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What Remains of Me

Written by A. L. Gaylin

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A L GAYLIN

what
remains
of
me



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PROLOGUE

At Carpentia Women's State Correctional Facility in Central California, the thermostat is always kept at a chilly 55 degrees. There's a practical psychology in this, one of the guards tells me. In cooler temperatures, prisoners are more alert and productive, more courteous too.

"The heat," the guard says, black velvet eyes belying his tall, muscular frame. "It does things to people."

In a way, Kelly Lund's story proves out the guard's point, for it was on June 28, 1980—the hottest night of the year—that Lund, then 17 and hopped up on a combination of marijuana and cocaine, walked into the Hollywood Hills mansion of Oscar-nominated director John McFadden and, in the midst of his own wrap party, shot him to death. Was it the heat, not the drugs, that drove this ordinary girl to enter a home filled with Tinseltown elite—with uber-cool rock stars and impossibly sleek models and the silver screen gods and goddesses whose glorious faces graced the pages of the movie magazines that lonely Kelly was known to have stashed under her bed?

Was it the 93-degree temperature—and perhaps the blinding rage it sparked—that propelled this Hollywood have-not past a glittering constellation of haves and into McFadden's opulent, Moroccan-themed living room where, finding him alone, she pumped three bullets into his chest and skull?

I consider that possibility now, as the guard leads me into Lund's cell—the tidy, dull square that has been her home for the past seven years. And as I reach the cell to find her sitting on her cot in her institutional orange, I decide, in my own way, to raise the issue.

“Kelly, do you ever miss the sun?”

She turns her gaze up to me, her gray eyes hard, dry as prison bars. In seven years, Kelly Lund hasn't aged a day. It's hard to imagine she ever will. Her skin is unlined, the whole of her as impervious to time as she is to all transformative emotions—shame, regret, caring. Guilt.

“The sun is still there,” she says. “No reason to miss it.”

“John McFadden isn't here anymore.”

“That's right.”

“Do you miss him?”

“I don't know.”

“Do you feel bad about killing him?”

“It was meant to be.”

“His death?”

“Yes.”

“How do you know?”

“If it wasn't, someone would have noticed me before I made it into the den.” She pauses for a moment, deciding whether or not to go on. Weighing her options. “I see myself,” she says, finally, “as an agent of fate.”

“Fate didn't murder John McFadden, Kelly. You did.”

Lund's gaze drifts, and for a moment, she appears immersed in the dull gray wall of her cell, as though she sees something in it that exists in herself. “You have your belief system,” she tells me. “I have mine.”

On one level, it is probably a defense mechanism, Kelly Lund's complete lack of spark, of color. When she was just 15, her fraternal twin sister, Catherine, stole their mother's car, drove to Chantry Flats—a remote overlook in the San Gabriel Valley favored by lovers—and took her own life by flinging herself into the canyon. An aspiring actress, Catherine had been everything Kelly Lund was not—beautiful, vibrant, and with a natural charisma potent enough to gain her entry into Hollywood's young party circuit at the tender age of 14. But she was also troubled, vulnerable—the type of girl who felt everything a little too deeply—and who ultimately, tragically, let those feelings get the best of her.

Conversely, it may have been Kelly Lund's very blandness that kept her alive and afloat in the same tank of sharks that devoured her sister. The block of ice to Catherine's fast-burning flame, Kelly had few friends, and—outside of a brief and puzzling relationship with McFadden's son Vincent—lived a largely uneventful life before committing the brutal act that would gain her the fame her lovely twin died for lack of.

“I almost didn't go to the party, you know,” she says to me now. “It was hot out and I wasn't feeling so great. But then, I changed my mind.” Never before have I seen a face so utterly placid, a pair of eyes so still.

I can't help wondering what those eyes must have looked like through John McFadden's lens a week before his death, when on his son's insistence, he'd filmed Kelly Lund. “Would you still have killed John,” I ask, “if he had been nice to you at the screen test?”

Lund smiles—the same smile she offered the world outside the L.A. courthouse the day of her sentencing. Not a smile at all, really. More a baring of the teeth. “How should I know?” she says.

The room grows even colder.

EXCERPTED FROM

*Mona Lisa: The True Story of
Hollywood Killer Kelly Lund*
by Sebastian Todd, 1989

CHAPTER 1

FEBRUARY 11, 1980

It was when Kelly Lund's science teacher, Mr. Hansen, asked her the third question in a row that she wasn't able to answer—the one about mitochondria—that Bellamy Marshall passed her a note. Kelly said “um” and swallowed hard to get her dry mouth working when she felt the balled-up paper hit her in the leg. She didn't think *note* at first, though. She thought *spitball*.

Kelly got spitballed a lot. So often, in fact, that she'd once told her mom about it. “They throw spitballs at me,” she'd said. “They laugh at my clothes because they're so cheap.”

“Cheap?” Mom had said. “Your clothes cover you up where you should be covered, which is more than I can say about those other girls you go to school with. If you want to talk about *cheap*, Kelly. Those girls are what I call *cheap*.”

Kelly had made a secret vow never to talk to her mom about school again.

So she didn't look at the note when it hit her leg. She ignored it, the way she ignored all the spitballs, the way she ignored so much of what happened to her, in school and elsewhere. *Ignore it and it will go away*. It worked for most things that hurt, if not all.

Mr. Hansen said the thing about mitochondria again, Kelly trying to hang on to the words, to mold them into something that made a little bit of sense. But she couldn't. She felt the sun pressing through the classroom windows and the itchiness of her cardigan sweater and the elastic of her peasant skirt cutting into skin—all of those things so much more real than the question.

Everyone was watching her. She felt that too.

“Miss Lund?” Mr. Hansen said.

Kelly gazed at the floor. Her eyelids fluttered. She felt herself starting to escape . . . “*Miss Lund.*”

For a few seconds, or maybe it was more, Kelly slipped into a dream—an actual *dream* of being seven years old and with her sister again, of sitting cross-legged on their bedroom floor, of sitting knee to knee with Catherine, staring as hard as she could into Catherine's bottle green eyes.

“Whoever moves first, dies.”

“But . . . but . . . I don't want to die, Catherine.”

Catherine places a hand on hers. It is warm and dry and calming. “Don't be scared, Kelly. You know me. I always move first.”

“Miss Lund! Am I keeping you awake?”

Kelly's eyes flipped open. She heard herself say, “No. I'm falling asleep just fine.”

Oh no. . .

A strange silence fell over the room—an airless feeling. Mr. Hansen blinked, his jaw tightening. Kelly knew she was supposed to say “I'm sorry,” and she started to, but before she could get the words out everyone started to laugh. It took Kelly a few moments to register that the kids were laughing *with* her, not *at* her. That never happened. Her heart beat faster. Her face warmed.

“Good one,” said Pete Nichol behind her, Pete a champion spitball

thrower who had never said anything directly to Kelly ever. Pete—tall and shining blond and rich too. The son of the producer of one of Kelly's favorite TV shows, swimmers' hair like white silk. Pete Nichol clapped Kelly on the back and Mr. Hansen said, "Miss Lund. You are on detention," and that made everyone laugh louder. Some even cheered.

Kelly turned and ventured a look back at the class and that's when she saw the balled-up piece of paper on the floor next to her leg—*not* a spitball—and when she glanced up and toward the next row over, Bellamy Marshall was gesturing at the paper, her silver bracelets jangling.

Read it, Bellamy mouthed.

Bellamy was new, the daughter of a famous actor named Sterling Marshall who'd been a big deal in the '50s and '60s and still kind of was. She'd started at Hollywood High after Christmas break, having been expelled from a fancy private school in Santa Monica for mysterious reasons. There was drama in that, high drama in the way Bellamy had shown up a week after school restarted, slipping into the back row of Mr. Hansen's class, the *very back row*, though Mr. Hansen had pointed at an empty seat in the front. Kelly had turned to look at this daring new girl in her bangle bracelets and designer jeans, her luxe leather jacket, Bellamy Marshall ignoring Mr. Hansen and breathing through frosty parted lips, like a movie heroine on the run.

Bellamy had smiled at Kelly and Kelly had smiled back, wanting to be her friend but a little sad for knowing that it wasn't possible. Not with this girl—this shining rich, leather jacketed girl who'd only smiled at Kelly because she didn't know any better . . .

That had been more than a month ago.

Once Mr. Hansen got everybody quiet, once he called on Phoebe Calloway in the front row and asked her the mitochondria question and Kelly felt reasonably invisible again, she kicked the piece of paper closer to her desk. She slipped it off the floor, unfolded it quietly.

PARTY AFTER SCHOOL. MY PLACE.

Kelly turned to Bellamy to make sure it wasn't a joke. She wore a different leather jacket today—a brown bomber. She probably had a closet full of them, all real leather.

Bellamy mouthed, *Well?* And then she winked at Kelly. She didn't look like someone who was joking.

Yes, Kelly nodded, amazed at this moment. Amazed at this day.

IT WASN'T REALLY A PARTY. JUST BELLAMY, KELLY, TWO BOYS FROM the soccer team, and a tall, skinny twenty-three-year-old guy named Len with a pencilly mustache and a sandwich bag full to bursting with what he called “Humbolt's finest.” They met up in the school parking lot, Len shaking the Baggie at Bellamy and grinning.

The two boys piled into Len's black Trans Am, while Kelly rode with Bellamy in her red VW Rabbit. They drove in the opposite direction from where Kelly lived, sped across Sunset Boulevard and past Barney's Beanery, Bellamy swerving around slow drivers, sunglasses focused on the road, silver bangle bracelets slipping up and down her wrists as she steered. They drove up, up, up, into the hills, neither one of them talking, just listening to the radio, to The Knack's “Good Girls Don't”—a song Kelly had never liked, not until now.

