the kitchen, my boot slips on something on the floor and I lurch forward, steadying myself against the wall. I glance down to see what I stepped on.

It's the photograph of my parents that had been taped to the fridge. I must've knocked it off the door when I stormed out of the room. I go to pick it up—

And then I pause, noticing something I never registered before.

There's another man in the frame with my parents. He's a little blurry, but I recognize him anyway.

Of course I recognize him. He's famous around here. Or notorious, I guess. The most notorious cheater in all of Lost Lake.

Jacob Knight, the husband Lori Knight murdered for cheating on her sixteen years ago, is sitting at the end of the counter where my newly engaged parents are standing. His tiny, blurry eyes seem to be fixed on my mother, and he looks . . .

Angry. He's staring at my mother with his jaw clenched.

Something cold fills my stomach.

There aren't a lot of reasons I would accept my mother lying to me about who my real dad is. But they never did figure out who

Jacob had been cheating on his wife with. Come to think of it, I don't even know how people knew he was cheating on his wife. But, if it was my mom, if she'd been pregnant with *his* baby the night Lori Knight turned into a witch . . .

Well. Maybe the lie was justified.

2

Reagan

I press down on the gas—hard. I don’t even want to go faster, I just want to feel the surge of adrenaline in my blood as I speed right through a stop sign, barreling out of the trees and onto the dusty, one-lane highway leading south.

South. I love going south. South means the city, civilization, *people*. I miss people.

I haven’t been driving for long when I see a guy standing by the side of the road, thumb out. He’s tall, Asian, with ear-length black hair that’s parted down the middle, nineties-teen-heartthrob style. He wears a flannel shirt, red buffalo checks hanging open over a gray tee and loose-fitting jeans.

I pull to the side of the road and ease down on the brake. “Hey,” I shout. “Where you headed?”

The hitchhiker looks at me without a word. “That depends,” he says, voice low. “Where you going?”

“Camp Lost Lake.”

“Don’t you know? That place is cursed. Anyone who steps foot in those woods comes face-to-face with the Witch of Lost Lake. You should turn around and go home, little girl.”

It’s the “little girl” comment that does it. I throw my door open

and jump out of the car. The hitchhiker's eyes go wide, and he puts his hands up—maybe he expects me to hit him. Instead, I wrap him in a big hug.

"Whoa," he says, his voice muffled by my jacket sleeve. "Do you hug now?"

"Just this once." I squeeze a little tighter. "Deal with it."

"I think you got taller."

"Or you got shorter. You definitely feel shorter."

"You know, I woke up feeling short today, so that must be it."

He curls his arms around me, and suddenly I'm wrapped up in the softest flannel and the kind of firm muscles you only get from doing manual labor.

I jerk away seconds before the hug changes from a *friend* hug to a *something more* hug. And then, just to prove that I haven't lost my edge, I slug him on the arm as hard as I can.

He rubs his arm, pretending to wince. "Ow. Damn, Reagan, for someone so tiny, you really know how to *hit*."

"Thanks for fitting me in," I tell Jack, genuine gratitude in my voice. He and his family are headed to Beijing in a few days to visit family. Today was the only day we could both be here. "I don't think I could've gone alone."

"Of course," he says. His smile shows all of his teeth. "I've always wanted to solve a murder."

"Three murders," I correct him. "Technically, we're solving three."

My cell phone—an ancient Nokia brick that I found at the Salvation Army last year—is already rattling in the cupholder when we climb back into my truck. I glance at the screen: *Mom*.

My stomach drops. She was taking a nap when I left, but I guess it was too much to hope I'd have another hour before she noticed I was missing.

"You have to answer it," Jack says. He and his mom are close, despite having nothing in common. She's this political artist and he's much more like his dad, into sports and the outdoors. But he tells her everything. It wouldn't even occur to him not to answer when she called.

I feel a pang. My mom and I used to be like that, too.

"What's she gonna do?" he asks, holding the phone out to me. "You don't have another car, right? And it's not like she's going to call the cops. Just tell her the truth."

I shoot him a look. He has a thing about the truth. It's one of the reasons he agreed to come with me. He actually gets my need to get to the bottom of what happened.

Feeling braver, I wedge the phone between my ear and shoulder, steering one-handed for a second. "Hi, Mom. What's up?"

Despite being an alleged murderer and legendary fugitive, my mom, Lori Knight, the Witch of Lost Lake, doesn't really get angry. In fact, she rarely raises her voice. But I must've really pissed her off because the second I answer the phone she starts yelling so loudly that I cringe and hold it away from my ear.

"Reagan Eleanor, did you take the truck? What were you *thinking*? Turn around right now—"

"You know I'm not going to do that," I tell her. "I tried talking to you about this, but—"

She cuts me off. "I told you, this isn't a discussion. I'm the mom and you're the kid. *I* make the decisions."

"And look where that's landed us!" I shout back. I never raise

my voice at my mom, and I can tell, immediately, that I've gone too far. There's a pointed silence on her end of the line that's a million times worse than the yelling. Next to me, Jack makes an *oh shit* face.

I exhale and blurt, "I only need it for a few hours and then I'll come right back, I swear."

"There's a bus leaving for Lost Lake, New York, in twenty minutes." She has, of course, guessed exactly where I'm headed. "If you don't turn around right now, I'm getting on it and coming after you myself."

Crap. I hadn't thought she'd take a bus. In the last few years, she's developed pretty bad arthritis in her hands, and it can make it hard for her to do easy things, like take her backpack on and off and tie her shoes.

