

Voices from Beyond

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To Bill and Trevor

Thank you for giving me the time to follow my dreams.

### Abstract

*Voices from Beyond* contains a reflection of historical fiction authors who have inspired me as a writer, a fictional short story titled “Adelaide,” and the first two chapters of a young adult paranormal thriller titled *Indigo*. “Adelaide” explores the consequences of domestic violence based on the actual events of a young woman’s murder that happened in 1917 in western New York. Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of *Indigo* take the readers into the life of a sixteen-year-old girl who is grieving the sudden loss of her mother opening the door for a stalker from a past life to enter her world. Both works are character driven pieces where young women are faced with adversity that challenges their strength.

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The past has always fascinated me. On occasion, I will come across a historic cemetery and stroll through that yard to read the names of the people who once graced our earthly plane. As I stand there thinking about who they might have been, I feel a sense of excitement as my imagination opens the door to another time. Images of women wearing long bustle dresses with long sleeves and high-neck collars, men wearing dark suits and top hats, horse drawn carriages, and children wearing sailor suits and dresses flood my mind. As I read the headstones, I wonder what stories they could tell me about their lives.

Not long after I began studying the craft of writing, I learned about the Linden Murders that took place between the years 1917 and 1924—just a few miles from where I live. I was intrigued by the unsolved mystery: a novel waiting to be written by me. I became engrossed in research: reviewing the court documents, reading news articles, reading the letters written to the district attorney, and studying photographs of the crime scenes. As I read through all the letters and court testimonies, their voices came through on the pages of the documents. Since then, research has become an essential part of my writing process.

I was still working on my historical novel when I started the Master's program, so I decided to use my research and wrote a short story titled "Adelaide" about a witness to the first victim of the Linden murders for my 2012 fall Prose Workshop. Through my research, I thought it was plausible that the first victim of the Linden Murders must have experienced some level of domestic abuse, so I decided to craft my piece around actual events of the homicide and the issues of coping with

domestic violence. This was the first story in which I felt my own voice as a writer was starting to come through. For instance, on page 3 of “Adelaide”:

Arthur let go of the door knob and briskly grabbed her forearm. He stared into her frightened eyes. “You ain’t doin’ nothin’ like that. You’re stayin’ right here! It ain’t none of your business and it ain’t proper to be gettin’ into others’ concerns when you ain’t asked.” With his other hand, he gently pushed her ginger tresses off her face and stroked her bruised cheek with his cold, chapped finger that was dripping with intimidation. Adelaide turned her face away from his hand. He sneered, and then let go of her arm and stepped into the house. (2-3)

I believe this paragraph is a good example of my voice coming through as a writer. My attitude toward domestic abuse is shown through Adelaide’s reaction after Arthur grabs her arm. From my interviews of women living with domestic abuse, it is a scary situation to be in, and it can happen without warning, as it did in this scene. Another example of my writer’s voice in this scene is how I chose to convey Arthur’s actions as he stroked Adelaide’s cheek “dripping with intimidation” to give a clear image—to create a subtle suggestion of blood dripping—of how cold-blooded he can be and that Adelaide’s fear of him is as real as the victim’s that the readers will later learn about.

As ideas for my first novel began to form in my mind, I began to search for works of historical fiction that would be comparable to mine. I found two novels: *A Northern Light* by Jennifer Donnelly and *The Weight of Water* by Anita Shreve.

Donnelly's book is a coming-of-age story about 16-year-old Mattie Gokey, who becomes absorbed in the real-life 1906 murder mystery of Grace Brown. I was intrigued by Donnelly's first-person narrative and her use of the two unique voices that people, especially young women, could identify with. The author's voice is clear and expressive as she communicates Mattie's awareness of the world through her hardships and internal struggles. Through Donnelly's research, she was able to include the voice of the murder victim, Grace Brown, through her real letters, which expressed her worries, desires, and feelings of separation from her suitor. The feelings of both distinct characters could be felt through her words. I've always tried to create an emotional response in my readers, and I was drawn into Donnelly's style because it is similar to mine.

Shreve's novel, *The Weight of Water*, has two intriguing storylines intertwined throughout the narrative: one fictional and the other historical, based on the facts of the 1873 Smuttynose Island murders. Like Donnelly, Shreve writes in two voices; one of her protagonist, Jean, who was struggling with her marriage, and a voice from beyond the grave of Maren, the only survivor of the murders, as she tells her story from her death bed in 1899. The author's psychologically charged narrative stayed with me long after I finished reading the novel, which is what I strive for in my writing. Shreve's skill is evident as she was able to maintain control of two storylines that demand the reader's close attention while she takes her readers back in time and back to present day within the same paragraph to maintain focus on the intertwined

emotions. Even after studying her novel, I'm impressed that she was able to move through time so smoothly.

Throughout the program, I found myself drawn to writing in two different genres: historical fiction and the paranormal. During my 2014 fall Prose Workshop, I wrote two chapters of a novel that began to blend the two genres. Because I like to survey the landscape and locate novels that would be similar to mine, I came across two books: *The Cure for Dreaming*, by Cat Winters, and *Kindred*, by Octavia Butler. Winters' young adult novel is a coming-of-age story about Olivia Mead's struggle of breaking free of her father's strict control during the Women's Suffrage Movement. From the first page, I fell in love with the first-person narrative and her beautifully detailed descriptions that seemed to hold me in the smallest of moments. This is a quality that I strive for in my writing. For example, Chapter 1 of my novel *Indigo* seems to demonstrate Winters' influence:

I locked my eyes back on my mother's mahogany casket which was hanging above the gaping, six-foot hollow in the earth. My grandmother and grandfather were clinging to me. I was all they had left of their daughter who lay inside. A warm breeze brushed my skin, bringing the fragrant scent of lilacs mixed in the humid air. I gazed at a long line of blooming, violet lilac bushes that stood as a wall between life and death... My knees shook as I leaned over and kissed the warm, rich wood grain, leaving behind my kiss printed in cherry lip balm and the tears that dripped from my eyes. (1)

I tried to lengthen the highly charged emotional scene of Linna's mother's funeral with clear descriptions and small details that would invoke my reader's senses and feelings, allowing them to relish scenes longer. The warm breeze, the scent of lilacs in the humid air, and Linna's shaky knees as she kissed her mother's warm casket, and the added detail of the printed kiss of cherry lip balm she left behind, leave my readers with an added sense of taste to seal the moment.

In my novel *Indigo*, a young adult paranormal thriller, Linna finds herself alone in the world with the sudden loss of her mother. Because "everything happens for a reason," Linna is set on a path of discovery as she learns about her psychic gifts, past lives, and ultimately her father. She also masters the ability to travel to the astral plane where she resides between lives. It is on the astral plane that she comes in contact, once again, with the man—who terrified her at the cemetery the day of her mother's funeral—from her past lives who is obsessed with her—and he is determined to kill her again.