Kelly had expected to be nervous when she got in the car, but Bellamy not talking to her felt like not getting called on in class. It put her at ease.

“Hand me my cigs, would you?” Bellamy said. “They're in my purse.”

Kelly picked Bellamy's bag off the car floor—a Louis Vuitton. A lot of the girls at school had these. They called them “Louie Vouies” and treated them in such an offhand way, tossing them around like they were worth nothing, but Kelly knew better. Her mother had

shown her one at I. Magnin once, tapping her nails on the price tag. “*Who would spend this kind of money?*” she had said. Kelly’s mother worked at I. Magnin behind the makeup counter. But even with her discount, she never bought anything there for Kelly or for herself. “*It’s obscene,*” she would say, about the prices, about the entire store. Kelly never replied. She found it beautiful.

“*Someday,*” Mom would say, “*I’ll get us out of this town.*”

Carefully, Kelly unzipped the bag. She plucked out a box of Marlboro Reds—Mom’s brand—and handed it to her.

“You can have one too,” Bellamy said.

“Thanks.”

Bellamy lit one off the car lighter, then slipped it to Kelly without looking at her. The gesture made her feel as though they’d known each other for years. Bellamy rolled the windows down and Kelly blew a cloud of smoke into the warming air.

“Len likes you,” Bellamy said, “I can tell.”

Kelly felt her cheeks redden. “How do you know him?”

She shrugged. “Just . . . around,” she said. “He can be a jerk but he’s always got good weed. And I love the smell of his car.”

“Is he really twenty-three?”

“Yep.”

“Wow.”

Through the windshield, the Hollywood sign loomed before them, making Kelly think of Catherine. It always did—how she used to brag about their view of it to anyone who’d listen. “*You can see the sign from our apartment,*” she’d say, leaning on the word *sign* as though she were talking about the Empire State Building or the Eiffel Tower, when the truth was, the Hollywood sign had been an eyesore back then—full of holes, crumbling into the hills, the first and third *o*’s missing almost entirely.

“*Who wants to see it?*” Kelly would say to her. “*It’s ugly.*”

“*No it isn’t. It just needs fixing.*”

Two years ago, a whole bunch of rich movie stars and politicians had taken interest in the rotting sign and rebuilt it. Alice Cooper had even donated his first *o* to replace the more destroyed of the two and declared himself Alice Coper for the rest of the year—something Catherine would have found funny if she’d still been alive . . .

On the radio, The Knack was fading into Tom Petty—that song Kelly liked about a girl raised on promises. She took another drag off her Red and gazed out at Catherine’s sign—sparkling white in the sun, the letters whole and welcoming. *Some things do wind up getting fixed.*

“You were killer today,” Bellamy said.

“Huh?”

“In science! How did you get the balls to say that to Hansen?”

“Oh,” Kelly said, remembering. “It uh . . . it just sort of came out, I guess.”

“I’m falling asleep just fine . . .” Bellamy said. “Man. That made my whole year. My whole *life.*”

Kelly took another drag off her cigarette, smiled a little. “I just had to say it,” she said. “He was being so annoying.”

Bellamy laughed—warm and contagious—and Kelly joined in. She tried to remember the last time she’d laughed at something that wasn’t on TV. It had to be back when Catherine was still alive, when they were still little kids. “Hansen’s face,” Bellamy gasped. “He was clenching his teeth so tight, I thought his eyes were going to pop out!” And Kelly laughed some more, Tom Petty singing about his American Girl, the whole car full of music.

Finally, they caught their breath. Bellamy slowed down at a stoplight, braking smoothly. She was a good driver. Kelly couldn’t drive at all. She’d signed up for Driver’s Ed, but hadn’t made it to most of the

classes. What was the point? Mom would never let her use the car anyway.

“So,” Bellamy said. “I guess they let you out early for a first offense?”

“Huh?”^x

“You know. I expected you to be stuck in detention ’til sunset.”

Kelly’s mouth went dry. *Miss Lund. You are on detention.* Mr. Hansen had used those words. She’d never been on detention before, woodwork kid that she was—one out of a mismatched set, the quiet twin, the dull one. Beyond bad grades, she’d never gotten into any type of trouble before today, never acted up, barely spoke. But here, this, her very first time and she’d . . . *Mom will kill me.* She turned to Bellamy, cheeks burning. “I didn’t go to detention,” she said. “I never checked in.”

Bellamy blinked her mascaraed eyes. “You’re serious?”

“Yeah,” she said. “I forgot.”

She turned back to the road as the light changed to green, her face cracking into a bright grin. “I think I’m falling in love with you, Kelly Lund,” she said.

Kelly grinned too. She couldn’t help herself.

WHEN THEY GOT TO BELLAMY’S HOUSE, THE BOYS WERE ALREADY waiting out in front. “What’s your name, sweetheart?” Len said. He kept smiling at Kelly, a slippery smile.

“Her name’s Kelly, not Sweetheart,” Bellamy said. “Try and keep from drooling.”

One of the soccer boys said, “Who cares about names? Let’s smoke.”

Kelly was only half-listening. She couldn’t stop gawking at Bellamy’s house. It was huge—an adobe palace with a gleaming red tile roof, balconies all around. They’d driven through a gate to get here, up

a long, palm-lined driveway that slithered up the side of Mount Lee, Kelly's ears clicking with each rising turn. It had made her heart pound, this drive, like traveling to another world.

And it *was* another world, wasn't it? The Bird Streets. That's what this area of the Hollywood Hills was called, the roads named for birds and perched so high, driving them felt almost like flying. Bellamy lived on Blue Jay Way. ("*Like the song,*" Kelly had said back in the car. Bellamy had nodded. "*I hate the Beatles.*")

Bellamy's front door was made of polished, carved wood. A maid in a white uniform let them in and walked away quickly, eyes aimed at the floor. "Don't let my little brother come upstairs, Flora," Kelly said. But the maid didn't seem to hear her.

Kelly saw a pink marble staircase, a crystal chandelier, huge windows, at least two stories high, overlooking the canyon. She bit her lip. She kept her eyes down like the maid, because she couldn't look too hard at anything. She wanted to seem like someone who'd seen a place like this before.

Bellamy's room was at the end of a long, carpeted hall. And as they all walked in, the two boys laughing about something that happened at practice the other day, Bellamy asking Len to show her the bag again, Kelly used every muscle in her body to keep her jaw from flapping open.

There was a stereo with a tape deck and turntable, speakers tall as Kelly's chin. There was a big TV, a vanity table with a huge mirror, a walk-in closet, door ajar to reveal rows of clothes, grouped by color. There was a record collection that filled an entire wall, a red leather couch, a zebra print throw rug that may very well have been real zebra. And best of all there was a king-size bed with a white puffy satin spread and dozens of throw pillows—the type of thing a princess would sleep on, or a queen. There was a framed movie poster over it—*Saturday*

Night Fever. Kelly noticed a pen scrawl across John Travolta's pants leg, and moved closer to it. Travolta's autograph . . . with a note. *For Bellamy*, he'd written. *Best wishes*. Kelly stared at the looping script and had to touch it. She had to press her fingers to the glass, just to make sure it was real.

"I hate disco but I still think John's sexy," Bellamy said. "My dad knows him."

Kelly's hand flew back. She felt herself blushing.

Bellamy smiled at her. "I met him once."

"You did?"

"I wanted to touch that chin dimple so bad." She leaned in closer, dropped her voice to a whisper. "I wanted to put my tongue on it."

"Make it a fattie," said one of the soccer boys. He was talking to Len, who was sitting on the edge of Bellamy's princess bed, rolling a joint intently.

"If this were my room," Kelly said, "I'd never leave."

Len said, "Few hits of this, you might not be able to."

"You want to spend the night?" said Bellamy. "My parents are in Switzerland, so it's just me and the staff till Friday."

Kelly swallowed. She hadn't even called home, and she knew Mom wouldn't approve. "*Keep away from those Hollywood types*," Mom would always say—even though she'd sent her girls to Hollywood High, where the sports team was called the Sheiks after a movie character played by Rudolph Valentino. Nearly everyone at school was a Hollywood type in one way or another—what else would they be? Mom may as well have said to Kelly and Catherine, "*Don't make any friends*," Kelly following the rule, Catherine dying for breaking it. "My . . . my mom . . . I don't think she . . ."

"Hey, it's cool," Bellamy said. "Some other time, though, okay?"

"Yeah, I'd love to."

“Lotsa nice red veins in this stuff,” Len was saying, the two boys oohing and aahing over it. They were both short and stocky with floppy hair and pink cheeks. Kelly didn’t know either one of them, and they didn’t seem like jocks at all. They reminded her more of two puppies from the same litter.

“Ladies first,” said Len. He gave Kelly that slippery smile. Kelly nodded at Bellamy. “You can go first.”

Bellamy plucked the joint away from Len. She put it to her lips and pulled off it deeply.

Len said, “Bet you wish that spliff was my Johnson.” The soccer boys chuckled.

She pursed her lips to keep the hit down. “The spliff’s bigger,” she said finally, smoke curling out of her mouth.

Kelly laughed.

One of the soccer boys said, “Burn!”

“Baby,” Len said. “You *know* that ain’t true.”

Bellamy rolled her eyes, though her cheeks flushed a little.

Kelly took a closer look at Len—the tight black T-shirt, the veiny arms, the thick belt buckle, shaped like a coiled rattlesnake. He seemed so old. She imagined Bellamy with him and the thought of it made her feel kind of strange, panicky . . .

