

April A. Taylor

# SINKHOLE

*A Horror Story*

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# PART ONE

*Humanity*

# CHAPTER ONE

## **Southgate, MI**

Allison gripped her toy truck as its wheels spun through the dirt. Despite her mother's attempts to the contrary, Allison's tomboy nature had punted all Barbies to the side. After their heads were removed, of course.

The eight-year-old girl with blonde pigtails envisioned a massive stretch of dirt where monster trucks battled for supremacy. In reality, her truck skidded around a tiny area in her family's suburban backyard.

The bird songs that served as her almost constant soundtrack stopped without warning, but Allison barely noticed. Content to live in a fantasy world, she continued to imagine the roar of the trucks.

The ground beneath her shook as her truck kicked into high gear. The squawking of birds returned in a cacophonous din just as an even louder crack split the earth open and sucked her

inside. Allison grabbed a handful of grass as her screams filled the yard.

*What in the world has she gotten into now?* her mother, Carol, wondered. Dashing outside, Carol noted with dismay the agitated sounds of dozens of her beloved songbirds. *If she's done something to hurt one of them...* Her mouth dropped open as wide as the ground's maw that was greedily trying to gulp up her daughter in one bite.

"Allison!" she cried out. "Hold on!"

Allison's fearful, tear-streaked face poked slightly above the sinkhole that threatened to tear her mother's heart into tiny pieces. Carol noticed how feeble her daughter's grasp on the grass had become.

A burst of adrenaline propelled her forward with more speed than she would have thought possible from her aching, arthritic legs. Leaping like a baseball outfielder, she flew through the air and landed with an audible thud at the edge of the sinkhole.

Carol reached for Allison's hands just as her daughter's grip gave in to the downward force of gravity.

"I've got you! Hold on tight, baby girl," she said through gritted teeth. *My god, how much does she weigh?* Carol's muscles trembled as she fought against the enormous burden threatening to pull her and Allison deep into the earth.

"Mommy!" the girl yelped uncharacteristically. Allison had transitioned from saying 'Mommy' and 'Daddy' at such a young age that Carol's stomach lurched at the sudden reintroduction of the tender phrase.

Summoning her strength and courage, Carol yanked fiercely, no longer fearful of dislocating her daughter's shoulders. Anything would be better than giving into the demands of her tired muscles, which begged her to let go.

The two stumbled and Carol fell on her back. Allison held on tightly for a few seconds before scrambling over Carol's head.

"Come on," the girl urged her mother. "It's coming for us."

With that, Allison disappeared from view as she threw herself in the direction of the house.

*What's coming for us?*

With one last weary glance at the open pit – that seemed to be moving, somehow – Carol gathered enough strength to follow her daughter inside. The two soon sat next to each other on the couch as Allison recounted the experience from her point of view.

"I was playing with my truck, and the ground started shaking." A frown interrupted her story and tears filled her eyes. "Oh no...my truck. It's gone!"

Shocked by the anguished howl of Allison's last word, Carol reminded herself that children have a completely different set of priorities. She pulled her daughter closer and stroked her hair.

"We'll get you a new one, I promise."

Somewhat mollified, Allison continued, "I grabbed the grass, but something wrapped around my legs. I couldn't move."

"Wait, what do you mean something wrapped around your legs?"

“It grabbed me, Mommy. It wanted to pull me down. And it wanted you, too.”

Allison’s words were freaky, but Carol knew the young girl simply didn’t have the right words to express what she’d experienced. To a child’s mind, falling into a sinkhole probably felt very much like being literally pulled down by some type of unseen monster.

“You’re okay,” Carol tried to soothe away Allison’s fears.

“No! I’m not! Stop saying that!”

Allison jumped off the couch and ran down the short hallway to her bedroom. Before Carol could intervene, Allison had slammed and locked the door.

“Allison?” Carol called gently while knocking. “Let me in, please.”

“No,” an impertinent voice responded. “You don’t believe me,” Allison sobbed.

“I’m sorry, baby girl.”

Allison didn’t reply. Sighing, Carol returned to the living room to give her daughter some time to deal with her fear. She flipped the TV on and got lost again within the crazy twists and turns of her favorite soap opera.

