

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Mom and Dad have just gotten home. They're unpacking groceries in the kitchen and I can hear them talking in hushed tones. That doesn't necessarily mean they're talking about me, but it's definitely a conversation they don't want me to hear.

Neither of them has said anything harsh about what I did, at least not yet. That doesn't stop me from feeling guilty and a bit nervous. They have to be disappointed that I'd do something so obviously wrong. I almost wish they'd speak up and tell me how they feel and get it out in the open.

I head to the kitchen and offer to help put stuff away. Mom's smile is tight as she passes me some green bags full of canned soup and vegetables. I'm stacking them on shelves when there's a knock at the front door.

"Get that, would you Shana?" Dad says.

When I open the door I find two police officers standing there. One of them is a woman and the other is Officer Plourde. My spirits lift to think maybe he's going to take me seriously after all. But that's not what he's here for.

"Shana Tremain?" he asks, though he should know perfectly well who I am, since I talked to him just yesterday.

"Yes."

"Do you have a parent present?"

"They're in the kitchen," I say.

"We're going to ask you to accompany us to the police station to answer a few questions," Officer Plourde says. "You'll need to have a parent come with you."

A flush of heat rushes through my body. I know it's adrenaline and that it's the response to the sudden fear I'm feeling. In an instant, I'm absolutely certain that Carrie has done something else to make trouble for me.

My voice trembles as I call out for my mom and dad. They appear at the end of the hall at once and hurry toward the door as soon as they see the police standing there.

"Officers," my mom says with a nod. "Can we help you?"

"We've had some complaints that we need to investigate," the female officer says. "Can one of you bring Shana to the police station? We'd appreciate it if she'd come in to answer some questions voluntarily."

"What kind of questions?" Mom asks.

"Questions in response to a complaint we've received," Plourde answers gruffly.

Mom and Dad both look at me questioningly. I shrug, to show them I have no idea what this could be about, even though I have no doubt that Carrie is behind it.



Fifteen minutes later, Mom and I are pulling up to the police station. I can't help but think this particular red brick building is becoming just a little too familiar to me.

We go in, but there's no waiting this time. We're escorted into a room and a moment later the female cop comes in. She introduces herself as Officer Cloud and passes me a business card, which I stick in my pocket. Officer Cloud says that Officer Plourde will be along in just a few minutes and perhaps we can go ahead and get started without him. That's fine with me.

"Is Shana under arrest?" Mom asks.

"No. She hasn't been charged with anything at this point," Officer Cloud tells her.

"So, we're free to go anytime we want to?"

"For now, yes. Naturally, we'd encourage her to help clear this matter up."

Mom seems to think this over. Officer Cloud and I both wait silently until Mom nods and tells her she can go ahead.

"Can you tell me where you were this afternoon?" she asks, turning to me.

"I went to the shopping centre to take around some resumes," I say.

"Shana is turning sixteen soon, so she's eager to get her first job," Mom adds. Officer Cloud gives her a polite smile before addressing me again.

"And did you see anyone you knew while you were there?" she wants to know.

"I saw Carrie Freeman," I say.

"Were you speaking with Ms. Freeman?"

"For a few minutes."

"During that conversation, did you make any threatening comments toward Ms. Freeman?"

"What? No! Of course not."

"You didn't tell her you were going to see her dead?"

"No! That's crazy!"

"Or that you were going to burn her house down with her and her mother in it?"

Mom gasps at that. "Shana would never say anything like that," she says. Officer Cloud doesn't even act like she's heard her.

"I didn't say those things," I say. "As far as I'm concerned, I want nothing to do with Carrie, ever again."

"In that case, you would have had no reason to go to her house after you left the shopping

centre, would you?" Officer Cloud says. Her voice is smooth, almost friendly.

"Well, I ... it wasn't like you think," I say.

Mom stares at me. "Were you at Carrie's house this afternoon?" she asks.

"I wanted to tell Mrs. Freeman the truth — that her husband didn't do anything," I say. "And I knew Carrie wasn't there, so I thought it was a good time to go. Only, she didn't want to talk to me."

Officer Cloud makes a few notes. She asks me if I'd sign a statement, but Mom says I'm not signing anything. She says this whole thing has gotten out of hand and that I won't be answering anymore questions unless I have a lawyer present. Then she tells me we're leaving. I'm shaking on the way out. It feels as though someone is going to come running after us any second and have me arrested. But no one tries to stop us and we make it to the car and drive home.

Mom tells Dad that she doesn't feel like cooking so we order in a pizza and salad. When the delivery guy knocks I nearly jump out of my skin, I'm so on edge. I nibble a bit of salad and manage to swallow a few bites of pizza before giving up.