Another influence I would like to mention is Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred*, which is a blend of historical fiction and science fiction about a modern day black woman who is able to travel back in time to a slave plantation in the antebellum South. I thoroughly enjoyed the first-person narrative and well-written dialogue. Butler's voice is straightforward, simple, and fluid, which helps the story to move at a fast pace. In my writing, I tend to love beautiful prose. However, Butler's novel has me thinking about the perfect mix of pleasing descriptions and how the story flows for the reader. Also, I tend to rely heavily on dialogue to move the story along at a

faster pace. For instance, when I'm writing a scene and visualizing the actions of my characters, I begin to hear their conversation as if I was standing in the same room. In my short story "Adelaide," for example:

"Addie, how long before it's ready?" Arthur asked as he took off his mud-covered boots by the door and hung up his wool coat on the hook by the window.

"About a half-hour, if I can get this fire rekindled." She looked up at him, trying to muster up some courage. "Why don't you sit down at the table while I finish getting supper ready? I need to talk to you about a visit I had today," she said nervously.

"Visit? What's this all about?" Arthur pulled the kitchen chair away from the table, sat down, pulled his handkerchief out of his shirt pocket, and wiped his nose. (9)

I believe this a good example of how I tend to utilize and rely on dialogue to tell my story and also keep my readers engaged and connected to my characters. My hope is for my readers to visualize the scene and hear my characters' voices as I do.

As I reflect on a few of the writers who have inspired me most, I see that, like them, I'm drawn to historical fiction, and I'm fascinated by the authentic documents that contain the voices from beyond the grave—a treasure for any writer of historical fiction. I read a number of historical documents for my first novel about the Linden Murders, and some of the information that I gathered for that novel made its way into

“Adelaide.” For example, I read a number of interviews and reports about the couple who walked by Adelaide’s house on that one historic November day. There were a number of witnesses who saw the couple, including Adelaide Spiers, who described the couples’ physical traits, their proximity to each other, their attire, and their argument. To tell a story that has authenticity, I included the historically accurate information in the details of my narrative. To further my understanding of the events surrounding the first of the five historic murders, I visited our Holland Land Office Museum and viewed the woman’s purple hat, the hair that was cut from her body, and other items found at the crime scene, which are continually on display at the museum.

Like the authors I have discussed, all of my pieces have been thoroughly researched. I believe that my detailed knowledge of the events combined with my creative imagination helps me to create realistic characters and emotional scenes, which gives readers realistic experiences within the world of fiction. People may ask: does fiction have to be realistic? For me, it is critical that I have a solid foundation in the topics and the time periods I am writing about to tell an authentic story. My stories have to be plausible so that my readers are not distracted by questions and doubts.

As with all writers, ideas for stories come from a number of places, and they are mixed and formed into a story. Part of my writing process includes reading a lot of non-fiction books for a variety of reasons. One of the reasons that I find research to be critical in my writing process is to answer some of my questions and give me a plausible explanation so that I can find a way to understand and make sense of a

particular topic. In good conscience, I cannot come up with an idea and write a story about it until I have enough background information to write a believable story that my readers will also believe. For instance, my novel *Indigo* is based on the mystifying concepts of astral travel—the ability of training your consciousness to leave your body in a sleeping or meditative state—and the theory of reincarnation. So the question for me is how do I make these out-of-the-ordinary concepts as realistic as one of my characters sitting down to eat a supper? The answer: research. For example, in Chapter 1 in *Indigo*:

I turned to where it came from. A man was standing near a large maple tree next to a freshly covered grave. I recognized him, but I couldn't place from where. He looked to be in his thirties. He was wearing a three-piece suit and hat that looked out dated. He was tall and good-looking. He had dark hair and dark, piercing eyes that seemed to be eerily looking through me. (5)

This is Linna's first experience with the unexplained. As I wrote this, in the back of my mind, I knew that I had to make the concept of Linna seeing this familiar apparition of this man in the cemetery plausible. These realistic explanations led me to two conflicting explanations that leave Linna with a choice and a path to take. The first realistic explanation led to the character development of Licensed Clinical Social Worker Ananda Patel, who believed that this was a brief psychotic episode brought on by the grief and stress of the passing of Linna's mother. The second explanation is given by psychic medium Emberly Hayes, who has another conceivable theory that

coincides with her training and experience with the other side. She believes that the man in the cemetery was from a past life who decided to taunt Linna during a weak moment, and that she had a past-life vision. I believe that both answers are authentic, based on the research I have done. A brief psychotic episode is a true diagnosis that can happen in the case of the sudden loss of a loved one and other traumatic events. And based on the well documented paranormal cases that I have read, people have been seeing apparitions for centuries. Also, I have read a number of books on psychic abilities, well documented cases of past lives, the hypnotic process of past life regression, and hypnosis, both so that I could attempt to explain the unexplained in my fiction and to satisfy my own skepticism and curiosity.

As I walk through historic cemeteries, read the names and dates carved in stone, and wonder about their stories, I also think about where their spirits might be at that moment. Are they watching me? Are they trying to get my attention from the other side? Or have they returned to this plane to learn lessons that were not completed in their last lifetime? As a writer, these mystifying concepts open my imagination to intriguing storylines. My determination to tell an authentic story and my study of the craft have taught me to have a good balance of dialogue, engaging descriptions, and a straight forward style.

## Adelaide

The deep purplish-blue bruise at the top of Adelaide's cheekbone caught her eye in the mirror of the hall tree as she placed her knitting basket into the storage bench. She set the basket on top of the hand carved wooden box that her father had made for her, and then gently closed the lid. She touched the side of her face. The swelling had gone down, but the pain lingered. Adelaide pulled a few more ginger locks from her Gibson Girl bun and hid the reminder of her husband's rage. The grandfather clock in the parlor chimed eleven times as she entered the kitchen. She pulled the pot of stew out of the icebox and set it on the stove to warm.

It was a cloudy mid-November morning. Adelaide stepped out her back door, lifted her skirt, and headed to the barn to ask Arthur when he would be ready to eat. On her way back to the house, she heard a man and a woman shouting. She peeked around the corner of her house and saw a couple arguing as they walked down the road. As they drew closer, Adelaide noticed the young woman was nicely dressed and had long, wavy, russet hair. She was wearing a lovely purple hat that Adelaide found herself admiring. Adelaide turned to see if Arthur was leaving the barn. Out of curiosity, she watched as the couple continued to walk toward the house still yelling at each other. Adelaide casually began walking down the driveway as the tall, burly, olive-skinned man passed the house. He gave her a quick glance and continued moving down the road. The woman trailed behind. She noticed Adelaide walking toward her and stopped at the end of the driveway. Adelaide glanced back again to

see if Arthur had left the barn but didn't see him. Holding her long skirt up, she rushed toward the woman standing at the edge of the driveway. The man, who was a ways ahead of her, turned, shook his head from side to side, and waved her on.

"Addie!" Arthur yelled, "What the hell're you doin'?"

Startled, Adelaide turned and looked at her husband's irritated face.

The teary-eyed woman looked over at Adelaide, who was standing just a few feet from her. "I'd better keep walking," she said, "he's really angry." The woman left and tried to catch up to the man, but he did not slow down for her.

Adelaide was troubled by the fellow's ill-mannered behavior, because she knew the behavior well.

"Addie, come here!" Arthur yelled, standing on the porch steps.

Adelaide scurried back to the house. "There's a couple walkin' east. The woman looked like she needed help, but the fellow she's with kept goin'. He wouldn't wait for her. She's cryin', Arthur. We need to see if they need somethin'."

