



RETROGRADE

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Retrograde

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Synopsis

Wealthy and beautiful Angela thinks no one will ever know about her dark, terrible past. Being thrown out by her stepdad and having no place to go, she is forced to do things for survival. After developing an application that made her rich, she became a popular figure; of course, everyone wants a piece of the pie, even the person who hates you the most. Angela never for a moment thought someone would threaten to expose her. Now she's being given the alternative.

You will do as I say or pay the price. Her past has reared its ugly head. Angela has to find the blackmailer and deal with him by whatever means. "Run, Angela," Jessica screamed as Angela sprinted through the woods with wind bustling through the branches of the trees, making the leaves howl in their symphony.

Running along the gravel path in the woods makes her realize how intricate the clash between weather and nature can be. Two natural forces are both in harmony and constantly fighting. The rain would come down any second; its distinct smell filled the air. Plush, intertwining clouds pushed their grey front toward where I stood.

The trees continued protesting against the wind as it blew their seeds. Maple seeds twirled down, only to get stuck on my clothes and in the creek.

Angela stopped by the edge of the river; she placed a hand on her chest, her heart wouldn't stop raging against her rib cage, and she fought to keep silent a small whimper. Her heart was so loud she feared it would give her away; it was so loud in her ears; she thought the creature that used to be someone she once trusted would hear it and tear it from her.

"Who is there?" She screamed, looking back and hearing footsteps getting closer. Until she stopped and looked back, there stood a man with a mask, holding a knife; who was this person? Being diagnosed with anterograde amnesia made her unable to create new memories; her past kept haunting her. Is it the same person who is always killing her in her dreams?

Chapter 1

(Truth or Dare) Pale and trembling in shock. Angela slams down the receiver, not waiting for the unknown blackmailer to finish. Her knuckles were white from gripping the phone. "OH God!" She whispers. Please let this not be real.

Let me wake up and find it was just an awful dream. It cannot be happening. Not now, after finally burying the dark past. Who was this caller? How did he know her name?

How does he know so much about her and her past? Even her phone number? Dazed and in a trance, Angela walks to her kitchen with unsteady legs. She takes a glass to fill it with water; her throat feels dehydrated.

Blindly she looks out her kitchen window, her mind returning to the caller's words; I know what you did with Cassie. I know you hide the body. How does he know so much?

Does she ask herself? How does he know Cassie?

Angela took a cup of cold water; Angela's eyes took in the beauty of the sunset.

The pool where she had a lovely relaxing swim seems to reflect a golden color; the evening sky does not have wind, all so beautifully quiet and peaceful.

Angela looks up at the sky, praying. Please, God, help me. Slowly she turns back and goes to the lounge; her eyes glazed with pain; she looks at the portrait of her beautiful mother.

I miss you, Mom, she whispers.

I wish you were here to help me through this. The pain was hard to deal with after losing her beautiful, vibrant, loving mother less than a year ago.

How could she turn to her dad? Multi-millionaire businessman, always in the press, moved in very influential circles only his closest friends knew he hired these chalets for whoever wanted a break away from marital life to have a fling away from prying eyes.

Slowly with leaden legs, Angela walks to the full-length mirror and stares at her reflection; her typically beautiful and bright sea-green eyes stare back at her hauntingly.

People always told her she had inherited her mother's beauty, the flawless olive skin and waist-length hair as sleek and shiny as a seal.

Women looked at her with envy. Many stared in lust at her perfect shapely body. But now, she saw nothing of it, only the mocking voice of her blackmailer banging in her head.

So many years have passed since that fateful day.

So young and carefree, she and Rogan were so much in love that Angela thought nothing could come between them. Rogan was then twenty-one back then, and Angela was eighteen. Angela met Rogan on campus; he was so handsome.

Angela stares blindly out the bus window as it goes through the karoo. Her beautiful green eyes blurred with tears. She does not notice the golden cloak of sunrise in all its magnificent beauty shining on the long green, golden meadows as the bus passes, nor does she see the horses and cows grazing in tranquility on this beautiful morning.

Angela, an eighteen-year-old, sees nothing; her heart feels like it shattered into a million pieces; she's been on the bus for approximately eight hours, and she's filled with fear of the unknown future as her home. Friends and all she loved seem now so very far away.

Her father's harsh words were unforgettable.

Closing her eyes, she tries to block out that horrible memory of just three days ago; Angela lies in her bedroom with earphones listening to music without a care.

Her brother Jack had opened her door and told her dad was calling, "Angela, are you deaf?" Knowing her father was easily upset, she went downstairs and saw her Mom and dad looking at her solemnly. Thinking it was because she had not yet cleaned the lunch table, she laughingly said, "I'm sorry, mom, I prepared the table," but her mother remained silent with eyes downcast. Angela was nervous and wondered what she could have done to upset her beloved parents.

Angela's father was a tall, stern man with greying hair. He loved his family dearly but was very strict with her and her brother Jack. Angela stood looking at her dad. His grey eyes seemed stormy as he asked her.

"Madam, what are your plans? You've been lazing around hanging out with that good-for-nothing Keegan. Have you decided which campus you are going to attend?"

Angela stood frozen. She had just gotten back.

She did not even think of campus or leaving her beloved home. Why was her father behaving this way toward her?

Looking at her Mom for an answer, her mother remained silent.

Angela looked at dad with shock and stammered, "but dad, I don't want to go to campus, I don't want to leave my home, I don't want to leave you, mom and Jack, please, dad," Angela pleaded, tears running freely down her cheeks. Angela went to her mother, sitting quietly in the chair.

She knelt and took one of her mother's cold hands in hers, pleading, "Mom, please don't send me away to campus, please, I beg of you and dad, this home is all I've ever known, please, please. I beg of you."

Then she heard her father's voice, like a death sentence, say, "well, madam, you have three days to decide whether it's either campus where you will be for a few years or your mother, and I will send you to a convent."

"Dad, that's not fair, three days?" said Angela.

"Well, you have to make it enough time, three days is enough time for you to decide, and we do with this conversation." said her dad, Mr. Fox, turned around and looked over at his wife Jenny, Angela's Mom.

She stood in silence. The last time she interfered in an argument, he threatened to leave her, and she needed his financial support.

Angela looked over at her Mom, who had set the table, and felt a sudden loss of appetite.

Jenny could see her stubborn husband's hostile glare, face contorted with rage, bared teeth, curled lip, and clenched jaw. She could see he was angry; his unbrushed curly hair looked messy.

Angela was trying her best not to cry any more than she did; her father was a heartless, selfish man who always wanted his way; Angela could not understand why her mother had put up with much of his drama; he did not deserve her.

