

A close-up, low-angle shot of a yellow 'DO NOT DISTURB' sign hanging from a polished brass door handle. The sign is slightly curved and has a hole at the top. The background is a dark, textured wooden door. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

**DO
NOT
DISTURB**

#1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR

FREIDA McFADDEN

Do Not Disturb

a novel by

FREIDA MCFADDEN

Do Not Disturb

2021 by Freida McFadden.

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To Libby and Mel

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CHAPTER 1

QUINN

While I'm washing the blood off my hands in the kitchen sink, the doorbell rings.

I freeze, my hands full of pink suds, the steaming hot water causing my fingers to burn and tingle. There's somebody at the door. Somebody waiting patiently on the front porch for me to answer. The timing couldn't be worse.

Could it be a package delivery? Maybe they'll drop the package at the door and go away. Or else leave me a note. *Sorry we missed you! We'll be back tomorrow!*

And then: three hard raps on the front door.

"Coming!" I call out in a strangled voice, even though it's unlikely they'll hear me. I scrub furiously at my fingers, and then at my fingernails, where the blood seems to have settled into the cracks. Who knew it was so hard to get blood off your hands? "Just a minute!"

I shut off the hot water and examine my palms, flipping them this way and that. Good enough? It'll have to be. I wipe them dry on a light green dish towel, leaving a smear of red behind. Damn, I didn't get it all—I'll have to wash my hands again.

As soon as I get rid of whoever is at the front door.

My heels clack against the linoleum floor of the kitchen, then go soft when they hit the plush carpeting in the living room. Derek and I pored over carpet swatches for hours before settling on the charcoal-colored carpet that now goes wall-to-wall across our vast living room. The carpet feels lovely when I'm in my bare feet, and I'm glad I held out for a darker color instead of a pale shade that would show every fleck of dirt. Our carpet can easily hide dust and debris.

Bloodstains too, apparently.

As I hurry to the front door, I glimpse bright lights through the windows. Red and blue flashing simultaneously. That can mean only one thing.

There's a cop at my door.

Oh God. No no no no no...

I take a split second to compose myself. *Keep it together, Quinn.* I take a deep breath, trying to get my hands to stop shaking. It doesn't work. So I go ahead and open the door.

I was right. It's a police officer at my door. Not just a police officer, but it's Scotty Dwyer, although he goes by Scott now, or else Deputy Dwyer. About a million years ago, when we were in high school, Scott and I used to date. I remember how awkwardly cute I thought he was, with his red-brown hair that always stuck up straight and all the freckles on his face. But then high school ended, I went off to college, and he went to work for his father's grocery store. I don't even remember breaking up with him, but the long-distance phone calls became less frequent, and one day during my freshman year, I realized we weren't together anymore.

Now Scotty is a policeman with a uniform and a real badge and everything. He used to be skinny as a rail, but now he fills out his dark blue uniform rather nicely. The freckles have faded,

and he's tamed his hair, although he still looks boyishly handsome.

That's the problem with moving back to the town where I grew up. Everyone I run into is the boy I went out with in high school or the kid who saw me throw up in the locker room or the girl who didn't invite me to her birthday party. It's exhausting.

But sometimes it can work to my advantage.

"Hey, Quinn." Scott smiles at me, but his face is serious. This isn't a social call—not that I would have expected it, since I have barely spoken to Scott in the last ten years. "Is everything okay?"

I wipe my hands self-consciously on my gray pencil skirt. "Sure. Of course. Why?"

"Well..." Scott's light brown eyes dart behind me, scanning my living room. The buttery leather sofa, the matching loveseat and ottoman, the wide screen television with surround sound, the photographs on our mantle of our recent skiing trip to Vale. "We got a phone call. One of your neighbors said they heard screaming coming from your house."

"Screaming?" I paste what I think is a very realistic looking smile on my face. "That's so strange! Are they sure it was coming from here?"

His eyes lock with mine. "That's what they said, yes."

I screw up my face, pretending to think about it. Finally, I snap my fingers. "Oh! You know what it was? I was watching a movie on TV, and then I went out to the kitchen and I turned the volume way up. So they probably heard the movie."

He nods, considering this. Everyone says Scott is a good policeman—kind but thorough. I squeeze my hands into fists, waiting to see if he buys my story. I look down at my trembling hands again, scared they might give me away. And that's when I notice it.

A crimson dot on my gray skirt.

Oh God, how did I miss it? How did I let myself answer the door with a drop of blood on my skirt? I quickly avert my eyes, trying not to draw attention to it. If he sees it, he'll insist on coming inside. And if he does, I'm finished.

"What movie?" he finally asks.

"Well," I say, "it was *Scream*. You know, with Neve Campbell and Courteney Cox?"

He clears his throat. "The one with the masks, right?"

"Right. So obviously, there was, you know, *screaming*." I smile apologetically. "I'm sorry if somebody got worried. But you can see there's no disturbance here."

"Uh huh..."

I hold my breath, keeping my eyes pointed straight ahead. I send Scott a subliminal message: *Don't look down. Please don't look down.*

Scott tilts his head to the side. "Are you alone here?"

I play with my hair, trying for casual and flirty. Easy, breezy. *Nothing to see here, Officer.* "Yep. Just little ol' me. Derek is still at work."

Don't look down. Please...

Finally, he nods his head. "Okay. Sorry to bother you. I just wanted to make sure everything was all right."

"Of course!" I laugh, hoping it doesn't sound as weird to him as it does to me. "I'm glad you came. It makes me feel safe to know you're out there protecting me."

Scott's cheekbones turn just the slightest bit pink. When we were in high school and he was embarrassed, his whole face would turn scarlet. "Just doing my job."

"I appreciate it. And next time, I promise I'll keep the volume down. Especially when I'm

watching scary movies!”