Arthur placed his hand on the door knob. "Ain't none of your business, Addie!" He didn't bother to look at her. "The only business you have right now is gettin' my dinner."

"I'm gonna run down the road and invite them in for some hot tea," Adelaide said standing on the top porch step.

Arthur let go of the door knob and briskly grabbed her forearm. He stared into her frightened eyes. "You ain't doin' nothin' like that. You're stayin' right here! It ain't none of your business and it ain't proper to be gettin' into others' concerns when

you ain't asked." With his other hand, he gently pushed her ginger tresses off her face and stroked her bruised cheek with a cold, chapped finger that was dripping with intimidation. Adelaide turned her face away from his hand. He sneered, and then let go of her arm and stepped into the house.

After dinner, Arthur headed back to the barn and Adelaide headed for the chicken coop to collect the eggs. On her way back to the house, carrying a basket full of eggs, she saw the same man running back toward town. A couple minutes passed and there was no sign of the woman lagging behind him. *He must have dropped the woman off at a relative's house and was in a hurry to get somewhere.* But the woman's tears still troubled Adelaide.

• • •

Four days later, just after dinner, Adelaide's neighbor, Grace Hunt, who owned the farm down the road, knocked on the their back door. "Addie! Addie!" Grace leaned over the porch to look in the kitchen window to see if anyone was home.

On her way to the door, Adelaide quickly pulled more hair out of her bun and draped it over the side of her face. She opened the door. "Grace, what is it? What's wrong?"

"Something awful has happened!" Grace replied. "Frank was out in the woods gathering logs this morning and found a dead body."

Adelaide gasped and covered her mouth. "Oh my, Grace, come in and tell me what happened."

“I can’t stay. Frank has been busy with the sheriff’s deputies, and he needs me back home. This was the first chance I had to tell you and the other neighbors what’s happened. I know it’s gonna be all over the radio and the papers. The sheriff’s plannin’ on interviewin’ everyone.”

“Was it a hunter?” Adelaide asked, as she rubbed her arms and closed her wool sweater.

“No, it was a woman; it’s just dreadful. Someone beat her to death. Frank wouldn’t let me go out there to see the body. He said it was too grisly.”

“Oh, my Lord, do you know who it is?” A sickening feeling clenched the walls of Adelaide’s stomach and a chill fell throughout her body. She began to tremble.

“No, we don’t know who it is yet. Listen, I really had better get back to the farm. I’ll let you know when I hear somethin’.” Grace stepped off the porch and left.

Arthur returned home from the saw mill near suppertime. Adelaide had beef soup and freshly baked bread ready just as he walked in the door. They both sat down at the wooden table.

“I had a visit from Grace Hunt today,” Adelaide said as she stirred her soup.

“What’d she have to say?” Arthur asked without looking up from his bowl.

“Frank found a woman’s body in their woods this morning,” Adelaide replied in a thin voice.

“He did?” Arthur gave Adelaide a quick, wide-eyed look as he ripped off a piece of bread and dipped it into his broth.

“Grace said she was beaten to death. No one knows who she is yet.”

“Anyone missin’? That’d be a place to start.”

“Arthur.” Adelaide looked up at him. “Do you remember when I saw that couple walkin’ past our house a few days back? A little while later, I saw the same man runnin’ back toward Batavia. Alone.”

Arthur dipped his bread into his broth and kept eating. “Even if it is that woman it ain’t none of your concern. Let the sheriffs do their work.”

“I felt sorry for her. She looked like she needed help.”

“Help?” Arthur scoffed. “What could you’ve done?”

“I don’t know, but somethin’,” Adelaide replied with regret-filled words.

“Grace told me that the authorities might be by to ask us some questions. I didn’t tell Grace about that couple that I saw. It upset me so; I could barely say a word.”

Late the next morning, there was a knock at the front door. Adelaide looked out the front window and saw a black touring car parked in the driveway. She opened the door and there were two men in dark uniforms standing on the porch.

“Mrs. Spiers?” one deputy asked.

“Yes, I’m Mrs. Spiers,” she replied nervously.

“I’m Sheriff Edgerton and this is Undersheriff Garrett. We would like to ask you and your husband some ques—”

“Yes, I heard about the woman’s body found on Frank Hunt’s farm the other day... Grace Hunt is a friend of mine.” Adelaide interrupted without even a thought and opened the door for the deputies to step inside. “Would you please come in?”

“Thank you,” Edgerton said as the men entered into the parlor and sat down on the sofa.

“Mrs. Spiers, have you seen anyone in the area who seemed out of place?” the undersheriff asked with a pencil and note pad on his lap.

Adelaide nodded. “Yes, yes I have,” she replied, fidgeting with her apron. “On Monday morning, shortly after eleven...I saw a man and a woman walkin’ down the road comin’ in this direction.” She hesitantly pointed west from Batavia. She began to tremble.

“Mrs. Spiers, are you all right? I can see that you’re nervous,” Edgerton asked.

“Yes, I am a bit nervous. I apologize.”

“There is no need to apologize, Mrs. Spiers,” Edgerton said with reassurance. “Please continue when you’re ready.”

Adelaide nodded. “...The woman stopped in front of our driveway...I tried to talk to her but she had to leave because the man she was with kept walkin’. She said that he was angry, so she hurried to catch up to him.”

“Did she happen to say why he was angry?” Edgerton asked.

She shook her head. “No, but she was cryin’. I thought she was cryin’ because he wasn’t waitin’ for her. She couldn’t keep up with him.” Adelaide removed the handkerchief tucked under her shirtsleeve and wiped a tear. “I’m sorry, I just feel I could have helped her or done somethin’ for her.”

“Take your time, Mrs. Spiers.” Edgerton paused for a moment and Garrett continued to write. “Can you describe what they looked like and what they were wearing?” Edgerton asked.

Adelaide nodded and blew her nose. “The woman had on a dark skirt...nearly all of it was covered up by her coat...her coat was...a dark plush coat and she was wearing a small purple hat. It was her purple hat that attracted my attention. It was such a lovely hat. And I noticed that she had something in her hand. I think...I think it may have been a small purse.”

“What about the man, Mrs. Spiers?” Garrett asked.

“The man was rather tall...much taller than the woman... and had an olive complexion. I think he had a mustache, but I’m not sure...He was a big man...wearing a tan overcoat. The coat was rather long, below his knees. And a bright-colored cap, greenish plaid, sort of a mixed color. And the coat, I don’t think it had a belt...I think it hung loose. Then not quite an hour after I saw the couple, I saw the man pass our house again, alone, in an awful hurry, almost runnin’.”

“This is all very helpful...Is there anything else that you remember?” asked Sheriff Edgerton.

Adelaide shook her head. “No,” she replied meekly, “not that I remember.” Her voice thinned as she brushed the wispy locks of hair away from her eyes and patted her tresses against the side of her face. “Do you have any idea of who the couple was or where they came from?”

“We are working on that as we speak, but right now, no we don’t,” Sheriff Edgerton replied. “Is your husband around? We’d like to talk to—”

“Arthur is out in the field today. And I know Arthur doesn’t have anythin’ to add,” she answered candidly. “He was in the barn a good part of that day and didn’t see them. I told him about the couple...And I told him that I wanted to see if they needed help. But he told me it wasn’t my place.... My place was to get his dinner.” Adelaide’s voice dissolved into a whisper.