It kills me a little, but I hang up the phone. This doesn't change anything. All it means is I have to hurry. I left my mom in a pop-up tent about two hours north of where I am now. If she catches that bus, she could make it to Camp Lost Lake in six hours. Less, if it's an express.

I don't think I've ever hung up on my mom before. We have one of those obnoxiously close relationships you usually only see on heartwarming sitcoms. Except for the fact that the moms in those shows aren't wanted murderers.

I've spent a lot of the last year asking myself how it's possible that I didn't have a clue that my mom was wanted for the murders of three people. In my defense, for most of my life, the Camp Lost

Lake murders weren't very well-known. Not until this amateur podcast, *How to Be a Final Girl*, did a season on them. I didn't listen to the podcast when it first came out—I wasn't into true crime—and then I refused to listen to it on principal. But that didn't matter. Within a year of its release, it seemed like everyone knew the story.

Before the podcast aired, I was a normal fifteen-year-old. I liked fried chicken and bad sci-fi movies. I was good at drawing, good enough that I was thinking about applying to Pratt's graphic design and illustration program for college. I was on my school's swim team, and yeah, okay, maybe I wasn't going to the Olympics, but I was good. Good enough that my coach thought I could've made varsity as a junior, which almost no one did. I had a bike, a bed, and the same three best friends since kindergarten: Hallie, Liza, and Sam. The four of us were practically a family. Or so I thought.

If someone had told me back then that my mom—the woman who nursed the stray cat who'd lived in our yard back to health, who sang that Beatles song "Blackbird" to me before bed every night, who made elaborate cakes shaped like cartoon characters for my birthday—if you told me *that* woman was secretly on the run for murdering her family, I never would've believed you.

But then the podcast went viral and everything went straight to hell. Suddenly everyone we knew was talking about the Camp Lost Lake murders. And not just talking about them, but reading about them, studying them, looking up Lori Knight's picture online, joking that she sort of looked like my mom, who was living under the name Lauren Karl at that time, and ha-ha wasn't that so weird?

I can't pinpoint exactly when our neighbors began to watch us just that much more closely; when Sam, Liza, and Hallie stopped putting me in the group chat. But I'll always remember the night my mom shook me awake in the dark and told me in a whisper to get in the car, that there was some stuff she had to tell me.

Looking back, there were signs. Like how my mom refused to talk about my dad or any other member of our family. How her entire life seemed to start the year I was born, the same year we moved to the small town of Pittsburg—not Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, but Pittsburg, New Hampshire. She always said her life before I was born wasn't important, that being my mother was the only thing that mattered, that I was her "fresh start." And yeah, okay, I got a little suspicious that something was up when she flat-out refused to get me a passport, or when I went looking for my birth certificate and she claimed I didn't have one. But I never would have suspected the truth.

She didn't do it. I *know* she didn't do it. The night we went on the run she told me the bullet points: she'd been framed, the local cops zeroed in on her from the beginning, there was no way she would've gotten a fair trial. And she gave me a choice. *She* had to go on the run, but I didn't. She said she understood if I wanted to stay behind, if I wanted to keep my normal life. She has and always will do anything to give me the life she thinks I deserve. But if I left, I'd never see her again.

I chose her. I will *always* choose her. But I don't have to be happy about it.

We've been living out of a beat-up old pickup—the only car my mom could afford to buy in cash—for twelve months now, bouncing from one under-the-radar mountain town to another,

staying in cheap rental houses when we have the cash, moving on before anyone looks too closely or asks too many questions. I can't remember the last time I ate fried chicken or wore nail polish or swam. I can still draw, of course, and I've been taking high school classes online whenever we have access to computers and free Wi-Fi at a library, but I'm assuming Pratt expects their incoming freshmen to have actually graduated from high school, so there goes that dream.

That's what today is all about: the stolen truck, the trip south. I've been trying to get Mom to come up with a way to clear her name for months now, but she won't even *talk* to me about it, no matter how many times I bring up the topic, no matter how many defense lawyers I look up online. She acts like it's over, like we just have to accept that this is our life. But I can't do that. I want my real life back. And I want my mom in it.

We're still a few blocks from Camp Lost Lake when I spot the blue-and-white cruiser sitting at the side of the road. My chest feels suddenly tight. Cops in general are not good. But cops here? Now?

Jack, oblivious to my terror, lifts a hand and *waves*.

"What are you doing?" I snap at him. "You can't wave at a cop!"

He looks genuinely confused by my reaction. "That's not a cop. I mean, it is, but it's just Karly. She comes out to fish on our land sometimes. She's cool."

A shiver moves through me, and I have to grit my teeth to suppress it. It seems to take us forever to drive past Karly's cruiser, and it might just be my imagination, but I feel like she studies my

face extra closely. My mom and I don't look much alike. We're both fair-skinned, but I'm freckly and blond, and she's much paler, with gray hair that she's dyed brown ever since we went on the run. Even so, my cheeks flare. I'm sure that, any second now, this cop will realize I stole this car from my mom, that I'm on the run, that I'm notorious fugitive Lori Knight's daughter.

I hold my breath, waiting to get busted.

But Karly just smiles like we're friends and waves a little harder. Weird.

"Turn here," Jack says suddenly, pointing out a narrow dirt road I'm about to drive past. I jerk my steering wheel to the side, taking the turn too sharply. Jack braces his hand against the top of the car and shoots me a look. "I thought you didn't want to get pulled over?"

