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FEAR STREET™

# R. L. STINE

*Seeing too  
much is  
murder!*



The  
Mind Reader



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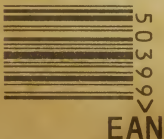
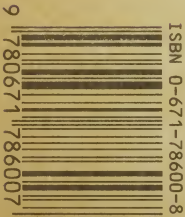
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BY  
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## A Grave Situation . . .

Ellie felt a chill. The light dimmed, and shadows lengthened over the room. An earthy smell drifted up from the floor.

Ellie felt herself being pulled down into the mattress. Brown earth spilled on top of her. So damp, so heavy.

She opened her mouth to scream.

The wet, brown dirt clogged her mouth, choked her, gagged her.

Ellie frantically tried to claw her way up from the heavy, dark dirt. It covered her nostrils and eyes.

Covered her. Pushed her down.

I can't breathe! she realized.

I'm being buried alive!

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FEAR STREET®  
R. L. STINE

The  
Mind Reader

A Parachute Press Book



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IL 7+

**The  
Mind Reader**

1857

## *chapter*

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# 1

“Hi, Sarah.” Ellie Anderson greeted her best friend and slid onto a stool at the counter of Alma’s Coffee Shop. “How’s work going?”

“Hey, Ellie. Pretty good.” Sarah Wilkins grinned and flicked crumbs at Ellie as she wiped down the pink Formica top. Sarah had short, sleek black hair, dramatic brown eyes, and olive skin. “Burger and fries?”

Ellie smoothed her long blond hair and wrinkled her nose. “Nope. Just a Diet Coke.” She glanced at the booths behind her.

Sarah leaned across the counter. “I know. You didn’t come in to see me. You came in to check out the guys.”

Ellie laughed. “Yeah, right,” she replied, rolling her eyes. “Like I do every day.”

## FEAR STREET

“Keep hanging out with me, and you won’t be shy around guys,” Sarah told her. “Anyway, there’s nobody here today except the Yuppie Brothers. Sarah used her nickname for Joel Harper and Frank Schuler, two of the most popular seniors at Shadyside High.

Ellie peeked over her shoulder to check out the four kids in the corner booth. They were eating big plates of fries smothered in ketchup. Joel and Frank wore their maroon and gray Shadyside High jackets. Squeezed in next to the wall were Anna Toro and Patty Jacquet, their girlfriends.

“And as usual, the Yuppie Brothers are with their brain-dead girlfriends,” Sarah added with a snort. “The guys are showing them how to work a french fry.”

Ellie let out a loud laugh. Sarah’s sarcastic sense of humor was one reason they had become such good friends. The two girls also had a lot in common, including the fact that they both lived alone with their dads.

Ellie and her dad had recently moved back to Shadyside. Ellie had been born there. But when she was two, her mother died. She and her father went to live with Ellie’s grandparents. Now, fourteen years later, her father’s sales job brought them back to Shadyside.

She was glad to be back, but switching schools before her senior year wasn’t easy. Most of the kids in the class had known one another since kindergarten.

## THE MIND READER

“Hey, are you going to get me that Diet Coke before I die of thirst?” Ellie asked, turning back to her friend.

“Yeah. Yeah.” Sarah flipped the rag in Ellie’s direction. “Maybe if you tipped more—”

The bell over the coffee shop door jangled. Ellie glanced over her shoulder. A cute guy she’d never seen before stepped inside. He had dark eyes and reddish brown hair, tousled on the top and short on the sides.

Too old for high school, Ellie thought. She checked out his clothes. An unbuttoned sport coat over a denim shirt and faded jeans. Definitely college. And he moved with a confidence that immediately set him apart.

“Wow!” Sarah exclaimed as she plopped the glass in front of Ellie. “Who is *that*?”

As the guy slid into the booth behind Ellie, he glanced at the two girls. His dark eyes caught Ellie’s. Caught them and held them.

Flushing, Ellie spun back toward the counter. “Quit staring at him, Sarah. He’ll think we’re coming on to him or something.”

“We *are*!” Sarah exclaimed in a hushed whisper. She grabbed a menu from the holder. “I’ll go get his order.” She stepped around the counter.

Ellie sipped her soda. She could hear Sarah talking to the guy. When he answered, his voice sounded soft and warm. What a cool guy, Ellie thought.

Give it up, Ellie, she told herself. You know how shy you are. Especially around college guys. You’d never even find out his name.

## FEAR STREET

“Brian Tanner,” Sarah announced breathlessly as she swept behind the counter.

Ellie couldn't believe it. “You asked him his name?”

“Sure. I told him it was for *you*.”

“You what?” Ellie blushed, then realized her friend was teasing her.

Sarah turned around to fill up a soda glass. “I wouldn't do that to you—*would* I?”

Ellie knew Sarah just might. Embarrassed, Ellie hunched over the counter, letting her long, honey blond hair shield her face. Even with her back to him, Ellie could feel the guy's dark eyes burning into her.

You're dreaming, Ellie, she thought. He's not watching you. He's checking out the menu.

All at once she felt an uncontrollable need to get out of there. She hopped off the stool. Reached into the pocket of her jeans and dug out two crinkled-up dollars. Calling goodbye to Sarah, she grabbed her backpack and rushed out the door, the bell jangling behind her.

As soon as she reached the sidewalk, Ellie broke into a run. She passed the window where the boy was seated and kept running until she could no longer see the coffee shop.

Gasping for breath, she slowed.

What was *that* all about? Ellie wondered. She was always shy around guys. But she never felt the need to run away before.

## THE MIND READER

Something clearly told her to get away.

Weird, Ellie thought. Totally weird.

As she stepped into the house, Ellie's big black Labrador retriever, Chaz, greeted her with ecstatic whining. His tail thumped against the doorjamb, and he wiggled with excitement as he pushed her back out onto the front steps.

"All right, all right." Ellie laughed. "I guess you want to go out!" She tossed her backpack into the hall and grabbed Chaz's leash off the hook. Then she slammed the door and jogged after him down the sidewalk.

It was late afternoon, a clear, cool fall day. The leaves were just beginning to change. Ellie glanced back at her new house: 1201 Raintree Lane. Not a bad place, she thought.

Even though the tiny two-story houses on the street were identical, they were all clean and tidy. A real improvement over her grandparents' place. A ramshackle three-story farmhouse with peeling paint and creaking floorboards.

Jogging slowly, Ellie turned onto Hawthorne Drive. Chaz ran ahead, sniffing excitedly at tree trunks. She whistled to him, then cut down Park Drive to Fear Street.

A fat brown squirrel darted under a hedge. Yipping loudly, Chaz chased it, his black coat gleaming in the setting sun.

"Hey, Chaz! Come back here!" Without realizing it,

## FEAR STREET

Ellie followed the dog onto Fear Street. In hot pursuit of the squirrel, Chaz bounded into the Fear Street Woods.

“Chaz! Whoa! Whoa, boy!”

By the time she caught up to him, he had forgotten the squirrel and was splashing in a tiny stream. The water turned muddy brown as he kicked.

Ellie found a large rock. She sat and leaned back against its mossy surface. Brian Tanner’s dark eyes popped into her mind. She wondered if she’d ever see him again.

Not that she was dying for a boyfriend. Not after what happened the past year.

Ellie sighed and closed her eyes. She’d never forget her junior year at Fairfield High. And the first love of her life, Tommy Wheaton.

Tommy was a great guy. But Ellie blew it.

She tried not to think about why they broke up.

I couldn’t help it! she wanted to scream. It was because of my visions!

In the vision—such a clear picture in her mind—Ellie saw Tommy kissing her best friend, Janine. The image was so strong, so powerful, that Ellie believed it.

She confronted Tommy and Janine. She accused them of sneaking out behind her back.

They denied it. They kissed once, at a party. But that was before Tommy and Ellie started dating. And it never happened again. But Ellie kept having the

## THE MIND READER

visions. She couldn't shake the idea that something was going on between them. She couldn't trust either of them anymore.

Tommy broke up with her. Janine told her she was crazy and never spoke to her again.

Crazy. Maybe I am crazy, Ellie thought unhappily. What else do you call someone who has visions? Visions that were almost always true?

Ever since she could remember, Ellie could predict future events. At first it had been fun.

She knew what her grandmother was making for dinner before she'd even started cooking. Sometimes she'd surprise her grandfather by climbing in the car minutes before he asked her to ride to town.

But when she had a vision of her cocker spaniel Jake being hit by a car, the visions stopped being fun. Ellie was nine at the time. She begged her grandparents to keep Jake tied up when she was at school.

I can't let this vision come true, she told herself.

One afternoon Jake broke his chain.

When Ellie stepped off the school bus that day, she found the dog lying by the side of the road, dead. He had been hit by a car.

"I hate my visions!" Ellie had wailed, tears streaming down her face. "I hate them! I hate them! Why can't I be like everyone else?"

But Ellie wasn't like everyone else. Whenever she got close to someone, whenever she started to like someone, she would have visions about him.

## FEAR STREET

After Tommy Wheaton broke up with her, Ellie vowed never to give in to her powers again. And never to let herself get close to anyone again.

*Wumpf!*

A muffled bark snapped Ellie back from her troubled thoughts. Chaz stood over her, a bone in his mouth.

"What do you have?" Ellie asked, pulling herself up.

Chaz whined.

Ellie jumped to her feet and brushed off the back of her jeans. "All right. I see it's a very big bone."

Ellie bent to study it. The bone was long and thin. Too long for a deer leg.

Straightening up, she noticed how dark the woods had become. "Come on, Chaz," she urged, feeling a chill. "Drop the bone. Let's head home."

She started toward Fear Street, crackling over dead leaves. Glancing behind her, she watched Chaz drop the bone, bark excitedly, and run back across the stream.

"No, silly! *This way!*" she shouted.

Barking loudly, the dog disappeared into the woods.

"Chaz! Cha-aaaaz!" Ellie called impatiently.

The dog's strange howl startled Ellie.

Something was wrong.

"Chaz!" she cried as she leapt over the stream and plunged into the prickly brush. The dog let out another howl.

## THE MIND READER

Briars tore at her skin. Ellie pushed through a stand of pines. She found Chaz sitting on top of a leaf-covered mound. There was a pile of dirt at one end, where the dog had dug a hole. Head raised, the black Lab howled again.

Then he lowered his head and began to dig furiously, kicking up dirt all around him.

“What is your *problem?*” Ellie demanded. She’d never seen the dog act so strangely. “Chaz! Stop! Stop it!”

Reaching down, she grabbed his collar. She struggled to yank the big dog away. But he ignored her, both front paws tossing up wet dirt.

“Chaz! Chaz! Please—!”

Abruptly he stopped and sat back on his haunches. He whined once more. Raised his black eyes to Ellie’s.

She glanced from Chaz to the new shallow hole he had dug. Her breath caught in her throat. Her fingers froze around the dog’s collar.

Something stuck up out of the dirt.

Ellie swallowed hard.

Crouching down, she brushed away the dirt.

And gasped when she saw what Chaz had uncovered.

## *chapter*

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## 2

A human hand.

Or what was left of a human hand.

With a muffled cry, Ellie jumped up.

It's not a hand, she tried to convince herself. That wasn't a leg bone he had either. It's one of my visions. Or my mind playing tricks on me because it's getting dark and we're near the cemetery.

Chaz whined. Ellie's gaze darted from the bones to the dog. And back again.

She wasn't imagining anything.

Ellie took a deep breath. She crouched down and peered more closely at the bones that formed the hand. They were real.

That meant she was standing on someone's grave. Someone was buried here in the woods.

## THE MIND READER

Ellie gasped and stumbled backward. Her heart pounding, she took off through the pines and oaks.

She had to get out of the woods.

*She had to get away from whoever—or whatever—was buried in the dirt.*

Ellie ran, boughs slapping her body. She jumped across the stream.

“Chaz! Come!” Ellie screamed. The Lab crashed through the brush and galloped beside her.

A shortcut to the street through the Fear Street Cemetery. Her heart thudding. Her temples pounding. Chaz jumped and barked excitedly around her, his tail wagging.

Dumb dog, she thought. Don’t you realize you just dug up someone’s *hand*?

As she stepped onto the street, a car rolled toward her. Glancing up, Ellie recognized Patty Jacquet’s little blue Geo. Frank Schuler sat in the passenger seat.

“Hey—!” Ellie shouted, waving her arms to get their attention.

The Geo pulled over to the curb. Patty rolled down her window. “Ellie? What’s wrong?”

Giggles came from the backseat. Joel and Anna were mashed together on one side.

“Can you take me to the police station?” Ellie asked.

Frank leaned forward. “Police? Huh? What’s the problem?”

## FEAR STREET

"I think I found a body!" Ellie pulled open the back door, and she and Chaz squeezed in.

"A what?" Frank exclaimed, turning in the front seat to look at her. He had short blond hair and light blue eyes. "A body in the cemetery?"

"Isn't that where they're *supposed* to be?" Anna joked. She had scooted onto Joel's lap to make room.

"I—I'm serious!" Ellie stammered. "I saw the bones of a hand!" she cried breathlessly. "Buried in the woods by the cemetery!"

Patty and Anna both stared at Ellie, studying her. Ellie flushed. Her heart was still racing.

"Gross," Patty said finally, tossing back her streaked blond hair.

"Maybe it's an old grave," Frank said thoughtfully.

Ellie clutched Chaz's collar. She heard the doubt in Frank's voice. She never should have told them. She didn't really know these kids. Now they'd think she was crazy. Just like the kids at her old school.

"Whatever it is, I think I should report it," Ellie explained. "Can you drive me to the police?"

"Yeah. Sure," Patty replied, guiding the car down Fear Street. "It's not far from here." She glanced at Ellie in the rearview mirror. "But are you sure it wasn't just some animal bones you saw?"

"No," Ellie replied, shutting her eyes. "No, I don't know. . . . I'm not sure about anything."

"You found a hand?" Sergeant Frazier repeated, his thick brows raised.

## THE MIND READER

“Yes. It—it looked like a human hand,” Ellie replied uncertainly. She gazed down at her own fingers clutching Chaz’s collar.

Before speaking to the desk sergeant, she’d taken a few deep breaths to calm herself. She didn’t want the police to think she was crazy too. “And maybe a leg bone,” she added.

Sergeant Frazier stared at her. He swept a hand back through his thick black hair. “Were these bones attached to anything?”

“I’m not sure,” Ellie replied. “Chaz found them. My dog. He started digging and . . .” Her voice trailed off.

Why is he staring at me like that? Doesn’t he believe me?

“Okay. We’ll check it out,” the officer said, pulling out a form from his desk drawer. “Let me get your name and address for this report.”

“Ellie Anderson, 1201 Raintree Lane.”

“Employed?”

“I’m a senior at Shadyside High.”

He pointed his pen toward her face. “And this isn’t some kind of dare or something? Some kind of dumb joke? I know how you kids can be.”

Ellie shook her head. “No.”

He sighed. “All right. I’ll send you in to Lieutenant Wilkins. But if this isn’t for real, you’d better tell me now. Wilkins doesn’t have a sense of humor.”

Ellie swallowed hard. “It’s no joke. I wish it were.”

When Ellie walked into the small office, she imme-

## FEAR STREET

diately recognized Lieutenant Wilkins. He was Sarah's father. She'd forgotten for a minute that he was a police officer. He and Sarah had the same dramatic brown eyes and dark coloring. But the lieutenant's hair was almost completely gray, and deep lines etched his face.

"You're Ellie, right? Sarah's friend," the lieutenant said.

Ellie nodded as she sat down. Chaz flopped down on top of her feet, lowered his head between his paws, and closed his eyes.

Wilkins gazed down at the form the sergeant had handed him. "Human bones?" he asked, raising his eyes to Ellie's.

"I think so," Ellie replied. "First Chaz brought me a long bone. Then he ran deeper into the woods. He dug at a mound of dirt. Almost like a"—her voice faltered—"a grave."

Wilkins nodded solemnly.

He believes me, Ellie thought, feeling all her muscles start to relax.

Lieutenant Wilkins stood up. He was taller than Ellie remembered. "Let's take a look. I'll get a couple of uniformed officers to go with us. It's dark. Think you can find it?"

"I think so."

Ellie followed the man out of the office. Will it still be there? she found herself wondering. Will *anything* be there?

\* \* \*

## THE MIND READER

When they reached the cemetery, Ellie let go of Chaz's leash. The dog trotted beside the cemetery into the woods. Ellie jogged after him, Lieutenant Wilkins and two officers following close behind. Their flashlights darted over the leaf-strewn ground.

A pale moon rode high over the shivering trees. A soft, steady breeze carried the heavy smell of autumn.

Ellie easily found her rock. "Chaz brought me the long bone first." Turning in a circle, she moved the flashlight they had given her, searching the ground for the bone. "There."

Wilkins stooped to study it. "That's no deer bone," he said grimly. He called back to an officer who was peering over her shoulder. "Bag it for evidence."

"Now where?" he asked Ellie, climbing to his feet. His expression solemn.

"Uh—" Ellie glanced toward the tiny stream. "I think I crossed right there. But I'm not sure because there's no path."

"We'll search till we find it." Lieutenant Wilkins offered her an encouraging, tight-lipped smile.

She led them down the bank and over the stream. The bright white flashlight beams danced off the trees, making everything come to life.

I'm lost, Ellie thought. She shivered in the cool night air.

"Are we through here?" she heard one of the officers murmur after they'd been standing in one place several minutes.

Lieutenant Wilkins held up his hand. "Not yet."

## FEAR STREET

"Let's try switching off the flashlights," Ellie suggested. "I may be able to see better that way." As her eyes adjusted, she crouched down and peered into the shadowy brush. She could see where she had broken some branches.

"Over there," Ellie whispered. Briars caught her clothes as she pushed through a patch of wild blackberries.

The grove of pines! Ellie's heart started to pound.

Moving slowly, she studied the ground, hunting for the spot Chaz had dug up. Wasn't the mound in the middle of the pines? The needle-covered floor appeared undisturbed.

No shallow, leafy grave. No bones.

Ellie felt her stomach tighten with dread. It *had* been a vision.

Not real. Just one of her visions.

Ellie kept her eyes on the ground. She didn't want to face Sarah's dad or the other two officers. She could feel their doubtful gazes on her back.

What could she say to them? "Sorry. I just dreamed up the part about the skeleton hand." How would *that* go over?

Chaz's sharp bark to her left made Ellie jump and turn.

Then in the silvery moonlight, she saw it.

A gray, bony hand, rising up, up, up out of the earth. Its skeletal fingers bent like claws.

Beckoning to Ellie.

## *chapter*

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### 3

“Over there!” Ellie choked out, pointing frantically. “The hand.”

