Like Butterflies: A Novella Examining Questions of Evil and Memory

An Honors Thesis

By

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Chapter One: Mara

“I want to forget. I want to forget the whole damn thing.” Mara clenched her jaw. Her heart beat fast. “I heard you can do that. Hypnotize me or something.”

“You’re direct. I like it.” The woman smiled. She stuck out a hand. Mara smelled vanilla lotion as she shook it.

“I’m Angele,” the woman said.

“Mara.”

“I see.” Angele smiled at her. She tucked a strand of gray hair behind her ear. The living room oozed softness. The afternoon light slanted in through the lacy curtains, gilding the maple wood floors. In the center of the room, stood a coffee table with a bouquet of fresh Jasmine.

“Would you like something to eat? I just picked up some cookies from Safeway.”

“Yes.” When Mara was a child, her mother had told her she needed to watch her figure and fed her as little as she could. Mara had gone to bed picturing all the things she’d wished she’d had for dinner: macaroni swimming in sharp cheddar cheese, hot chocolate stuffed with marshmallows, ice cream smothered in chocolate sauce. Her mouth watered.

Angele leaned back in her chair. “I didn’t hear a please.”

“Please.”

Angele got up slowly and went into the kitchen. She returned a moment later carrying a plastic dome with a 2.99 sticker on it. She took off the lid and began to nibble daintily on a cookie. “What do you want to forget?”

“Not your business. You make me forget. I pay you. Then we get on with our lives.” Mara tapped her foot against the floor. How was she going to forget if Angele brought it up again? Her insides twisted. She remembered standing as far away from the casket as possible, listening to her sister, Audrey’s, eulogy: “My mother, Serena Woodley, was a dedicated community member, a great friend, and a fantastic mom.” All these years later and Audrey still lied.

Angele spoke again “Sweetie, if I’m going to help you forget something, I need to know what it is.”


Angele leaned forward. Her dark eyes shone. “Your childhood?”

“Yes.”

“I’m sorry.” Angele reached over and put a hand on Mara’s shoulder, rubbing it gently. Mara flinched, and then made herself relax. It wasn’t Angele’s fault that Mara wasn’t used to being touched. In her family, they hadn’t touched each other any more than they had to.

Mara’s mouth twisted. “It’s not your fault.”

“I’m sorry anyway.”

Never, not once, had Mara gotten an apology. Not for the big things anyway. Wasn’t she at least owed that, after all this time? But no. Her mother had died of throat cancer—stupid selfish woman. And Audrey had kept lying. Mara’s breath hitched. “It’s just that my mother died and now I’m…”

“Lost,” Angele finished.
“Exactly.” Mara pressed her lips together. “She and I... She hurt me and now she’s gone and I don’t know what to do. My father and I haven’t really spoken, not since I left school. My sister, she isn’t helping. We don’t speak and when we were little…”

“Yeah?” Angele leaned in.

“Nothing,” Mara snarled. Her sister had always been on that damn piano. The notes had wafted up from the basement studio, soft as good night kisses. But they hadn’t drowned out the knife edge of her mother’s voice or her own mewling: “Please. I’ll still lose weight. I’ll only have a little bit.”

“I see.” Angele laced her fingers together. “Do you want her to feel what you felt? Get her to at least feel something?”

Mara’s eyes darkened. “Yes.”

“And what did you feel?”

“That nothing is okay. That nothing will ever be okay.” Mara’s breath caught on the last word.

“Then why not hurt her, like she hurt you? Then she’ll know.”

Mara’s chest fluttered. As a child she had cried alone, in the dark. It had been a family rule: Never embarrass mother in public. Do not cry in public. If she did what Angele said, there would be another human being somewhere out there who knew what it was like to be her. What it was like to cry alone and know that however loud you were that no one was coming to check on you. “I don’t know if I can. Audrey doesn’t care about anything I do.”

Angele handed her a cookie. “What does she care about?”

Mara took it. It was dry and stale. She swirled the crumbs around in her mouth, trying to get the last taste of sugar before the pieces dissolved. “I don’t know. We aren’t close.”

“Is she married?”

“Yes. He adores her.”

“There’s an opportunity there.”

Mara shrugged. The thought of getting Audrey’s husband, William, involved made her feel a little queasy. This was between her and Audrey. “I don’t know. Wouldn’t it be better to just get her directly? I mean, she cares about this guy but...”

“And she cares about being adored.” Angele’s eyes twinkled.

Audrey did love to be adored. She’d been high school valedictorian, president of the Muses club, and captain of the track team. Mara remembered seeing her off to her junior prom, silently wishing she’d get the flu. Audrey had worn a soft peach dress and her hair had curled around her face, tumbling down in doll-like ringlets. She and her friends had all gathered in the entryway to pose for pictures. Audrey had always been in the center, beaming. Her friends’ arms had looped across her slim waist, their shiny styled heads resting on her shoulders.

“Yes, she does.”

“Then it’s easy, if you’re not scared to do it.”

“I’m not scared.” Mara brought her chin up. Her heart sped.

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of if you are. To make this work, you’re still going to have to forget something.”

“Why? If I’m going to try to hurt Audrey, I’ll need to remember her and what she did.”

“I never said you were going to have to forget the same thing. Just enough to harden you up a little.”

“I am hard.”
Angele rubbed her shoulder again. “I know, honey. But I don’t think you’ve deliberately hurt someone before, not seriously anyway, not the way you were hurt.”

“I see.” Mara bit her lip.

“Then can I have a memory?” Angele held out her hand.

“A memory? How does this work, anyway?”

Angele laughed softly. “I take your hand. You forget. I learn.” One of the windows came open and a cold gust of wind blew across Mara’s face, scattering the scents of vanilla and jasmine. She shivered and wrapped her arms around herself. Angele closed the window.

“That’s not possible.” It couldn’t work like that. Hypnosis, she could have understood, but not this. It was against science. E equaled mc squared. The earth traveled around the sun. For every action there was an equal and opposite reaction. Memories didn’t change through skin to skin contact.

“Have I given you any reason to disbelieve me?”

“But what your suggesting…it’s not logical.” People couldn’t just exchange memories with each other. Neurons didn’t do that.

Angele laughed again. “I took my first memory when I was five, my mother’s. It was such a small, fragile thing; she’d gone in the men’s bathroom instead of the women’s that evening at a party. She didn’t want to remember so she gave it to me. It was a delicacy, the blush, the mouth opening in surprise.”

Mara swallowed. Angele sounded so sure. Was Angele insane? Or could she really help Mara, if Mara gave her a memory. “What if I want to remember?”

“Then I can’t help you.”

“Why not?”

“I take your memories and I gobble them. And they melt in my mouth like ice cream.” Angele’s eyes sparked.

Mara’s mouth twisted. “That’s not an explanation.”

Angele sighed. “If you remember too much, you empathize too much. If you empathize too much, then you can’t go through with it. You don’t want to remember everything, do you?”

Mara certainly had memories she could do without—the day she’d left Sonoma State, for one. It was a state school; how could she have failed at a state school? “Which memory do you want?”

“I’ll need the worst.”

Mara swallowed. What was her worst memory? She tapped her foot on the floor as she thought. There had been that time when…No, it wasn’t that one. Or when… She shivered. She didn’t want to think about that one. She shook her head. “I might have something. But I’m not sure if I want to—”

“I didn’t say this was easy. Most people can’t do it. If you’re not sure…”

“I’m sure. I just don’t understand why I have to give it up. I’m not very empathetic. I could probably…”

“Memories are like spider webs, the tangled strands of unquiet minds. They bind like ropes and squeeze you tight. You need to make a choice here. Do you want to be trapped or free?”

“I’ll do it. I just need a minute to think.” Mara put up her hand to stop Angele. She closed her eyes. Her chest clenched. I’ll think about it just this once, she told herself. Then Angele will make me forget. Forever. This one had been in the bathroom. She had bled all over the tile. She had tried to staunch the flow with toilet paper. She had locked the door tight and cut.
She’d thought it would make her feel better but the blood running down her arm had just made her stomach squirm. What was so wrong with her that cutting didn’t even help? She couldn’t be happy even if she took a knife to her arm to do it. White spots danced in front of her eyes.


Angele leaned forward. “Remember, this is for you, to make your sister understand.”

“I said okay.”

“She’ll notice you.” Angele reached forward and rubbed Mara’s knee.

“She’ll notice me.” Mara repeated.

“Take my hand.”

Mara grasped Angele’s hand. The veins stood out like delicate threads under the skin. Mara tried to hold it as gently as she could. It slipped beneath her fingers. The scent of vanilla was heady, cloying. It collided with the jasmine, making the air smell like sugar and springtime—too much sweetness. Mara gagged. She tried breathing through her mouth. The air went still. Mara inhaled and her breath stuck in her chest. Her heart contracted. Little lights spun in front of her eyes. She forced herself to exhale. Soon it would all be over and she wouldn’t have to feel anymore. She would make Audrey sorry for what she hadn’t done. Sorry for lying at the eulogy.

“Harder,” Angele coaxed.

“Ok.” Mara clamped down so hard her knuckles went white.

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Chapter Two: Mara

Mara paused outside her sister’s front door. She glanced over at Angele. Angele had offered to come with her for ‘moral support.’ “Audrey isn’t home. It’s just William.”

“That’s good, dear.” Angele touched her shoulder. Monday through Friday Audrey worked from ten to six at her PR agency. Mara reached under the flowerpot for the spare key. Audrey wasn’t much of a gardener—too much dirt, but she did like flowers. This one was a lily, long and thin, opening into a cupped white blossom.

Mara crept across the porch and yanked her hood over her face. One of boards under the welcome mat creaked. She reached into her pocket and pulled out a pair of latex gloves. She offered another pair to Angele. “Do you want these?”

Angele nodded again. “Good thinking. It’s always better to be safe than sorry.”

Mara wiggled her fingers into the sticky plastic. She couldn’t leave any prints. She turned the key in the lock and held her breath as the bolt slid back. She pushed the door open slowly and looked at Angele.

Angele had been so good to her. She hadn’t even seemed surprised when Mara first came back to thank her. She had served her more Safeway cookies and sat her down to talk. She had asked how Mara was and had wanted the real answer. Did Angele know how rare that was? Most of the time, her family didn’t even bother to ask.


“Thank you.” Mara looked about her. The entryway was painted a sunny yellow and the floors were burnished cherry. She spotted at a couple of antiques, Audrey’s taste, and a sleek set of speakers that probably belonged to William. Audrey marketed for a PR agency and William was a computer consultant. William worked from home. Every weekday at three o’clock, he took a half hour nap. Mara checked her watch then mouthed. “It’s five past three.”

“Good. Now try the kitchen like we planned.”
The kitchen was off the entry way. It had hardwood floors and a granite island in the middle. There was a half-finished protein shake on the counter, William’s. Audrey would never drink a protein shake, or leave dishes out. The knife block was in the far corner. Mara crossed the room and stood in front of it. She paused for a moment then selected the largest. It was a slicing knife with a fat steel blade. She held it up to show Angele.

“That will be just fine.”

They crept up the stairs to the bedroom. Mara whispered, “Careful, the floorboards squeak.”

“Good for you, noticing that.”

Slowly, Mara turned the doorknob to William’s bedroom. He slept flung out across the bed, all tangled limbs and tousled hair. He snored softly. Good, he was asleep. Silently, Mara stalked across the room, Angele by her side. If she went too fast and waked him, it would be over. His eyes were closed. As Mara approached, they fluttered but did not open. For a moment, Mara had a crazy impulse to bend down and kiss him on the forehead. She shook her head and raised the knife.

What if she didn’t do it? He looked so sweet and vulnerable. His chest was bare. Mara could see the curves of muscle outlined faintly under the skin. He was smiling in his sleep. Was he dreaming of Audrey? He had never meant Mara any harm. What would happen once she plunged the knife down? What would his death be like? Mara’s breath caught in her chest. Her muscles froze.

“I can’t.” She stammered. She had come all this way, spent months watching the house and planning with Angele. Now at the final moment, she just couldn’t. Her arm refused to move. His eyelashes quivered again and Mara caught her breath. He turned over and went back to sleep.

He snored just like she did.

You’ll let Angele down, she told herself. She was so kind, letting you come and talk things over with her. Her chest tightened. She’s helped you so much. She’s the only person who cared enough to help you. Your own family treated you like you were something repulsive. But she didn’t. You can’t let her down. Do it, now! No, now! Her arms still refused to move.

Angele’s warm hand curled over hers. “Just imagine your sister there, instead of him.”

Mara stared at William’s light brown curls and tried to imagine Audrey’s chestnut locks in their place. Their mother had always loved Audrey’s hair. She used to say it looked like Belle from The Beauty and the Beast. When Audrey was little, she used to joke that Mara looked more like the beast. Her mother had always smiled indulgently whenever Audrey did this. Even on her deathbed her mother hadn’t apologized or said I love you. She’d gone where Mara couldn’t reach her and left Audrey behind to tell her lies.

Mara brought the blade higher. Her fingers trembled. For a moment, she was afraid she would drop it. She inhaled deeply, smelling the lavender soap Audrey used on the sheets. When they were little, she and Audrey had both liked lavender. Audrey had given her lavender bath salts for her tenth birthday.

“Oh, God,” she choked. Ever since she was fifteen, she hadn’t liked the sight of blood. She didn’t remember why, but the thought of it always made her gut clench.

“I know you can do this. You are brave enough to do this.”

“I’m sorry.” Mara looked down. Her vision swam. The pattern on the carpet blurred. The only clear thing was Angele’s eyes as they tried to catch hers.

“Are you sure you can’t?”

Mara whimpered, “I’m sorry.”
“Okay.” Angele laid a hand on Mara’s shoulder. “I’ll do it.”

Mara flinched. Was there disappointment in Angele’s eyes? She sniffed, catching another whiff of Angele’s vanilla perfume. It intoxicated her. “Would you?”

Angele peeled Mara’s fingers away from the knife and smiled down at her. “For you, anything.”

The blade sliced through the air and drove deep into William’s sternum. His eyes snapped open. He had blue eyes, like hers, but with a fleck of brown in one corner. Mara shuddered. He clutched at the blade, trying to stop the blood from flowing over his fingers. It poured through them and spilled between his knuckles. He choked and gagged as he fought for air. He struggled for a moment then went still.

Mara looked away. It hadn’t been a nice death. Deep breath, she told herself, deep breath. Was that what Audrey had told herself when she’d played her piano? Mara shivered.

“It’s okay. You can turn around now.” Gently, Angele took her shoulders and turned her to face William. His face had gone slack. His mouth flopped open. Mara’s hand brushed his arm. She drew it back quickly. He was still warm. The blood had begun to pool around the body, staining the sheets. Towards the edges of the mattress little flecks of it scattered into tiny dots. No amount of soap would wash the marks out.

Mara’s stomach dropped. Then the gall rose up the back of her throat, burning her and keeping her warm. Had William really deserved that? He had married Audrey. That was all. But he had made Audrey believe that things would be okay. Now she would have to recognize that they weren’t and never could be. Mara forced her lips into a smile. She pictured Audrey coming home, calling for William and getting no reply. Audrey wouldn’t cry at first. Audrey never cried.

She remembered Audrey limping all the way to one of her piano recitals, when they were children. They’d been running late and her shoes had been killing her the entire time. When she took them off, there was blood in the back of the heel and a huge blister forming. But when their teacher had asked how they were Audrey had grinned and said: “I’m doing great, thanks. How are you?” Mara had known then that swapping out Audrey’s recital shoes for her old pair, a size too small, wasn’t going to do it. She hadn’t even whimpered. And afterwards Mara had felt…odd. She didn’t remember exactly how she had felt, but she had been off somehow.

Mara faced Angele. “We should go.”

“In a minute, honey. We have to make this look like a robbery. Remember?”

There were blood spatters on Mara’s sweatshirt and jeans. She’d been standing next to Angele when…when the knife had gone in. She would need to get rid of her clothes later. Quickly, she returned to the bedside table and began yanking out Audrey’s jewelry. Audrey favored simple, classy, pieces. Mara snapped her pearls apart before shoving them into her pockets. Was there anything else valuable she should take?

She paced over to the adjoining bathroom. She dug through the drawers, dumping their contents as she worked, until she found a brush of Audrey’s. Mara had a video of her and William fighting to use against her later. But it couldn’t hurt to make things worse for her, in case the police didn’t buy the robbery setup. Normally, Audrey would be at work now, but she wasn’t. Angele had called her out to Point Reyes pretending to be a client. When she got there she would find no client and no alibi. Mara tore a couple of hairs out and dropped them over William’s body. Angele put an arm around her. She held her as the hairs floated down like leaves, drifting quietly into the thickening blood.

Chapter Three: Mara
William’s funeral was a large one, held at the Fernwood Cemetery in Marin County; even some of his clients attended. It was a good thing for Mara. She’d blend in. She wore a loose black blouse and pencil skirt. As long as she didn’t speak to anyone and Audrey didn’t spot her, she could pass as a mourner.

People gathered around the grave in tight little knots and held one another. The immediate family gave their eulogies. His younger brother described how William had taught him to swim and talked about his work at the local animal shelter, how he’d always bring extra treats for the rescue dogs. His father talked about going fishing together. He said that he was always willing to get up at four so they could start by five thirty. When it was his mother’s turn to speak, she sobbed so hard she couldn’t finish. Mara looked down at her shoes, then over at the other mourners. Her jaw tightened. It wasn’t as if Audrey had given her any choice… this was the only way she could have understood. And it served her right for saying what a fantastic mom their mother had been. Their mother had been a sadistic bitch. And now she was a sadistic dead bitch. The only things that could touch her now were the worms.

Audrey stood apart from the rest. She had married into the family but she wasn’t family. Audrey, Mara thought, didn’t know how to be family. Audrey had dressed in a close fitting black suit. It hugged her hips and showed off her narrow waist. Her makeup was minimal, a light brushing of powder over her blanched face, a tint of pink on her pursed mouth. Even at a funeral, Audrey looked good. Her eulogy was short: “He proposed to me across from D’Angelo’s, under the redwood tree in the plaza. There was a sunset. Neither one of us could stop smiling.” She focused on a point above her audience and didn’t look at anyone, even when she sat down.

William was cremated and his remains were buried under an oak tree in the historic section of the cemetery. The inscription read “Beloved Husband and Son.” Why did people always feel the need to put beloved on gravestones? Most of the people Mara had known hadn’t been beloved to anyone, even to their relatives, especially to their relatives.

When she’d attended her mother’s funeral, she’d stood in the back and listened to a bunch of women in tight black dresses gush about what a good person her mother was. Not one of them really knew her. They were lucky Mara hadn’t punched them. The only thing Mara had liked was the food. They’d had a white chocolate cake that was to die for. All her life, Mara’s mother had eaten mainly salads and never with any dressing. Mara doubted she’d appreciate the irony.

Mara’s stomach rumbled. She’d forgotten to eat lunch before coming. She checked her watch, half past two. They would get to the reception soon and then she would need to hide somewhere until she could get Audrey alone. Maybe she could grab a brownie or a mini quiche from the buffet in the meantime. The longer she stayed the fewer people there would be and the more chance someone might realize she wasn’t supposed to be there, that she didn’t know William well enough to mourn him. Her heart thumped. She’d watched him bleed out, she’d heard his last wet gurgle for air, but they’d never interacted accept for a few awkward moments at he and Audrey’s wedding. He suggested they all meet for drinks sometime but they never had.

By the time Audrey was alone, it was almost dark. The last streak of orange sunlight was sinking below the horizon. Audrey had stayed to help the caterers pack up. She looked absurd in her tailored suit and her four inch heels trying to carry fold out tables. After they left, Audrey walked out, alone, to William’s grave. She brought a single calla lily and dropped it beneath the headstone. Soundlessly, it fell to the grass. She stood, her head bowed. It started to rain, fat droplets blowing over the hill. She crossed her arms around herself but didn’t move.
Mara shifted from foot to foot behind the oak tree where she was hidden. What was she waiting for anyway? The longer she hesitated, the more chance that Audrey would leave. She took a deep breath and stepped out. “Hello Audrey.”

Audrey jumped and spun around with a short scream. “Don’t scare me like that! I thought you were…”

“The brownies were delicious. How did you keep them warm?” It was true. The brownies were fantastic.

“You were at the funeral?” Audrey’s eyebrows rose.

“Yes, I was.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t invite you. I thought since you and William had only met once that you wouldn’t…”

“And you and I don’t speak.” Mara took a step forward.

“Yes well…thank you for your condolences.”

“I didn’t offer my condolences.”

“Yes well…I’m glad you liked the brownies.”

“They were fantastic.” Mara smiled.

“Please go away. I’d like to be alone now.” They hadn’t even started talking and Audrey had already dismissed her.

“You’re a widow. You shouldn’t be alone.” Mara crossed over to Audrey and put an arm around her shoulders.

Audrey pulled away. “I’m sorry. It’s just that we were never close and…”

“You never told anyone that our mother starved me.” Mara spoke in a fierce hiss.

Audrey jumped. This was the only time Mara had ever brought it up. “Is that what this is about?”

“Yes.” Mara balled her fists.

“Can we do it later? My husband…” The second dismissal attempt in as many minutes. Mara gritted her teeth.

“No.”

“I’m not proud of it. But this—”

“You shouldn’t be.”

Audrey pursed her lips. “Why now?”

“I wanted to see if losing your husband changed you. We haven’t really spoken since your wedding.” Every time Mara had tried to approach Audrey during she and William’s wedding Audrey had walked away. The only reason they had talked at all was because William had waved her over. In the end, they’d only spoken for a few minutes, just enough time for Mara to congratulate her and for Audrey to give her a brief hug. There had been at least a foot of space between them.

“I’m the same as I always was.”

“You look terrible. You’re getting all wet.” The rain soaked into Audrey’s funeral clothes and made them cling to her skin. The flowers on her delicate black hat were getting sodden.

“It’s William’s funeral. Can’t you leave me in peace?” Audrey’s voice broke on the last word. A third dismissal.

“You’ve always wanted me to go away! Ever since we were kids. I remember knocking on your door all the time. You always pretended you weren’t there.”

Audrey blushed. “I can’t discuss this now. William is dead.”

“Really? I hadn’t noticed.”
“Don’t…”
“There were times I got so thin I could count my ribs. And she kept saying I needed to lose weight. Sadistic bitch.” Mara walked forward so she was standing right in front of Audrey. Her voice rose. Audrey flinched. “And you never told. You never said anything, not to CPS or anyone else. You were five years older. You could have told. And then at her funeral, you kept lying even after she was dead. Do you know how to do anything but lie?”
“I felt so alone.”
“But you weren’t alone. You had a sister.” A stream of spittle flew out of Mara’s mouth onto Audrey’s cheek. Audrey wiped it away with the back of her hand.
“Please go.”
“Your friend, Lisa, her mother asked you. She asked you if I was alright. And you told her I was fine.” Mara spluttered. She could barely get the words out. Spit was still spraying though her lips. Her face purpled.
She remembered listening to Audrey sooth Lisa’s mother: “No, she’s fine. There’s nothing to worry about. It was good of you to make sure though.” Mara’s stomach had growled as she’d eavesdropped around the corner. She’d thought about interrupting them, about going up to Lisa’s mother and saying: “Yes, there’s something wrong.” But her knees had gone weak and the words caught in her chest. She was only eight years old. She couldn’t force them out.
“I said go.” Audrey’s lip was quivering.
“Not until I’m finished!”
“You ambushed me after my husband’s funeral!”
“I did more than that!”
“What did you do?” Audrey’s eyes opened wide. She bit her lip, hard.
Mara stepped forward and spoke in a low vicious whisper. “I found someone, someone who cares. She took a knife and stabbed your husband for me.”
“You what!”
“I found someone and she stabbed him.”
“He never did anything to you.” Audrey spoke so softly Mara could barely hear her.
“Who is this woman?”
Mara’s cheeks flushed. Audrey could never know about Angele—caring Angele, who had stood over William, smiling, with his blood streaking her wrists. Mara swallowed. “I’ll never say.”
“I’ll go to the police. I’ll tell them you said this.”
“They won’t believe you.” When Mara was in elementary school, she’d always been packed the same thing for lunch—celery, a tangerine, a piece of bread with no butter, and a container of non-fat milk. If she was lucky, she’d get raisins too. She’d tried to trade with other kids but most second graders didn’t really like celery—at least not without peanut butter. One time she’d told a teacher that her mom was like Miss Minchin in The Little Princess. The teacher had told her not to tell lies about her parents who “loved her very much.” Her parents had given a lot of money to that school.
“The only hairs at the crime scene are yours. Do you want the police asking if you did it?”
“We shared that bedroom. My hair would be everywhere.” Audrey took a shaking step forward. Audrey had never gone hungry. Their mother said that because she was tall she didn’t have to watch what she ate as much. She had such a “nice willowy figure.” Audrey was allowed to pack her own lunch. Sometimes she even had chocolate.
“I have a video.” Mara removed her cell phone from one of her pockets and held it up. “This is you throwing a plate at William. It must have been a quite a fight.” “That was one time!” Audrey lunged for the phone and Mara jerked it away. “The police don’t know that. And this isn’t the only copy.” Mara put the phone back in her pocket.

