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we were liars

e. lockhart

family

of

liars

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For Hazel

*The Sinclair Family Tree*

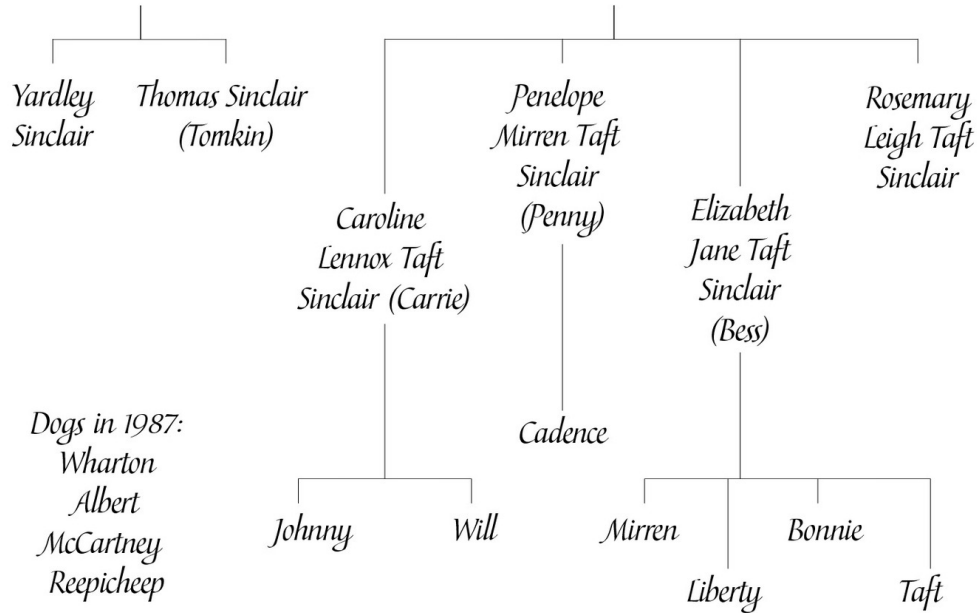


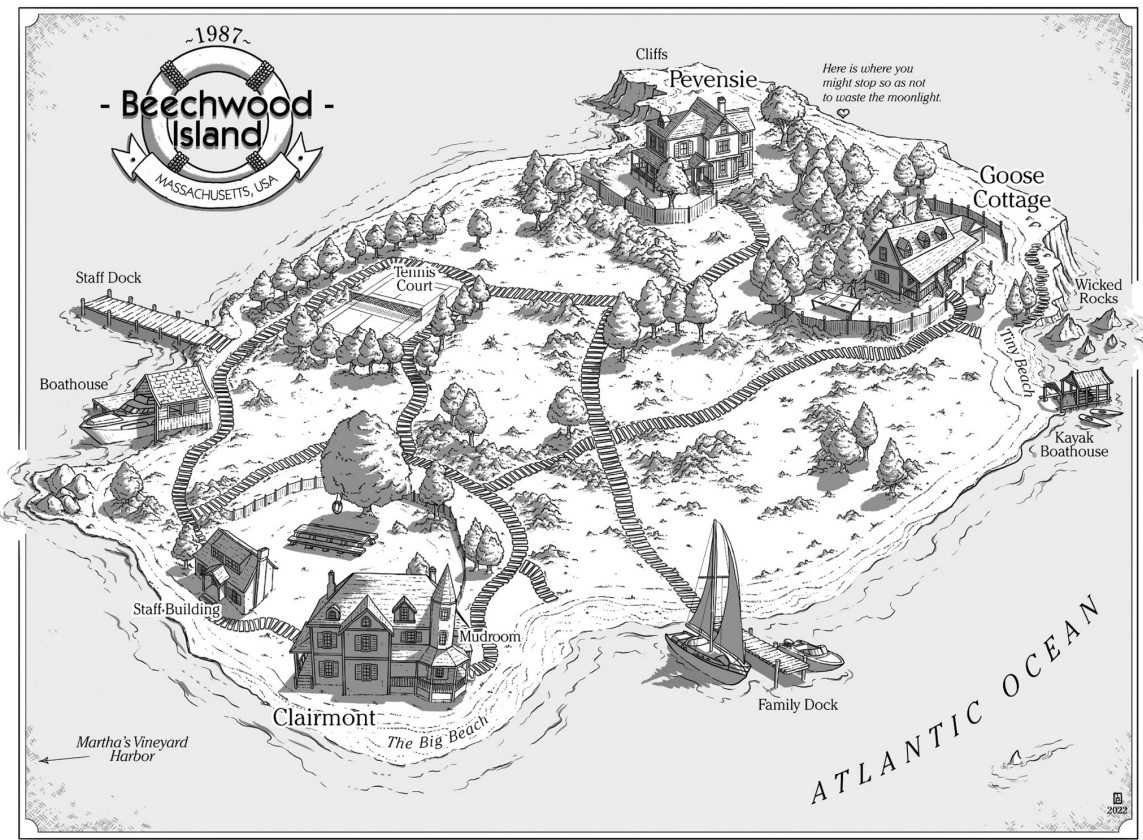
*Dean Sinclair*

*Harris Sinclair & Tipper Taft Sinclair*

Pevensie  
and Philadelphia

Clairmont  
and Boston





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Dear Readers,

This book contains spoilers for the novel *We Were Liars*.

I love you, and I wrote this for you—with ambition and black coffee.

xo

E

PART ONE  
A Story for Johnny



# 1.

MY SON JOHNNY is dead.

Jonathan Sinclair Dennis, that was his name. He died at age fifteen.

There was a fire and I love him and I wronged him and I miss him. He will never grow taller, never find a partner, never train for another race, never go to Italy like he wanted, never ride the kind of roller coaster that flips you upside down. Never, never, never. Never anything.

Still, he visits my kitchen on Beechwood Island quite often.

I see him late at night when I can't sleep and come down for a glass of whiskey. He looks just like he always did at fifteen. His blond hair sticks up, tufty. He has a sunburn across his nose. His nails are bitten down and he's usually in board shorts and a hoodie. Sometimes he wears his blue-checked windbreaker, since the house runs cold.

I let him drink whiskey because he's dead anyway. How's it going to hurt him? But often he wants hot cocoa instead. The ghost of Johnny likes to sit on the counter, banging his bare feet against the lower cabinets. He takes out the old Scrabble tiles and idly makes phrases on the countertop while we talk. *Never eat anything bigger than your ass. Don't take no for an answer. Be a little kinder than you have to be.* Stuff like that.

He often asks me for stories about our family. "Tell about when you were teenagers," he says tonight. "You and Aunt Penny and Aunt Bess."

I don't like talking about that time. "What do you want to know?"

"Whatever. Stuff you got up to. Hijinks. Here on the island."