Frowning, Lieutenant Wilkins squinted in the direction she was pointing. “What’s she talking about?” Ellie heard one officer whisper.

Lieutenant Wilkins shook his head. “I don’t see anything.”

Ellie blinked. The hand vanished.

But she had seen it! She *had!*

With a frantic cry, she pushed her way through the pine boughs.

Where is it? Where is it? Where?

Lieutenant Wilkins grabbed her elbow and pulled her back. “Ellie, stop. What’s wrong? What do you see?”

## FEAR STREET

She pulled away from him. "The hand—" she murmured.

Where?

She had just seen it. Beckoning to her.

Where?

She stumbled over a large rock. Dropped to her knees.

As she started to get up, she saw the low mound. "There!" she cried, pointing. "Right there!"

She led Lieutenant Wilkins and the two officers to the low, leaf-covered mound. Their flashlights formed a bright spotlight.

They all stared down in silence at the bones. The bones that shimmered in the harsh light.

Lieutenant Wilkins dropped to his knees to examine it closely.

"Whoa," one officer said softly. "It really is a hand." He turned to Ellie. "How did you suddenly know where to find it?"

Before Ellie could reply, Lieutenant Wilkins stood up quickly. "Jackson, get back to the squad car and radio this in. Tell them to get the crime technicians out here—right now."

"Yes, sir." Stumbling over a root, the man took off. Ellie didn't move. She just stared at the hand.

"Barnett." Wilkins pointed to the other officer. "I want this place secured."

"I'll get right on it, Lieutenant."

"Ellie." Lieutenant Wilkins crouched to Ellie's eye

## THE MIND READER

level. But she couldn't focus on him. All she could see was the hand, rising up, up out of the ground. Moving slowly. Pointing to her. Motioning to her. Moving.

"Ellie!"

Startled, she snapped her chin up. "Huh?"

"Let's get you home," Lieutenant Wilkins told her gently. "We'll take care of this."

"No!" She shook her head sharply. "I need to see—to see . . ."

To see *what*? Ellie wasn't sure.

"We'll be digging and searching the area for several hours," Lieutenant Wilkins warned. "What about your parents? Won't they worry?"

Ellie hesitated. "It's only my dad and me. And he's working late tonight."

Lieutenant Wilkins shrugged. "I guess you can stay if you want. But you have to move out of the way. This is considered a crime scene. This does look like a grave."

Ellie took a last glance at the bony hand before stepping back. It lay so still now, encrusted in dirt. But she had seen it move.

It had pointed to her. Beckoned as if calling to her, calling her to this dark, frightening spot.

Ellie shivered. Why? she wondered. Why did the hand beckon to me?

"Ellie!" Sarah's voice cut through Ellie's thoughts. Ellie glanced up. Her friend pushed through the

## FEAR STREET

brush. She wore a sweater over her waitress uniform. Behind her stood a group of kids Ellie recognized from school.

"What's up?" Sarah asked, her eyes alive with curiosity.

The other kids clustered around. Officer Barnett had stretched yellow tape in a circle around the mound. Lieutenant Wilkins, Officer Jackson, and two crime technicians were huddled inside the circle.

A dozen other grim-faced people milled around just outside it. Some carried flashlights. Two plainclothes officers were talking excitedly into their radios.

"Sarah, how'd you get here?" Ellie blurted out. "What are you *doing* here?"

"Joel and Anna came in to Alma's telling everybody you found a dead body in the Fear Street Woods," Sarah explained. "Then we heard the police sirens. Before I got off work, I called the station to speak to my dad. The desk sergeant told me he was here. I figured you might be too."

Ellie glanced over at Sarah's dad, who was supervising two officers, carefully digging into the low dirt mound.

"Are you all right?" Sarah asked.

Ellie nodded. "Just frozen to death."

Death. Ellie covered her mouth with her hand. "Oh, Sarah. I found a hand."

Sarah draped an arm around her. "Do they have any idea who it is?"

"No. Your dad said it will take all night just to dig

## THE MIND READER

up the rest of the body. Then nobody knows how long it'll take to identify it."

"Are you sure it isn't Bambi?" Sarah joked. Even in this grim situation, Sarah had to crack jokes. But Ellie saw her tremble.

Sarah let out a tense laugh. "You'd think I'd be used to this, being a cop's daughter."

The two girls gazed toward the lighted grave. Lieutenant Wilkins and one of the crime technicians were still hunched over it. A mound of dirt about a foot high had been heaped to one side.

Sarah's father raised a camera and took several snapshots of the grave. In the sudden brightness of the flash, Ellie spotted someone standing apart from the crowd. He wore a baseball cap pulled down low on his forehead. From under the bill of the cap, his dark eyes burned into hers.

It took her a moment to recognize him. Brian Tanner. The guy from the coffee shop.

Brian quickly glanced away.

Ellie nudged Sarah with her elbow. "Sarah," she whispered. "It's that guy from Alma's. Brian Tanner. What do you think he's doing here?"

Sarah shrugged. "Who knows? He took off right after you did. Never even drank his Coke." She scrunched up her face and squinted at him. "I keep thinking he looks familiar."

"Maybe you met him at a party or something," Ellie said. "Speaking of *party* . . ." She glanced around. The woods were crowded with people whispering and

## FEAR STREET

watching. Anna and Joel, Frank and Patty, a handful of other kids Ellie recognized. "You'd think *this* was a party, the way everyone's hanging out!"

"Hey—any excuse for a party!" Sarah joked.

"No kidding." Ellie dropped her hand to stroke Chaz. She peered back across the circle of tape. Brian Tanner had vanished.

Weird.

Excited murmurs drew Ellie's attention to the center of the marked-off area. Officer Jackson and a crime technician stood in the wide hole they had dug. They both wore rubber gloves.

"I found something, Lieutenant," Jackson called to Lieutenant Wilkins.

Ellie held her breath. Sarah leaned forward to see better. The crowd around the circle grew silent.

The crime technician held out a plastic bag. Using metal tongs, Jackson lifted something out of the hole.

Before he stuck the evidence into the bag, Ellie caught a glimpse of it. It was a rectangle of red fabric.

Sarah gasped. Her fingers suddenly dug into Ellie's hand.

Lieutenant Wilkins stared over at his daughter. Ellie saw his eyes fill with pain.

"Sarah? What's wrong?" Ellie asked.

Sarah didn't reply. Wide-eyed, she silently stared back at her father.

Then Sarah's grip on Ellie's hand grew slack. And with a weak cry, she crumpled to the ground.

## *chapter*

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# 4

“Sarah!” Ellie shrieked. She dropped down beside her. Sarah’s eyes had rolled up in her head.

“Sarah! Sarah!” Ellie cried frantically.

No response.

“Let me through!” Ellie heard Lieutenant Wilkins’s tense voice above her. Then he crouched down beside his daughter.

“She just—collapsed,” Ellie stammered.

Waving an arm in the air, Lieutenant Wilkins yelled, “Over here!”

Seconds later Officer Jackson knelt beside Sarah. “Excuse me,” he said, motioning for Ellie to move back.

Ellie stood up. Chaz whined and nuzzled her hand.

## FEAR STREET

She stared down at Sarah's unmoving body. What happened? Why did Sarah collapse like that?

"She's okay," he assured Lieutenant Wilkins. "Pulse is normal. Looks like she just fainted."

Lieutenant Wilkins nodded.

Sarah groaned and blinked her eyes. She gazed up at Ellie, dazed.

"You're going to be okay," her father told her softly.

A few seconds later he moved over to Ellie, his eyes tired. "Go home, Ellie," he said firmly, taking her arm. "Sarah will be okay. Someone will take care of her."

"No. I really need to stay," Ellie insisted.

"No. Home," he insisted softly. He placed his hands on her shoulders and turned her around. "It's late. Your father's going to be worried. Barnett!" he bellowed over his shoulder. "Instruct the other officers to clear everyone out of here. Then drive Miss Anderson home."

"Wait!" Ellie clutched his arm. "What's wrong with Sarah? What happened?"

Wilkins sighed. "She'll be okay. She just fainted. . . ."

Yes, but why? Ellie wanted to know, but it seemed that Lieutenant Wilkins didn't want to tell her.

"Come on, Ellie," the female officer urged. "It's late. Won't your parents be worried?"

"No," Ellie replied as she led the way up the steep bank. Behind her, the crowd was being ushered away.

## THE MIND READER

“It’s only my father and me. He’s probably not even home yet.”

When she reached the top of the bank, Ellie turned for one last glance. Through the trees she could see Sarah climbing to her feet. Two officers were still standing near her. Lieutenant Wilkins was probably back in the marked-off area, inspecting the red fabric.

The red fabric.

*That* was what made Sarah cry out, Ellie remembered.

Why?

Why would a piece of fabric make Sarah faint?

She turned to follow Officer Barnett to the street.

“Ellie! Hey, Ellie!”

Ellie glanced up from her open locker. Frank Schuler jogged down the hall toward her, pushing through the crowd of kids as if they were the football defensive line.

Startled, Ellie dropped her backpack to the floor. Frank had never said two words to her before. Why was he calling her?”

“Pretty weird scene last night,” Frank said. His pale blue eyes sparkled as he smiled at her. He wore a grungy plaid shirt over baggy, faded jeans torn at both knees. “Guess you’re some kind of a hero or something.”

Ellie shook her head. “Hero? I don’t think so.” She narrowed her eyes at him. “You didn’t even believe

## FEAR STREET

me—did you?” she accused him. “When I came running out to your car, you thought I was crazy, right?”

Frank’s cheeks turned pink. “Hey, no way.” He leaned against a locker as Ellie slammed hers shut and twirled the padlock. “Did the cops say who was buried there?” he asked.

Ellie shook her head.

“Frank!” a voice called out from the crowd. Patty rushed up to them and slid her arm through Frank’s. She wore a pale aqua T-shirt under a blue vest, and black leggings.

“Did you ask her?” Patty demanded of Frank as if Ellie weren’t standing there.

“Yeah. She doesn’t know anything either.”

Patty’s blue eyes lit up. She tossed back her streaked blond hair with a flip of her head. “Well, I do! Anna told me some great gossip. Did you notice that Sarah Wilkins wasn’t in school today?”

Frank nodded. “Yeah. She usually sits in front of me in history.”

“Wellllll . . .” Patty drew out the word forever. She straightened her vest. Then she leaned closer and whispered. “Do you remember Melinda, Sarah’s older sister?”

“Huh?” Ellie cried out. “Sarah has a sister?”

“*Had* a sister,” Patty replied, lowering her voice.

“Sarah had a sister?” Ellie repeated, unable to conceal her surprise.

“Melinda disappeared,” Patty confided in a hushed

## THE MIND READER

whisper. "And someone told me she was wearing a red sweatshirt the night she disappeared."

"Ohhhh." Ellie let out a low moan.

The red fabric. So that was why Sarah fainted. And why her father's eyes were filled with such pain.

But why didn't Sarah ever mention her sister?

Frank and Patty stared at her with startled expressions. "You okay?" Patty asked.

Ellie bent down and snatched up her backpack. "I'm fine," she lied. "But I'd better run or I'll be late for class."

She called out goodbye and raced down the hall to the pay phone by the front office. She had to call Sarah!

She held the phone receiver in a trembling hand and punched in Sarah's number. No answer.

Frustrated, Ellie slammed down the phone. She stared at the wall of the phone booth, thinking hard. At least now I have some idea of why the visions returned, she thought. And why the hand beckoned me to the shallow grave.

Because I allowed myself to grow close to Sarah.

The body in the grave must be Melinda's.

Sarah's sister Melinda must have used me to reach out to Sarah.

After school Ellie hurried to her job. Shelving books at the Shadyside Public Library didn't pay much, but Ellie loved being there. She loved the musty, old-book smell of the library. And she loved the quiet.

## FEAR STREET

Picking up a book, Ellie stood on tiptoe to stick it onto a high shelf. Cool air hit her skin where her sweater rode up.

“Excuse me,” a male voice said behind her. “But can you help me find a book about primitive weapons?”

“Just a sec.” Ellie groaned as she shoved the book onto the crowded shelf.

Even before she turned around, Ellie could tell the guy was studying her, his gaze traveling up and down her body. Embarrassed, she pulled her sweater down and spun around.

Brian Tanner watched her with an amused smile. He wore a denim workshirt and straight-legged jeans.

“Primitive weapons? You mean swords and spears and things?” Ellie croaked. She cleared her throat and pointed down the aisle. “It would be in the six hundreds.”

“I checked there.”

“That should be the right section. Did you check the computer listings?”

He grinned shyly. Tiny lines crinkling around his eyes. His eyes were dark, but standing close to him, Ellie noticed they were flecked with gold.

“I decided I’d rather ask you,” he said.

Ellie felt her face grow hot. She couldn’t help but grin back at him. Brian Tanner’s smile was hard to resist.

“Well, I’ll see if I can find it. Not that I’m an expert.

## THE MIND READER

I just work here after school. *High school*," she added, not wanting him to get any wrong ideas about her.

"Yeah? I'm at Waynesbridge." He followed her down the aisle. "You know. The community college."

"Oh. I didn't even know Waynesbridge had a college," Ellie replied. "My dad and I just moved to Shadyside."

"I know."

Her smile faded.

"This is where the book should be," he said. Reaching past her, Brian pointed to a shelf of books.

"How do you know?"

"Because they all have the same call number," he replied.

"No," Ellie said. "I mean, how did you know I was new in Shadyside?"

"Uh—" Doubt flickered in Brian's eyes. "Because this is the first time I've seen you at the library," he replied. "And you look like the kind of girl who hangs out at the library a lot."

Ellie's eyebrows shot up. "Huh? Is that supposed to be a compliment? What kind of girl hangs out at the library?" she demanded.

"Well . . ." He hesitated again. "A girl who likes to read?"

Ellie had to laugh at his embarrassed expression. Maybe Brian Tanner wasn't quite as smooth as he thought he was. The idea pleased her.

Because he was really *cute*. And she hadn't been attracted to a guy in a long time.

## FEAR STREET

Turning away from him, she scanned the shelves. Forget Brian Tanner, she scolded herself. He's a college guy. All he wants is a book. Then he'll be gone.

"Here's one. It's called *Primitive Weapons*." Ellie reached up. Her fingers closed around the spine and slid the book from the shelf.

A gasp caught in her throat.

A silver-handled knife rested in the empty space she had made.

Bright red blood dripped from its gleaming blade. A puddle of darker blood spread on the shelf. The blood dripped over the shelf onto the floor at Ellie's feet.

The knife slid forward, its blood-smeared blade aimed straight at Ellie's heart.

*chapter*

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5

*E*llie screamed and stumbled back, slamming her shoulder into the shelf behind her. The book dropped to the floor.

“Hey! What’s wrong?” Brian caught her elbow.

Ellie’s chest heaved. She stared in horror at the shelf.

Empty.

No blood. No shiny dagger.

*There is no knife!*

Another vision.

“Sorry!” Ellie cried, feeling herself blush. Brian held on to her arm. She gently pulled it away.

Breathe deeply. Calm down, she told herself. Ellie shut her eyes.

Only a vision.

## FEAR STREET

You can handle it, she told herself.

She opened her eyes and flashed Brian a reassuring smile. "Nothing's wrong, really. Something moved when I pulled out the book. A mouse, I guess."

His eyes continued to study her. "That was quite a scream for a mouse," he said.

"Thanks. I'm a good screamer," Ellie replied, trying to lighten things up. She bent down, picked up the book, and shoved it into his hand. "Bye," she said, avoiding his eyes. She quickly headed down the aisle.

He must think I'm a total jerk, she thought.

But why do I keep having these frightening feelings every time I see him? Why do I have such a strong sense that I should stay away from him?

"Ellie, wait!" she heard Brian call.

She didn't turn back. She swept past the librarian sitting at the main counter and hurried into the office behind the checkout desk, shutting the door behind her.

Now she was safe.

She leaned her back against the door and thought about the knife. Fear swept over her. It's happening again, she thought. The visions. My powers invading my life. But why?

Because of Brian?

Because she felt attracted to him? Attracted and frightened at the same time?

No, it couldn't be, she thought. It must have been the book—*Primitive Weapons*.

## THE MIND READER

Of course! That's why she saw the knife. The title of the book triggered the vision.

Ellie felt her body relax. Everything will be okay, she told herself. Brian Tanner and his book will go away, and the visions will go away too.

"Hey—whoa!" Ellie murmured out loud. "What's going on here?"

When Brian called to me, he called me by my name. But I never told him my name!

At six Ellie stepped out of the library and gazed up at the charcoal sky. A gusting wind carried a chill. It shook the trees that lined the long walk, sending leaves tumbling to the ground. A sheet of newspaper swept past Ellie's feet like a silent gray ghost.

Ellie hitched her backpack up on her shoulder and zipped her windbreaker. It's a pretty long walk to Sarah's house, she told herself, watching dead brown leaves swirl in the wind. But I want to check on her before I go home.

Leaning into the wind, she made her way to the sidewalk and started down Park Drive toward Fear Street. Ellie watched the numbers on the houses as she walked by. Twenty minutes later she recognized Sarah's address.

Ellie stopped at the curb and stared up at the dark house. No lights. Not even a porch light.

Where were Sarah and her father? Were they out?

Ellie shifted her backpack to her other shoulder and

## FEAR STREET

started up the sloping front lawn toward the gray clapboard house. Ellie wondered why Sarah had never invited her to her home. Sarah always preferred to go to Ellie's or hang out at the mall.

"Weird," Ellie murmured. Sometimes she felt really close to Sarah. But there were lots of things Sarah kept private.

Like her sister. Why hadn't Sarah ever mentioned Melinda? Ellie wondered again. Was Melinda's disappearance just too painful for her?

As she neared the house, Ellie could see how run-down it was. The front steps were broken. The paint on the front wall was chipped and peeling.

She rang the bell. Waited. No answer. No sounds inside.

Maybe Sarah's asleep, Ellie thought.

She stepped down to the walk, turned, and peered up at the second floor. Pink curtains framed a window in the front. It had to be Sarah's bedroom. The window was open a crack.

"Sarah!" Ellie cried, cupping her hands around her mouth. "Are you up there?"

She waited, staring up at the dark window. "Sarah? Are you there? It's me."

No. No one there.

As she turned to leave, something caught Ellie's eye.

A shadow crossed the upstairs window. A curtain fluttered.

Behind the curtain, a face appeared. A pale, ghostly face.

## THE MIND READER

"Sarah?" Ellie called.

No. As the curtain fluttered aside, Ellie saw the gray, fleshless forehead, the empty black eye sockets, the leering, toothless grin. And realized she was staring at a grinning skull.

