

CHAPTER TEN

"Carrie has been uneasy around me for a while," Hayley says. She's speaking slowly and her voice is subdued. "I've felt her watching me, wondering what to do about the threat I pose to her."

"*Threat?*" I repeat. "What do you mean?"

"I think Carrie was worried about something she said to me a year ago." Hayley pauses. I can see that she's struggling with what to say next. I wait silently.

"Remember the boarder my grandparents had for a while?" she says.

"The guy with the really bushy eyebrows?" I ask.

"That's the one. Anyway, he gave me the creeps. Something about him just *bothered* me."

I nod, thinking back. Hayley had told us this guy's presence made her really uncomfortable when he'd rented a room at her grandparents' house. I'd only met him a couple of times, but I could totally see what she meant. He had a way of coming into a room that reminded me of a snake slithering around. His eyes were small and dark and when he pointed them at you,

you could almost feel how cold they were. The worst thing, though, was his mouth. He had the thinnest lips I've ever seen, and they looked as if they were always just about to sneer.

"He didn't stay all that long, did he?" I ask.

"Four months," she answers. "It seemed a lot longer than that, believe me. I spent as much time in my room as I could, just to avoid him. I was *so* glad when he got his own apartment and moved out."

She pauses to offer a slightly embarrassed smile. "Looking back, I feel silly about it. I mean, he was never mean or rude or anything to me. There was no reason for me to feel the way I did."

"He looked pretty creepy," I remind her.

"I guess that was the whole thing. And the poor guy couldn't help the way he looked."

"My mom always says you should never judge a person by appearance. Even a serial killer can look like someone you would totally trust."

"True," Hayley says.

There is silence then, for a moment or two. A shadow seems to pass over Hayley's face. I can see that she wants to speak, but she hesitates.

"So ... you were going to tell me something about the things that have been happening?" I ask.

"You mean the things Carrie has been doing," Hayley says evenly.

"Right," I say. Everything we've already talked about has left me feeling like a traitor. I wonder if Hayley can sense that.

"I know she's your best friend, Shana. How do I know I can *really* trust you?"

"Because I'm here," I tell her. "Because I could have just ignored the things that were bothering me. But I didn't."

"There's more to this than just Carrie, though," she answers. "And I'm not quite sure whose side you're going to be on when you hear the whole thing."

"Well, I can't *make* you trust me," I say. I'm getting impatient and just a little angry that she's hedging. I've already taken her side against my best friend. You'd think that would be enough for her to be sure of me.

Hayley draws in a deep breath. Her cheeks bulge as she lets it out slowly. Then she shrugs and says, "I guess I have no choice. And really, what else do I have to lose?"

She picks up a throw pillow and hugs it to her stomach, like she needs something for comfort, or support. And then she tells me the whole story.

"It was last year, when the boarder we were just talking about was here. I guess he'd been living at the house for a couple of months by then. So, this one afternoon, Carrie came by to

pick up some DVDs she was borrowing from me, and he was kicking around the house. He wasn't bothering us or anything, but I noticed her glancing at him. Later on, when he wasn't around anymore, she mentioned him. I told her how creepy I found him."

Hayley gets up and goes to her window. She stands there, looking out, her back to me. I want to tell her to hurry up and finish the story. I can't see how it could have anything to do with what Carrie has been doing. That makes me curious about what the connection could possibly be.

"I told Carrie that I wished my grandparents would get rid of him," Hayley continues after a moment. "But I'd already told them I didn't like him, and they just said I was being silly. That's when Carrie said if I really hated having him there, she knew how I could get rid of him."

Hayley turns from the window and looks me straight in the eye. "She told me it would be easy. All I had to do was say he molested me and that would be the end of him."

My heart begins to pound hard in my chest. I feel like I can't quite breathe. Suddenly, I can't look at her. I know she's aware of my reaction, but she doesn't comment on it.

"So my theory," she continues, "is that she's worried I think that's what she did with her

stepfather. It was no secret that she didn't want him around."

"Carrie wouldn't do that," I insist. My voice sounds strange.

"Well, even if she *would* do it," Hayley says, "I guess that's not what happened. After all, she had a *witness*, didn't she? *You* saw him touch her."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I can't answer. There are so many thoughts rushing through my head that it's impossible to sort them out. I need time to think.

"That's what you testified to, isn't it?" Hayley asks after a bit. "That you saw Joe Kelward touch Carrie?"

"Yes," I say.

"So it's like this," Hayley says. "I don't trust Carrie. At all. I've seen her set people up too many times over the years. And you know what I'm talking about. The little whispering campaigns. The lies and twisted stories. She manipulates people into doing her dirty work all the time."