“Earth to Kelly.” Bellamy was holding the joint out to her.

“Sorry.”

Kelly started to take it, when Bellamy pulled back. “Get out,” she said—not to Kelly, to Kelly’s left shoulder. When Kelly turned, she saw a skinny boy with Bellamy’s same black eyes standing in the doorway.

“Hi,” Kelly said.

The boy smiled at her. He wore a *Star Wars* T-shirt, spindly pale legs sticking out of white shorts. He couldn’t have been more than ten.

“Don’t say hi to him. He’s Satan’s spawn.”

The boy blew a raspberry. One of the soccer boys laughed, and Bellamy got up from the bed in a rush. She slammed the door in his face. Locked it. When she turned around, her face was an angry pink. “My brother Shane.” She said it to Kelly like a swear word. “I swear to God he won’t leave me alone.”

KELLY HAD TRIED POT ONCE, WITH CATHERINE. THEY’D BEEN THIRTEEN at the time and Catherine had brought it into their room along with their mom’s pink lighter. Kelly had asked where she’d gotten the stuff, but Catherine had refused to tell her. “*Just try it,*” Catherine had said.

“What if I freak out?”

“Would it kill you, Kelly? Would it kill you to freak out just one time in your entire life?”

Kelly had inhaled too hard and coughed it all up and felt nothing.

This time, though, it had worked. At least Kelly thought it had. Her head felt soft and fuzzy, as though someone had rubbed lotion all over her brain. Bellamy had agreed to take the soccer boys home, seeing as they both lived nearby, and when Kelly had said good-bye to her, she’d seen her face in flashing frames.

Kelly had accepted a ride from Len—something she hadn’t thought very much about until now, but as she slipped into the front seat of the Trans Am, that panicky feeling flooded through her again. She found herself focusing too hard on each movement. The click of the lock echoed in her ears and the leather seats squeaked and clawed at her. Kelly felt Len’s syrupy gaze on her too, and when she turned a little, there was Len’s face. Close. God, he was so old.

“Good stuff, huh?” His breath was hot and sticky. His eyes blurred into one.

“Really good.”

Len’s hand slipped up under her peasant skirt and rested on her thigh. Her whole leg stiffened. The car did smell good, she thought—like warm leather and pine.

He leaned in and kissed her, his mouth spongy and lax. His lips were too wet and the pencil mustache scratched at her nose. He thrust his tongue into her mouth and then just let it lay there on top of hers, slimy and sleeping.

My first kiss. She hadn’t expected it to be like this. Catherine had once said her first kiss would feel like magic and she’d wanted to believe that. But then again, how was Kelly supposed to know what magic felt like? She closed her eyes, tried to relax. His mouth opened wider, so he was biting into her cheeks. What part of this was supposed to feel good? There had to be something. She tried running a hand through his greasy hair and he moaned, his wet lips vibrating.

The weed made Kelly nervous. It was getting hard to breathe, but she didn’t want to pull away because she didn’t want to have to look at Len. She didn’t know what to say to him. *Thanks? That was interesting?*

At one point, back at the house when the boys were laughing about something, Bellamy had set her head on Kelly’s shoulder. “*I knew we’d be friends,*” she had said. The memory of it relaxed her.

Len pulled away. Kelly’s mouth still tasted of him, a sour taste. “Better get you home,” he said. “Unless you want to stop somewhere first.”

She didn’t want to stop somewhere with him. But she didn’t want to go home either. She heard herself say, “I don’t care.”

Len started up the car but kept his hand on her thigh. Kelly closed her eyes and leaned back, Bellamy’s voice from this afternoon still in her head, making the hand feel lighter.

“*You’re like me.*” Bellamy had said it into Kelly’s ear, in a soft, pressing whisper she could feel more than hear. “*You have secrets.*”

CHAPTER 2

APRIL 21, 2010

Kelly gripped the wheel—one hand at ten o'clock, the other at two. She glanced into the rearview. No one behind her or next to her. No one on this entire stretch of the 10 sprawling east and into the desert, but still she clicked her blinker before switching lanes and checked the mirrors again—both of them, rearview and driver's side. She had to be safe. She couldn't break any rules.

She thought about turning the radio on, but decided not to. *What if it's on the news?* Instead she switched off the air conditioner, opened the window, and let the warm air wash in, feeling the roar of it, listening to the gallop of the wheels on the road. There was so much passion in driving alone at night. Kelly could always get lost in it, even now.

Kelly had learned to drive only five years ago, a month or two after her release, so it was still so new and exciting. Her husband had taught her over an eight-day period that must have felt very long to him, after business hours in the big empty lot outside the Costco in La Quinta.

He'd been so patient with her, never raising his voice—not even when she braked so hard the whole car convulsed

and the backs of their skulls slammed into the headrests. “*Okay, we’re definitely stopped,*” Kelly’s husband had said, once they caught their breath. “*Next time, try to be a little less emphatic about it.*”

Kelly glanced at the clock on the dashboard. 2:47 A.M. *Please be sleeping,* she told him in her mind. *Please don’t wake up and see that I’m gone.* Then she shut the drawer on her husband’s face, his name. She locked him away.

One hour left. Just forty-five minutes more on the freeway and then ten or fifteen minutes on surface streets and then . . . She checked the rearview again. Peered hard into the glass and searched for headlights beside her, behind her, far back as she could see . . .

No one had followed her.

Kelly closed her eyes for a few seconds, breathed in and out. When she opened them again, she was thinking only of the drive—of the rush of air on her skin and her hands on the wheel and the vast, empty lane in front of the headlights, leading her into the darkness, bringing her home.

SHANE MARSHALL WAS UP AT SIX, AS HE ALMOST ALWAYS WAS THESE days, as he’d been for the past five years, every morning, up with the sun, up as soon as the pills wore off, watching his wife sleeping.

Shane brushed his hand against the side of her face, lightly so as not to wake her.

Twenty-five years of knowing her, fifteen years of marriage, five in the same house. The whole time, the same questions. The same wondering, and wanting to know her and not wanting to know. The same ache.

Kelly stirred. A lock of hair fell across her eyes, gold streaked with silver. Shane liked the way the soft morning sun made the silver hairs

glisten. He put his camera up to his face. He wouldn't take the picture—that would be too invasive, wouldn't it? But he would watch her through the lens. He would take in her cream-colored skin and her round shoulders and her silence.

“I love you,” he whispered.

She stretched, eyes shut tight, mouth curling into a smile, or maybe a grimace. He wasn't sure. She was so hard to read, his wife of fifteen years. *What's on your mind, Kelly Lund? Who is on your mind?*

He snapped a picture.

Kelly's eyelids fluttered.

“Good morning.”

“Shane?”

“Expecting someone else?”

“Funny,” she murmured. “What time is it? Six?”

“Catching the golden hour.” He snapped another shot. The desert sunlight dappled her face. “Catching you.”

“Shane,” she said. “Please don't take my picture.”

“I can't help it. You're beautiful.”

She opened her eyes—those sad, opaque gray eyes. Shane was forever trying to see inside them, see through them and now . . . watching her eyes through the lens, he saw a coldness in them, something he didn't understand. Something new.

“Stop,” she said, her face changing again, the eyes softening as though someone had dropped a veil over them. Why couldn't he figure her out?

He put the camera down.

“Did I sound harsh? Sorry. I'm just . . . God, I'm so tired.”

Gently, Shane touched Kelly's face. “It's okay,” he said. “I shouldn't have taken your picture.”

She took his hand in hers, pressed her lips against his wrist. She held his palm to her smooth cheek, every part of her so soft—her skin, her mouth, like a silk scarf over a knife.

He wrapped his arms around her and held her to him, feeling her sweet breath at his chest, the filmy fabric of her camisole, inhaling the clean scent of her hair. He wanted more, even though he knew better. He kissed her neck.

“Shane,” she said.

“I know.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I understand,” he said, trying again. That was their life. Shane trying, Kelly pulling away. Kelly apologizing. Shane understanding.

God, he was so tired of understanding.

The phone rang. Shane started toward it, but then he realized it wasn’t the bedroom phone ringing. It was the phone in the kitchen—his work line. At six? He rushed into the kitchen, plucked the receiver off the base. “Hollywood Photo Archives,” he said.

“Shane.”

How strange life could be. Just this morning, waking up, he’d thought about his sister for the first time in God knows how long. *Maybe Dad’s right*, he had thought. *Maybe we should try and get along*. And now, here she was after five years of not speaking to each other, feeling the same way as Shane at the same time of morning? How was that possible?

“It’s Bellamy,” she said. “Are you alone?”

“I know who you are,” he said. “Why would I be alone?”

“Oh God. I can’t do this.”

“Why are you calling me?”

There was a long pause on the other end of the line, Bellamy breathing in and out, loud enough for him to hear the breathing. Shane’s jaw tightened. This was the Bellamy he knew, the Bellamy who loved her

loaded silences, her mind games, the Bellamy he'd stopped speaking to for good reason. Was she drunk? High? Or was she tape-recording him for one of her projects?

"I'm hanging up now."

"No, wait," she said. "I'm sorry."

He swallowed. *Sorry*. "What is it?"

"Dad."

"Did he put you up to this call?"

"*What?* No. God, Shane. Oh my God I can't . . ." Her voice broke.

"Bellamy?"

"I can't say it."

More breathing. An awful feeling burned in the pit of Shane's stomach, rose up into his throat. A swelling dread. "What happened?"

"I can't."

His heart pounded. "Bellamy, please."

"Can't say it."

"*What happened to Dad?*"

"*Don't yell at me.*" She was crying now.

"*Tell me.*" He fought out the words, as though someone were strangling him. And when he looked up, he saw Kelly, standing at the far corner of the room.