## *chapter*

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# 6

“O hhh.” Ellie let out a low, frightened moan and shut her eyes.

When she reopened them, the skull had vanished. She blinked several times, staring hard at the fluttering curtains in the dark window.

Another vision?

It *had* to be, she told herself.

But why? What did it mean? And was Sarah up there?

Her heart pounding, Ellie darted up the steps and pounded the door with both fists. “Sarah? Sarah?” She rang the bell, keeping her finger on the button, listening to the steady buzz inside the house.

“Sarah? Can you hear me?”

Silence.

Ellie turned. “She isn’t home.”

## THE MIND READER

The grinning skull—another vision, Ellie realized. A vision of death.

Whose death?

Ellie suddenly remembered Alma's Coffee Shop. Sarah's after-school job. Sarah is probably there right now, Ellie realized. Of course. That's where she is. She'd miss school, but never work. Sarah needs the money too much to miss work.

Shoving her hands into the pockets of her windbreaker, Ellie leaned into the wind and started jogging down to the street. I'll go to Alma's, she decided. Dad won't be home for dinner anyway. I'll check out the coffee shop. Make sure Sarah is okay.

She had walked three or four blocks, when a black Jeep pulled up beside her. Ellie started walking faster. She didn't know anyone who had a black Jeep.

But the Jeep inched along beside her. The passenger window rolled down. A face appeared. "Hey—Ellie! It's me! From the library!"

Ellie turned to see Brian, leaning across the passenger seat, staring out the open window. "Didn't scare you, did I?" he asked, grinning.

"No way," Ellie lied.

"Hop in," Brian called. "Where you going?"

"Alma's," Ellie replied. "But I don't ride with strangers," she added playfully.

"Well, I could drive you to Alma's and introduce myself on the way," he suggested, his dark eyes catching the glow of the streetlight. "Then we won't be strangers."

## FEAR STREET

"Except you already know my name." She stepped away from the curb. "And I never introduced *myself*."

"Oh." He rubbed his chin. "Well, I can explain that. I heard the librarian call you."

Ellie's eyes narrowed. "No, you didn't. She calls me Miss Anderson. Not Ellie."

"Okay. Okay. I lied. Your friend at the coffee shop told me."

"So why did you lie?" Ellie demanded, not letting him off the hook.

He laughed. He even blushed a little. Oh, was he cute!

"Come on, hop in," he urged.

But something told her not to.

She pointed ahead to the coffee shop. "I think I can walk. Thanks anyway." Before he could reply, she took off, running toward the restaurant.

The Jeep squealed as it pulled away. Brian honked the horn—three short honks—and disappeared around the corner.

Ellie burst through the door. The jangling of the bell and the warmth inside reassured her. She stopped to catch her breath.

Why did I do that? she asked herself.

Once again she'd run from Brian Tanner as if he were a monster. Was it because he lied about how he knew her name? Or was she afraid of having more visions?

Ellie shook her head, not sure of the answer.

## THE MIND READER

Dropping her backpack on the floor, she slid onto a stool at the far end of the counter. Alma's was nearly empty. A white-haired couple sipped coffee in a booth. A burly guy wearing greasy coveralls sat at the other end of the counter, downing a plate of franks and beans.

But where was Sarah?

Ellie craned her neck, trying to see through the pickup window into the kitchen. The sizzling of a burger on a grill told her someone was back there.

The swinging doors flew open, and Ernie Marks, owner and cook, burst through. Ernie was about forty, nearly bald with eyeglasses about an inch thick. "Rare burger," he sang out as he plopped the plate in front of the guy in coveralls. "How are the franks and beans?"

"Lousy as always," the man joked. "That's why I keep coming back."

Ernie chatted with the guy for a few seconds. Then he came over to where Ellie was sitting. "So? Where's your friend?" he demanded.

Ellie fiddled with the napkin dispenser. "That's what I was going to ask you."

"I haven't seen her," Ernie replied, wiping his hands on his stained apron. "She didn't call either."

"That's not like Sarah."

Ernie sighed. "You're telling me. She hasn't missed a day all year."

Ellie glanced down and realized she had shredded a napkin with both hands. She dropped the pieces onto

## FEAR STREET

the counter. "You heard about last night? The body in the woods?"

"Yeah." He rubbed his bald head.

"I heard it might be Sarah's sister," Ellie said, her voice dropping to a whisper. "You lived here two years ago, didn't you? Do you remember hearing anything about Sarah's sister? Why she disappeared?"

Ernie shook his head. "Just what was in the papers."

"Ernie! More of that mud you call coffee!" The guy in coveralls held up his cup.

"Yeah. Yeah." Ernie reached for the coffeepot.

Ellie slumped forward over the counter.

"Excuse me, is this seat taken?" a voice said.

Startled, she swiveled to the right. Brian Tanner stood by the stool next to hers.

"Uh, yes. It's reserved for the Queen of England!" she joked.

Brian laughed. He settled casually onto the stool. He looks very athletic, Ellie noticed. "I'll get up when the queen gets here," Brian promised. "So what do you recommend?"

"What are you doing here? Having dinner?" Ellie asked, tossing her hair back.

"Are you?" Brian shot back.

She shook her head. "No. I have to get home. Chaz is waiting."

"Your dog."

"How'd you know that?" she asked.

He raised his hands as if defending himself. "Hey. I

## THE MIND READER

just guessed, okay? I mean, you were with a dog last night.”

Ellie relaxed. “Yeah. I was.” She glanced sideways at him. “So what were you doing in the woods last night?”

“Same thing everyone else was. Looking for cheap thrills. Trying to find out what was going on.” He rested his chin in the palm of his right hand. “I heard you were the one who found the body.”

A shudder ran through Ellie. “Yeah. But I really don’t want to talk about it. It still gives me the creeps. So if you’re the Waynesbridge Community College reporter or something, then you’re wasting your time,” she added lightly.

He shook his head. “No. I’m not a reporter.”

Ellie swiveled toward him. “Then why are you hanging around Shadyside? Do you live here?”

Brian shook his head. “No. I live with my grandparents in Waynesbridge. So, where’s Alma?”

“I don’t think there ever was one,” Ellie told him. “I think that’s the name of Ernie’s cat.”

Brian laughed. “And how are Alma’s hamburgers? Do they have cat meat in them?”

“Probably,” Ellie replied, grinning. Her stomach growled. Embarrassed, she clapped her hand over it.

Brian grinned. “Then I say we order two.”

Half an hour later Ellie checked her watch. She and Brian were having so much fun talking, she’d forgotten about the time.

“Oh, no, it’s after seven. My dad will have a cow.”

## FEAR STREET

"So call him," Brian suggested. "Tell him I'll bring you home in fifteen minutes."

"Uh—" She hesitated. The jangling of the bell over the door interrupted her thoughts. Lieutenant Wilkins strode into the restaurant.

"Lieutenant Wilkins!" Ellie called, sliding off her stool. "I've been trying to find Sarah. Is she all right?"

The police officer stared vacantly at Ellie as if he didn't recognize her for a moment. Then he nodded. "She's fine. She's staying with her aunt for a few days. I came in to tell Ernie."

"Oh, good. I was worried." Ellie bit her lip. She was dying to ask Lieutenant Wilkins about the body, but he was already walking away. She watched him lean over the counter to talk to Ernie.

Ellie shoved her hands in the back pockets of her jeans and turned again to the counter. To her surprise, Brian's stool was empty.

Ellie's mouth dropped open. Where was Brian? The men's room?

Lieutenant Wilkins nodded to Ellie as he left.

"Please tell Sarah to call me," Ellie said. She took the last sip of her soda, her eyes on the men's room door.

"Hey, you want dessert?" Ernie asked, picking up the dirty plates. "I've got some banana cream pie that isn't too stale."

"No." Ellie shook her head. "Brian's going to take me home now."

## THE MIND READER

“Brian?” Ernie stopped clearing the dishes. “The guy you were with?”

Ellie nodded.

Ernie tilted his head toward the door. “He left.”

Ellie caught her breath. “Left?”

“Yeah. When you were talking to Lieutenant Wilkins. He threw down some money and took off like a shot.”

Ellie walked home. She found her father in the living room, reading the paper in his threadbare armchair. She kissed the top of his head. “Hi, Dad. Sorry I’m late. Did you have dinner?”

He grunted a reply, absorbed in the newspaper article.

Ellie glanced over his shoulder. She swallowed hard as she read the headline: UNIDENTIFIED BODY FOUND IN FEAR STREET WOODS.

Last night she was in bed by the time her father arrived home. She hadn’t had a chance to tell him about the scene in the woods.

Besides, she was avoiding the topic. Her father hated it when she mentioned her powers. He always accused Ellie of imagining things.

But she had no choice. She had to tell him about the body. “I’m the one who found the grave,” Ellie began reluctantly.

Her father lowered the paper. “You? What were you doing in the woods?”

## FEAR STREET

"Taking Chaz for a walk. He's really the one who found it."

Her father stared at her, shock on his face. Dark circles under his eyes. He seemed suddenly tired and old. "You know how I feel about the woods at night, Ellie. I've told you—"

"Over and over," Ellie cut in. She made her way to the couch and sat down. "But it wasn't night when Chaz and I started out. By the time I showed the police the grave, it was dark."

Her father's eyes flashed with anger. "You are to stay away from the police, young lady. You are not to get involved with their investigation."

"Dad!" Ellie couldn't believe how angry he was. "Didn't you hear what I said? I'm the one who found the body. How can you expect me to stay out of the police investigation?"

"Because I'm your father and I said so!"

"Said so!" Ellie echoed. "That's not a reason. You're always telling me I can't do things, but you never tell me why."

"I don't have to tell you why!" he fumed.

"Yes, you do!" she shot back. "I'm almost seventeen. I'm not a kid anymore!" Ellie gave her father a cold stare. "Besides, this time your rules don't make any sense."

Her father stared back at her with an expression that was impossible to read. Then his shoulders drooped. He tossed the newspaper to the floor and let out a sigh. "I know that," he said. "But please stay

## THE MIND READER

away from the police. I don't want you to end up like your mother!"

"My mother? What does Mom have to do with it?" Ellie cried.

He hesitated. He cleared his throat. Finally, he choked out, "Your mother didn't die in a hospital like I told you, Ellie. She was killed."

"Killed?" Ellie gasped, raising her hands to her cheeks. "What are you talking about? Mom died of appendicitis."

"Oh, Ellie." Her father got to his feet, crossed the room, and sat beside her on the couch. "You were only two years old when it happened. I didn't want to lie—neither did Grandma and Grandpa—but how could we explain it to you?"

He shook his head. "Then later, when you were old enough to understand, I just couldn't find a way to tell you. Besides, I didn't want to talk about it—ever again." His voice broke. "It was just too painful."

Tears sprang to Ellie's eyes. She couldn't believe it. All those years she'd thought she'd known the truth about her mother. "How did it happen, Dad? Who would kill Mom?" she asked in a tiny voice.

He avoided her eyes. "There was a little girl who disappeared. Later it turned out she was killed. Some nutcase—someone who never should have been let out of jail—killed her. Then he killed your mom."

"But why?" Ellie pressed her father. She had to

## FEAR STREET

know the truth, even though she could see that talking about it was torture for her dad.

"I don't know why! Don't you think I've asked myself that question a million times?" Ellie's dad was sobbing now.

Ellie felt chill after chill run down her back. She felt numb. Completely numb.

My mom was killed?

Her stomach lurched. She stood up on rubbery, weak legs.

Somehow she made her way upstairs to the bathroom before she started to vomit.

Minutes later she heard her father knock on the bathroom door. "Ellie, are you all right?"

"Yes," she croaked. "No, I mean . . ." She burst into tears.

"I'm sorry," her father called through the door. "I shouldn't have told you like that."

"I wanted to know, Dad," she replied. "And I'm okay. Really. I'm just going to take a shower."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

She heard him pad slowly down the stairs.

Dark thoughts, frightening thoughts, hammered at the back of Ellie's brain. Still feeling sick, she forced them away. She pulled off her clothes. Then she turned on the shower and waited until the water got steamy.

She stepped under the hot spray.

Ellie closed her eyes, trying to summon up the few

## THE MIND READER

memories she had of her mother. She couldn't remember much. She did remember her mother's long, blond hair, green eyes, and soft voice, which tinkled like bells when she laughed.

Ellie and her father were pretty close. But all her life Ellie felt a hole, as if something were missing.

Why did someone kill her?

Why?

Ellie shut her eyes and lifted her face, and let the steamy hot water spray over her. Slowly Ellie felt her body relax.

A moment later she opened her eyes.

Opened her eyes and gasped.

Above the showerhead, a knife shimmered against the white tiles!

With a cry, Ellie stumbled back.

The knife's silver handle gleamed. Blood dripped from the blade, splashing on her feet.

She glanced down. The tub was filled with blood. Blood up to her ankles. So hot. So thick!

As the knife plunged toward her, Ellie raised her arms. And shrieked, "Noooooooooo!"

Ducking from the knife, she slipped.

Fell. Into the hot blood.

"Owww!" Her head smashed against the hard tub. Blood splashed up against the tile wall.

The hot water sprayed over her.

Frantically wiping her eyes, gasping for breath, she struggled to her knees.

## FEAR STREET

And then she heard the cry.

A frantic cry for help, echoing off the blood-smeared shower walls.

Ellie froze. And listened hard.

Listened to the eerie cries.

And recognized her mother's voice!

## *chapter*

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# 7

“**M**om!” Ellie wailed. “Mom—I can hear you!”

She struggled to hear over the steady roar of the shower.

But the cries had vanished.

“Mom—no! Don’t go away! Don’t leave me! Mom!” Ellie moaned.

“Ellie! Ellie!”

Another voice. Her father’s voice. Calling from the hallway. “Ellie, are you all right?”

Gasping for breath, her entire body trembling, Ellie couldn’t answer. Her eyes moved up to the showerhead.

The bloodstained knife had vanished.

The blood had vanished from the walls, from the tub.

## FEAR STREET

Such a frightening vision.

She climbed shakily to her feet, twisted the shower knobs, turned off the water.

Mom? Are you still here? Ellie thought desperately. I heard you, Mom. I heard your cries. Please don't leave me!

"Ellie—answer me! Are you okay?" Her father's distressed call intruded on her concentration.

She took a deep breath. "I'm okay!" she managed to choke out. "I couldn't hear you, Dad. The shower—"

"You have a phone call!" he shouted through the door. "Brian somebody."

"Huh?" Brian Tanner? Why would Brian be calling her?

"Tell him I went to bed."

"You sure?"

"Yes," she replied firmly.

Ellie climbed shakily out of the shower and dried herself. She pulled on her old terry-cloth robe, and glanced at her reflection in the steamy mirror. Her face was pale, and her eyes blank and hollow.

Why had she heard her mother's voice for the first time in fourteen years? Ellie wondered, staring into the mirror as if searching for answers.

And why did she keep seeing a silver-handled knife? A knife dripping with blood?

Did it have something to do with Brian Tanner?

With the body in the woods? With her mother?

She had to find out.

Tightening the belt of her robe, Ellie made her way

## THE MIND READER

downstairs. She found her father at the kitchen table, his hands wrapped around a coffee mug. Ellie saw at once that his eyes were bloodshot.

She hesitated in the doorway. "Dad?"

He turned away, embarrassed by his tears.

"Dad, how did Mom die?" Ellie asked softly. She dropped down into the chair across from him.

He shook his head. "I can't talk about it anymore today, Ellie. It's been fourteen years, but it feels like I just lost her yesterday. I'm sorry."

Ellie squeezed his hand. Tears welled in her own eyes. Should she tell him what had just happened in the shower? Tell him about seeing the knife? About hearing her mother's voice?

No. He hated her visions. He refused to believe in them. Simply refused.

"I'm sorry. I just can't say any more," he said, avoiding her eyes.

"That's okay," Ellie replied softly.

I'll find out the truth myself, she decided.

Sarah did not show up at school the next day. Ellie wasn't surprised, but she wished Sarah would phone her. She really wished they could talk.

Ellie spent all six periods in a fog. She couldn't stop thinking about her mother. When the final bell rang, she ran all the way to the library.

"Good afternoon, Miss Anderson," the head librarian greeted her. "We have lots of work for you today."

"Great." Ellie barely nodded. "But first I need to do

## FEAR STREET

some research for a school project. It'll take only a few minutes."

Without waiting for the librarian's reaction, Ellie darted to the reference room and the only microfiche machine. For a second she stared at the dates on the drawers holding the film.

Mrs. Anderson had died when Ellie was only two. That was fourteen years ago.

But which month?

Ellie closed her eyes and tried to remember what her father had told her.

Suddenly the coolness of crisp air and the smell of rain-soaked earth filled Ellie's nose. She closed her eyes, let her arms fall limp, trying to let the vision in.

Trees dappled with red, orange, and yellow leaves swayed in her mind. Her mother was killed in the fall. Then a leering jack-o'-lantern made her eyes snap open.

October.

Ellie pulled out the drawer labeled "September-December" and plucked out several rolls of film. She threaded the first roll into the machine, turned it on, and adjusted the picture.

The front page of *The Shadyside Beacon*, October 1, Tuesday, flashed on the screen.

A murder would certainly have made the front page, Ellie decided. She scrolled through the roll.

There! October eighteen.

SHADYSIDE WOMAN ATTACKED, STABBED TO DEATH.

## THE MIND READER

*Stabbed!*

Stabbed by a silvery dagger?

Ellie's throat tightened. Her mouth felt as dry as cotton. Her temples throbbed as she squinted to read the article.

Early yesterday morning a vicious knife attack on Fear Street left Mrs. Louise Anderson of 128 Canyon Road fatally wounded.

Town police, summoned by a passing motorist, were on the scene in minutes. But the woman was already dead.

Mrs. Anderson's two-year-old daughter was found nearby, crying but unharmed, still seated in her stroller. There were no other witnesses.

Horrified, Ellie raised her eyes from the screen and slumped back in the chair. She couldn't read the rest. Tears filled her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

That was me!

I was there!

*Did I actually see my mother murdered?*

Hot tears burning her cheeks, Ellie stared blindly at the screen. The words blurred.

And as they blurred, a hazy image replaced them.

A woman on a sidewalk. A bright fall day.

The woman—Ellie's mother!

Mrs. Anderson screamed. Raised both hands to shield her face.

## FEAR STREET

Ellie clapped her hands over her mouth. Muffled the scream that spilled from between her own lips.

“Mom! Mom! Nooooooo!”

For just an instant, her mother’s frightened gaze met Ellie’s. “I love you!” she mouthed. Then Ellie saw her crumple slowly to the sidewalk.

