

## PROLOGUE

Not many people can isolate the singular moment in their life when things veered off course. When suddenly their existence—which may not have been perfect, but was at least reliable—abruptly swerved into oncoming traffic. My moment could have been the day my parents died. Or when I realized I'd never had a true friend.

But those aren't the days I'm thinking of.

Believe me, I know what I did was wrong. Or, at a minimum, I know it was immoral. I mean, *I lied to the police*. Still, my intentions were honest. Really, they were.

In fact, I remember everything about that night—the way the streets were slick with milky fog. The way a steady breath of air whistled in my ears. The way the chill infested my body as I stopped in front of her house, with its sagging rain gutters and weedy lawn.

I knew the house well. I had a direct view of it from my second-floor bedroom, where I'd lived for nearly all of my twelve years. I'd watched the splintered front door dangle from a pair of corroded hinges and sway in the slightest breeze. I'd mourned the three cats that were buried under crooked gravestones in the strip of a front yard. And I'd spent hours imagining what was concealed in their decrepit shed, nailed shut by an X of reticent wooden planks.

I'd pitied the girl who lived there, with her silky red hair and tenacious blue eyes, but I'd also admired her. She was everything I wasn't and everything I wished I could be.

The problem was that I was so foolishly desperate for a friend, so eager to soothe the sting of loneliness—that when she showed up on my doorstep, I let her in, no questions asked.

I just wanted someone to *see me* for a change. Is that so much to ask?

I guess so.

Because my actions that night changed our lives forever.

And not for the better.