"What?" Kelly said.

Shane shook his head hard, to shake his thoughts together and at the same time ward off Kelly, so he could be alone with them. He needed to be alone. *Go away*.

"What's going on?" Kelly said.

"*Go away!*"

Through the plastic earpiece, Bellamy was saying sorry again. Bellamy who never said sorry, Bellamy who never cried, breaking into sobs. Shane asked her no more because he knew. *Dad*, she'd said, the word

crumbling to pieces. *Dad is dead.* “I’m sorry, Shane, oh Shane, I’m so, so sorry.”

“SHOULD I COME WITH YOU?” KELLY ASKED, DURING THAT ONE BRIEF moment after Shane hung up, when she forgot who she was and what she’d done and saw only her husband, his loss.

“No, Kelly.”

“Oh,” she said, remembering. “Okay.”

“I mean—”

“I get it.”

Shane grabbed his denim jacket out of the coat closet. He opened the front door, and a warm breeze swept in, like breath. He turned and stood there for a while, facing her with the desert sun haloing all around him. “You’ll come to the funeral, right?”

“Yes.”

“You’ll hold my hand.”

“Yes.”

“I love you,” Shane said. His face was in the shadows, so Kelly couldn’t quite see his eyes. She was glad for that.

“I love you too,” she said.

AFTER SHANE LEFT, KELLY STARED AT THE CLOSED DOOR FOR A WHILE before walking back into the kitchen. She made a pot of coffee, toasted some bread—no sense in cooking a big breakfast if Shane wasn’t going to be around. The whole time, she didn’t think about Sterling Marshall. She didn’t think about anything. She just listened for the birds.

The desert was so quiet, especially compared to Carpentia where there had been so much noise. All that shouting and clanging all night long, everything echoing—footsteps and singing and screams. Some-

body would weep, it didn't matter how late at night it was or how far away the weeper was from Kelly's cell, the sound of it would travel. It would weave its way into her thoughts and wake her up if she'd been lucky enough to get to sleep at all. She used to wad up toilet paper, shove it in her ears, but that did no good. The sounds vibrated. She could feel them.

Here, though, in Joshua Tree, you had to strain to hear birds. Kelly leaned against the kitchen window. She put her ear to the glass as the coffee bubbled, listening for the *wow, wow* of the Gambel's Quail, the cry of the golden eagle, the death-rattle clacking of the roadrunner's beak.

When she'd first gotten out of Carpentia and she and Shane had moved here, Kelly had bought a guide and memorized all the desert species—their names, their field marks, their calls and nesting patterns. She'd put a few feeders outside to draw the braver ones closer, and now she wanted to hear more of them, the flap of their wings, the chirping and rustling as they landed and ate, and most of all, those subtle sounds she couldn't hear from indoors—the sounds they made leaving, knowing they'd come back.

IT WASN'T UNTIL KELLY HAD TAKEN HER COFFEE AND HER TOAST BACK to her workspace in the bedroom that she thought about her father-in-law again— and only then when she saw the news story on her home page.

Kelly's brain had a way of doing that. *Avoidance*, the shrink at Carpentia had called it, but she thought of it more as organizing her emotions. It was as though Kelly had a big file cabinet in her head and she could take her feelings and slide them into drawers and lock them up, deal with them later.

Problem was, lately, the drawers kept flying open.

Kelly stared at the picture: a dashing young Sterling Marshall, as he appeared in his Oscar-winning role in the 1950s war movie *Guns of Victory*. She clicked on the link and skimmed the article:

Movie legend Sterling Marshall is dead at the age of 79 of an apparent suicide . . .

Marshall had recently been diagnosed with cancer . . .

. . . though sources say he may have left behind a note, the contents of the alleged suicide note have not been revealed . . .

Suicide? A note?

Kelly's cell phone was on her bedside table—resting next to its charger, because she hadn't plugged it in last night. Kelly was always forgetting to charge her phone, forgetting so consistently that it almost felt intentional, almost as though she *had a need to see the phone die*. Shane had once said that to Kelly after failing to reach her one night. He'd apologized immediately—so obviously mortified over his own choice of words that it made Kelly's cheeks flush. "*I'm just not used to modern technology,*" she had said.

The phone still had a few gasps in it. She plugged it into the charger, tapped in Shane's cell number. It rang a few times, then went to voice mail. "The news reports are saying suicide," she said into the phone. "They say your father had cancer. Did you know, Shane? Had he told you about it before? I wish I could help or . . . I don't know what I wish. I'm sorry. I hate to see you hurt." Kelly's voice sounded strange to her. Tinny and insincere. It didn't matter. She was speaking to no one, having ended the call before saying any of it. Kelly turned back to the computer.

The actor's daughter, Bellamy Marshall, 48, a multimedia artist who came to fame in the mid-'90s with a series of controversial painted photographs, accompanied by tape-recorded interviews . . .

Kelly stopped reading. Her gaze drifted back to the picture—the wavy dark hair and the cleft chin, the black eyes that were Shane's eyes and Bellamy's eyes—velvet-soft and fathomless . . .

Kelly shut her eyes, an old afternoon flooding her mind. A sunshiny, spring afternoon in 1980, when Sterling Marshall was only Bellamy's dad and his house was only Bellamy's house and Shane was nothing more than Bellamy's annoying little brother.

On this particular afternoon, Kelly had been curled up with Bellamy on her zebra print rug as they so often were back then, watching British music videos on Bellamy's enormous TV—first VCR Kelly had ever seen—a bag of Doritos nestled between them. They'd been stoned out of their minds, piling chips into their mouths and crunching away, their fingers stained that salty orange. Kelly could remember Mr. Marshall cracking the door and poking his handsome head into the room. *"Please turn the music down, girls."*

Without even thinking about it, Kelly had said, *"Okay, Dad."*

"Did you just call him Dad?" Bellamy had said. *"Oh my God, that's so cute!"*

Funny how close the past can feel—close enough to grab on to and let it pull you along. But once you reach out. Once you reach to touch it . . . She had loved him once. She'd envied Bellamy for having Sterling Marshall in her life, because compared to her own father he had seemed so strong. *"Okay, Dad,"* she had said. And maybe a part of her had said it on purpose. Wishful thinking, back then, back when she still thought wishfully . . .

Kelly exhaled in a rush, sweeping the memory away. For a few seconds, she allowed herself to recall the closer past, the previous night. And then came thoughts of other things that needed to be swept away, needed to be cleaned.

INSIDE KELLY'S CLOSET, ON THE FLOOR BEHIND THE TWO NEAT ROWS of shoes, lurked her clothes from last night—the jeans, the new Adidas sneakers, the soft, pale gray hoodie she'd bought at Target last fall. She thought about throwing them all out. Of burning them in the yard, maybe tossing them in the trunk of her car and driving 'til she could find an open gas station Dumpster.

But these were all favorite clothes, more noticeable in their absence—especially to Shane, observant photographer that he was. “*What happened to those jeans I love on you?*” he might say. Or, “*Didn't you just buy a new pair of running shoes?*”

Besides, the stains weren't that bad.

Kelly scooped the clothes up in her arms without looking at them, without seeing the rust-brown splotches on the sneaker soles, the hem of a pant leg, the edge of a pale gray sleeve. She brought them into the kitchen and dropped them in the washing machine—sneakers first, then hoodie, T-shirt, jeans, socks, followed by a cup of detergent, two cups of bleach. It almost felt like a ceremony. She worked the knobs on the machine, selecting Heavy Duty, selecting Hot Water, turning away as she did it. *Avoidance.*

It was a two-year-old stainless steel washing machine, sleek and efficient. And before Kelly returned to her workspace, she listened to it for a while. There was comfort in the whoosh of the water, the grind of the motor, the sounds the machine made, erasing Sterling Marshall's blood.

“It's over with,” Kelly whispered. Then she went to work.

KELLY'S JOB ENABLED HER TO USE THE PART OF HER MIND SHE LIKED

using most. It was the same part she used when she drove—the part that could escape her body, her life.

She flipped open her laptop and called up her latest photo, her work in progress, a wholesome brunette she'd decided to call Danielle G. “What’s your story, Danielle G?” Kelly whispered, the way she always did when she called up her photos.

For four years and counting, Kelly had worked for SaraBelle.com—an online “no-strings-attached” dating service for married men and women (mostly men) who were looking to cheat on their spouses. It was her job to write what her bosses called “grabbers”—alluring female profiles to accompany the models’ photographs displayed prominently on SaraBelle’s home page. All of the grabbers were fake. Paying the membership fee allowed you to click on them, which in turn would unlock the actual site, where you could explore the real, more prosaic, profiles and pictures.

Kelly’s job may or may not have been legal. She hadn’t asked. She hadn’t investigated. She didn’t care.

A Hollywood Photo Archives client who happened to be a silent partner in SaraBelle.com had recommended her at Shane’s request. After a brief phone conversation, the site’s administrator had offered Kelly what he called a “creative writing position.” And she had said yes immediately, no questions asked. Sitting at home, face hidden behind a laptop screen, dreaming up “ideal women” all day long . . . There was no job more suited to Kelly’s needs or skill-set. The idea that Shane had known that about her—that he’d been certain enough of her ability to make things up to put her in contact with the powers that be—troubled

Kelly for reasons she couldn't quite put her finger on. But that didn't make her any less grateful.

Kelly had decided Danielle G should be thirty-two, the mother of a six-year-old son and married to a banker. Her hobbies: *Pilates, cooking, yoga, staying in shape.* (Redundant yes, but on this site, with these men for customers, you never could talk about your body too much.)