## *chapter*

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# 8

*E*llie shuddered violently, sobbing. No wonder her father couldn't talk about the murder. Ellie knew that her mother's terrified expression would haunt her for the rest of her life.

One line from the article played over and over in her mind: *There were no other witnesses.*

Except for her two-year-old daughter, Ellie thought. Except for me.

Her hand shaking, Ellie reached for the knob on the microfiche machine. She turned to the next day's edition of the paper. ALLEGED MURDERER CAPTURED read the headline.

She read the article with tear-blurred vision. The man was a resident of Shadyside. Bloodstained clothes were located in his house. The knife was found

## FEAR STREET

in a trash can. Lots of evidence. But the police could not come up with a motive.

"Miss Anderson!" The librarian poked her head through the doorway. She frowned at Ellie. "We have books to shelve."

"Right!" Ellie wiped her damp cheeks, then unloaded the film and flipped off the machine.

As she dropped the rolls of film back into the drawer, she knew she had the answer to at least one of her questions. Why she kept seeing a knife. Moving back to Shadyside—and finding that mysterious grave—must have triggered old memories.

Terrifying memories she had buried for fourteen years.

Ellie pressed her thumb on the Wilkinses' doorbell and kept it there.

Come on, come on, she urged silently. I know you're in there, Sarah.

She had phoned from the library. Someone had picked up the receiver. Picked it up. Listened. Then replaced it.

Lieutenant Wilkins had told Ellie that Sarah was staying with an aunt. But for some reason, Ellie couldn't shake the feeling that Sarah was in Shadyside.

Frustrated, she banged on the door. "Sarah? It's me, Ellie."

She rattled the doorknob. To her surprise, the knob turned.

## THE MIND READER

Ellie held her breath as she pushed open the door. She peered into the dark hallway.

“Sarah?” Ellie called softly.

The hall smelled musty. The stale air carried a chill. Ellie stepped inside. The heavy silence engulfed her.

“Sarah?” she called again when her eyes adjusted to the dark.

Ellie strained to listen. The house was quiet.

“Sarah? Are you home?” Ellie started up the stairs. The steps creaked under her feet.

As she climbed, particles of dust scattered in the air. Ellie paused at the top of the stairs.

This was the first time she had been inside the house. Which was Sarah’s room?

“Sarah?” Ellie stepped cautiously toward the room at the front. The door was half closed. Ellie stopped outside the door. “Sarah? Are you in there?”

Silence.

Taking a deep breath, Ellie pushed the door open the rest of the way. Leaning into the darkness, she squinted across the room.

“Sarah? Oh, *no!*” Ellie let out a terrified scream as she saw the unmoving figure sprawled across the bed.

## *chapter*

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# 9

*E*llie grabbed the doorframe, held on tightly, struggling to keep her knees from buckling. In the dim light she could make out Sarah's sleek black hair.

Sarah was stretched out on her stomach, her arms sprawled lifelessly at her sides.

"Sarah? Sarah? Sarah?" Ellie repeated her name.

Slowly the figure moved. Sarah raised her head, pushed away the tangles of black hair, gazed up at Ellie. "It's you?" she murmured in a groggy voice.

Ellie dove to the bedside. "Thank goodness!" she cried. "I—I thought—"

"How'd you get in?" Sarah asked, pulling herself up to a sitting position.

"Sarah—what is it?" Ellie cried, ignoring the question. "What's wrong?"

## THE MIND READER

"Everything," her friend replied, moaning.

Sarah grabbed a teddy bear and hugged it tightly. Ellie saw that she was wearing the same waitress uniform and sweater she had been wearing on the night the police dug up the grave.

The bedspread and blanket lay crumpled on the floor. Glancing up, Ellie saw that there were no pictures or posters on the walls, no decorations of any kind.

"Sarah, I—I've been so worried," Ellie told her. "Your dad told me you were at your aunt's, but—"

Sarah snorted. "My aunt's? I don't have an aunt," Sarah said sharply. Her arms tightened around the bear as she turned back to the wall.

Ellie hesitantly sat on the edge of the bed beside her friend. "Then what's going on? Please tell me so I can help."

"You can't help. But I will tell you. That 'thing' in the grave was my sister." A sob burst from Sarah's throat. Ellie placed a comforting hand on her friend's trembling shoulder.

So it was true.

"Since he found out, my dad's been crazy. I haven't talked to him since the night they found her. He comes in to the house, eats, then leaves. He won't tell me anything. *Anything!* Even though she was my sister!"

Sobs racked Sarah's thin shoulders. She buried her face in her bear as she cried.

## FEAR STREET

"Oh, Sarah," Ellie whispered as she stroked her friend's hair.

Time passed. Sarah's shoulders stopped quivering. Neither girl said a word.

The silence was heavy, cold, unbearable.

After a while Sarah's body relaxed and her arms loosened their grip on the bear.

She's asleep, Ellie realized. She picked the blanket up from the floor. She covered Sarah, then tiptoed out of the room.

Poor Sarah! Ellie thought. This is so horrible! What can I do?

I really shouldn't leave her here alone. But what if her father comes home and finds me here? I don't want to upset him any more than he is!

Maybe I'll call later and invite Sarah to come stay at my house.

Ellie stepped quietly back out into the hall. She noticed an open door across from Sarah's. Ellie knew at once it had to be Melinda's room. Curiosity tugged at her.

Ellie pushed the door open wider. Pictures hung from each of the walls. The bed was made with a flowered spread, frilly pillows, and a dust ruffle. Brush, comb, perfumes, and makeup were arranged neatly on a glass-topped vanity.

And the room was spotless.

As if Melinda still lived there.

A framed photo on the dresser caught Ellie's eye. She picked it up. A school picture.

## THE MIND READER

The smiling face resembled Sarah's, except the eyes were blue. Melinda's long black hair hung past her shoulders.

How did she die? Ellie wondered.

Who buried her in a dark, lonely grave in the woods?

Why had Melinda reached out to Ellie? Why, after all this time, did she want to be found?

Ellie studied the photo, searching for clues. The beautiful girl in the picture looked as if she could have been voted most popular in her high school class. Most likely to succeed.

Not most likely to die.

Then, before Ellie's eyes, the photo began to change. Melinda's smile faded. The dark lips quivered.

Ellie blinked.

What is happening? What am I seeing?

Melinda's lips opened. Her glimmering eyes slowly grew wide with horror.

Staring out at Ellie, Melinda screamed.

And screamed.

A terrifying, silent scream.

The photo fell from Ellie's hand. The glass shattered on the floor.

Ellie turned and ran.

She flew down the stairs, jumping the last two steps. She stumbled and fell against the front door.

With a stifled cry, she grabbed the doorknob and yanked the door open. Cool air brushed her cheeks.

## FEAR STREET

She ran furiously, her arms pumping at her sides, ran as fast as she'd ever run. Down the block.

At first she didn't hear the feet pounding the pavement behind her. Her own footsteps drowned out all other sound.

By the time she realized she was being followed, it was too late.

Turning to see who was behind her, she stumbled over a fallen tree branch, and sprawled onto her stomach.

A heavy body fell on top of her, knocking her breath out.

Gasping for air, she struggled onto her back. Gazed up into his face.

"You!" Ellie cried in a choked whisper.

## *chapter*

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# 10

“Who did you *think* it was?” Brian Tanner demanded. He pushed himself up and got to his feet. He brushed the dirt and dead leaves off his black jeans.

“I—I’m sorry,” Ellie stammered. Who *did* she think it was? “I just panicked, I guess,” she admitted. “I’m not used to being chased down a dark street.”

Brian gingerly touched a cut on his lip. “Didn’t you hear me calling you?” he asked.

“Why are you following me?” Ellie snapped, pulling herself to a sitting position. Her ribs ached. Her right knee throbbed. “Are you my bodyguard or something?”

Still rubbing his cut, he sighed. “I’d like to be. But after last night, I can’t blame you for running away from me . . .” His voice trailed off.

## FEAR STREET

“Because you left me at Alma’s?” Ellie tried to sound cool. “What was *that* about anyway?”

He shrugged. “Something came up. Sorry.” He pulled a red bandanna from his back pocket and dabbed at his lip. “So why were you running?” he asked.

“Uh—” Ellie didn’t know what to say. No matter what she told him, it would sound stupid.

Leaning forward, she wrapped her arms around her knees. She’d felt so angry and hurt when Brian had stranded her in the coffee shop. But even though it was only yesterday, it seemed a long time ago.

She raised her eyes to him. “If I tell you, you’ll think I’m nuts.”

“So try me.” Brian dropped down beside her on the grass. He pulled a dead leaf from her hair and tossed it away. “Go ahead. Spill.”

She took a deep breath. “I was running from the Wilkinses’ house. I went there to talk to Sarah.”

He nodded. “I called your house earlier. When I got no answer, I figured you might have gone to check on your friend. *That’s* why I happened to see you and follow you.”

He leaned closer, his eyes locked on hers. “So what happened at Sarah’s? Something bad?”

“Sarah was lying in the dark. She seemed totally messed up. She—she told me it was her sister. Buried in the woods. Sarah was really upset.”

## THE MIND READER

As she spoke, Ellie absently pulled up handfuls of grass. "I didn't know what to say," she told Brian. "I just sort of sat there. She was exhausted. Totally wrecked. She fell asleep, and I was alone in the house and—" She shuddered. "I guess my imagination went wild or something."

He stared back at her thoughtfully. His eyes were unreadable.

"So now it's my turn to ask questions," Ellie said. "Why were you looking for me?"

He touched his lip. The bleeding had stopped. "To apologize. You know. About last night."

"I'm listening."

He lowered his eyes, picking at a thumbnail with two fingers. "Sorry I had to run out like that. It's just that—well—when I saw that cop come into Alma's, I remembered I had parked the Jeep in a no-parking zone. I figured if he saw my car there, he'd stick me with a ticket. I can't afford to pay any more tickets. So I ran out to move it. I hurried back, but you were gone."

"Any *more* tickets?" Ellie demanded.

He grinned sheepishly. "I've gotten a few on campus."

"Hmmm." Ellie wasn't certain about his story. But he sure was cute. She had a sudden impulse to lean forward and kiss him.

"I called to explain, but you wouldn't talk to me. Are you mad?" he asked quietly.

## FEAR STREET

"I think I'm getting over it," she replied, making a joke of it.

"Good." He held out his hand to help her up. She took it. Then she brushed off the back of her jeans.

"So now what?" she asked, staring down the dark street.

"So now I ask you out," Brian replied almost shyly. "You know. To a movie or something."

Ellie smiled. He's actually asking me out, she thought. She knew she should be happy. But something held her back. A feeling. A bad feeling. Something she couldn't describe even to herself.

"I don't know if I can, Brian," she heard herself say.

"Huh? Why not?" He crossed his arms. "Give me one good reason."

"I—I don't have one good reason. I don't even have a bad reason. It's just that, well, these past couple of days have been so weird." She bit her lower lip.

"You mean finding the body in the woods? Or is it because of what happened before? With your old boyfriend?"

Ellie inhaled sharply. She gaped at him in shock. "What do you mean?" she cried.

He couldn't possibly know about Tommy Wheaton, Ellie told herself. Why did Brian say that?

He shrugged. "Nothing," he murmured. "I didn't mean anything. Really."

## THE MIND READER

"No. Tell me," Ellie insisted. "Why did you say that about my old boyfriend?" She stared at him without blinking, forcing him to answer.

His cheeks turned pink. "I—well—I figured if you're this nervous around guys, it must be because someone really hurt you. That's all."

If only it were that simple, she thought wistfully.

Brian put a hand on Ellie's shoulder and steered her back to the sidewalk. "Don't say no," he urged her. "Tomorrow is Saturday, right? It's supposed to be really warm out, like spring. Maybe the last really warm day this fall. We'll have a picnic. At Fear Lake. Just you and me."

She opened her mouth to say no. Then closed it.

A picnic did sound like fun. And she needed fun. Maybe it would take her mind off the dreadful thing she had learned about her mother. And help her stop thinking about poor Sarah and her dead sister, Melinda.

"Do you like to canoe?" Brian asked.

She nodded, still thinking hard.

"I think the canoe rental is still open this late in the year. We can rent one. Have you ever rowed to Fear Island?"

Fear Island was a tiny island in the middle of the lake set back in the Fear Street Woods. In the summer it was a popular picnic spot for Shadyside people. But on an afternoon in late autumn it would probably be deserted.

## FEAR STREET

“Chaz can even come along as a bodyguard,” Brian suggested, grinning.

Ellie smiled back. She couldn't help herself. A date with a cute guy doing something fun. With her dog along to protect her.

What could possibly go wrong? she asked herself. What could possibly go wrong?

## *chapter*

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# 11

Saturday morning Ellie ate her cereal while watching the morning news on the small countertop TV. Chaz lay at her feet, chewing a rawhide bone. The morning sun streamed into the tiny kitchen. It was the sunniest, cheeriest room in the house.

The weather reporter announced a warm, sunny fall day. Then the anchorman returned to the screen. Ellie's heart jumped into her throat as he said, "We return again to our lead story—the discovery of a young woman's body in the town of Shadyside."

Ellie jumped up from her chair and turned up the volume. The picture changed. She recognized the outside of the Shadyside police station. A petite woman stood on the steps. She was holding a microphone and motioning toward the front door behind her.

## FEAR STREET

“Two years ago the life of one of Shadyside’s best-known detectives was turned upside down,” the reporter began. “The teenage daughter of Lieutenant Jack Wilkins disappeared, leaving no clue to her whereabouts. Now police have positively identified a body found two nights ago in a shallow grave as that of Melinda Wilkins.”

Melinda’s school picture flashed on the screen.

The scene changed to the Shadyside cemetery, then moved to the woods where Ellie had found the grave.

Ellie sat down and picked up her spoon. But she was concentrating too hard on the TV to eat. The camera panned back to the reporter. Behind her, Lieutenant Wilkins and a man in a dark suit were stepping out the front door of the police station.

The reporter ran up the steps to meet them. “Lieutenant Wilkins!” she called out. “Two years ago, when your daughter disappeared, she was listed as a runaway.”

Nodding curtly, Lieutenant Wilkins continued down the steps. The reporter had to jog to keep up with him. “And yet you made it clear that you suspected foul play. Why didn’t anyone follow up on your hunch?”

Lieutenant Wilkins halted and ran a hand through his hair. His voice sounded tired and strained. “We were never able to turn up any evidence of foul play. Besides, my daughter’s friends told the investigating officers that Melinda planned to run away with her boyfriend. That’s why she was listed as a runaway.”

## THE MIND READER

“Was the boyfriend ever found and questioned?”

“No, he disappeared the same day. All attempts to locate him failed. My belief is that he may have been murdered at the same time.” Lieutenant Wilkins’s eyes narrowed. “Now, if you’ll excuse me.”

Turning away, Lieutenant Wilkins headed down the sidewalk. The reporter jogged behind him, calling, “Lieutenant, how was your daughter killed?”

Lieutenant Wilkins ducked into the passenger side of a black car and slammed the door. The reporter turned her attention back to the camera. “That was an exclusive interview with Lieutenant Jack Wilkins, the father of Melinda Wilkins. The Shadyside police are now considering the case a homicide. They are stepping up the search for the boyfriend of Melinda Wilkins. His name is Brett Hawkins. My sources say they are using new computer technology to track him down. Anyone with information about Brett Hawkins should contact the department.”

*They are searching for her boyfriend.*

Brett Hawkins.

Lieutenant Wilkins’s weary face revealed that he was working overtime to find Melinda’s killer. Yet Ellie hoped he’d also pay some attention to Sarah. Sarah was obviously not in any condition to be left alone.

Reaching for the phone, Ellie punched in Sarah’s number. She let the phone ring ten times. No one answered.

Ellie let out a frustrated sigh.

## FEAR STREET

She had tried calling Sarah at home the night before. And she had tried Lieutenant Wilkins at work. Why wouldn't Sarah answer? And why wouldn't the detective return her calls? Did he still want Ellie to believe that Sarah was at her aunt's house?

Ellie glanced at the clock over the oven. It was after nine. Late. Brian would be picking her up at ten. She wouldn't have time to run over to the Wilkinses' house to try to see Sarah.

Ellie shivered. The photograph of Melinda flashed into her mind.

Melinda used my powers to guide me to her grave, Ellie thought grimly. But why did the photo on the dresser also call out to me? Was Melinda trying to tell me something more?

Then a frightening thought burst into her mind:

The bony, beckoning hand. The blood-dripping knife.

Were they warnings too?

Had Ellie's visions returned because *she* was in some kind of danger?

Ellie shook the frightening thought from her mind. "Today is a day for fun," she told Chaz. He wagged his tail as if he understood her.

"Nervous?" Brian asked, glancing at Ellie. He cut the engine and pulled out the ignition key.

"Uh, no. What makes you think that?" Ellie replied quickly. He nodded to her fingers drumming on her thigh. "You're about to tap a hole in your jeans."

## THE MIND READER

“Oh.” Ellie lowered her hands. “Sorry.”

Ellie opened the door of the Jeep. Chaz bounded out from the backseat, almost knocking her over.

The Fear Street woods were a blaze of color. Yellow and red leaves shimmered brightly under the clear blue sky. Birds chirped as if it were spring.

Ellie took a deep breath. The air was clean and piney. “What a day!” she exclaimed as they made their way into the woods.

Through the trees she could see the lake, sparkling like crystal. The boat rental cottage stood at the edge, canoes stacked high beside it.

“I’ll get us a canoe,” Brian said, setting down the picnic hamper.

“Sure.” Ellie watched him jog over to the canoes.

He was right. She *was* nervous. She wanted to have fun. But something was keeping her from relaxing and enjoying the day.

Ellie thought about how great Brian looked in his chinos, a blue flannel shirt open over a white T-shirt, a blue and red Cubs cap pulled down over his auburn hair.

And he had brought a feast. She could smell the fried chicken through the basket.

If only she could get rid of her feeling of dread when she was with him. If only she didn’t feel as if she should stay as far from Brian as she could.

“Got one!” Brian called from the rental stand. He came jogging back, carrying two paddles and two life jackets.

## FEAR STREET

"No life jacket for Chaz?" Ellie asked.

Brian halted. "Can't he swim?"

Ellie burst out laughing. "I'm kidding."

"Hey. You've got a great laugh," Brian grinned back at her. "I haven't heard it before."

"Thanks," Ellie replied awkwardly.

"And I like your hair in a ponytail," Brian continued. "It makes you look like—" He hesitated.

"A pony?" Ellie said as she picked up the picnic basket.

He laughed. "Not what I was going to say. In fact, I don't know what I was going to say." He gazed at her thoughtfully. "You're different from the other girls I've dated."