After eating silently, Angela went upstairs to her room and closed the door. She thought of running away, but where would she go? Angela put on her headset and listened to music until she fell off to sleep, waking up to the sound of thunder; she glanced over at the clock; it was only 11 pm, and the house was quiet; Angela walked over to the bathroom when she heard sounds coming from her mother's room. It sounded as if her mother and father were still up; as she padded over and heard a slam, she heard her mother crying, "shut up" said her dad, "you need to stand by me when I make a decision; I should have left the day you cheated on me with Mike."

"I will walk out, and you can take care of your daughter," Mr. Fox, "no, please, I am nothing without you." her Mom pleaded; "Mike was the biggest mistake. It was one night I thought she was yours." "That's why I am sending that girl away. Every time I look at her, I see Mike's face," said Mr. Fox.

Were they talking of her? Is this asshole John not her dad? "Please stop, John," Jenny pleaded; Angela went to the kitchen, took a knife, and gripped it tightly as her knuckles turned white. Angela hated this man her Mom was with; maybe he disliked her because she reminded him of her dad.

Angela walked over to the room where her parents were; she was about to push open the door when her brother saw her. "What are you doing?" He whispers.

She gave him a signal to come closer, "place your ear against the door," she whispered. "Is that Mom and dad fighting again?"

Angela nodded her head, and the room light went on, "let's go back to the room," whispered Jack.

They walked back to Jack's room, "What are you doing with that knife?" Said, Jack

Angela looked through the window; all she felt was anger and hatred, all these years, she had let this bully she had called her dad control her, and now she had found out he was not her dad.

Maybe it is a good thing they aren't blood-related; she is much better off away from this place; Jack saw tears rolling down his sister's cheek; this was the first time he had seen his sister cry; he leaned in to hug her "What are you doing?" She snapped, realizing he did not know she was his stepsister."

"I was about to hug you; why are you being so weird?"

"Sorry, I am fine."

Angela stood up and walked back to her room. It had started to rain; something about the rain had made her feel calm even though the temperature had dropped.

"I do not need three days to decide; I already know where I am going."

Angel had fallen asleep, waking up to a loud noise; she had looked out the window. The sky was tar-black, and the large clouds moved towards the house.

She heard a tapping on the window, and then it became a pitter-patter. People ran for cover outside. Umbrellas opened as the clouds spat out their beads of water. Puddles began plinking as the rainfall became heavier. The roofs of the cars danced with spray, and she could hear the murmuring of the rain through the window.

It sounded like angry bees buzzing; it began as a whispering. The day had been beautiful, and the sky was like a dome of plasma blue. The clouds had looked like airy anvils drifting under the gleaming disc of the sun.

The moon seemed to turn the leaves into a flaming patchwork of colors: scorching yellows, lava reds, and burnished browns. It added an alien glamour to a perfect scene.

She had looked up at the clock; it was three in the morning, and everyone was asleep. Angela covered her head and put on her headset, turning it loud to her favorite song; she had drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 2

When she was done, she headed downstairs; her mother had set the table for breakfast.

Angela somehow had a feeling of confidence and an urge to get out of the house. Not only had her mother lied to her about her biological dad, but she had made her live with this monster all her life.

Angela felt sick in her stomach looking at this coward of a man.

"Good Morning, Mom and Dad."

Her mother looked up, surprised at her sudden tone of happiness.

"Good Morning, honey," said her Mom, "how did you sleep with this storm?"

"Like a baby," she answered, sounding cheerful. "The sun was beaming through her blinds, causing the woman to stir. Usually, waking up was a simple task for Angela; she was a morning person; she groaned when the first beam of sunlight hit her face.

Angela picked up her nightstand alarm clock and looked at the time.

"Ugh, why is it so early?" She placed her clock back on the surface and slowly began to sit up. She put her hand to her head which was throbbing. "Nothing, a little Excedrin, can't handle." Crawling out of her warm bed, she walked to her bathroom, took two pills, and poured tap water into her rinse cup. Once she had taken her medicine, she jumped into a warm shower, washing away any residue.

She caught her dad's eye looking at her; he had a look of annoyance and disgust; nothing new, Angela thought; at least now she knew why; her Amazonian figure sat well on her wafer-thin body. She had a decanter-shaped waist, and her complexion had an impeccable, ochrous hue. Her pencil-thin eyebrows eased down gently to her black, beetle's-leg eyelashes. A sculptor could not have fashioned her seraph's ears and pixie's nose any better.

Her beguiling, oyster-white teeth lit up the room when she broke into a smile. It could jolt you like an electric current when that megawatt smile gave you her full attention.

Filed to perfection, her Venus-red fingernails ran through her nougat-brown hair. Spools of it plunged around her photogenic face and hid a swan's neck, elegant and smooth. I loved her nebulous, Eden-green eyes, which sparkled with the 'Joie de Vivre.

They were like two beryl-green jewels melted onto the snow.

Her calamine-pink lips tasted like rose petals. It surprised others that they were plump and Botox-boosted as she had a timid, shy personality.

She whispered to me in a dulcet voice as sweet as any songbird. Her voguish clothes kept captive an aroma redolent of cinnamon and meadow-fresh mint. It lingered in the room long after she had gone.

"Where is your brother?" Her dad asked in an annoyed tone.

Angela nudged her shoulder, " what does that mean?"

"I don't know, dad."

"He's in bed. Go and wake him up!"

Angela got up from her chair and walked upstairs; I can't wait to get out of this hell hole."

Angela knocked on her brother's door, slowly pushing it open. His bed had been made up, the curtains were open, and the window; Angela had walked over to the window looking out; all she could see were broken trees and bins tilted over.

Where has Jack gone to? He was nowhere to be seen, Angela heard the toilet flush, and she walked over to the bathroom, "Jack, is that you?" There was no response, Jack. "Yes, it's me; who else would it be?"

Jack faced the bathroom mirror; his shoulder-length, silky black hair looked messy.

Jack touched his neck, and the scar on his neck was still visible; he remembered that day as if it was yesterday when he and his brother Keagan were on their way to the shop; it had been raining for hours now. The steady patter of water against his raincoat faded to a dull rush in the back of his mind. The thick wool was almost soaked. He didn't know if it would ever be dry again.

They had tramped their way along the rutted, muddy trail in uncomfortable silence. It was supposed to be a full moon tonight. Not that he could tell since he was only ten years old; the clouds above stopped any light from aiding through the narrow path they walked to the shop. He had a torch in his bag-any good man does-but God knows it wouldn't light in this downpour.

A sharp gust of wind shook the trees above their heads, showering the already miserable frame with a fresh deluge. They had wiped the water from their eyes with a wet sleeve, and out of nowhere, the dark figure was approaching, his eyes widening with madness. He was carrying what looked like a blade, long, sharp, and glistening with damp red blood.

They were afraid, but there was no running; the figure was too close to them, and even though they longed to escape, their bodies felt paralyzed. He couldn't move. He couldn't shriek. He couldn't grasp. Felt hollow and numb, like a skull emptied of live flesh. The shock had wrapped around his body, battling down his throat. "It is their time to die he thought.