“I would never hurt William.”

“If you go to the police, I’ll tell them you and William fought. That you screamed and threw things.”

Audrey bent her head. She turned away and put her face in her hands. “Go.” Mara didn’t move. Yet another dismissal. She had arranged to kill William and Audrey still dismissed her. She stood shaking on the grass.

“I said go away.” Audrey’s voice tightened. She turned back to face Mara and dropped her hands. Her cheeks were as pale as the clouds overhead. “Now.”

Mara stepped closer. She could feel Audrey’s warm breath on her face. “No.”

Audrey brought her knee up and slammed her heel into Mara’s foot. Mara howled and stumbled backwards. Audrey advanced, her hands curled into fists. Bright hot pain spiked through Mara’s instep. Audrey had never been violent before. She didn’t even kill spiders. Audrey threw a wild punch at Mara’s head. She missed.

Mara tripped and fell. She curled over on her side, clutching her hurt instep. Audrey drew her foot back and aimed for Mara’s ribs. Mara tensed her side muscles, waiting for the blow. Seconds passed. It didn’t come. The pain in her foot was excruciating. She tried to massage it but that just made it worse. The blow still didn’t land.

“Get up. Get up and walk away.” Audrey stepped back from Mara. Mara rolled over to the gravestone and pulled herself up into a kneeling position. It was raining harder now. Audrey was drenched.

Mara stood slowly, trying to keep her weight off her foot. “His shampoo will still be in the shower. His crossword puzzle will be on the bedside table. But he’ll never come back.”

“Are you trying to make me kick you again?”

Mara grimaced at her across the gravestone. “Every time you think of William I’ll be there. I’ll be there when you pack his things. I’ll be there when you see his thrillers on the book shelf. I’ll be there when you put away the one he didn’t finish”

Audrey turned her back on Mara and walked away. Mara called after her. “Audrey, did you cry?”

Audrey kept walking, head bowed. The calla lily still lay beneath the stone, crushed into the muck, white petals stained brown. Mara had rolled over it, mushing its graceful curves into a pulpy mess.

Mara sank back down and stretched out in the mud. Cradling her foot, she lay staring at the sky through the pouring rain. Her chest was light and airy, like something had been scooped out of it. All she felt was the mud under her back and the stabbing in her foot. Her eyes glazed over as the rain kept falling, soaking her to the bone.

**From the Case Notes of Deputy Patterson**

**Robbery Theory:** A robber broke into the Masons’ house and killed William Mason.

Points in Favor: Jewelry of Mrs. Mason’s was stolen. A foreign print was found on the Mason’s front door key.
Points Against: None of the electronics downstairs were taken. The master bedroom was the only room touched.

Conclusion: Probably bullshit.

Mrs. Mason Theory: Mrs. Mason murdered her husband.

Points in Favor: Hair of Mrs. Mason’s was discovered at the scene, on top of the body. Mrs. Mason has no alibi. Allegedly, she was seeing a client in Point Reyes but the client never showed. She returned home at 7:30 and discovered the body.

Points Against: The hair could have fallen out when she was checking the victim’s pulse. Allegedly, she was bending over him at that time. Also, it was her bedroom as well as his. Her hair would be everywhere. She states that she stopped at the Bovine Bakery and ordered an ice tea. One of the servers thought she recognized the picture we showed her of Mrs. Mason but could not make a positive I.D. We have no witnesses to say she did it. As far as we know she has no motive to kill her husband. Friends and neighbors say they were happy. He has no life insurance policy. Most of his estate goes to the Humane Society.

Conclusion: Probably also bullshit. Not enough to prosecute.

Other Theory: Murdered by a friend, a client, a lover? (No evidence he had one.)

Patterson leaned back from his notes and rubbed his forehead. The station was dark except for the lamp on his desk and the dim light made his eyes strain. It was bad. He snorted. All murder was bad. But this one made his spine tingle. He cracked his neck. He had been with the Sherriff’s department for ten years. He didn’t usually react like this. Was it because the victim had been asleep when it happened? The poor bastard hadn’t been able to try and defend himself. It was over before it began. At least the guy wasn’t suffering for long.

Patterson crossed his legs on top of his desk and looked up towards the ceiling. Was it the wife? It usually was. He checked his watch. Nine o’clock. The victim was going in the ground tomorrow—going in the ground at thirty-three. Maybe he would call Jordan, say good night. Sarah didn’t usually mind when he called on her days. He’d wish Jordan a quick good night and then get back to work. He’d do what he could and hope it actually mattered. Usually, after the first forty-eight hours, they didn’t have much of a chance. Guy made $500,000 a year and his case would probably still go cold. Only this time someone, maybe a newspaper, might care. He should get another look through the evidence in before he called Jordan. Patterson took a quick slug of coffee and bent over his case notes again.

Chapter Four: Audrey

The strap of her heel bit into her instep as she hobbled out of the cemetery. Thunder boomed and the rain came down so hard she could barely see. She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and looked around for her car. It had to be here somewhere; why could she never remember where she parked? Was Mara coming after her? She looked back over her shoulder but couldn’t see through the sluicing rain. She walked faster but her heels tripped her up. She
couldn’t stop shivering. Tears started to prick her eyes. Then she remembered Mara’s voice calling through the storm, “Did you cry?” She gnawed on her lip and counted to ten.

She would get to the car, lock it, and call Deputy Patterson. He was in charge of her husband’s case. He would know what to do. Police officers with reassuring voices and neat, professional uniforms would come and put Mara in the back of a squad car. They’d tell Audrey that everything would be alright, “Not to worry ma’am. We’ll see that justice is done.” They’d make sure Mara couldn’t get her. Mara would be gone. She wouldn’t have to see her again until she testified. The police officers would escort Audrey home and give her a phone number to call if she needed anything. Not that she would.

She dropped her keys as her clammy fingers slipped on the door handle. It was completely dark now. Were those footsteps she heard out in the rain? She fanned her hand over the wet cement, fumbling for the keys. Yes! She had them. She jammed them in the lock. Come on, come on, come on! She wrenched the door open, slid into the driver’s seat, and locked it again. She exhaled. No one could get in now. Her blackberry sat in the glove compartment. It had seemed disrespectful to bring it to William’s funeral. He had hated it if they were home together and one of their phones rang. Audrey bit her lip again. A thin line of pain spread across the plump ragged flesh. She reached into the glove compartment and pulled out a tattered business card. Her fingers fumbled as she dialed the number.

“Deputy Patterson, Marin County Sheriff’s Department.”
“I need to talk to you.”
“Who is this?”
“Audrey. Audrey Mason.
“Hi Audrey, what can I help you with?”
Audrey’s hand shook. The phone almost fell through her sweaty fingers. “It’s about my sister.”
“Your sister?”
“Yes, my sister. She…Oh my God…she and this woman…” She’d found William in the bedroom, the slicing knife still in his chest. She’d rushed to the bedside to take a pulse. William, couldn’t be dead. They’d only been married for two years. It wasn’t possible. His wrist had been cold and stiff. Audrey had screamed when she’d felt it. Her voice had ripped up the back of her throat, scouring it.

“Can you speak more slowly?”
“It’s my sister. It’s a long story. When we were children you see… I didn’t mean it.”
Audrey swallowed.
“Audrey, I want you to take a deep breath for me. Can you do that?”
“Yes.” Audrey breathed in, gulping down the stale air from her car.
“Let’s start somewhere simple. Can you describe your sister for me?”
“She has brown hair and blue eyes. She’s about five four and wearing—” Audrey broke off. She had caught sight of herself in the rearview mirror. Her chestnut hair was coming out of its bun and there were purplish shadows under her light blue eyes, like she’d been bruised there. Her mother had always said that her eyes looked like the sky on a winter morning. She’d said Mara was the only one who could make blue eyes ugly. Mara’s eyes were a bit murkier than Audrey’s. They shifted color in the light, like the sky reflected in a puddle or pond. Audrey shuddered. Maybe she would get contacts. Gray had always seemed like a nice color. Could they really believe that she had killed William?

Audrey stammered, “She’s wearing—“
“Just speak slowly.”
“I’m trying.” What if they believed Mara? She imagined being hauled off in a squad car, sirens screeching. Would they push her in gently or would they hit her head on the car roof? Would her mug shot show the bruising under her eyes? Audrey began to shake. She pressed her teeth together and willed herself not to shriek.
“Audrey, are you still there?” If she was sent to jail, he wouldn’t call her Audrey anymore. She’d have a prison number.
“Yes. I mean never mind.”
“Never mind?”
“I’m sorry. I made a mistake.”
“Made a mistake?”
“Yes. There’s nothing. It was nothing.” She had meant to surprise William that last evening. She’d gotten them concert tickets to see Foo Fighters. She was normally more of a Natalie Merchant, Sarah McLachlan fan herself but this was an early birthday present. She’d called out when she’d first opened the door “Honey, guess what!” He hadn’t replied. She remembered the dust motes swirling down through the lamplight as she’d paced through the house.
“Are you sure, Audrey?”
“Yes. I’m sorry to have wasted your time.” Audrey hung up. A moment later her phone rang again. She picked it up, her fingers trembling.
“Audrey, this is Lieutenant Patterson. Are you sure you made a mistake?”
“Positive.”
“I’d like to hear what’s worrying you though. Is this about William’s case?”
“No, something completely different.”
“If you like, I can come by your place and we can talk about it.”
Audrey’s heart skipped a beat. “No thank you. I just had the funeral today and I’m worn out. Thank you for your concern.”
“We could do it some other time.”
“I’m actually pretty busy, catching up with work and stuff. You know how it is. It really isn’t important.” Audrey tried to keep her voice light.
“As long as you’re sure. I’m always available, if you decide you want to contact me later. In fact, I’ll probably be checking back in in a couple of weeks with an update.”
“Okay then, bye.” She forced herself to smile then remembered he couldn’t see her.
“Bye, Audrey.”
She breathed a sigh of relief. That had been way too close. What if he’d insisted on coming over to talk? What could she possibly have said: the murderer is a friend of my estranged sister, please ignore the video my sister is going to show you of me throwing a plate at my husband? Now at least she had a reprieve. He wouldn’t come to talk to her for the next two weeks. She could work out what to say by then. She was in PR; it was her job to know what to say.

The house was dark and empty when she arrived home. She didn’t even have a dog or a cat to greet her. She didn’t even have a pet hamster. When she was little, she’d owned a rabbit, Miss Whiskers. Her fur was the softest thing she had ever felt. She had loved it when Miss Whiskers dug on the backs of her legs when she wanted attention. Miss Whiskers had lasted about a year before her mother had said she was allergic. After that, they’d taken Miss Whiskers to a local shelter. She had meant to talk about getting a rabbit with William but somehow the
subject had never come up. Her stomach twisted every time she thought about telling him what had happened to Miss Whiskers.

The sound of her footsteps echoed through the dark hallway. She reached out and fumbled for the light. Her shoulders relaxed as she released the breath she hadn’t realized she was holding. She hung her hat and coat on the rack. They were still damp. She took tiny steps into the entryway. Her heart started to beat faster. Could Mara or her friend be waiting here for her? Could they have gotten here first and broken in? Audrey scurried into the main room and flicked on that light too. No one was there. She raced back across the hall, stumbling over her heels, and shot the bolt in the lock. She breathed out again.

Her stomach rumbled but she didn’t want to go into the kitchen. She would skip dinner tonight. She’d eaten a lot at the funeral anyway. People usually didn’t talk to you as much if you were by the buffet. She winced. She knew that was rude but she hadn’t been able to stop herself. In the days that had followed William’s death, she’d heard a lot of “I’m so sorry” and “If there’s anything I can do…” There wasn’t anything they could do. Nothing would bring William back. What she really wished for was someone to just sit with her and not say anything. But no one ever did.

His family was sympathetic but she felt claustrophobic every time she was with them. She’d never really understood them to begin with. They were noisier than her family had ever been. There was always something going on at their place, a pickup basketball game, a hike on Mount Tamalpais. They were always touching each other too, a hug here, a slap on the back there. She’d sat with his mother for an hour before the service and listened to her cry, flinching with every sob. Audrey had tried patting her on the shoulder a couple of times but she’d kept crying. By the end, Audrey had wanted to curl up in fetal position with her hands over her ears. But instead she’d straightened her coat, checked her hair in the mirror, and gone to meet the caterers. Keep calm and carry on, that was her motto.

She could have tried talking to her father. It probably wouldn’t have done much good though. He and her mother had divorced around the time Mara was born. Nowadays he only spoke to Audrey on Christmas and her birthday. He hadn’t even come to William’s funeral.

Before Audrey went to bed she turned on all the downstairs lights. If Mara or her friend came by the house, they would see that Audrey was awake and alert. The downstairs looked much as it had when William was alive. She hadn’t had time to put his things away yet. She’d been too busy arranging the funeral. His Giants cap was still hung next to her Hermes scarf. His muddy shoes were still jumbled in the entryway. She’d been nagging him to put them away for days before he died but now he was gone she didn’t really want to move them.

She didn’t want to go upstairs either. Every time she started up her muscles locked and she couldn’t continue. So she pulled out the sofa bed and used some of the sheets from the linen closet. When she woke up her back would ache and she’d have cricks in her neck but it was better than the alternative. The upstairs was a vast maw, wide open and waiting. If she started up, she would never come down again.

She triple checked the locks and put a chair in front of each door before slipping under the covers. Should she even be staying here? Maybe she would be safer in a hotel. But a hotel wouldn’t have William’s favorite Dilbert mug on the coffee table. It wouldn’t have the throw pillows with little blue stars on them he’d given her for their six month anniversary.

Stop worrying and go to sleep, Audrey thought. You’ll get up and go to work. You won’t even have time for lunch. You have that press release due, and the company Facebook design.
She yanked the covers over herself and pulled her knees up to her chest. Her knuckles clenched the blankets as she stared at the opposite wall.

When she was little she had taunted Mara, she had told her that she looked like the beast from *Beauty and the Beast*—something to do with her hair? It was light brown and it had usually been matted because no one brushed it.

“You’re a beast!” Audrey had laughed and made snarling noises, gesturing at Mara with one hand curled into a claw.

“I am not!” Mara’s face had turned bright red.

“Are too!”

“Am not. And that’s final. Times infinity.” Mara had crossed her arms and pouted. Later though, Audrey had seen her little face crumple.

Audrey hadn’t done it after that. She’d meant to apologize but had never gotten around to it. Every time she tried the words got stuck in her chest.

The shadows crept up the wall as time passed, visible by the lights she’d turned on. She wished she could have taken a sleeping pill but those were upstairs in the medicine cabinet. Slowly, her eyelids slid closed and her grip on the blankets loosened.

*She was thirteen again and listening to Mara’s wails:* “Please. Just a little. It won’t make me fat.” It was just after dinner time but she was already in bed. She locked her hands around the bedposts. The cold metal pressed into her finger pads. Can’t tell, can’t tell, can’t tell. Her stomach cramped. Keep the words down. Choke them down. They piled up on each other and squirmed around her gut: I have a sister. She doesn’t get to eat. I can hear her crying. Sometimes she knocks on my door. I have a sister.

The wails changed to howls, tearing through the walls. Something crashed in the kitchen. Glass fell. Audrey heard a bellow. There was a bang and then a thud-thud-thud up the stairs. Her heart boomed inside her chest. The thing was coming for her. It would eat her soon. She ran up the stairs. Her feet weren’t fast enough. Its fetid breath was on her neck. They were on the roof now. She was skidding over the tiles towards the edge. The sky ripped open beneath her. It was gaping bottomless space—the stairs to the master bedroom reaching up to swallow her: “You let me go hungry and thought I wouldn’t eat you?”

**Chapter Five: Audrey**

Audrey sat up. Sweat dripped down her temple. She felt suffocated. The air was dry and it stuck in her throat. She looked at the clock—5 A.M. Neither she nor William had liked to get up early. She peeled back the sheets and swung her feet out of bed. Her toes flinched as they touched the cold wood floor.

Mara was still out there somewhere. What was she doing right now? Was she satiated at last? And who was her friend? Audrey pictured a grim woman dressed in black, leering, with a scythe in her hand. Please, please, let them be finished, Audrey thought. Let her go somewhere far away from me. She wasn’t the one who abused Mara. It wasn’t Audrey who said Mara could only have celery for lunch. Audrey forced herself to breathe slowly. There was nothing she could do now—nothing. She strode to the downstairs bathroom and started to wash her face.

All that day she was distracted. Her eyes kept going to the photo of her and William in the center left of her desk. They’d taken it after a hiking trip up the Dipsea trail. She had told William she was sweaty and gross but he’d asked a passing family to take the picture anyway. She tried to focus on her work, even turned the picture face down, but it was no good. She used
you’re instead of your and put three comma splices in her press release. An intern pointed them out so thankfully her boss, June, didn’t see. June would be nice about it but she’d also think Audrey couldn’t do her job. Audrey massaged her temples. She wished she’d eaten something that morning besides a cold Starbucks muffin and a cup of green tea.

“Do you want to get some lunch?” It was June. June and Audrey looked a lot alike. They both had chestnut hair and shopped at the same stores: American Eagle, Abercombie and Fitch, Forever 21. June went shopping every weekend, for her it was recreation. After Audrey joined the company, she’d started inviting her to go with her. It had been a bit awkward at first, June was heavier because she’d been pregnant, but Audrey had assured her that she looked wonderful all the same. June had always responded, “No, I look like a whale. You look amazing though.” It had made Audrey’s stomach twist a little but once the conversation got moving and they passed this ritual it was okay.

“No thanks, I’m trying to get a head start on this project.” Audrey tried to smile.

“Are you sure?” Her co-workers used tentative quiet voices with her now.

“Positive,” Audrey forced her smile wider. “You go and have fun.”

“If there’s anything I can do…”

“Thank you, but I’m fine.” This was the disadvantage of an open office plan, anyone could drop in. When she’d first started she’d liked it, but when she first started she hadn’t been recently widowed. She’d had the energy to go out with June then. Then it had been her reassuring June that, yes you look fine, no your tights don’t have any runs, and yes you’ll be a great mother. Not June worrying that she’d have a breakdown now her husband was gone.

The year before, June had lost her baby. It had been born premature and only lived for a week. For a month afterwards, June had wandered around the office, snotty and red eyed, insisting on doing something. If she was in a meeting, there was always a discreet box of tissues nearby. She came to work in pajamas once. Their supervisor had had to explain to her that, as this was a PR company, business casual was expected from all employees. Audrey had blushed in sympathy.

But then, a few months ago, June went back to normal. She put on her stylish black pumps and fitted skirts that showed off the weight she’d lost since her pregnancy. She started gossiping about The Bachelorette by the water cooler again. If anyone mentioned the baby or congratulated her on how well she was coping, she’d stare into space for a moment then say she didn’t know what they were talking about. If they pressed her, she’d smile and say she’d forgotten all about it. It was strange but no one was complaining. June was beaming and running the office again. That was what mattered.

Audrey was still behind that evening so she brought the press release home with her. June had requested another draft by next Wednesday. Maybe she shouldn’t have taken so much time off for the funeral. She’d used up most of her sick days making sure that everything was just perfect. She’d called the florist, arranged the catering, scouted the venue, and designed the announcement by herself. The announcement had been the most difficult. She had spent over an hour choosing the font. In the end, she picked Vivaldi. It was a choice she now regretted. William would never have liked it. It was too frilly. The catering had gone well though. Several people said they liked the brownies but when she’d eaten one it had tasted like cardboard.

Mara had liked the brownies. She’d said so, before their fight at the cemetery when Audrey had crushed her instep. Mara’s breath had still smelt of chocolate. All Audrey had had to do was to lift her foot and let gravity do the rest. Mara’s smug mouth had opened wide and she had stumbled away from Audrey, collapsing on the ground. Audrey’s whole body had trembled
as she stood over her, ready to strike. Her mouth watered. She imagined Mara’s ribs smashing under her shoes, the cracks shooting across the white bone. Why hadn’t she done it?

William wouldn’t have done it. It had been a slushy cold day when she’d first met him. She had been walking back from her lunch break. June had stayed in to finish a project so she was alone. The cold had sliced through her jacket and she was shivering. All she had wanted to do was get back to her office. But she’d stopped to watch William. There had been a ten year old boy with a small terrier on a leash. The terrier kept stopping to sniff the muddy ground and the boy would pull on the leash to haul the terrier forward. The terrier had been whimpering. The boy had drawn back the leash to hit the terrier but William had grabbed his arm, stopping the strike: “That’s not how we treat animals. They don’t know any better but we do.”

She had asked him out there and then. It had been the first time she’d ever asked anyone out— before it had always been the other way around. She’d kept twisting her gloved hands and she could barely look him in the eye but he’d said yes. They’d chosen the Boudin Bakery. It was a nice place, not too fancy, good for a first date. He’d called the next day to ask her out for the weekend.

That night she dreamed again.

William stood in front of her, the slicing knife still in his chest. Blood poured over his front. Audrey shrank back. William advanced, waving his arms: “Why didn’t you tell me?”
“I couldn’t. I just couldn’t.” Audrey cringed.
“We were together for four years and you never told me.”
“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” She reached up to touch William’s curls. His hair disintegrated in her hands.
“I told you everything—the divorce, my grandfather’s heart attack.” William was yelling now.

“Lots of people get divorced. Everyone loses their grandparents.” Audrey started to cry. Her tears turned to molten silver. They splashed onto William, burning his face and neck. He howled.

“Get away!” William lurched back from her.
“Would you still have loved me if I’d told you?”
William’s mouth opened but he didn’t reply. She remembered kissing that mouth. He brushed with clear mint toothpaste and she could still taste it on his lips in the morning. His flesh began to fall away, like snow melting off a tree. He dissolved and he still hadn’t answered.

When Audrey woke, she was still crying. The tears glittered on her face like frost.

William had asked about her family, just a month ago. He had told her she should reach out to Mara, that he didn’t want his children growing up believing it was okay to ignore their family. And she had thrown a plate at him. She’d never been violent, not even as a young child. She certainly hadn’t thought of herself as a candidate for domestic abuse. Audrey turned over and buried her face in the pillow.

She missed her deadlines for the press release and the social media platform. Every morning she dragged herself out of bed to stare at the computer in her office, rewriting the same sentences over and over. The flowers she normally kept on the corner of her desk were wilting. The bags under her eyes still hadn’t gone away. She’d had to start using heavier foundation. When she arrived home at night, the first thing she’d do was turn on all the lights. Then she’d check the locks, twice each. Next she would pull up a chair in front of each door. So far nothing had happened. Mara and her friend had not come. Who was this friend anyway? Had Mara made her up? Or was there really someone out there? A Lady Macbeth with William’s blood on her
hands? She hadn’t heard from Patterson yet either, though it had only been a week. Was it possible he’d forget to contact her? She blinked and rubbed her eyes, squinting against the glare of the fluorescent lighting.

A hand waved in front of her face. “Hello, anybody home?”
Audrey blinked. She was in her office. “Sorry what?”. June sighed, her hand resting on her hip. “Do you want to have lunch?”
“No, thanks. I’m very behind.” Audrey turned back to her computer.
“I want you to have this,” June pressed a business card into Audrey’s hand. It read: Angele, erasure of painful recollections.

“What is this?”
“I know you’re having some trouble and I thought this might help.”
“Yes, this woman?”
“She’s well…you’ll understand when you meet her. She’s fabulous.”
Audrey crossed her arms over her chest. “Is she a therapist? I don’t need a therapist.”
“No, of course not. She’s just really helpful, understanding too.”
“Then what is she?”
“I don’t know. I just know she helped me a few months ago.”
“I don’t need to ask strangers for help.” Audrey’s lip started to tremble. “I’m sorry about those deadlines. I’ll make it up to you. I was planning on working over the weekend anyway.”
“It’s not a problem. She was wonderful though. You really should go to her. There was...something wrong with me. I think it gave me an ulcer. I talked to my husband about it but he said I was just nervous about having the baby—new parent jitters. He said I was being silly. Later, he said it was just the grief talking. He didn’t help at all. But when I went to her...” June smiled. She put the card down on Audrey’s desk. “She made it go away. She took it and she carved it right out of me. I can’t even remember what it was.”
“You had an ulcer when you were pregnant?” June was being very strange. Was this like the time she had gone to that life coach who suggested a juice cleanse? June had talked about nothing but the virtues of sugar free limeade and the weight she’d lost from it for weeks. It had taken at least a month for her to get back to normal and to admit that; maybe, lime water wasn’t the best way to shed those last few pounds.

“Think about it, okay?” June touched her shoulder. “I’m worried about you.”
“Fine.” Audrey swept the card into her desk drawer. She hunched her shoulders then forced herself to relax them. She didn’t need June thinking she couldn’t handle things.