"Oh?" Ellie's heart quickened. She didn't really want to hear about other girls he'd gone out with. Chaz ran ahead, sniffing at tree trunks and fallen leaves.

Brian's expression turned serious. "Yeah. You're a lot quieter. Most girls think they have to chatter constantly. And you're taller."

"Thanks," Ellie replied, rolling her eyes. What a compliment.

They followed a path through the woods to a small dock on the lake.

No one around, Ellie saw, shielding her eyes with one hand and gazing along the shore. Way down the shore, a lone fisherman pulled a shiny fish from the water.

Ellie turned back to find Brian standing close,

## THE MIND READER

staring intently at her. Dropping the paddles and life jackets, he leaned down. He kissed her softly on the lips. His mouth barely brushed hers.

Ellie's lids fluttered shut. He was so gentle.

How could she not fall for him?

Chaz barked and her eyes flew open.

Brian smiled. "Ready to watch me make a fool of myself trying to paddle a canoe?"

They took turns paddling. The canoe glided easily over the gentle lake water.

Fear Island rose up in front of them. Ellie steered the canoe to a secluded cove with a small sandy beach. She could see charred wood scattered across the sand. Lots of people had picnicked there during the warm months.

Ellie paddled hard until the canoe ran aground. Then she jumped out onto the wet sand. Chaz leapt into the water. Swaying unsteadily as he made his way from the stern to the bow, Brian passed her the picnic supplies.

The sun felt hot, hot as summer. The chicken tasted good and greasy, the way Ellie liked it.

When they finished eating, Ellie slumped back on the blanket. Behind Ellie, Chaz nosed in the brush. Brian lay on the blanket beside her, his hands tucked under his head, his Cubs cap over his face.

They talked and laughed for an hour. Ellie couldn't believe she had ever felt nervous. She found herself thinking about Brian's kiss. Would he kiss her again?

## FEAR STREET

She really wanted him to.

Brian propped himself up on one elbow and reached into the basket. "Want an apple?"

"Sure." Ellie sat up. "You thought of everything."

He grinned at her and pulled out an apple. "Just like Adam and Eve," he said softly.

She laughed uncomfortably. What a weird thing to say, she thought.

He rubbed the apple on his T-shirt. "Want me to cut it for you?"

"Sure."

Brian reached again into the basket and pulled out a knife.

Ellie caught her breath.

She forced herself not to scream. Forced her eyes away from the knife. Forced them to stay on Brian's face.

His face remained calm as he concentrated on slicing the apple.

The silver-handled knife cut through the fruit's bloodred skin.

The same knife Ellie had seen in her visions.

## *chapter*

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# 12

**W**ith a shudder, Ellie jumped to her feet.

Startled, Brian glanced up. The knife hovered in the air. Apple juice dripped from the blade.

“What’s wrong?” Brian demanded.

“Uh—” Ellie glanced frantically toward the woods.

Calm down, she scolded herself. Don’t let him see how scared you are. He’ll just think you’re crazy.

“That knife—” she blurted out.

“It’s pretty deadly looking, isn’t it?” Brian said brightly, waving it in the air. “It was my grandfather’s. He gave it to me when I was in high school. I’ve always loved this knife.”

Ellie couldn’t stop the shudders of fear that rolled down her spine. I’ve got to get away, she told herself.

## FEAR STREET

Away from that knife—just until I start to feel normal again.

“I can’t see Chaz,” she said. “I don’t want him to get lost. I’d better go after him.”

He chuckled and scraped the knife against the apple. “Okay. If you’re not back in twenty minutes, I’ll send a search party.”

“I—I’ll be right back,” Ellie stammered. Whirling around, she raced into the woods. Chaz came running out from behind a tree. When Ellie stopped to catch her breath, the Lab galloped over. Kneeling, Ellie grabbed the loose skin around his neck and buried her face in his warm coat.

Stop panicking, Ellie. Think.

So the knife looks like the one in your visions. So what? There are lots of knives with silver handles.

Ellie began to feel a little calmer. Chaz sat on his haunches and whined, trying to lick her face.

Even my own dog thinks I’m acting like a jerk, she thought.

I can’t keep repeating the same stupid mistake.

I meet a guy. Decide I like him. Start having visions, and go crazy with suspicion.

That’s crazy. Just plain crazy.

Ellie glanced back toward the beach. Maybe I’ll tell Brian about my visions, she thought. For some reason, I have the feeling he might understand.

After all, he said he liked me because I’m different. He just doesn’t know *how* different.

## THE MIND READER

Ellie leaned forward, tucked in her shirt, and smoothed the hair back into her ponytail.

I *will* tell him about my powers, she decided. I don't want to lose him the way I lost Tommy Wheaton.

Brian will believe me. He'll understand. I know he will.

She sat hugging Chaz for a while, waiting for her heartbeat to return to normal. Then, taking a deep breath, she got to her feet and started back to the beach to talk to Brian.

"Brian?" she called, stepping out from the trees.  
"Brian?"

She stopped and stared openmouthed at the empty beach.

He was gone.

*chapter*

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13

*E*llie blinked several times, struggling to focus.

The yellow sand shone under the bright sunlight. The picnic basket was gone. So were the blanket, her Windbreaker. *The canoe.*

Panic sliced through Ellie. Chaz ran up the beach, barking at a flock of starlings.

Had Brian taken off just as he had that night at the coffee shop? Had he stranded her there on that tiny, deserted island?

“Ellie! Hey—Ellie!”

Brian’s voice. She spun to her left. Where was he calling from? The woods?

She started toward the sound—then froze.

No. I won’t go back into the woods. I’ll wait by the shore. If I go into the woods—if . . .

## THE MIND READER

If what?

Five minutes earlier she had decided to confide her deepest secret to Brian. Now she didn't trust him enough to hunt for him in the woods.

Make up your mind, Ellie, she told herself. You can't be afraid all your life.

Taking a deep breath, Ellie turned back to the woods. As she turned, she glimpsed the bow of the canoe. It broke through the line of trees and drifted out into the lake.

"Ellie?" Brian called from the stern. Taking off his cap, he waved it to catch her attention. "Over here!"

Ellie breathed a sigh of relief. "Hey—what are you doing?" she called, running to the shore.

"Looking for you. I got everything packed up, and when you didn't show, I got worried. Then I heard Chaz barking in the woods, so I paddled into this little inlet to find you."

"Oh." Now Ellie felt twice as stupid. She waded into the water and grabbed the bowline, then called Chaz. The Lab leapt into the canoe, his sandy paws slipping on the metal bottom.

"Sit," she told him firmly. Plucking the life jacket from her seat, she started to slide it on. But the ties were tangled. She tossed it back to the floor of the canoe. Stepping in, she settled on the hard seat.

As they backpaddled from the shore, Ellie glanced over her shoulder at Brian. He was gazing into the lake, his arms rising and falling as he dipped the paddle into the water.

## FEAR STREET

He senses that something is wrong, Ellie realized. He isn't blind. He saw that I ran off into the woods like a frightened deer.

Grasping her paddle firmly, Ellie started to row with all her might.

The canoe slid easily through the sparkling clear water. The gentle slap of the paddles helped relax her. The sun felt warm and comforting on her face.

"Ellie." Behind her, Brian whispered her name. He'd stopped paddling, she realized. The canoe was floating in a lazy circle.

Goose bumps tingled up Ellie's arms. She had a sudden feeling of dread.

"Ellie." Brian's voice louder now, more insistent.

She shut her eyelids tight. No, she thought to herself. I don't want to hear what you have to say. You're going to tell me you never want to see me again. You're going to tell me I'm *too* different.

Too weird.

But she could feel the heat of his gaze on her back. The glare of his eyes as he willed her to turn around.

"Hey, Ellie."

She whipped around and half stood.

Startled, Chaz leapt to his feet. Letting out a surprised *yip*, he jumped on her.

"Hey!" Ellie cried out as she lost her balance.

The dog staggered forward. The canoe dipped to one side—and Ellie plunged over the side.

Arms flailing, she hit the cold water.

She choked. Swallowed water.

## THE MIND READER

Cold. So icy cold.

So cold, her muscles froze.

No!

Got to swim. Got to pull myself up!

She struggled to move. Struggled to get over the shock of the freezing, dark water.

Frantically she lifted both arms. Kicked her feet.

Pain shot through one hand as her knuckles banged against something solid.

The canoe!

Still gasping for air, Ellie reached up, brushed her palm against the canoe's smooth side.

"Nooo!" She uttered a hoarse wail as clammy fingers circled her ankle like a vise.

And dragged her down.

Tossing up both hands, she made a desperate grab for the canoe. She clawed at the side, trying to find something to hold on to.

But the strong hand around her ankle was pulling her down, down.

A hard kick didn't free her.

Down, down. Her lungs about to burst.

I'm going to drown was her only thought.

*chapter*

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14

**N**o! Please!

I don't want to die like this.

In a grave of murky water.

Using her last bit of strength, Ellie kicked hard—and felt her leg break free.

Raising her arms, she shot upward.

Yes. Yes!

Up now. Moving through the chill. She opened her eyes, and gazed up through the water.

When she burst above the water, she hungrily gulped air into her burning lungs. A spasm of coughing racked her body.

Above her, Chaz barked from the canoe. Ellie reached up and grabbed the side of the canoe with one hand, still struggling to catch her breath.

## THE MIND READER

Brian? Where *was* he?

Water ran down over her face. She squinted into the canoe.

Brian's blue and red Cubs cap lay on the floor of the canoe. Chaz stood over it, barking excitedly.

Where was Brian?

Panic tightened her chest. Frantically Ellie rubbed water from her eyes, swept back her hair, searched the lake.

She heard shouts from nearby. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw a rowboat bobbing over the water, moving rapidly toward her.

The fisherman she had seen before. He was rowing hard, coming to rescue her.

But where was Brian?

"Brian! Brian!" Ellie began to dog-paddle in a circle, calling his name. She stroked a few feet from the canoe, afraid to get too far.

She gasped when she spotted him. His head facedown in the water. His arms floating limply on the water's surface.

She swam quickly over to him, and using a life-saving hold, rolled him onto his back.

Is he breathing? Is he?

Yes!

But his eyes were closed and his face was deathly pale.

The fisherman's rowboat rounded the canoe and came into view.

## FEAR STREET

"Over here!" Ellie cried. "Hurry! Over here!"

"I've got you!" the fisherman shouted, pulling up beside them. "Nice day for a swim!"

On her knees on the ground, Ellie leaned over Brian. "You okay? You look a little better. You're starting to get some color."

Brian coughed. "I'm okay. Still a little dizzy. And cold." His entire body trembled under the canvas tarp the fisherman had spread over him.

"I'm cold too," Ellie said, shivering.

"Where's Raphe?" Brian asked. The fisherman had introduced himself as Raphe.

"Went to get his truck. He's going to drive us home."

"Great first date," Brian muttered.

"You were out for a long while," Ellie told him. "But Raphe brought you around."

"He saved my life," Brian said softly, his eyes still not focusing.

"Actually, Chaz saved both our lives," Ellie told him. "Raphe heard Chaz barking like crazy. That's how he knew something was wrong."

"Wh-what happened?" Brian asked weakly, shivering hard under the tarp. "I mean, I saw you fall and . . ." His voice trailed off.

"I don't really know," Ellie told him in a trembling voice. "I'm a good swimmer. But something—"

"I was so scared," Brian interrupted. "You went

## THE MIND READER

down, and you didn't come up. I panicked. I jumped in after you."

He coughed, shutting his eyes till it ended. Then he continued. "The water was so cold. And so dark. I couldn't see you. I think I dived too deep or something. I—I grabbed on to something. I started to pull myself up."

*You grabbed onto my ankle!* Ellie realized.

Brian, you didn't realize it, but you were pulling me under.

"But I swallowed too much water," Brian continued in a hoarse voice. He reached up and grabbed her hand weakly. His hand felt as icy cold as Ellie's. "I couldn't see. I came up to the surface. I thought you were there with me. I tried to pull you up. But—I passed out, I guess. And then you saved *me*."

She stared down at him, shivering.

His cold fingers tightened around hers. He raised himself and brushed his lips against her cheek. Ellie turned her face to kiss him.

His lips were soft on hers. Soft and cold.

Then he dropped back onto the ground. "Man, I'm so tired," he whispered, his eyelids drooping. "Thank you for saving me, Ellie," he added groggily. "Even though I'm supposed to be saving you."

"Huh? Saving *me*?" Ellie stared down at him. "What do you mean, Brian?"

He didn't reply.

"What do you mean?" Ellie repeated shrilly. "What do you *mean*, you're supposed to be saving me?"

## FEAR STREET

He was asleep. Ellie stared down at him, studying his face. His breathing was hushed and regular. He looked like a little boy, sleeping so peacefully.

We're okay, Ellie thought gratefully. We're both okay.

Happily, she squeezed Brian's hand.

"Ummm." He sighed, smiling in his sleep.

She leaned over and kissed him gently on the cheek.

His lips parted. "Melinda," he murmured softly.

*chapter*

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15

*E*llie's heart stopped.

Melinda. Did he say Melinda?

Yes. He whispered the name in a voice filled with tenderness.

But why?

Did he know Melinda Wilkins?

Melinda isn't that common a name, Ellie thought.

Why did he whisper Melinda?

She slid her hand from Brian's grasp. His hand fell limply to the ground.

She wrapped her arms tightly around herself, trying to warm up. The sun disappeared behind a large, puffy cloud. The sky darkened, and Ellie's thoughts darkened too.

She stared down uneasily at Brian. Did he know

## FEAR STREET

Melinda Wilkins? Why did he murmur her name now? Why was he thinking about Melinda?

She remembered how Brian ducked out of Alma's when Lieutenant Wilkins walked in.

Was he really worried about a parking ticket? Or was he worried that Lieutenant Wilkins would recognize him?

The scene on the lake replayed itself in her mind. Did Brian know he was pulling her down under the water? He told her innocently that he had grabbed on to something in the dark water. But did he know it was Ellie's ankle?

Had he only pretended to pass out in the water? If the fisherman hadn't rowed up, would Brian have pulled her under?

Such sick thoughts, Ellie told herself.

Such sick, frightening thoughts.

I'm crazy. I should be locked away. Brian jumped into the lake to save me. He risked his life for me. And here I am, thinking these sick thoughts about him.

He's a great guy. A terrific guy. And he really seems to care about me.

So why am I afraid of him? Why do I have such horrible visions when I'm around him?

What am I doing here? Ellie asked herself.

She leaned forward on the bench and peered down the long, tiled hallway. In the next room she could hear the *clack* of computer keyboards and the low voices of police officers.

## THE MIND READER

Her stomach growled. She had skipped dinner. Just didn't feel like eating.

After Raphe dropped her at her house, she had taken a steaming hot shower, changed into warm pajamas, slipped under the covers, and drifted into a long nap. She awoke around dinnertime, tried to reach Sarah on the phone. Still no success.

She dressed quickly, pulling on a pair of jeans and a gray sweatshirt. Then, still feeling tired and edgy from her frightening experience at the lake, she took a bus to the Shadyside police station.

Sitting on the hard wooden bench in the brightly lit waiting room, she shifted uncomfortably, wondering what she would tell Sarah's father.

Finally the desk sergeant led her back to Lieutenant Wilkins's office. As she entered, he glanced up slowly from a stack of papers on his desk.

Ellie couldn't keep the shock from her face. The detective had aged ten years overnight! His eyes were red rimmed and bloodshot. His tie was stained and hung loosely from his wrinkled shirt.

"I know, Ellie," he said before she could speak. "You're worried about Sarah. You want her to come stay with you this weekend. I told you she was at her aunt's because I thought she needed to get some rest. The last thing she needs . . ." His voice trailed off.

"Why doesn't Sarah answer the phone?" Ellie demanded. "I've been calling and calling."

"She's very upset," Lieutenant Wilkins answered sadly. He shut his eyes and wearily rubbed the bridge

## FEAR STREET

of his nose between his thumb and forefinger. "It's been very hard—on both of us."

Ellie hesitated. Then she blurted out the other thing on her mind. "I need to know about Melinda's boyfriend."

Wilkins opened his eyes and stared hard at Ellie. "Brett Hawkins?"

"Yes. I couldn't remember his name," Ellie said.

For a second Wilkins didn't move. He continued to stare at her, frowning. Then he pointed to a wooden chair in front of his desk. "Sit down and tell me what's going on. Why do you want to know about Brett?"

Ellie lowered herself unsteadily into the chair and gripped the chair arms. She cleared her throat. She didn't know what to say.

Should she tell Lieutenant Wilkins that Brian whispered Melinda's name?

That he had a silver-handled knife she'd seen in visions?

That the lieutenant's dead daughter had called out to her from a snapshot?

Oh, no, Ellie thought. If I say any of that, he'll think I'm totally crazy.

What have I done? she asked herself. Why did I come here?

"Ellie? Are you all right?" Lieutenant Wilkins asked, his voice gentle. "Would you like a Coke or something?"

She shook her head, and stared down at her lap.

"Brett Hawkins," Lieutenant Wilkins repeated

softly. "He's probably dead too. We can't find him. We've searched for two years." He sighed, shaking his head. "His body will probably turn up in the Fear Street woods. Just like Melinda's." His voice cracked.

Ellie stared at him in silence, desperately trying to figure out what to say.

"Brett was the last person to see Melinda—alive," Wilkins told her. "Whoever killed Melinda may well have killed him too."

Ellie's stomach somersaulted. She suddenly felt sick. "Did Melinda know a boy named Brian Tanner?" she asked softly. So softly that Lieutenant Wilkins made her repeat the question.

Then he rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Tanner? Does he live in Shadyside?"

Ellie shook her head no.

"No," Lieutenant Wilkins said finally. "I don't remember that name."

Ellie breathed a silent sigh of relief. If Brian had known Melinda Wilkins, the police would have questioned him after her disappearance. But Lieutenant Wilkins had never heard of him.

That meant that Brian must have muttered the name of a different Melinda.

That meant that Ellie's fears about Brian were all ridiculous.

"I guess I don't have anything to say," Ellie said, climbing to her feet. "I'm sorry I took up your time. I just—"

"Here. Here's a snapshot of Brett Hawkins," Lieu-

## FEAR STREET

tenant Wilkins said. He pulled a small photograph from the file in front of him. "It's not a very good one. When Melinda first disappeared, I found it in Melinda's things. We circulated copies everywhere, with no luck."

He leaned across the desk and handed her the photo.

With trembling fingers, Ellie reached for the photo. She held it close and stared at a couple of teenagers in front of a motorcycle. The guy's arm was draped casually around the girl's shoulders. Her head nestled against his chest.

