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CHAPTER ONE

Addy

Monday, June 22

“Are we seriously watching this?”

Maeve lifts the remote, then her eyebrows. The coordinated challenge annoys me because she knows perfectly well that we are, in fact, watching this. *This* is the entire reason that we’re sitting in front of the television on a beautiful summer day.

“You didn’t have to invite me over,” I remind her, snatching the remote before she has a chance to toss it across the room. I click the On button, then press Channel until I find the station I’m looking for. “I was perfectly fine at home.”

“You’re never perfectly fine after one of these,” Bronwyn pipes up from the corner of an overstuffed sofa. The Rojas media room is a much more comfortable place to watch TV than my living room, with the added benefit that there’s zero chance of my mother poking her head in. I forgot, though, that this enhanced viewing experience would come with a heaping dose

of concern. Bronwyn returned from Yale for the summer a couple of weeks ago and immediately started trying to take charge of my life like the bossy older sister I already have.

Not that I'm complaining. I've missed talking to her in the Bayview Four group chat, which we really need to rename now that it's nine people strong: me; Bronwyn; Nate Macauley; Maeve and her boyfriend, Luis Santos; Cooper Clay and his boyfriend, Kris Becker; and Maeve's fellow Bayview High rising seniors Phoebe Lawton and Knox Myers. It's a very coupled-off group chat, with the exception of me and those last two. Possibly only me, since nobody fully buys Phoebe and Knox's insistence that they're just friends.

Bayview Crew, maybe? I pick up my phone and edit the group chat name. It doesn't look half bad.

"Who's this guy?" Maeve asks, squinting at the screen. "Is he going to introduce—"

"No," I say quickly. "This isn't the Eastland High program. That starts at three o'clock. This is . . . I have no idea, actually."

"A town council meeting," Bronwyn says. Of course she'd know; she probably watches this kind of thing for fun. "Looks like they're wrapping up a budget vote."

"Thrilling. But at least that *matters*." Maeve props her bare feet up on the coffee table a little too aggressively, wincing as her heels slam into the marble top. "At least it deserves a platform. Which is more than you can say for—"

"It's local cable, Maeve," I interrupt. "They're not picky about their programming."

My voice is even but my heart thuds uncomfortably, and I'm torn between wishing I were by myself and feeling grateful that I'm not. The town councilman we're watching announces

that the meeting is over, and the scene fades as interim music begins to play. Bronwyn, Maeve, and I sit in silence for a few beats, listening to what sounds like a weirdly plucky instrumental version of “The Girl from Ipanema.”

Then a half-filled school auditorium appears on screen with the words *Eastland High School: Summer Seminar Series* superimposed along the bottom. Before I can react, Bronwyn abruptly launches herself off her sofa and onto mine, flinging her arms around me.

“Oh my God, what are you doing?” I mutter, dropping my phone onto the cushion.

“You’re not alone, Addy,” Bronwyn says in a fierce whisper. The smell of green apples surrounds me: Bronwyn’s distinctive shampoo, which she’s used for as long as I’ve known her. And probably a lot longer than that, since Bronwyn is nothing if not a creature of habit. One time, when Nate was being extra mopey about their long-distance relationship, I gave him a bottle of it wrapped with a big red bow. He got annoyed, which was the entire point—it’s never *not* fun to crack Nate’s cooler-than-thou façade—but he also kept it.

“Obviously,” I say, spitting a strand of hair from my mouth. Then I sink into the hug, because I actually do kind of need it.

“Good afternoon, Eastland High, and welcome to the start of our summer seminar series.” The man behind the podium doesn’t introduce himself, probably because he doesn’t have to—he’s likely a teacher or an administrator. Somebody in charge of shaping the minds of teenagers who look a thousand years younger than I feel, even though I turned nineteen just a few months ago.

“Look at all those eager beavers. School let out two weeks

ago, and they're already back," Maeve says as the man continues with what Principal Gupta liked to call "housekeeping"—all the random announcements that have to be crammed in before any type of school-related event can start. "Good old Eastland High. Remember when you stalked Sam Barron in their parking lot, Bronwyn?"

"I did not stalk him," Bronwyn says, although she technically did. It was a necessary evil, though. Solving the mystery of Simon Kelleher's death hinged on Sam—the boy Simon had paid to create a distraction while we were in detention the day he died. It was the biggest, most horrifying story ever to hit Bayview. Until a few months ago, when a Simon copycat launched a deadly game of Truth or Dare that nearly got all of us blown up at my sister's wedding rehearsal dinner.