She opened up the field called *My Story*, started typing: *I always thought Bill was enough for me, but once our son Jack went off to preschool and I started spending long days at home alone, I was able to see everything that was missing from my life. More and more, marriage has seemed like a crutch—a convenience. There is such yearning within me—he doesn't see it but there is. Making love to Bill can't fill it. My fantasies and my romance books and even my vibrator can't fill it. It is a desire that overpowers. An endless, aching need.*

Kelly's hands jumped off of the keyboard. She blinked at the screen. *Where did that come from?* A line that had no place in a grabber. Too poetic. Too pretentious. But it was familiar. That sad kind of familiar that she couldn't get a handle on at first but once she did, once she knew . . . It was . . . Oh, it was . . .

An endless aching need.

A line from "The Rose." Bette Midler.

The doorbell rang. Kelly stood up, her heart still pounding, the song still in her head, that drawer flying open . . .

She headed out of her bedroom with her hands over her ears, as though the song were playing out loud and not in her head. "Stop," she whispered. "Stop it, stop it, stop it . . ."

It only subsided once she neared the front door. The bell rang again. Shane. It had to be. Probably forgot something. Or maybe . . . *Maybe he wants me to go to the house with him after all . . .*

She put her hand on the door but stopped when she saw the looming figure in the fogged glass beside it. Bigger and taller than her husband.

“Ms. Lund?” The voice at the door was deep and serious and not at all familiar.

“Yes?” She had to reply. He could see her through the fogged glass just as easily as she could see him.

“Would it be all right if I come in?” He pressed his badge up against the glass as the washing machine twisted into a new cycle. “I’m with the LAPD. Homicide.”

CHAPTER 3

The drive from Joshua Tree to Hollywood took more than two hours, but Shane moved through it in a dream state, sliding up and down on-ramps, his hands numb on the steering wheel, the hot air from his Jeep's open window pushing in on him like breath.

Suicide. Bellamy hadn't said that on the phone. Shane had learned it from the radio: *Movie legend Sterling Marshall—who was suffering from pancreatic cancer—is dead of an apparent suicide. Details after the break.*

Shane hadn't waited for the break. He'd flipped off the radio, the word dialing through his head as he finally hit the Hollywood Freeway, maneuvering his Jeep through traffic that appeared to be out of central casting—the gleaming red Ferrari with its slick-haired driver, text-weaving in and out of the diamond lane; the big, dumb Dunkin' Donuts truck cutting him off, horn blaring aggressively; the douchebag Hummer clinging to his side and blasting hip-hop, bass amped up enough to inspire road rage. Or 'roid rage. Or both.

Suicide.

Who would have thought that Dad would commit suicide? Dad, who did all his own stunts, famously walking

over hot coals to prepare for one film role, wrestling with a live alligator for another. Dad, who had been tortured as a POW in the Korean War. (“It ain’t *Hogan’s Heroes*,” he used to tell Shane and Bellamy. But nothing more. “*You kids don’t need to hear any more about it.*”) Dad, who never even accepted Novocain at the dentist. Fearless, pain-taunting Sterling Marshall, killing himself over stage 2 cancer? It didn’t make sense. Unless he had another reason.

Or unless it wasn’t suicide after all.

Shane’s cell phone rang. He glanced at the screen. *Kelly*, it said. He declined the call—a reflex, like killing a bug. “I’ll call you later,” he whispered, apologizing to no one. Apologizing for his thoughts.

Shane stared at the road and listened to the quiet roar of his tires on the macadam. He tried to clear his head, but Dad’s voice still wormed in, Dad’s voice over the phone two weeks ago, swearing his illness wasn’t serious, that it was treatable, that he planned to fight it, just as he’d fought every bad thing in life and come out a winner. “*Stage two*,” he’d said with a laugh. “*It’s practically a baby.*”

Had he been acting? With Sterling Marshall, you never could tell. “*Don’t listen to your mother, Shane. You know what a worrywart she is.*”

Same old Dad. That same sweetness about him, that same strength. Didn’t matter what was going on. Dad made you feel like everything would be all right. “*Shane, can you do me a favor, though?*”

“*Sure.*”

“*Can you please give your sister another chance?*”

“*Dad . . .*”

“*I know, I know. But she means well. She loves you, son, whether or not she’s able to say it.*”

First time Dad had mentioned Bellamy to Shane in years. Why? It wasn’t like him to bring up painful topics . . . Had he brought Bellamy up out of emotional necessity? Was asking his kids to make peace a last request?

“A calming presence.” Many years ago, someone had said that about his father—Shane couldn’t remember who.

The voice had been deep. It was a man who had said it. “*Outside of Henry Fonda, your father has the most naturally calming presence of any actor I know.*” A kind voice, and so familiar. If Shane could place a name to it, maybe he could get this man to speak at the funeral . . .

“You don’t understand, Dad.”

“I just want my family to get along. It’s the one thing that could . . .”

He’d never finished the sentence.

Shane gritted his teeth. *Stop. Drive. Keep it together.* What else had he said, Dad’s friend? If he really focused, Shane could almost hear the lilt in the voice, the smile in it. He had smiled, hadn’t he?

“You want to know a secret, kiddo?”

“Sure!”

A car horn shrieked—the Ferrari. Shane had cut him off without realizing it. He sped up, but the Ferrari pulled up, kiss-close behind him.

“Don’t tell the gossip rags.”

Shane pressed on the accelerator, but the Ferrari followed, riding the Jeep’s bumper, flexing its speed. “*See, if anybody finds out, they’ll get jealous, but the truth is, your father is the best actor I’ve ever worked with. I’m not kidding around.*” The voice shimmered in his mind now. More than thirty years later, but there was still no mistaking it. John’s voice. John McFadden’s voice.

The Ferrari flashed its brights.

“Asshole!” Shane yelled. But it came out a sob, and then more followed—wet, angry sobs that made it hard to breathe, to drive, to see the road.

“SUGAR PLEASE,” SAID THE POLICE DETECTIVE. HE WAS PROBABLY TEN years younger than Kelly—big shouldered and ginger haired, complexion like strawberry ice cream sprinkled with cinnamon. He was too pink

for Kelly, too soft. Of course he wanted sugar in his coffee. Probably liked it flavored too. Probably a big fan of hazelnut vanilla toasted caramel Cracker Jack crême brûlée.

Kelly filled a mug with coffee and set it down in front of the detective. She got the carton of sugar out of the pantry and poured some into a bowl. She placed the spoon on top and slid it across the kitchen table to him thinking, *Have at it.*

She couldn't remember his name. He'd introduced himself at the door, but everything he'd said after Detective and before LAPD Homicide had flown clear out of her head. Bruce or Brian or Barry . . . she thought it began with a *B. Brûlée*. First man she'd seen in a tie since . . . Well, probably since she last met with her parole officer. This detective's tie was gray, a spatter of red polka dots on it that made Kelly think of . . . Shane never wore ties.

He spooned in the sugar—two, three, four, five spoonfuls before Kelly's stomach went sour and she had to look away. As though on cue, the washing machine shifted cycles, thump-thump-thumping in time with her heart. "Thank you for letting me in," he said. "I know we usually call first, but I was in the area."

Thump, thump . . . "I don't have a lot of time."

"This won't take long," he said. "By the way, I'm sorry for your loss."

He scooped another heaping spoonful of sugar into his cup, which felt almost like an obscene gesture. (*How many was that? Nine? Ten?*) But he wasn't focused on the coffee. Scoop after scoop, his eyes stayed trained on her face. *Technique*. Everybody had a technique for talking to Kelly—journalists, psychiatrists, prison guards, cops. Especially cops. Especially sugar-spooning cops in spatter ties who couldn't stand anything bitter in their lives, not even coffee.

"Thank you," Kelly said. Was that the right response to say to

someone being sorry for your loss? *Thank you for being sorry?* The washing machine thumped. Kelly wanted to throw something at it.

“You all right?” The detective said it in a probing way, made it sound like a trick question. All those years at Carpentia, Kelly had longed to speak to someone who didn’t talk to her like this, who wasn’t trying to pry something out of her brain with the penetrating gaze, the deliberate gesture, the expertly placed question designed to catch her off guard . . . The detective said, “You look pale. Like you didn’t get a lot of sleep.”

The washing machine made a socking sound, almost as though something alive were trapped inside, struggling to get out. Kelly’s sneakers. Her bloodstained sneakers. “I slept fine,” she said. “I’m good as can be expected. Under the circumstances.”

“Doing some laundry?”

She didn’t reply.

“You don’t mind answering a few questions, Miss Lund?”

“Mrs. Marshall.”

“Huh? Sorry, that machine of yours is kind of noisy.”

“My name. It isn’t Lund. It hasn’t been for the last fifteen years. You can call me Mrs. Marshall.”

“Fair enough.” The detective blew on his coffee, took a tentative sip. “So, Mrs. Marshall,” he said, “any reason why you aren’t at your in-laws’ house with your husband?”

“Only immediate family should be there.”

“And you aren’t?”

“Excuse me?”

“You’ve been married to his son for fifteen years. You’d think at that point, they’d have accepted you as one of their own.” He swallowed more coffee, eyes fixed on her face as the thumping grew more insistent, the whole machine jumping with it, until it suddenly, mercifully eased into a lower cycle. “Are you sure you’re all right?”

“I told you. I’m fine.”

“Okay. When was the last time you spoke to Sterling Marshall?”

“I don’t know.”

“You ever text him? E-mail? Snail mail?”

“Not recently.” In her mind, she saw Sterling Marshall’s name in gold embossed letters on thick, creamy stationery. He’d written her in prison once, only once, a long time ago. She remembered his careful handwriting and what he’d told her in the letter. Another drawer flew open . . .