"Sorry," I murmur. But I feel better now that we're off the main road. Less exposed. I've seen pictures of Camp Lost Lake online before, tons of times, but I'm still not prepared for how beautiful it is here. Green, tree-covered hills rise to either side of a low valley, like we're tucked in a massive, leafy pocket. Small wooden cabins pop up here and there between the trees. Ahead, there's a lodge with a pitched roof and circular windows, and to the left is the old camp director's office, a lighthouse towering over it. Just beyond there's the lake, deep and so clear that I can see the whole sky reflected on its surface.

"Damn," Jack mutters, but he doesn't sound awed—he sounds annoyed. I follow his gaze to the dirt parking lot tucked to the side of the office. It's filled with dusty cars and, now that I'm paying closer attention, I can hear people in the distance, talking, laughing.

Oh no. This was not part of the plan.

“Park over there so they won’t see the truck,” Jack murmurs, nodding at a dirt road twisting off into the trees.

I take his advice and follow the road around to the other side of the director’s office. From here I can see that the patio behind the camp office is filled with teenagers rummaging through boxes and old camp equipment. A cleaning crew, maybe?

I scowl through the windshield. “I thought the grounds were supposed to be abandoned.”

“Yeah, I heard some woman from town is turning it into a bougie hipster retreat or something.” Jack glances at me. “You want to leave?”

I chew my lip. I *can’t* leave. If I go running back to my mom with my tail between my legs, she’s going to do everything in her power to make sure I’m never alone with her car—or any car—ever again.

This is my one shot. If I don’t take it, goodbye normal life. I would hate myself forever if I let a chance like this get away.

“No,” I say, shaking my head. “I came all this way; we’ll have to try to . . . avoid them. I guess.”

“Okay.” Jack sighs through his teeth. “What’s the plan? Are you still looking for this M. Edwards person?”

The name hangs in the air between us, ominous.

I ignored the *How to Be a Final Girl* podcast for as long as I could, but after everything that went down with my mom, I realized I needed to work up the nerve to listen. I wanted to know the whole story of what happened that night, not just the parts my mom felt like telling me.

After I did, I became something of a Camp Lost Lake obsessive. There isn’t a single thing about the case that I don’t know. And

in all my research, the thing that truly surprised me is that I'm not alone in thinking the details don't add up. There aren't many people out there who don't believe it was my mom, but once I started combing through true crime forums, I found a few other armchair detectives who doubted the official version of events. But none of their theories seemed quite right to me. Most of them were focused on figuring out what happened to Gia North's video camera. Gia had been notorious around town for filming gossipy videos, and the theory goes that she caught something about the Witch on video and that's why she was murdered. But the killer would have destroyed the camera after she killed Gia, right? It seems silly to spend so much energy on it.

For the last year I've studied the case the way most high school juniors study for the SATs. I've read through every witness statement and police report and DNA analysis I could get my hands on. And I think I found the one clue that doesn't make any sense, something no one else seems remotely curious about, maybe because the only mention of it was a single note at the very bottom of a photocopied, impossibly hard-to-read evidence list:

A camp key card with the name M. EDWARDS written on it.

Camp key cards were given out to campers on their first day of camp. Campers used them to get into the lodge and the cafeteria and their cabins, and they allowed the camp director, Miranda D'Angeli, to keep track of which campers went where and when. The murders happened two weeks before camp officially opened, so there weren't any campers on the grounds. An old record of key card usage I found online showed only Mrs. D'Angeli, my mom, and a few other counselors using their key cards throughout the day.

The M. Edwards key card was only ever mentioned once, in that badly photocopied list of evidence collected the night of the massacre. It had been collected from the deck outside Mrs. D'Angeli's office, but the key card usage record doesn't show it being used at all that night. So what was it doing there?

The key card never seemed to be considered particularly important by either the detectives who investigated the case or the many podcasters, filmmakers, and true crime experts who've delved into the facts in the years since. So far, the only other person who even mentioned it was a cohost from the original *How to Be a Final Girl* podcast, and they just assumed some past counselor left their card on the deck and didn't give it a second thought, especially since the evidence against my mother was so strong.

But here's the thing: there's no record of anyone named M. Edwards working at the camp in 2008. I know; I checked.

My theory is that M. Edwards is an old Camp Lost Lake counselor who dropped their key card when they were sneaking around camp the night of the final murder. I think this might be the person who stole a bow and arrows from the archery shed, killed Gia and Matthew, and framed my mom. Gia's body was found near the key card. Maybe she took it on purpose, maybe she even meant for it to be a clue for the cops.

Archery is a niche skill, even at a camp like this. One of the reasons people were so willing to point the finger at my mom was because she used to be a really great archer, and the bow used had belonged to her late husband, Jacob Knight. Jacob was the archery instructor at Lost Lake, and his initials, JK, were carved into the side. He was the first victim the night of the murders. I'm also pretty sure he was my dad.

Before the podcast, whenever I asked about my dad, Mom would get this really sad look in her eye and say something like “I don’t like to think about that time in my life. You’re my family now. You’re my second chance.” And any follow-up questions I asked about her *first* chance made her go all quiet and distant.

But then the podcast came out, and it made it impossible for her to keep her past a secret. She would’ve been married to this Jacob Knight guy when she got pregnant with me, and about a year ago I found a picture of him. We have the same nose.

But anyone could’ve stolen that bow. And I have to believe someone else had the archery skills to pull these murders off. I think it’s this M. Edwards person. But I can’t prove that until I figure out exactly who M. Edwards is.

That’s why we came here. The murders happened a few years before everything in the world was digitized. If I can sneak into the old camp director’s office, there’s a good chance I can find hard copies of their files. Getting M. Edwards’s full name won’t entirely prove my mother is innocent, but it could point me in the right direction.

After a moment, Jack inhales like he’s gearing up to say something big, and asks, “Are you sure you want to do this?”