"It was the same as now. We took the boats out. We swam. Tennis and ice cream and suppers cooked on the grill."

"Did you all get along back then?" He means me and my sisters, Penny and Bess.

"To a point."

“Did you ever get in trouble?”

“No,” I say. Then, “Yes.”

“What for?”

I shake my head.

“Tell me,” he pushes. “What’s the worst thing you did? Come on, spill it.”

“No!” I laugh.

“Yes! Pretty please? The absolute worst thing you ever did, back then. Tell your poor dead son all the gory details.”

“Johnny.”

“Oh, it can’t be that bad,” he says. “You have no idea the things I’ve seen on television. Way worse than anything you could have done in the 1980s.”

Johnny haunts me, I think, because he can’t rest without answers. He keeps asking about our family, the Sinclair family, because he’s trying to understand this island, the people on it, and why we act the way we do. Our history.

He wants to know why he died.

I owe him this story.

“Fine,” I say. “I’ll tell you.”

—

MY FULL NAME is Caroline Lennox Taft Sinclair, but people call me Carrie. I was born in 1970. This is the story of my seventeenth summer.

That was the year the boys all came to stay on Beechwood Island. And the year I first saw a ghost.

I have never told this particular story to anyone, but I think it is the one that Johnny needs to hear.

*Did you ever get in trouble?* he asks. *Tell me. What’s the worst thing you did? Come on, spill it...The absolute worst thing you ever did, back then.*

Telling this story will be painful. In fact, I do not know if I can tell it truthfully, though I'll try.

I have been a liar all my life, you see.

It's not uncommon in our family.



PART TWO  
Four Sisters



## 2.

MY CHILDHOOD IS a blur of wintry Boston mornings, my sisters and I bundled in boots and itchy wool hats. School days in uniforms with thick navy cardigans and pleated skirts. Afternoons in our tall brick town house, doing homework in front of the fireplace. If I close my eyes, I can taste sweet vanilla pound cake and feel my own sticky fingers. Life was fairy tales before bed, flannel pajamas, golden retrievers.