Garrett stopped writing and glanced up at Adelaide and then over at Edgerton for a moment. “I guess we won’t bother him, then, but let him know that if he has any information to add to what you just told us, to give us a call or stop down and see us,” Garrett said and then stood up.

Garrett walked towards the door. “If you or your husband remember anything else or see anyone that looks suspicious, please call us,” he said as he stepped out the front door.

Sheriff Edgerton stepped by Adelaide and followed Garrett out the front door. “We hope you will attend the viewing at Turner’s Undertaking Company tomorrow. The captain scheduled a viewing of the body. We want to see if anyone has any idea who this woman is. It starts at nine in the morning and will continue until eight at night, so everyone will have plenty of opportunity,” Edgerton added and stepped into his touring car.

“Thank you for telling me. My husband and I will be sure to go after his evenin’ chores.”

"Have a good day, Mrs. Spiers," Sheriff Edgerton said.

"You too, thank you, bye now," Adelaide said as she waved and closed the door.

. . .

Arthur came in from the field that evening as Adelaide was adding more wood to the stove to heat up the stew she had made that morning.

"Addie, how long before it's ready?" Arthur asked as he took off his mud-covered boots by the door and hung up his wool coat on the hook by the window.

"About a half-hour, if I can get this fire rekindled." She looked up at him, trying to muster up some courage. "Why don't you sit down at the table while I finish getting supper ready? I need to talk to you about a visit I had today," she said nervously.

"Visit? What's this all about?" Arthur pulled the kitchen chair away from the table, sat down, pulled his handkerchief out of his shirt pocket, and wiped his nose.

"I had a visit from the two sheriff's deputies today. They came to ask some questions...And I told them about the couple I saw a few days ago."

"Oh yeah, what did they have to say?"

"They didn't say much...I just told them what happened. And they are tellin' everyone to go to Turner's tomorrow because they are gonna have the body on display...I told them that we would go after your evenin' chores. You'll go with me, won't you, Arthur?" she asked softly.

Arthur shook his head with disapproval. "Lord, Addie, what're you gonna figure out by going there? There ain't nothin' to see," Arthur said as his brown eyes blackened and his voice filled with frustration. He stuffed his handkerchief back in his shirt pocket. "The woman's stone cold dead, and the word at the mill is it ain't a sight for a decent woman to look at."

Arthur stood up from the table, grabbed the bar of soap on the window sill, pumped water into the sink, lathered his hands and then rinsed them. Adelaide turned and watched him leave the kitchen. She peeked around the doorway and set her eyes on him as he sat down on the sofa and picked up the newspaper. Adelaide's anger stirred from within. She tightened her lips and marched into the parlor. She stood in the doorway staring at him with her teeth clenched.

"In the two years of our marriage, I've never gone against your word, Arthur, but we're goin' when you're done with the evenin' chores. You know I'm too scared to drive the horse carriage alone! If we had a car, it would be different, I would go by myself. So tomorrow, I need you to be ready by seven," Adelaide demanded and then left the room. Heated, she walked over to the cupboard, opened the door, and then reached in and lifted the lid to the money box that held their car savings. "It's still there," she said under her breath. Then she softly set the lid down and closed the cupboard door.

"You're serious about this, ain't you?" Arthur hollered back with a tinge of amusement in his voice.

Adelaide marched over to the doorway and nodded. "Yes, I'm very serious!" She turned around and stepped back into the kitchen, wiped her hands on her apron, then picked up the knife and thought about another use for it. She then sliced the freshly baked bread.

The next evening, Adelaide hung her blouse and skirt up in the closet in the spare bedroom and put on her only black dress. She pulled her hatbox off the closet shelf, opened it and placed her small black velvet hat, adorned with a small fan of Mephisto feathers, on her head for the ride to the funeral parlor.

Arthur finished milking the cows by 6:00 PM and was washed, clean-shaven and dressed in his best black wool pants and white shirt a half-hour later. He greased his wavy brown hair back and put on his cap.

Arthur and Adelaide stepped up into the carriage and rode west down Route 63 toward Batavia. The ride was quiet except for the sound of the horse's hooves hitting the road. Adelaide was in deep thought, replaying the night her life changed back in New York City.

It was Adelaide's nineteenth birthday, and she was celebrating with her parents at her favorite restaurant, Delmonico's... She gave quick glance across the room and Arthur's handsome face caught her eye as he stood at the bar with his cousin Eldon. She couldn't help but smile at him. The two men came over to their table, and she learned that Eldon worked for her father and Arthur was in New York visiting family. She thought it was fate.

Adelaide reached up and touched the top of her cheekbone and pressed on it. There was still a trace of pain below the surface. She glanced over at Arthur with moistened eyes, and then gazed down the road at the lights of the town as a tear streamed down her cheek. Adelaide's thoughts wandered back to the woman standing at the edge of the driveway.

"I wonder how many bruises he gave her before he killed her?" Adelaide asked, shattering the silence.

Arthur glanced over at Adelaide. "You can't relate the two."

"Maybe *you* can't, but I can," Adelaide said with coolness that added a chill to the already bitter, night's air.

"Addie." Arthur whispered her name, which floated through the air like goose down as he reached over and set his chapped hand on Adelaide's knee. "A wife needs a little fixin' from time to time, that's all. It ain't nothin' more than that."

Adelaide's lips tightened as she gave Arthur a quick glare. "Arthur, please keep both hands on the reins," she said as she lifted his hand off of her knee. "What if the horse decides to take off runnin'?"

The gas street lamps lit Main Street brightly they approached the Turner Undertaking Company. Adelaide's heart rate increased. She began to perspire as she brushed the wisps of hair out of her eyes, no longer hiding the bruise that had by now faded into a memory.

A couple who had just left parlor walked down the brick sidewalk towards them. The woman, dressed in black, sobbed as the gentleman clutched her arm.

“You sure you want to go in?” Arthur asked as he reached over to clutch Adelaide’s arm.

She pulled away.

“You don’t have to do this.”

She stopped and turned. “I do need to do this,” she answered, looking straight into his captivating brown eyes, realizing how handsome he still was. If only his decency matched his good looks.

Adelaide and Arthur watched a man in a dark suit run out of the parlor doors with his hand over his mouth and vomit off the side of the porch.

“My goodness, how bad is it?” Adelaide whispered.

They entered the parlor; a gentleman in a black suit directed them to sign in and thanked them for coming.

Adelaide looked to the other side of the room at the body of the young woman who lay in the wooden casket. Trembling, she walked ahead of Arthur and over to the casket.

“It’s her, it’s her,” Adelaide sobbed. “That’s her purple hat.” She pointed.

“Her face, her beautiful face, what did he do to her? What did he do?”

The woman’s face was bashed. Her skin was ripped to shreds, exposing her broken skull and clots of dried blood in the crevices. Adelaide glanced over at Arthur. His face began to turn a pale hue of green as the blood drained from his skin. He pulled himself away from Adelaide and ran out the room doors, leaving her alone beside the casket.