It was cloudy when Audrey drove home, the kind of heavy gray clouds that weighed down the sky. There was no rain, only a monotonous drizzle. Audrey hated clouds. When she was little, the house had always been gray. The curtains were kept shut and the carpet had smelled of cigarette smoke no matter how much air freshener their housekeeper had used. Audrey’s mother had smoked a cigarette every day after dinner “instead of desert.”

Her mother had started smoking a week after Mara’s birth. She had lain in bed sixteen hours a day. Every so often she’d take a hit off her cigarette and her eyes would glaze over. Even when she was out of bed, she’d barely moved. She hadn’t made dinner or helped clean the house. She hadn’t nursed either. She’d bought a pair of earmuffs so Mara’s cries wouldn’t keep her up at night.

Later that night, Audrey lay awake staring at the ceiling, sleeping no better than she had the previous week. She thought about selling the house. She could move down to LA, work for another PR agency. It would be sunny there, no clouds. Audrey heard that even in winter the
temperature barely dropped below seventy. She would probably have to change her name
though; she needed to get away from Mara and her friend permanently. Where did you even go
to change a name? The courthouses? It would be too easy for Mara to find her that way. Some
criminal selling fake passports? Audrey pressed her lips together. She had always obeyed the
law. The worst thing she’d done was run a red light back in high school. She didn’t even drink
until she turned twenty one. Could she google it: where can you go to get a fake name? She’d
think about it tomorrow, when she was fresher. Audrey closed her eyes and forced herself to
breathe in and out. It took her an hour to finally fall asleep.

The room was a heavy sunken gray. Audrey’s feet stuck on the carpet like she was
walking through a swamp.

“Hello?” Audrey called. A sickly fog started to rise from the floor. It leached on to her
bare arms. Her feet began to sink.

“Hi, sweetie.” Her mother smiled, reclining on the bed.

“Mom?”

“Yes. Come and give mommy a hug?”

“Okay.” She struggled forward. The carpet was up to her calves now. It pulled at her
toes and sucked on her pant legs. “How’ve you been?”

“I’ve been very well. I’ve just been choosing the wine to serve at the PTA auction.”

“That’s nice.” The carpet was up to her chest. “Can you fix the carpet? It’s hurting me.”

“Don’t be melodramatic, dear. Keep calm and carry on.” Her mother smiled again.

Audrey was swimming now. Her feet didn’t touch the bottom.

“I’m suffocating.”

“I went with a merlot. It will go so well with the camembert.”

“Please help!” Audrey started thrashing. The carpet was up to her chin.

“Stop whining,” her mother raised an eyebrow. “You want to give mommy a hug, don’t
you?”

“Yes. I do.”

“Then keep going.”

Audrey went under. She tried to scream and inhaled the gray. It slid down her mouth and
into her stomach. She gasped and choked, clawing for the surface. The gray pulled her down—
devouring her. The last thing she saw was her mother’s smile.

Audrey’s eyes snapped open. She looked around and shivered. It was okay, she was in
bed. The floors were hardwood, not carpet. There was no gray here. Her teeth clicked against
each other. She couldn’t stop shaking.

She reached over to the coffee table and fumbled around in her purse. She removed the
business card: Angele, erasure of painful recollections. Who was this woman? Could she really
help her? The card felt smooth and comforting as she rolled it around her fingertips. She ran her
thumb over its elegant loops. It couldn’t hurt to try the number. At worst, the woman wouldn’t be
helpful and she could just leave. At best…could the woman really make her forget? Could she
carve out this awful malignant piece of her? Remove it like you would a tumor?

Audrey could still move. She could have a fresh start as long as she knew she could never
be found. She could leave instructions for herself, telling her what to do. People wrote things to
themselves all the time. She would just have to make sure to leave the instructions on the coffee
table, next to William’s mug, where she would be sure to see them. Three months ago, June had
gotten better. She’d started trying again; wearing her hair in a French twist and putting on her
lily-of-the-valley perfume. Was this woman responsible? Slowly, Audrey dialed the number.
Chapter Six: Audrey

She had an appointment two days later. Her stomach fluttered as she stood in the woman’s living room, pink with maple wood floors. There was a fresh bouquet of Jasmine in the center of the coffee table. Audrey would have preferred an office but the woman didn’t have one. Who doesn’t have an office? She’d tried googling her but had come up with nothing. Apparently, the woman only did business by word of mouth. It wasn’t normal; most professionals Audrey knew at least had a LinkedIn or a Facebook.

“I want to forget.” Audrey looked into the woman’s eyes and tried to sound firm.

“Of course you do, dear. You all do.” The woman was plump and motherly with strands of gray hair escaping from her bun. She wore a thick knitted sweater over a pair of faded jeans. Her rosy cheeks dimpled. “Would you like a cup of tea?”

“Yes please.” Audrey smoothed a hand over her blouse and shifted forward a little. “I’ll just be a minute.” The woman smiled, her dark eyes twinkling. In the kitchen, Audrey heard the kettle whirring, the clatter of mugs being taken down from the cupboard. It was soothing, like rain pattering the roof on a stormy night.

“Is chamomile alright?” The woman passed her a mug. “Be careful. It’s hot.”

“Thanks,” Audrey smiled. “What should I call you?”

“I’m Angele.” The woman’s voice was light and fluid. Maybe a little too fluid to be quite natural. “Now tell me what the problem is and we’ll see if I can help you.”

“I want to forget someone.” Audrey shifted a little. She closed her eyes, remembering. Mara, with her mousy brown hair. The brightness in her eyes when she told Audrey her friend had killed William. “Can you do help me do that?”

“Oh course.”

“How? Is it like hypnosis?”

“All you have to do is hold my hand.”

“That’s impossible. You can’t forget someone just by holding someone else’s hand.” It didn’t work that way. Holding a person’s hand didn’t make you forget things: Alzheimer’s, yes, getting hit on the head, sometimes, holding hands, no.

Angele’s eyes sparkled. “Yes you can. I was taking memories since the time I was five years old. I’ve devoured your disappointments and your fears. I’ve tasted the tear tracks on your faces. I know what I’m doing. What do you have to lose?”

“Not much.” Audrey looked down. Who was this woman anyway? Was that relish in her voice?

Angele reached forward and put a hand on her knee. “You’re in pain, aren’t you? “Yes. Yes, I am.” Audrey’s voice was quiet. William was gone. He’d never kiss her good morning again. She’d never hear him wrestling with the neighbor’s dog or arguing with the referee on television. They’d never have children.

“I’m sorry.” Angele crossed around the table and put her arms around Audrey.

Audrey stiffened for a moment, and then leaned into them. She inhaled Angele’s warm vanilla scent. She wasn’t used to being hugged like this. William’s embrace was...different, and her own family didn’t touch each other more than necessary. The best hug her mother had given her was at her graduation when a friend’s father had offered to take their picture.

“Thank you.” She shivered, remembering again. Mara’s voice coming out of the rain: They won’t believe you. The smash of her foot into Mara’s instep. Mara’s pleading woven into her piano notes. The noise drifting into the air like the dust on the day of William’s death.
“You must have been desperate.” Angele gently disengaged and went back to her side of the table. “It’s a good thing you’re here now. Who is it that you want to forget? Husband’s mistress?”

Audrey blushed again. “No. I can’t talk about it. It was someone who hurt me deeply.”

“I understand.” Angele leaned forward. “But if I’m going to remember them for you, I need to know something about them. Before I can help you.”

“Remember them for me?”

“That’s what happens. I learn. You forget.”

This was against science. It was against Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, and Einstein. It was even against Stephen Hawking. Not that she knew what Stephen Hawking did. Her muscles tensed. “How is that possible? Do I need to tell you my memories?”

“No honey, like I said before, just hold my hand.”

The woman was either crazy or she was impossible, the miracle that Audrey was looking for. “It’s that simple? These memories are painful ones. Are you sure you want them?”

“Nothing is that simple. But you’ll feel better. That’s what you want, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is. But are you sure?” It couldn’t hurt to try it. If she didn’t forget, then she was no worse off than she was before.

Angele smiled, exposing her teeth. “Of course I’m sure, dear. Just tell me the name and let me make this better for you.”

Audrey shrank back a little. “It’s really…”

“I’m concerned about you. So much pain for such a little woman.”

“Her name is Mara Woodley.” Audrey spat the words out as fast as she could.

“What was that?”

“Mara Woodley.”

“Anything else?” Angele raised an eyebrow.

“No.” There had been that freezing rain, the mud spattering up her suit. Mara’s dirty fingers clutching William’s gravestone. If it worked, she wouldn’t have to know anymore.

“I see. And why do you want to forget her?”

“She scares me.” Audrey bit her lip and shuddered. She’d lain awake at night, imagining Mara’s voice out of the darkness, her unknown friend, the thrust of the knife down into William’s sternum. Had he suffered? Now she wouldn’t have to imagine. Audrey sat up straighter. “There’s something I need to remember though. I need to get away. I have to change my name, so she can’t find me.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“Will I remember to do that?”

“You’ll be safe, trust me. You can leave a note for yourself and I’ll make sure you get it.”

“Okay, just give me a minute to write.” Audrey scribbled quickly on a sheet of paper from her bag and passed it over to Angele. She wouldn’t have to dream now. She could just press her face into the pillow and sleep.

“Here, have some more tea.” Angele pushed the cup into Audrey’s hand. Audrey sipped, feeling the warm liquid slide down her throat. Her shoulders loosened.

“Do you have any questions for me?” Angele asked.

“Will it hurt?” Audrey’s voice squeaked.

“Of course not.” Angele gave a little laugh. “It’ll only take a minute. Then you won’t have to remember anymore. You’ll be free.”

“I’ll be free.” Audrey repeated.
“I can help you forget yourself.” Angele reached for Audrey’s hand.
“I think you mean ‘forget her.’” Audrey drew her hand back.
“Forgetting one means forgetting the other.”
“How?”
“Memories are like butterflies. You cannot remove a wing without killing the insect.” Angele’s voice was soft as a lullaby. “You’ll be a better off this way. You’ll be at peace.”
“At peace,” Audrey sighed.
“Just let me help you. Okay?” Angele reached up and stroked her cheek.
Audrey looked at her reflection in the window. Her face was thin and pale. Her brown hair hung greasy and tangled around her shoulders. When was the last time she’d let herself go like this? She’d barely managed to put herself together for the funeral. She’d forgotten to wear waterproof mascara and she’d accidently scraped off all her lipstick. Thank God she had found someone as kind and helpful as Angele. Someone who understood. Someone who could fix her the way June had been fixed. “Okay then. I’ll do it.”
“Good for you.” Angele beamed. “So who was she?”
“I told you. Her name was Mara Woodley.”
“No. I mean, who was she to you?”
“Oh.” Audrey took a deep breath. The air was calm, waiting, like the stillness before the storm. “She was my sister.”

From the Case Notes of Deputy Patterson
To Do
1. Submit Mrs. Mason’s phone call into evidence. She definitely lied. How much did she lie about?
2. Run background check on Mrs. Mason’s sister. Talk to her friends, neighbors, anyone she knows, and then talk to sister.
3. Arrange for a patrol car to drive by Mrs. Mason’s house tonight. Gut feeling.
4. Go over transcripts of the case.
5. Check back with Audrey in a couple days. Keep the pressure on. (Not two weeks, she’ll let something slip if she isn’t expecting me.)
6. Find out who the woman was Mrs. Mason mentioned along with sister.
7. Get that cough checked out.

New Evidence
We have no matches for the fingerprint found on the Masons’ key. Waitress’s identification still uncertain. Phone call by Mrs. Mason, suggests she knows something. Mention of the sister and an unknown woman.

Questions
Does Mrs. Mason know who did it?
Is there anyone that Mrs. Mason would be afraid to incriminate?
What does the sister have to do with it?
Is Mrs. Mason safe?

Patterson pushed his chair back and hacked up a chunk of sputum. He dabbed at it with a tissue and felt his forehead with his other hand. It was hot. He couldn’t have a fever. It was absolutely the wrong time to get sick. His partner was new. He was a good kid; he wasn’t good enough to take care of things on his own. Even without the press. When they called, Patterson
would just say no comment. There wasn’t a story if no one said anything. And he was supposed
to take Jordan ice skating this weekend. She’d been talking non-stop about it for the past two
weeks. He felt his forehead again. No change. The heater was on way too high in the station.
Maybe that’s why his forehead was hot. He hacked up some more mucus.
He got up slowly from his chair and walked to the front of the station. The dispatch was
settled in his chair, munching on some stale pretzels. Patterson cleared his throat.
“Can you get a patrol to drive by this address, 101 Caledonia St., Sausalito?”
The dispatch shifted in his chair. “Sure. What do you want them to look for?”
Patterson clenched his jaw. The truth was he didn’t know what to look for. He just knew
that Mrs. Mason had sounded scared. Of course, she could just be scared because she stabbed her
husband and didn’t want to get caught. He ground his teeth together. “Signs of a break in.
Anything unusual.”
“Who lives there?”
“One of my suspects.”
“Consider it done.” The dispatcher paused. “And Patterson…”
“Yeah?”
“You look awful.”
“Thanks.” Patterson rolled his eyes and went back to his desk. At least now he had
something to go on. Something to do besides sit at his desk and stare at the same notes over and
over. He would run a full background check on the sister. It might be nothing. Or it could be
something. He needed it to be something.

Chapter Seven—Mara

Mara opened the door and stepped into her freezing apartment. She lived in a grubby two
room place in Marin City. She’d moved across the Bay six months ago so she could be closer to
Audrey and William while she plotted William’s murder. Also, Angele was in Marin so that was
convenient too. The only furniture was a sofa bed, a television, a microwave, and a mini fridge
with a pile of cutlery on top of it. There was no counter so the microwave just sat on the floor.
She didn’t know if this was safe and she didn’t really care. The wallpaper curled and yellowed in
the corners. There was a small pile of squashy boxes from the last time she’d moved and an old
suitcase overflowing with clothes. Off to the side was a small moldy bathroom with a dirty single
pane window.
Mara inhaled the smell of mildew and stale cigarettes. She shrugged off her dumpy
overcoat and left it piled on the floor as she limped toward the sofa bed. Her foot ached where
Audrey had stomped it—so she wasn’t such a little prissy after all. Mara’s eyes glazed over as
she remembered. She breathed in and out, focusing on the throbbing as it pulsed like a heartbeat.
She lay down and looked up at the crack in the ceiling. Step on a crack, you break your
mother’s back; step on a line, you break your father’s spine. What do you step on to
break your sister? You step on her heart.
The rain had made Audrey’s make up run in jagged lines down her
face—just like that crack in the ceiling. Mara’s mouth watered as she pictured the perfect o
Audrey’s lips had made when Mara had told her what she’d done. She closed her eyes and
remember some more; the inscription “Beloved Husband and Son, the tight set of Audrey’s
shoulders, Angele’s hand on the slicing knife. Mara started. Why was she so jumpy?
Her stomach rumbled. It was time to get something from the fridge. Slowly, she pushed
herself off the couch and hopped over to it. All it had inside was a cold pizza and a bottle of stale
coke. She pulled the pizza out and began to eat mechanically. She would have to go grocery shopping soon. Her chest tightened. How much did she have left in checking again—$10,000? No, it couldn’t be that little. She had to have at least $12,000 left from her job at Jack in the Box. She’d been careful, saved every penny possible so she could leave and spend all her time planning William’s murder.

Mara shook her head. He’d looked so surprised when Angele had killed him: Angele, with her knitted sweaters and her wispy gray hair. William’s mouth had been wider than Audrey’s when she’d heard the news. Audrey’s had been little, almost demure. William’s eyes had flashed as though he had recognized Mara somehow. Had he thought she was Audrey? When they were younger people had always asked Audrey—“oh, is that your sister?”

Mara’s fingers began to shake. She slammed her hand into the rough wooden boards. The pain shot up her wrist and she gasped. Her chest loosened. Slowly, she made her way over to the sofa bed, dragging her foot behind her. Was it broken? Had Audrey broken her foot? Audrey’s eyes had lit up before she stomped. Mara had seen it coming. The gathering of energy and then the explosion as it had splintered outwards. Maybe those heels of Audrey’s had been good for something after all. She would wait and see. If it didn’t get better in a day or so, she would buy some ice for it. If it still didn’t get better, well… she’d decide what to do then. She didn’t have insurance, not since she’d quit her job. She knew that was illegal now but she didn’t care. If the feds wanted her to get insurance, they should send her a check for it. She lay back and closed her eyes but couldn’t fall asleep. Every so often she gave a little whimper as she burrowed deeper under the covers. She imagined voices calling to her from the darkness.

“Ugly.”
“Fatty.”
“Worthless.”
“Coward.”
“Beast.”

Mara yanked her pillow over her head. Was this what everyone heard when they shut their eyes at night? Had Audrey ever heard voices like this? She couldn’t have. People like Audrey, who scented their sheets with lavender and honeymooned in Paris, didn’t hear voices like this. Besides, what she had done and what Audrey had done were completely different things. Audrey had willfully kept her mouth shut and watched as their mother starved Mara. She had arranged a lavish funeral for their vicious mother. People like their mother didn’t deserve funerals. They didn’t even deserved tombstones. All Mara had done was…

She pulled her shoulders up around her ears, hunching them, then took a hank of her hair and ran it through her fingers. It was as greasy and tangled as ever. The water pressure in the apartment was terrible, so it never really got clean in the shower. She closed her eyes so tightly she saw pinpoints of light. All she had to do was silence the voices, and then she would be happy. Angele had killed William, reclaimed what Audrey owed Mara, made sure Audrey would know how Mara felt. There was no one to comfort Audrey when she cried now. But now Mara had Angele. Maybe she would visit Angele soon, to say thank you. An image flashed across her mind, Angele brushing her untidy hair over her ear, revealing a tiny spot of blood on her temple. Or maybe not. Mara clenched her jaw. Maybe she should give Angele some space for a while, make sure she wasn’t angry at her for not killing William herself. She curled up tighter. Her shoulders were still tensed when she woke the next morning.

Mara shivered as she looked around the bedroom. Not for the first time, she wished she could afford heating. When she was working, and still had money for things like that, her
favorite treat was a hot bath. She eased herself off the sofa bed and towards the open suitcase. Rummaging inside it, she pulled out a small battered journal and a pen. She sucked on the pen for a while and then began to draw. When she was little, she had wanted to become an artist. That dream had lasted until her parents had told her they wouldn’t help pay for art school because she “didn’t have the talent.” She still drew though. Slowly, she made a wobbly line across the page, and then erased it. What was with her? Even in elementary school she had known how to draw a straight line. She put her pen back in her mouth and thought. It was no good. She closed her sketchbook with a snap.

The next two weeks passed in a blur of gnawed pen caps and empty pizza boxes. She rarely left the house. She sat on the couch and waited for her foot to heal. A few days in she broke down and bought some ice. It helped; the foot was still swollen but it wasn’t agony anymore. She searched online help wanted ads and didn’t find anything. Twice her landlord called and told her she was late with the rent. Well, she thought; if you’re going to charge $350 a month for a shitty dump like this then you should expect late rent. It wasn’t her problem. She wasn’t the one who set the rent so high.

The knock came around seven o’clock. She was expecting the pizza delivery guy so she opened it. There was a policeman on the other side.

She jumped and stumbled backward. She winced as her weight landed on her hurt foot. What the hell were the police doing here! She wasn’t a suspect. She couldn’t be a suspect. It was never the spouse’s sister who did it. And what about Angele? Her heart raced. Had something happened to Angele?

She tried to smile, “Is there a problem?”
“No ma’am,” The officer pushed the door open wider. “May I come in?”
“Now isn’t a good time. Could you come back later?” Had Audrey said anything? How dare she threaten her and Angele! If she had…Mara would take that string of pearls she’d stolen from the apartment and strangle her with it. It wouldn’t be like it had been with William. She’d be able to do it. Wait…what had she done with those pearls? Were the things she’d taken from Audrey’s place still in her apartment? Her heart jammed inside her chest and she forced herself to breathe slowly. Don’t panic. Don’t panic. What was that phrase she had heard Audrey use—keep calm and carry on?

“This will just take a few minutes.” The officer stepped across the threshold, pushing Mara aside. “When was the last time you saw your sister?”
Mara gave a choked laugh. “My sister—you mean Audrey?”
“Yes ma’am.”
“Let’s see.” Mara looked around the room. “That would have to be at her wedding. It was a couple of years ago.” The wedding cake had been a carrot cake. Audrey had always had a weakness for carrot cake. Mara preferred chocolate, much richer. What had it said? To the happy couple, William and Audrey? Happily ever after William and Audrey?
“I see.” The officer’s face was closed off. “That’s a long time.”
“Can I ask what this is about?” Mara shifted from foot to foot.
“We’re investigating the death of her husband, William Mason. This is just routine.” Mara tried glaring. “You still haven’t caught the killer yet? It’s been a month.”
Patterson grimaced. “I had pneumonia. Had to give it a rest for a couple weeks.”
“Oh.” She relaxed her face. “Would you like something to drink?”
“No thank you. Were you close with your sister?”
“I’m afraid not.” Mara gave what she hoped was a sad smile. “We were five years apart and we had different interests. Now that William’s been...well you know… I’d like to reach out. I’m just not sure what to say.”

The officer smiled. “Yeah, I understand. My brother and I weren’t close until he divorced. I started coming over after work to watch the ball game. You a Giants fan?”

“Not really.”

“Some people like the A’s better.” Patterson shrugged. “Would you say she and her husband were happy?”

“I’m not really sure. Like I said, we didn’t have much contact. William seemed like a nice guy, though.” It was true. William gave to charity, volunteered at animal shelters. Why did he have to be such a fucking saint? Why couldn’t he have been an embezzler or a murderer or something? Mara blushed suddenly.

“Did they seem happy at the wedding?”

“Yes.” Her mouth was dry and her voice cracked a little. Where had she put those pearls! How did she not know where they had gone? She had secreted the details of William’s murder, of Audrey’s reaction, away for herself, like a squirrel gathering its cache for the winter. She shut her eyes and tried to focus on what she’d done with them.

“Are you okay ma’am?”

Mara forced another smile. “I’m just trying to remember if there’s anything I’m leaving out. Something that didn’t seem important at the time.”

“Don’t worry about it.” The officer reached into his pocket and pulled out a business card. “Just call if you think of anything.”

“Of course.” Mara took the card, moving to closer to the entryway.

“Thank you. And good luck with your sister.” The officer left, closing the door behind him.

Mara looked at the business card: Deputy Patterson, Marin County Sheriff’s Department. Slowly, methodically, she tore it into little strips. Now where had she put those pearls? She started to pace. If they were still here, she could get rid of them, flush them down the toilet or something. If they weren’t, then she already had. She looked everywhere, by her boxes, inside the fridge, she even underneath the mattress of the sofa bed. They were nowhere. She breathed out slowly, trying to unclench her jaw. A coke would help. She needed a coke—a coke and some of the cookie dough she’d been saving for an emergency. Then she could relax and go to bed.

Mara slept fitfully. Her eyes stared at the dark empty ceiling as she tried to unclench her shoulders. Had her mother ever stared at the ceiling like this? Had she ever felt guilty about what she’d done? She had gone where Mara couldn’t ask her and left Audrey behind to lie for her. Mara could almost feel the world spinning underneath her, getting ready to fling her off into the darkness. You’re foul, the walls whispered, rotting from the inside out.

What had that policeman been doing here? Had it really been just routine or had Audrey said something? Had she accused her or Angele of William’s murder? Nothing could happen to Angele. She had only been trying to help Mara. She shouldn’t be punished for that. Mara should check. Go and see Audrey. Make sure that Audrey knew Mara was invincible—that if she knocked her off the world Mara would drag her into the emptiness as well. Mara’s breathing eased a little. She would go and see Audrey, see her brushing her stray hair back over her forehead, see the little pucker her mouth made when she was anxious, see the...Mara scrunched up her face but couldn’t remember what she’d been thinking next. She crossed over the mini fridge and picked up a knife. She stroked the cold metal gently and laid it against her cheek. That
was better. Slowly, she started to replace it on the fridge top. She craned her neck to look out the
grimy bathroom window. Dawn was approaching, faint and blue over the sill.

The knife sliced through her thumb and she nearly dropped it. Blood welled up beneath
her skin and began to spill through the cut. She raised her hand to her mouth and began to suck
on it. Her cheeks puckered as she tasted the salt.

**Chapter Eight: Mara**

Mara crouched outside Audrey’s office building. Even though it was noon, the day hadn’t
started to warm up yet. She wrapped her coat and scarf around her and tried to ignore the wind
streaming through. In her pocket, she massaged the knife handle. This time, she would be able to
use it— for herself and for Angele. Angele would be so proud of her when she found out how
she had protected them. She wouldn’t be angry that Mara hadn’t killed William. She’d wrap
Mara in her arms and tell her how resourceful she’d been. Audrey could not be allowed to
speak. Audrey’s speech could be deadly. California was a death penalty state. Mara twitched. It
hadn’t used to be this way. There had been a time when Audrey’s speech, to CPS, to a teacher,
even to their father could have set her free.