Sometimes, I deeply question why any of us continue to live in Bayview.

"I lightly interrogated him," Bronwyn adds. "And it's a good thing I did, or . . ." She trails off as all our phones buzz in unison.

"Bayview Four is lighting up," Maeve reports before I can reach for mine.

"I think we should change it to Bayview Crew," I say.

"Fine by me," Maeve says with a shrug. "Kris says to stay strong, Addy. He also wants to know if you're still up for waffles tomorrow morning. I happen to like waffles, too, in case that's relevant information for the two of you. Luis says *Fuck that guy*. He's not talking about Kris, obviously; he means—"

"I know who he means," I say as the Eastland High speaker raises his hand to quiet the restless chatter that's started up among the audience.

“All of us at the Eastland High Summer Seminar Series realize that there are many other things you could be doing on a beautiful June afternoon,” he says. “It’s a testament to the importance of today’s special topic that you’re here instead.”

“Special, my ass,” Maeve mutters, tucking a strand of hair behind one ear. It’s exactly the same shade of dark brown as Bronwyn’s, but she recently cut it into a cute, choppy bob. After a battle with childhood leukemia, Maeve spent the first few years of high school trying to get out from behind Bronwyn’s shadow, and I think her final form emerged when she stopped echoing her sister’s signature ponytail.

“Shhh,” Bronwyn hisses, before finally releasing me.

“At Eastland High, we want to inspire you to dream and achieve, but we also want to prepare you for the harsher realities of life,” the speaker continues. “The decisions you make as high school students today will shape the trajectory of your future for years to come, and the wrong choice can have devastating consequences.”

“Is that what we’re calling it now?” Maeve asks. “A *wrong choice*?”

“Maeve, I swear to God—” Bronwyn starts.

“Quiet!” The word bursts out much more loudly and angrily than I intended, startling Bronwyn and Maeve into silence. I’d feel shame at the misdirected rage, which neither of them deserves, if I weren’t such a giant ball of stress. Because any minute, I’m going to see . . .

“Nobody knows that better than today’s guest. He’s here through an educational partnership with the California Department of Corrections, to speak frankly with you about how his actions derailed what was once a bright and promising

future. Please welcome our speaker, who's a current inmate at the East Crenshaw Juvenile Detention Facility and a former student from neighboring Bayview High—Jake Riordan.”

Bronwyn squeezes my arm and Maeve inhales sharply, but other than that, I've managed to cow them into temporary silence. Not that it matters; if they spoke, I wouldn't hear a word over the blood pounding in my ears.

Jake Riordan.

My ex. The love of my life, once upon a time, when I was too naïve and insecure to see who he really was. I knew he could be jealous, and if you'd pressed me back then—which nobody except my sister, Ashton, ever did—I might have admitted that he was controlling. But I never would have imagined that when I cheated on him, he'd get revenge by teaming up with Simon to frame me for murder, then nearly kill me when I tried to expose him.

Oh, right. Jake wasn't *actually* trying to kill me, according to his very expensive lawyer. *Lack of specific intent*, she said, along with a lot of other legal buzzwords piled onto his defense that, ultimately, kept him from being tried as an adult.

At the time, a lot of people called it a sham of a trial, especially when it was over and Jake was sentenced to a juvenile facility until the age of twenty-five. Everything he did—not just to me and my friends, but to Simon—boiled down to a whopping seven and a half years behind bars. The headlines screamed “Privilege on Display!” and there were a half-dozen online petitions urging the judge to impose a harsher sentence.

But memories are short.

Jake's been a model prisoner ever since he went in, and last December, a true crime show ran a profile on him that was, as

the *Bayview Blade* said, “surprisingly sympathetic.” Jake was humble. He was remorseful. He was *committed to helping other young people avoid the same mistakes he’d made*. And then, barely two weeks after my sister’s wedding at the end of March, Juror X surfaced.

Or rather, his former girlfriend did—a woman who claimed she’d gotten hundreds of texts about Jake’s trial from one of the jurors while it was happening. Turns out, Juror X kept her up to date with a constant stream of confidential information and visited news sites that he was supposed to keep away from. When screenshots surfaced on BuzzFeed, Juror X panicked, tried to delete his Internet history, lied under oath, and basically gave Jake’s legal team the opening they’d been looking for to ask for a new trial.

