

Jem ran down the stairs zipping up the side of her summer dress. She swung the door open the second the bell chimed for the third time. “You’re late.”

Finn stood on her doorstep. The evening sun bathed him in orange light. All buttoned up again. “Sorry. Is it too late? We could reschedule.”

“No, it’s fine. I’m only teasing.”

They sat at the table in the same seats they always chose. It had become a ritual, this weekly meeting. Part of the fabric of her life. Like a really lame recurring date with no romance, no touching. No sex. Except the stuff she made up in her head.

What would she do every Saturday if Gerald’s murder got solved?

Finn rubbed a palm over his long crew cut. He needed a trim. It was on the verge of falling out of line, not standing at attention. A vision of a long-haired Finn flashed through her mind. She covered her smile with one hand. He’d be even hotter with long hair.

“I don’t have much news tonight. I can’t tell you everything, being a murder investigation and all.”

“I understand. Not sure I could handle everything.”

“I bet you can handle more than you think.” He pulled out a notebook and pencil. He tap-tapped the eraser end against the paper. “What was Gerald like?”

“What do you mean?”

“At home. Everyday Gerald. Who was he?”

“Why does that matter?”

“I don’t know. I’m no profiler, but maybe his everyday habits, the person he was at home when he’s most vulnerable, not the public guy all his colleagues know, will tell us something about why he left. About where he went. Maybe point to why he went there. If we knew that, it might lead to the killer.”

Jem nodded slowly and looked past Finn’s head at the wall. Gerald’s write-on wipe-off calendar still hung there, frozen in time, four years ago this June. His neat black Xs through the first to the fourth, obsessively marking the passage of time. Commemorating his successful completion of each listed task. Then on the fifth, the X was not so neat. An arrow of red marker shoved an incomplete task into the box for the sixth. The X through the sixth was only a slash, not confined to the square allocated for that twenty-four hour period, but invading the territory of the twelfth. Two tasks were circled and moved from the seventh all the way to the fifteenth. Messy, crooked slashes marked the

seventh to the tenth. The eleventh was a dark square, obliterated by black Sharpie. And then nothing. He didn't come home on the twelfth.

Maybe the slash from the sixth pushed him over the edge. How could he face his precious calendar after the sixth declared war on his mind?

“He was obsessed with order. Numerical, alphabetical, chronological. But he never ironed his clothes and rarely brushed out his hair.” She shifted her gaze to Finn's angular face. “He was obsessed with health food. No meat, no eggs, no cheese. Nothing that caused any animal any discomfort. But he refused to get a pet. Wouldn't go near the SPCA. He was obsessed with finding a cure for all cancers, a magic bullet if you will. But he refused to take any medication if he got a cold or the flu. And of course, he went off his meds. You know, the antipsychotics.”

“He was a walking contradiction.”

Could he read her mind? “Yes, that's what I always told him. He was brilliant, a genius. But he didn't understand the simplest, most obvious humour. A complete social nerdlinger.” She huffed. “That sounds like such a stereotype. He wasn't completely awkward. I mean he never had trouble finding a girlfriend. And I know he loved me. But he didn't believe in public displays of affection.” No, he kept those very private. And then even the private ones became rare.