She had even thought about asking Audrey, at their mother’s funeral, if their mother had
said anything about Mara. If she regretted what she’d done at all. But after Audrey’s eulogy,
Mara’s stomach had clenched up and she hadn’t been able to go anywhere near her. She’d stayed
by the buffet, cramming tartlets down her throat wishing she were anywhere else.

Mara sat down on the bench and crossed her arms, waiting for Audrey to come down the
street. She checked her watch; it was one o’clock. Audrey should be coming back from her lunch
break soon. Mara bounced her knee up and down. Why couldn’t Audrey just be here already?
What was she waiting for? A few minutes later Mara spotted her. Her dark hair flew up around
her face. She was arm in arm with one of her co-workers. They were wrapped around each other,
stepping in tandem. The co-worker had perfect silky hair, like Audrey’s. It was even a similar
shade of chestnut. They were slim and shiny, dressed in black pumps and tight fitting coats.
Audrey was laughing at something her co-worker said, her head thrown back as the light gilded
her throat. Mara gritted her teeth and crept closer. She walked behind them as they spoke. If she
tilted her head, she could just catch what they were saying. She held her breath
and sucked in

Audrey touched her co-worker’s arm. “So your brother pushed you down the stairs on his
skateboard?”

Her co-worker shrugged. “Yep. Brothers will be brothers.”

“I’m amazed you survived your childhood.”

“I got a concussion that day, but yes, I survived. I still tease him about it.”

“And you’re not resentful?” Audrey’s voice lowered.

Her co-worker flapped a hand. “Of course not. Don’t you have any siblings?”

“No, I’m an only child.”

Mara froze. Her face went numb and tingly. She raised a hand to her mouth, and then
lowered it. So that was what Audrey was telling people? That Mara didn’t exist. But she was
here. She was standing in the street, feeling the hard stone underneath her shoes, the wind
smacking her cheeks, the bite of the cut where she’d slashed her hand that morning. Her eyes
watered and she scrubbed them furiously with her coat sleeve. Her hand shook as she took off
her scarf. She hadn’t washed it at all since she owned it. It smelled of MacDonald’s.
She strode over to Audrey and tapped her on the shoulder. “You dropped this.”
Audrey edged backward. “No, that’s not mine.”
Mara shoved the scarf into Audrey’s hands. “Yes, it is.”
“No it isn’t,” Audrey let the scarf drop.
“I saw you drop it.” Mara searched Audrey’s face, waiting for her eyes to widen, for her mouth to flap open. So you thought you could dismiss me, did you? Audrey’s expression didn’t change.
“No. This is my scarf,” Audrey reached into her bag and pulled out a scarf. It looked like it was made of tissue paper. “See. It’s a Hermes.”
Mara pulled her hood down, letting Audrey see her whole face. “No, this scarf’s yours.”
Audrey’s coworker broke in. “I’m sorry. I have a presentation in ten. I have to run. It’s Martin. You know how he gets.” The co-worker rolled her eyes.
“Such a worrier.” Audrey flapped a hand.
The co-worker started to walk away. “I’ll see you later.”
Audrey turned. “Wait, I’m coming too.”
Mara latched onto Audrey’s wrist. She jerked her inwards and pressed the knife point against her stomach. Audrey gave a little gasp. Mara marched her to a nearby alley and peered into it. It was empty and the stores faced the other way. Mara’s pulse raced. So far it was okay, she was using the knife. “Don’t scream.”
“Okay,” Audrey whispered. They were so close Mara could almost feel Audrey’s heartbeat through her blouse.
“Shut up.”
“I’ll give you my money. You don’t have to do this. Do you want my scarf? It’s a Hermes.”
“Stop it.”
Audrey’s knees wobbled and she sank towards the street. Mara leaned into her, supporting her weight. “My money’s in my purse. Please take it and leave me alone.”
“Didn’t you hear what I said?” Mara snarled and almost dropped her.
“Yes.”
“Have you told them anything?”
“Told who anything?”
“The police.”
“No.” Audrey mouthed.
“No, sis.” Mara corrected her. She reached over and shook Audrey. Audrey’s head whipped backward and her teeth clicked together. Mara shook her again.
“I don’t have a sister.”
Mara lunged forward with the knife. She pulled the ends of the Hermes scarf tight around Audrey’s neck and pressed the blade to her jugular. It felt good. Her vision sharpened. Before she met Angele, she would never have dreamed of doing something like this. But watching Angele had showed her how good it could feel. Knives gave you power. What would happen if she cut Audrey? Would she suffer? What did suffering even look like? She would find out soon. Audrey spluttered. She clawed at the scarf with her fingernails. Mara cinched it tighter. “Yes you do.”
Audrey shook her head and kept pulling at the scarf. Mara flung her back across the cement. Audrey stumbled and fell. She tried to scream but couldn’t. She clutched her throat as Mara stalked towards her. “Say I’m your sister.”
“You’re my sister.”
“Now say you’re sorry.”
“I’m sorry.” Audrey could barely whisper. She scooted back across the cement as Mara advanced.

Mara looked down at her. Audrey’s eyes were vacant; she looked passed Mara without seeing her. What if…? Mara’s stomach dropped. It was possible, unbelievable, but possible. Could Audrey have gone to Angele too? How would she have even found out about her? Angele wouldn’t do that to Mara. Angele had sat down with Mara, had given her tea and cookies, listened as she told her story. She knew Mara wanted to be noticed so there was no way she would have helped Audrey forget her. Mara’s stomach plummeted. It was impossible. There was no way. None.

The last time they’d seen each other Audrey had almost broken her foot. This time she knelt down on the cobblestones, practically waiting for Mara to finish her off. Why was she so different? Had she had memories removed? It was out of the question. She cupped Audrey’s chin, pricking her throat with the blade.

“Wait’s my name?”
“I don’t know,” Audrey croaked. “Please, I don’t know.”
“You have three guesses.” Mara made a small cut on Audrey’s neck, the blood staining her pretty white skin.

“No.” Mara set her jaw. Audrey jerked backward, opening the cut wider. She screamed and clapped a hand over it, slicing her palm on the knife. Mara shuddered a little. It was more blood than she’d meant to draw. There was something about blood…Mara shook her head and pressed closer.

“Anne.”
“No.” Mara set her jaw. Audrey jerked backward, opening the cut wider. She screamed and clapped a hand over it, slicing her palm on the knife. Mara shuddered a little. It was more blood than she’d meant to draw. There was something about blood…Mara shook her head and pressed closer.

“Jane.”
“No.” Mara grabbed Audrey’s hair, bunching it in her fist.

“Danielle.”
“N—”

“Molly!” Audrey’s eyes were like dark windows.

“You heartless bitch.” Mara brought the knife down. It slashed through Audrey’s hair. Strands slid downwards onto her shoulders as she sobbed quietly. Mara shoved her away and she hit the street with a thud. Mara stood up. “If you tell the police, I’ll kill you.”

“Okay,” Audrey shifted her gaze up and to the right.

Mara lowered her voice. “You’re not the heroine here. You won’t be rescued. You’re not worth saving.”

“William—”

“Is dead. Serves you right for going to Angele.” Angele had done it. There was no other explanation. Had she not known who Audrey was? It couldn’t have been on purpose.

“Don’t know who Angele is. I don’t know anything. How do you know about William?”

“So you remember that?”

Audrey gaped. “My husband was brutally murdered. How could I ever forget?”

“Close your eyes and count to fifty.”

“Okay,” Audrey sniffled.

“You’re pathetic.” Mara shoved the knife back in her pocket and stalked out of the alleyway. She crossed her arms around herself, huddling against the chill. So Audrey hadn’t told
anything to the police. She hadn’t known there was anything to tell. Mara frowned. If Audrey had chosen to remember, maybe Mara would be on her way to jail right now, to sit out the rest of her life stuffed in a six by eight box. Instead, she was striding along the street with her eyes watering in the wind. No one knew she was an accessory to murder, no one knew she had a knife in her pocket. If they did, they would probably walk further away. She breathed in and willed herself to feel relieved. She inhaled a passerby’s cigarette smoke and gagged.

To Audrey she was dead; no, worse than dead. She had never been born. Audrey had gone to Angele and deliberately erased her. Mara curled her fist. Audrey was still lying. She still didn’t know the painful empty feeling in Mara’s stomach on the days she wasn’t fed, the days she could almost taste her own salvia. She didn’t know how she had carefully looked away from Mara when she’d eaten her morning cereal—coco puffs, fruit loops, and honey nut cheerios, all packaged in petite little boxes.

Mara paced further up the street. Her chest constricted with every step. Her breathing quickened and she took off her coat. She had done everything, everything, and still Audrey didn’t have to pay. She had found the loophole in the universe through which to escape Mara’s noose. Well then, Mara would just have to close the loophole. She would find Angele and ask her give back Audrey’s memories. Angele cared for Mara, enough to kill for her. Giving back Audrey’s memories would be no problem. It must have been a mistake. She couldn’t have known who Audrey was. Audrey must have tricked her. Bile rose in the back of Mara’s throat.

Chapter Nine: Mara:

The sun was sinking by the time she arrived at Angele’s. Mara could see its thin red rim in the distance. The house was half in shadow. She eased the gate bolt back and slid inside the fence. It was late, around five thirty; Angele would probably be home. The lawn was neatly mowed and there was a row of snowdrops planted beside the path up to the porch. Mara slid into the yard and around the back. For some reason, Angele liked using the back door for people she knew well. It didn’t make much sense to Mara, the front was so much nicer, but it was Angele’s house and she could do what she liked. The backyard was overgrown with blackberry bushes and the lawn all but disappeared into the dirt. There was a rusted swing set standing in one corner, left over from the previous owners. It creaked softly in the wind as Mara squished her way through the mud up to the house.

Mara pressed her hand to the doorknob. It was colder than she expected. She turned it and the door swung open. She called, “Angele.”

The hallway stretched out in front of her like a long moist throat. Mara squinted in the gloom. She couldn’t see very far ahead. Quietly, she eased herself inside. The door shut with a soft shudder. It was chillier than she remembered. Didn’t Angele have heating? “Angele, its Mara.”

Angele stepped forward out of the gloom. “Hi Mara. Why didn’t you tell me you were coming?”

“I need you to give Audrey her memories back.” Mara wrung her hands. “You had a woman come to you and you took some of her memories. You need to give them back. It’s really, really important.”

Angele raised her palm. “Slow down, dear. I can’t understand what you’re saying.”

“A woman came to you and you took some of her memories. I need you to give them back.”
“Calm down. It’s going to be fine. What woman was this?”
“Her name is Audrey Mason.”
“Oh, you mean Mrs. Mason.” Angele’s face fell. “You must be the sister. I’m so sorry. What she did was... I tried to talk her out of it but she wouldn’t listen.”
“That’s funny,” Mara snarled. Her breath hitched and she blinked rapidly. “Audrey’s great at listening. She just won’t do anything about what she hears.”
“I know. I’ve seen her memories, you poor thing. No wonder you wanted to hurt her. She was even worse than you told me.” Angele moved forward and put a hand on Mara’s arm. “Why don’t you come upstairs? I can fix you a cup of tea and we can figure this out.”
“Ok.” Mara exhaled. Angele would fix this. Angele was great at fixing things. Her own mother broke things: dishes, an heirloom vase, her children. But Angele fixed them. Angele stepped in closer and took Mara’s hand. She led her to the living room. This time the room was dark. Mara bumped her shin on the coffee table. “Shit.”
“I’m sorry. Here, let me turn on the light.” Angele leaned forward and flicked on the lamp. It gilded the center of the room but left the rest in shadow. The room felt smaller to Mara than it had the last time she had been there. Angele had added a couple of doilies to the coffee table. Mara reached out and ran the linen through her fingers.
“This is beautiful—”
“Please don’t touch that. You’ll get it dirty.” Angele took the doily.
Mara blushed. “Sorry.”
“No problem, sweetie. It’s just that your hands are smudged and I want to keep the doilies pretty for my other guests. You understand.” Angele laced her fingers together. “Now, you wanted me to return Mrs. Mason’s memories of you? Is that what the issue is?”
“Yes.”
“I’m afraid I can’t.”
“What do you mean?” Mara’s heart dropped into her stomach. Was Angele punishing her for not killing William? She couldn’t be; Angele cared for her. She would fix this. She had to fix this. Audrey had tricked her but now Angele knew the truth everything would be okay again. Angele had killed Audrey’s husband. She had killed him for Mara. She couldn’t possibly be on Audrey’s side.
“I mean that I can’t return Mrs. Mason’s memories. They’re mine now.”
“What do you mean they’re yours?” Mara’s gut twisted. Killing William had made Angele happy.
Angele smiled. “Well, this house is mine. That doily is mine. Mrs. Mason’s memories are mine. You see?”
“Are you sure?”
“Yes, the only way you or your sister could get your memories back is if I was badly hurt. Or dead. And you don’t want that. Do you, dear?”
“No, I don’t.” This couldn’t be happening. Angele had squeezed her shoulder when she was feeling tense; she had told her how glad she was that Mara had come into her life. Angele would not deny this. Maybe she didn’t understand how badly she needed it, how the need filled her chest and made her tingle all over. “I still don’t understand.”
Angele leaned forward, her eyes shining. Mara’s vision blurred. She inhaled Angele’s vanilla lotion. Little lights sparkled in front of her eyes. The room shifted, only Angele stayed centered. “Then will you let me show you?”
“Ok.”
“If you’ll just take my hand again…”

“Of course.” Mara gave Angele her hand and the world went completely white.

She was thirteen again, at Nordstrom. Her mother had promised to get her a bra for her birthday since “she was so fat her tits were showing.” She wanted one of the lacy pink ones, like Audrey had. Maybe if she was good and asked politely her mother would get her one. Most of the other girls at school had nice bras.

The lights glared down at her as she walked slowly down the aisle. She stuck as close to her mother as she could. She’d hadn’t been here in ages; mostly, she just wore Audrey’s hand me downs. There were so many clothes.

Her mother grabbed a plain tan bra off the rack and threw it at Mara. “Here, try this on.”

“Could I try this one instead?” Mara held up a pink bra.

“No.” Her mother didn’t even look at her.

“Why not?”

“I said so.”

“Could I try on both? Please.” Mara widened her eyes to make them look cuter. One of the other kids at school, one of the popular girls, said this worked on her mother all the time. She told the class she’d once gotten her mother to buy her a cell phone and a pink rhinestone case for it using only her wide eyed expression.

“No. You’re not pretty enough.”

Mara started to tear up. She turned away so her mother wouldn’t see. The dressing room door slammed as she pulled it shut behind her. She slid her arms through the bra straps, hoping it wouldn’t fit. She reached back behind her to do up the clasp and it slipped through her fingers. Why did they make them so small? Leaning way over, she tried again, and again. Her heart started to race. What if she never figured it out? What if she spent the rest of her life in this dressing room because she couldn’t get her bra on? Her mother would be so angry. The other middle school girls managed to get their bras on. Why couldn’t she?

“Hurry up,” her mother wrapped on the door.

“I can’t get it on,” Mara whispered.

Her mother’s voice was sugared, like a sweet that would make Mara throw up later. “What was that? I can’t hear you.”

“I can’t get it on.”

“Louder.”

“I can’t get it on.”

“Louder. Tell the whole store you can’t get your bra on.”

“I can’t get my bra on.” Mara’s chest heaved and tears rolled down her face.

“Then I guess we’ll have to stay here until you do.”

It took her at least four more tries. In the end, she did the bra clasp in the front then turned it around. Why hadn’t she thought of that sooner? “It’s on.”

Her mother opened the door and gave her a brief look. “It fits. Put your shirt on and let’s go.”

Mara shuffled out of the dressing room. Her face flushed. She wanted to go back inside and hide until everyone left. They were probably all looking at her, wondering who the stupid girl was who couldn’t even put her bra on. She tucked her head down so she couldn’t see them as she followed her mother out of the store. She dug her nails into her palms, letting their sharpness distract her as she trudged behind her mother to the car.
Mara opened her eyes. Her head was spinning. The lamp light beat down on her half closed lids. There was something wrong inside her. She couldn’t have seen this. People didn’t relive their memories because a woman touched their hand. She breathed faster. They didn’t forget things that way either, and yet she had. Something lurched and she gagged. The wrongness hovered in the room, hanging between her and Angele.

Angele smiled, “Do you see now?”

“See what?”

Angele leaned in closer. “How badly you wanted that pink bra. And that it was impossible for you to get it. Your mother was right, you just aren’t pretty enough.”

“That’s not true.” Mara recoiled. This was like getting the wind knocked out of her. Her eyes watered. Why was Angele doing this?

“Really?” Angele reached behind her and pulled out a small hand mirror. She pressed it into Mara’s hand. “Look at yourself. Pretty girls have doe eyes and soft lips. Their hair smells like floral shampoo. Your eyes are beady and your lips are too thin. Your hair…”

Angele raised her brows. “You already know what your hair looks like.”

Mara studied herself in the mirror. Her eyes were beady. She sniffed her hair. It smelt like stale cigarettes and it was definitely too oily to ever be pretty or even just okay. It was ugly.

“Stop it.” Mara tried to look Angele in the eye but couldn’t. It was like Angele had taken a knife and stabbed it into her stomach, driven it in all the way to the hilt. Was this what William had felt when he’d seen Angele’s face, beaming down at him after she’d plunged the blade into his sternum?

“You were so revolted with yourself you decided to give yourself away. And now I own you.”

Mara’s voice was so quiet she could barely hear it. “I wasn’t revolted.”

“You still are.” Angele reached up a hand as if to stroke Mara’s cheek. Mara jerked backward. “Don’t touch me.”

Angele dropped her hand. “I don’t have to. I already know how disgusting you are, how thick and blubbery your skin feels, the way your thighs jiggle when you walk.”

“That’s not—”

“You’re like a ball of yarn. I pulled on one end and you unraveled. I pulled harder and you kept unraveling. Eventually, I reached the center and discovered there was nothing there at all.”

“You can’t know that.”

“I do. You gave me a memory and now I can see the rest, not that there’s much to see. I thought you would be more flavorful but you’re just bitter, like a copper penny.” Angele shrugged.

“How is that possible?”

Angele smiled. “I’ve wondered that myself; how I could devour so much and still have room for more. I should be full by now but I’m nowhere near.”

Mara felt nauseous. What had she gotten herself into? “I’m—”

Angele leaned forward and whispered, “Do know my father was afraid of me? He cringed every time he saw me. If I walked into a room, he’d leave. He should have been, after what happened to my mother.”

Mara got up slowly from her chair. Her head still spun. Angele had killed William. What would she do to her? “I’m leaving now.”

“No you’re not. You’re almost used up.”
A thin line of spittle trickled from the corner of Mara’s mouth. “Shows what you know.”
“You’ve already started to forget things haven’t you—your father’s birthday, the name of
your sister’s pet rabbit, where you put the pearls.”
“You!”
“You’ll keep misplacing things: the Stefano’s phone number, the keys to your apartment.
After that, you’ll forget where you are and what you’re doing. In the end, you’ll choke because
you can’t remember how to swallow.”
“What did you do to me!?” Mara spluttered. Angele didn’t care for her at all. The tea, the
cookies, the reassuring caresses, those had all been lies. Mara fell back and sprawled in her chair.
She couldn’t keep her balance; the floor was slipping out beneath her.
“I didn’t do anything. It was all your idea. You came to me—remember?”
“You tricked me! I didn’t know that it would…”
“You never asked. You’ll forget everything, even your name. If it makes you feel better,
it will happen to Audrey too.”
“I know my name.”
“For now. In the meantime, you’ll fade slowly—like a wilting flower. Like the lilies on
your sister’s porch. I think I’d like to watch.” Angele reached for Mara’s chin and tilted it up to
meet her gaze. Her eyes were fever bright. They bulged like an insect’s.
“No. I’m leaving.” Mara grabbed for the wall and missed.
“No, you’re not.” Angele grasped Mara’s wrist and Mara’s world collapsed, going white
again.
She was five, lying tucked under Audrey’s arm. Audrey was reading to her: “I’ll get you
my pretty and your little dog too!” Audrey dropped the book and tickled Mara. Mara shrieked.
“You be quiet up there!” Their mother called up the stairs. “Audrey, honey, we’re going
to be late for your recital.” Audrey pushed Mara away...

From the Case Notes of Deputy Patterson

Mara Mason, Background:

Age: 25
Height: 5 ‘4’
Weight: 140 IBs.
Ethnicity: White

Arrest Record: Three parking tickets. No criminal record, violent or otherwise.

Employment History: Worked at Jack in the Box until six months ago, unemployed ever
since. Why did she quit? Moved to Marin City six months ago also. Landlord says she’s
late with her rent. What has she been doing for the past six months if not working? Did
she try to rob her sister’s house to get money? William’s death = robbery gone bad?
Doesn’t make sense. William was asleep when killed. Why would she choose to rob the
only room with a person in it?

Education: A semester and a half at Sonoma State College.

Why is Mrs. Mason afraid of her? Was she blackmailing her? Was that what Mrs. Mason
wanted to tell me about? No, she was lying when she said it wasn’t about William’s case.
Was her sister blackmailing her for killing William? Did the sister even meet William? No reason to kill a guy you haven’t even met. Unless it’s to get to someone else. Does she have some kind of issue with her sister? She lied during our conversation. She kept looking away from me.

To Do

1. Get warrant for sister’s fingerprints. See if they match the one on the door key.
2. Talk to Mrs. Mason again.
3. Send another Patrol car by Mrs. Mason’s house. See if they notice anything unusual.
4. Find out who the woman was that Mrs. Mason mentioned along with her sister.

Patterson shifted into drive and pulled away from the sister’s house. The sister wasn’t what he’d thought she’d be. He’d expected someone thinner, prettier. The sister looked…sloppy. No one would ever say Mrs. Mason was sloppy. Controlling yes, tight-assed yes, sloppy no. Were siblings usually alike? He’d been an only child. His brother hadn’t gotten a divorce. He had. On the weekends or after work he’d crack open a beer and watch the game; that much was true. Only these days, after work was becoming nine or ten at night. So much for the day shift. Last week one of the older deputies had taken him aside and given him the you-can’t-solve-them all speech. It was a good speech. But it didn’t stop him grinding his teeth at night. His dentist said he would have to get a special retainer. Stupid fucking pneumonia. If he hadn’t been sick he would probably be…where he was now.

It was an unusual case. All his suspects were women. Women didn’t kill people. Well, ninety percent of the time they didn’t. Patterson exhaled. He’d been bound to run into a female murderer eventually. What kind of women took a slicing knife and stabbed a defenseless man with it? Neither Mrs. Mason nor her sister really fit. Patterson couldn’t picture Mrs. Mason getting her hands dirty. She might hire somebody to kill a guy but he didn’t think she’d do it herself. Unless she had him completely fooled. Could she have hired someone to kill Mr. Mason? If she had, she probably would have a better alibi. She paid attention to details. The sister…he didn’t know as much about her. She slumped and rarely looked him in the eye. She carried herself like a victim. She was fragile. That was the one thing she had in common with Mrs. Mason. They were both fragile. He shivered a little. Sometimes fragile people snapped. And all hell broke loose when they did.

Chapter Ten: Audrey

Audrey staggered out of the alleyway, clutching her throat. The woman who attacked her was nowhere to be seen. What was she, schizophrenic? Audrey stumbled over to a bench and threw herself down on it. Her fingers shook as she dialed 911.

“911, please state your emergency.”

“I was attacked.” Audrey looked around her. There was still no sign of the woman. Cupping the phone to her ear, she stood up and walked quickly to her office building. “There was this crazy woman. She threatened to kill me.”

“Is this a crime in progress?”

“It just happened, a couple minutes ago.” Audrey shivered then wrenched open her office door, stepping quickly inside. “Hurry or she’ll get away.”

“I have a patrol car on route. What is your location?”
Audrey gritted her teeth. “I’m in 36 Mitchell Blvd, San Rafael. It happened in an alley nearby. I don’t know what it’s called. There’s a green bench in front of it. Don’t worry about me. Just get her.”

“Can you describe the suspect? What was she wearing?”
“She had on this ratty hoody and jeans. I think the hoodie was gray. She had brown hair.”
“Ethnicity?”
“White.” Audrey caught sight of herself in the glass door. Her hair was tangled and her makeup was smudged. One of her pumps was cracked and her slacks were ripped. There was a red rim around her throat where the woman had tried to strangle her. The cut on her neck started to throb. Audrey felt it gingerly then moved her hand upwards to the place where the woman had sliced her hair. She swallowed.

“Any distinguishing features, scars, birthmarks, anything?”
“No.” Audrey held the phone with her shoulder as she rearranged her clothing and fished in her purse for a baby wipe. She dabbed at her face, trying to get all the makeup off. She couldn’t come back to work with mascara running down her cheeks. People in the lobby were already staring at her. Why hadn’t she worn waterproof?