I hate to admit how much truth there is in what she's saying. But when you're friends with someone, you let stuff like that slide. Sometimes you even buy into it a little.

"But when I heard that you were going to testify, that was different," Hayley tells me. "Unless, of course, she talked you into it somehow."

Her words hang there between us. I know she's waiting, giving me a chance to deny it. It

would be so easy. All I have to do is open my mouth and tell her that didn't happen. But I can't. There have been enough lies.

On the other hand, it's not that easy to admit the truth, either. I know I'm not going to get away with saying nothing. After everything that's just happened, Hayley deserves an answer. More than that, she deserves the truth.

"She asked me to help her," I say. It sounds lame.

"To help her by lying in court ... under oath," Hayley says.

"Yes." It's a bit of a relief to admit it. To get it out. I hadn't realized, until this moment, how much it was bothering me.

"That man went to prison," Hayley says, like I need someone to tell me.

"I know that," I answer. "But maybe he really did do something to her."

"Right."

"It's possible," I insist. "You didn't see her when she told me about it. She was a mess — crying and shaking and scared."

"I just bet," Hayley says.

"But really, Hayley. You didn't see her that day. She was seriously upset."

"Oh, I've seen Carrie upset lots of times," Hayley says with a sharp laugh. "Like the time she got caught dumping garbage on her

neighbours' lawn. Remember how she went on, telling them how sorry she was and begging them not to call the cops. And then when they let her off she laughed behind their backs and called them suckers."

I remember it all right. Hayley and Jen and I had been at Carrie's place when the couple who live two houses away from her came knocking on the door. They accused her of throwing trash in their yard. Carrie denied knowing anything about it until they produced some mail that had been in among the garbage. It was addressed to her parents, so they had her solid. I forget exactly why she did it. She takes things the wrong way sometimes, so it probably wasn't over much.

Hayley's right. Carrie had put on quite a show of how sorry she was when the neighbours showed up. And it really had been nothing but an act. But I can't believe she was acting when she told me about her stepfather.

"I know what you're saying," I tell Hayley. "But you weren't there. You didn't see the tears or hear the way she was sobbing."

Hayley throws her hands up and shrugs. "You just believe whatever you need to," she says. "But remember that if you're wrong, the man you helped put in prison might be innocent."

I feel like I've been punched hard in the stomach. There is silence in the room for a few

moments. I try to convince myself that there's no way Carrie would do anything that horrible. This isn't some prank, some slightly destructive bit of revenge. It's a man's life — his honour and his freedom. It's unthinkable that my best friend could do something that evil.

"I don't know what to do," I finally confess.

Hayley crosses to me and slings an arm around my shoulder. "You have to find out the truth," she says.

"How? There are only two people in the world who really know what the truth is. One of them is locked up. So, what do I do, just go and ask Carrie? Like she would ever admit it if she's been lying the whole time."

"Yeah, I don't think it would be very smart to say anything to Carrie," Hayley says. "If she even *suspects* that you doubt her, watch out."

I want to say that Carrie is my best friend, that she would never do anything to hurt me. But I can't.

"So, what do I do?" I ask. "There's no way I can find out the truth."

"Maybe not about that," Hayley admits.

"But there are other things."

"Like what?"

"Like the stolen jewellery. I know *I* didn't take it, but stuff *did* go missing."

"So, you think Carrie has it?" I ask.

"Yes, I do. Either that or she got rid of it. I already wondered if she might have planted stuff here, but I looked everywhere I could think of and there was nothing."

"I don't think she'd get rid of anything," I say. "She'd be more likely to show up with it one day and claim she forced you to give it back."

Hayley doesn't look convinced. "You know what? I bet she plans to keep it. Think about what she took. We know about Lori's ring — the one her dad gave her. And even though she was setting me up, she took that brooch your great-grandmother left you. It looks like there might be a pattern there — that she's taking things that have sentimental value."

"So that makes you think she's more likely to keep the stuff?" I ask.

"Absolutely. I bet it makes her feel powerful to own things that other people value that way — things they can't replace."

"That's horrible," I say.

"*Carrie* is horrible," Hayley snaps. "A lot of things about her have bothered me for a while now, especially in the past year or so. Mean things she did, and sneaky. But I never wanted to say anything. I figured, let it go — why cause trouble in our group?"

I guess there have been a few times I've been bothered by something Carrie has done, too, but

VALERIE SHERRARD

I'm still not quite ready to believe the worst of her. There have, after all, been a lot of good things, as well. It's hard for me to think so badly of someone who's been my best friend for so long.