Ellie recognized Melinda. Then she held the snapshot closer to study the guy.

He had jet-black hair pulled back in a ponytail. He wore tight jeans, a black leather jacket, and cowboy boots. His smile was charming.

And his eyes . . .

A chill crept into Ellie's heart.

Her mouth went dry.

She'd recognize those eyes anywhere.

They were Brian's eyes.

Brian Tanner was Brett Hawkins.

## *chapter*

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# 16

*E*llie gasped as she stared at the photo. Brian Tanner, his arm around Melinda, smiled back at her from the snapshot.

Then his face blurred. The entire snapshot blurred. Ellie glanced up. The walls of the office faded away and a thick white fog drifted in.

In front of her, Ellie could hear Lieutenant Wilkins talking. But he seemed so far away, on the other side of the fog, and she couldn't make out his words.

Ellie straightened up in the chair. The photo fluttered to the floor. The carpet beneath her faded. Dead brown leaves scattered at her feet.

What was happening?

A dark tree loomed in front of Ellie. She smelled decaying leaves and damp earth. Her vision tunneled under the tree's roots, down a deep black hole.

## FEAR STREET

Down, down.

What was that object? Buried in the bottom of the hole. Caked with mold and rust.

Closer, Ellie dropped. Down. Down into the loamy earth.

Until it came clearly into view. A silver-handled knife.

Ellie reached for it. The knife vanished in the darkness. Her fingers clutched air.

Lieutenant Wilkins's voice drifted down into the hole. "Melinda was stabbed," he was saying, his voice still far away.

Ellie drifted up. Back up into the white fog.

"Who could have killed my little girl?" The officer's wounded voice cut through the fog.

Ellie blinked. She found herself back in the tiny office. She bent and picked up the photo from the floor. "I think I can help," she whispered.

Wilkins leapt to his feet, his red-rimmed eyes narrowed on her. "What? What do you know?" he demanded. He stepped around the desk. "Tell me!" he pleaded.

Ellie stared up at him, still half in her vision, still floating in the thinning fog.

He shook her shoulders. "What? Ellie, you must tell me. I have to catch the monster who killed my daughter."

"I think I know where the murder weapon is."

Lieutenant Wilkins let out a sharp gasp. "How?"

"The same way I found your daughter." Ellie slowly

## THE MIND READER

raised her gaze to meet Lieutenant Wilkins's eyes. She had to tell him about her visions.

"I have visions," she revealed in a hushed voice.

"Visions? You mean dreams?"

"Sort of. Only I'm awake. But just like dreams, I can't control them. And like dreams, they're in my mind. They're pictures that I see so clearly. They're like messages from—"

She stopped. It was so difficult to explain.

Lieutenant Wilkins was staring at her, not blinking, not moving. "Messages from other people?" he asked, his voice low. "From beyond? Like from my daughter?"

Ellie nodded solemnly. "I don't know how, but Melinda used my powers to bring me to her grave," she explained. "She *wanted* to be found."

Wilkins's face twisted in pain. For a moment he seemed to forget Ellie was in the room. Then his eyes returned to hers.

"You said you know where the murder weapon is. Did you see that in a vision too?"

She nodded. "Yes. Just now. After I saw the photo of—" She faltered. Not yet. She wouldn't tell him yet about Brian Tanner. "Brett Hawkins. I saw a knife at the bottom of a hole."

Lieutenant Wilkins grabbed her arm. "A knife? What kind of knife? Can you take me to it?"

Ellie pulled back. His fingers had dug into her wrist. "I think I can find it," she told him. "If we go back to the spot where we found Melinda."

## FEAR STREET

Taking long, eager strides, Lieutenant Wilkins pulled his suit coat off the back of his desk chair and opened the door. He ushered Ellie from the office and nodded to the desk sergeant. "I'll be back in twenty minutes. We'll be out at the grave site. You can get me on the car radio."

By the time they reached the cemetery, the sun was setting. Streaks of pink floated through a purple sky. The wind was warm, almost sultry.

When Ellie stepped from the unmarked police car, her legs felt like rubber. What a long day, she thought. Was it just this morning that Brian and I headed off to the lake?

She led the way down the beaten path. The brush and undergrowth had been crushed by the crowds of police and onlookers. When they reached Melinda's grave, all that was left was a mound of dirt and a gaping hole.

Ellie glanced at the hole. Her stomach churned.

"Think, Ellie," Lieutenant Wilkins prodded. "Or relax, or do whatever you have to do to find the murder weapon. It might be the only chance we have to catch Melinda's killer."

"Okay." Ellie took a deep breath.

She circled the hole, letting her mind go blank as she moved. The sky darkened as the pink streaks faded to purple. The wind grew cooler.

Ellie tried to remember what she had seen in her vision. A large tree. Gnarled, with knobby roots.

## THE MIND READER

She raised her eyes. At the edge of the pine grove stood an oak tree. It towered over her, its limbs reaching toward the sky. Ellie studied the base of its trunk. Its roots were exactly the same as the tree in her vision.

"This is the tree," Ellie whispered. Lieutenant Wilkins hovered right behind her. She sank to the ground. Her fingers brushed away leaves and earth until she uncovered a hole the circumference of her arm.

She glanced at Lieutenant Wilkins. He hunched down beside her, staring intently at the hole. "I think it's down there," she told him.

"Good." His mouth was set in grim line. "My hand is too big to reach in. Can you do it, Ellie?"

Ellie nodded.

"It's important evidence, so you need to wear rubber gloves," he instructed. He pulled out a pair from his suit-coat pocket. "If you find anything, we'll put it right in an evidence bag. I don't want any prints erased."

Ellie pulled on the rubber gloves. Beside her, the lieutenant was watching her every move.

Ellie thrust her right arm into the hole. She twisted her wrist, trying to work her hand through the leaves and dirt that had collected.

She reached . . . reached . . .

And her fingers touched something long and smooth.

## FEAR STREET

She held her breath.

She grasped the object. Slowly, carefully, pulled it out.

A knife.

Caked with rust and clinging dirt.

Holding it between her thumb and index finger, Ellie raised it to Lieutenant Wilkins.

His eyes went wide. He stared at it in silence for a long while. Finally he let out a pained sigh. "I recognize it," he uttered in a trembling voice. "I recognize it. Brett Hawkins used to flash that knife around."

"No," Ellie whispered. The knife nearly fell from her hand.

Lieutenant Wilkins finally turned his eyes away from it. "I guess I wanted to believe that Brett was dead," he said emotionally. "I didn't want to believe that he murdered Melinda. But here is the weapon. Brett's knife."

He remained silent for another moment. Then he pulled out a plastic evidence bag.

Ellie dropped the knife inside.

"I don't know why he killed Melinda," Lieutenant Wilkins murmured, talking more to himself than to Ellie. "I always thought he was kind of tough. But not a bad kid. For the past two years, I thought he was murdered too. But I guess I was wrong."

Ellie sank back against the trunk of the tree. "I know where he is," she blurted out.

## THE MIND READER

Wilkins squinted sharply at her. "Huh? What are you saying? How do you know where he is? Another vision?"

"No." Ellie shook her head. Now that she knew the truth, she wanted it to be over. "I met him at the library. He told me his name was Brian Tanner. He was so nice. He seemed like a great guy. But I guess he was hanging around me only to get information about Melinda. He must have found out I was friends with Sarah."

Brian never liked me at all, Ellie realized bitterly. Everything he said or did, even his gentle kisses, was a lie.

Lieutenant Wilkins took a deep breath. Even in the dim light, Ellie could see that he had gone very pale. "Brian Tanner, huh? Can you take me to his house?" "I don't really know where he lives," Ellie replied. "He told me he lived with his grandparents in Waynesbridge. But that could have been a lie too."

Wilkins nodded. "That's more information than we've had in two years. Thanks, Ellie." He squeezed her hand gratefully. Grasping the evidence bag, he started out of the woods. Ellie dragged along behind him.

When they reached the unmarked car, Lieutenant Wilkins radioed the information back to the department. Ellie didn't listen. She wanted to go home and crank up some really loud music, crank it up all the way to drown out her troubled, bitter thoughts.

## FEAR STREET

Lieutenant Wilkins gestured for her to get in the car.

Ellie shook her head. "I want to walk home," she told him. "I *need* to walk for a bit."

"Brian could be dangerous," Lieutenant Wilkins warned.

"He doesn't suspect that I know anything," Ellie replied.

"If he calls you, try to get his address," Lieutenant Wilkins instructed. "If you see him again, call me immediately. Do you understand?"

Ellie nodded. She said good night and started off down Fear Street.

A rustle in the bushes made her stop. "Huh? Who's there? Is someone there?" she called. Goose bumps pricked her arms.

"Ellie!" a voice called from behind a tree.

Startled, Ellie uttered a shriek.

Sarah Wilkins stepped toward her. Sarah's black hair was a matted cap of dirt and tangles. She wore a torn bathrobe. Squinting in the darkness, Ellie saw that she was barefoot.

"Sarah? What are you doing here?" Ellie demanded.

Sarah clutched at Ellie's hand. "Looking for my father. Where is he?"

"Why? What's going on? You're not dressed. You shouldn't be out here—"

"I called the station," Sarah interrupted. "The desk

## THE MIND READER

sergeant said my father had a break in the case.” Sarah turned wild eyes on Ellie. Her cheeks were flushed. “Did you have something to do with it?” she demanded. “Did you find out more about my sister’s death?”

Ellie reached for Sarah’s shoulder, trying to reassure her. “Yes. And everything is going to be okay.”

“What do you mean?” Sarah clutched Ellie’s arm.

Ellie hesitated, not sure how much she should tell her friend. “Well, do you remember Brian Tanner? The guy from Alma’s? He’s really Brett Hawkins, Melinda’s boyfriend. Your father thinks he killed your sister.”

“What?” Sarah tottered dizzily, throwing out her hands to catch her balance.

Ellie grabbed her friend, afraid she was going to pass out. “Sarah, don’t you see? This is good news. Now the police can catch your sister’s killer!”

“No. No,” Sarah moaned, shaking her head from side to side.

Ellie felt panic tighten Sarah’s muscles. What was wrong?

“Sarah.” She held on to her with both hands. “Are you okay?”

“No!” Sarah cried. She jerked out of Ellie’s grasp. “Get away from me,” she growled. “Get away. You don’t understand. You can’t understand! No one can!”

She whirled around and raced into the street.

## FEAR STREET

"Sarah!" Ellie called. Sarah was running up the middle of the street, her bare feet slapping the pavement, her robe flapping behind her.

I'm sorry. I can't chase you, Sarah, she thought, breathing hard. I'm just too worn out.

Poor Sarah.

She just can't deal with this.

Staying against the curb, Ellie started trudging toward her house. She had just turned onto Park Drive, when Lieutenant Wilkins's car sped by without slowing. He didn't seem to notice her.

As the car rolled past, she caught a glimpse of his profile. He was staring straight ahead, leaning stiffly forward, both hands on top of the steering wheel.

The walk seemed to take forever. Finally Ellie was home. Fiddling for her key. She pushed open the front door. Chaz immediately came bounding out to greet her, uttering sharp, whining cries, his tail wagging furiously.

"Hello? Dad? Are you home?" Ellie called. He's probably asleep in his armchair, she thought.

She pushed the front door shut and stepped into the dark living room.

Someone *was* sitting in the lounge chair.

"Hey, Dad—why don't you turn on a light?" Ellie called.

He moved quickly, rising up from the chair in a single swift motion.

And Ellie realized she wasn't staring at her father.

## THE MIND READER

“Brian!” she cried. “You scared me. How did you get in?”

Ignoring her question, Brian stepped up to her, his dark eyes narrowed unpleasantly. “Ellie,” he said with quiet force. “Why did you show him the knife?”

*chapter*

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17

*E*llie gasped.

“Why, Ellie?” Brian demanded as he jumped up from the chair and hurtled toward her.

Ellie spun around and sprang for the front door.

Brian slammed his body against hers. She fell heavily against the door, shutting it.

She tried to scream. But Brian clapped a hand tightly over her mouth.

He pressed her against the door, breathing hard, his face close to hers. “Why, Ellie? Why?” She could feel his hot breath on her cheek.

She stopped struggling. He was too strong. She couldn’t break away.

“If I take my hand off your mouth, will you promise not to scream?” he demanded in a harsh whisper.

She nodded.

## THE MIND READER

Slowly he removed his hand.

Ellie sucked in a deep breath. "I don't know what knife you're talking about!" she cried breathlessly, stalling for time. "The one you had at the picnic?"

He shook his head, his mouth twisted in a scowl. His dark eyes glared at her. "The knife hidden under the oak tree," he uttered.

"Oh!" Ellie let out a sharp cry. How could Brian know about the buried knife?

Only one way. *He* buried it.

Holding her in place, Brian locked the door and secured the deadbolt.

I'm trapped, Ellie realized, feeling her entire body tense in terror.

"You murdered her, didn't you?" she croaked. "And buried the knife under the tree." The words slipped out of her mouth. She felt so frightened, she didn't realize she was saying them.

His scowl faded. His dark eyes filled with surprise. "You don't really believe that, do you?" he demanded.

She stared back at him and didn't reply.

I've said too much, she warned herself.

He's a killer. He killed Melinda. He could kill me too.

He loosened his grip. "Ellie—" he started to say.

She brought both her hands up and shoved him with all her might. Startled, he stumbled backward against the coffee table.

Ellie darted past him, heading for the back door.

But before she even reached the dining room, Brian

## FEAR STREET

had grabbed her wrist and swung her back onto the sofa.

She fell over the sofa arm, landing heavily on the cushions.

With a groan Brian threw himself on top of her, pressing her against the sofa. "Not yet, Ellie." He gasped. "You have to hear me out. Then I'll let you go."

"I don't *want* to hear you!" Ellie cried angrily. "I don't want to hear your lies. Because that's all you've been telling me! You're not Brian Tanner. You're Brett Hawkins. You were Melinda's boyfriend. You killed her!"

She lashed out with her fists.

"Ellie, stop!" Brian threw his arms in front of his face. "Stop, and I'll tell you everything. Don't you at least want to know?"

Ellie stopped struggling. "Okay."

Brian slowly lifted himself off her.

Ellie sat up quickly, smoothed back her tangled hair. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly, waiting for her heart to stop thudding.

Brian sat back tensely against the sofa and stared down at his hands. His auburn hair fell over his face, but he made no attempt to push it away. "You're right," he murmured. "I did lie. I am Brett Hawkins. Two years ago Melinda and I—well—it's hard to explain. We were in love. She—was going to run away with me. Leave Shadyside. Only—"

## THE MIND READER

“Only she changed her mind, and you killed her!” Ellie interrupted. “Please stop, Brian. Or Brett. Or whatever your name is. Please. No more lies.”

“Ellie—” he pleaded.

Ellie couldn't stop herself. “You used me to find out what Wilkins knew,” she accused. “You don't care about me. And you don't care about telling me the truth. You just don't want to get caught!”

Brian started to protest. But Chaz's urgent barking interrupted him. Brian jumped to his feet.

Someone pounded on the front door. “Police. Open up.”

Ellie screamed. “I'm in here!”

“Shut up! It's Wilkins!” Brian snarled. He reached to cover her mouth. But Ellie scrambled off the couch, out of his grasp.

She stumbled to the kitchen. She could hear Chaz barking furiously at the front door.

Brian chased after her. Caught her.

“No!” she gasped. Thrusting her elbow up hard, she caught him in the throat.

He groaned. His hands shot up to his neck.

Ellie hurtled to the kitchen door. Her fingers fumbled on the knob, trying to unlock it.

Behind her, Brian bent over. Wheezed and choked.

She pulled the door open. Staggered out onto the back stoop.

Into Lieutenant Wilkins's arms.

“Where is he?” he demanded. “Where's Hawkins?”

"Inside," Ellie choked out, pointing.

She turned to see Brian in the doorway. "Ellie, no!" he cried, still holding his throat.

He didn't try to run. He didn't move.

Lieutenant Wilkins drew his pistol. "I've waited a long time for this," he said in a trembling voice. "You're under arrest, Brett."

"How—how did you know he was here?" Ellie stammered.

Lieutenant Wilkins pointed to the house next door. "Your neighbor heard shouting. Some kind of fight. She called the station. When I heard it was at your house, I figured it out."

Keeping the pistol trained on Brett, he turned to Ellie. "You were a big help. I'm very grateful, Ellie. You're okay, right?"

Ellie nodded.

"Let's go, Brett," Lieutenant Wilkins said softly. "I—I thought it would make me happy to bring you in. But I don't feel happy. I just feel sick."

He put his free hand on Brett's shoulder and shoved him toward the driveway. Brett didn't resist. As Lieutenant Wilkins pushed him to his car, Brett stared over his shoulder at Ellie, glaring at her until he disappeared around the corner of the house.

Exhausted, trembling all over, Ellie slumped to the top step and buried her face in her hands. "It's over," she murmured out loud. "At least it's over."

\* \* \*

## THE MIND READER

A little after ten that night, Ellie decided to take a long, hot bath and go to bed early. Starting to the bathroom, she heard the phone jangle downstairs. She heard her father get up to answer it.

She stood in her bedroom doorway, listening intently. Maybe Sarah is finally calling me back, she thought.

“Ellie?” Her father called from downstairs. She made her way to the top of the stairway. “It’s Lieutenant Wilkins,” her dad reported, his expression troubled. “He wants me to bring you down to the station. There’s been a problem.”

“Huh?” Ellie gasped. “A problem?”

Her father nodded. “Yeah. Wilkins said that Brett got away. He may be coming after you.”

## *chapter*

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# 18

“**N**o!” Ellie cried. “How? I mean—did Lieutenant Wilkins tell you?” She made her way down the stairs.

“Wilkins brought him to the courthouse to book him,” Mr. Anderson said. “Then, later, he was taking him to the jail. Somehow, Brett got the cuffs off. When Wilkins opened the door of his car, Brett knocked Wilkins down and ran off. Wilkins fired a couple shots at him. But Brett got away.”

“Whew!” Ellie dropped down onto the couch, shaking her head in disbelief.

Her father lowered himself beside her. “I told them I didn’t want you going down to the station. Wilkins told me what you did. You’ve already done your part.”

## THE MIND READER

“But I have to go, Dad,” Ellie protested. “I have to help them find him. Before he—before he comes back here!”

“Ellie!” her father insisted sharply. “You will *not* go down there. You will *not* help the police. You will not risk your life any more than you already have.”

“I’ll be at the police station. I’ll be safe,” Ellie replied.

Mr. Anderson jumped to his feet. He balled his hands into tense fists. “Don’t you understand?” he cried with surprising emotion. “I don’t want you to repeat what happened to your mother!”