At the same time, Allison gingerly pulled off her blue jeans. Wicked rope burns scarred her alabaster flesh. She winced with her first exploratory touch.

*See? I told you something grabbed me,* she non-verbally pouted toward the closed door. “Parents never believe anything,” Allison grumbled under her breath.

Later that day, her father, Scott, came home and became instantly enraged. “A sinkhole? You’ve got to be kidding me! It’s that damn fracking, Carol. You know it is.”

Carol nodded silently. She wasn’t sure how fracking had anything to do with it, considering that they were three counties away from Michigan’s closest hydraulic fracking site. Saying that to her angry husband was way too dangerous, so she kept her mouth shut – like usual.

“I’m taking this all the way to Lansing,” he shouted while stabbing at buttons on his phone.

*Sure. Like the governor is going to be sitting around, just waiting to take your call,* she thought, irritated he hadn’t shown more concern for their daughter.

As Carol predicted, Scott’s call was passed on to a voicemail system. He ranted and raved about the hole in their backyard until the system unceremoniously cut him off, causing him to go off on a new tangent about his tax dollars entitling him to proper representation.

Unable to put up with his attitude any longer, Carol quietly left his side and wandered to the mailbox.

“What’s Scott yelling about this time?” her nosy neighbor, Becky, asked. Becky’s posture screamed annoyance, but her eyes sparkled in the hopes of getting some juicy gossip.

“A sinkhole opened up in the backyard.”

“What?”

“A sinkhole. It came from out of nowhere and almost killed my kid.”



“Oh my god, are you serious?” Becky took a few steps closer. Concern and intrigue duked it out for top billing on her face. Concern won out after a few seconds, but only by the slightest of margins. “Is she okay?”

Carol appraised her neighbor’s new stance and expression. “Thanks for asking, Becky. It’s a hell of a lot better than what her damn father did.” She shot a sneering glare toward the backyard. “And yeah, she seems to be okay. Just scared, is all, but that’s to be expected, right?”

“Absolutely,” Becky concurred. “How did it happen?”

“I have no idea. Scott thinks it’s fracking, but I don’t know...Allison said something grabbed her and was pulling her into the ground, but that doesn’t make much sense either, does it?”

“Hmmm...either way, it sure sounds odd.”

Carol was pleasantly surprised by Becky’s restraint. Normally, she would have taken a side and argued up a storm for it. This time, she seemed every bit as confused as Carol, which clearly sucked the wind out of her fiery sails.

“I know this is crazy...but...do you think it’s possible something was trying to pull her in?”

Becky let Carol’s question bounce through her mind for a few beats. It seemed preposterous, but so did a sinkhole appearing from out of nowhere.

“Well, I reckon that’s the type of thing you’d have to ask an expert. But I’ve done a lot of digging and never seen anything

like that. Unless she means the tree roots came to life,” Becky laughed.

Carol usually bristled at Becky’s insistence on talking like a southerner. The fifty-year-old woman had spent less than the first year of her life living in Texas, and yet she still peppered her speech with works like ‘reckon.’ Distracted by her own thoughts, Carol didn’t react this time.

“Wait...what was that you said about tree roots?”

“That’s the only thing I’ve ever seen while planting veggies. Never saw anything else when that terrible contractor dug up my yard, neither.”

“Thanks, Becky,” Carol’s voice drifted as she made her way to the front door.

“No problem,” Becky called out.

Carol slipped inside and went straight to the junk drawer. *Where is it?* she thought, flustered, as visions of evil tree roots slithered through her mind. Her fingers collided with a solid hunk of metal, and she pulled the flashlight free with a smile on her face.

Stalking with determination into the backyard, she straightened her back, puffed up her chest, and prepared for an argument with Scott. He was nowhere to be seen as she approached the sinkhole, but she knew he was probably already hitting the bottle hard and ready to spar.

Carol dropped to her knees and crept toward the edge. Her breath hitched in her throat as she peered over the edge. The flashlight came to life, but its strong beam failed to make much

of an impact. She didn't see any monsters hiding in the ground, but something else jumpstarted her heart, making it race inside her chest.

The light was completely engulfed before she could spot the bottom of the hole. *Does it go all the way to Hell?* Unsure how to test her theory, Carol looked around until her eyes fell on one of her decorative rocks. They weren't too large for her to lift, but they certainly had enough heft to make an audible sound upon landing.

