

Chapter 1

Amanda Greene lay facedown on the bed, her nose squashed against the scratchy blanket. She became aware of the smell first—musty, with the hint of sourness that comes from too much vodka on an empty stomach. She sniffed, rubbed her aching eyes, and then rolled up, the light sending darts of pain all the way to the middle of her fuzzy brain.

Groaning, she fell back and tried in vain to pull the thin cover over her gummy eyes. It was trapped beneath her body, but she continued to tug crankily.

“Shut the lights off, Danielle,” she wailed, surprised that her voice was this thin, reedy thing. She tossed restlessly, something hard digging into her thigh. She shifted, causing it to dig deeper. *That’s going to bruise*, she thought absently. Reaching beneath her leg, she pulled out her phone. Swiping her finger across the surface, she squinted. She propped herself onto her elbow and looked at the smudged face of her cell. Seventeen missed calls. She scrolled down; more than half were from her mother. *What does she want?* Amanda groaned, her head falling back heavily onto the mattress. They had only just reconnected, and now her newly divorced mother wouldn’t leave her alone.

“Danielle,” she said. “Kaitlyn?” She called for her two best friends. Her knee throbbed. She rubbed it absently, the skin raw and sensitive. Her rib cage screamed when she moved. *Ugh, what did I do to myself?* she wondered.

The phone vibrated impatiently in her hand. She looked at the illuminated screen, disappointment blooming in her sore chest when she recognized the number was not Patrick’s. Her mother. Again. Really, her mother had virtually ignored her for four years after Amanda moved back with her dad. It had taken

her mother's second divorce and the death of her beloved grandmother for them to reconnect at all. It hadn't been all peaches and cream, either. Just recently they had developed a wary sense of appropriate—unless there was a phone involved, apparently. Her mother never understood boundaries. Amanda threw her phone onto the floor, wincing when it made a crunchy sound.

Something fluttered from the corner of her eye. It changed the quality of the light in the room, playing with the shadows for a second. She raised her impossibly heavy head and looked through squinting eyes, but she couldn't quite see anything. Her head was loaded, as though it weighed too much. It fell back onto the tousled sheets. Movement by the window competed with her attention again, but she didn't have the strength to look at it. Her belly spasmed with anxiety, and inexplicably, her eyelids prickled as if she were going to cry. She stretched her right hand to the messy side table, searching for her antacids, but her fingers fumbled with her collection of pill containers, all of them empty. She cursed long and loud, throwing the amber-colored container against the wall with a loud crack. Patrick had said he would reorder her prescription. He always took care of her, reminding her to renew her megastrength stomach meds and antianxiety pills. *Yeah, well, that was before yesterday*, she thought angrily. Her bottom lip trembled, but she fought the feelings of hurt and despair with deep, painful breaths. She sucked in air through her nose and exhaled slowly through her mouth. It left her lightheaded, the gut-wrenching, twisting pain persisting.

She shuddered and rolled onto her back, a chill caressing her shoulders, the knowing feeling of something hovering just out of her line of sight. It was a rapid movement, both teasing and elusive. It had to be a bird. She lay sprawled on the bed motionless, watching the play of light against the white wall of her room. The shape altered, like a pulsing lava lamp. She dismissed the annoying outline. It waved again, persistently. She tried to calm herself, forcing the noise and light attacking her sensitive eyes and ears to close down. It was no use. Everything ached, and, for the third time, she tried to remember what had

happened after they started drinking shots. She lay there, her arms thrown wide, her hands floppy and useless, her mind in a weird limbo, replaying her conversation with Patrick in her head.