I glance at him. He’s always understood my need to know what happened that night. It’s weird of him to pull back now that we’re so close. “I *have* to do this, you know that. I have to know the truth. It’s the only way I can get my life back.”

“Yeah, I know, it’s just . . .” He shrugs and glances out the window.

“It’s just *what*?”

“You only get your life back if you prove your mom didn’t do it, right? What happens if . . .”

He doesn't finish his sentence. Probably because he doesn't have a death wish.

"My mom didn't kill anybody." I'm so angry, I force the words through my clenched teeth.

"I don't think that, I swear," Jack says. "All I'm saying is . . . C'mon, Reagan, the evidence against her is bad. If she didn't do it—"

"She *didn't* do it," I interrupt, glaring at him. "This M. Edwards person did."

Jack lifts a hand, placating me. "Okay."

For a moment, we're both quiet. There's a distant, muffled rumble of thunder, a reminder that, even though it's sunny now, there are storm clouds waiting on the horizon, threatening rain. Despite myself, I shiver.

Finally, Jack sighs and says, like he can't help himself, "It's just . . . if you're so sure M. Edwards is the real killer, why not call the cops? They still have an anonymous tip line for the murders, I looked it up. All you'd have to do is call the number and leave a message telling them what—"

"I already did that. Months ago."

"Then shouldn't we wait for them to investigate? That's the *right* thing to do."

The word *right* hums through me. It's such a Jack thing to say. As though doing the right thing should protect me somehow. My hands tighten around the steering wheel until I'm gripping the vinyl so hard I feel my knuckles go numb.

Doing the *right* thing hasn't exactly done me any favors. Before the podcast went live I got the right grades and I hung out with the right people, and where did it get me?

Woken up in the middle of the night, dragged away from my nice home, my good friends, and my whole respectable, upstanding life.

I can taste the tears in the back of my throat. This is the part that still gets to me, even now, a year later: I'd really thought that being good and doing the right thing would be enough. Maybe it sounds naïve, but back then I didn't know any better. I really thought if I did what I was supposed to do, then everything would turn out okay. It makes me angry, now, that I was ever so stupid.

"I'm not really interested in what's right," I say, swallowing my anger. "I just want to get my mom off the hook and get my life back."

"Okay, I hear you." Jack levels me with a heavy look. "But this M. Edwards person, whoever they are, could still be out there. They could have a whole life, and I'm willing to bet they'd do anything to keep from being found out."

JUNE 12, 2008

The Day Before the Murders

Officer Karly Knight was perched on her regular barstool at the far end of the counter in the Lost Lake Diner, looking through her Key West brochure. She'd thumbed through it so many times that the corners were all dog-eared and soft, but she couldn't help it. Every time she saw the pictures, she smiled.

In just a few weeks, *she* was going to be sitting on one of those white beaches, looking out over the impossibly blue waters, the Florida sun beating hot on her shoulders. She'd snorkel through reefs and take a kayak tour of the mangroves and wake up at dawn to go deep-sea fishing. She couldn't wait.

"Did you know that forty-one degrees is the record low temperature in Key West?" she asked as Johnny D'Angeli, the guy who owned the Lost Lake Diner, leaned over the counter to pour fresh coffee into her cup.

"Is that right?" he said, good-naturedly. Karly had been filling his head with Key West facts almost every morning when she came in to grab coffee before her shift.

“And it’s only ever gotten that cold *twice*, once in 1981 and once in 1886,” Karly read from the brochure. “It says here that most days are in the seventies and eighties, no matter what time of year it is.”

“Sounds boring,” chirped a voice from below the counter. A moment later, Johnny’s pregnant wife, Miranda, appeared, holding her tiny baby bump with one hand and a fresh sleeve of Styrofoam coffee cups with the other. “I think I’d miss having seasons.”

Karly’s smile tightened. She couldn’t figure out what Johnny saw in Miranda. Johnny was down-to-earth and no-nonsense, the kind of guy who always said what he meant. Karly appreciated a guy like that. Miranda might like hiking and camping and stuff, but she was also almost aggressively cheerful. She’d dated Karly’s older brother, Jacob, back in high school, and Karly never liked her much. Everything she said sounded like it ended in an exclamation point.

“Well, *I* think it sounds like paradise.” Karly said, turning back to her brochure. She hated how cold it got up here. Last January it dipped below zero degrees every day for a week. She’d wanted to move away from New York since she was seven years old, but, of course, she could never do that before, not with her mother’s condition.

Early-onset Alzheimer’s. Barbara Knight was diagnosed when Karly was seventeen years old. With her dad out of the picture and her older brother already away at college, she’d been the only one to take over her mother’s care. Instead of applying for colleges and researching majors, Karly had been talking to doctors, taking notes on treatment, researching drug trials.

But, a few months ago, she and Jacob finally sat down and had a little talk, and they both agreed it was his turn to take care of their mother, that it was only fair. In just a few short weeks, Barbara would move in with Jacob and his family, and Karly would retire on the beach.

Miranda said something about a missing sleeve of to-go lids and disappeared below the counter again when a jingle announced the diner door opening, bringing in a flurry of chilly spring air. Karly shivered. It was already June and the temp still hovered around sixty degrees, a full twelve degrees lower than Key West's average of seventy-two. She cupped her coffee with both hands, thinking of sand and sun and miles of blue water.