Feeling cold, vulnerable, scared, and soaked from the rain, there was no point in resisting. Exhaustion succumbed, and all that went through his mind as if it was just a bad dream that would end; lightning struck, lightening up the dark; Jeremy was a year older than him and tried to protect his brother by standing in front of Jack.

"Empty your pockets said the deep voice." Jeremy emptied his pockets and came across a chain he was holding onto for their mother.

"This chain doesn't belong to me. Please take everything and leave the chain." He pleaded; that's when the dark figure grabbed Jack and placed the knife blade on his throat.

"You do not want to mess with me, kid."

Jeremy handed the chain, even though there was a cut on Jack's throat from the sharp blade that pushed against it. Jack never felt it; Jeremy saw the blood dripping down his throat; Jeremy pulled out a pocket knife. Jack screamed "no" as the man hauled to Jeremy and stabbed him several times; Jack ran up to him to save his brother; when the man was about to stab Jack, two guys with pistols came running up to them. The guy saw the two men; he ran as they fired shots.

The guy had disappeared into the darkness; His brother lay bleeding on the sidewalk in the rain. He was eleven years old and wore a pale blue Sunderland football shirt.

Printed across the back of the shirt was a print of the number 11.

He had been stabbed five minutes ago. The knife had entered the left side of his chest, tearing a wide gap in his flesh. The rain was pouring, and the pavement absorbed all the blood from his wound.

He had felt the excruciating pain as the knife plunged into his chest, then the sudden relief as the jagged blade was pulled from his body. Jeremy had heard the words, "you will be okay" he was losing a lot of blood as he saw two elderly men frantic on the phone; one guy held a cloth on the stab wounds applying pressure.

His body was on the ground, the warmth of life stolen away by death's cold embrace. Synced with the impact to the concrete floor, Jack promptly sprinted to his brother, ignoring the fatigue in his swaying legs set in from the ongoing battle. Jack was desperate to find any flickers of life or hope left in his brother but was met with cold silence broken only by the breeze gently blowing the cold air into his face. Looking up at the two men, the despaired expressions on their faces, he could tell. Jeremy was gone.

He had never felt that vulnerable and alone; at that moment, the cold air never bothered he sat on his knees, helping, endlessly crying. When he heard a siren from far, The ambulance came with aggressive speed, the kind of sheer driving audacity that let everyone know the siren wasn't a polite request to move.

The two men ran to the center of the road; as the ambulance stopped, two paramedics ran over to Jeremy, they had checked for a pulse and tried to resuscitate him, but he was long gone. It had been over half an hour since the incident.

Jack sat in silence in the rain, looking at his brother's motionless body covered in blood.

When the paramedic shook his head, Jack knew his brother was dead. That low-life scum took the chain his brother was holding onto.

He swore he would get revenge. Being at this young age and going through such trauma has affected him, causing sleepless nights and having a replay of the scene in his dreams.

Chapter 3

"So, son, what have you been up to? Have you decided where you will study?"

"Yes, dad, I was considering Harvard."

"Good son, you always knew where you were heading in life."

Angela's dad glanced at her as she rolled her eyes, "So young lady, it is day one. Have you decided where you will be going?"

Angela nods; that's good said her dad; where have you decided to go? She wanted to say away from your sad face, bite her tongue, and give off a fake smile.

"I have decided to go to campus."

"The intelligent choice, young lady," said her dad.

There was silence for a moment when there was a knock on the door, "who could that be here so early." said her dad; go get the door, son.

Jack walked over to the door, "Hello, officer."

"Good day, young lad. Is your name Jack?"

"Yes," said Jack frowning, wondering how the cop knew his name, "would you mind if I ask you a few questions relating to the disappearance of Nicole?"

Mr. Fox overheard the officer and stood up,

"Jack does not answer that." His father exclaimed.

Walking over to the door in his grey suit, the officer raised his eyebrows when seeing Mr. Fox; the cops recognized him well since he had multiple cops suspended for not having sufficient evidence of the accused violating the law; he was visionary and a fast thinker,

When the cop saw Mr. Fox, he knew he had to have his facts together for this visit.

"Good morning, Sir, I am sorry for disturbing you, but the reason," "hurry up," said Mr. Fox; Angela had hated how her dad spoke down to her, "Officer Jerry, why are you on my doorstep at this hour?"

The officer gulped; "well, I do apologize, Sir. Still, I am here because," he pulled out a photo of a young girl aged sixteen or seventeen. She had red hair and ocean blue eyes with pale light skin.

"This girl went missing two days ago, and your son was the last person speaking to her;" just then, another officer came walking from the car.

The second cop immediately recognized Mr. Fox, the best lawyer in town; his interrogation tactics were unlike any other. "So you are telling me that because my son was last seen with this girl, you have the right to question him?"

The one cop looked over to the other, "No, Mr. Fox, but "then what are you doing here?"

"We hope your son can help us by directing us where she might be?"

"Where she might be?"

"So you want my son to do your job?"

Jack walked to the door, "dad, it's fine."

"Go back to the table and finish your breakfast."

"I know how this goes; you guys will keep coming back looking for answers; my son has nothing to say to you, officer Jerry."

"But sir, if your son could help us, we could be saving a life?"

"So you are telling me she was kidnapped or taken, not missing, do have reason to believe this is an abduction due to circumstantial evidence you have come across, but you are not getting anywhere.

"Now you want to pin the blame on someone to close the case; that is why you are here, right officer Jerry?"

If the law were breakable, you would interrogate my son without my consent or acknowledgment, which is why you asked if his parents were here.

"No, sir, do have a good day." said the official, realizing they were not going to be able to speak to Jack.

Angela looked out of the window; it was a beautiful day; the layer covering the atmosphere had an aura of brightness as the light flickered through it and reached the earth's surface, making it scorching.

The sun finding its way from the horizon to the summit of the sky, pierced its lucid sunlight to the people, making their faces plastered with an eerie glow, squinting eyes, and glittered demeanor.

The birds are soaring high with zeal and zest; it could bring courage to even a derelict in the search for betterment in its life.

Angela stood up from the table and helped her mother. Her dad had left, and she had finally had a chance to speak to her Mom, "are you okay, honey?" said her mother; "I am sorry, but maybe;" Angela looked at her mother's face and noticed a blue mark beneath her eye, "he hit you again didn't he"

Her mother is beautiful in all aspects. Her smile shines like the sun at sunrise; she has black hair with shimmering sprays of white, long, and smooth curls like noodle spaghetti. Her eyes are black and round, filled with love even though one eye is blue; when she laughs, you can see a beautiful love on the side of her cheek.

