

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Hayley and I are eating lunch the next day when Jen comes over to our table. For a few seconds my hopes rise. I think she's there to join us. That idea is crushed when she makes no move to sit down.

"These didn't belong to any of us, so I guess they're yours," she says to me. She reaches a fist out and opens it over a bare spot on the table. A delicate gold chain and matching anklet land in a tiny heap. I recognize them as mine, although I hadn't even realized they were missing until this moment.

"It looks like she was taking things from you too, Shana," Jen says. "I don't know why you're on her side."

"Come on, Jen," I say. "You've known Hayley for a long time. Do you *really* think she'd steal anything — from anyone?"

A shadow of doubt passes over Jen's face, but I can see she's afraid to think about it too much. It's easier and safer to go along with the others, especially when one of them is Carrie. Funny that I never understood before how

much power she has over the group. How long has it been this way?

I could never have admitted it until now, but there was always a thread of fear running through my friendship with Carrie. I'd seen her in action enough times to know how dirty she could get when someone crossed her. And even though we were best friends, I think I always knew that, under the right circumstances, she could turn on me, too.

Hayley gives me a sad smile after Jen has moved off. I'm sure she's sifting through as many feelings as I am as we eat lunch. It feels like everyone in the cafeteria is staring at us and it doesn't take much brainpower to figure out why. I have no doubt that Carrie is hard at work spreading stories about Hayley and me. I'm sure there is hardly a person left at the school who hasn't heard something horrible about us. And if I know Carrie, she won't have limited herself to the lies about us stealing. Whatever stories she's telling will be bigger and darker and uglier than that.

I shake my head, like that might clear away the unpleasant thoughts. There's no point in obsessing over something I can't change — at least, not right now.

"She won't be happy until she destroys us, you know," Hayley says.

It's like she's been reading my mind. "We have to find a way to prove that we're the ones telling the truth," I say.

"How?"

"I don't know," I admit. Then I remember something my mom has told me a few times. "But everyone makes mistakes when they commit crimes. That's how they get caught."

"What about the people who get away with things?" Hayley asks. Not exactly encouraging, but it's a fair question.

"I still think they all probably made mistakes," I say, "only maybe no one looked hard enough to find them."

"So, what mistake do you think Carrie made?" she asks.

"I don't know — yet. But I'm sure there's something, and all we have to do is figure it out."

"And then *prove* it," Hayley adds.

"Yes, then prove it," I agree.

"That's probably going to be the hard part," she says with a sigh.

That evening we get together at my place and write down everything that's happened so far. We write in third person, so there won't be any

confusion in case we eventually have to give it to someone else to read — like the police. We organize everything by timeline. In the end, this is what we have to work with:

Facts in the Case

1. Last summer: Carrie tells Hayley she can easily get rid of the boarder she doesn't like by accusing him of molesting her.
2. Last fall: Carrie's mom and Joe Kelward (who have been dating for about a year) get engaged and then married. Carrie makes no secret of the fact that she doesn't like him and doesn't want him in her life.
3. January: Carrie accuses her new step-father of molesting her. He is arrested and charged.
4. It's hard to know exactly when Carrie begins to worry about Hayley, but it probably wasn't long after the charges were laid against Joe. Carrie must wonder if Hayley will suspect that she made up the accusation, just as she suggested Hayley do with the boarder.
5. February: Carrie tells Shana there isn't enough evidence against Joe and she is terrified he will get off. She convinces Shana to help her by giving false testimony.

6. For several months before the trial, some of our friends begin to notice items of jewellery are missing. We learn later that Carrie is framing Hayley. We now know she did that to get rid of Hayley, so that if Hayley had any suspicions, she couldn't share them with the rest of us.
7. The trial is held and Joe is convicted. Hayley cannot hide her feelings — which is when Carrie realizes for sure that Hayley suspects that Carrie made up the story about Joe in order to get rid of him.
8. Carrie sets up the scene at Shana's house where Hayley is "caught" stealing.
9. Carrie pretends she's going to see Hayley to work things out, but actually makes up nasty messages for both Hayley and the rest of us to make sure we stop being friends.
10. Shana goes to see Hayley, learns the truth. Somehow (HOW?) Carrie finds out that Shana has taken Hayley's side.
11. Shana finds the stolen jewellery in Carrie's house, and tries to "discover" it with the others there. This backfires because Carrie has found out what she's up to and turns it all against Shana instead. (How did Carrie find out? Perhaps there's a clue there.)
12. Carrie goes to the police and tells them that Shana has threatened to recant testimony

as a way of hurting Carrie. As a result, the police do not believe Shana when she goes there to admit she lied.

"Well, that's it, I guess," I say, looking the list over. I keep staring at items ten and eleven, and I wonder out loud how Carrie found out about those things.

"It's probably something simple," Hayley says, "like she called your place and your mom told her where you'd gone, or maybe someone saw you and mentioned it to her."

"Maybe," I say.

"You can't start getting spooked about this," Hayley says. "I mean, she's just a kid, like us. She doesn't have superhuman powers or anything. It's easy to get nervous with Carrie, because she doesn't play fair, but anything she does has a normal explanation. We have to remember that."

"You're right," I say. I'm glad, really glad, that Hayley and I are on the same side.

I make a copy of our list for Hayley on my scanner. That way, we can each add notes if we think of anything else, or come up with ideas on how to expose Carrie for the lying manipulator she is.