“Height?”
“She was short, maybe 5’3’, 5’4.’”
“Eye color?”
“Blue.” The woman’s eyes had been light blue, like hers. Had the woman been attracted to her by some kind of freak resemblance? “She said she was my sister. She must have been off her meds.”

“Are you injured?”
“I have a cut on my neck and some bruising around my throat.” There were bloodstains on her Hermes scarf, like the ones on the sheets when William had died. Audrey bit her lip. She couldn’t bleach the scarf; it wasn’t white. And besides, you didn’t bleach a three hundred dollar Hermes scarf.

“You need to go to the hospital, get those checked out. A patrol car will be with you soon. Can I have your name?”
“Audrey Mason.”
“Audrey Mason? As in the Audrey Mason whose husband was just killed?”
Audrey crossed her arms around herself. “Yes. How did you know that?”
“I saw it on the news. So your husband is killed and a month later you’re attacked?”
“Yes.” Audrey raised her voice.
“Was anything taken?”
“Which time?”
“Now.”
“No. She just threatened me.”
“Okay ma’am. Just sit tight and an officer will be right with you. Is there anything else you need?”
“No.” Audrey paused, shifting from foot to foot. “Should I go to a hotel tonight? Would that be safer?”
“I doubt they know where you live, unless this wasn’t random.” The dispatcher paused.
“Of course it was random. Do you think I go out of my way trying to attract lunatics like that?!”
“Calm down ma’am. You can go to a hotel if it makes you feel safer but you should be fine. We’ll send an officer to drive by your place tonight.”

“Thank you.” Audrey exhaled.

“I’m going to hang up, ma’am. The patrol officer should be with you momentarily.”

“Fine.” Audrey hung up.

It was past eight o’clock when Audrey finally arrived home. She gripped her keys between her fingers as she walked from the garage to her porch. She’d heard somewhere that this was good for self-defense, handy for walking in deserted parking garages or through your own front door. She winced. She crossed the threshold, pulling the door tight shut behind her and locking it. She hurried over to the light and turned it on. That was better.

The room was familiar, comforting. Although she’d put a few of William’s things away, the room stayed mostly the same as it had when they’d lived in it together. His thrillers were still on the antique bookshelf they’d received as a wedding gift. The cherry blossom fan she’d picked up in China Town was still on the wall. She knew she’d bought it but she couldn’t remember when. Or maybe William had gotten it for her? His mountaineering magazines were piled on the desk. He’d wanted to take her rock climbing but she’d always said no. No way was she dangling fifty feet up a cliff. She picked up one of the magazines and ran a finger over its glossy cover. She’d forgotten to cancel the subscription so one had arrived for this month too. She should probably do that soon. It didn’t make sense to pay for magazines that no one would read. She’d get around to it in a little while, maybe that weekend.

She flung herself down on the sofa bed next to the coffee table. There was a letter on the table with her name written but she hadn’t read it yet. Work was busy at the moment and when she came home she never seemed to have much energy. With a small sigh, she reached for the letter. It probably wasn’t important, most likely another condolence card. She opened it anyway.

Dear Me,

The letter read. Audrey leaned back a little. Was that her handwriting? It looked like her handwriting. The words blurred a little.

You need leave the Bay Area. There’s someone here who wants to hurt you. This person is dangerous and they won’t stop. Change your name if you have to; get as far away as you can. Don’t use the courthouses. It’s too easy to find you that way. I know this sounds crazy but you have to trust me.

You can have a fresh start. William would have wanted that for you. He loved you. He would have wanted you to be happy and you can’t be happy in Marin.

Good Luck,

Mrs. Audrey Mason

Audrey reread the letter. It didn’t make sense. Why would she need to drop everything and leave the county? It definitely looked like her handwriting though. It said it was from her, the writing was similar, and yet she hadn’t written it. She couldn’t have. She would have remembered writing a letter like that. But if she hadn’t, who had? Goosebumps ran up her back. When had she first received it? It had been a few days. Was it last Saturday? Last Sunday? No, the mail didn’t come on Sundays.

The writer was right about one thing though: it sounded crazy. She was due for a promotion at work, provided she started performing like her old self, and a substantial pay raise. She owned a nice two story house in Sausalito, on the hillside overlooking the waterfront, perfect for raising a family. Her chest squeezed. True, she didn’t like to go upstairs because William had died there but the downstairs was still usable. It wasn’t the time to sell; it was a buyer’s
market. That’s why she and William had bought when they had. Her network was here; her friends were here. And yet…

Audrey froze. Just days after the letter had arrived she had been attacked. A madwoman had assaulted her on her way back from lunch, claiming to be her sister. Was this who the letter had warned her about? No, it couldn’t be. She would have remembered someone like that. The woman had been greasy, with hair that smelt like cigarettes. She had dressed like a homeless person. It had to be a coincidence. She’d didn’t even have a sister. She’d wanted one, someone she could play dolls with and practice braiding on, but her parents had split up before they could have a second child. Neither had remarried.

The doorbell rang and she jumped, stumbling backward and banging her heel on the coat rack. She gripped her keys tightly in her hand as she advanced toward the peep hole. She peered out and saw a policeman’s uniform with a deputy’s badge attached. She opened the door slowly, craning her neck around the doorjamb.

“Hello?”

“Audrey, this is Deputy Patterson. Can I come in?”

“Yes.” She stepped back, opening the door wider. Of course! Patterson had told her he would come to give her an update. When had that been? Two weeks ago, three weeks ago? She’d lost track.

“I heard about what happened. I’m sorry.” Patterson removed his jacket and hung it on the coat rack next to William’s Giant’s cap. “Are you okay?”

Audrey smoothed her blouse. “I’m fine, just a few bruises.”

“The dispatcher told me there was a cut too. Can I take a look?”

Audrey pulled the neck of her blouse down and exposed the puffy red line.

“Ouch.”

“I was lucky. I’m still alive. She was crazy. She thought she was my sister.”

Patterson held up a hand. “Just a minute, are you saying your sister attacked you?”

“No. I don’t have a sister.”

“Yes, you do. You called me about her two weeks ago.”

“No, I didn’t. I’m an only child. I can’t have called you about a sister I don’t have.”

Patterson had to be mistaken. The closest she’d come to having a sister was her pet rabbit, Miss Whiskers, and she’d been taken to an animal shelter a year after Audrey had gotten her. Audrey’s stomach squirmed. Her mother hadn’t liked pets.

Patterson took a step forward. “I looked her up after we spoke. Her name is Mara Woodley. She worked at Jack in the Box until six months ago when she moved to Marin City. You definitely have a sister.”

Had Patterson gotten the records confused? Did he assume they were sisters because the woman had Audrey’s maiden name? “I think you must have looked something up incorrectly.”

“No, I didn’t. You called me two weeks ago about something your sister did. Something you were scared to tell me.”

“That’s not true.” Ever since Audrey was five she had wanted a sister; someone she could confide in, someone to share the burden of her mother’s helicopter parenting. Most of her friends had siblings. She had always sympathized with them when they complained but inwardly rolled her eyes. They didn’t know how good they had it.

“Audrey, I want to help you but you have to be honest with me. I can’t do anything if I don’t know what’s going on.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Audrey’s voice rose.
Patterson’s brows lowered and he stepped in close to Audrey. “Your husband was stabbed. You were almost killed this afternoon. You need to tell the truth.”
“I am telling the truth!” Audrey stepped backward.
Patterson shook his head. “No, you’re not.”
“Here, look at this.” Audrey snatched the letter off the coffee table and thrust it into Patterson’s hand. “I wrote this and I can’t remember why. Either that or someone else wrote it and sent it to me.”
Patterson read the letter silently and then looked up at Audrey. “You wrote a letter to yourself saying you needed to leave Marin but you didn’t say who was after you or why. And now you can’t remember writing the letter?”
Audrey deflated. “Yes.”
“When did this letter arrive?”
Audrey’s heart clenched. “I can’t remember.”
Patterson looked her up and down, and then tucked the letter in his uniform pocket. “Can I keep this?”
“Yes.”
“Keep your doors locked and don’t go places alone. Stay in at night. You should get a burglar alarm.”
“Yes, I will. Isn’t there anything you can do?”
“Not until you’re ready to be honest. You still have my card, right?”
“I am being honest! Why don’t you believe me?!” Audrey shrieked. She put a hand over her mouth and blushed. “I’m sorry. That was uncalled for.”
“Don’t worry about it. Just let me know if you need anything. Do you have anyone who can stay with you?”
Audrey shook her head. “No.”
“Good night then, Audrey. Be careful.” Patterson left, closing the door behind him.
Audrey locked it and placed a chair under the knob. It had been only a few days ago that she’d convinced herself it was okay to stop putting chairs in front of the doors. Now she was back to square one. If only she hadn’t been attacked by a lunatic claiming to be her sister—a sister that Patterson argued existed. Audrey stiffened. Patterson said he had checked the records and found that she’d had a sister. That she herself had called him saying her sister had done something. Why would she have done that and why didn’t she remember it? Her gut twisted. She’d been under a lot of stress lately. She’d taken two weeks off work to arrange the funeral and now she had to catch up. Had she just forgotten the phone call because she was busy? But then why had she made it in the first place?
Audrey sat very still and tried not to hyperventilate. Her behavior lately hadn’t been exactly normal. She used chairs to block the doors. She rarely ever slept through the night. She’d wake up in a cold sweat, flying upward off the pillows with a scream, but could never remember what she had dreamed. She was always twitching, distracted in meetings. If she heard someone walking behind her, she had to look back over her shoulder, just to make sure they weren’t following her. She forgot her keys on the stand by the door almost every morning and had to go back for them. Sometimes, she’d look up from her work and not remember if she was at the office or at home. Cubicle walls meant office; the rug with purple flowers on it meant home.
Was this natural grieving behavior? She should ask someone. But who? She hadn’t spoken to most of her friends outside work since William’s funeral. Besides, how would they know? She could try asking June. June had lost her baby. But whenever anyone brought it up,
even if it was just to say how well she was coping, June would claim she couldn’t remember. Audrey bit her lip. She could try Patterson. But he already thought she wasn’t being truthful. She could try a therapist or something. Audrey started to breathe faster. A therapist was out of the question. Who knows what she’d be talked into admitting? Her childhood hadn’t been like everyone else’s. Most little girls didn’t have mothers who stood over their piano practice and rapped them on the head with a pencil every time they hit a wrong note. Most mothers didn’t discourage their daughters from having other children over because they were messy. Audrey hadn’t had a single playdate until she was six years old. Maybe that was why she’d wanted a sister so badly. Her gut squirmed. A month or so before William had died, she’d told June about the missing playdates. “Really?” June had gaped: “No playdates until you were six!”

Audrey didn’t need any more looks like that.

Who else was there? She could ask her father. He would definitely know if she had a sister. She winced a little. The last time she’d spoken to him was at her mother’s funeral. When she’d heard he was coming, she’d offered him the chance to give a eulogy but he’d declined. The funeral had been open casket. Another Hermes scarf covered up the hole in her throat her mother had used to breathe during her last months. Her father had hung around the fringes of the crowd for the entire service. When it had ended, he had marched up to the casket and taken a swift look inside it, as though he was checking to make sure her mother was really dead. No, she would not ask her father for answers.

She was overreacting. She had to be. Tomorrow, she would go into work and finish her design for the company Facebook. Patterson would catch whoever it was who wanted to hurt her and then she could go back to normal. In the meantime, she would stay close to home and not go out at night, as Patterson had suggested. It wasn’t like she had much of a social life anyway. She hadn’t even been to after work happy hour in a month. Her mouth twisted. Had it really been that long since she’d had a night out? Maybe she should try to do something; she didn’t want to turn into a hermit. After all, Thanksgiving was coming up. It wouldn’t do to spend that one alone. She could ask June if she could spend it with her and her husband, offer to bring something. She wasn’t much of a cook but she could always stop by Whole Foods. She would ask June if she could come for Thanksgiving and leave finding the answers to Patterson. Surely, some confusion following the death of a loved one was natural; it would pass soon enough and then she could go back to normal. Keep calm and carry on, Audrey told herself, keep calm and carry on.

Chapter Eleven: Audrey

Audrey dressed carefully for work the next morning. Her bruises couldn’t show. She didn’t want to have to face her colleagues’ sidelong glances or their whispers when they thought she wasn’t paying attention, “Where’d she get those bruises? There was a big commotion yesterday…I wonder if?” Audrey clenched her teeth. It was better to look as though nothing had happened. She selected a long sleeved white blouse and plain dark slacks. Good, the bruises on her arms and neck were hidden. There wasn’t much she could do about her missing hair though. She would have to conceal it with a hat and make an appointment with her stylist for the weekend. The cut on her neck was just visible, peeking up above the collar of her blouse. She’d need a scarf to cover it. She shivered. The scarf she’d worn yesterday had been one of her favorites but she didn’t want to wear it again. She didn’t think she’d want to wear that scarf for a long time. Besides, it had blood on it.
Work was sluggish. There was plenty to do but she couldn’t force herself to get started. She glanced at the clock, 10:15. How was it only 10:15? She had to have been here longer than that. She would ask June about Thanksgiving at lunch. Her stomach tightened a little. What if June had something special planned with her family? What if she wasn’t even hosting? Then June would have to ask the host if Audrey could join them. She imagined June saying, “I’m sorry to impose but my friend just lost her husband…”

Audrey pulled out her chair. She couldn’t stand it anymore. She would go over and ask June now. She stretched a little as she stood up and began walking to June’s desk. It was empty. Audrey raised her eyebrows. What was June doing away from her desk at 10:15 in the morning? It was too late for her to be getting her tea from the break room and too early for lunch. Besides, she and June usually got lunch together. They’d walk over to the Redwood Café and split a Greek salad. June would gossip about their clients and dissect the latest developments in Prince William and Kate Middleton’s relationship. For the most part, Audrey would listen. It was nice, just sitting there with the sun on her legs, being carried along by June’s chatter.

Only lately, June had been quieter. She’d lose track of her words midsentence and Audrey would have to prompt her. Audrey leaned over June’s neighbor, Martin. “Do you know where June is?”

He turned around in his seat and looked up at her. “I haven’t seen her since she went to get her tea. We have a meeting with Carter this morning. I hope she hasn’t forgotten.”

“June wouldn’t forget that.”

“She’s been pretty distracted lately.” Martin bounced his knee up and down.

“No she hasn’t.” Audrey’s stomach twisted.

Martin opened his mouth, about to say something, and Audrey put up a hand to stop him. “I’m sure everything’s fine. I’ll just go and see what’s keeping her.”

Audrey hurried down the hall to the break room. The sooner she asked about Thanksgiving, the sooner she could get back to work, the sooner her stomach would unknot. The break room door was open and June was inside. June was making a pot of coffee and her eyes were glazing over. The pot was overflowing, spilling boiling liquid over the counter, but June just stood there. Audrey walked over and shook her shoulder. “June! Hey June!”

June blinked her eyes. “What?”

“The coffee pot’s spilling.”

June looked at the coffee pot and then back at Audrey. “Yeah, I guess it is.”

Audrey reached over and turned off the coffee pot. She snatched some paper towels from the roll and began to mop up the spill. June still just stood there. “Do you want to help me with this?”

“No, not really.” June stared at the opposite wall.

Audrey moved in closer to June, bending a little so that she was eye to eye with her. “Are you okay? You don’t even drink coffee.”

“I don’t?”

“No, you don’t.” Audrey led June away from the counter and sat her down in one of the chairs. She would finish cleaning up the spill later. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’m great. Never better since I met with Angele.”

Angele, Audrey recognized that name from somewhere. She furrowed her brow. Hadn’t June recommended she meet with someone called Angele? “Yeah, didn’t you tell me to go see her?”
“Um hmm.” June nodded and smiled. “I’ve been recommending her to everyone I meet. She’s absolutely amazing. Here, I have her card.”

June pressed the card into Audrey’s hand: Angele, erasure of painful recollections. Audrey’s spine tingled. “What exactly does this woman do?”

June shrugged. “She fixed me. I had a missing piece, or was it a broken piece? And she fixed it. I don’t remember much.”

“What do you mean you don’t remember?” Audrey’s heart started to beat faster. June was sweet, trusting. She’d once bought a facial cleanser online that turned out to be flour mixed with water and salt. Even though she worked in PR, she believed still advertisements. Had this woman done something to June?

“I mean I don’t remember.”

June had been distracted lately, like her. They had both lost loved ones. June had lost her baby and Audrey had lost William. It was normal to be confused while grieving, but forgetting things? Was it really normal to think someone was amazing without remembering them? For that matter, was it normal to not remember if you were in your office or at home? Audrey’s chest tightened. Had she gone to this woman as well? She raised her voice and leaned in closer to June. “Think!”

“What for?” June shrugged.

Audrey took a deep breath. “I’m asking you as my friend to try and remember this woman. I’m worried about you. You were just standing there watching the coffee pot overflow. I think this woman may have hurt you.”

June blushed. “Hang on. Before we go any further, I have to ask. What was your name again?”

“My name?”

“Yeah. I’m really bad with names. It’s nothing personal.”

“June, it’s me. We’ve worked together for the past three years.” Audrey’s mouth dropped open. Please, please, please, let this be a mistake. Was June playing a joke on her? She looked June up and down. Her eyes weren’t sparkling. She wasn’t trying to hide a smile.

“Have we?”

Audrey put a hand on June’s shoulder. “Yes, we have.”

June brushed off Audrey’s hand. “So what was your name again?”

“It’s Audrey. You’re the one who hired me. You don’t remember that?”

“No, I don’t.” June scooted her chair away from Audrey.

“You introduced me to my favorite drink, pink martini with a twist. And then to the band, Pink Martini. We laughed about it. Are you sure you don’t remember?”

“No, I don’t.” June scooted away even farther. “Have you seen a doctor recently?”

“What? No.”

“Maybe you should consider it.” June got up from her chair and started walking away. Audrey grabbed June’s shoulder and swung her around. She raised her voice. “I’m not the one with the problem! You’re the one with the problem. I’m not—” She broke off.

June backed away even faster. “There’s medication for this, Prozac or something. A friend of mine was on it and it really helped her. But if you don’t leave, I’m going to have to call security.”

“Call security! I work here!” Audrey shrieked.

Martin entered the room. His hair was mussed and there were sweat stains under his armpits. “What’s going on? Why are you being so loud?”
“It’s June. She…She can’t.” Audrey flung a hand towards June. Martin looked around. “Why is there coffee everywhere?”

“June spilled it.”

June looked at the coffee, puzzled. “No I didn’t.”

“Yes you—” Audrey broke off again. “Never mind.” Martin checked his watch and then looked at June. “We’re three minutes late to our meeting. Are you ready now?”

“Meeting?” June raised an eyebrow. “I guess, sure. Why not?”

“Okay then.” Martin left and June followed him.

Audrey sat down heavily in the chair June had vacated. She put her head in her hands and tried to think: shit, shit, shit. Was June crazy or was she crazy? She shook her head. Everyone else remembered her. It had to be June. But if it was June, then wouldn’t it be her too, eventually? Had this Angele woman done something to them both? Had she even met with Angele? She sucked on her tongue and tried to remember. She thought she’d met with Angele but she wasn’t sure. It might have happened. She had been forgetting a lot of things lately: where she’d put William’s mug when she’d taken it off the coffee table, where she’d put her keys, where she was. She winced. Most people, even grieving people, knew where they were. What had this Angele done to them?

Her heart gave a jolt and she sat bolt upright. She didn’t have a sister, but Patterson thought she did. What if she had just forgotten? She pressed her lips together and tried not to whimper. How did you forget your own sister? She’d wanted a sister since she was five years old. She’d begged so hard for one that her parents had gotten her a life size American Girl doll for Christmas instead. She couldn’t have hallucinated that. The coffee was still dripping off the counter and on to the floor, falling to the linoleum with soft plops. She massaged her temples. Where could she find out, without a doubt, if she had a sister?

She could ask her parents. They had to know if they’d had two children or one. Her mother was dead, so that left her father. She clenched her teeth. She imagined how that conversation would go, “You don’t know if you have a sister? And you drove all the way up here to ask me. Of course you do/do not have a sister. Was this really necessary?” No, she didn’t want to ask him. He’d think it was a waste of time and he’d be right. He hadn’t even come to William’s funeral.

Audrey twitched and gave a small shiver, snapping upright again. If she had forgotten a sister, who else could she forget? Could she forget William? Her stomach dropped. No, not William, never William. She pursed her lips and tried to think of him: the way his mouth dimpled when he smiled, the way he’d remembered to get her white chocolate on Valentine’s Day because that was her favorite. She exhaled. Good, he was still there. But for how long? Would there be a time when she forgot how he took his coffee, black with an extra shot of expresso? How he grumbled and pretended to be asleep when she tried to wake him up in the morning to say goodbye before work? She couldn’t forget William. William was her white knight, complete with thick wavy hair. If she forgot William, she would be alone. It would be just her and the gaping black maw upstairs. If there was a chance she could forget William…then she had to talk to her father or to that Angele woman.

Her father lived in Forestville, Sonoma—a miniscule town off a two lane highway. She’d seen his apartment once, when he’d moved in. The paint was faded and the windows were grimy. Audrey had suggested hiring someone to clean them, had even offered to pay, but her father said he liked it just fine the way it was. The outside walls were a pale yellow and the walk
was paved in concrete. Occasional weeds poked through and there were a few cigarette butts thrown off to the side. She didn’t know why he had an apartment here in the first place. When they were children he’d lived in a waterfront loft in San Francisco. What had possessed him to move to a small apartment in Novato where the only water was the small over chlorinated pool by the side of the path? True, her mother had paid for the loft. She had said that she didn’t want her children visiting a slum on the weekends.

Audrey remembered the way her father had looked at the corpse at her mother’s funeral. Their marriage had definitely been less than happy. He’d made a lot of changes after she’d died. He’d retired and moved to Novato for one. Her mother had been opulent. She’d usually worn a string of pearls around her neck and had her nails professionally manicured once a week. When she’d died, her oldest daughter had inherited the pearls and her ex-husband had gone to live in a dirty apartment in Novato.

Her father had made it clear that he didn’t want to see her when he’d missed William’s funeral. Audrey gritted her teeth. Fine, if he didn’t want to see her she wouldn’t make him. If he wanted to hide in his dirty little apartment, he was welcome to do so. It was a long drive anyway. She forced herself to relax her jaw. She would see that Angele woman instead.

Was this Angele woman dangerous? Should she try to get Patterson to come with her? She clenched her fist. What could she possibly say to him? “I’m sorry about earlier. It turns out I might have a sister and this woman could have made me forget her. I don’t know how it happened, hypnosis maybe?” She would sound like a crazy person. It would be better if she handled it herself. She took a deep breath. She would check the phone number on the card June had given her; see if it was in the yellow pages. If it was, then she’d find the woman’s address there. If wasn’t, she could call the woman again and pretend she was just another potential client. It was a reasonable course of action.

Audrey jammed her keys into her car door and swung herself into the driver’s seat. She sped out of the parking space and checked her rearview mirrors to make sure no one was following her. The day had started to cloud over, going from watery blue to gray. There might be rain later. She drummed her fingers on the steering wheel.

She would have doted on a sister like she had doted on Miss Whiskers. She’d made sure to play with Miss Whiskers every afternoon and never forgot to feed her the way other children sometimes did with their pets. But in the end, when her mother had said she was allergic, she had given Miss Whiskers up. Her stomach knotted as she pulled out onto the highway. She never would have done anything to put her memories of her sister in danger. Never. This trip was just a precaution. Just a precaution, she repeated to herself, just a precaution.

**From the Case Notes of Deputy Patterson**

**Effect:** Mrs. Mason is terrified. According to patrol officers, she leaves all her downstairs lights on at night, locks all doors and windows, and constantly looks over her shoulder.

**Cause:** She murdered William and she’s scared we’ll find out (probably not). She’s just scared because she’s living in a house where a murder took place (also no). She was attacked and almost killed (maybe). She was afraid before the attack happened.

**Effect:** Mrs. Mason was attacked.
**Cause:** Random bad luck (no). The attacker said she knew Mrs. Mason, that she was her sister. The description Mrs. Mason gave the dispatcher matches her sister--> the attacker was probably her sister.

**Effect:** Mrs. Mason lied about her attacker/sister. She said she has no sister when clearly she does. Stupid lie to tell; easily disproved. Does not make sense.

**Cause:** She was afraid of her attacker/sister. Attacker/sister blackmailing her? Did attacker/sister kill husband?

**Effect:** Mrs. Mason shows me a letter, allegedly written by her, saying she has to leave town but says she cannot remember writing the letter. The handwriting is hers.

**Cause:** Wants police protection? A stupid lie to tell. Mrs. Mason in PR; she should be a better liar than this. My third grader is better liar than this. **Mrs. Mason telling the truth?**

**To Do**

1. Go to sister’s apartment and get her fingerprints. If sister out, put an A.P.B. and get fingerprints from a glass or other surface.
2. Find out who the other woman is in Mrs. Mason’s phone call (still no luck).