Her seventeen-year-old nephew, Matthew, slid his elbows onto the sticky counter beside her. "Hey, Auntie Karly," he said, flashing a smile that she was well aware all the teen girls around here thought was impossibly charming. Matthew was a bit of a town golden boy, just like Karly's brother had been back when they were in high school. Track-and-field star, top of his class, and something about his face made all the girls think that everything he said sounded deep. Maybe it was the eyelashes? As far as the rest of the town was concerned, Matthew could do no wrong. Jacob had been exactly the same way. Matthew even looked remarkably like his dad. At a distance, Karly sometimes mistook one for the other.

Karly took another sip of coffee to hide her grimace. She had also been a track-and-field star and at the top of her class, but when you were a girl, you had to work a little harder to impress people. At least, she always did.

"Hey there, Matty," she said, swallowing.

Matthew's smile faltered. "You know Mom's the only one I let call me Matty."

Karly knew. But she thought it was good for Matthew that at least one person in town hadn't completely succumbed to his charms. "I used to change your poopy diapers, Matty, I'll call you whatever I like."

An annoyed expression crossed Matthew's face, looking all wrong with his tousled blond hair and little-boy dimples. But then Johnny snickered, and Matthew shook the look away.

"Fair enough," he said easily. Turning to Johnny, he added, "Hey, Mr. D'Angeli. Can I get a coffee and a banana muffin to go?"

Johnny went to pull a muffin out, but Matthew stopped him. "No, the one on the bottom," he said. Turning to Karly, he explained, "Andie says the muffins on the bottom are the freshest."

"Andie told you that?" Miranda asked, popping back up. Her normally cheery face looked concerned.

Karly couldn't help smirking. It was well-known around town that Miranda didn't want her daughter dating her ex-boyfriend's son. In fact, the only time Karly could ever remember seeing a crack in her perfectly cheerful demeanor was when she overheard Miranda telling Andie that the Knight boys were no good.

If Matthew was surprised to see Miranda appear, he didn't show it. "Hey, Mrs. D'Angeli. Whoa, that baby's getting pretty big."

"It is," Miranda said with a thin smile.

"Andie and I were working on a history project together last semester," Matthew explained smoothly. "Tell her I say hi the next time you talk to her, will you?"

Miranda still looked skeptical, but she said, "Yeah, I will."

While Johnny went to pack up his order, Matthew pulled out

his wallet and dug around for a few crumbled bills. Distracted, humming along with the My Chemical Romance song playing over the speakers, he didn't seem to notice when a card slipped between his fingers and fell to the floor.

"I'll get that," Karly muttered, but she didn't think Matthew heard her. He was thanking Johnny now, reaching over the counter to grab his muffin and coffee.

"Keep the change," Matthew said, turning for the door. "See you, Mr. and Mrs. D'Angeli!"

Karly held up the card. "Wait, Matty, you—"

But Matthew had already ducked out the door into the cold. Karly glanced down at the card he dropped, wondering if it was important.

The card was thick and creamy white, a sketchy outline of mountains and a lake printed on the front.

Karly recognized it immediately: It was a Camp Lost Lake key card. And written in blocky, capital letters across the back, right above a barcode and an electronic stripe, was the name M. EDWARDS.

3

Olivia

“Pickle . . . stop it.” I scrunch my nose, snorting with laughter as Pickle Rick’s tiny pink tongue sweeps over my chin. “You’re tickling me.”

“That dog loves you,” Andie says, glancing at us from the driver’s seat. We’re in her fancy electric car, on our way to the old Camp Lost Lake grounds. Everything around us is leather and chrome and spotless, like even the dust is too intimidated by Andie to settle. I don’t blame it. My sister can be intimidating.

As Pickle’s tongue slides over my nose, I close my eyes, taking a second to imagine a future like this for myself, a future of organized drawers and living spaces so clean they don’t hold fingerprints. Capable and collected, I’ll move through the world with effortless grace, my hair flat-ironed into a silky curtain, my clothes graceful and unwrinkled—just like Andie.

I glance sideways at her while giving Pickle Rick another ear scratch, trying to work up the courage to ask the question I’ve been rolling around in my head since we left. I almost immediately lose my nerve. I love my sister, I do. But it can be easy to feel overwhelmed by her.

We've never had a normal sister relationship. She's so much older than me, for one thing. And she's lived somewhere else my entire life, first in New York City for an internship that was so prestigious she somehow convinced our mom to let her leave before her senior year even ended, then undergrad at UC Berkeley, Stanford for business school and, from there, start-up land in Silicon Valley. And now she's back. For the first time in sixteen years, Andie's living in Lost Lake, opening her own company, putting down roots. It feels more like hanging out with a local celebrity than my actual sister.

It's not like she doesn't try. She's always been really nice to me, sending lavish gifts for my birthday and Christmas, texting that she was impressed when I made straight As or was elected class treasurer. But there's always been this distance between us. Sometimes I feel like I don't really know her at all.

She glances at me, and she must realize I have a question because she says, "What's up?"

Okay, Olivia, spit it out, I think. This is Andie. My big sister. Not Rihanna.

"Um, mom used to date Jacob Knight, right?"

Andie's phone buzzes, distracting her. "What? Um, yeah, I think so."

Her casual answer encourages me to keep going. Clearly she doesn't think this is a weird thing for me to talk about. "But that was way back in high school, right? Way before she met either of our dads?"

Andie's phone's buzzing again. She doesn't pick it up, but she's spending more time squinting down at the screen than watching the road. "What?"

I hesitate, wondering if I should just tell her what I know about Dad. Andie knows how it feels to have questions about her parents. Mom got pregnant with her right after she graduated from high school. She was even married to Andie's dad for a while, before he decided he didn't want to be a dad and took off. Andie went through this phase of seeking him out and trying to have a relationship with him. Once, when she was visiting from school on break, I went through her things. While I was snooping, I found this postcard tucked between the pages of some advanced calculus textbook. There were only two lines of slanted handwriting:

I'm sorry. Don't try to fix this and don't try to find me. It's not safe. I'm starting over.