Juror X’s real name is Marshall Whitfield, which the Internet collectively discovered within a few weeks of the story breaking. He’s now gone underground after being doxed, and I might feel sorry for him if he hadn’t tossed a grenade into my life.

Now Jake’s case is pending, and in the meantime, he’s started what Maeve sarcastically calls the Jake Riordan Rehabilitation Tour. The school visits aren’t always televised, but when they are . . . I watch. I can’t help myself.

“He looks terrible,” Maeve says, glaring at the screen.

She’s not entirely right. Jake looks older than nineteen, but not in a bad way. He’s still handsome, his brown hair cropped short and his eyes a piercing, summer-sky blue against too-pale skin. He’s clearly working out more than ever, which you can tell despite the shapeless khakis he’s wearing. He approaches the podium to scattered applause, his head bowed and his hands clasped in front of him. No handcuffs, of course. Not

for a school visit, although the three officers sitting in folding chairs off to one side are armed and ready for trouble.

But Jake never gives them any.

“I’m here to tell you about the worst time of my life,” he says in a low, earnest tone, which is how he always starts. And then, with his hands gripping the edge of the podium and his eyes locked on the students in front of him, he tells them about the worst time of mine.

He’s clever. He talks a lot about *pressure*, *undue influence*, and *duress*, as though he were Simon’s reluctant, clueless patsy instead of his eager conspirator. According to Jake, he doesn’t even remember attacking me and Janae Vargas in the woods behind her house; all he wanted, he claimed during the trial, was for us to stop threatening him. *Us*, threatening *him*. That didn’t go over well in the court of public opinion, though, so he’s careful to avoid the topic during school visits. If anyone mentions me, he quickly segues into a monologue about how his poor choices hurt *everyone*. Especially him.

Next November, it will be two years since that awful night in the woods. A lot of good things have happened since then: I moved in with my sister, I made new friends, and I graduated high school. I took some time off so I could figure out what I wanted to do with my life, and I’ve decided it’s going to involve teaching. I got my first-ever passport last month, so that Maeve and I can travel to Peru at the end of July to be counselors for an English immersion program. After that, I’ll start applying to college. My dad, although he’s still the definition of a hands-off parent, came through with an offer to help with tuition.

The ticking clock of Jake’s release has always been far enough away that I could believe I’d be ready once it wound

down—older and wiser, settled into the kind of busy, important life where I'd barely think twice about my convict ex being back on the streets.

It never occurred to me, until recently, that the clock could be reset.

“What does Eli say about all this?” Maeve asks as Jake continues his well-rehearsed monologue. My sister's husband heads up a legal-defense nonprofit, so he's our go-to expert for anything crime-related. Even though, as Eli has pointed out to all nine members of the Bayview Crew at one time or another, we rarely listen to him until it's too late. “Does he think Jake's going to get a new trial? Or that he'll be released, or—”

“Eli is busy thinking about who's going to cover for him during paternity leave,” I remind her. My sister Ashton's surprise pregnancy—she's due in November—is why I've moved back in with my mother. Mom and I haven't always been on the best of terms, but being excited about the baby has given us something to bond over. Lately, that bonding mostly consists of coming up with grandmother names that won't make her sound old. Current leader: Gigi, because Mom refuses to consider my suggestion of Insta Gram.

“Eli can think about more than two things at once,” Bronwyn says. “Especially if you let him know how worried you are.”

“I'm not worried,” I say, eyes on the screen. My voice is muffled, though, by how hard I'm gnawing on my knuckle.

Jake has wrapped up his speech and started taking questions from the kids. A boy sitting in the front row asks, “What's the food like in prison?”

“In a word? Awful,” Jake says, with such perfect timing that everyone laughs.

“Do you get to see your mom and dad?” a girl calls out. The camera jerkily pans her way, and I catch the flash of another girl’s coppery curls behind her. It almost looks like—but, no. I must be seeing things. Still, when I glance at Maeve, she’s squinting at the television with a puzzled frown.

“Not as often as I’d like, but yes,” Jake says. “They haven’t given up on me, and their support means the world. I hope I can make them proud again someday.”

“Barf,” Maeve says, but even she sounds slightly less sarcastic. The Jake Riordan Rehabilitation Tour is *that* good.

Another boy raises his hand, and Jake acknowledges him with a chin lift. It’s such a familiar gesture—the way he’d greet our friends in the hallway of Bayview High, one arm wrapped tightly around my shoulders—that I shiver. “If you could go back in time, what would you do differently?” the boy asks.