Her Mom is of average height; she has large eyelashes and figured eyebrows. Her lips are thick with a sparkle of pink; her nose is medium and much defined. Her ears are rounded and neither too large nor too small, 'normal.' Her face is generally smooth with a bit of wrinkle on her forehead but beautiful still. She is of a robust constitution but with nice curves.

She looked a lot like Angela, and as for Jack, he looked a lot like his dad; Angela used her index finger to remove Mom's hair from her face, "why do you allow him to do this to you, mom?" "Well, it's not as if food will magically appear on the table; he is a good man. He had troubles in his past that he is still dealing with, but things will improve."

"No, mom, he will keep hitting you for as long as possible because he's a coward." "That's enough, Angela; you shall not speak like that about your dad." "I heard everything, mom, last night about him not being my dad."

"You were not supposed to hear that, honey." said her mother attempting to lean in and hold her, Angela turned a cold shoulder, turning her back to her Mom, "well, I did hear it, mom, and I wish you had told me, than me having to hear it while he kept on hitting you."

Her mother walked over to the kitchen table, looking out the window, "where is your brother Jack?" "He is in his room, mom."

"It should never have happened, and your dad won't ever forgive me for what has happened, Mike was his best friend, and he came around often; your dad was drunk and left the house, I was vulnerable and alone, and Mike

was there and," her Mom paused, "anyway. What made you change your mind about going to campus? Is it something you want to do?"

"I do not have much choice, and it will give me a break from this house, especially with everything that has happened; I had made up my mind last night."

"As much as I will miss you, I want the best for you in life, so this is the right decision."

Angela smiled; "I need clothes and toiletries."

"We can drive into town later and get those things."

Her mother never spoke about what had happened to Jeremy, their dad was a great guy and always outgoing, a family man, but after what happened to Jeremy, he started drinking more often and staying out late.

Jenny knew he was cheating on her with the Secretary with all the lipstick and perfumes on his clothes, she had confronted him, and he denied it.

He went into his lawyer's defense mechanism mode and turned on her saying she had a guilty conscience of Mike, which is why she always accused him.

Jenny stopped loving her husband long ago, and he knew she had, which is why he was frustrated with his life.

Angela went upstairs to her bedroom and walked over to the window when she saw a suspicious-looking vehicle opposite the street. Angela then took her phone and snapped a picture of it; it was an old Cadillac with two gentlemen in formal wear; they looked like they were detectives. They were looking at the house; what would they want with her brother?

Why were they suspecting Jack? Thought Angela, as she remembered the incident with Nicole; her eyes were a fire in water if you can imagine such a thing. They were passionate about ice. So even on first meeting Angela, she'd be a friend for life, never dominating nor submitting, but a companion who walks freely alongside. And that she was and more.

They were close in school, but as they both grew older, they never communicated much until Angela learned that her brother and Nicole were in a relationship, that is when she started to come more around to the house, and they would spend more time together.

Jack and Nicole had broken up months ago, but they remained friends; she was in a relationship with a famous footballer. That is why Angela found it rather strange for the cops to suspect her brother.

Chapter 4

Jack was shaken by this visit and realized that Nicole's disappearance was severe.

He went to their favorite hang-out spot, and they spent a lot of time by the train; one particular hang-out spot was on the roof of the train; although Nicole was no longer his priority, deep down, he still cared about her well-being.

Angela heard the door downstairs opening and shutting close, she looked through the bedroom window where she saw Jack wearing a hoody with a neon dragon on the back, and she noticed the Cadillac had started to follow her brother.

Angela then climbed into her old Mom's old sedan and followed the Cadillac; the guy in the passenger seat was taking pictures; why were they suspecting her brother, 'well, whatever is happening, Angela needs to warn her brother.

Angela took her cell phone and called her brother, he was in her eyesight, and she saw Jack taking the phone from his pocket, looking at it, and putting it back.

"Dammit, Jack."

Angela wanted to accelerate and overtake the detective, but that would look too obvious; she sent him a text.

"the cops are following you."

He never took his phone until she missed the call.

When Angela saw him reading the text, she ended the call; Jack stopped as the Cadillac came to a halt.

Angela stopped a few meters behind them "do not look back, Jack, she whispered under her breath.

Jack then walked to the opposite side of the road and walked into a corner house, that is where the footballer stayed; why would he go to the house Rick was staying in, " what if Rick had something to do with this disappearance of Nicole, he would be implicating him. "What are you doing? I told you, you're being following; don't you think Rick is also a suspect?"

Jack took out his phone, looked at it, and put it back into his pocket, "did you get that, Jim? I told you something happened to that girl, and they are hiding something."

"You know Fred, being a detective all these years, I can tell you, you are wrong on this one, my friend."

He was last seen with her, and my suspicions are on those two; they are hiding something.

"What are you doing here, mate?"

"Have you heard of Nicole?"

"Of course I have. Are you forgetting I am the one who is dating Nicole, mate?"

"No, I have not forgotten, and trust me, I do not have any intentions with your girl; you are forgetting what you did behind my back, my good old friend."

Jack placed his hand on Rick's shoulder, "have you forgotten it's that stupid game of yours that created this mess we are in now? I have detectives following me,

"So I must stay here for about an hour."

Rick became pale; he felt a wild, sudden stab of fear assault him strange pain rose in his throat, anxiety, fear jerked a sharp breath, the color drained from his face spasm of fear crossed his face

Blood pounded in his ears as adrenaline burst into his veins, a feeling of something squeezing his chest making his knees weak as sweat beaded his brow; "the detectives are following you?"

"Yes, you look pale. Is there something I need to know?"

Jack clenched his fist. No, of course not, Rick answered, "well, you can't stay here; you have to go; the detectives might think we know something."

"We do not know anything, so why are you panicking?"

"Me panicking, no, never, I am fine," Rick nervously laughed as he stood up from the sofa and walked Jack over to the door. "It was good seeing you; I will let you know if I hear anything."

Turning, Jack walked out of the door and noticed the car with the detectives. They were pretending to go about their own business. Jack then walked back to the house, where he found Angela seated.

Angela approached her brother. "Why are they following you?" Jack shrugged his shoulders. "Do you have any involvement with the disappearance of Nicole?"

"Excuse me?"

"You heard me, Jack; what were you doing at Rick's house?"

"I just went to pay him a visit."

"Oh please, we all know you can't stand each other."

Please, Angela, get a grip. I don't have the energy to entertain this.

Angela had walked to the lounge, and she somehow had a feeling that her brother was hiding something, and whatever it was he was hiding, she would find out; she had two days before campus.

Angela and Jack were never close; they barely spoke.

Jack had a reputation as a badass guy; most of his peers looked up to him, and he was popular with his convertible car and always wore a leather jacket. Angela, being beautiful and intelligent other women were jealous of her.