“Did you speak to Mr. Marshall often? Did your husband?”

“Maybe.”

“Can you give me more of an idea than ‘maybe?’”

“You would have to ask my husband.”

In the letter, Sterling Marshall had called John McFadden “a dear friend and one of the great directors of our time.” Kelly remembered that phrase as though she were looking at it for the first time. *A dear friend*. Her stomach clenched up. He had talked about Kelly, how she hadn’t “*been in control of her senses*” and so he understood. He knew she was sorry. But she wasn’t sorry. She would never be sorry.

“ . . . once a week? Twice a month? Or was it more like a holiday-type thing?”

The doctor at Carpentia has informed me of your very recent “news.” Another line from that letter, still burned into Kelly’s brain. The quotes around the word *news*. Want to demean something in one step? Put quotes around it.

“From what you knew of your father-in-law, would you say he had any enemies?”

I trust Shane doesn’t know yet. I trust you’ll do the right thing.

Kelly heard herself say, “Suicide.”

The detective jumped a little. “Pardon?”

“The news reports. They said it was suicide.”

“We haven’t released any official comment to news outlets.”

“What did he say?”

“Huh?”

“Sterling Marshall. What did he say in the note?”

He exhaled. “I’m not here to talk about what you read on the Web.”

“Was there a note?”

“When was the last time you spoke to your father-in-law?”

“I told you. I don’t know.”

In the letter, Sterling Marshall had told Kelly that he’d helped Shane to start a photo archive business. He’d promised to keep supporting him, to make sure he’s always taken care of, *but only if you do what needs to be done*. Underneath the table, Kelly’s fists clenched up.

“Were you aware that Mr. Marshall owned a gun?”

She looked at him. “No.”

“Did you ever see or hear about a gun when you visited him at his house?”

Kelly opened her mouth, closed it again.

“Maybe at a family get-together? Did he ever tell your husband about it?”

“About what?”

“Owning a gun,” he said.

“Not that I know of.”

“You’re aware, aren’t you, that your father-in-law was a pretty big antigun activist? You’ve heard of the John McFadden Fund.”

The washing machine rumbled.

“I’ve heard,” she said, “of the *John McFadden Fund*.” She made herself say the name clearly, deliberately. As though it had quotes around it. She met his gaze and saw something there, an uneasiness.

The detective cleared his throat. He slid back in his chair, which gave Kelly a type of sad satisfaction. *Good. Be uneasy.*

“Sterling Marshall was very close to the man you shot in the head.”

She nodded at him. “Yep.” He couldn’t shake her. If the washing machine couldn’t shake her, if the memory of that letter couldn’t shake her, then nothing could, including him, especially him—Barry Brûlée or whatever his name was. He was made of cinnamon. She was made of rock.

“Would you say that you got along well with your father-in-law?”

“Sure.”

“Really? Give me an idea of how close you were. Did you call him Sterling? Mr. Marshall? *Dad?*”

“This is how it’s going to be, huh?”

“I’m asking pretty basic questions.”

“Are you going to talk to my husband? Will you at least show *him* the suicide note?”

“Bellamy Marshall says that you and her father were not on the best of terms. Is she lying?” Kelly looked at him—the gold-spun eyebrows, the faerie green eyes. The pale pink hands, hovering over his mug.

He said, “Can I ask you something?”

“No.”

“Did you ever feel like . . .”

“I said you can’t ask me something.”

“Did you ever feel like Sterling Marshall chose John McFadden over you?”

She stared at him. “I don’t care if he did.”

“Mr. Marshall gave an interview two days ago. In the *Times*. It was for the fifth anniversary of your release. I’m sure you read it. He said he still misses his old pal John. But he doesn’t blame you, not anymore. You were just a kid after all. Raised by an uncaring, irresponsible

mother. Tragically lost your twin just a few years before, and besides, you were on drugs. A teen addict. Didn't know right from wrong."

Kelly heard a noise outside the kitchen window—a swooping hiss. Turkey vulture. "He never said that about my mother."

"Where were you this morning, between the hours of midnight and three A.M.?"

"Here."

"You mean, in this house?"

"Yes."

"Can anyone verify your whereabouts? Your husband, maybe?"

She shut her eyes. Behind her lids she saw a fuse box—the same one she'd made up in her mind at seventeen when she'd stood outside the courthouse, surrounded by strangers, her whole future crashing in, turning to dust. Cameras flashing at her and men with mean voices shouting her name, but all she'd heard was the hum of that imaginary fuse box. All she'd seen were the two long rows of switches, shutting down one by one.

And she'd smiled.

"Mrs. Marshall," he said. "Were you at your father-in-law's last night?"

"You need to leave," she said. "You have no right to be here. You have no right to question me in my house, without a lawyer present."

The detective took a long drag off his supersweet coffee, then placed the cup back onto the saucer. The clink hurt Kelly's ears. The whole time, he never took his eyes off of hers, the green of them glittering with something . . . knowledge or hate. Or maybe it was both. That's what all this technique was, wasn't it? A combination of knowledge and hate, cooked up and heaped on you like teaspoons of sugar.

"We'll be in touch, Ms. Lund," he said.

AFTER HE LEFT, KELLY LOCKED THE DOOR. AND AS SHE TRANSFERRED her clothes and shoes into the dryer, she thought of Sterling Marshall's letter again—the only letter he'd ever written her, outside of the holiday cards addressed and signed by Mary, his wife. A letter sent to a prison fifteen years ago, when Kelly was thirty-two but still seventeen inside because prison locks you up in other ways, not just physically. And so, before starting to read Sterling Marshall's words, Kelly had spent a good amount of time marveling at the creamy paper, the glossy ink. She'd run her fingertips over the gold-embossed name and felt, for a time, special. A letter from *the* Sterling Marshall. Written in his own hand. To her.

She remembered how beautiful Sterling Marshall's signature had looked, even after she'd read the letter—a letter asking her to get rid of her baby and not to tell her husband about the pregnancy, ever.

She remembered what Sterling Marshall had written, just before signing it: *Family means everything to me.*

To this day, she still had no doubt he'd meant it.

CHAPTER 4

SHOTGUN WEDDING! “MONA LISA” KILLER TIES THE KNOT WITH MOVIE STAR’S SON

I now pronounce you man . . . and murderer?

In a top-secret ceremony behind the barbed wire gates of Carpentia Women’s State Correctional Facility, Shane Marshall, 25, wed Kelly Michelle Lund, 32—the dead-eyed former teen drug addict currently serving 25 years to life for the brutal slaying of Oscar-nominated director John McFadden.

The son of movie legend Sterling Marshall, boyishly handsome Shane wore a charcoal gray suit and dark glasses as he entered the prison on May 15, his mother, Mary, at his side. “Shane’s been visiting Kelly at least once a week for years,” a prison insider tells the Enquirer. “To say they’re an odd couple would be a pretty big understatement!”

Shane’s mom was the only family member present at the wedding, which lasted 15 minutes and was performed by the prison chaplain. “My son is in love. I can’t stand in the way of that,” Mary said in

a statement. But Shane's big sister Bellamy Marshall, 32, wasn't so accepting. "I wasn't invited to the wedding," said the art world superstar, whose chilling piece Mona Lisa immortalized the coke-addled murderess at her sentencing. "I don't agree with or understand my brother's decision."

Like it or not, though, the arty beauty may be an aunt soon! The Enquirer has learned that Carpentia allows conjugal visits. And according to our prison source, sexy Shane wasted no time shacking up with his killer bride!

National Enquirer
May 25, 1995

CHAPTER 5

FEBRUARY 12, 1980

Each sound echoed. The slamming of the Trans Am's door, Kelly's ragged breath, her footsteps, too heavy as she climbed the stairs to her third-floor apartment, her key sliding into the lock, turning.

Kelly hoped her mom was asleep, but that was a stupid thing to hope, especially once she'd opened the door and felt the blaze of the kitchen lights and heard the oldies station blasting and inhaled that piney, chemical smell.

Mom was cleaning.

"Is that you?" Mom's voice came from behind the high kitchen counter, singsongy like the voice on the tinny transistor radio. *In the jungle, the mighty jungle . . .*

"Hi, Mom." Kelly stepped around the counter. Mom was on her hands and knees, scrubbing. She leaned into it, working harder than was necessary, her whole body surging with each scrub-stroke like waves slapping the shore. "Where were you?" Mom said.

"Out?"

"Come on now, Kelly," Mom grunted, "be specific." Her breathing was sharp. Her fingers gripped the brush handle and Kelly couldn't help but stare at the knuckles, so

white it looked like the bones were pushing through. “Who were you out with?”

Kelly’s heart pounded. She’d worked this out in her mind when Len was driving her home, but back then she’d been higher than she was now.

“I was with a friend”—Kelly tried anyway—“from math class. We have a test coming up and we were studying late. I lost track of time.”

“What’s your friend’s name?”

She swallowed. “Susie.”

“Susie what?”

“Susie . . . Mitchell.” Kelly gazed at the counter—Mom had bought a bunch of new bananas. They were splayed out in a bowl, nearly ripe but not quite, their skins that pretty pale green. Kelly liked them best that way. She liked that slight tartness, the whiteness of the fruit. Her stomach growled, and she wanted to take one, but she was afraid that if she did, Mom might make a fuss about her eating so late or worse yet, she’d know what she’d been doing. “*Do you have the munchies?*” Mom would say. She knew enough to say that, to use those words.

Scrub, scrub, scrub . . . “What do Susie’s parents do?”