Shit, Patterson thought, Mrs. Mason could die. If there was another body, the press would go berserk. He’d probably be demoted if not outright fired. Patterson tapped his pen against his desk. Why won’t she tell me what the problem is? Whatever guilty secret she has, revealing it has to be better than dying. He put his head in his hands. Mrs. Mason had already been assaulted, next time she might not survive. The attacker was probably the sister, who Mrs. Mason now claimed didn’t exist. Mrs. Mason was panicking—losing her head and telling stupid lies. Patterson rubbed his chin. Mrs. Mason was not a stupid woman. Did she hit her head when she was attacked? Was that it? He hadn’t seen a bump though. He bounced his leg up and down. His feet itched to get up—to run out and do something.

He forced himself to breath slowly. Charging out the station door wouldn’t help. He could haul Mrs. Mason in for obstruction of justice—sit her down and make her tell him the truth. But if a mugger with a knife hadn’t made her want to talk what chance did he have? She’d be out on bail in a day and he’d get a blistering lecture from the Deputy Chief. Women like Audrey Mason didn’t like being pushed around and were rich enough to complain about it. What motivated Mrs. Mason anyway? What was she really like? She dressed like a trophy wife and had a degree from UC Berkeley. Patterson clenched his jaw. Women like Mrs. Mason used a lot of energy making sure people never found out what they were really like. He’d dated women like her. With them you were in trouble before you even knew what you did.

So what he could do. He couldn’t just sit here staring at his notes or someone (probably Mrs. Mason) would end up at the county morgue. He could run more background checks but his gut told him he’d already found out everything he could that way. He’d already put out an A.P.B for the sister and she hadn’t been found yet. He could follow Mrs. Mason; see if she did anything else that might give him a clue. It was a long shot. He could end up sitting outside her office all day, drumming his fingers on the dashboard and finding nothing. But it was his only shot.
Chapter Thirteen: Mara

Mara turned over. She didn’t know if she was asleep or awake. Was Mara even her name? Did she even have a name? She was laying on a floor somewhere, spittle trailing out her open mouth. It was a cloudy day; barely any light came through the windows. What time was it? How long had she been here? What time was it? Her head swam and she pressed it into the carpet. She needed to think, yes, think. That was it. That was what she needed to do. Where was she? She had been dreaming. Was this a dream? Her eyelids felt heavy. She craned her neck and looked upwards.

She was in a room with a bed and a dresser in it. The bed had flounces on the sides and a mountain of pillows at its head. Someone could get lost in those pillows, get lost and smother themselves. There were lace curtains on the windows and a soft white carpet on the floor. Everything in the room was white, even the dresser. She rubbed her eyes against the glare. What was this place? And who was she?

She looked down at her hands. They were rough and there was a small mole on the right one. She’d seen that mole before somewhere. There were no mirrors in the room so she couldn’t find out who she was. She was a useless fatty without a name. She pinched the skin on the back of her wrist, hard. Her eyes watered. Did it even matter who she was? She curled up into a little ball on the carpet, making herself as small as possible. A sound began on the roof, like it was being tapped on by enormous fingers. That sound had a name, what was it? Did it start with an r, or was that just her imagination?

The door opened. She sat upright and scurried backward. She closed her eyes so tightly they scrunched; she didn’t want to see whatever came through it. Could it see her, if she couldn’t see it?

“Hello dear.” A woman entered. She was plump, with pink cheeks and strands of gray hair drifting over her face, the rest pulled back in a loose bun. She wore a red sweater with a turkey on it. “Do you like my sweater? It’s almost Thanksgiving.”

“Thanksgiving?” Mara slurred. What was Thanksgiving? And what did it have to do with the woman’s sweater?

“Yes.” The woman began to walk towards her.

Mara scooted even further backward. Her tailbone hit the wall. “Who you?”

“Oh.” The woman smiled. “You’ve forgotten; it’s about time. I’m Angele.”

“Ang… Ang…Angel…” Her tongue felt thick and heavy as it flopped between her teeth. She shrank back.

“Are you afraid?” Angele smiled again.

“Scared,” she mumbled.

“That’s good, sweetie. When you came to me you were rabid. You wanted to cause as much pain as possible. It was natural. That’s all your good for, causing pain. Except in the end you couldn’t even do that.” Angele shrugged and adjusted her sweater as she crept towards Mara.

“Pain,” Mara repeated.

“But we can’t both cause pain.” Angele shook her head, as though she’d caught a child with its hand in the cookie jar. “It can only be one of us and that’s me. I need that pain.”

“I…” Mara’s vision swam as Angele knelt down beside her. Angele reached a hand towards her cheek as though she was going to caress it.
She squirmed. She was pinned to the wall now, like a fly wrapped in spider silk. Her eyelashes fluttered. Her vision was going white. The white from the room was invading her skull. There was a wrapping sound coming from outside the room. Or was it from inside her head? The wrapping grew louder. Angele drew her hand back and stood up. Mara breathed out slowly. Could Angele really be leaving? She held her breath, afraid to exhale any more than she already had. Then Angele rose.

“Wait here for me. Will you?” Angele blew her a kiss as she left. As the door closed behind her, Mara collapsed, shuddering, to the floor. She pressed herself down deeper, trying to sink through the carpet. She heard low murmurs from the other side of the door. Her head lolled. Who was she again? Something creaked, a door maybe? There was this nursery rhyme or maybe was it a poem: “Will you step into my parlor?” said the spider to the fly.

“Come in, dear. Oh my Gosh! You’re soaking. You poor thing.”

“Thank you. This will just take a minute. I have a question I wanted to ask you. You’re Angele, right?”

“Oh course! You must be so cold. What were you thinking going out in just that light sweater?”

“It wasn’t raining this much when I started. Shall I wipe my feet?” Boots scraped on the mat.

“Thank you. You’re such a polite young woman. Would you like a cup of tea? I picked up a new oolong at the farmer’s market yesterday.” The way into my parlor is up a winding stair / And I have many pretty things to show when you are there.

“Yes please, that sounds nice. My question is—”

“Can it wait a little while? If you just sit down and have some tea, I’m sure we can figure it out.” I have a little looking-glass upon my parlor shelf, / If you’ll step in one moment, dear, you shall behold yourself.

Mara picked herself up slowly. It had been so long since she’d heard voices. She’d forgotten how nice they sounded. One of them she didn’t like. That one was Angele’s voice. It was too fluid. She liked the other voice though. It had squeaks and strange pauses. She crawled towards the door. She raised herself to a kneeling position, hanging on the knob. The metal slipped beneath her fingers. She let out a groan.

“What was that?” The voice she liked sharpened. O no, no, ” said the little fly, “for I’ve often heard it said, / They never, never wake again, who sleep upon your bed.

“I’m sorry. I left the television on. At my age there isn’t much else to do.”

“Oh. I see. This tea is very good, thank you.”

“It’s nothing.”

The door swung open and Mara fell forward into the hallway. There was a muffled thud as she struck the carpet. She crawled towards the voices. Soft light spilled out of the room ahead.

“You look so cold. Give me your hand and I can warm it up.” Angele’s voice was like honey or gooey lace. So he wove a subtle web, in a little corner sly, / And set his table ready to dine upon the fly.

Mara crawled into the room and let out another groan. The woman with the nice voice screamed and pushed back her chair; its legs scraped as they shot across the floor. One of the tea cups tumbled over the edge of the table and smashed as it hit the maple wood boards.

“Don’t worry, that’s just—”

“Oh my God! Who is that?” Nice Voice stumbled backward.
“It’s not important. Why don’t you wait here for a moment and I’ll take care of it?” Angele rose from her chair and reached out to touch Nice Voice’s shoulder. Nice Voice lurched away.

“There’s a woman. There’s a woman on the floor. She’s crying. You have a crying woman on your floor.”

Mara caught sight of herself in the puddle of tea spilling across the wooden boards. She was a mess. Her face was pale, almost yellow, like she hadn’t gone outside in a long time. Her hair was lank and matted. A tear slid down her sunken cheek.

“It’s okay. Why don’t you just give me your hand and—” *Come hither, hither, pretty fly, with the pearl and silver wing.*

“What do you mean it’s okay?! You have a crying woman on your floor.” Nice Voice blanched. “Did you kidnap her?”

“Kidnap her?” Angele laughed. “Don’t be silly.”

“Silly! You have a crying woman on your floor!” Nice Voice shrieked.

Angele shook her head. “Take a deep breath and calm down.”

“Calm down! You’re telling me the calm down!”

Bam! Bam! Bam! Someone pounded on the door. “Sheriff’s Department, open up!”

“Thank God, Patterson.” Nice Voice stumbled over to the door, skidding in her pumps, and wrenched it open.

Patterson pushed past her into the room and glanced around him. His eyes flicked over Mara. There were nice eyes, chocolatey brown. Not like Angele’s eyes. Angele’s eyes were so brown they were almost black. Angele had insect eyes, curved and shiny, like jewels set into her skull. She stepped forward to meet Patterson. “I’m afraid you can’t come in.”

Patterson put a hand on his deputy’s badge and looked the Angele in the eye. He had a soft mouth but there was a set to his jaw. “I heard sounds of a disturbance, allegations that you kidnapped a woman. I’m coming in.”

He stepped forward and Angele moved to block him. “Don’t you need a warrant?”

“I have probable cause.” He stepped around Angele.

“Oh, that’s alright then.”

“Ma’am, I’m going to need to see some I.D.”

Angele dimpled at him. “Of course, Sir. Now where did I put my purse?”

Angele stepped closer to Mara. Mara shuffled backward, away from her. Get away, get away, get away, she thought. She let out a moan. “Guh wa.”

Patterson took a step towards her and spoke to Angele. “What’s wrong with her?”

Angele dimpled again. “She’s fine. She just has some trouble vocalizing. It’s so sad. She had an accident a few months ago and ever since she’s been, well…”

“Ma’am this woman is a suspect in a murder investigation. How did she come to be in your home?”

Angele crept closer to the Mara. Mara shrank back. Angele wrapped a hand around her hair. She whispered, “Tell him you want to be here or you’ll forget everything. You’ll forget how to swallow and you’ll die.”

“Guh wa.”

Mara felt Angele’s lips moving against her ear, wet and moist. “You are invisible. You are a ball of yarn with nothing in the middle.”

Mara tried to move her lips but they were thick and heavy. Her tongue was a slice of blubber in her mouth. “Guh wa.”
“Fine.”

Mara’s eyes rolled up in her head and her vision detonated. Everything was a harsh white. *Up jumped the cunning spider, and fiercely held her fast. He dragged her up his winding stair, into his dismal den; Within his little parlor; but she ne’er came out again!* Her feet collapsed under her. She was like a pumpkin with its guts scooped out. Who was she? Her head was draining now; her thoughts dribbled out like pus. Who was? Who? Was she even a who?

**Chapter Fourteen: Mara**

Angele was wrenched away from her. Strands of her hair came off in Angele’s hands. She screeched and looked up. The lamplight blazed. She blinked her eyes shut again, shook her head, and then opened them.

Patterson had his arm wrapped around Angele’s chest as she kicked at his shins.

“Ma’am. You’re going to have to come with me.”

Angele struggled, and then went limp. “I understand, officer.”

Mara exhaled, breathing fast. It was okay. Angele couldn’t get to her, not while Patterson was holding on. She tensed. What about when Patterson left? A darker cloud drifted past the window. There were a couple of biscotti on the table next to the spilled tea cup. She reached up and crammed them into her mouth. They were dry and crumbly, like they’d been sitting in the pantry for a year.

She gagged, clutching her throat. How did you swallow again? Her muscles were stuck. She hadn’t eaten since…she couldn’t remember. Of course she didn’t know how to swallow. Her heart thudded. Air, she needed air. Air. Her face was turning red. Did you move your muscles up to swallow? Think. But her thoughts had been drained. Did she even have any in the first place? She lost her grip on the table and slid downwards.

There was a thud on her back and she fell forward. The biscotti crumbs flew out of her mouth. She blinked her eyes and looked up. Nice Voice knelt down beside her, the tea soaking her smooth crisp pant leg. Her brow was wrinkled a little. Her lips were half open and her cheeks were flushed. Mara’s mouth opened as well, “Tha…”

Nice Voice’s eyes were blue, like hers. They were as pale as ice. She stared up at them. The lashes quivered ever so slightly. There were tiny crow’s feet at the corners, either from smiling or frowning, Mara couldn’t tell. She hoped they were from smiling. She liked the crow’s feet; they made Nice Voice look softer somehow. The rest of Nice Voice’s face was perfectly smooth, almost vacant. She reached up to touch Nice Voice’s cheek. Nice Voice drew back a moment and then held still. The skin on her face was warm, flushed. Mara inhaled, feeling her lungs expand. It was luxurious, breathing again.

Nice Voice had saved her. Nice Voice had even let her touch her cheek. She had never done anything for Nice Voice and yet Nice Voice had helped her. Warmth began to spread up her cheeks and she blushed. What was this new feeling? The sound on the roof continued, growing louder. Nice Voice looked down at her and then took another biscotti from the table. She broke off a piece and handed it to her. “Chew slowly this time.”

“Why? Why you help?”

Nice Voice shivered for a moment. “I don’t…”

“Scared,” Mara said softly.

“I know.”

Mara placed the biscotti between her lips. So that was what sugar tasted like. She sucked on the roof of her mouth to savor it. What was that flavor in the corner behind her tooth? Something just the a little dark, bitter. It started with a C…Choc…Choc… She reached for the
thought as she probed the flavor with her tongue. It slipped just out of reach, the biscotti crumbs dissolving between her teeth. She would have to try again later. She smiled. How long had it been since she’d done that?

“Shit!” Patterson howled; his hands cupped over his groin. His eyes opened wide. He blanched.

“I can’t come with you.” Angele twisted towards him and raked her nails over his eyes. Blood sprayed. Angele turned away from him and began to walk towards her and Nice Voice. “These two chose to come here. They just wanted a little nip and tuck, to feel better about themselves. Plastic surgery for the mind. And now they have to face the consequences.”


The woman smiled and came closer. “Of course, dear.”

“I can’t forget William!” Nice Voice shrieked. “I’ll be alone. Do you even understand what that means—to be alone?”

“I’m always alone.” Angele’s eyes flashed.

“Then you know what it’s like! How can you do this knowing what it’s like?” Nice Voice was almost sobbing now. “Please, I’m begging you, stop.”

Mara froze; she knew what it was like too. She had been alone in Angele’s white room, with only the voices in her head for company. Beast.

Patterson stumbled forward. One hand cupped his groin. The other tried to staunch the blood coming from his eyelid. He spoke through clenched teeth. “Audrey, what did she do?”

“She…she…” Nice Voice stuffed her fist in her mouth as tears rolled down her cheeks.

Mara stiffened. This was wrong. Nice Voice should not be crying. Nice Voice was strong. She had eyes like blue ice. It had been Nice Voice’s hand that had struck her back and let her breathe again. Nice Voice should not be crying. “Guh wa.”

Angele ignored Patterson, focusing on Nice Voice. “Why does a cat chase a mouse? To feel its last heartbeats, the blood pumping through its mouth, hot and bitter. It is the mouse’s blood that makes its own heart race. The cat is most alive when it chases the mouse.”

Patterson lurched forward another step, towards Angele. He fumbled for his Taser. “Ma’am, you just assaulted a police officer.”

Angele stepped away from him, moving closer to Nice Voice. “Your memories make me feel. I can feel your muscles tense. Your pulse quiver.”

Mara whimpered. Get away, get away, get away, she thought. She could not stand that whiteness again. Not again, not again, please not again. The noise on the roof, the one that started with r, quickened. It was all around her now. It drummed into her skull. She picked up one of the shards of the tea cup and clutched it in her hand. She grasped it so tightly blood began to flow into her palm. “No gai.”

Angele kept walking towards them. Nice Voice flinched away. Angele smiled. “Please hold still. It will make things easier. You’re mostly gone already. I just have to finish off the rest.”

Nice Voice stepped backwards and bumped into the table. “No. You can’t. You can’t have anymore.”

Angele sighed. “It’s not like you liked yourself in the first place. Why keep fighting now?”

“I’m a successful professional. I had a loving marriage and caring friends. Of course I like myself.”
Angele laughed. “So you decided to give me a few of your memories? I’ll tell you one thing: people who like themselves don’t come to me.”

“I’ve done nothing wrong. I’ve give money to UNICEF and the Red Cross every year.”

Angele was standing a foot away from Nice Voice now, speaking in a hushed murmur. “I’m impressed. Almost anyone can keep a secret—if they really have to. But to keep a secret from yourself? To cut into yourself, to divide yourself into fragments so that you no longer know it. That’s an art.”

Nice Voice hesitated and Angele pounced. She took a final step forward and rested her hand on Nice Voice’s neck, right over her pulse. Nice Voice’s slumped forward. The spark drained from her eyes. Angele was bent over her, whispering in her ear. Nice Voice whimpered. She grew paler as the pink spots on Angele’s cheeks brightened.

Patterson lunged forward and tripped, falling to one knee. He blinked blood out of his eye. “Separate them!”

Mara scrunched her eyes closed. Her fingers tightened around the shard. She didn’t want to see what was happening to Nice Voice. She’d already felt it for herself, the sibilant whisper curling up inside her ear. Not again, not again, not again, she thought. Not that glaring whiteness exploding inside her skull. Not that vast, bleached void. It had to stop.

“I said separate them!”

Was he speaking to her? Why would anyone speak to her? Nice Voice had spoken to her though, so it was possible. Slowly, Mara opened her eyes and looked at Nice Voice. Nice Voice’s mouth had flopped open. She was going grayer and grayer—like a corpse. Her face went slack. She reminded Mara of someone; she didn’t want to remember who. It hurt to look at her. Mara rose to her feet. Her muscles shook and she swayed. Nice Voice had stopped whimpering. Mara’s heart skipped a beat.

She threw herself sideways into Angele. They tumbled to the floor, Angele on the bottom. She dug her fingers into Angele’s shoulders, keeping her down. Not again, not again. She thought of the whiteness, how it blotted out the darkness behind her closed eyelids. Her fingers stiffened as she pressed them deeper into the skin around Angele’s collarbone. Keep the whiteness away. Make it get her, not me. Not me. With the whiteness came a cavity, as though she had no insides, as though she were just skin stretched over a skeleton. Who was she again? Keep the cavity away. The whiteness rose inside her.

She closed her eyes. This was it then. At least she had tried. No one could say she hadn’t tried. She remembered Nice Voice feeding her the biscotti. She would focus on that before the whiteness devoured her. What was that dark flavor? The texture had been soft, smooth; it had melted in her mouth, making her salivate. Choc something. Choc… That was it, chocolate! At least now she knew. Her heart beat faster, colliding with her lungs.

Angele screamed and writhed away. Mara followed. She scrunched up her brow, thinking as hard as she could about the biscotti. Pressure built insider her skull. It wasn’t much, but if she thought about it, then the cavity wouldn’t get her. It wouldn’t bloom in her insides like a diseased flower. Not again. Not if she shoved at it with all her might. Attacked it with something it could never understand or counter. Something bittersweet and smooth as the skin on Nice Voice’s cheek—chocolate.

Angele’s sweater ripped. The rosy spots on her cheeks were turning duller. Bluish hollows appeared beneath her eyelids. Her hands twisted, clawing Mara. Mara seized them, bending them back. She would keep fighting. She would fight until Angele’s mind exploded.
Until the light burst behind Angele’s eyelids and blinded her. Something snapped and Angele went limp. The air went out of her in a soft sigh.

Chapter Fifteen: Audrey, fifteen minutes before

Audrey gasped. There was a woman crawling out from the hall. She thrust her chair backward. Her heart sped. She’d known there was something wrong with Angele. But this? Her tea cup rolled off the table and crashed to the floor.

“Don’t worry, that’s just—”

“Oh my God! Who is that?” Audrey’s voice quavered. The woman was a mess. Her face was pale, almost yellow, like she hadn’t gone outside in a long time. Her hair was lank and matted. A tear slid down her sunken cheek. She looked like the woman who had attacked her. But she couldn’t be. That woman had almost cut her throat. This woman flinched away from them; like she was afraid they would hit her.

“It’s not important. Why don’t you wait here for a moment and I’ll take care of it?” Angele stood up and moved towards Audrey, stretching out her hand. Audrey shied away. She did not want those smooth puffy hands anywhere near her skin.

“There’s a woman. There’s a woman on the floor. She’s crying. You have a crying woman on your floor.” Audrey tensed. How had this woman got here?

“It’s okay. Why don’t you just give me your hand and—”

“What do you mean it’s okay?! You have a crying woman on your floor. Did you kidnap her?” Audrey clapped her hand over her mouth; she hadn’t meant to say it. What if she was a witness to a kidnapping? Would Angele try to hurt her too? Angele was an older woman but what if she had a gun or a knife? Or what if… The back of Audrey’s neck prickled. What if she accelerated what she was already doing to her and June?

“Kidnap her?” Angele laughed. “Don’t be silly.”

Angele’s voice traveled languidly across the room. Audrey felt like it was reaching for her. A scream started in the back of her throat.

“Silly! You have a crying woman on your floor!”

Angele shook her head. “Take a deep breath and calm down.”

“Calm down! You’re telling me the calm down!” The scream burst through her lips. She couldn’t think. There crying woman on Angele’s floor, who might be the same woman who had attacked her—reduced to a mewling heap. She looked down at the crying woman and then looked away quickly. The other woman goggled up at her, eyes vacant.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Someone hammered on the door. “Sheriff’s Department, open up!”

“Thank God, Patterson.” Audrey exhaled. She wasn’t on her own now. Patterson could make Angele confess to whatever it was she’d done to her and June. Angele wouldn’t hurt her or the other woman if he was there. She raced to the door and flung it open. Sweat trickled down her armpits, staining her blouse.

Patterson pushed past her into the room. He gave her shoulder a quick squeeze as he stepped over the threshold. He looked around the room. He paused when he saw the woman on the floor and held her gaze. He adjusted his badge and strode further inside. Angele came forward to meet him. “I’m afraid you can’t come in.”

Patterson’s eyes narrowed. Audrey leaned against the table. It was solid and smooth under her hand. It would be alright. There was a cop in the room—a cop with a crisp uniform
and a wide stance. There was someone in charge now. “I heard sounds of a disturbance, allegations that you kidnapped a woman. I’m coming in.”

He stepped forward and Angele moved to block him. “Don’t you need a warrant?”
“I have probable cause.” He stepped around Angele.
“Oh, that’s alright then.”
“Ma’am, I’m going to need to see some I.D.”
Angele smiled at him. “Of course, Sir. I’m Angele. Now where did I put my purse?”

Angele stepped closer to the other woman. The other woman shuffled backward. Get away from her, Audrey thought. Just go away and leave us both in peace. The other woman’s mouth was slack. She’d been chewing on her own hair. Hadn’t Angele done enough? The other woman let out a moan. “Guh wa.”

Patterson took a step towards the woman and gave Angele a hard look. “What’s wrong with her?”

Angele smiled again. Her voice was like honey or a good wine. “She’s fine. She just has some trouble vocalizing. It’s so sad. She had an accident a few months ago and ever since she’s been, well…”

“Ma’am this woman is a suspect in a murder investigation. How did she come to be in your home?”

Angele crept closer to the other woman. The other woman shrank back. Please no. Audrey thought. Why wasn’t Patterson stopping her? Audrey shivered and wrapped her arms around herself. Couldn’t he see how dangerous she was? How her eyes were black and beady like an insect’s?

“Guh wa.” The other woman groaned.

Angele leaned down and whispered something in the other woman’s ear. The woman’s face went white. What had Angele said? Audrey quivered then relaxed. At least it wasn’t her that Angele was hurting. Audrey’s stomach clenched.

“Guh wa.” The other woman spoke again. Audrey flinched. She wanted to cover her ears but couldn’t force her hands to move.

“Fine.” Angele’s voice was a deathblow.

The woman went limp in Angele’s arms. Her chest rose and fell, fast and shallow. Her mouth stretched open even more. She gazed blankly at the opposite wall. Audrey tried to scream and made strained gargling noise instead. “Patterson!”

Chapter Sixteen: Audrey, fifteen minutes before

Patterson was already lunging across the room. He gripped Angele by the shoulders and swung her away from the other woman. He wrapped her in a bear hug, yanking her tight to his chest. “Ma’am, you’re going to have to step aside.”

Angele relaxed. “I understand, officer.”

The other woman lurched over to the coffee table and seized one of the biscotti. Audrey shifted out of the way. She didn’t want that greasy hoodie touching her. The other woman shoved half the biscotti between her lips. Her eyes widened and she reached for another bite. Crumbs spilled out of her mouth and down the front of her shirt. Her teeth gnashed together. There was a loud wet chewing sound. Audrey averted her eyes. A gray-black cloud shifted, covering the window.
The other woman gagged. She pulled in her cheeks, trying to suck in air. Her face began to turn red. Her eyes darted around frantically. She slid off the table and hit the floor with a thump. What was Patterson doing? Audrey glanced quickly at him. He was still holding tight to Angele. It was now or never.