Not being the biological daughter of Mr. Fox, an influential lawyer, she spent a lot of time in her room and at the library; she had one close friend Chloe, who was kind-hearted and sweet; others would say too sweet for this cruel world.

Chloe was shy and intelligent; she wore reading glasses, had blonde hair but dyed it red, and had a beautiful smile; she sat at the corner of a train, her petite figure leaning against the window sill, deeply immersed in thoughts.

She had an erect figure even though she was petite. Her arms were gently folded, and her legs were folded crossly.

Her bosom was well mature for her age. Her face showed she was lost in thoughts. Her face was calm, and a slight smile spread across her face.

She had a crush on Jack but barely exchanged two words with him, and she had typed multiple messages to him but then ended up deleting them.

She had heard of Nicole and had seen what had happened that night with Nicole; she vaguely remembered a fire in the woods with students, and Nicole had a blindfold on, they were intoxicated, and they were laughing and pushing her, then stripped her down.

Everyone knew what had happened before she ran into the woods except Angela, who was not invited to that party.

They could all get in trouble; Chloe sat on the train wanting to tell Angela what had happened, but with Jack always being around, 'they' would find out, and she would be called a snitch.

Jack had feelings for Chloe but never told her; dating her would mean his bad-boy reputation could be ruined, as everyone saw her as a shy geek, which is why they invited her, but Jack protected Chloe; he knew their intentions and told them.

Nicole would be an easier target, as his sister would start asking questions, and the student knew Angela wouldn't stop until she had found the answers she was looking for.

No one dared to pick on Angela, knowing her dad is a top lawyer and her brother Jack would hurt anyone who hurts his sister; Jack had once beat up a kid so severely with a baseball bat that he was walking on crutches for months. Nothing happens to Jack because his dad is a powerful man.

As Chloe stood up to climb off the train, three men came walking up to her, standing around her, she nervously looked around, and as she tried to pass them, the guy in front of her pulled out a pocket knife, leaning over.

"Where do you think you are going, pretty one." At this moment, Chloe knew if she didn't do something now, even though there were people on the train, they would end up doing something terrible to her.

"Chloe then reached her right hand into her bag, searching for her pepper spray, then one of the other guys grabbed her hand, squeezing it; careful now, don't do anything stupid.

As the train came to a stop, Tom and a few of his friends boarded the train; Tom was on the football team and was close friends with Jack, Tom, and Chloe; we were in the same science class.

He wears his number eight broad wing's blue and yellow Jacket; he has short blonde hair, is masculine, and is six foot tall with blue eyes. He turned and noticed the three guys standing around Chloe and noticed she looked afraid.

Tom had nudged Jimmy, and when Chloe looked up, the three guys followed her eyes. Tom, without hesitation, walked up to the guys. Chloe, why are you standing here? Stand over there with us. Jimmy and the other two guys followed Tom; Tom had noticed the guy holding a pocket knife.

"Boy, do you want to get yourself killed today?" Jimmy noticed a gun on the waist of one of the thugs; Jimmy placed his hand on Tom's shoulder to make him aware these guys were carrying more than just a pocket knife.

Instead, Tom ignored Jimmy, grabbing the guy's hand. "No, Tom" Chloe had noticed the gun.

Chapter 5

"It's fine, Chloe; these assholes think they will get away with hurting you, but that is not going to happen."

A friend of Joey's noticed something the other guys had not known, the guy with the gun had a dollar sign tattooed on his neck.

Tom, "let it go;" Jimmy had known that Joey came from a rural area with gangsters.

Joey's upbringing was not easy, having a drug addict of a father.

The tattoo was more than just an ordinary tattoo; it was a rank, "these guys have been in and out of prison, and the dollar sign was a ranking of twenty-six.

The number twenty-six was high ranking amongst other prisoners, indicating they do not fear returning to prison.

The guy with the tattoo, who was six feet grabbed Jimmy and pushed him to the window, then removed his gun.

The train stopped by the next station, and people ran out as the train reached a standstill.

"Hey, man, let him go." Said Joey; the other two men, surprisingly, also had guns; Joey had noticed the tattoo of the other two guys; one was a rapist and the other a killer.

The two men pointed their guns at Jimmy's friends; "empty your pockets," said the killer, "come on, man, it does not have to be this way," said one of Joey's friends. Without hesitation, the guy on the left shot their friend in the leg, "does it look like we are joking right now? Hand over your stuff."

Chloe had never seen someone get shot at close range before; as she screamed, the rapist gripped his hands around her throat and started to choke her; she bit into his wrist to break free; as he called, he hit her unconscious with the elbow.

At that moment, five armed cops ran to the train door, aiming their weapons at the three guys. The swat team came afterward, emptying the station. "Drop your weapons and let the kids go," commanded the cop as the man then laughed out loud and pointed the gun at the cops holding Jimmy as a shield, "if you want to take me, you would have to kill me," the swat team then pushed in front of the cops, standing in a steady pose, as they had their lasers on their guns aimed at the man's head.

Joey's friend was lying on the ground holding his leg, as he had lost a lot of blood. He became pale; the swat immediately noticed his injury, and they insisted they lower their weapons; it had become evident the swat had taken over.

There was no getting out of this; the other two men raised their guns, aiming at the swat, "we have a clear shot; take him out." As the swat opened fire on the one guy in the chest, he fell; if Jimmy had known this would be the outcome, he would have found an alternative method to dealing with this.

No people were dying. "Jimmy had tried to break free, as the man grabbed him around his neck, choking him and holding him in front of the swat and police as a shield, "we are leaving here, and you will get us a chopper and ten million in the next hour."

Agent Voss is taking over, and he arrives at the train station; he has over two decades of experience negotiating with criminal minds and immediately recognizes the tattoo on their bodies.

The number twenty-eight was the highest ranking, and the twenty-seven marked the number for a killer who shot Agent Voss. Thankfully he was wearing a bulletproof vest when the number gang shot at him.

He insisted that in this time frame, the amount of money they requested couldn't be made; you would have to give us more time.

"You have two hours," said the twenty-eight.

"Please be reasonable; we need at least twenty-four hours; the banks won't have the kind of cash."

"Well, that is not our problem;" Chloe slowly started to gain consciousness as the officer told her to stay down.

The negotiator maintained eye contact with the twenty-eight; okay, we will have it in two hours; do not do anything stupid. "I can't promise, don't be too long;" Jimmy hit the guy on his side using his elbow, and the guy opened fire and shot Jimmy in the back. The swat raced over and nailed both the men to the ground.

Rushing to Jimmy's aid, he was dead; there was no pulse as Chloe crawled over to Jimmy; the cops pushed her away as the paramedics checked for signs of life and shook their heads, his dead.

Chloe sat on the train floor in tears; everything had happened so suddenly, yet every second of what had happened felt so long.

Chloe was shaking; as she looked around, there were cops everywhere; Joey was in shock as they were removed from the crime scene.