We're happy.

It didn't have a signature or a return address, and the only clue to where it came from was the mountain range on the front, the words LAKE WINNEPESAUKEE written in big block letters in the lower left corner. I'd assumed it was from Andie's dad, off with his new family, telling her to stop looking for him, so I put the postcard back and never asked about it. We were all relieved when she gave up and let Dad officially adopt her, so the four of us could be one big, happy family.

I could tell Andie the truth. She'd probably understand. I even open my mouth, trying to figure out how to word it. But something stops me. The thing is, Andie's never confided in me about how she felt about her bio dad. She didn't tell me about the postcard, and she never told me how much it hurt when he cut her out of his life.

"I'm just . . . curious about what Mom was like when she was

young,” I mutter, losing my nerve. It feels weird trusting her with this when I know there’s so much she’s never told me.

“Mom wasn’t really any—” Andie’s phone beeps and, like Pavlov’s dog, she jerks her head toward the sound without seeming to process what she’s doing. Unfortunately, she completely forgets to hit the brake when she does this, and the car keeps rolling—

Right through a stop sign.

I spot flashing red and blue lights in the rearview mirror.

“Seriously?” Andie mutters, wrinkling her nose. Even I have to admit this is bad luck. As far as I know, Andie’s never gotten a ticket before. She’s probably never even broken a traffic rule. What are the chances that one of the two cops in our small town was waiting at the corner the second she did?

“It’ll be okay, it’s just Karly,” I tell her, glancing at the rearview mirror. Officer Karly Knight is a regular at Dad’s diner. We’ve known her since we were kids.

A few minutes later, Officer Knight is smiling as she leans down to peer through Andie’s car window, the crinkly skin around her eyes showing her age. She actually looks remorseful as she says, “I’m afraid I’m going to need to see your license and registration, Andie.”

“Of course, Officer Knight,” Andie says. She pops open her glove box and removes a sleek black folder of organized paperwork. “I’ve been wanting to call you, I was so sorry to hear about your mother.”

Officer Knight’s smile wobbles. Everyone in town knows her mother, Barbara Knight, recently died after a decades-long battle with dementia. “Thank you, Andie, that . . . that means a lot.”

Officer Knight blinks, taking a second to wipe something from her eyes. “We just had the reading of her will and . . . to be honest, I’m still a bit of a wreck.” She hands Andie back her paperwork and says, “I’ll let you go with a warning this time. But stay off that phone. And be careful up at the campgrounds today. We’ve had reports of someone lurking around up there. It’s probably just kids messing around, but you never know.” She glances over at me and the smile slips from her face. “Olivia. I-I didn’t see you there.”

Something about her expression makes me feel awkward all of the sudden. Officer Knight and I have always gotten along, but now she’s looking at me like she’s seen a ghost.

“Is something wrong?” I ask.

She doesn’t say anything for a moment, just stares, eyes narrowed, before turning to look back down the road behind her.

“Sorry,” she says after a moment, shaking her head. “Déjà vu.”

Camp Lost Lake’s main office is built into the side of a hill. While the front of the building is level with the ground, the back sticks out into thin air where the ground gives out to a sharp incline, creating the illusion that it’s precariously balanced—one false move, and the whole thing could fall. It’s only when you get closer that you notice the thick, wooden stilts drilled into the ground below, holding it up. A narrow balcony wraps around the sides and back of the building, creating a shaded patio. That’s where everyone’s hanging out now, half-full boxes stacked around them.

“Can you walk the rest of the way?” Andie wants to know. “I forgot to pick up plates for the barbecue.”

"Sure," I say, nudging Pickle Rick aside so I can climb out.

"And see if you can find out whether the phone and internet guys came by this morning to set up the landline!" Andie calls out the window. "I got confirmation that they were able to get the electric working, but no one seems to know whether the internet and phone guys were here."

I flash a thumbs-up at her rear window as she peels away and trudge up the path to join the others. Andie has a construction crew scheduled in a few weeks, but she wanted to get a cleaning committee in before then to see if anything's worth salvaging. For a long time after the murders, no one came back here. Dad said it was because the cops restricted access to the lake and surrounding areas while they searched for Matthew's body. But the lake opened back up the next summer, and people still stayed away. Andie says what happened was too sad, that no one wanted to be reminded.

Whatever the reason, leaving the campgrounds vacant for all those years just led to rumors and stories. *Don't come back to Camp Lost Lake, or the Witch will return.*

The place is like a time capsule. Detectives and police officers searched the lake, but the cabins, the lodge, even my mom's old office, have been left exactly as they were that night. Mom once told me she was reading *Water for Elephants*, but she left her copy behind on her desk, and she could never bring herself to come get it. To this day, she doesn't know how the book ends.

But that was sixteen years ago. Most people don't believe the old urban legend about the Witch of Lost Lake returning, and it wasn't hard for Andie to convince people to join her cleaning committee. There are only, like, two other options for work in

Lost Lake: either you can wait tables at Dad's diner, or you can bag groceries at the general store, and there are always around thirty kids applying for each opening, so getting one is like winning the lottery. Andie's paying us all twenty bucks an hour to spend the summer cleaning out old fridges and dumpsters, which is unheard of in a town that thinks the minimum wage is a suggestion. Half my school volunteered.