*Here goes nothing.*

She pitched the rock into the hole and waited. Several minutes later, when Scott stumbled into view from behind the garage, she still hadn't heard the rock hit anything. Carol scooted herself backward, certain that if she fell into the hole, she'd never stop falling.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Dunns, WV**

Rachel and Ivy Meador stalked through the woods of southern West Virginia. The two sisters were mirror images physically, but they had little else in common except for a shared interest in genealogy. That familial bond had brought them to a town so small that only 200 people called it home.

Dunns was the type of place that had made *Little House on the Prairie* look like a modern story as recently as the 1960s. They knew some of their distant relatives lived in farmhouses during the '50s and '60s that hadn't been equipped with indoor plumbing. Some of those homes had even lacked electricity.

The twenty-three-year-old twins stood just over five feet. They had long, flowing brunette hair, sparkling green eyes, and slightly plump frames. Rachel's cheekbones were a hint fuller than Ivy's, but beyond that and Ivy's chipped tooth, it was practically impossible to tell the two apart. Until they opened their mouths, that is.

Hot sun beat down on them as they maneuvered between branches and fallen trees. The hunt for their great-grandmother's first home had taken them far off the main dirt road, which shared its name with the town. It was common to find abandoned structures dotted throughout the wilderness, and the instructions they'd been given made it clear that hiking was the sole way to reach their destination.

Sweat-soaked long pants and thin, long-sleeved shirts made the women miserable. But the fear of being bitten by a tick was engrained far too deeply into Ivy's psyche for either of them to dress in a seasonably appropriate manner.

Rachel silently cursed Ivy's nervousness.

*This is ridiculous. I could be wearing comfy clothing, but little Ms. Paranoia strikes again.*

An old wooden farmhouse caught their attention in the distance.

“I bet that’s it!” Ivy said.

“It’d better be,” Rachel grumbled. She was every bit as responsible as Ivy for having planned this trip. Now that they were here, though, her interest in genealogy had taken a backseat to her love for modern conveniences – especially air conditioning.

Ivy pulled out a camera and started lovingly documenting everything. She issued a series of “oohs” and “aahs” as she got her first good look at the dilapidated property through a zoom lens.

With the house finally in sight, Rachel started warming back up to the entire purpose of their trip. And she had to admit that the old structure seemed to magically transport her back in time.

A few yellowed and weather-beaten ‘No Trespassing’ signs were tacked to the surrounding trees. Ignoring them, Ivy and Rachel craned their necks upward as they took in the surprisingly well-constructed home.

Made solely from wood and nails – at least as far as they could tell – there were two sections to the house. The front portion held the living room and had a seven-foot-high ceiling. The back expanded to two stories, and they knew before walking inside there’d be a loft area for sleeping. The similarities to *Little House on the Prairie* apparently went even further than either of them had expected.

As they stepped closer to the house, a whisper floated through the trees.

“What was that?” Ivy asked.

“What was what?” Rachel responded.

“Didn’t you say something?”

“No.”

Confused, they took a couple more steps before halting.

“There! Hear that?” Ivy said.

Rachel nodded. She had no idea who – or what – was making the noise, but it almost sounded like the trees themselves were trying to speak. Shaking off that idea as nonsensical, the twin sisters stepped forward again.

A brown blur raced through the corner of Rachel’s vision. She went airborne before she could react and landed with a hard thump. She released a painful scream as an

intrusive presence chomped down on her arm. Rachel struggled to face her opponent, and her mouth fell open.

*What the fuck?*

A tawny-colored deer with a white belly and white spots had pinned her to the ground. Blood dripped free of its otherwise adorable face. Momentarily paralyzed, Rachel couldn't decide what to do, and this hesitation allowed the deer to rip through her flesh again.

Ivy tried to distract the deer by yelling and tossing sticks and rocks at it, but her actions had zero effect. The deer stuck with its meal like a dog with a juicy steak. Horrified, Ivy ripped her phone free of her purse, only to be met with the inevitable: no signal.

“Help! Help us, please!” Ivy shouted as her sister screamed again, although she knew in her gut no one was around for miles.

*What do I do?* Ivy thought frantically as the seemingly rabid deer continued to ignore her efforts.