Audrey knelt down beside the prone woman and hit her on the back as hard as she could. Her palm stung. The crumbs shot out of the other woman’s mouth and splashed in the tea puddle. Audrey flinched. The other woman’s mouth opened, “Tha…”

Was the woman trying to thank her? Audrey leaned over the other woman. Her cheeks were still red but she was breathing normally now. The other woman’s eyes were blue, like hers only murkier. They blinked up at her. The other woman looked almost childlike, lying there gazing up at Audrey. Audrey’s face softened. Slowly, the other woman brought her hand up and rested it against Audrey’s cheek. It was moist, with spilt tea and mucus, and God knew what else. Audrey flinched, and then caught the woman’s eyes again. They were like a deer’s eyes, big and soft. Audrey blushed and held still. She inhaled quietly.

Audrey reached up to the table and grabbed another biscotti. She broke it into small pieces, and handed one of them to the woman. The rain kept beating on the roof, growing louder. “Chew slowly this time.”

“Why? Why you help?”

Why had she helped this woman? She could have been the woman that attacked her in the alley. Strangely enough though, she reminded her of June. June had had that same vacant stare on her face when they’d last spoken. Audrey hadn’t been able to help June. June had looked right past her. Audrey shuddered. “I don’t…”

“Scared,” the other woman said softly.

“I know.” Audrey’s heart thumped. She still had to find out what Angele had done to her and June. What if it wasn’t reversible?

The woman started to eat the biscotti. She still ate with her mouth open but at least now she wasn’t making that wet smacking sound—baby steps. Audrey smiled. The other woman looked like she was doing better and Patterson had Angele; maybe this would turn out okay after all.

“Shit!” Patterson howled. He cupped his groin with both hands. His face paled and his eyes rolled up in his head. “Shit! Shit! Shit! That hurts!”

“I can’t step aside.” Angele twisted towards him and raked her nails over his eyes. Blood sprayed. Audrey flinched away. She didn’t want to see Angele, nails extended, her fly-away hair coming out of its neat grandmotherly bun, insect eyes shining. Angele turned away from Patterson and began to walk towards them. Oh no, no, no, no, Audrey thought. Angele spoke. “These two chose to come here. They just wanted a little nip and tuck, to feel better about themselves. Plastic surgery for the mind. And now they have to face the consequences.”

Audrey forced herself to stand. She had to know. “William? Will I forget William?”

Angele smiled and came closer. “Of course, dear.”

“I can’t forget William!” Audrey shrieked. She would have to face the maw upstairs by herself. Sooner or later it would reach down and swallow her. “I’ll be alone. Do you even understand what that means—to be alone?”

“I’m always alone.” Angele’s eyes flashed.

“Then you know what it’s like! How can you do this knowing what it’s like?” Audrey started to cry. Snot ran down her face. She probably looked terrible. “Please, I’m begging you, stop.”
Patterson staggered forward. Blood ran down his cheek. He spoke in a tight voice, “Audrey, what did she do?”

“She…she…” Audrey crammed her hand into her mouth. She couldn’t answer Patterson. There was no logical explanation for what Angele had done—what she had done in coming to Angele. She’d been stupid to think Patterson could help. He was a cop in Marin County. He probably spent most of his time dealing with drunken teenagers. Not grandmotherly woman who stole your memories and leech out your insides. There was nothing and no one that could defend them now. She’d been stupid to think there was.

The other woman groaned again, “Guh wa.”

Angele ignored Patterson and concentrated on Audrey. Was she going to hurt her like she’d hurt the other woman? “Why does a cat chase a mouse? To feel its last heartbeats, the blood pumping through its mouth, hot and bitter. It is the mouse’s blood that makes its own heart race. The cat is most alive when it chases the mouse.”

Patterson lurched forward another step, towards Angele. He felt for his Taser. “Ma’am, you just assaulted a police officer.”

Angele kept moving closer to Audrey. Her voice was slow and sinuous, like honey being poured from a jar. Audrey gave a little moan but the voice kept coming. “Your memories make me feel. I can feel your muscles tense. Your pulse quiver.”

“No gai.” Why was the other woman still trying to talk? Audrey wanted to plug her ears and curl up into fetal position; only she didn’t have the energy. Her hands hung limply by her side. Why had she even stood up in the first place?

Angele moved a few steps closer. Her insect eyes glittered. “Please hold still. It will make things easier. You’re mostly gone already. I just have to finish off the rest.”

Audrey tripped backwards, stumbling against the table. Angele was right. She was mostly gone. The world was dim to her now. Her insides felt like tissue. Soon she would be like June. What was the point? Her stomach lurched. What would William say if he knew she was giving up like this? Audrey’s voice broke. “No. You can’t. You can’t have anymore.”

Angele sighed. “It’s not like you liked yourself in the first place. Why keep fighting now?”

“I’m a successful professional. I had a loving marriage and caring friends. Of course I like myself.” Audrey forced her shoulders back. Act as if, she told herself. Act as if you’re brave. Angele laughed. “So you decided to give me a few of your memories? I’ll tell you one thing: people who like themselves don’t come to me.”

“I’ve done nothing wrong. I give money to UNICEF and the Red Cross every year.”

Angele was standing a foot away from Audrey now. It would be so easy. To just stop fighting. Angele’s words groped for her like tendrils of fog. “I’m impressed. Almost anyone can keep a secret—if they really have to. But to keep a secret from yourself? To cut into yourself, to divide yourself into fragments so that you no longer know it. That’s an art.”

Audrey shuddered. Had she really hated herself enough to do what Angele said she had? She had cracks inside her, but didn’t everyone? Audrey paused.

Angele attacked. She put a hand on Audrey’s throat. It felt like a corpse’s hand. Audrey’s vision started to go white. She was done now. Soon she would crumble to dust. Tiny pieces of her would fall, one by one, coating the floor in ashen snow. Who was she again? Angele was hollowing her, scooping out a hole where her heart used to be. What was a heart, anyway? And what was the point of having one? She was five again. Her fingers poised above the piano keys; twinkle twinkle little star. Each note had to be exactly right. She clenched her shoulders. Her
mouth trembled. Bong! She flinched. The pencil cracked her on the head. She shouldn’t have made a mistake. She started again: how I wonder what you are...

There was a muffled voice in the background. “Separate them!”

“I said separate them!”

Audrey exhaled and her eyes drifted shut. Angele was crooning in her ear: “You might as well never have lived.”

Audrey gasped. The weight of Angele’s hand on her neck lifted. Audrey opened her mouth to breathe. Angele was gone. The other woman grappled with her on the floor. Audrey pushed herself as far away from them as she could. She tilted her head back and took loud gasping breaths.

Her name was Audrey Mason. Her husband was William Mason. She had a friend called June. She worked in public relations. She had a sister—Mara. She could hear music—piano notes. They swarmed around her. She covered her ears and whimpered. What were they? They rang as softly as fallen leaves and as harshly as clashing cymbals. Her heart thumped rapidly against her ribs. Outside, the rain continued to pour.

Chapter Seventeen: Mara

Something scraped Mara, like a dry brush rasping across a blank canvas. Colors burst across her vision: purple, gold, blue, red. Were there really that many colors in the world? Mara cringed. The scraping continued. Her vision started to clear. She saw the curved rim of a tea cup, the thin blade of a knife. Did the world really have lines that were that sharp? She clenched her entire body, curling in on herself. How long had it been since she had felt pain like this? Real focused pain, not the blurred agony Angele had caused her.

She tried to gasp down the stale air from the room but none entered her lungs. She stumbled over to the window and forced it open. She stuck her head out of it, into the driving storm. The cold rain soaked her face and neck. Mara, her name was Mara. Her gut clenched; there was a stabbing pain in her stomach. She had watched a man die, William, watched his eyes go dull and his face stiffen as he lay in a pool of his own blood. Blood, like the blood that had gushed from her arm when she’d tried to cut herself. A sick feeling rose in her stomach, like when her skin had started to split open that long ago afternoon in the bathroom. Bile rushed up the back of her throat and she threw up over and over. Was this what she was? A woman who had watched an innocent man die? Was this all she was? Her sick spattered the wall of Angele’s house. No. No. No.

She felt her old anger at Audrey. It glowed white hot like the tip of a poker. All that time and Audrey had never told anyone. She had kept her secrets. Maybe Angele was right; it was an art. Was she weak like Audrey? Was that all Audrey had been? Weak? But Audrey had saved her, when she’d been choking on the biscotti. Mara had watched her husband die and Audrey had saved her. It didn’t make sense. It was impossible. She quivered, remembering her hand on Audrey’s cheek.

She stared downwards into a puddle. There was a purpling bruise on one cheek and her hair was so matted she’d have to cut it later. How long had she been here? Trapped in Angele’s glaring white room. A thread of spittle ran down the corner of her mouth. Her lips weren’t so bad, a little full, but not too bad. She looked down at her hands and dry heaved again. These were the hands that Angele had taken the knife from. Her stomach seized up again, like someone was trying to rip it open. Why had she done it? Was it all Angele or was it her too? She was the
one to give Angele her memories. But she had been tricked, Angele had promised her… Mara groaned. Did it really matter what Angele had promised her? She wiped her mouth and straightened. Her eyes were like Audrey’s, blue with flecks of light in them, like ice in the sun. She had looked into Audrey’s eyes and seen her own brittleness reflected back. If Audrey could change enough to save her, to let her touch her cheek, could she as well? Could she ever be someone other than the woman who had helped kill William?

Voices murmured in the background. “Is she?”

“She’s breathing, but she isn’t responding.” That one was Patterson’s.

“Oh that’s…” That was Audrey.

“I’m going to have to call a paramedic. Did you see what she did to her?”

Audrey hesitated. “To me, it just looked like she had her hands on her shoulders. I couldn’t see much else. I was a bit…preoccupied.”

“I understand. That’s what it looked like to me too.”

Mara’s eyes glazed over as she stared into the storm. What did it matter what happened to Angele as long as she wasn’t…? As long as she wasn’t taking Mara’s rough dirty hand and enfolding it in her soft vanilla perfumed one. Mara didn’t think she’d ever want to taste vanilla again. She shivered, the rain was pummeling her, but she didn’t move back inside. Better the rain than the stale cloying air in Angele’s room. Air that smelled like vanilla and jasmine. Air that smelled like Angele. Mara shook her head. Angele wasn’t responding; Mara wouldn’t have to face that yawning cavity again. Not again. She resisted the urge to go back and finish her off. She could take one of the tea cup shards and slice Angele’s jugular. She could do it this time. The blood would soak the cream rug and drip into the cracks between the maple wood floors. There was another stab of pain in Mara’s stomach. She opened her mouth to gasp and the air hissed out between her teeth. Not again. As long as Angele couldn’t hurt her anymore, it didn’t matter. Not again.

A hand touched her shoulder and she jumped around with a scream. It was Patterson. He drew her gently back from the window and shut it. There was a grim set to his mouth. He held one of Angele’s doilies over his eye to stem the bleeding. “Are you alright?”

Why was he being so courteous? She was an accessory to murder. Her heart jumped. But he didn’t know that, not yet anyway. She buried her face in her hands, covering it as best she could. Her hands weren’t big enough though, some of her cheek was still showing. She gulped.

“I’m—”

“Ma’am, you did very well, getting that woman away from Mrs. Mason…”

Audrey shrieked behind them. The hair stood up on the back of Mara’s neck. Audrey’s finger shook as she pointed at Mara. “It was her Patterson! She helped kill William, her and her friend! She was the one who attacked me in that alley.”

Patterson stiffened. “Are you sure, Audrey?”

“Yes, she’s short with blue eyes and brown hair. She’s even wearing the same hoodie.”

Audrey’s face contorted and she looked at Angele. “Oh my God, was she the friend?”

“Fuck.” Patterson pressed his face into his palm. Blood trickled down his temple. He blinked and looked at Mara. Mara held out her hands. She hoped he wouldn’t pinch the handcuffs to tight. He grabbed one of her hands and held it up. “You’re bleeding.”

Mara nodded. “Yes, I am.”

He grabbed another doily from Angele’s table and pressed it into her palm. “Press down on that and hold your arm above your head. Keep it elevated. Fuck, we need the paramedics.”
Mara’s arms were so tired she could barely lift them. What was the point anyway? She let them hang down by her side. “It’s okay.”

“No.” Patterson grabbed her wrist and raised it over her head. “It isn’t.”

“Aren’t you going to arrest her!” Audrey’s voice sounded hoarse.

“I’ll take her to Marin General Hospital. They have a psych ward. I’ll get an officer to keep watch on her there.” Patterson pulled out his phone and began to dial. He paused. “Shit, what do I even tell them? Did you see what that woman did to her?”

Audrey shivered. “I felt it.”

Patterson looked over at her. “You should probably come to. Get them to take a look at you.”

“Do I have to?”

Patterson raised his eyebrows. “I probably can’t make you. But I recommend it. Jesus, Audrey, that woman…”

“Then I want to go home.” Audrey’s voice quavered.

“Fine.” Patterson sighed. “But don’t leave the county.”

Audrey nodded. “Fine.”

Patterson looked down at his phone and finished dialing. “Hello, this is Deputy Bruce Patterson of the Marin County Sheriff’s department. I need an ambulance at the following address… I’ll need a forensic team here as well. Thank you. I’ll be out front when they arrive.” Patterson spoke to Mara and Audrey. “Come this way. This is a crime scene. Only the paramedics will be allowed in. They’ll be here any minute.”

Angele was still lying on the floor where Mara had collided with her. Blood ran down her collarbone where Mara had grabbed her with the tea shard in her hand. Her eyes were sunken inside her skull—insect eyes. Mara wanted to go over and close them but she didn’t want to get anywhere near Angele. As it was, they stared eerily out of her face, taking in nothing. The lashes fluttered and they rolled up, whites pointed towards the ceiling. Mara jumped backwards. Mara had done this to her; driven her into a coma. Mara waited for her stomach to clench up again. It didn’t. Instead she exhaled, a long breath, almost a sigh. Whatever awaited her, in prison or out of it, could not compare to the white room Angele had kept her in. Angele’s mouth was closed now; it couldn’t drip her poison anymore. Her perfumed hands were crossed over her chest, like Snow White’s in her coffin, *lips as red as blood*. Her hands would never clasp Mara’s again. Mara would cut hers off before she let that happen; it would hurt less. Mara flipped her eyes upward and thought, almost like a prayer, please don’t let her ever wake up.

“What was that?” Audrey’s lips moved almost silently. She looked up and met Mara’s gaze. Mara looked at Audrey’s clenched jaw and wide eyes. She knew her own eyes were just as wide. There was a flash, a crackle of electricity, between them.

Mara sighed. At least she had helped Audrey. Audrey wouldn’t lose everything. At least she wouldn’t lose any more than she already had. Mara had lost Audrey her husband but she had preserved her memories of him. Did that count for anything? Was every time she looked for a reason why she wasn’t completely evil just an excuse? Didn’t all villains look for excuses? So they could deny what they were? *Beast.* Her stomach knotted.

“What was that?” Patterson asked.

“Nothing.” Audrey pressed her lips closed again.

They proceeded down the walk, away from Angele’s cream house, past the row of snowdrops. There was a loud whirring as an ambulance sped around the corner. Its lights flashed as it skidded to a halt outside of Angele’s house. A crime scene truck was close behind. The
Neighbors peeped out from behind their curtains, the light from their windows falling across the dark street.

Patterson turned to Audrey. “Are you sure you don’t want to come to the hospital with us?”

“I’m sure.”

“I’ll take you’re statement tomorrow then.”

“Alright.” She gave a quick nod and disappeared into the driving rain.

Patterson put a hand on the small of Mara’s back and steered her towards the paramedics. One of the paramedics took her arm and guided her gently into the ambulance. Mara winced. This was what her life had come to. She was sitting in an ambulance on her way to the psych ward with possible assault and murder charges mending. Sure, Patterson didn’t seem that interested in prosecuting now but that would probably change once she recovered, if she ever did. How had she ended up like this? Where had things gone wrong? Or had she been born wrong? A wrong child in the wrong family. She burrowed into the seat cushion. When she was little and the question “what do you want to be when you grow up” had come up, she hadn’t answered accessory to murder. When she was really little, she had wanted to be a ballerina-astronomer-puppy trainer-finger painter. As she grew older and realized that wasn’t an actual job, she had settled on being an artist. Did they have sketch books in prison? For death row inmates? Mara’s gut tightened and she swallowed. She could end up on death row if they didn’t believe Angele did it.

Mara raised herself up and peered out the ambulance window. The night was closing in now, the heavy clouds hiding the stars as the rain kept coming. The only light came from the windows of the houses. Families were sitting down to dinner now, tucking their chairs in and putting napkins in their laps. Parents were telling their children to wash their hands. A tear rolled down her face. What was it that had made her mother want to hurt her so much? That made Audrey so determined to lie about it? Her stomach tensed. All of this and she still didn’t know. Her head flopped forward on to her neck and her eyelids sagged. She just wanted to sleep. She pressed her cheek against the window; her skin was warmer now she was out of the storm. The cut on her hand throbbed. She felt the paramedic’s cool hands peel the doily off and start to clean the cut. She flinched as the antiseptic touched her skin. She caught sight of her reflection in the window. It wavered in the dark pane, bending eerily around the glass—a pale face with haunted eyes. What did you do if the thing haunting you was yourself? Beyond it, the house windows shone like lanterns twinkling through the black November rain.

From the Case Notes of Deputy Patterson

Question: Who was that woman and what did she do to Mrs. Mason and her sister?
Answer: I don’t know. I cannot think of a rational explanation for Mrs. Mason and her sister’s behavior when they came in contact with that woman. Drugs?

Question: Who killed Mr. Mason? Audrey? Mrs. Mason’s sister? Mystery Woman?
Answer: I don’t know. The fingerprint on the door key was Mrs. Mason’s sister’s. However, it could have gotten there another day if she visited. This isn’t likely, as Mrs. Mason and her sister weren’t close, but it is possible.

Question: Was the mystery woman the friend of her sister that Mrs. Mason told me about?
Answer: I don’t know (again). They didn’t look friendly when I saw them.

Question: Why did Mrs. Mason lie to me?
Answer: She was scared (see previous notes). Of what, I need to find out.
Question: Why did she accuse her sister of helping murder Mr. Mason?
Answer: It could have been the truth or it could have been because of a private grudge between them. Or she could have done it to cover up that she killed him (unlikely).
Question: Is this accusation true?
Answer: See answer two.
Question: Was this what she was going to say in her phone call to me?
Answer: Most likely. The phone call was about her sister and about William’s case (even though Mrs. Mason denied it).
Question: Was it her sister who attacked Mrs. Mason? Why?
Answer: Yes. Her sister matches the description Mrs. Mason gave the dispatcher. Mrs. Mason has bruises and a cut on her neck that indicate that she was really attacked (she didn’t lie about it to get her sister in trouble with the police). The sister could have attacked her to keep her quiet (if she found out about Mrs. Mason’s accusation).

Patterson reached up and felt the puffy skin around his eye. The cut had needed five stitches and he’d be squinting for a while. What a night, two hours spent waiting in the ER with an icepack pressed to his eye—his own damn fault for letting that Angele woman scratch him. After that, another two hours spent waiting to hear from the hospital about Mara or that Angele woman only to be told, “We don’t know what the problem is yet. If you come by tomorrow, we may be able to tell you then.” Patterson hit his fist on the dashboard. They were doctors for god’s sake. It was their job to know this stuff. So why the hell didn’t they? It was one o’clock at night and the Deputy Chief would expect a report soon.
Patterson’s shoulders slumped. The report could at least wait until tomorrow when he’d had a chance to talk to Mrs. Mason and come by the hospital again. He’d get some answers out of those incompetents if he had to sit in the damn waiting room until the second coming. He ground his teeth. He still hadn’t made an appointment to get that retainer fitted. His stomach clamped.
What kind of answers could there be for what had happened?

He had seen perfectly normal, healthy women, Mrs. Mason and her sister, turn gray when the gray haired woman, Angele, had touched them. He’d seen their eyes going darker and darker. Seen them go limp, heads tilting backwards like ragdolls. It wasn’t possible. Patterson punched the dashboard again. Something rattled. He clenched his fist and swung a third time. The windshield shook. Shit, he couldn’t damage the car. He forced himself to put his hand inside his pocket. He stared straight ahead. Touching someone’s face didn’t make them turn gray. Was it drugs? Some poison that worked through skin contact? But then why wasn’t Angele affected too? She would have had to get it on her skin to touch Mrs. Mason and her sister with it. Had the night been a horrible dream? His eye hurt too much for it to be a dream. Not to mention his bruised testicle. This would teach him not to take his attention off a suspect again. Even if that suspect looked like his grandmother. What if she’d had a weapon? A knife or a gun?
Patterson tensed. If she’d had a weapon, she probably would have killed him with it. He’d watched her smile as Mrs. Mason had gotten weaker and weaker. She was like one of the children on his street—the little boy who liked pulling the wings off butterflies. He had forbidden Jordan to play with that kid. She’d said okay. She saw it too.

Only now Angele was in a coma Patterson would have to wait until she woke up to question her. If she ever woke up. The hospital staff wasn’t sure that she would. They said it was about a fifty-fifty. The back of Patterson’s neck tinged. Maybe it would be better if she didn’t. But then Patterson would never find any answers. He’d never know why she’d targeted Mrs.
Mason and her sister or find out what poison it was that she’d used. The hospital had told him that Mrs. Mason’s sister was in shock but there was no damage beyond that, aside from the stitches in her palm where she’d cut herself. Good, it meant he didn’t have to drive out to Mrs. Mason’s place and drag her skinny protesting ass to the hospital. He snorted. On second thought dragging Mrs. Mason around had its appeal. Only he’d drag her to the station interview room, sit her down, and make her talk. Maybe she or her sister could give him the answers Angele couldn’t.

Patterson put the key in the ignition and turned it. He was lucky things had turned out as well as they had. No one else was dead. He gave a bitter chuckle. All that and he still didn’t know who had killed Mr. Mason. Angele fit the profile but there was no evidence linking her with the crime. There was no evidence even showing who she was. She’d had no driver’s license, no nothing. Public transportation in Marin was terrible. How had she lived here without a driver’s license? Patterson twitched. He knew he would remember this case for a very long time, possibly until his dying day. Meeting Angele had been like touching something dark and slimy. Like the mystery boxes at Jordan’s friend’s Halloween party. Did he really want to know what was inside? He had a feeling it wouldn’t be spaghetti.

He took a deep breath. Yes, he wanted to know. He had seen the glee in Angele’s eyes as she had raked his face. He touched his hand to his eye again, running his fingers along the bumps where the stitches were. He wanted to know the person who had gotten the drop on him.

Patterson sighed. He would go home and some sleep. He would call Jordan in the morning—see how she was doing. Then he would get Mrs. Mason’s statement and then go to the hospital. Maybe, together, those statements would give him something logical to put in the report. It was doubtful, but it could happen. Patterson gritted his teeth even tighter. He straightened his shoulders and flicked the headlights on before driving off into the night.

Chapter Eighteen: Audrey

Audrey’s stomach writhed. She turned over in bed. It’s been a long day, she told herself, a long exhausting terrible day. Even though it had only been eight o’clock when she’d arrived home, she’d kicked off her shoes and walked straight into the sofa bed. She hadn’t even bothered to wash off her makeup. When she woke the next morning, she would find tiny smudges of her concealer smeared on the pillowcase.

She exhaled. At least she would never forget William now. She’d remember how he’d talked to their computer like you would a cat or dog (“Come on buddy, load. You can do it! There’s a good hard drive!”). She’d remember how still his face looked when she found him that day, the dried blood stiffening on his shirt (silence). She turned over again. Waking up without William was like waking up without a leg or an arm. Amputees sometimes experienced a phantom pain, a ghost pain in the limb they’d lost. Was this what her grief was, an ache in a limb she no longer had?

With William she had been happier than she had ever been and now he was gone. Did every person have one time in their life when they were shinningly, perfectly happy? One time when their world overflowed and it seemed like they could have anything they wanted. William had swept into her life and kissed her awake. The warmth from his lips had spread down her limbs and made them tingle. William could face things. He had told her to see her family. He was a prince with wide innocent eyes and a sword that could slice through the wall of thorns and concealer she’d built around herself. He was a warm. She could huddle up beside him on cold
nights and feel the heat of his breath on her pale face. With William she was safe from the world, safe from herself. As long as she kept her mouth closed, lips pursed, and never ever told him where she’d come from or what she’d failed to do. As long as she never told him about the nights she’d lain awake in bed, fingernails digging into her palms, listening to Mara crying.