They saw Jimmy's body being put in a body bag when just a few moments ago, they were talking and joking.

Joey sat in the ambulance as the paramedics shined a small light on his eyes; he then realized he had to tell Jimmy's family.

Joey was dating Jimmy's sister Claudia; Joey took his phone from his pocket and scrolled down to her name.

Hesitantly he clicked on her name, and after a few seconds, he pressed the call button.

"Hey baby, I thought you guys were at the game, is everything okay?"

The words couldn't escape his mouth as he opened; words couldn't come out; instead, tears rolled down his cheek.

"You are scaring me, is everything okay, and why do I hear sirens around you?"

"It's your brother," he gulped.

"What about Jimmy? Is he okay?"

"He was shot."

Mom and Joey heard Claudia yelling on the other end of the phone.

"Yes, honey?"

"Jimmy was shot."

"Honey, what are you saying."

"He was shot, mommy Claudia cried hysterically."

Pass me the phone, honey, "Joey, is this you?"

"Yes, mam."

"What sick game is this of yours?"

"It's not a game, mam."

The mother heard sirens around; "where are you guys now?" She was in disbelief, "Is my son at the hospital? What hospital is he in? Tell him I am on my way."

Joey shook his head as he couldn't find the courage to tell her that her son was dead; Negotiator Voss then looked at him and walked up to him; he saw Claudia on the phone. Claudia, he said curiously, "is that family of agent Voss?" then paused, "is that family of Jimmy."

Jimmy nodded his head; agent Voss took the phone, "Hello, who is this?" The lady on the other end said, "Hello, Mam, this is agent Voss. Can I please come and see you?"

"Why is my son in trouble?"

Jimmy's mother was a church-going community leader.

Jimmy's father entered the room; Jimmy's dad was an average construction worker and family man.

"Honey, why are you and Claudia crying?" He then reached for the phone; as his wife was speechless and handed him the phone, he looked at the name with a frown, Joey? "What is happening?"

"It is not Joey, Sir; I am agent Voss; I am afraid I have some unfortunate news relating to your son. May I come and see you?" Jimmy's dad gulped as he breathed in more profoundly, "is my son okay?"

"Sir, I am afraid not. Would you and your wife mind coming down to the station?"

"Yes, of course, we are on our way;" Claudia was close to her brother, hearing her brother was shot and he could be dead in the tone Joey said; tears ran down her cheeks as she tried to control her emotion.

"Come, honey, we have to go." Jimmy's mother felt something was not okay. She was dreading the worst; as she sat in the window up at the sky, she was suddenly calm and looked over at her husband; "I am sure he's just in trouble like every other teenager these days; he will be okay, right?"

Her husband looked at her and had not answered; he had known it had to be serious, Jimmy was not a kid to get in trouble, and he had a bright future ahead of him.

Let's go, honey. Claudia, who was in her blue jeans and black leather Jacket with her red hair loosely hung down her shoulders, looked over at her dad, "I am also coming."

"No, honey, you should stay here in case he gets home, and there is no one to lock open."

Her dad knew what to expect at the station and couldn't bear to let his daughter hear the news they were about to receive; it had started getting dark as Jimmy and his parents left the house. Claudia kept on buzzing Joey's phone; everything still felt unreal.

The friend shot in the leg was unconscious and rushed to intensive care.

This has been the worst day of Chloe's life. It's a day that left a scar on everyone's heart.

Chapter 6

Angela stood up and got ready for the day ahead. Today she was leaving the house; little did everyone know she had money saved up enough money to start a new life.

The money she saved she had saved up was her online sales of lingerie; Angela had been doing this since she was eleven and had a mind of an entrepreneur.

Jack was Loafing around the house all day; he is due to start college next month.

The disappearance of Nicole had everyone on eggshells; there were all sorts of rumors and speculations.

The detective had a suspicion that Jack had something to do with it. As for his dad, he had slowly started to believe his son was hiding something, but like any other parent, he would protect his family.

It had been three days; as Angela glanced out of her window, She saw the detectives opposite the road, "Jack, she shouted from her room; those detectives are still out there. Jack walked over to the window; he had seen the car parked there.

"Are you sure you had nothing to do with her disappearance?"

Jack rolled his eyes, "are you seriously having this same conversation as we had last week?"

"I had nothing to do with her disappearance," a detective had climbed out of the car; he was wearing a white shirt and black tie, with black pants and glasses to hide his eyes.

The detective looked up at the window Angela and Jack were standing at; he looked as if he was in his mid-thirties; they were back; this time, their dad was not around, only the mother, hearing the doorbell.

Angela's mother walked over to her door, "hello, detective; I see you are back; my husband had told you he doesn't want you here."

"Good day, Mam; I promise not to take too much of his time. We only need to run over a few questions."

Their mother looked down, avoiding eye contact when the detective noticed the blue mark beneath her eye.

"Mam? Are you okay?" The detective questioned; Angela's Mom remembered the recent incident and brushed her fingers through her hair to cover up the bruise beneath her eye.

"Yes, I am fine," she smiled nervously, then turned around, looking around, "he's not here" "Mam, he never left the house all day."

We know he is here; Beautiful Angela then walked over to the door, confidently wearing her white lace dress, her hair was tied in a bun, and she was wearing a waistcoat leather Jacket.

As she stared at the detectives, Angela appeared flawless and beautiful in her eyes.

Angela confidently looked at the detective and glanced at her mother.

She could tell her mother looked scared as she placed her hand on her mother's shoulder.

Angela's mother placed her hand over Angela's hand, "I believe my mom has made it clear my dad won't be happy?"

The detective nervously broke eye contact, fidgeting with his pen; "sorry," words barely escaped his mouth.

Something about Angela made him nervous; the detective gulped, opened his mouth to reply, then said, blushing, "have a good day, mam."

He walked at a fast pace back to the car.

Angela closed the door and smiled at her mother. Jack slipped down the stairs.

His mother then walked up to him, grabbing him by the chest; "what have you done with that girl? I demand to know what you have done to her."

Jack frowned; "Mom, chill, please. I've done nothing to her;" Angela then walked up to her brother, "if you have done nothing, why are they convinced you had something to do with Nicole's disappearance? You know they will speak to you if you are suspicious of a crime; they could detain you. So you better tell us what happened to Nicole so we can help you."

Jack mumbled something; "excuse me?"

Jack walked to the kitchen. "It was a silly game; we were in the woods that Saturday. The guys decided to make her drunk and blindfold her;" Angela's mother became pale, "you did what?"

"I did nothing, Mom. Did you not just hear what I said?"

"They blindfolded her, and we went to the van; they guys decided to all hide in the truck, and we drove off till by the lake and left a speaker with a USB sounds of wild animals."

"Why would you do something like that? Whose idea was this?" Angela snapped, and Jack continued as the two women stood with their arms folded, "we went back, and she was not there."