Ellie stared up at her father. “Mom? What about Mom?”

“I know I haven’t told you the whole story about your mother’s death,” he said, his face reddening. He began to pace back and forth in front of Ellie. “She was killed because she was helping the police on a murder case.”

“A murder case?” Ellie echoed.

Her father nodded. “The little girl who was killed—she was a neighbor of ours. Your mother had dreams about the girl’s death. In her dreams she saw a man in a red flannel shirt. Then one night she saw the man’s face in one of her dreams.”

Mom had visions too! Ellie realized.

Her father continued to pace, avoiding Ellie’s eyes. “She decided she had to tell the police. Reluctantly, I agreed.” He swallowed hard. “The next day they

## FEAR STREET

arrested the little girl's uncle. His was the face in your mother's dream. But the police didn't have enough evidence to hold him. They had to let him go."

Mr. Anderson turned to her, his eyes filled with pain. "The next day the uncle attacked your mother while she was walking with you. He stabbed her . . . so many times . . . so many times . . ."

Ellie jumped up, walked over to her father, wrapped her arms around his trembling shoulders, and hugged him.

"If only I had told her not to go to the police," he whispered. "Why did I let her go?"

"But she had to go," Ellie replied softly. "You couldn't stop her."

He sighed.

"And I have to go too," Ellie said softly.

Mr. Anderson stepped back, shaking his head. "But how can you help, sweetheart? You've already done everything you can."

"You know how," Ellie replied. "Mom had dreams. I have dreams too. And visions. You've always known. You just refuse to believe it."

"I don't know what to believe," he replied sadly. He reached into his trouser pocket and pulled out the car keys. "Here. Why don't you go warm up the car. I'll be out in a minute."

"Okay," Ellie said. She kissed him on the forehead and hurried to get her jacket.

A few seconds later she stepped out into the cool

## THE MIND READER

night. Her father's two-door Corolla stood in the drive. Ellie hesitated on the front stoop.

Was Brett out there? Hiding in the shadows? Waiting for her? Waiting to pay her back for getting him caught?

The low evergreens along the front walk trembled.

Was he hiding behind them? Waiting to jump out and get her?

With a shudder she pulled her jacket tighter, and stepped onto the walk.

She was a few feet from the car, when the dark figure burst out from the bushes and leapt onto her with a furious grunt.

*chapter*

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19

“Chaz!” Ellie shrieked. “Get down! Get down!”

The dog’s big paws had left wet mud stains on the front of her jacket. He dropped to all fours, his tail wagging furiously.

“Did Dad let you out and forget about you?” Ellie asked, brushing the mud off with both hands.

She pushed open the front door and let Chaz run inside.

Then she turned and made her way to the car.

At the Shadyside police station, Lieutenant Wilkins greeted her apologetically. “I’m so sorry to call you out now, Ellie,” he said, ushering her alone into his tiny, cluttered office. His face was drawn, his eyes

bloodshot and watery. "I can't believe this happened. I'm really embarrassed."

Ellie didn't know how to reply. He really should get some sleep, she thought, sitting down in the chair in front of his desk.

"Brett really surprised me," Lieutenant Wilkins said, groaning as he lowered himself into his desk chair. "I guess capturing him meant too much to me. I got careless."

"How can I help?" Ellie asked, shifting uncomfortably in the chair.

He leaned over the desk toward her. "I thought you might remember something about him. Something that might give me a clue as to where he might be headed."

"I—I don't know," Ellie stammered.

Staring intently at her with his tired eyes, the lieutenant began to ask question after question. "Have you met any of his friends? Did he ever describe his grandparents' house? What kind of car did he drive? Do you remember the license plate number?"

Ellie did her best to answer. But she realized she hardly knew anything about Brett Hawkins.

Finally Lieutenant Wilkins leaned back in his chair, uttering a frustrated sigh. "Then what about a vision, or whatever you do?" he asked.

Ellie swallowed hard. "I can't just have a vision whenever I want one!" she exclaimed. "I really don't think—"

## FEAR STREET

"Here," Lieutenant Wilkins interrupted, feverishly shuffling through the files on his desk. He handed a photograph to Ellie. "This helped you before. Try again, okay? I'm really desperate, Ellie. I need to get this guy back. I can't have my daughter's killer get away again."

Ellie took the photo and raised it to her face. It was the same snapshot of Melinda and Brett he had shown her before. Brett smiled out at her from the photo. He seemed so happy. They both did.

Ellie let out a sob. "I—I can't!" she insisted.

"Try. Please," Lieutenant Wilkins begged. "Anything will help. Anything at all."

Ellie obediently stared down at the snapshot. Stared at the smiling faces. Stared until the faces blurred.

Until the entire photo blurred. The colors faded away, faded into a shimmering yellow blur. Like bright sunlight.

Ellie stared at the bright golden light until it hurt her eyes. Glancing away, she lowered the photo to her lap.

"Well?" Lieutenant Wilkins asked eagerly. "Did you see anything?"

"Just a color," Ellie told him shakily. "Just yellow. Or gold. Yes. It gleamed like gold. That's all. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry."

Lieutenant Wilkins narrowed his eyes at her. "Gold? That's all? Just gold? What does that mean?"

## THE MIND READER

“I don’t know. I’m sorry,” Ellie repeated. “I’m really sorry.”

The streets were empty as Ellie and her father drove home. The town of Shadyside closed up early. Dark houses and yards whirred by.

When they got home, Ellie went right to bed. She snuggled under the covers and shut her eyes. She was almost asleep, when Sarah’s face floated into her mind.

Sarah.

Poor, frightened Sarah.

Sarah knows something, she thought.

Sarah has been acting so strangely.

Like a crazy person.

She hasn’t left the house. She hasn’t returned my calls.

It’s because she knows something.

I’ve got to talk to her, Ellie decided. Jumping out of bed, she dressed quickly and tiptoed downstairs. Her father was sleeping. Good. Grabbing his car keys from the table, Ellie slipped out of the house.

I’ve got to find out what Sarah knows. About Melinda. About Brett.

A few minutes later she pulled up into the Wilkinse’s driveway. She cut the engine and the headlights and stared up at the dark house.

What *do* you know, Sarah? Ellie wondered.

Tonight I’m going to find out.

She felt a chill as she made her way to the front

## FEAR STREET

door. Was Brett waiting around the side of the house, waiting to leap out at her?

Am I going to be afraid to go anywhere for the rest of my life? Ellie wondered sadly.

She rang the doorbell. She knocked loudly. She shouted up to Sarah's window.

No reply.

Once again she tried the front door. Found it open. Slipped inside.

Into the dark entryway. "Sarah? Are you upstairs? Are you awake?"

Silence.

Leaning on the wooden banister, Ellie made her way up the stairs. A dim night-light on the floor provided the only light.

She crept to Sarah's bedroom and stopped outside the half-closed door. "Sarah? Hey—Sarah? It's me! Wake up!"

No reply.

Then Ellie heard a moan from the room across the hall.

Melinda's room.

"Sarah!" Ellie turned the knob. The door was locked. She pounded on it. "It's me, Ellie."

Silence.

Ellie pressed her ear to the door. She could hear Sarah's harsh breathing.

"Sarah. Let me in. I *can* help you. I do understand."

"No, you don't. You're the one who found her. You're the one who ruined everything!"

## THE MIND READER

Ellie jerked her ear away from the door. "What are you talking about?"

Something hard hit the door, then Ellie heard the sound of breaking glass.

"Go away, Ellie."

Ellie backed up. Sarah sounded completely out of it. Ellie had to get in the room to talk to her. Before Sarah really hurt herself.

Ellie pulled her right leg back, then kicked the door as hard as she could. It swung open. Books, pictures, and clothes were scattered on the floor. Sarah was kneeling on the bed, her left hand holding down a pillow.

Ellie leaned over her friend. "We have to talk. About Brett Hawkins. About Melinda."

"No!" Sarah cried loudly. Her cry ended in another long yawn. "No. I won't talk about it, Ellie."

"But I can help you," Ellie told her. "If you'll only tell me what you know, I—"

"No!" Sarah insisted heatedly. "No-no-no!"

"But, Sarah—" Ellie pleaded.

"Don't you understand?" Sarah cried, struggling to pull herself up against the headboard. "You're ruining everything!"

"Huh?" Ellie stared at her friend in shock. "What did you just say?"

"No one asked you to find her body. No one asked you to stir everything up!" Sarah exclaimed. "No one asked you."

"But, Sarah," Ellie insisted, her head spinning.

FEAR STREET

"Melinda was your sister. Don't you want to know what happened? Don't you want Melinda's murderer caught?"

"No," Sarah replied, her eyes burning into Ellie's. "No! No! No!"

"I—I don't understand," Ellie confessed.

"I *know* you don't," Sarah replied bitterly. "You don't understand anything. You don't even know that I *hated* Melinda. I hated her! Hated her!"

"Huh?" Ellie gasped in shock.

"I hated her so much, I killed her!" Sarah screamed. "It was me, Ellie! I killed Melinda!"

*chapter*

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20

Sarah stared hard at Ellie, as if waiting for her to react.

But Ellie felt too shocked, too horrified to speak.

A heavy silence fell over them. Outside the window, a cat yowled. Its cry sounded so human, Ellie thought it was a baby.

The cat yowled again.

Neither girl spoke. It was as if Sarah had said too much. As if neither of them could speak again.

Finally Sarah broke the silence. "It's true what I said. About hating Melinda."

"But you loved her too," Ellie insisted softly.

"I guess. It was hard to love her. Melinda had everything. She was beautiful, smart, had tons of friends, and"—her voice quivered—"my father

## FEAR STREET

loved her more than anything. Especially more than me.”

Ellie lowered her eyes. “Your dad doesn’t love you?”

Sarah shook her head. “Not like he loved Melinda. It was as if the world revolved around her. I tried everything. After my mother died, I did the cooking, cleaning, grocery-shopping. I was only fourteen, and here I was, trying to run the house.”

“That must have been hard,” Ellie said softly.

Sarah shook her head as tears formed in her eyes. “It didn’t matter to him. He’d come home from work, rush past me without even a hello, to go see Melinda. It got worse when she met Brett Hawkins.”

“Your dad didn’t like Brett?”

Sarah nodded solemnly, a tear rolling slowly down each cheek. “Dad and Melinda had a big fight. He told her she couldn’t see Brett anymore. Well, that did it. Melinda decided to run away with Brett.”

Resting her head back against the headboard, Sarah sighed. “It’s horrible to admit it, but it made me really happy. I was ecstatic. With Melinda gone, I figured Dad would finally pay attention to me. So, of course, I told Melinda I’d help any way I could.”

“It’s weird that you didn’t recognize Brian, I mean, Brett, at Alma’s Coffee Shop that day,” Ellie interrupted.

Sarah’s eyes widened. “Oh, he looked so different. The Brett I knew had long black hair and wore a

## THE MIND READER

studded motorcycle jacket. Besides, Dad *hated* Brett. So Brett didn't come around the house much. I saw him only a couple of times."

"So you helped Melinda get ready to run away?" Ellie prompted.

"Yeah. I lied to Dad, and I even gave Melinda money from my savings account. The night she planned to run away, Dad had to work late. He was the sergeant in command back then—not a detective. Melinda planned to meet Brett at the Division Street Mall at eight o'clock."

"What happened, Sarah?" Ellie asked. "Did she meet him?"

Sarah shook her head. "Dad called from his squad car to say he was coming home early. He wanted to take us out for pizza. Dad was going to ruin everything. Melinda tried to call Brett, but there was no answer at his house. She panicked and started throwing things in a suitcase."

Fresh tears clouded Sarah's eyes. Ellie smiled at her, encouraging her to continue. She was desperate to hear the rest of the story.

"I offered to find Brett and tell him there was no way Melinda could make it to the mall. He should pick her up at the corner. That way Melinda could finish packing, then sneak out of the house.

"I hurried to the mall," Sarah continued, closing her eyes. "Brett was waiting there. I told him about my dad coming home early. I told Brett where to meet

## FEAR STREET

Melinda. He thanked me and hurried to his car. By the time I got home, Melinda and her things were gone.”

Sarah’s voice faltered. She blew her nose into a tissue, and then met Ellie’s eyes. “That’s the last I ever saw of my sister.”

Ellie bit her lip. “Sarah. I don’t understand. Why did you say you *killed* her?”

“Don’t you see?” Sarah cried with a sob. “Dad was right. Brett was worse than no good. He was a killer. And I helped him. I was so eager to get Melinda out of the house, I sent her to her death. If I hadn’t helped Melinda that night, she’d still be home. *She’d still be alive!*”

Relief washed over Ellie. “Oh, Sarah,” she moaned. “You didn’t kill her. You can’t blame yourself.”

Ellie’s own eyes filled with tears. It must have been so horrible for Sarah. For two years. Wondering where Melinda was. Hoping she was alive. And blaming herself for everything that had happened.

But one thing puzzled Ellie.

*Why* did Brett kill Melinda?

Had she changed her mind at the last minute? Had that sent him into a rage? Did they have some kind of fight? Had he planned to kill her all along?

Why?

Ellie felt a chill. She crossed her arms over her chest. Sarah pulled the rumpled blanket from the side of the bed and wrapped it around her shoulders.

## THE MIND READER

The light dimmed. Shadows lengthened over the room. An earthy smell drifted up from the floor.

Ellie blinked.

What's happening?

Sarah slowly vanished into a gray cloud.

Ellie felt herself being pulled down into the mattress. Brown earth spilled on top of her. So damp, so heavy. It covered her, pressed her down.

She opened her mouth to scream.

The wet brown dirt clogged her mouth, choked her, gagged her.

Shooting up both hands, Ellie frantically tried to claw her way up from the heavy, dark dirt. Her fingers closed around a hard, round piece of metal. Dirt clogged her nostrils and eyes.

Covered her. Pushed her down.

I can't breathe! she realized.

I'm being buried alive!

*chapter*

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21

*E*llie choked out a scream.

She felt hands shaking her roughly by the shoulders. "Ellie! Ellie!" Sarah's voice, very far away.

Struggling, reaching up with both hands, clawing at the heavy dirt, Ellie pulled herself out.

As her eyes opened, she found herself sprawled on the rug, flat on her back. Sarah leaned over the side of the bed, staring down at her, her face twisted in confusion. "Ellie—what happened?"

Ellie staggered to her feet. "I felt as though I were being buried alive—in a grave."

"What?" Sarah swung her legs over the side of the bed. Ellie stood still, steadying herself. She had been hiding something in her right hand. She could still feel the hard smoothness in her palm.

Slowly, she opened her fist. Her hand was empty.

## THE MIND READER

But she'd been clutching something. Something important.

"Buried in a grave," Sarah repeated. "You mean, like Melinda's grave?"

Still staring at her palm, Ellie nodded. "Yes. There's something in that grave. Something your sister wants me to find."

"What are you talking about?" Sarah demanded. "You sound as if Melinda spoke to you."

"She has. Sort of." Ellie raised her eyes to her friend. "Oh, Sarah, I know it sounds crazy, but your sister has been communicating with me. Through visions. That's how I found her grave in the first place."

Sarah's mouth dropped open. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Because I knew you wouldn't believe me," Ellie replied. "And because I didn't want anyone to know. Before I moved to Shadyside, my visions got me in trouble. I didn't want it to happen again."

"Wow," Sarah murmured. "Now it all makes sense. When my father told me you were helping the investigation, I wondered how you knew so much."

"I know it sounds crazy," Ellie confessed. "But I have the visions only when I really like someone, when I get close to someone. Like you. At first nothing happened when we became friends, and I figured my powers had vanished. Then I found your sister's grave."

## FEAR STREET

"What about Brett?" Sarah asked. "What happened when you met him?"

Ellie sighed. "I started having frightening visions about a knife. A bloody knife. I thought it was about my mother. My mother was stabbed to death."

"I'm sorry," Sarah said softly, lowering her eyes.

"But the knife vision was a warning. A warning to stay away from Brett. I just didn't understand it. And just now I felt something. Something buried in a grave."

"Something in my sister's grave?" Sarah asked. "Something that might help us catch Brett?"

Ellie nodded.

Sarah stood up. "Then let's go find it."

"You're sure?" Ellie asked.

"I owe it to Melinda," Sarah replied solemnly.

She changed quickly, pulling on gray sweats and a pair of blue Doc Martens. Then she ran a brush through her short black hair.

Ellie followed her downstairs. Sarah pulled a blue windbreaker from the front closet. Then, turning on a lamp, she stepped into the living room.

Ellie watched from the doorway as Sarah slid open a drawer on a low end table.

She gasped as she saw the silvery object in Sarah's hand.

A small revolver.

Sarah raised the revolver slowly, pulling back the hammer with her thumb.

"Sarah!" Ellie cried in alarm.

*chapter*

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22

“It’s my dad’s extra gun,” Sarah replied. “In case Brett shows up.”

She released the hammer, then shoved the gun into the pocket of her windbreaker. “We’ll be ready for him.”

The sight of the weapon gave Ellie a chill.

But if Brett does appear, I’ll be glad we have it, she decided.

They went out the front door. Then Ellie followed Sarah around back to the garage to pick up a shovel and flashlight.

Sarah shone the flashlight around the still, silent woods. Then she lowered the beam of light to the ground. The mound of dirt rose up in the light.

## FEAR STREET

“What are we hunting for?” Sarah asked in a whisper.

“I don’t know,” Ellie replied, circling the grave. “I couldn’t see it. I could only feel it in my hand.” The choking feeling of being buried suddenly returned to her.

What if the vision were a warning? she thought. A warning to stay away from here.

Goose bumps tingled her arms. She shook off the thought.

No, she decided. The vision had to be a message from Melinda, telling me to find the object in the grave.

“It’s very small. And round,” Ellie told Sarah. She plunged the head of the shovel into the soft dirt, and began to dig.

As she tossed up the first shovelful, Sarah let out a low moan. Ellie glanced up at her friend. “Are you all right?”

Sarah shook her head. “No.” She covered her face with her hands. “I don’t know if I can do this. I mean, that’s where Brett buried my sister. It’s just so—awful.”

“We’ll work quickly,” Ellie assured Sarah. “We’ll be out of here in a few minutes. Just hold the light steady, okay?”

Sarah nodded and held the flashlight with both hands.

Ellie leaned on the shovel, digging into the soft dirt.

## THE MIND READER

The wind made the trees whisper. Dry brown leaves floated silently to the ground.

Ellie squatted down and began sifting dirt through her fingers. Sarah crouched beside her, holding the beam of light over Ellie's hands as she worked.

"Oh." Ellie let out a moan as her fingers swept over something damp and soft.

Just a worm, she realized.