It takes me a minute to make my way across the patio. First, I spend a few minutes chatting with the French Club kids, who've taken it upon themselves to handle the rancid dumpsters—or, en français, *poubelles rances*—and then I stop and say hello to Amir and Kayley, who I know from Mathletes. When I walk up, Kayley is in the middle of a joke about how the Witch is coming out of hiding to attack us because we're all so bad.

"You've got the story wrong," Amir corrects her. "It's not the Witch of Lost Lake who's going to attack, it's *Matthew Knight*." He lowers his voice when he says Matthew's name, trying to make it sound spooky.

Kayley rolls her eyes. "Matthew *drowned*. The Witch is the one who got away."

"Yeah, but they never found Matthew's body. People think he, like, lost his memory, and now he's some wild mountain man living off the grid, killing anyone who comes out in the woods . . ."

By the time I make my way over to Hazel, I've already been here for nearly twenty minutes.

"*Finally*." Hazel groans when she sees me. She's standing in the corner nearest the wall, loading things into a cardboard box. "You're too popular for your own good. I was starting to think you wouldn't be able to fit me into your busy schedule."

She's teasing me. The popular kids at our school are all athletes and cheerleaders, just like they are everywhere else. I just volunteer for a lot of different clubs and teams, so I happen to know a lot of people. And, to be honest, it seems like they only want to talk to me when they need something from me. I have a little problem saying no to things I'm not that interested in doing, so I tend to get asked for favors. A lot.

Hazel leans over the box she'd been packing up, her thick, springy natural curls swinging forward to cover her brown skin and deeply freckled face. "Pretending you're capable of doing everything all the time without any visible effort just reinforces the narrative that girls should be perfect. It's like those influencers who post 'I woke up like this' pics but fail to mention all the makeup and filters and the *two grand* they spent on veneers so they could have the perfect smile."

"Wow, Hazel," I say, shocked. She never goes off on me like this. "I am *not* an *influencer*."

"Sorry," Hazel says, blinking like she's just coming out of a trance. "That's not what I meant."

"These are my real teeth."

"I know. I've just been feeling some weird vibes all morning. I pulled the Lovers card before coming here."

Hazel pulls a tarot card every morning. It's kind of a meditation, her way of preparing herself for the day. "Does this mean you're finally going to ask Brianna out?" I ask, happy to move the topic away from me.

"What?" Hazel frowns. "Didn't I tell you? Brianna told me last week that she hates bread. She hates *all* bread, Olivia. You know I can't be with a girl like that."

I smirk. Hazel's parents run Pecky, an artisanal Jewish grocery store and bakery in town. Her dad's the one who originally opened Pecky, but her mother's family all come from the Caribbean, so when they got married they started selling cornmeal pudding and Jamaican toto alongside the hamantaschen and babka. For people who love cooking as much as Hazel's family does, saying you hate bread is like saying you hate puppies or rainbows. Like, why don't you like joy?

"Okay, then, who are these Lovers?" I ask.

"I don't know, but they were reversed, which isn't good. We're talking strained relationships, miscommunication, *lies*."

My eye twitches. *Lies*. Without meaning to, I think of my mom, my dad, the lie they've been telling my whole life.

But I'm not even close to ready to share this drama with Hazel, so I clear my throat and say, trying to sound like I couldn't care less, "Okay . . . so what? Some couple is lying to each other. We couldn't be more single, so it obviously doesn't have anything to do with us."

But Hazel's shaking her head. "Have I taught you nothing about tarot? The Lovers don't have to be two people in love. They can represent *any* kind of relationship. Some people think the Lovers are associated with the star sign Gemini, so it's possible that they're not even lovers, but twins—"

"Oh no," I say, throwing my hands over my chest in mock horror. "*I'm* a Gemini!"

Hazel rolls her eyes at me. "If you see any deceitful twins, maybe run the other way, okay? Now, what am I supposed to do with this?" She holds up a sleeping bag. "I found it over by the trees. It was unrolled and everything, like someone's been using it."

“Creepy,” I mutter, shivering. I don’t know anything about sleeping bags, but the one Hazel’s holding is kind of the same shape as this thousand-dollar one Dad uses when we go camping. “Here, let me take it. Andie wanted me to keep an eye out for any equipment we can resell. Apparently, some of the old camp stuff was pretty high quality.”

I’m looking around, trying to think of somewhere out of the way I can stow the sleeping bag, when my eyes fall on the back door to Mom’s old office. The same office she hasn’t bothered cleaning out since 2008. If she left an unfinished novel on her desk, maybe she left something else behind, too. Like, for instance, a date book containing secret notes about a meetup with my real dad.

I feel a little thrill at the possibilities. But when I try the back door, it doesn’t budge. “Don’t bother, it’s locked,” says a voice behind me.

I turn. The voice came from Eric Weisel, who was my bio lab partner all of last year.

Eric is taller and skinnier than should be allowed, and he can sometimes be kind of annoying, but our joint project on cell mutation last year earned the best grade in the class, so I’ve mostly forgiven him for that.

It looks like he’s found an old badminton racquet and birdie among the camp things. He’s dribbling the birdie on the racquet, leaping around so erratically that Maggie O’Reilly and Kayley Cho keep squealing and ducking out of the way of his long, skinny limbs.

“How’d you get over here so fast?” he asks, frowning. “I thought I just saw you in a truck with some guy?”

I have no idea what he's talking about, so I ignore that, jerking backward as he lunges past me. "The door's locked?" I say, disappointed. "You're sure?"

"Yup," Eric says, grunting. "I wanted to look for sunscreen, but that guy your sister works with, uh . . . Sawyer? He told me he has the only key, and he's not letting anyone else in."