By Jack twitching his eye, Angela could tell that he was leaving out a detail.

"Jack, I know you too well, you are not that stupid, and that won't be a reason for the cops to suspect unless you leave out details."

Angela's mother glanced over at Angela; her daughter would make a good lawyer someday.

Jack looked down to the ground; "Rick, after she was drunk, he," Jack swallowed, "he what, Jack?"

"He tied her to the tree; it was a joke, though," "A joke? Being tied to a tree? If it was Rick, why are the detectives suspecting you?"

Jack took a deep breath, "and he touched her inappropriately," "he what, who touched her?" said Angela's mother, pale as if she had seen a ghost.

Angela walked over to Jack.

"What did you do?"

Jack took a deep breath, "So you knew they were dating Rick and Nicole?" "They broke up that night. He tied her and raped her; I found out afterward that Nicole was so drunk, though we both had raped her and threatened to report us, so Rick panicked, and before I could stop him, he lost it and hit her with a brick."

Angela's mother had now stepped back; "what have you done with that poor little girl?" Her mother had started shaking and crying, "so why are the detectives stuck on you? Why do they keep coming back here? "Did you touch her, yes or no?"

"Who do you think I am? No, I did not?"

"Where is Nicole now?"

"She ran off without her clothes into the woods." "What about the others who were at the party?"

Jack now looked down, realizing his sister had him in a corner, and panicked, "there was no party happy?"

"What are you saying, Jack?"

"That night Rick and I were driving, we at first never noticed it was Nicole when driving past her; I looked up and saw it was Nicole.

We reversed, and Rick being intoxicated, flipped over her; we realized what had happened and checked if she was alive, but she was not.

I wanted to go to the police, but Rick said he would take me down with him because while reversing, I pushed his foot down on the accelerator, thinking he would swerve and break. Still, we had not realized she was this close, and we had bumped into her."

Jack now leaned his head over, holding his head.

"It was an accident, Mom; we took her body and dumped it in the river; when further down the stream, she gained consciousness, we saw her last fighting against the current of the water. I tried going after her, but it was too late. She was out of eyesight and nowhere to be seen.

We had spent hours looking for her, but no sign of her."

Jack walked over to the window. "I have to tell them what happened, mom."

"No, you can't; if you do, you won't see the light of day again.

We will have to tell your dad. But how could you be so stupid? Did anyone see you?"

"I am not sure, but there was a particular movement at the opposite house, but we assumed it was the wind; those people usually work."

"You know you have done many stupid things in your life, but this is the dumbest thing you have done," said Angela

"You have to stay in the house and not talk to anyone; I will go out and see if I can see anything at the river."

"I will have to tell your dad this, so we can be prepared for what is to come."

Jack didn't seem much bothered, "why are you so calm, Jack?"

Jack looked up "well because dad would preach, cover up my trials and end up putting Rick behind bars, and I don't care what happens to me. Because this family is messed up, you are being sent away. Dad is beating Mom. So what is left of this family?" Jack snapped; his mother looked up at him with tears, realizing how broken her family was.

"It will be all; okay; we will get through this without anyone being locked up." Angela walked over to the kitchen, looking over at the detective's car, "if I leave the house, they are going to follow me."

"You could always sneak out in the back, and they won't see you; I will come with you." "before anyone does anything, we need to call your dad and tell him what happened."

Angela shook her head; "dad would make things worse and make sure the blame was on Rick alone;" Angela knew Rick was hardworking and did not have a father; his two little siblings depended on him and their mother.

Angela and Rick were close friends as kids, but as they matured, they spoke less to each other.

Rick has attempted to reach out to Angela. Angela had stopped talking to him since he tried kissing her without her consent.

Chapter 7

"What are you telling me? How did I raise an idiot like you? I had known you had something to do with the disappearance of Nicole. Who's idea was it to get rid of the body?"

Mr. Fox rolled up his sleeves as Jack stood by the kitchen sink. "Do you realize everything I worked so hard for would be all for nothing? When they convict you, you won't see the light of day again."

Mr. Fox ran his hand over his beard, thinking as he paced up and down, "So you were not driving?"

Jack shook his head; "Rick was driving;" Jack nodded, "you still never told me whose idea it was to dispose of the body." Jack looked down, "Mine, dad."

Mr. Fox then walked calmly behind Jack, suddenly placed his arm over his neck, and started to choke. "dammit, you are a bigger idiot than I thought you were."

Mrs. Fox placed her hand over his shoulder.

"Let go of Jack" Angela stood in shock, watching her dad's outburst, not daring to speak up, knowing her father might run up to her and start fighting with her.

He had let go of Jack; "you know what, I know what to do to get these suckers off our property; we will put this on Rick."

"No, Dad, you can't," said Angela

Mr. Fox turned to her, "you know the apple does not fall far from the tree; you would rather see your brother locked up and cover for that low-life useless waste of oxygen? If that's the case, young lady, you leave my house and never come back." Mr. Fox pointed to the door.

"There is the door if you protect that low-life scum."

"Calm down, dad." Said Jack as he was rubbing his neck, it's.

"Okay, I will take the fall and face the consequences."

"You won't do such a thing. You think I will let you throw away your life because your sister intoxicates your mind?"

"In the morning, we will go to the police station, and you will make a statement saying that this was Rick's idea; you climbed into the pickup, and he drove into Nicole; he left you there and said he would take her to the hospital."

"I can't do that, dad. It's a lie."

"What's the point of two sitting for a crime you had not committed, son."

"But dad"

"No, but! Your Mom will confirm you got home by foot that afternoon, and you young lady, you are leaving today, and not a word to be spoken about what happened."

Angela smiled. "Yes, dad, just as you wish," she said in a sarcastic voice as she walked up the stairs; her dad looked at her from behind; "that thing is toxic; I can't wait to get that girl out of my house."

Angela came to her room and looked around; there was nothing but old portraits of her Mom and her on the beach, her Mom was happy in that portrait, and a little brown box she had gotten from her granny.

She opened the box, remembering she had received it before her granny's passing, but she never came out to open it. Angela now took the box and placed it on her lap as she sat crossed legs on the bed.

The box had a brown envelope; she had unsealed the envelope; Angela had a loving grandma from her Mom's side.

Her granny was fond of her; they would build sand castles together and spend a lot of time playing; Angela loved her granny, and she would follow grandma Betty, as the kitchen always lingered of that delightful smell.

The smell of freshly baked bread out of an oven was a smell she remembers waking up too often.

On the third of July 1964, she was diagnosed with cancer. Sadly it was too late to do anything since she had stage four cancer.

Angela's memory was sitting by grandma Betty's bedside and holding her fragile pale hand where the veins were transparent as a golden fish in a clear pound.

Her grandma had always told her, "I have a surprise waiting for you when you grow older, and this surprise will be life-changing."