“Everything,” Jake says instantly. He gazes directly into the camera, and I recoil as though he’d just entered the room.

There it is.

That’s what I’ve been waiting for—the reason I keep torturing myself by watching these. I don’t want to see it, but I need to acknowledge that it exists. That glint in Jake’s eye. The one he can’t hide for a full Q&A session, no matter how hard he tries. The one that reflects all the anger he’s pretending he no longer feels. The one that says, *I’m not sorry*.

The one that says, *What would I do differently?*

I wouldn’t get caught.

CHAPTER TWO

Phoebe

Monday, June 22

I hunch lower in my seat, wishing I'd thought to wear a hoodie even though it's eighty degrees outside and the Eastland High School auditorium doesn't have AC. I knew there might be cameras here, but usually the kids who sit way in the back, like I am, aren't the type to ask questions.

I know Addy watches these things. What am I supposed to say if she sees me? How do I explain . . . this?

Deny, deny, deny, Phoebe. You're good at that.

"Any further questions?" The man who introduced Jake Riordan gets up from the front row to stand beside him. "We have time for one more."

Are you truly sorry?

Would you ever hurt someone again?

What made you like this?

Those are the questions I need answers to. I can't bring

myself to ask them, but I keep hoping that maybe someone else will.

Instead, a girl calls out, “Are you getting a new trial?”

Jake ducks his head. “I try not to think about that,” he says. “It’s out of my hands. I’m just living the best life I can, one day at a time.”

I search what I can see of his face and think, *Please let that be true.*

Like half my classmates, I had a crush on Jake Riordan once. He was a junior when I was a freshman, and he and Addy were already the It Couple of Bayview High. I used to watch them glide through the hallways back then, marveling at how glamorous and grown-up they seemed. When they split up after Simon Kelleher’s death, I’m embarrassed to admit that my first thought was *Maybe I have a chance with him now.* I had no idea how unhappy Addy had been, or what Jake was capable of doing. He hid his dark side incredibly well. A lot of people do.

I know how stressed Addy is, and I wish I could talk about it with her—*really* talk about it, not just offer empty reassurances. But I can’t. I cut myself off from that possibility back in April, and now the only person I can confide in is my older sister, Emma. Who moved to North Carolina to live with one of our aunts as soon as she graduated two weeks ago, and might as well be on the moon considering how infrequently she returns my texts.

What’s done is done, she said before she left. *We had our reasons.*

* * *

“Sorry, I’m sorry I’m so late, and thank you so, so much!”

My words are breathless, tumbling over one another as I scurry through Café Contigo to reach Evie, one of the new waitresses, who’s ringing up a takeout order at the cash register. I asked her to cover the beginning of my shift, knowing I wouldn’t make it back from Eastland in time, but I hadn’t anticipated so much traffic. I’m more than an hour late, and Evie, who’s been working since the café opened at ten a.m., has every right to be annoyed.

Instead, she gives me a cheerful smile. I wish Evie could bottle her always-positive attitude and sell it, because I would definitely buy. “No worries, Phoebe,” she says, handing a bulging paper bag to one of our regulars. “I told you to take your time.”

“The doctor’s office was so crowded,” I murmur, grabbing an apron from under the counter and wrapping it around my waist. Then I pull an elastic from my pocket and yank my hair back into a haphazard ponytail. All my hair doesn’t make it through the elastic, but whatever—speed is of the essence here. “Okay, I’m ready. You can go.”

“Relax, Phoebe. Grab a drink or something. And maybe check out your hair in the mirror before you try to serve tables like that,” Evie says with a grin, tugging at the end of her own bleached-blond braid.

“What?” I ask, just as Luis Santos, Maeve’s boyfriend, comes out of the kitchen, stops in his tracks, and starts to laugh.

“Nice horn,” he says.

“Oh God,” I mutter, catching sight of my reflection in the mirror that lines the far wall. Somehow, I’ve managed to

make myself look like a deranged unicorn. I pull out the elastic, wincing as a few strands of hair come with it, and sink into a chair beside the register. “I’m a disaster. Is your mom mad that I’m late again?”