But I have to admit, it looks kind of hopeless at this point.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Besides giving myself a headache thinking about all of this, nothing has happened over the last few days. Until earlier today, that is.

I'd just dropped off resumes at a few stores in the Halifax Shopping Centre. Summer's coming soon and I'll be sixteen in July, so I'm looking forward to getting my first real job.

So, anyway, I was making the rounds in the food court on the upper level when I saw Carrie heading toward me. I don't know if she'd already seen me. She looked startled when she got close and glanced in my direction, but that could have been an act. *Everything* with Carrie is an act.

She was alone, and as soon as she saw me she made a beeline in my direction. I stood my ground, chin up, and waited while she walked right up to me.

"I guess you know by now that you made a big mistake when you decided to cross me," she said.

"I made a big mistake when I decided to be *friends* with you," I answered. I should have left

it there. I should have let it go and walked away. But there was so much anger in me! It had been building for days, which is why I couldn't help but add, "You shouldn't think that you're going to get away with any of this."

She laughed at that, but it was ice cold and humourless.

"I'm so much smarter than you that I actually pity you," she said with a snort. "Like last year, when you and Mike broke up."

"What do you mean?" I asked, startled by the change of subject.

"I did that," she told me. "And you never even suspected."

I stared at her, uncomprehending, while she continued. "When I went to use your laptop that day, Mike's Facebook page was still up. He hadn't remembered to log out. So I changed his status—it took two seconds. A few minutes later when I was in my own account, I showed you his status change and you went right to pieces. It was so easy — because you're so dumb."

"Why would you have done that? We were friends then," I said, not quite believing her.

"To amuse myself, mostly. But it was annoying — you were always busy with him, or talking about him or whatever. So, I got rid of him."

I felt sick. I remembered how upset Mike had looked at school the next day. Even through

my pain I'd found that odd, since he was the one who'd broken up with me. Suddenly, it made sense. I realized how cleverly Carrie had fooled both of us into thinking we'd been dumped. On Facebook, for everyone to see. What could have been more hurtful and humiliating? And that's why it had worked just as she'd planned. Neither of us had ever even tried to talk about it — our pride wouldn't let us. My heart was breaking all over again, but I forced myself not to react. "This situation isn't the same as that, Carrie. You're not going to get away with what you've done this time. I'm going to see to it."

"Oh, really. Then I see you haven't learned your lesson yet," she said. Her voice was hard, the words clipped and sharp. "I'll just have to do something about that, won't I?"

"Do whatever you want," I said. "I'm not afraid of you."

She laughed again, tossing her head back for effect. Then she walked away.

My stomach was queasy from the encounter so I decided to forget about taking around any more resumes just then. I headed to the bus stop and a few minutes later I was on my way home, which is where I am now.

There's no one here, so I decide to call Hayley to see if she wants to come over. She's not home, and there's no answer on her cell. I

flop across my bed. Then I sit straight up, struck by an idea.

Carrie is at the mall. Which means she's not home right now. But chances are good that her mother is at their house and it has just occurred to me that she might be the person I need to talk to. If I can convince her of the truth, maybe she can find a way to force Carrie to admit what she did, and free Mr. Kelward.

In a flash, I'm out the door and on my way to her place. I'm breathless and my heart is thumping madly in my chest by the time I get there. I don't even wait to get my breath back before I jab my finger at the doorbell.

Carrie's mom appears at the door a moment later. She looks puzzled, and not exactly happy to see me.

"Mrs. Freeman," I say. "I need to talk to you for a few minutes."

She sighs heavily, shaking her head. "Carrie told me you might show up here one of these days, Shana," she says. "I really think you should just turn around and go home. We've been through a lot, and I'd appreciate it if you didn't try to cause any trouble."

"I don't know what she told you," I say, "but I want you to know the truth. I lied. I lied to the police and I lied in court. I never saw your husband do anything, and I believe

Carrie made the whole story up just to get rid of him."

"I asked you not to bother us," she says quietly. "Please, just go away."

Mrs. Freeman looks like she's about to cry, and I feel sorry for causing that. She reaches for the door, but I feel I need to make one last effort.

"Your husband didn't do anything wrong," I say, raising my voice so she can hear even as the door swings closed. "He's innocent! He doesn't deserve to be locked up and you don't deserve to be going through all of this. Please, believe me!"

Do I imagine it — the slight hesitation just before the final little push that closes the door completely? I stand there with the *click* of the lock echoing in my head and I'm overwhelmed with pity for the woman on the other side of the door.

I wonder if there's any doubt in her at all. Can she let herself think that her own daughter is so evil that she was willing to destroy a man's life, not to mention her own mother's happiness? And for what? Because she didn't happen to like him? Because she didn't want to give up some of her mother's attention?

I walk away, feeling worse than ever, wishing I hadn't come. What good did it do? What if Mrs. Freeman had let me in and listened to me? What if she *had* believed me? Her husband

is still in prison. Even if he got out tomorrow, he'd still know that she took Carrie's side against him. How could their marriage ever be put back together again after all the terrible things that have happened?

As I head back toward home, I realize how impossible the situation is. Carrie's mom almost *has* to believe her daughter. If she lets herself think Carrie lied, her whole world will crumble even more than it already has.

It's all so hopeless and horrible.