I call Hayley later and tell her about the whole thing.

"We need to be super careful," she says. "Honestly, it might be a good idea to stick together when we go anywhere for a while."

"We can't let Carrie win that way," I protest. Even so, I know she's right. It's hard to fight lies when you can't prove that's what they are.

After we hang up, I get out my list of what's happened to add today's events to it. And that's when I notice something that might help!

CHAPTER TWENTY

I stare at the two points on the list for a moment. Numbers eleven and twelve:

11. Shana finds stolen jewellery in Carrie's house, and tries to "discover" it with the others there. This backfires as 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.

It has just occurred to me that these two things may, in fact, be listed backwards. The big blow-up at Carrie's place happened on Saturday. I went to the police the next day and I'm almost positive that Officer Plourde told me that Carrie had been in a few days before then. That means she went to them *before* the showdown at her place on Saturday.

It's not much, but it's something. If only someone will listen to me!

I pick up my cellphone and dig the card Officer Cloud gave me out of my pocket. She's still on duty, but not at the station, and someone promises they'll have her call me back as soon as she can.

That turns out to be less than ten minutes.

"Do you have the file there in front of you?" I ask.

"Do I need it?" she asks. She sounds tired and impatient.

"I think so. I think there's something in there that will prove Carrie is lying."

"Hang on," she says. I hear muffled voices in the background, the sound of a chair scraping on the floor, footsteps, and some paper shuffling. Then there's a thud, the kind that's made by a book or stack of paper landing on a flat surface.

"Okay, so what've you got?" Officer Cloud asks, coming back on the line.

"The date that Carrie went there and said I had told her I was going to try to make trouble for her."

"What about it?"

I explain how I found the stolen items at Carrie's place. "She must have realized it, though. So she set me up for when the others

were around — which she couldn't possibly have done if we'd already had a fight about it."

"And?" says Officer Cloud.

"The big blow-up with her happened on Saturday. And there are three other girls who were there, so they're witnesses to that. The thing about it is that that it happened *after* she made that statement to Officer Plourde about the thefts. That *proves* she lied."

There's silence for a few seconds — just enough time for me to picture her rolling her eyes or sighing. But then she asks me for the names and contact information for the other girls.

I give her the details, but I can't help wondering if Carrie has thought of this, too. If she has, she'll have done her best to find a way around it. When I think of how she convinced me to lie — in court — I can't help but wonder if she could have persuaded the others to lie about Saturday. She's perfectly capable of coming up with a story that would make that seem reasonable to them. The web of lies could be endless.

"Is there anything else?" Officer Cloud asks after she's written down names and phone numbers for Lori, Jen, and Krysti.

"No. That's it."

She says she'll look into it, but she doesn't sound too excited about it. After we hang up I sit and wonder what good it's going to do even

if she does ask the others. It doesn't establish that Carrie lied about her stepfather, and that's the thing I really need to be able to prove.

For a moment I can picture his face, smiling and friendly, when he first became Carrie's stepdad. I hadn't been able to understand why she didn't like him back then. He seemed genuinely nice to me. It had seemed to make sense when she told me he'd been molesting her, but now I know that was a lie. What was it, then, that made her dislike him? Could anyone really be so selfish and evil that they would do what she did for no reason other than she didn't happen to want him around? Didn't she even care what that did to her *mother*?

But the image of Joe Kelward's smiling face fades and gives way to a different expression. I see, instead, the hard, angry look that stared back at me when I was on the witness stand. I recall seeing panic in his eyes, and how that gave me a feeling of satisfaction at the time, thinking he was getting what he deserved.

Except he wasn't.

Nausea washes over me and I have to take long, slow breaths to settle it. My shoulders slump forward as tears fill my eyes and spill over. How could I have gotten myself into such a terrible predicament? Why couldn't I have just said no to Carrie in the first place? I knew what I was

doing was wrong, even if it *seemed* like it was for a good reason at the time.

Glancing around my room I can't help wondering what it's like where Joe Kelward is right now. I picture a small cell with a narrow bed sporting a thin mattress. There would be a sink and toilet right there in the same room, and zero privacy for when he wanted to use them. This innocent man has to eat and shower and spend his days with murderers and rapists and other criminals.

I can't begin to imagine the despair he feels. Knowing that it's at least partly my fault is like a burden that gets heavier with each passing day. If only there was something I could do to help him.

That's when it occurs to me that maybe there is something I can do. It might not be much, but I can write to him. I can tell him what happened and let him know I'm doing what I can to try to right the wrong that's been done to him.

I can give him hope.