Sarah gasped. "Oh, Ellie!" The light from the flashlight darted wildly.

"What? What's the matter?" Ellie demanded.

Sarah pointed, her eyes wide with horror. "A bone! A human bone!"

Ellie's eyes landed on the small gray object. Gingerly, she reached out and touched the end with one finger. The object was cold and hard. A stone.

She let out a long breath. "It's only a stone, Sarah." She handed the shovel across the grave to her friend. "Why don't you dig for a while?"

Sarah took the shovel and began to dig. Ellie held the flashlight in one hand, sifted dirt with the other. As Sarah turned up shovelfuls of dirt, Ellie bent over the ground, sifting it through her hands.

The flashlight dimmed. "I think the batteries are dying," Ellie said.

Sarah nodded. "We've got to hurry."

Ellie combed the dirt, sifting it carefully. She stopped when her fingers brushed against something small and smooth.

## FEAR STREET

"What did you find?" Sarah cried, dropping the shovel and falling on her knees next to Ellie.

Ellie rubbed the object against the front of her jacket. Sarah's hand trembled as she shone the flashlight on it.

A button.

A gold button.

"Huh?" Sarah cried, unable to hide her disappointment. "How's that supposed to help us?"

"Well, I'm not sure," Ellie replied thoughtfully, staring at the round button gleaming in the light. "Maybe the person who buried Melinda dropped it."

"Maybe," Sarah replied softly, lowering her eyes to the button. "But that was two years ago. How can we prove that Brett was wearing something with gold buttons two years ago?"

"Well," Ellie started to explain, "if the police search his closet and find—"

A sound made her stop.

The sharp snap of a twig.

Nearby.

"Who's there?" Ellie called, feeling a chill of fear.

He stepped out quickly from the trees.

"Brett!" both girls screamed at once.

Brett moved toward them rapidly, his eyes on Ellie. "What's that?" he demanded coldly. "Did you find the button?"

*chapter*

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23

*He knows about the button,* Ellie thought, gripped with fear as Brett stepped forward.

*He remembers that he dropped the button the night he murdered Melinda.*

Brett's auburn hair fell over his forehead, greasy and unbrushed. His denim jacket was dirty and wrinkled. His pants had stains on both knees.

He's been hiding in the woods, Ellie figured. She stared into his eyes and caught a glint of fear.

He's tired and he's frightened, she realized.

He's been hiding for two years. Hiding and running. And now he's desperate.

*He'll do anything.* Those frightening words burst into her mind and lingered.

Brett reached out a hand. "Let me see it, Ellie."

## FEAR STREET

She took a step back, bumping into Sarah. Sarah let out a frightened cry. "Go away, Brett," Sarah said in a trembling voice, half hiding behind Ellie. "My father will be here any second. You'd better run."

Brett ignored her. He held out his hand under Ellie's chin. "The button. Let me see it."

"What button?" Ellie asked innocently. She had it gripped tightly in her right fist.

"My father is coming," Sarah lied. "You'd better run, Brett. Hurry!"

"I want to see the button," Brett insisted in a hard, emotionless voice. His eyes narrowed at Ellie.

He knows I have it, Ellie told herself. I might as well show it to him.

She raised her right fist, opened it. The gold button was revealed in her palm. As she lowered her eyes to it, it began to glow.

Her entire palm glowed golden, like a tiny sun.

Brighter, brighter. Until the dark trees, the purple night sky, the leafy ground, swam in the shimmering gold, faded behind it, vanished.

A flash of red darted through the gleaming yellow. The red rose up, expanded, became the front of a red sweatshirt.

Melinda's red sweatshirt.

Ellie saw Melinda's lips part in a silent scream. Saw her struggle with someone. Hands wrestled her shoulders.

Who is it? Is she fighting with Brett? Ellie won-

## THE MIND READER

dered, squinting into the bright golden light, struggling to see clearly.

She could see only the strong hands pulling at Melinda. Could see only the back of the attacker. Could see only Melinda's face, twisted in fear and horror.

And then Melinda faded too, with a final silent scream. Ellie stared into the shrinking circle of gold. Watched it fade, fade, fade back into the darkness of her palm.

A round metal button.

She raised her eyes back to Brett. "The button, Ellie," he insisted softly, almost wearily. "Let me see the button." He made a quick grab for it, swiping his hand against hers.

The gold button fell out of Ellie's hand. Dropped into the dirt.

Sarah bent and picked it up. She examined it as she stood up. Ellie heard her let out a low cry. "The button—" Sarah gasped.

"I need to see it," Brett insisted, holding out his hand.

"You knew you dropped it here? That night?" Ellie demanded.

Brett's eyes flashed angrily. He opened his mouth to answer.

But another voice rang out, interrupting him.

*"Don't move! Everybody freeze!"*

Brett lowered his hand and spun around.

## FEAR STREET

Ellie breathed a sigh of relief as Lieutenant Wilkins stepped out from the trees.

Sarah grabbed Ellie's arm. "Dad!" she cried, unable to hide her surprise. "How did you know—?"

"One of my officers was driving by. He saw you two entering the woods. He radioed me." Lieutenant Wilkins kept his eyes on Brett as he talked to Sarah. He fumbled at his holster and pulled out his revolver.

"Whoa!" Brett cried out, raising both hands in surrender.

"You got away once," Lieutenant Wilkins told him quietly, without any emotion at all. "This time you're not going anywhere."

"Lieutenant Wilkins," Ellie cried, moving past her friend. "We found a button. In Melinda's grave."

"Step back!" Lieutenant Wilkins cried, raising his voice angrily. He motioned with the gun. "Both of you girls. Step back. He's dangerous."

"But, Dad—" Sarah pleaded.

"Get to the car!" Lieutenant Wilkins screamed impatiently. "Now! Get away from here! Get to the car!"

Ellie and Sarah hesitated. Ellie saw Brett's eyes go wide with fear.

Brett, his hands still raised, took a step back.

"Get to the car! Now!" Lieutenant Wilkins screamed at the girls.

Brett took another step back.

Lieutenant Wilkins raised his revolver at Brett.

## THE MIND READER

"You're not getting away this time!" he shouted.

"Run, girls. Go! Now! Get away from here!"

"No! Dad!" Sarah cried.

Ellie had her eyes locked on Brett.

"Don't shoot me!" Brett choked out, backing away.

"No escape this time!" Lieutenant Wilkins declared, aiming.

"No, please!" Brett pleaded.

"You killed my daughter! Did you really think I'd let you get away from me?" Lieutenant Wilkins steadied the revolver.

"Wait—!" Brett screamed.

But the gun rang out, a loud explosion that echoed off the trees.

*chapter*

---

24

*E*llie uttered a terrified shriek. She waited for Brett to fall to the ground.

Brett's face froze in an expression of shock. His arms dropped to his sides. His knees bent.

But he didn't fall.

Then, to Ellie's surprise, Lieutenant Wilkins uttered a groan.

She turned to see him holding his shoulder. Dark blood ran down the shoulder of his suit coat. He opened his mouth in a gurgle of shock.

Raising her eyes, Ellie saw Sarah standing behind him, the revolver still gripped tightly in her hand, still aimed at her father's back.

Lieutenant Wilkins let out another groan of pain and turned slowly to face his daughter. "Sarah—why?" he moaned.

## THE MIND READER

Sarah kept the gun poised. "I figured it out, Dad," she replied in a hollow voice. Her eyes stared accusingly, but the rest of her face revealed no expression at all.

"Sarah—you *shot* me!" Lieutenant Wilkins declared, gripping the wounded shoulder. Blood flowed over his hand, soaked the suit-coat shoulder.

"I figured it out, Dad," Sarah repeated coldly. "When I saw the button, I remembered. I recognized it, Dad. The gold button from your uniform. You were so upset about it that night. The night Melinda disappeared."

"But, Sarah—" Lieutenant Wilkins protested weakly.

"Melinda was gone," Sarah continued, ignoring his plea. "Melinda was gone, and you were so worried about a missing button on your uniform. I guess I was too upset about everything to question it then. But I figured it out tonight. I figured it all out. You killed Melinda."

"It was an accident!" Lieutenant Wilkins declared hoarsely. He cried out in pain. Gripping his bleeding shoulder, he dropped to his knees in the dirt beside the mound.

"You killed your own daughter," Sarah murmured, keeping the gun poised.

Ellie let out a shocked cry. She saw Brett step up beside her, his eyes narrowed at Lieutenant Wilkins.

"It was an accident," Lieutenant Wilkins insisted. "I didn't want Melinda to leave, to go away with *him*."

## FEAR STREET

He glared up at Brett, disgust on his face. "We fought. I didn't mean to shove her. She fell and hit her head. An accident. You have to believe me, Sarah. I loved her. I loved her more than anything!"

"I know," Sarah replied bitterly. "And then you made it look as if she were stabbed. And you buried her in the woods. Buried Brett's knife too. So it would look like he did it. Then you went after Brett."

"He ruined our family!" Lieutenant Wilkins screamed. "Why shouldn't I pay him back? It was *his* fault—not mine! He ruined our family!"

"You were going to shoot me!" Brett accused, putting an arm around Ellie's waist, trying to steady himself. "That's why you let me get away this afternoon! You didn't want me to go to jail. You wanted to kill me!"

Lieutenant Wilkins glared up at Brett, his eyes cold with hatred. "You killed our family! You deserve to die."

Ellie gasped as she saw Lieutenant Wilkins raise his revolver. Holding it steady in both hands, he aimed it at Brett's heart. Then he pulled the trigger.

## *chapter*

---

# 25

Once again the trees echoed with the *crack* of gunfire.

Ellie grabbed Brett. "Are you—" she choked out. But she saw that the shot had gone wild.

Brett stepped forward and kicked the pistol out of Lieutenant Wilkins's hand. "Two years you kept me running!" he cried angrily. "Two years of running and hiding! And I was innocent. What about *my* family, Lieutenant Wilkins? What about *my* family?"

Lieutenant Wilkins groaned in pain. He grabbed his shoulder and slumped to the ground. "Sarah—get help," he murmured.

Sarah hesitated. Then she tossed the gun to the ground and started to run toward the street. "I know how to work his police radio!" she called back. "I'll call for an ambulance!"

## FEAR STREET

Ellie watched Sarah disappear into the trees. She realized that Brett's arm was still around her waist. Letting out a long, relieved sigh, she leaned against him and shut her eyes.

"What should I call you—Brian or Brett?" Ellie asked.

"Call me Brett," he replied thoughtfully. "I don't have to be Brian anymore. Brian wasn't real. And I am."

Ellie and Brett sat together on the couch in her living room. Brett held her hands between his. As they talked, Chaz stretched out in front of them on the carpet, snoring at Ellie's feet.

"There are so many things I don't understand," Ellie told him. "How did you know to run away? How did you know that Wilkins was going to try to blame you for Melinda's death?"

Brett shut his eyes, remembering. He squeezed Ellie's hands tighter. "That night—the night Melinda died—I hurried to her house to take her away. But the house was dark. There was no one there. I guessed that Melinda had changed her mind about running away with me."

"That must have been when Wilkins was burying her in the woods," Ellie said sadly.

Brett remained silent for a moment. Then he continued. "I was very upset. I drove around for hours. When I got home, my mom was waiting up for me. She was very upset, very frightened. She said that

## THE MIND READER

Wilkins had come to arrest me. Arrest me for killing his daughter.”

“Oh, my gosh!” Ellie exclaimed. “What did you do?”

“I swore to my mother that I didn’t do it. Then I took off. I was so shocked, so scared. You see, I’d been in some trouble before. I knew no one would believe me. So I took off. I drove and drove. I couldn’t believe Melinda was dead. I was totally out of my head.”

“And for the past two years?” Ellie asked.

“I stayed with relatives. I hid out. I kept on the move. I changed my looks. I changed my name. I just knew that if I returned home, Wilkins would get me.” He sighed. “It’s been horrible, Ellie. A horrible nightmare.”

She pulled her hands from his. They settled back against the couch. Chaz let out a loud yawn.

“So why did you come back to Shadyside?” Ellie asked softly. “You knew it would mean trouble. Why did you come back here, Brett?”

His dark eyes burned into hers. “Because of you,” he replied.

Ellie reacted with surprise. “Huh? Me? You didn’t know me!”

“I saw you in a vision,” Brett told her.

*chapter*

---

26

“*I*’m kind of like a mind reader,” Brett explained, seeing Ellie’s shock. “I have visions. Dreams—only I’m wide awake.”

“You too?” Ellie exclaimed. “I—I don’t believe it!”

“It’s true,” Brett insisted. “I had a vision about Melinda. She was in the woods, in her red sweatshirt, covered with leaves. She was asking me to come help her. Begging me. She seemed so sad. Then I saw you in the vision, Ellie. I didn’t know who you were. But you were so beautiful. You were standing beside Melinda. And you seemed very brave.”

Ellie stared at Brett, shaking her head.

He has visions too, she thought in amazement. Why didn’t I guess? Why didn’t I realize?

“After that vision,” Brett continued, “I knew I had to come back to Shadyside. I had to find out the truth

## THE MIND READER

about what happened to Melinda. And I had to protect you.”

“And so you came back here—” Ellie started to say, taking his hand again.

“And I found you,” Brett said. “And you found Melinda’s grave in the woods. Just like in my vision. And do you want to hear something even more crazy?”

“What?” Ellie asked.

“When I met you, I knew you had the powers too. And I knew that you and I together could solve the mystery.”

Ellie sighed and shook her head. “I can’t believe I was so scared of you,” she confessed. “I had frightening visions of a silver-handled knife. And that afternoon on Fear Island, when you took out that knife to cut the apple—”

“I *told* you it was my grandfather’s knife,” Brett told her. “My grandfather was a cop. It’s some kind of police knife.”

“That’s why it matched the knife Lieutenant Wilkins buried beside Melinda,” Ellie realized. “He must have had one just like it.”

Chaz rolled onto his back. Ellie leaned over and scratched his belly. The dog grinned in his sleep.

“And the gold button?” Ellie asked, settling back next to Brett. “How did you know Sarah and I found it? Another vision?”

Brett nodded. “Yeah. I had another vision about Melinda. She was holding a gold button in her hand.

## FEAR STREET

She was showing it to me. I didn't know why. I knew only that it was really important. I knew that gold button held the answer to the whole mystery. That's why I was so desperate to see it tonight in the woods. I thought I could solve everything with it."

"Luckily, Sarah solved the mystery—just in time," Ellie murmured with a shudder.

She leaned her head against his shoulder. They sat in peaceful silence for a while. The only sound the gentle snoring from the dog.

"My mother had visions. I guessed she passed the ability down to me," Ellie said softly.

"I've had them since I was a little boy," Brett revealed. He sat up and smiled at her. "In fact, I'm having one now."

Ellie stared at him in surprise. "Huh?"

He nodded, grinning. "Yes. Bet I can read your mind. Bet I know exactly what you're thinking."

"What am I thinking?" Ellie challenged.

He leaned forward and kissed her, a long, tender kiss.

"You're right," Ellie said.

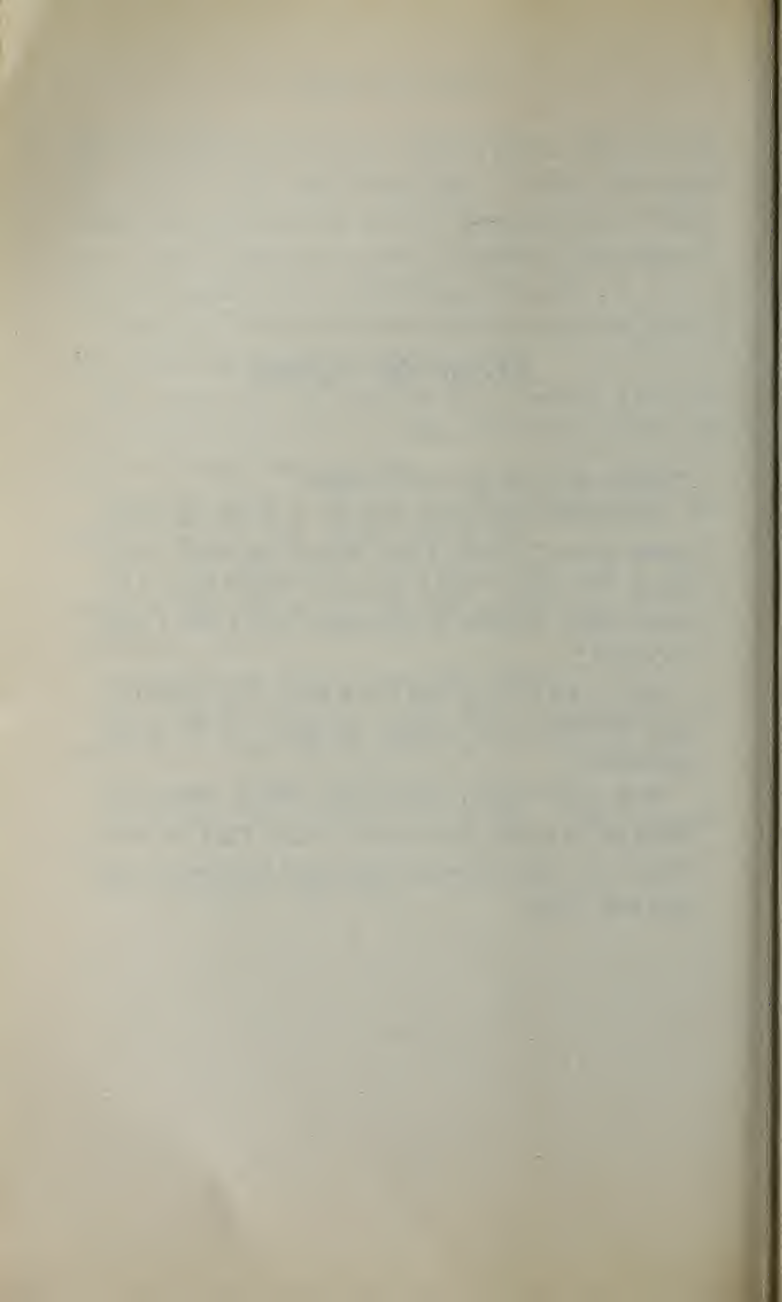
## *About the Author*

“Where do you get your ideas?”

That’s the question that R. L. Stine is asked most often. “I don’t know where my ideas come from,” he says. “But I do know that I have a lot more scary stories in my mind that I can’t wait to write.”

So far, he has written more than fifty mysteries and thrillers for young people, all of them bestsellers.

Bob grew up in Columbus, Ohio. Today he lives in an apartment near Central Park in New York City with his wife, Jane, and fourteen-year-old son, Matt.



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