There were four of us girls. In the summers, we went to Beechwood Island. I remember swimming in the fierce ocean waves with Penny and Bess while our mother and baby Rosemary sat on the shore. We caught jellyfish and crabs and kept them in a blue bucket. Wind and sunlight, small quarrels, mermaid games and rock collections.

Tipper, our mother, threw wonderful parties. She did it because she was lonely. On Beechwood, anyway. We did have guests, and for some years my father's brother Dean and his children were there with us, but my mother thrived at charity suppers and long lunches with dear friends. She loved people and was good at loving them. Without many around on the island, she made her own fun, having parties even when we hadn't anybody visiting.

When the four of us were little, my parents would take us to Edgartown each Fourth of July. Edgartown is a seafaring village on the island of Martha's Vineyard, all white picket fences. We'd get deep-fried clams with tartar sauce in paper containers and then buy lemonade from a stand in front of the Old Whaling Church. We'd set up lawn chairs, then eat as we waited for the parade. Local businesses had decorated floats. Vintage car collectors proudly tooted their horns. The island fire stations paraded their oldest engines. A veterans' band played Sousa marches and my mother would

always sing: “Be kind to your fine-feathered friends / For a duck could be somebody’s mother.”

We never stayed for the fireworks. Instead, we motored back to Beechwood and ran up from the family boat dock to the real party.

Clairmont house’s porch would be decked out in fairy lights and the large picnic table on the lawn dressed in blue and white. We’d eat corn on the cob, hamburgers, watermelon. There would be a cake like an American flag, with blueberries and raspberries on top. My mother would have decorated it herself. Same cake, every year.

After supper she’d give us all sparklers. We’d parade along the wooden walkways of the island—the ones that led from house to house—and sing at the top of our lungs. “America the Beautiful,” “This Land Is Your Land,” “Be Kind to Your Fine-Feathered Friends.”

In the dark, we’d head to the Big Beach. The groundskeeper, Demetrios in those days, would set off fireworks. The family sat on cotton blankets, the adults holding glasses of clinking ice.

Anyway. It’s hard to believe I was ever quite so blindly patriotic, and that my highly educated parents were. Still, the memories stick.

—

IT NEVER OCCURRED to me that anything was wrong with how I fit into our family until one afternoon when I was fourteen. It was August, 1984.

We had been on the island since June, living in Clairmont. The house was named for the school that Harris, our father, had attended when he was a boy. Uncle Dean and my cousins lived in Pevensie, named for the family in the Narnia books. A nanny stayed the summer in Goose Cottage. The staff building was for the housekeeper, the groundskeeper, and other occasional staff, but only the housekeeper slept there regularly. The others had homes on the mainland.

I had been swimming all morning with my sisters and my cousin Yardley. We had eaten tuna sandwiches and celery from the cooler at my mother’s feet. Sleepy from lunch and exercise, I set my head down and put

one hand on Rosemary. She was napping next to me on the blanket, her eight-year-old arms covered in mosquito bites, her legs sandy. Rosemary was blond, like the rest of us, with tangled waves. Her cheeks were soft and peach-colored, her limbs skinny and unformed. Freckles; a tendency to squint; a goofy laugh. Our Rosemary. She was strawberry jam, scabby knees, and a small hand in mine.

I dozed for a bit while my parents talked. They were sitting in lawn chairs beneath a white umbrella, some distance away. I woke when Rosemary rolled onto her side, and I lay there with my eyes closed, feeling her breathe under my arm.

“It’s not worth it,” my mother was saying. “It just isn’t.”

“She shouldn’t have it hard when we can fix it,” my father answered.

“Beauty is something—but it’s not everything. You act like it’s everything.”

“We’re not talking about beauty. We’re talking about helping a person who looks weak. She looks *foolish*.”

“Why be so harsh? There’s no need to say that.”

“I’m practical.”

“You care what people think. We shouldn’t care.”

“It’s a common surgery. The doctor is very experienced.”

There was the sound of my mother lighting a cigarette. They all smoked, back then. “You’re not thinking about the time in the hospital,” Tipper argued. “A liquid diet, the swelling, all that. The pain she’s going to suffer.”

Who were they talking about?

What surgery? A liquid diet?

“She doesn’t chew normally,” said Harris. “That’s just a fact. There’s ‘no way out but through.’ ”

“Don’t quote me Robert Frost right now.”

“We have to think about the endgame. Not worry how she gets there. And it wouldn’t hurt for her to look—”

He paused for a second and Tipper jumped in. “You think about pain like it’s a workout or something. Like it’s just effort. A struggle.”