The parlor director approached Adelaide, who was on the verge of passing out. The director grasped her by the arm and guided her to the next room. He sat her down and gave her a glass of water. When she was ready to leave, Arthur gently held Adelaide's arm as they walked out to their carriage. No words were spoken the rest of the evening.

That night, Adelaide lay restless in bed, waiting for the sound of Arthur's snore. Once it had started and his breathing deepened, Adelaide crept out of bed. In the dark, lit by hints of moonlight seeping through the drapes, she pulled the packed suitcase out of the spare bedroom closet. She removed her night gown, tucked it into her suitcase, and slipped on her long skirt and blouse that she had hung up earlier. With her suitcase in hand, she stood in the hallway and listened again for Arthur's snore. The snoring continued, and she quietly stepped down the stairs.

Adelaide set the suitcase down and opened the hall tree bench. She lifted her knitting basket and pulled out her carved wooden box. Quietly, she stepped into the kitchen, opened the cupboard, and pulled out Arthur's money box. She pulled out the two hundred and sixty dollars in car savings and placed it into her wooden case. Then she quietly walked over to the counter, picked up Arthur's wallet, and lifted the entire twenty-two dollars he had in there and stuffed the money in her skirt pocket. She slipped on her shoes, threw her coat over her shoulders, and then ran out the door with her luggage in one hand, clutching the carved box in the other.

The sun was beginning to rise as Adelaide left the house and briskly walked down Route 63 into Batavia. She arrived at the Jackson Street train station at 5:40 AM. Slightly out of breath, she stepped up to the only opened window.

“Where to, miss?”

“The 6:05 train to New York City, please,” Adelaide said as she slid three dollars to the clerk.

From *Indigo*

Chapter 1

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a man with dark hair walk up to the back of the crowd and stop. Suddenly, I began to feel a little uneasy. I glanced over to see who it was, but people were blocking my view of him. I locked my eyes back on my mother's mahogany casket, which was hanging above the gaping, six-foot hollow in the earth. My grandmother and grandfather were clinging to me. I was all they had left of their daughter who lay inside. A warm breeze brushed my skin, bringing the scent of lilacs mixed in the humid air. I gazed at a long line of blooming violet lilacs that stood as a wall between life and death. On the other side, the laughter and shrieks of children could be heard as they ran and played in their yards.

"Amen," I whispered as the tears leaked from my eyes and fell down my cheek at the reverend's close of the Lord's Prayer. I anxiously wiped my face, took a couple of deep breaths, and looked over at my grandmother. Her velvety pink skin, lightly tanned by the Florida sunshine, had turned pale and transparent. Her light, hazel eyes—blank. She trembled without a sob. I seemed to feel her numbing disbelief through my entire body. Then I looked over at my grandfather. Below his full head of salt and pepper hair, his crisp blue eyes were red, swollen, and pooled with tears. I thought I heard him say, "My baby, my baby." But his lips didn't move.

"We're going to miss her terribly," my grandfather said in a broken voice. I reached down and gently placed my hand on top of his olive, sun bronzed hand for a moment as he gripped the top of his cane.

I nodded. “Yeah,” I said softly. My grandmother’s arm dropped from my waist, so I reached for her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. “Come on. We should go,” I said as I wept.

“Okay,” my grandmother replied. She let go of my hand and took a couple of steps toward the casket. Then she kissed her fingers and tenderly placed them on the shiny wood. I followed her lead. My knees shook as I leaned over and kissed the warm, rich wood grain, leaving behind my kiss printed in cherry lip balm and the tears that dripped from my eyes. I turned, linked arms with grandmother, just like my mother used to do, and we walked over to my grandfather, who was standing by a tall, rose granite headstone. As much as my grandparents tried to be my strength, I knew that it needed to be the other way around. But they were going back to Florida, and I had to stay in New York. How much help could I be to them?

On the way to my grandparents’ SUV, I saw my best friend, Jessica, her mother, her father and her brother Alex, who I’d be staying with until graduation. I was grateful that her parents asked me—the girl who lived in the government subsidized, Cedar Wood Village apartments—to move in so that I could finish my last year at Batavia High School. I turned to my grandparents and said: “I need to go tell the Shafers that I’ll be staying there tonight. I’ll be back in a couple minutes.”

Jessica and her family were walking toward me. They looked as if they walked out of a high end catalog that was selling the perfect life. Tears swelled in my eyes. The unfairness of losing my mother from a sudden aneurysm at sixteen and not having a father made me want to scream. Why me? Why did I have to have the shitty

life? It's not fair! If I'd known where my father was, I'd have gone to his house and screamed in his face and say: "She was nineteen and pregnant! You left her to do it all, alone! And now, I'm alone!" I hate him!

After Jessica and her family had navigated through the headstones, I took a few more deep breaths to calm my nerves. I wiped my tears and met up with the Shafers by a large, dusty green pine tree. I removed my black jacket. The sun had taken its place at the top of the cloudless sky and began to heat up the afternoon.

"Oh, Linna," Jessica cried and gave me a hug. As she hugged me, I tried not to be mad at her for having her perfect life, but I couldn't help it. I was mad at the world.

Mrs. Shafer gave me a long embrace while Jessica stood next to me. Her floral perfume lingered around me for a moment. Suddenly, I was swept back in time to my first day of middle school. I had walked into the bathroom and into a cloud of my mother's sweet-scented perfume. It smelled so pretty. I stood in front of the mirror and began to look at my face from every angle. I pulled my long, sandy brown hair up into a pony tail. *Too elementary school.* So I let it drop down and fall over my shoulders. I stared at my brown eyes admiring my dark, feathery eyelashes that didn't seem to cry out for mascara. But my face needed something. Then I noticed my mother's blush brush lying on the shelf. I grabbed it and gently stroked each cheekbone. It was just enough color to add a little something to my face. I turned and saw my mother standing in the bathroom doorway in her cut-off jean shorts and white tank top that showed off her dark tanned, olive skin. Her lips and sky blue eyes were

smiling at me as she pushed a long strand of her wavy, chestnut brown hair out of her eyes and said, “You’re growing up so fast...It feels like I just dropped you off at kindergarten yesterday...and now, you’re in middle school. And another year, I’ll have a teenager in the house,” she said with a tinge of disbelief. She stepped into the bathroom and gave me a hug. We both looked into the mirror. I filed the image away into a special place. “It’s time to go to school,” Mom said and kissed my head.

“Are you planning on staying with your grandparents tonight, sweetie?” Mrs. Shafer asked, transporting me back to 2015 as she stepped back and looked into my teary eyes.

“No,” I replied. I sniffled and brushed away the tear that ran down my face. “They only have one double bed in their hotel room.”

“What time do you think you’ll be over?” Jessica asked, misty-eyed.

“Probably after dinner, around 7:00 or so.”

“Do you need to get anything else out of the apartment?” Mr. Shafer asked as he shrugged off his charcoal gray suit jacket.

“No, my grandparents took the last few things out last night, and we dropped them off at Goodwill,” I replied as I tried to pull myself back together. “My grandfather has the keys and is going to drop them off at the office before they head back.”

“Before he does it, I want to take you over there one last time, just to make sure the apartment is in good shape,” Mr. Shafer said. “I want to make sure you get *all* of your mother’s security deposit back.”