Her jaw tightened. Mara had helped kill William. She had brought Angele to their home and Angele had stabbed him. It had to be Angele; there was no one else evil enough, no one else hungry enough. Angele had probably led her on like she’d led Audrey on. Was that why had she saved her, back at Angele’s? Because Angele had hurt both of them? Audrey’s gut squirmed. Was she disloyal to William, now that she had helped Mara? But Mara had looked so pathetic as she’d crawled on Angele’s floor, her eyes blank like a lobotomy patient’s. Audrey shivered. She knew how that felt, to feel your own blankness pressing in on you. It was a though she had taken off her makeup and discovered she no longer had a face.

How could she have been so stupid as to go to Angele in the first place? But Angele had seemed so comforting. She had taken Audrey’s hand in hers and told her everything would be alright. Had it been so wrong to want to believe that? Angele had rubbed Audrey’s knee and offered her a cup of chamomile tea. On rare occasions, when Audrey was sick as a child, her mother had made her chamomile tea. Was it so wrong to want to drink it? To feel the warmth of the cup in her hands and the hint of honey soothing her throat.

In the mornings, when Audrey first awoke, there was a moment she when didn’t know what had happened, when she could have been any other woman stirring beside her husband. Then she would open her eyes and it would come back: She was Audrey Mason. She had a mother who had nearly starved her sister. In those few seconds before the moment dissolved, her shoulders wouldn’t be tense and her mouth wouldn’t be tight. She’d wanted to live that moment for the rest of her life. Audrey stirred. Maybe she still did.

But the price was all the other moments. The air stuck in Audrey’s throat. Then the memories started to come, falling down around her like that evening’s storm, drenching her to the bone. All the things she’d done and said and been: the time William had taught her to surf down in Monterey, the time he’d proposed. Her friendship with June, she could have forgotten that too. She could have forgotten all the times she’d stopped by the breakroom to share a muffin and some gossip, all the times she’d told June that, yes, she looked just fine. There were other things too, things that made her cringe: the redness around June’s nails where she’d bitten them after she’d lost her baby, the small black hole at the base of her mother’s throat, just wide enough to stick a finger through. Audrey pressed her face into her pillow. Whenever she’d seen that hole, she’d felt a quiver of revulsion. What kind of daughter was revolted by her own mother?

She wriggled against the sheets. She still couldn’t sleep. The rain was receding outside, slowing to a drizzle. Audrey forced herself to breathe slowly, in and out, in and out. Count the breaths, one, two, three, four…You’re here. You’re here and you’re alive and you can remember. You’re still Audrey. Angele isn’t here. She can’t hurt you anymore. Meeting Angele had been like running her finger down the petal of some soft downy flower, only to find it had a fanged worm at its center—a canker blossom that made you bleed. Audrey forced her eyelids closed.

She perched on a wall. Her feet dangled off the edge, miles from the ground. She scrunched her eyes shut against the dizzying vertigo. The wind buffeted her back and she dug her fingertips into the rough bricks. Don’t look down, whatever you do, don’t look down.
“Hello dear.” A purring voice, smooth as honey.
Audrey screamed over and over and over. Her throat hurt. She should get some chamomile tea to soften it. She shook her head. Not chamomile, never chamomile. Chamomile was poisonous.

“Children should be seen and not heard.” A finger brushed the back of her neck.
Her lips locked together. Yell, scream, screech, howl, shriek, she thought. But nothing came out. Her mouth was sealed, lips mortared together like the bricks on the wall.

Audrey blanched, cheeks pale as snow. Snow, cold and white, which would melt at the first touch of spring.

“You might as well never have lived.” The words caressed her ear, smooth as a silk blouse or a feather light kiss.
There was a light push on the small of her back and she fell. She plummeted through the air. Her eyes watered. Her hair blew out behind her, streaming into the blue emptiness. The ground was growing larger and larger. She would smash into it in five, four, three, two, one...

Audrey Mason sat on a wall,
Audrey Mason had a great fall
All the king’s horses and all the king’s men
Couldn’t put Audrey back together again.

Audrey sat bolt upright with a scream. The dawn light was just beginning to peak through the curtains. Angele’s last words to her still rang in her ears: you might as well never have lived. Had she told Mara something similar? Was that why she recognized the fear in Mara’s eyes?
Sweat coated her legs. She reached up and switched off her lamp, even with Mara and Angele in the hospital she still hadn’t been able to sleep without it on. The whiteness couldn’t get her if the light was on; it couldn’t slip in through the cracks in her skull and lick around the edges of her brain until she was all eaten up.

She peeled back the covers and swung her legs out of the sofa bed. She was still dressed from last night. Her blouse and slacks were wrinkled and her makeup was blurred. What was she thinking wearing a hundred dollar work blouse to bed? If June knew, she would have giggled about it. Maybe later she would call June, see if she remembered again. She didn’t know what she would say to her though. It would be awkward: “Hey June, remember me? Audrey? We’ve been friends for three years. You sent me to a woman called Angele. Any of that ring a bell?” She should probably start with something small. It was Saturday so she wasn’t going in to work. When she went back on Monday, she would ask if June wanted to grab lunch, the way they always did. She wouldn’t talk about Angele. She’d ask about William and Kate and their new baby instead. Babies were always cute. Who wouldn’t want to talk about babies?

She padded into the kitchen to make herself a cup of coffee with plenty of foam. The steamer whirred busily as Audrey tapped her fingers on the countertop. She reached up into the cupboard, groping around for the cinnamon. She’d always liked cinnamon on her coffee. Her fingers brushed a small box and she froze— chamomile tea. William’s mother had brought her a tea sampler as a house warming gift when they’d bought the place and she hadn’t finished it yet. Most of it was herbal and she preferred her teas fruity. The chamomile was still left. Quickly, holding it between her thumb and forefinger, as though it might bite her, she carried the box over to the garbage. She flung it in and slammed the lid down after it.
The doorbell rang and she jumped. Was it Patterson? Or some other officer? Did they need her statement already? Her stomach jolted. She still had no idea what she was going to tell him. Ideally, something that didn’t make her sound like she should be in a mental home. She walked slowly towards the door and looked out the peep hole.

Chapter Seventeen: Audrey

Patterson’s brown eyes looked back at her. Her heart beat rapidly. Couldn’t he have at least waited until she’d had the chance to drink her coffee? She sank to the floor and put her back to the door. Couldn’t she wait a minute before answering the door? Just long enough to get her breathing under control. Maybe if she waited long enough he would think she was out and go away, and then she could have one more day of denial. The doorbell rang again.

William had once asked her why she had sounded so sad on the piano. She had denied it; she’d said she wasn’t sad at all. She hadn’t thought either one of them could bare the real answer. William’s mouth would have dropped open and he would have shied away, like June when Audrey had told her she hadn’t had any playdates. She had chosen William because he was normal. He didn’t know what it was like to listen to his sibling sobbing at night. She had loved it, that naïveté. He threw himself at the world full force because he didn’t know what it could do to him. Like the Prince in Sleeping Beauty, slicing through the thorns around the castle, like he didn’t know they could cut him. But they could; they could devour him and bleed him dry. Audrey knew this; it was her job to keep watch for both of them. So when William asked why she sounded so sad on the piano she had lied and told him she wasn’t. Her chest clenched and for a moment she couldn’t breathe. She had failed. She hadn’t watched closely enough and William had died. I’m sorry, she thought, I’m sorry I couldn’t protect you.

The doorbell rang a third time. “Sheriff’s Department, open up.”

Audrey took a deep breath. Quickly, before she could change her mind, she pulled the door open. Patterson stood in the threshold. His uniform was rumpled and one of his eyes was swollen shut. He hadn’t brushed his hair or shaved since they’d last seen each other. Audrey looked him up and down. For someone who had fought with Angele, he had gotten off lightly. She bit her lip. He didn’t know how lucky he was. “Come in, Deputy.”

He stepped through the doorway. “Are you ready to make your statement?”

“I just need to get changed first.”

“I’ll wait. I can drive you to the station.”

Audrey shifted foot to foot. “Actually, I’d like to go somewhere else first, we can talk there. If that’s okay.”

“Your official statement needs to be taken at the police station.” She could almost hear Patterson grinding his teeth.
She shifted from foot to foot. “I was thinking something a bit, well, unofficial.”
“I work for the Sheriff’s Department. I am required to get an official statement. Anything you say with me can, and most likely will, be used in a court of law.”
“I understand. I just wanted to stop by somewhere else first and then go take my official statement.”
“You might want to get a lawyer before you make any statement, official or unofficial.”
“Thank you for warning me. But no, I’m not getting a lawyer. At least not for the first statement.” What she had to say to Patterson would sound crazy. She didn’t need another person listening to the think she’d gone off the deep end.
“Are you sure, Audrey?”
“Yes.” She paused. “Why were you at Angele’s yesterday? You were a godsend but why were you there?”
“I was following you. I came in when I heard you yelling.”
“Okay. Shall we take your car or mine?”
“Mine.” Patterson probably thought she was going to bolt any second. She didn’t blame him. She wasn’t so sure herself.

In the end they made two stops, one to the florist’s and one to the cemetery where William was buried. It was drizzling when she arrived at the cemetery. The cool droplets fell on her face and hair as she swung her car door open. She carefully placed her phone in the glove compartment and gathered up a bouquet of crocuses from the passenger seat. No phones today William. Not at your graveside.

Patterson swung himself out of the driver’s seat and strode around the front of the patrol car to join her. “So this is where your husband is buried?”
Audrey nodded and began to lead him through the cemetery. “Follow me.”

The ground around William’s headstone was squishy from the recent rains. The leaves on the oak tree beside it were red gold, flashing brilliantly against the cloudy sky. William would have loved it. Autumn was his favorite season. He said everything was crisper, sharper in the Fall. Audrey sighed. William would have loved this Autumn with its smell of wet leaves in the air. Audrey knelt down by the headstone and laid the crocuses in front of it—the only blooms in what promised to be a long gray winter. Beloved Husband and Son.

She laid her hand on the headstone and closed her eyes for a moment. It was slick and smooth from the mist. You wanted to know William, well, here goes, she thought. I love you and I’m sorry. A soft breeze ruffled the hair on the back of her neck. It was time, past time.

She turned around to face Patterson. “Are you ready for this? It’s a long story.”
“Yes.” He looked her in the eye. Audrey blinked, and then forced herself to return his gaze.

“Well.” She took a deep breath. “I have a sister.”

Like Butterflies: A Literary Analysis
For my senior thesis I chose to write a novella, *Like Butterflies*. *Like Butterflies* uses the form of the novella to examine questions of what is, what causes, and what ends evil. More specifically, it uses the genre of police procedural as a construct to encourage the reader to engage with these questions. Because this genre deals mainly with crime and its consequences it is an appropriate choice to serve as a vehicle for questions concerning evil. However, the sources used as background and inspiration for *Like Butterflies* pull from a variety of genres in 20th and 21st century literature. Authors used as sources include Truman Capote, Flannery O’Conner, Gillian Flynn, and Angela Carter. These authors all examine the larger questions of evil that appear in *Like Butterflies*, in addition to different subthemes such as mercy and self-hood, in particular female self-hood. These subthemes are further explored in *Like Butterflies*. *Like Butterflies* examines the connections between self-hood, mercy, and evil, showing how both a strong inner self and an act of mercy can halt evil.

In one of my sources, *Gone Girl*, self-hood is deeply suppressed. Both main characters in the novel sacrifice their self-hood in order to maintain appearances. They are a married couple, Nick and Amy. On the outside, their marriage appears to be normal. However, on the inside it is violent and self-destructive (in the course of the novel Amy frames Nick for her murder). Nick says of Amy that: “She needed to dazzle men and jealous-ify women: Of course Amy can cook French cuisine and speak fluent Spanish and garden and knit and run marathons and day-trade stocks and fly a plane and look like a runway model doing it. She needed to be Amazing Amy, all the time” (Flynn 45). While Nick and Amy are both unreliable narrators, this statement of Nick’s is borne out by Amy’s own declarations that she has been putting on appearances. So much of Amy’s energy goes into creating a perfect outer self that she neglects her inner self. Amy says: “It was as if he [Nick] hollowed me out and filled me with feathers” (Flynn 223).
This statement connotes emptiness and lack of a strong identity. Towards the end of the novel, Amy retains her focus on the exterior. When she goes back to Nick she says: “Well, then screw him, he did too good a job, because I want him, exactly like that. The man he was pretending to be—women love that guy. I love that guy.” (Flynn 392). The person she loves is not real but a fiction, created by Nick to bring her back so he would not be prosecuted for her murder. In declaring her love for this fiction, she consciously chooses appearances over reality. Both she and Nick dedicate themselves to preserving the appearance of a happy marriage at the expense of their self-hood.

However, this dedication to the appearance of happiness prohibits them from truly becoming happy and causes much of the evil present in the novel. The appearance of happiness takes the place of the reality. The dynamic between Nick and Amy brings the reader to question the difference between surface normality and deeper dysfunction. It even raises the question of whether or not this surface normality even exists. Amy states that: “In the meantime, we can work on our rebuilding. Start with the façade. We will have a happy marriage if it kills him.”(P. 398).” The wish expressed in this sentence is impossible. One cannot be happy while simultaneously being killed. The sentence also hints at the damage that was done over the course of the novel in order for Amy to achieve the perfect family she had always wanted. There are no lengths she will not go to obtain her “happy marriage.” Indeed, she links it with the death, either figurative or literal, of her husband. In order to return to Nick she does in fact kill another one of her suitors, Desi. This murder occurs because of Amy’s wish to return to Nick and begin rebuilding their lives together, lives which are predicated on falsehood. Amy’s desire to continue their “façade” leads her to commit evil acts throughout the novel. In Gone Girl, Nick and Amy
give precedence to appearances to the detriment of their inner selves, which acts as a catalyst for the evil found in that novel.

This dynamic of characters choosing appearances over self-hood appears in *Like Butterflies* and causes evil throughout as it does in *Gone Girl*. One of my antagonists, Angele, has the ability to take memories away from other characters. The effect of this removal is physically and mentally disastrous. It is the removal of the character’s personality and self-hood. I describe Audrey’s encounter with Angele as follows: “It was as though she [Audrey] had taken off her makeup and discovered she no longer had a face” (McGinnis 113). Angele reduces Audrey to a façade whose inner personality is almost non-existent. When Mara’s memories are removed she also loses her inner self. Towards the end of the novella she asks: “Who was? Who? Was she even a who?” (McGinnis 96). Mara’s identity has become so fragmented that she questions whether or not she has one. As in *Gone Girl*, characters in *Like Butterflies* lose their sense of self.

A strong healthy inner self or lack thereof is closely tied to agency and morality within *Like Butterflies*. The more agency and sense of self a character has, the more likely they are to act in a moral fashion. For example, Mara is only able to watch a murder and do nothing after she has lost her worst memory, which is a crucial part of her sense of self. Mara’s evil is predicated on the fact that she has lost her memories and therefore her self-hood. Afterwards, when she regains her memories and her selfhood, she feels some remorse for what she has done. This gives her character a hope for redemption. She is capable of goodness only when her self-hood is restored. In *Like Butterflies*, the character who commits the most evil, Angele, has the least developed sense of self. Angele tells Audrey: “Why does a cat chase a mouse? To feel its last heartbeats, the blood pumping through its mouth, hot and bitter. It is the mouse’s blood that
makes its own heart race. The cat is most alive when it chases the mouse” (McGinnis 99). To feel present and alive, Angele needs to harm others. When she taunts Mara she asserts, “I need that pain” (McGinnis 92). It is not that she wants to hurt others. It is that she needs to do so. Because her sense of self is so underdeveloped she needs others’ pain in order to feel authentic. Her lack of self-hood is the cause of her evil. In Like Butterflies, the lack of inner self is the basis for the evil the characters commit.

An offshoot of this theme of self-hood and lack thereof that I worked with was hunger and desire relating to inner emptiness. I used both literal and figurative hunger as a trope for showing how empty my characters were, and therefore how evil they were, at different times throughout the novella. All three main characters, Audrey, Mara, and Angele experience emptiness and hunger at some point in the novella. They each attempt to fill this emptiness in various destructive ways. Mara attempts to revenge herself on Audrey. Audrey concentrates on her outer appearance. Angele uses the memories of others to fill her own void. When Mara asks her how it is possible for her to remove memories, Angele replies: “I’ve wondered that myself; how I could devour so much and still have room for more. I should be full by now but I’m nowhere near” (McGinnis 63). I describe Angele’s memory taking as a process of emptiness and satiation (or lack thereof). Angele is never satiated. The evil in my novella thrives on negation of the self and the moral emptiness this causes, which as shown through the trope of hunger.

This lack of self-hood and emptiness in Like Butterflies is juxtaposed with the image of feminine perfection Angele represents and Audrey strives for. This image of feminine perfection is also explored in Angela Carter’s The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories. Angela Carter specializes in re-telling the fairy tales, many of which use the image of perfect femininity, and turning them on their heads. One of her stories, “The Lady of the House of Love,” is a retelling
of Sleeping Beauty. In this instance, the character that symbolizes Sleeping Beauty, the Countess, is a vampire who invites travelers to her castle and kills them. The Countess is not sweetly feminine, no matter how much she may wish to be. She is a predator. The narrator states: “She has no mouth with which to kiss, no hands with which to caress, only the fangs and talons of a beast of prey” (Carter 134). Attributes that are normally used to show affection are instead used for destruction and violence. To attempt to wake Sleeping Beauty/ the Countess is dangerous. The image of the sweet, safe, feminine personae is false.

In my novella, I also use the image of female perfection that Sleeping Beauty personifies. I take this image and I juxtapose it with the more complex, and often more dangerous, reality of my characters’ psyches. Often, this image conceals the evil that my characters commit. For instance, I chose to give my villain, Angele, a sweet and motherly outside but a ruthless predatory inside. I describe her as follows: “The woman was plump and motherly with strands of gray hair escaping from her bun. She wore a thick knitted sweater over a pair of faded jeans. Her rosy cheeks dimpled” (McGinnis 37). This description evokes a comforting maternal character. It is nurturing and non-threatening. However, the real Angele is very different. At the end of chapter three Angele tells Mara: “In the meantime, you’ll fade slowly—like a wilting flower. Like the lilies on your sister’s porch. I think I’d like to watch” (McGinnis 67). Angele looks forward to witnessing Mara’s pain. The narrator describes her as follows when she makes this statement: “Her eyes were fever bright. They bulged like an insect’s” (McGinnis 67). The prospect of Mara’s pain makes Angele excited. Angele rejoices and feels the most present when she destroys others. The motherly female image she presents to the world is false. Like the Countess in “The Lady of the House of Love” she survives by being a predator. I choose to include this juxtaposition between Angele’s motherly image and her true personality because it
shows the danger that comes with believing too much in cultural images of feminine perfection. Much of the evil in my novella is driven by characters who wish to be or appear as perfectly feminine, leading either to the seduction of others or to the destruction of their actual selves.

Conversely, Like Butterflies also invites its reader to ask how evil, and cycles of evil are ended. How do characters regain their self-hood and the morality that accompanies it? In answering this question Like Butterflies draws on many works including Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood. At the close of In Cold Blood, Agent Dewey, who has been in charge of capturing the novel’s murderers, Dick and Perry, watches their execution. His thoughts on it are these: “Dewey imagined that with the deaths of Smith and Hickock [Perry and Dick], he would experience a sense of climax, release, of a design justly completed” (Capote 341). The verb imagined implies that the deaths of Perry and Dick did not give him the closure he wished for. In Capote’s novel, death cannot provide the emotional finish looked for by Dewey and others. Instead what provides it is life, in particular the continuation of life. The novel ends with a meeting between Dewey and Susan Kidwell, a childhood friend of one of the murder victims. Dewey sees in Susan the potential for a good life that was denied to her friend, Nancy Clutter. The last lines in the novel are as follows: “he [Dewey] called after her as she disappeared down the path, a pretty girl in a hurry, her smooth hair swinging, shining—just such a young woman as Nancy might have been. Then starting home, he walked toward the trees, and under them, leaving behind him the big sky, the whisper of wind voices in the wind-bent wheat” (Capote 343). Susan realizes the potential for life that was denied to Nancy. The pastoral description and potential for life at the end of In Cold Blood indicates sense of closure and peace. The closure at the novel’s finish can only be provided by life, not death. It is life that has the final say. The
continuation of the old pattern (death) is replaced by a new pattern (life), which brings a halt to the evil present in the novel.

*Like Butterflies* also uses the trope of life after death, of recovery after tragedy. Like *In Cold Blood*, it uses pastoral images to do so. The narrator states: “William would have loved this Autumn, with its smell of wet leaves in the air. Audrey knelt down by the headstone and laid the crocuses in front of it—the only blooms in what promised to be a long gray winter.” (P. 129).

Because this section is written in third person limited point of view the narrator’s words are very close to the thoughts and feelings of the protagonist, Audrey, whose perspective dominates this final section. It is Audrey’s recovery that the reader is witnessing. As in *In Cold Blood*, the final passage is heavily pastoral. This is evidenced by the smell of wet leaves and the crocuses that Audrey puts on her husband William’s headstone. These images of nature are juxtaposed with the image of death—William’s headstone. Death and life exist side by side. Both *In Cold Blood* and *Like Butterflies* stop the cycle of evil before the end of the novel. This is made possible by the characters’ recommitment and reengagement with life.

In *Like Butterflies*, this reengagement is made possible by mercy. The model for the mercy seen in *Like Butterflies* can be found in Flannery O’Conner’s short story “The Artificial Nigger.” In “The Artificial Nigger” it is mercy and not retribution that breaks the cycle of evil and animosity between the two protagonists, Mr. Head and Nelson. The anger between them comes to a climax when Mr. Head denies that Nelson is his grandson. This severance not only separates Mr. Head from Nelson, but from himself as well. The narrator states: “The women [who Nelson had previously disturbed] dropped back, staring at him with horror, as if they were so repulsed by a man who would deny his own image and likeness that they could not bear to lay hands on him” (O’Conner 123). This sentence emphasizes the similar appearance of Mr. Head
and Nelson to draw the reader’s attention to the essential sameness between the two characters.
The evil in this story is not in the other but in the self. “The Artificial Nigger” portrays the
denial of evil inside the self as an unnatural act that results in self-alienation. Nelson does no
better than his grandfather. The narrator says: “As for Nelson, his mind had frozen around his
grandfather’s treachery as if he were trying to preserve it intact to present at the final judgment”
(O’Conner 125). He focuses on the wrongdoing of his grandfather and by doing so keeps it alive
in his own mind. Mr. Head and Nelson each continue in this state, isolated from one another and
locked in their private miseries. What stops this continuum is a statue of an African American
that they see on their journey through the city. This statue acts as a higher power, an outside
force that restores them to a state of goodness and connection. The narrator declares: “They
could both feel it dissolving their differences like an action of mercy. Mr. Head had never known
before what mercy felt like because he had been too good to deserve any, but he felt he knew
now” (O’Conner 128). In order for Mr. Head to feel this mercy, he must first have done wrong.
The wrong doing makes the mercy possible. The mercy of the statue then breaks the cycle of evil
and misery that Mr. Head and Nelson had inhabited. Continuing previous cycles of evil and
death do not help the characters’ situation or emotional equilibrium. Instead, it is life and mercy
that save them.

Mercy also stops evil in Like Butterflies. At its climax I have Audrey show Mara mercy.
Mara is choking on a biscotti and Audrey saves her by hitting her on the back. She also lets Mara
touch her cheek, which adds an element of human connection inspired by the works previously
discussed. I describe this moment as follows: “She reached up to touch Nice Voice’s cheek. Nice
Voice drew back a moment and then held still. The skin on her face was warm, flushed. Mara
inhaled, feeling her lungs expand. It was luxurious, breathing again” (McGinnis 100). This is my
description of mercy and how it feels to receive mercy. Mercy for Mara is an experience akin to an epiphany, as it is in “The Artificial Nigger.” At this point in the story, evil and violence are all she knows. The mercy Audrey shows her changes that and later allows her to feel some remorse for her actions. The trope of hunger and emptiness is also negated here. Mara eats the biscotti and for the first time she feels satiated, both physically and emotionally. Her self-hood is restored by accepting Audrey’s mercy, which is shown by Audrey giving her the biscotti. By showing and accepting this mercy my characters incorporate goodness into their identities where it resides alongside the evil that is already apart of them and helps to mitigate this evil.

Like Butterflies provides a variety of scenarios where evil can take place as well as detailing the psychological effect of evil both on the victim and on the perpetrator. The themes of mercy and self-hood are woven into Like Butterflies and contribute to the larger theme of evil within the work. Characters in Like Butterflies are more likely to commit evil acts if they have a weakened sense of self. Conversely, they are more likely to refuse evil if they have previously been shown mercy. Like Butterflies reflects the evil that becomes possible through lack of self-hood and the possibility of redemption once mercy is shown. However, although Like Butterflies poses and attempts to answer questions concerning evil it is the reader’s prerogative to study these questions for themselves and to arrive at their own answers. Like Butterflies encourages the reader to use the struggles, misdeeds, and eventual potential for redemption of its characters as a way to begin their own explorations.
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