“She’s not here. Pa is,” Luis says, and I breathe a sigh of relief. I love both his parents, but Mr. Santos is by far the more lenient boss. “We’re not all that busy, anyway. It’s too nice out. Speaking of which.” His smile widens as the bell on the café door jangles and Maeve steps inside, waving to us with both hands as she crosses the room. “There’s my cue to take off. Maeve and I have big plans. Hey, beautiful.”

“Hi,” Maeve says with not quite her usual level of enthusiasm, even as she melts into Luis for a kiss. I turn away, wishing happy couples didn’t send such a stab of jealousy through me. *It’s your choice to not be part of one*, I remind myself, but that doesn’t help. Mostly because it doesn’t actually feel like a choice.

“You rode here, right?” Luis asks expectantly.

“In a manner of speaking,” Maeve says, scuffing the toe of one sneaker against the tile floor. Luis raises his eyebrows, and she says, “Mostly, I walked it.” He sighs, and she adds, “I’m sorry, but I don’t see why I need to get better at riding a bicycle when you’re perfectly capable of doing it for both of us.”

“You can’t ride on my handlebars forever,” Luis says.

“Why not?” Maeve counters. “It’s not like I’m going to out-grow them.”

“Heading for the bike path again?” Evie asks, hiding a smile. Luis bought Maeve a bicycle a couple of weeks ago, determined to make up for the fact that she never learned how to ride one between cancer treatments when she was a kid, but

it's slower going than he expected. Maeve doesn't so much *ride* the bike as she straddle-walks it. Or just regular walks, while resentfully wheeling the bike beside her.

"It's going to be *great*," Luis says with what seems like misplaced optimism.

Maeve rolls her eyes and turns to me, one arm still around his waist. "Phoebe, it was the weirdest thing. I was watching Jake's school visit earlier—"

Luis's smile vanishes. "Fuck that guy," he growls. There aren't many things that pierce Luis's laid-back vibe, but his former friend is one of them.

"I know." Maeve gives his arm a comforting squeeze before turning back to me. "I saw a girl in the audience who had your exact hair and . . ." My heart sinks as her eyes rove over my sparkly tank top, which wasn't exactly designed to be overlooked. "Shirt."

"Really? That's so weird," I say, busying myself with creating a less ridiculous ponytail. "I meant to watch, but I got stuck at the doctor's. How's Addy holding up?" I hate lying to Maeve, but I'd hate it even more if she knew what I was lying about.

"Same," Maeve says. She looks like she's about to say more, but she pauses as the door jingles again and a familiar figure enters the café.

"Owen! What's up, bud?" Luis asks as my not-so-little-anymore brother approaches the counter. "Jesus, did you grow another foot?"

"No," Owen mutters, because he's humorless like that lately.

"Your order's on the counter," Evie tells him. She doesn't need to add *It's on the house*, because Mr. Santos never lets my brother pay.

“Thanks,” he says in the same monotone, grabbing his takeout without even glancing my way. Maeve catches my eye with a rueful grin, like, *He’s thirteen, what can you do?* I force myself to smile back, even though my stomach twists as Owen slouches out the door and lets it slam closed behind him.

“Good talk, Owen,” Luis says, and Maeve lightly punches him.

Almost three months ago, when Owen was still twelve, Emma and I learned that he’d posed online as Emma—who’d been posing as me—to chat with a boy who’d roped Emma into a revenge-swapping plan. The boy, Jared Jackson, promised he’d make my ex-boyfriend, Brandon Weber, pay for the fact that Brandon had caused a forklift accident that killed our father three years ago. In return, Emma was supposed to help Jared get revenge on Addy’s brother-in-law, Eli, who’d helped send Jared’s crooked-cop brother to jail. Emma got cold feet and bailed—but Owen stepped in and kept the pact going.

Then Brandon died in what everyone thought was an accident, as part of a Truth or Dare game that Jared set up. When Owen abruptly stopped communicating, Jared decided to get revenge on his own and plant a bomb at Eli’s wedding rehearsal dinner. If Knox and Maeve hadn’t stopped him, everyone at that restaurant could have died. Instead, Jared was arrested and promptly gave me up as his accomplice. Emma, who’d landed in the hospital after weeks of guilt-fueled binge drinking, confessed that it was actually her. But we didn’t realize Owen was involved until we read chat transcripts between him and Jared and saw a word Owen misspelled while practicing for a spelling bee: *bazaar* instead of *bizarre*.