“Her dad is a doctor and her mom . . .” Kelly cleared her throat. “She’s a nurse.” Next to the bananas was a tin ashtray mounded with cigarettes. There had to be at least a pack’s worth in there, and it had been empty this morning. It was hypocritical, Mom’s habit displayed on the kitchen counter like a bouquet of flowers, Kelly using everything she had to hide one night.

One life-changing night . . .

“So if I called the school and asked for Susie Mitchell, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Mitchell, they’d know who I was talking about?”

Kelly drew in a shaky breath. “You shouldn’t smoke so much.”

Scrub, scrub, scrub . . .

Kelly listened to the song. *Hush my darling. Don't fear my darling.* The antenna gleamed at her. She desperately wanted to go to her room.

"You didn't answer my question," Mom said.

Kelly looked down. Her skirt was inside out. Quickly, she shifted it so that the tag was in the back, crossed her arms over the waistband. "Sure," she tried, though she couldn't quite remember the question now.

The radio said, *a weem a woppa weem a woppa*. Mom's shoulders surged to the beat, her hair flopping. She wore faded jeans, an oversize, pale blue men's shirt that must've come from her most recent ex-boyfriend—a banker who, as it turned out, had both a wife and little kids. Kelly spotted a long sweat stain, running down the back.

Mom said, "I got a call from your school."

"Huh?"

Mom stopped scrubbing. She sat back on her heels and looked up at Kelly, a shiny lock of hair falling across her forehead. Her natural color was the same as Kelly's—"ash blond" she called it—but she dyed it a brighter shade to look good under the lights at I. Magnin. It reminded Kelly of a goldfish. It was the same color Catherine's had been. "It was the principal's office, Kelly. You had detention today and never showed up for it."

"Oh . . ."

Mom stared into her eyes, so sharp a stare that Kelly could feel it—as though she were trying to bash into her brain, read her thoughts . . . *Can she tell I've been smoking? Does she know about what I did with Len?*

"That's all you're going to say, Kelly? *Oh?*"

Kelly took a breath, wrapped her arms tighter around her waist. *Just sound normal.* "It was my science teacher." She said the words very carefully. "I didn't know the answer to a question. He got mad at me. He told me I was on detention but I thought . . . I thought he was just *saying* it. He's mean. He doesn't like me and . . ."

“They said he’d marked down that you were insubordinate.”

“I wasn’t, Mom,” Kelly said. “I swear. He just . . . he doesn’t like me.”

Mom let out a heavy, rattling breath. “Go on to bed,” she said quietly. “It’s late.” Kelly left the room, relief flooding all over her, through her. *I’m free.* She let her thoughts wander now because she could. She recalled what had happened in Len’s Trans Am, all of it. She imagined herself on the phone with Bellamy, receiver pressed to her ear, her voice a thin whisper.

Guess what? I have another secret.

She wished she could call her. But it was 2:00 A.M., and she had school tomorrow and besides, the phone was in the kitchen. Right next to the bananas. Man, Kelly was hungry. Her stomach gnawed at her.

Kelly couldn’t think of food anymore and so she made herself think of other things, of Len again, his bucket seats that reclined all the way back and how he’d said, “*Sorry,*” afterward. How he’d handed her a Kleenex, which was sort of gentlemanly in a way . . .

“Kelly,” Mom called out. “Stop dawdling!”

“I’m not!”

Dawdling. What an old-lady word. Mom had an old-lady name too—Rose Lund. It didn’t match her looks at all, but it suited her personality, especially in the past two years. She never laughed, hardly ever smiled when she wasn’t with a boyfriend. And even with her boyfriends, Mom’s smiles looked fake, like someone posing for a picture. She said things like “stop dawdling” and “don’t you sass me, young lady” and spent her whole life working and cleaning and smoking, not enjoying any of it, dating boring men with boring jobs she thought could “get us out of Hollywood once and for all.”

Mom hadn’t always been this way. Kelly had dim memories from back when their dad still lived with them—one in particular, a chicken fight in some fancy pool, Catherine on Mom’s shoulders, Kelly on their

dad's. They must have been about six years old. Mom had been wearing a hot pink bikini and was laughing so hard, tears streamed down her cheeks. She may have been drunk, now that Kelly thought about it, but seeing her laugh like that . . . Mom had such a great laugh. They'd been at the home of a B movie producer—Kelly's dad was a stuntman, and Mom had worked as a makeup artist, so they used to get invited to a lot of these low-level Hollywood parties, their little family . . .

"Kelly Michelle Lund!"

"I'm getting ready for bed!"

"It doesn't sound like it!"

Kelly rolled her eyes. "Okay, okay." Passing Mom's room, Kelly noticed a big heart-shaped box on the nightstand. *Who's that from?* Her stomach gaped, begged. She could practically smell it. *Chocolate. Just one piece.*

Kelly heard the *weem a woppa* song ending, Casey Kasem's voice, murmuring something about a classic. Casey's voice reminded Kelly of her dad's, the gentleness of it. Outside of Catherine's funeral, where all he'd done was sob, Kelly hadn't heard Dad's voice since she was little, but still she remembered. At least she thought she did.

"We'll be right back," said Casey, and then some used-car ad came on, about fifty decibels louder than the show had been. Kelly slipped off her shoes, timed her footsteps on the soft carpet to land with each shouted word.

Catherine's framed picture sat on Mom's nightstand next to the chocolates. It wasn't normally there, the picture. It was usually on the TV in the den, and seeing it here, in Mom's room, made Kelly think back more than she wanted to.

Kelly looked into her sister's bottle green eyes as she slipped the lid off the box, took a piece from the edge—coconut, which her mom wouldn't miss. *Those eyes. They still laugh at you.*

Catherine had left them on Valentine's Day. Weird, that hadn't occurred to Kelly until now. The picture next to the bed. The chocolates. It had taken all that, just to remind her. But the truth was, it hadn't felt sudden. Years before she died, Catherine had begun leaving Kelly and Mom, a little at a time.

With Mom, it had started earlier, and it had been a lot more dramatic. Catherine yelled at her, called her a bitch. She slammed doors in Mom's face, mocked her "no Hollywood" rules, and made a big, spectacular show of pushing her away.

But she was sweeter about leaving Kelly. Instead of screaming at her, she eased out of her life in such a way, Kelly barely noticed it happening. First, she stopped watching *Happy Days* with Kelly at night, excusing herself to take phone calls in the kitchen and later heading out to, as Catherine put it, "destinations unknown." Instead of dragging Kelly along like she used to do when they were little and it was sleepovers and birthday parties she was going to, Catherine would leave on her own to meet her new and mysterious circle of friends, reporting back to Kelly when she returned and Mom was out of earshot. "So this girl I met at the party? Her dad used to play drums for Jimi Hendrix!"

"I kissed the most adorable guy. He's done commercials! You know that Tide one, where those kids roll down the hill and get grass stains . . ."

"Kelly, I can't believe you don't know who Jimi Hendrix was . . ."

"I'm going all the way. Don't tell Mom."

"I lost it, Kelly. For real. I bled and everything."

"The Whisky is amazing. You have to go there sometime. All these girls were doing poppers in the bathroom."

"I can't believe you don't know what poppers are . . ."

"I can't tell you who he is. He's . . . he's kind of famous. We haven't done it yet but we will. I can feel it."

Kelly loved these late-night talks, looked forward to them so much, she barely noticed that they were happening less and less, that Catherine was becoming weird and remote, claiming tiredness, slipping off to sleep, saying “tell you later. I promise.” Later never came. Catherine was shedding Kelly, the same way you’d shed any bad habit, bit by bit.

By the last few months of her life, Catherine had become a stranger. She’d grown lean and leggy and hard-eyed, while Kelly stayed a chubby kid. She started wearing lipstick you could only get in Europe that came in an elegant silver tube and was called *Rouge de la Bohème*. She took it with her everywhere, made a big show of applying it.

Mom didn’t know what to make of her. “*Who are you, anyway?*” She said that to Catherine more and more.

Catherine hardly ever said a word to Kelly, sneaking in late without waking her, ditching her at the school bus with a quick wave good-bye. She would disappear for days at a time and return wearing brand-new clothes and once, a new necklace with a delicate, shimmering chain and gold, heart-shaped pendant that had two small diamonds at the bottom. “*Where did you get that?*” Mom had asked, between her teeth, eyes narrowing as Catherine just stood there, smirking at her. “*Answer me. Who gave that to you?*”

“*I think it’s pretty,*” Kelly had tried. Neither one of them had paid any attention.

Kelly pined for Catherine. She started spying on her, following her down the street at a safe distance as she walked with her beautiful friends, strawberry blond hair swinging and gleaming. She strained to overhear Catherine’s phone conversations, marveling at her coy laugh, her cagy, clever way with words.

She stayed up late, listening for Catherine’s rides to drop her off outside their apartment. Sometimes it would be groups of girls, their

laughter floating in the night air. Other times, Kelly would hear rustling and heavy breathing outside their front door and she'd know it was a boy.

Once, when Kelly was home from school sick and Mom was at work, she'd heard tires screech outside their window. Kelly had peeked around the curtains to see her sister hurrying away from the most beautiful car she'd ever seen—a shiny black Porsche, with tinted windows and mirrored hubcaps. Kelly had been so enthralled with the car that she hadn't even bothered to think about who Catherine had been storming away from until he got out of the driver's-side door and followed her a few steps. As Kelly watched, the Porsche's driver grabbed her sister's swinging arm, then spun her around, pushed her up against one of the palms that lined their street, and kissed her, hard. It looked strange and mean, as she'd never imagined a kiss could be.

As he headed back to his car, Kelly had been able to take a good, long look at him—mirrored aviator glasses to match the hubcaps, black T-shirt and sports jacket and slacks, not jeans. Very short hair, receding hairline. He wasn't a boy. He was a grown man, much older than Len. He was probably older than their father.