“Oh, okay...I didn’t even think about that,” I said, gratefully.

“I don’t want you to get blamed for something that was already there,” Mr. Shafer said as he glanced over at Mrs. Shafer and Jessica.

Alex’s eyes set on mine. “Hey, Linna: Jessica and I painted your room yesterday,” he said, sympathetically. “My dad and I are going to go home and move your bed and dresser in.”

I formed a partial smile. “Thanks, you guys.”

“I love the color you picked out,” Jessica said with a grin. “It’s a really nice blue—sort of looks like the sky right after the sun goes down. I can’t wait for you to see the room.”

I turned to Mrs. Shafer. “I feel bad: that was your craft room.”

“Don’t feel bad. I haven’t worked on a craft since I started yoga,” Mrs. Shafer assured me as she reached over and caringly rubbed my shoulder.

“Well, that makes me feel a little better,” I said to Mrs. Shafer. “I really appreciate you letting me move in. I would have had to finish school in Florida.”

“We’re happy to have you,” Mr. Shafer said, with conviction.

I glanced over my shoulder. My grandparents were waiting for me with their engine running. “I better go. I told my grandparents I’d be right back.”

“Okay, Linna, we will see you later then,” Mrs. Shafer said.

“Yeah, text me if anything changes,” Jessica said.

“We’ll have your bedroom ready for you,” Mr. Shafer said and Alex nodded.

“Okay, thanks...I really appreciate all that you’ve done for me already.” Tears began to fill my eyes again as I walked away. It wasn’t supposed to be this way.

“Linna,” a man’s familiar deep voice called.

I turned to where it came from. A man was standing near a large maple tree next to a freshly covered grave. I recognized him, but I couldn’t place from where. He looked to be in his thirties. He was wearing a three-piece suit and hat that looked out dated. He was tall and good-looking. He had dark hair and dark, piercing eyes that seemed to be eerily looking through me. It was him! He was the one I saw out of the corner of my eye. As I stared at him—at his eyes—a creepy feeling sent a chill through my body. I began to tremble and started to become nauseous. “No!” I screamed. “Stay away from me!” I yelled instinctively and ran toward my grandparents’ vehicle. I flung the back door open and jumped into the backseat, terrified, confused, and shaking.

“What’s going on?” my grandfather asked with concern.

“Just Go! Drive! Drive!” I yelled, gasping with fear. Then I leaned against the back seat and squeezed my eyes shut, trying to erase his face from my mind. His face—intense with pleasure—flashed in my mind. He was standing over me holding a long knife, dripping with blood. I felt the sensation of warm liquid on my chest and right hand oozing between my fingers. Suddenly, I was hovering over my body. My throat was slit. My chest was covered in stab wounds. There were so many. My hand was on my chest as if I was trying to stop the bleeding. She didn’t look like me, but I knew it *was* me—and about the same age. My long, old fashioned brown skirt had

been pushed up to my waist exposing my undergarments as if I was dragged by my feet. My eyes were opened but lifeless.

I felt the vehicle stop. I opened my eyes. "Go!" I yelled. "Why are you stopping? Go! He's gonna kill me!" I impulsively screamed.

"Linna, who's going to kill you?" my grandmother asked in a panicked voice as she turned around and peered through all windows. "I don't...I don't see anyone."

I started kicking the back of my grandfather's seat for him to drive. "Grandpa, please go! Go!" I cried. "He's coming after me!"

My grandfather turned around. "Stop kicking my seat!" Then he scanned the grounds through each window. "There's nobody there. And there's nobody after you, Linna," he insisted and then set his eyes on back on the road and waited for the cars to pass to turn out of the Grandview cemetery. "Please, just calm down." He peeked in his rearview mirror shaking his head with confusion and alarm.

I turned to look out my window. "There's a bloody handprint on the glass!" I screamed. In a panic, I looked down at my shaking hand. I placed my hand over the top of the handprint. It matched mine.

## Chapter 2

After my grandfather drove out of the cemetery, he drove me straight to the emergency room.

A nurse with pinned-up blonde hair, who couldn't have been more than twenty-five years old, brought me into a small area with a bed. Her name tag read Shannon Haywood, LPN with a small photo next to her name. She pulled the white curtain around the track in the ceiling.

"You can sit on the bed," the nurse said. "The therapist will be in shortly."

*Therapist?* "Okay," I said with disbelief. *I don't need a therapist!*

My grandparents came in. I could see the deep concern on their faces as they quietly sat down on the two chairs next to the bed.

A hand clutched the opening of the drape. Then an attractive, dark skinned woman who looked to be in her early thirties with long dark hair wound in a bun and pinned to the back of her head entered my makeshift room. The name tag that was clipped to her fitted, navy blue blazer read Ananda Patel, LCSW.

"Hello, I'm one of the social workers for the hospital," she said with an Indian accent, and shook all of our hands. "So what brings you here today?"

I began to tell her about my mother's sudden death and funeral. Ananda kindly expressed her sympathy to us. Then I explained what happened at the cemetery. I told her about the man who was after me and the bloody handprint on the window, which I confirmed was *my* handprint. My grandmother had tears in her eyes as I told Ananda how I had been stabbed to death and remembered him standing over

me with a bloody knife. And he showed up at the cemetery to kill me again. As I told her the story, I realized how crazy it sounded.

Ananda listened intently and wrote notes on a small note pad as my grandparents assured them that they never saw a man say anything to me at the cemetery and there was no bloody handprint on the window of their SUV.

Ananda turned to my grandparents and then looked at me. “Linna, I have some questions to ask you that will help me gain a better understanding of what happened earlier.” She turned to my grandparents again. “Would you mind if I met with Linna in private?”

I glanced over at my grandparents’ concerned faces. Then I turned to Ananda. “They can stay. I have nothing to hide.”

Ananda nodded. “Very well, then... Why don’t you tell me more about this man you saw?”

“I already told you what happened. And I don’t *need* a therapist!” I said adamantly. “I’m not crazy! I know what I saw! I saw him! He was standing in front of me and said my name! And he wants to *kill* me!”

“Linna, please calm down,” my grandpa said with tears leaking from under his wire framed glasses as he nervously clutched the handle of his cane. “You’re not making any sense.”

“Honey, something’s not right; you’re seeing things that aren’t there,” my grandmother pleaded as she held her purse on her lap. “Please listen and be respectful

to Ananda. She is trying to help you. You've been through so much this week. We all have." Her voice began to break.

Ananda reached over and placed her hand on mine. "Yes, you told me what happened. Now, I need to ask you some medical questions," she explained. "What you've stated to me and what your grandparents confirmed, it appears that you may have had a brief delusional episode," she replied softly. "If this was the case, I have to try to determine what could have caused it."

"It wasn't—" I could see the anguish on grandparents' faces. I put my head down and stared at the white tiled floor and began to sob. "Okay," I whispered.

After a long period of questioning about my medical history, medications or drugs I never took, everything I had to eat in the past twenty-four hours, and then convincing Ananda that I was *not* going to hurt myself, she gave me a possible explanation of what had happened inside my head. She thought that I might have suffered from a rare condition called brief reactive psychosis which—in her words—can appear suddenly after a traumatizing, stressful event. She said she had seen it happen before—it was rare—but it can happen after a loss of a loved one or a traumatic experience.