In that moment—seated at our kitchen table with our

mother and Emma's lawyer—my sister and I made a silent pact to keep that information to ourselves. I couldn't imagine doing anything else, because it was clear from Owen's messages to Jared after Brandon died that he hadn't understood what he was doing. My sweet, innocent, still-grieving little brother never meant for Brandon to get hurt.

But almost immediately, doubts started creeping in. I knew I couldn't tell anyone—especially not Maeve and Knox, after they'd risked their lives to stop Jared—and the secret made me feel horribly isolated once Emma moved away. Owen turned thirteen a few days later, becoming tall and sullen seemingly overnight, and I couldn't stop thinking about how he was the same age Brandon was when he accidentally killed our father. And how, if Brandon had ever taken responsibility for that, he might still be alive.

So now I lie to my friends, semistalk Jake Riordan, and compose late-night texts to my sister that I'm too afraid to send:

What if Owen turns into another Brandon?

Or another Jake?

Do you think we did the wrong thing?

Do you think we should tell someone?

By the time work is over and I've helped Mr. Santos close, I know I should drive straight home. It's almost eleven o'clock, I'm exhausted, and I've got an early shift tomorrow. But when I come to a fork in the road that leads to my house, I take the opposite direction.

I can't help it. Consciously or not, I've been looking forward to this all day.

When I reach a familiar house, I park in the driveway but bypass the front door and head around back instead. Then I hoist myself onto a tree, climb until I'm parallel with a jutting edge of the roof, and carefully step onto it. There's a window in front of me, and when I tug at the sash, it lifts easily. I squeeze through, wishing like always that the space was a little bigger so the maneuver wasn't quite so graceless. Then I land on the hardwood floor, dust off my hands, and close the window before turning to face the room.

"You know you could just ring the doorbell, right?" Knox says.

He's lying in bed, propped up by a half-dozen pillows with his laptop open in front of him, so sleepy-eyed that I'm pretty sure he was dozing before I came in. My heartbeat quickens even as some of the day's tension flows out of me, and I hold on to the edge of his dresser to steady myself while I pull off my sneakers.

"I don't want to wake your parents up," I say. "Besides, climbing through your window makes me feel like I'm in a teen movie, so it's on theme." I cross over to his bed, pull back the navy comforter, and slip in beside him, curling into the white T-shirt he always sleeps in like it's a favorite blanket. "What's up next?"

Knox taps a few keys before angling the laptop toward me. "*She's All That*," he says. We've been steadily working our way through classic teen movies since school ended, and we've finally reached the nineties. "I think it's the one where the girl takes off her glasses and becomes prom queen."

"She probably lets her hair down too," I say, resting my

head on his shoulder and breathing in the scent of the citrusy soap he uses.

“Life was so simple in the twentieth century,” Knox says. I wait for him to press Play, but instead, he drums his fingers against the edge of his laptop, for so long that I raise my head to give him a questioning look. “So,” he says, keeping his eyes on the frozen screen. “I’m glad you came, because—I mean, not that I’m ever *not* glad, obviously, it’s always good to see you, and it’s not like I wasn’t expecting you or anything—”

“Knox,” I say, fidgeting with the edge of his comforter. “You’re babbling.” That’s never a good sign.

“Right. Sorry.” His fingers keep drumming as I study his profile, wondering how there ever could have been a time when I didn’t find him attractive. How did I miss those cheekbones? “It’s just . . . I wanted to tell you that I kind of think we should stop doing this.”

“Doing what?” I lift my head from his shoulder, stung. “Watching movies?”

“No, not that. We should definitely keep doing that. It’s more . . .” He gestures to the inch of space between us, now that I’m sitting up straight. “This.” I stare at him, and he swallows visibly. “You. In my bed. It’s . . . too much.”

“Too much *what*?” I ask, pulling his comforter over me like a shield. “I’m not doing anything!”

“Yeah. That’s the problem.” Knox rubs the back of his neck. “Look, Phoebe, I totally respect that you want to be friends. I’m fine with it, I swear. I never expected anything else.”

My heart squeezes at the simple truth of the words. Knox and I kissed once, the night of Ashton and Eli’s wedding, and I

thought—hoped—it was the start of something great between us. But then Owen happened. I couldn't tell Knox about it, and I couldn't get involved with him while lying about something that important. So when he asked me out, I told him I thought we were better as friends. Even though part of me was relieved at how quickly and easily he swallowed the lie, a bigger part of me absolutely hates it.

“But you being this close . . . look, I'm not, like, *pining* or anything,” Knox says, sending another knife through my heart. “It just makes it hard to stay in the friend zone, is all.”