Kelly had hurried back into her bedroom and gotten into bed, closing her eyes and seeing it all again behind her lids—the beautiful car, the man with the aviator glasses. The way he'd grabbed at her sister.

"You're here," Catherine had said. *"What are you doing here?"*

"I'm sick."

"Okay. Um . . . Hope you feel better."

It had made Kelly open her eyes—the crack in Catherine's voice. And then she'd looked at her face, the streaks of mascara down her cheeks. *You're crying,* she had wanted to say. *You never cry.*

"Kelly?"

"Yeah?"

“Do you remember Thumbelina?”

Kelly had nodded, remembering the doll they'd both begged for when they were little—tiny Thumbelina who could crawl and turn over and looked so real and cute on the TV ads. They'd pleaded with their parents for months—*Just one Thumbelina doll! We can share it!*—and finally their dad had relented. They'd torn open the box, only to find a cheap plastic thing with hollow eyes that whirred angrily when you pulled the string, flailing and falling on its side like something broken. The real Thumbelina had been nothing like the doll in the ad. She'd been scary, in fact, and while Kelly had been disappointed, Catherine had sobbed.

Cried real tears, just like now.

“We wanted that doll so bad,” Kelly had tried.

Catherine had nodded slowly, touching the necklace, tapping a finger against the two small diamonds. *“We never should have opened the box.”*

Valentine's Day couldn't have been more than two months later. Catherine had come home very late. Close to 3:00 A.M. Kelly had been sound asleep and she'd woken up to the front door slamming, a car roaring away.

“Where were you?” Mom had shouted.

And then Catherine had said it, in an awful, smirking tone that made Kelly pull the pillow over her head. *“I was with my Valentine.”*

“Tell me his name.”

“You don't get to ask me that.”

“Catherine—”

“Get away from me!”

Mom had exploded. She'd called her all kinds of horrible names.

Kelly had gotten up. She'd left the bedroom she still supposedly shared with Catherine and padded into the hallway, just in time to see Mom slap Catherine hard across the face . . .

“*I’m sorry,*” Mom had sobbed, just after the slap. “*I’m sorry, baby. We can fix this. Let me help you fix it.*”

Catherine had spotted Kelly in the doorway and run for her, her whole cheek bright red. She’d thrown her arms around her, hugged her for the first time in so long. “*It’s in the top dresser drawer,*” she had whispered in her ear. “*Keep it for me.*”

Before Mom could stop her, she’d grabbed the car keys off the hook by the door. She’d run out, starting up Mom’s car and driving away—leggy, mature Catherine who had somehow learned how to drive. Mom had run out of the house, screaming after her own car before finally collapsing on the front step, Kelly staring at her, not knowing what to do.

“*Go back to your room,*” Mom had told Kelly. And so she had. She’d looked in the top dresser drawer and seen it there. The necklace.

ON THE KITCHEN RADIO NOW, THE ANNOUNCER INTONED, “looooooowest prices evvvverrrrr” in a rumbling, movie demon voice, and Kelly tried to make those words drown out what was looping through her brain. *The car screech. Mom’s sobs. “Don’t leave me. Don’t leave me.”*

It was easier to pretend Catherine was alive and in the room with her, sneaking candy, trying to put one over on Mom the way they used to before everything went sour.

In Kelly’s shirt pocket was Len’s phone number, written on the back of a Denny’s matchbook. “*So you’ll think of me when you light up,*” he had said.

“Did it count, Catherine?” Kelly whispered to the picture when the radio was at its loudest. “Tonight with Len? Can I call it my first time?”

Kelly popped the whole chocolate in her mouth, curling her tongue around it, closing her eyes for the sweet, rich taste.

She gagged. It was awful. Stale and nearly tasteless. Kelly spit it out into her hands, picked up another, tested it with her fingers. It felt like plastic—not even a hint of softness. *How old is this box of candy?*

“What is wrong with you, Mom?” she said, under her breath, then left the bedroom in a few long steps, grabbing her shoes on the way out, making it into her own room at last as an ad for some skin care cream blared. Softly, carefully, Kelly closed her door. She grabbed a tissue out of the box on her nightstand, wrapped the candy in it, a strange sadness flooding through her, the chalky taste lingering.

What is wrong with you, Mom?

She headed across the hall to the bathroom. “Rockin’ Robin” tweet-ilee deeted out of the radio like drips of ice cold water.

“Kelly?”

“Just brushing my teeth!” Kelly brushed the awful taste out of her mouth, along with the questions floating around in her brain, the sadness. The past. Valentine’s Day would be the two-year anniversary of Catherine’s death and her mother was up all night scrubbing the kitchen floor, an ancient box of stale chocolates (*Who gave them to her?*) waiting on her nightstand. She brushed all of that away, too. And then she flushed the piece of candy down the toilet.

Once she was in her room again, Kelly checked the very back of her nightstand drawer—the place where she now kept the necklace. She changed into her pajamas and got into bed. A little bit of her high still lingered and she was glad for that. As she closed her eyes, she brought her thinking back to Len, how tightly he’d held on to her. She thought about Bellamy, her new friend, and what she’d say to her in science class tomorrow.

BELLAMY DIDN’T SHOW UP AT SCHOOL FOR THREE WHOLE DAYS. THE first day, Tuesday, Kelly could barely keep her eyes open from lack of

sleep the night before. She spent most of the day in a haze but arrived early to science class and stood waiting at the new girl's empty desk, clutching the Denny's matchbook with Len's number on it—her new talisman. She stood there, waiting and waiting until Mr. Hansen came in and started writing on the board and Evan Mueller, who sat next to Bellamy, asked Kelly what the hell she was doing, all moony-eyed at Bellamy Marshall's desk like a groupie. "Are you a lezzie or what?" he said. Kelly didn't answer.

After school, she finally went to detention, which was held in the same room where she normally had study hall. There were three other kids in the room with her—a couple of punk rock boys with scary spiked Mohawks and dog collars and anarchy signs on their leather jackets, a girl in tight jeans and a tube top, chewing fruit gum Kelly could smell from three rows away. None of them paid attention to her and neither did Miss Rivers, the teacher in charge. And so the three hours went quickly. Kelly spent the whole time with her notebook open, writing long letters to Bellamy, asking her questions.

THE NEXT DAY OF BELLAMY'S ABSENCE, KELLY SNEAKED OVER TO THE administration office during lunch, the Denny's matchbook buttoned into the pocket of her denim jacket. She asked the receptionist, Mrs. Yanikian, if she could tell her where Bellamy Marshall's locker was.

"Why?"

"I'm in her science class."

"Yes. And?"

"And . . . we have a project. We need to work on it and I can't find her . . ."

Mrs. Yanikian glowered at her over the cat's-eye glasses she wore on a gold chain around her neck. The rhinestones at the edges twinkled.

“Can you tell me the locker number, please?”

The receptionist paged through a notebook on her desk, her manicured nails a deep bloodred, her copper hair molded into perfect waves. Mrs. Yanikian spent an awful lot of time dolling herself up, just to sit in this cage of an office all day long.

“Bellamy Marshall is absent today,” she said. “But if you have a project together, you should already know where her locker is.”

“I . . . forgot.”

Mrs. Yanikian smiled at her with flat eyes. “Run along, Kelly,” she said. “The bell is going to ring soon.”

ON THE THIRD DAY, WHICH WAS VALENTINE’S DAY, KELLY SAT WORRYING through science, Bellamy’s empty seat gaping at her back until finally she could no longer stand it. She raised her hand.

Mr. Hansen, who had been explaining something having to do with cell production, said, “Yes, Kelly?”

“Can I get a hall pass please?”

“Silly me. I thought you were going to contribute to class discussion.”

A few kids snickered. Kelly took a breath. “I need to go to the bathroom.”

More snickers. Mr. Hansen let out a heavy sigh and handed her a pass. It was everything Kelly could do not to leap out of the classroom, but she made herself take it slow. She made herself walk, not run, down the hall to the pay phone outside the nurse’s office because running would get her stopped by a hall monitor or janitor. She knew this. It was the way life worked. Try to rush something, you get delayed. You break the rules, bad things happen.

Once she got to the pay phone, her heart starting pounding. In her mind, she told herself, *It will be fine*. Before she could think too long,

she threw her quarter into the slot, plucked the Denny's matchbook out of the front pocket of her corduroys, and dialed Len's number.

It rang and rang and rang and rang.

Not home. She was about to hang up when, finally, a woman answered.

Kelly's stomach dropped. "Who is this?"

"Who is *this*?"

She shut her eyes, felt her cheeks flushing. "Is Len there? Sorry. I'm just . . . I'm looking for my friend Bellamy and I don't have her number and so I'm wondering if maybe—"

"Len?"

"He's friends with my friend Bellamy and . . . uh . . ."

"Is Len your *boyfriend* or something?"

She cleared her throat. "I met him the other day. He gave me this number."

The woman started to laugh.

"He did. I swear."

"You sound young. How old are you, anyway? Twelve?"

Kelly exhaled hard. "No."

"Honey, trust me on this," the woman said. "Len does not want to see you."

"*You don't know that. He gave me this number. He told me to call.*"

The woman laughed some more. "This number," she said, "is a pay phone."

Kelly's cheeks burned. She slammed down the receiver, her neck hot, her throat swelling, that awful tingle starting in her belly, coursing through her . . . same thing she had felt on her first day back at school two years ago, working the combination on her locker next to Catherine's empty one and knowing she had no one now. No sister to follow around. No chance of a friend.

Len had given her a made-up number.