Witnessing her grandma's struggles, she was always happy to be around her; Angela felt safe and comfortable in her presence.

When her grandma mentioned that surprise, she thought it would become old photos that would be sentimental; being young, all that made her happy was animals and sweets; never would she have guessed what was to come.

Angela was looking at the brown envelope when a knock on the door, "honey, it's me." As she pushed open the door, her Mom said, "are you okay?"

Angela smiled and nodded, "I am sorry about your dad and how he spoke to you."

"It is okay, Mom; you should not be the one apologizing. He should be apologizing."

"You know I will miss having you here; this house won't be the same without you."

Angela let out a faint smile, not saying anything.

"Are you ready for this new beginning?"

Angela nods and lets out a gentle smile, "will you be okay, mom?"

"Yes, honey." said her mother holding a brave face.

"Please don't say anything about your brother. If this ever comes out, his future will be destroyed?"

"It's always been about him, Mom; no one ever worried about how I feel. I am glad I am leaving."

Mrs. Fox's eyes caught the brown box.

"Is that from your grandma Betty?"

Angela nodded, "yes, it is," as her mother picked up the photo of grandma Betty holding Angela in her arm at the beach.

"I remember this day, it was scorching out, and the sky was clear; we put your tiny little feet in the water as you came running back as you were about to fall," her mother let out a smile. "Your grandma caught you right in her arms."

"As she always did catch me, mom," Angela smiled as Mrs. Fox set down the photo. "Do you need help packing?." Angela took the brown envelope and put it in her bag. She will later look at what is inside.

"Yes, please do, mom; the sooner I get away from this man, the better it is;" Mrs. Fox wanted the best for her daughter like any parent does.

The heat waves rose off the pavement like flames above a roof.

As the day wore on, the heat climbed higher. Sandals were the same as going barefoot, as those who had walked on the street could feel the heat of the sand blistering the soles of my feet with every torturous step.

The detectives that sat in the car all day could no longer stay in the same spot if they didn't find shelter soon; their brains would fry like an egg on the pavement from the blinding heat.

Rivulets of sweat poured off the detective's shirt, soaked and clinging to their formal wear. Without mentioning the temperature or the oppressive heat, they communicated in the car that he was sweating like a turkey the day before Thanksgiving.

Angela and her Mom had a cooler in the house, so the heat was not as intense as it was outside.

"I have a gift for you." said her Mom, as she handed her a box with a dress, "this is beautiful;" Angela had changed into the dress her Mom had given her and bent half at the waist, arms stretched in front of her with hands coming together to form a toppled-over steeple.

Her Mom gathered up the dress and helped her wriggle into it.

Angela straightened up, smoothed the frock neatly into place, and performed a clumsy pirouette followed by a playful curtsy. "So, how do I look?"

"It's very unusual." Said her Mom and rubbed her chin. "It brings back memories of my younger days," said her Mom, looking over to the mirror at the side of Angela's bed. Her mother remembered once feeling young and naively in love.

A whole new world awaits her daughter when she leaves this house, Mrs. Fox had so wished Angela not to go so soon, but she no longer has a say; Mr. Fox has made up his mind, and there is no changing his mind.

Even if she could change her husband's mind, she wouldn't because it's in Angela's best interest to be away from this house as far as she can.

Angela looked at her mother and let out a smile.

"Someday I will come back for you, and I will take care of you, mom; I do not support what dad is going to do with Rick, but in all honesty, Nicole's body had not been discovered yet, so they should wait before making any approach to this situation."

"You have always been smart, and I know you will be successful someday, but we need to do everything we can to protect your brother, which is why you do not tell anyone about what happened."

Angela looked away, then back up at her Mom, and she smiled. "Okay, mom."

Chapter 8

The dawn chorus is the herald of spring. It starts with a lonely, serenading minstrel, usually a blackbird. She is clear and harmonious, as fresh and sweet as the gardens she will later raid. In the neighboring tree, her saucy fanfare dares others to match their salsa song of the canopy.

The competition rouses them from their slumber, opening their beaks to the heavens. The avian aria slowly becomes a fugue, bouncing through bough and bower. The lilting majesty of their song cascades into open spaces, through glassy windows, and onto the smiling lips of the dreamers within. Spring is here.

What are the triggers for the comforting cannon of tree music? Is the lace of morning fog slowly receding as the months roll by? Is it the gently unfurling flowers, velour soft and receptive to warmth? Is it the baked oven smell of grass as the sun purges it of water? It is this and more. It is the world moving from iron grey to fairyland—green. It is the spools of lambs' wool hanging from straggly bushes, a wedding card to the nesters.

It is the mist of smells, the frill of flowers, and the scent of magic in the air.

Shoals of honeysuckle, primroses, and bluebells sway and weave a rich mosaic in the meadows.

Harp strings of golden light touch steaming shadows and soften the frozen earth for the wildflowers.

Turtle-slow lawnmowers pedicure the grass while leaving their clippings behind for the fussy nesters. Gnarled hands with snipping shears scalp the hedges.

The world is young, and so was Angela, lush and bountiful again. It is a spirit-enriching pastoral scene. Under the wraith-silver moon, the alchemy of balsamic scents swirls around the meadow.

Angela breathes in deeply, the calm morning breeze awakening her senses to the beauty of nature around her. The sweet fragrance of flowers in full bloom fills the air. She looks up as a flock of beautiful colorful birds flies past. Their chirping noises seem like music to her ears.

"How I wish I were one of these beautiful, graceful creatures," Angela says to herself. "I would spread my wings and fly so high, far away from this dreadful place I've been sent to." Her heart feels heavy as her beautiful eyes start to tear up.

Angela's fear of being in a strange place far away from her beloved family fills her with dread and anxiety. "I miss you, mom," her heart whispers as she wipes a rolling tear from her eyes away.

Angela looks at the massive white building structure ahead of her. Its white brilliance seems to sparkle in the early sunrise. Knowing she must go in and register, her feet feel heavy as if it's frozen and cannot move. "Is this to be my prison for the next three years?"

All around the massive ground, about thirty little colorful dorms scattered.

All is still silent. "I guess that's where the students are." She thinks to herself, "I wonder what dorm is mine?" Angela prayed it was not hidden too far to the back; that would be scary; she loved open spaces. Angela is so deep in thought that she jumps with fright and turns, almost colliding with the stranger standing behind her.

In shock and stammering, she looks up at the most beautiful man she has ever seen.

His eyes, like gold, seem to mesmerize her.

Angela is speechless. "Is this man real? Am I dreaming? Who is he? Why had she not seen him before?" The thoughts race through her dazed, shocked mind

The stranger looks at the beautiful girl seeing her tremble and get ready to take flight. "Who are you, young lady? Are you a new student here? If not, then why are you trespassing on private property?"