Then don't. The words are on my lips, and I want to cover his with mine while I say them, tossing his laptop to one side so I can finally, *finally* pull off that white T-shirt. But of course I can't. And of course he's right, and my one source of comfort was never going to last. This hasn't been fair of me, and it's been superhuman of Knox to put up with it for as long as he has. “I get it,” I say numbly, swinging my legs off the side of the bed. “No problem.”

“We can still watch the movie, though,” Knox says. “Just, you know, downstairs. I can make popcorn, if you want.”

Oh God. There's nothing I want less than to traipse into Knox's living room and sit on opposite ends of the couch with a bowl of popcorn between us. Watching a movie I couldn't care less about, since the only reason I came here is to be close to him. But it would be a jerk move to refuse when he's been nothing but honest, so I force a smile and say, “Sounds great.”

After all, what's one more lie?

CHAPTER THREE

Nate

Wednesday, June 24

The digital billboard at the edge of Clarendon Street has had the same ad for as long as I can remember—a dancing energy drink—so the fact that it’s changed catches my attention while I’m stopped on my motorcycle at a red light.

TIME FOR A NEW GAME, BAYVIEW.

Those are the only words, red against a stark white background. They fade off the screen and I wait, mildly intrigued despite myself, to see what’s next. Then the ad copy cycles back to TIME FOR A NEW GAME, BAYVIEW once again. So much for building suspense. Or letting people know what the hell you’re promoting. A-plus job, advertisers.

The light changes and I roar through it, following the familiar route to the Bayview Country Club. For a lot of people, summertime in Bayview means beaches, barbecues, and one-upping one another on social media with their no-filter vacation

pictures. For me, it means a second job. Construction work by day, serving drinks to Bayview's McMansion crowd at night, then trying to sleep for a few hours in a house filled with five other people who have nothing to do except throw parties they keep trying to drag me to.

Living the dream.

I pull into the parking lot and settle my bike between two freshly painted white lines, then take out my phone to check the time. There's a new text waiting for me—a picture of Bronwyn and Stan, my bearded dragon, sitting side by side on an oversized rock in Bronwyn's garden. Now that she's home from Yale for the summer, she's decided that Stan needs, as she puts it, "more exercise and mental stimulation." So, some days when she's done with her internship, she picks him up, brings him to her house, and hangs out with him in the backyard. As far as I can tell Stan isn't moving any more than he usually does on these field trips, but he does seem to like having a new rock to sit on.

I grin, my mood instantly lifted. My girl's back in town for the next two months, so I guess I am, in fact, living the dream. Bronwyn's prelaw, and she had her pick of internships in New Haven or New York for the summer, but she chose one in San Diego. It's a fantastic job with the kind of woman-owned start-up that she wants to be general counsel for someday, so I don't even have to stress about her giving up opportunities to be closer to me.

Don't let a bird make off with him, I text back.

I WOULD NEVER, Bronwyn responds with a horrified-face emoji.

Of course she wouldn't. There's not a person in the world

you can count on more than Bronwyn Rojas. I know exactly how good I have it with her, and that's why I'm doing all this—the jobs, school, the cheap-ass house with too many roommates so I'm not blowing everything I make on rent. One of these days I'm going to be the guy Bronwyn deserves, not the guy she had to save from prison while we were in high school.

In the meantime, though, I have drinks to serve.

I shut off my bike, pocket the keys, and head for the giant pillars that frame the country-club entrance. At the edge of the parking lot, there's a bulletin board filled with flyers hawking landscaping services, tutoring, housecleaning, dog walking—all the stuff rich people can't do on their own, because they're too busy hanging out at country clubs. My eyes land on one I haven't seen before that's a lot more glossy than what's usually there. Bright white, with just a few words in a large red font:

TIME FOR A NEW GAME, BAYVIEW.

My steps slow, and I frown before yanking off the flyer and turning it over. There's nothing on the other side. It's clearly a companion piece to the billboard ad I saw on my way here, and I still don't understand what it's for. Unless . . .

It's probably a company trying to be edgy. But it hits me, now that I'm holding the words in my hand, that some asshole might want to remind Bayview of the Truth or Dare game that killed Brandon Weber. That kind of thing happened a lot after Simon died—copycats of Simon's gossip app, About That, kept springing up around school. Those were created by students, though, not somebody with the kind of money to rent a billboard. Although come to think of it, there are probably plenty of Bayview High kids who could.