But even though Ananda gave it a fancy medical name, the man I saw was real to me. I was sure that he had killed me and was determined to do it again—but none of it made any sense. It was crazy. I was here. I was alive. Maybe Ananda was right. They were just delusions.

Before leaving the hospital that evening, Ananda suggested that I go to grief counseling. She offered to see me through her private practice. So I agreed to counseling and began to meet with her weekly over my summer vacation. The last time I met with her was at the end of August, just before the start of my senior year.

Ananda opened her office door as I sat quietly on the wooden chair of her waiting room and set my handbag on the chair next to me. "Linna," she said with a smile. "Come in. I'm ready for you."

"Okay," I said, rose from the chair, grabbed my handbag, and walked into her office.

"Have a seat," Ananda said and gestured toward her rustic chocolate, leather couch, and I sat down as I always did. She sat down in her matching leather chair to the left of me. "So, how're you today?"

"I'm good," I replied as I noticed a small, golden Buddha statue sitting on the back corner of her large desk next to her flat screen computer monitor. "I'm excited about starting my senior year. I just received a letter from my fashion teacher welcoming me to the Fashion Careers Academy. I worked really hard to get in and now it's here. And soccer will be starting soon. I'm also thinking about getting a job, so I'll be busy."

"That's exciting." Ananda's face lit up with genuine enthusiasm for me. "That's so good to hear, Linna. It'll be good for you to get back into your normal routine."

I nodded. "Yeah, I'm thinking that too."

“Busy is good,” Ananda said with certainty, “but what about the time when you’re not busy? We’ve spent a lot of time talking about the five stages of grief the past three months; do you find that being able to identify your feelings has been helpful?”

“Yeah, it’s helped.” I reached down into the handbag I had set on the floor next to me and pulled out Ananda’s three-fold brochure on the five stages of grief and opened it. “I really think I’m way past the denial stage. But as far as the other stages— anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—I seem to feel any one of them depending on the day. It’s complicated.”

“I know what you mean by complicated, but it’s normal, and it takes time. One day you find yourself in a place of acceptance. Then other days you find yourself angry and depressed.”

I nodded. “That’s me. *And then* I get angry about other things in my life.”

“Like what?” Ananda tilted her head with a puzzled expression on her face.

“Jessica,” I reluctantly admitted. “I mean...I appreciate the Shafers letting me move in with them until I graduate—but I look at Jessica, and I get angry.”

“What’s it about Jessica that makes you angry? Did she do or say something that made you angry?”

“No, she didn’t *do* or *say* anything at least directly to me... But this morning, I overheard her talking to her mom. I mean, she’s my best friend in the world, but I find myself hating her sometimes.” After the word hate rolled off my tongue, I felt so guilty. I don’t hate Jessica. I love Jessica. She’s been like my sister to me. She’s done

nothing but be there for me—almost my whole life—since kindergarten. She never cared how much I did or didn't have, unlike some of the other stuck up bitches at my school.

"Hate? That's a strong word," Ananda said. "What was she talking about that made you so angry?"

I took a deep breath. "She was talking about the car she's getting for graduation. She's having trouble deciding if she wants a BMW or Mercedes," I replied. "I was like WTF! You have a perfectly *good* car, already! I wanted to say to her, *and that's your biggest problem in your perfect little world today!*"

"So you *hate* her for that?"

"No, not hate," I said regretfully. "I feel bad that I even said that. But I find myself angry when I hear her talk about things like that. I mean... I'm not mean or nasty to her—it's just in my head. I just think and get mad and think about her life compared to mine and get madder. She has everything: a nice house, two parents, a brother, and at the end of the year, she'll have this *new* car. And my life is the total opposite," I spewed.

"Has she been saving up for a car?" Ananda asked.

"God no, she doesn't work," I blurted. "She would have no way to save any money. Her parents are buying it for her—just like they bought one for her brother. Alex got a brand new Audi when he graduated from high school. The only thing Jessica had to do was be born a Shafer," I said.

Ananda nodded. "That's true for some people."

“I’m just jealous,” I admitted.

“Jealousy is a normal feeling.” Ananda assured me. “It’s understandable. We all experience jealousy at some time in our lives.”

“Some time—or all the time.” I said adamantly. “I wish I could trade her life for mine. My life sucks!” I could feel my blood starting to heat up. “My mother worked her ass off at two shitty jobs—cleaning houses as big and as beautiful as the one I am living in and then bartending at a hole in the wall bar a couple of nights a week—for what little we had. And now she’s gone.”

“Yes, she’s gone,” Ananda gently sympathized, “and she did work hard to give you a good life, I’m sure of it. In my opinion, seeing your mom work hard taught you the value of work and money. Nothing comes easy in life, Linna.”

“Well, it all comes easy for Jessica,” I said.

“Maybe right now it does,” Ananda acknowledged. “But unless her parents are going to financially support her all of her life, she’ll have to learn how to support herself someday, which makes you way ahead of her.”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“You just told me that you’re going to the tech center to learn skills that have value, and you’re going to start looking for a job. These are all good things! You’re ambitious. What’s Jessica doing her senior year?”

“She’s taking the regular classes at the high school,” I replied. “She applied to the Health Careers Academy, but her grades weren’t high enough.”

“Interesting... It sounds like Jessica has reason to be jealous of *you*,” Ananda said with an informative tone of voice.

I shrugged my shoulders and said: “Maybe she does, but she doesn’t show it.”

“Is she looking for a job?” Ananda asked.

“No, of course not—she has no reason to,” I replied like a snap of a whip.

“Work is good for the soul,” Ananda assured me. “It builds confidence and independence, and it leaves you with a sense accomplishment—and money can’t buy those qualities.”

I nodded as I listened. A few layers of my anger toward Jessica began to shed away.

“My parents worked hard to give me and my sister better lives than they had,” Ananda said proudly. “We moved here from a poor village in India. I was eight and my sister was five when we moved to the US. When we lived in the village, I remember us barely having enough food to eat and wearing rags for clothing. After we moved here, my parents worked in my great uncle’s restaurant to save up enough money to open their own restaurant. Then my sister and I worked for my parents all through high school and college. Hard work was expected from us.”

“Really?” I asked as I hung on the word poor. “I would have never thought you were *ever* poor.”

“Yes, we were *very* poor,” Ananda said with seriousness and without shame.

“Does anything I am telling you put things in another perspective for you?”

“Well, now that you tell me all of this, I think the only person in that house that knows anything about hard work is Mr. Shafer. He’s *always* working,” I replied.

“Does that change your jealousy status?”

I nodded. “Sort of...maybe right this minute it does,” I admitted. “I can’t say how I’ll feel next time Jessica and I go to the mall.”

“Acknowledging how you’re feeling is important, so when you go to the mall, *try* to think back to what we talked about,” Ananda said with frustration and a deflated tone as if she failed to make her point. “I know it’s hard to see now, but the big house and expensive cars are material things that don’t really matter in life. When you’re my age, you’ll understand and see life differently.”

“I understand what you’re saying, but that doesn’t make my life feel any better *now*.”

“I wish I had the power to change that for you,” Ananda said empathetically. “But I tend to believe that there’s a plan for all of us on this earthly plane we live on,” she said.

