

The January air was sharp as shattered glass in Hannah's lungs. The scull sliced through the water soundlessly; the oars cut through with precision as she pumped and pushed her legs and arms in a familiar rhythm. Embraced the burn in her muscles. It was early; the sun hadn't fully breached the horizon, but hers was not the only boat on the river. A college crew sped past, their coxswain nodding to her as they passed. She was on the last leg, approaching the clubhouse at the far end of Boathouse Row, when she pulled in her oars and let the momentum take her home as the sun glowed orange over the skyline of Center City.

I needed this. The solitude and quiet. The solace I always find on the water. I need the calm to carry me through the day.

She lifted the bow side oar and glided alongside the stage before climbing out with practiced grace. She stood and stretched, pulled off her cap and wiped the light sheen of sweat from her brow. Hannah rowed all year, conditions allowing, and though sometimes the river froze, winter was her favorite. In the dog days of summer, the algae and pollen created a pungent film on the water's surface, which hindered the oars. Cold meant clean. "This is perfect."

Pulling her single scull from the river was the hardest part, and she did it effortlessly. She'd rowed since college and had deceptively muscular legs and arms. With the oars in one hand and the boat over her shoulder, she carried her gear to the clubhouse and secured it in the garage. It had been converted into a storage area for boats and gear decades prior, but was still called the garage.

Twenty minutes later, dressed in her favorite charcoal pencil skirt and a silky blouse the color of ripe peaches, her long black hair—still damp from the shower—plaited down her back, Hannah pulled a thick wool cap over her ears and slipped into the cashmere coat her parents gave her for Christmas. She hurried across Kelly Drive and onto Lemon Hill Drive, where she'd parked her car ninety minutes earlier.

Her mother hated the Mazda. Thought she should drive something small, sporty, and feminine. Hannah considered it, and, despite her secret infatuation with the Porsche Carrera, chose the sport utility vehicle. Sculling, skiing, and her volunteer work at the Women's Humane Society Animal Shelter in Olde City made the compact SUV the better choice. Frosty morning sunlight glinted off the chrome detailing. Hannah smiled. And she's pretty.

With the fob in her hand, she remotely started the car, used her foot to open the liftgate and tossed her duffel bag in the back. She'd had it customized for transporting animals and no

matter how funky her gear got, or muddy, or sandy, she wouldn't damage her interior. She shivered, closed the hatch, and unlocked the doors. With one foot in the car, and her body half in the seat, she froze.

A standard piece of paper, folded in half and tucked under the windshield wiper, fluttered in the icy breeze. Dread curled in her stomach. The coppery taste of fear coated her tongue. She reached for it, slowly, cautiously, as though it would bite her if she moved too quickly, and picked it off her windshield. She checked the back seat. Empty. Checked it again. Hopped into the driver's seat, and locked the door. She waited a second, two, before unfolding the sheet.

*It's exquisite torture watching you. Wondering how those powerful legs will feel wrapped around me. How the muscles in your arms will quiver under restraints. I'll know soon.
For your sake, I hope you meet my expectations.*