“In the market for some tutoring?” calls a voice behind me.

I turn to see Vanessa Merriman in a sheer, nearly see-through white sundress over a striped bikini. Vanessa and I graduated together, and she was Addy's friend until she took Jake's side during their breakup. Somehow, even after Jake wound up in jail, Vanessa never seemed to think she had anything to apologize to Addy for. I guess she's back for the summer from whatever college she went to, which I don't know because I couldn't care less about Vanessa Merriman.

She leans provocatively against the side of the bulletin board and adds, "Maybe I could help you out. I excel in many subjects. Human anatomy, for example." I just stare at her, until she laughs and says, "Come on! Lighten up; that was a joke." She raises a hand like she's about to slap my arm but freezes before she makes contact. "Wait. Weren't you practically blown up a few months ago? How do you still have all your limbs?"

"Reports were exaggerated," I say.

Vanessa cranes her neck, eyes widening as she catches sight of my left arm. I got the worst of Jared Jackson's bomb attempt in March, since I'd been walking with Bronwyn in an arboretum behind the restaurant where Ashton and Eli were having their rehearsal dinner. Knox, who had no idea we were there, tossed the backpack he'd seen Jared leave beneath the restaurant a few feet away from us. We had to run for our lives and didn't make it out of range before the bomb exploded. I'd thrown myself over Bronwyn, shielding her, and ended up with an arm full of shrapnel. The wounds have healed, but the scars will never go away entirely.

"Ouch," Vanessa says. Then she pats my cheek and adds, "Well, it could be worse, right? At least nothing hit that pretty face of yours."

Looks like Vanessa's priorities haven't changed since high school. She reaches for the flyer I'm holding, but I drop it into the trash before she can grab it.

"What was that?" she asks, tossing her hair over one shoulder. Vanessa has expensive-looking hair; the kind that's darker on top and lighter on the bottom, with lots of different-colored highlights. Addy would know what it's called. "Why'd you throw it out?"

"Because it's weird," I say, resuming my trek toward the entrance.

Vanessa falls into step beside me. "Weird how?"

I'm not interested in swapping theories about mysterious billboards with Vanessa Merriman. "Don't you have a pool to get to?" I ask.

"I need a drink first," Vanessa says, slinging her tote bag over her shoulder. Then she starts telling me about the trip to Ibiza she just got back from, and she keeps up a steady stream of one-sided conversation all the way from the parking lot through the front entrance and the main corridor, until we reach the restaurant where I work. She hops onto a stool at the U-shaped bar, takes off her oversized sunglasses, and says, "I'll have a gin and tonic."

"Nice try." I step behind the bar and wave to Gavin, one of the bartenders, who's serving an older couple at the other end of the bar. "But it doesn't matter how good your ID is when you graduated high school with the barback."

"Oh, come on, Nate." Vanessa pouts. "No one cares. It's not like I'm driving."

"Then what were you doing in the parking lot?"

"Okay, it's not like I'm driving *far*."

“Here.” I fill a glass with ice, soda water, and a lime. “Use your imagination.”

Vanessa sighs and takes a long, resentful sip. “You know what? You’re a lot less fun than you used to be.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

She makes a face. “Don’t.”

“Nate, my friend.” Gavin comes over and claps me on the shoulder. His pale skin is still sunburned from the weekend, and his light-brown hair is darkened at his forehead with sweat. There’s too much open air around the bar for the AC to make much difference. “Stephanie just called from the road. She’s almost here, but I’m already running late to meet someone and need to take off. Can you . . . you know?”

You know is code for *cover for me*. Technically, I’m not supposed to pour drinks since I’m not twenty-one, but country-club management doesn’t pay much attention to the bar. Half the time, I’m like a second bartender anyway.

I’d been hoping to grab some food before starting work, since I came here from my day job at Myers Construction. There wasn’t enough time between shifts to make going home worth it, and besides, home is worse than ever thanks to my newest roommate. The only guy I semiliked moved out two weeks ago, and guess who moved in? Reggie Crawley, the former Bayview High student best known for being outed by Simon Kelleher for having a camera in his bedroom. In that case, Simon actually did what he always claimed to do: *expose the assholes*. And it’s not like Reggie has improved with age; when the *Bayview Blade* interviewed people about a true crime show that made Jake look like a decent guy, Reggie went on record with this gem: “He was always pretty cool to me.”