“A *plan*?” I asked with irritation. “I’d like a refund on this *plan* that *I did not* sign up for.”

“I know what you mean, but we can only control so much from my office,” she said lightheartedly and changed the serious feel that weighed so heavily in the room. “Okay, we took the needed Jessica detour, but let’s talk more about this school year—your *big* senior year.”

“Okay,” I said, feeling a little lighter.

“I know you’re going to be busy when school starts,” Ananda said. “Do you think that we need to continue to meet as often?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “I don’t know. You tell me, you’re the therapist—what do you think?”

“I think you’re doing well,” Ananda replied with a smile. “You’ve come a long way over the past couple of months. After you start school, see how it goes and keep visiting your memory box like you’ve been doing all along. Then when you’re into your routine by the end of September, call me to set up an appointment.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” I said. “Actually, after going through therapy, I’ve started to become interested in psychology. And I’ve decided that I’m going to take psychology the second half of the year instead of having an extra study hall.”

“That’s great!” Ananda replied. “If I can be of any help, let me know.”

“I will,” I said gratefully. “Oh, yeah, I was gonna say...out of all of your suggestions, I like the memory box the most. It has helped me a lot.... When I go to bed, I talk to mom in my prayers. Then I imagine myself pulling an envelope out of my memory box. Then I open it, and we—I mean I talk to her about it. When I’m finished, I ask her to keep watching over me, and then I go to sleep.”

Ananda smiled. “I’m sure she’s listening, and I’m sure she’s watching over you *all* the time.”

■ ■ ■

It was almost six weeks since school started when Jessica and I drove up to the house in her car after our soccer practice was canceled. There were three cars and

a SUV in the driveway, and an older model minivan was parked along the street. I turned to Jessica and asked: “What’s your mom having a party?”

She scanned the vehicles and glanced over at me. “Huh? It sure looks that way...She’s probably having another purse party.” Jessica rolled her eyes as she parked in front of the house next door. “She likes to take advantage of these things when my father’s out of town and when she knows Alex and I aren’t going to be around. I hope it’s almost over.”

I laughed a little, but I was also a little irritated at Mrs. Shafer’s freedom to just do whatever she wanted all day. Unlike my mother who had to work two shitty jobs. This gave her plenty of time to get into the latest trends on the party circuit. What else did she have to do?

I grabbed my fashion sketchbook, my book bag, and my royal blue Blue Devils Class of ‘15 hoodie out of the back seat. Then we headed up the freshly sealed driveway. The blacktop was scattered with brown, crumbling leaves that crunched beneath our shoes. Jessica opened the garage door. Mrs. Shafer’s brand new white BMW was sitting in the garage next to my mother’s old, rusted red Honda Civic.

We entered the earth-toned, ceramic tiled mudroom that linked the garage and the kitchen and I heard women talking in the other room. We both threw our things on the window seat in the kitchen that overlooked their backyard: I could see their covered kidney-shaped pool, waterfall, and landscaped yard with blooming golden, crimson and ivory mums speckled around the brick patio. Jessica was surrounded by her *perfect* little world that matched her *perfect* little life.

“Jessica, is that you?” Mrs. Shafer called out from the front living room.

“Yeah, it’s us,” Jessica replied as she opened the refrigerator, pulled out two coconut yogurts and handed me one as I sat down at the breakfast bar. She opened the drawer next to the sink, grabbed two spoons, and pushed my spoon across the counter.

Mrs. Shafer rushed into the kitchen with a surprised look on her face. “I thought you two had soccer practice?”

Jessica shrugged her shoulders and replied: “It was canceled.” She peeled open her yogurt and stabbed it with her spoon. “What’re you having, another party?”

Mrs. Shafer glanced at me for a second, and then looked over at her daughter. “Yes, sort of... I have some friends here from yoga. Would you two mind going upstairs for about an hour or so until we’re finished?” she asked with uneasiness. “It will give you a chance to start your homework.”

“No problem, Mrs. Shafer,” I replied as I placed a spoon full of the sweet, creamy coconut yogurt into my mouth. I stood up from the stool. “Come on, Jess, let’s go upstairs.”

“Give me a minute, I’m still hungry,” Jessica said as she scraped the spoon around the small plastic container, threw it in the sink, and tossed the yogurt container into the garbage below the sink.

“Darlene!” an unfamiliar woman’s voice called out.

“Just a minute...I’ll be right there,” Mrs. Shafer replied with a tinge of anxiousness in her voice.

I wandered over to the sink, set my spoon next to Jessica's and an empty glass, and then threw my empty container into the garbage. I looked over at Mrs. Shafer. She was acting odd. I was curious as to why she was in such a hurry to get rid of us.

Jessica opened the large, stainless steel fridge again. She pulled out the plate of left over pizza we had ordered from Batavia's Original Pizzeria—where I hoped to be hired—the night before. I grabbed a bottle of water and closed the fridge.

Jessica turned to me. "Do you want a piece?"

"Nah, I'm good," I replied as she set the platter on the island with a cream-colored marble top that I always admired. I loved the beige and black stone with the touches of shiny copper. Jessica threw a large piece of pizza onto a plate and placed it into the microwave. She hit thirty seconds. The aroma of pizza filled the kitchen.

I wandered over to the window seat, sat down, and opened my sketch pad as I waited for her to finish her pizza. The colors cream, beige, black and copper would be chic color story for a clothing line. I uncapped my water, took a sip, and set it down on the window sill. I pulled my pencil out of the front pocket of my book bag and began to sketch a clean-lined silhouette.

I heard footsteps and looked up. A woman with medium length reddish-burgundy hair was standing in the entrance of the kitchen, next to the round pillar. "Dar," she said insistently. Her wide, sparking blue eyes were on me. Her eyes had mystic quality about them. She was wearing a long gauze skirt with a solid emerald green tank top that made her reddish-burgundy hair look even brighter red. Her right

arm was tattooed with long green vines and vibrant red roses. She *did not* fit the image of Darlene Shafer's socialite friends, who dressed to the nines and carried Louis Vuitton handbags.

"Girls, this is Emberly Hayes," Mrs. Shafer said, nervously.

Jessica nodded and waved with her hand as she chewed on a mouthful of pizza.

"Hi, I'm Linna. It's nice to meet you." I smiled.

"And that's my daughter, Jessica," Mrs. Shafer added and gestured toward Jessica.

Emberly nodded. "It's nice to meet both of you." She glanced over at Jessica and then back at me as I picked up my bottle of water.

"They're on their way upstairs to start their homework, so we can finish up in the other room," Mrs. Shafer said and gestured with her hand toward the kitchen stairway.

"Who in this house is connected to a Kathleen?" Emberly asked with determination and vigor that filled the room. "She has brown, wavy hair. It's a little past shoulder length." She motioned with her thumb behind her. "It's not anyone in *that* room. So it's *got* to be someone in here." She looked to her left—into the thin air—and gave a slight nod. "She's telling me yes, in here."

A shock ran through my body. I gasped as I swallowed my water. I began to choke and cough. I glanced over at a stunned Mrs. Shafer. Then I looked back over at Emberly. My eyes were wide.

“My mother’s name was Kathleen,” I replied softly.

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