I frown. Eric's skin is very pale and covered in freckles. I have a hard time believing that he doesn't travel with his own personal sunscreen everywhere he goes.

As if reading my mind, he says, "I ran out."

I turn in place. There has to be another way inside. I study the building for a few minutes, my eyes traveling past the balcony to a row of windows directly over my head. The first is closed, and so is the next. Closed, closed, closed—

Open.

My breath catches. The window is barely cracked, broken maybe, too many years of neglect and exposure to the elements. It probably doesn't close properly anymore. Whatever the reason, it doesn't matter—it's *open*.

"Olivia?" Hazel says, coming up behind me. "You okay?"

"Yeah, I just need the, uh, bathroom," I blurt. "Do you know where it is? I had this huge coffee before I left home, and I really . . . have to . . . go."

Hazel frowns at me, but after a moment she turns. "Okay . . . the only working toilets are over there." She points to a small, shed-like building on the opposite side of the grounds. "But there are spiders, so I'd just hold it."

Hazel's terrified of spiders. I wouldn't put it past her to avoid liquids all day so she won't have to brave the bathrooms. I tell her

it's an emergency and then I actually walk over to the bathroom shed, just in case she's watching me. When I reach the doors, I glance over my shoulder.

Hazel and the rest of Andie's army of workers have gathered around a tall, thin guy with tan skin and a shock of purple hair. This is Sawyer, Andie's college-age intern. He's the one I have to worry about catching me, and who will definitely tell Andie I broke in someplace I wasn't supposed to be. In fact, it looks like he's in the middle of going over rules right now. I hear his voice drift toward me. ". . . Be careful not to wander into the woods alone. We've had reports of strangers hanging around after—"

"It's the Witch of Lost Lake!" someone shouts, and everyone else snickers.

I turn back around, tuning them out. This is it. Everyone's distracted. I'm not going to get a better chance than this. It's now or . . . now.

My skin tingles with nerves as I walk away from the bathrooms and into the trees. I feel the temperature change the second I step beneath them. It's ten degrees cooler in the woods, the light hazy and dappled. It takes a second for my eyes to adjust, and then they settle on something a few feet away, some shape several inches taller than me and hulking.

I think of what Officer Knight said about someone lurking in the woods and flinch, my heart slamming into my teeth before I realize what I'm looking at: not some creepy witch hiding out, but a dead tree, long ago split down the middle by a bolt of lightning. I have to take deep breaths to get myself to relax.

The stairs are old, wooden, creaky. They lead up to a narrow balcony that wraps around the sides and back of the office, just

above where everyone's still working. I read in a book once that if you walk along the edges of creaky stairs, you can keep them from making any noise. I try that now, carefully placing my sneakers as close to the wall of the old building as possible as I go up and up.

It actually works. I'm a little shocked. Maybe I could have a future as a spy.

I make my way up to the balcony and to the part that hangs directly over where everyone's working. It's nothing special, a wooden deck surrounded by a high guard rail, but the slats are close enough together that no one's going to see me here if they happen to look up.

The office is higher up than nearly every other structure around camp, aside from the lighthouse. From here, I can see over the tops of trees, all the way out to the archery range.

A cold feeling slips down my spine. That's where Lori Knight killed her husband. Which means I'm standing in the same spot Gia stood moments before she was shot with an arrow.

I can still make out the tattered remains of three hay bales on the range, a single white-and-red target attached to the one on the far right. Sixteen years ago, Lori Knight went to that exact spot, picked up a deadly weapon, and went to hunt down her family. If I squint, I swear I can still see an arrow sticking out of that last remaining target, the feathers long blown off the shaft so that all remains is a splintery wooden stick.

I swallow my fear and turn back around. *Window*, I remind my racing brain. *Get to the window*.

It's an old, wooden window, the white paint peeling away in curls. One of the glass panels is cracked, but the others are all intact. And there's about half an inch of space between the bottom

of the window and the top of the frame. I was right. *It is open.*

My heart thuds. It's so loud that I can't even tell how quiet I'm being, but no one looks up or shouts "Hey, Olivia, what are you doing up there?" so I'm still in the clear. I slide my hand between the frame and the bottom of the window. And then, exhaling, I try to ease it up—

It doesn't budge. Not the slightest bit. Well, crap.

I glance down to make sure no one has seen me, yet. So far, so good.

I lean into the window, putting some real muscle into my attempt to move it this time. Rough wood presses into my palms, making me wince. I hear a crack that sounds like wood splintering, and I back off, anxiously glancing down. No one else seems to have noticed.

Come on . . .

I try again.

Snap.

I jerk away from the window, but it's too late. A crack splinters through the frame. I watch, horrified, as it spreads from the window to the wall, growing bigger, deeper. A piece of trim jerks to the side, sways for a moment, then drops away, crashing onto the balcony at my feet.

I have both hands pressed over my mouth, my eyes wide with horror. Someone definitely heard *that*. Every instinct in my body is telling me to run, to hide, but before I can move a muscle, my eyes land on the wall.

There's a rotted area below the newly missing piece of a trim and, inside it, someone's stashed an aluminum *High School Musical* lunch box.

What the hell?

It's like a hiding place.

I act on autopilot, not thinking, just reaching for the lunch box, my curiosity blocking my fear of being caught just for a second. But, as I reach for the box, the rotted wood it's resting on gives way, and it falls.

I leap back, shocked, as the lunch box tumbles across the balcony, slides just below the guard rail, falls over the edge—

And slams into the patio below, where it pops open. Through the narrowest gap in the slats, I can see that a small, handheld video camera has tumbled out.