He wags a finger at me. “You do that.”

“And we should catch up sometime,” I add. “Derek and I would love to have you over for dinner.”

“Sounds great, Quinn.”

Scott doesn’t want to have dinner with me and Derek. But that’s fine, since it wasn’t a genuine invitation, anyway.

He ambles down my front steps, and then down my driveway to his parked police car with the flashing red and blue lights. I never quite meant to break up with Scotty Dwyer, but now, for the first time, I wonder what my life would have been like if I hadn’t. If I had married a good, honorable man of the law instead of Derek, the man that I chose. I wouldn’t be standing here with blood on my skirt and on the soles of my shoes. That much is for sure.

I shut the door, but I keep watching Scott through the front window. I watch as he starts up the engine and pulls onto the road, and I don’t look away until his car is out of sight.

He’s gone. Thank God.

Now that he’s out of sight, I inspect my skirt. The drop of blood is about half a centimeter in diameter. I’ve never attempted to get blood out of my clothing before, but I have a bad feeling my best work skirt is ruined. Then again, that’s the least of my problems.

I walk back out to the kitchen, examining the carpet for signs of bloody footprints. The kitchen looks about the same as how I left it a few minutes ago. The sink faucet is dripping like it always does. There’s still that crimson smear on the green dish towel. The three plates I left in the drying rack are still lined up in a row. The refrigerator has that note taped up that I wrote to myself to remember to buy more paper towels.

And also, my husband is still lying dead on the kitchen floor in a pool of blood.

CHAPTER 2

I want to make one thing clear. I killed him.

I'm not going to claim it was the butler or a one-armed man. I did it. I killed my husband. All I can say in my defense is I had a good reason.

I look down at Derek, lying where I left him on the kitchen floor, his warm blood forming an uneven circle under his body. The knife is next to him, also dripping with blood and covered with my fingerprints. For a moment, I consider wiping the handle clean, but what would I be trying to achieve? This is my house. Nobody has as good a motive for killing Derek as I do. I tracked my own bloody footprints all over the carpet. Oh, and a police officer just saw me here at what I'm sure will be the approximate time of Derek's death.

So I would say a few fingerprints are not worth worrying about.

I bend down beside him, getting more blood on my skirt, but I think we can assume the skirt is a lost cause at this point. His brown eyes are cracked open as he stares into nothingness, his perfectly chiseled features frozen. The muscles in his face are completely relaxed for the first time since I've known him. Even when Derek is sleeping, he's tense. He grinds his teeth loud enough to wake me. Maybe in death, he's achieved that total relaxation that the meditation app on his phone failed to provide. Maybe he's finally achieved a sublime state of complete bliss.

Would it be a terrible thing to say that I hope he *hasn't* achieved bliss? Would it be terrible to say that I hope he's burning in hell right now?

Well, either way, it's true.

And now I have to figure out my next move. As I see it, I've got two options:

- 1) Stay here and confess
- 2) Run

Option number one is tempting. After all, I'm already here. Inertia is powerful. And perhaps I could spin this. After all, my neighbor heard me screaming. Would anyone believe it if I told them the truth? That if Derek weren't lying here dead, it would have been me. Him or me—that's what it came down to.

I reach out and touch my neck. It's still tender from where his fingers were. There will be bruises. He's never left behind bruises before—at least not in a place anyone else could see. I can still hear his voice hissing in my face: *Why are you home so early? Who were you planning to meet here?*

Him or me. Maybe a jury would sympathize.

Then again, it's not likely. Derek was well-liked by everyone in our community and also *connected*. He owns a business that everyone in New England has heard of. And more importantly, his *family* is connected. They've donated to every state politician currently in office, including the DA. And they never liked me. If they find out what I've done, they won't rest until I'm rotting away in a prison cell for the rest of my life. They will spend every penny they've got

to make me pay for this.

So that leaves one option: *Run*.

I don't want to leave my home. Or my job at the bank. My parents are gone, but my older sister Claudia lives only twenty minutes away, and she would be devastated if I disappeared off the face of the earth. But she would understand. She knows about Derek. What he's like.

It's Friday afternoon. If the odds are in my favor, nobody will find out about this until Monday, when neither of us show for work. Of course, that precludes the possibility that Deputy Dwyer pays us another visit. Or my sister pops in to say hello. Or more likely, Derek's mother comes by for *absolutely no reason at all* except to count all the ways I'm an unsatisfactory wife. (To be fair, this time she would be absolutely right.)

I get up off the floor and look down at my husband's body. If somebody comes into this house, I'm done. They will see him immediately, and the manhunt will begin. Derek's mother has a key, because she likes to come in anytime she wants. The chances of me getting a three day head start are small. But maybe I'll get twenty-four hours.

Of course, if things had gone differently, and I was the one lying on the ground right now, Derek could easily lift me up, throw me in his trunk, and toss me in a nearby body of water. Then he could come home and clean up the evidence. But I can't do that. Derek has a good eighty pounds on me. There's no way I could lift his body. He died on the kitchen floor and that's where he's staying. Attempting to do anything else will waste valuable time.

No, if I'm going to run, I've got to run right now.

But first, I have to change.

I run upstairs to our bedroom. I made the bed this morning, the way Derek likes, with our Seraphina Ivory Damask bedspread folded neatly over the bed and the pillows propped up and fluffed. My mother always had me make the bed when I was a kid, but I stopped doing it as an adult. Until I got married, and I realized Derek required it. And it didn't just have to be made—it had to be made in a very particular way, according to his specifications.

I flash back to a moment a couple of months ago, when Derek walked into our bedroom and discovered that I had folded the bedspread *over* the pillows, rather than under. He narrowed his eyes as I felt my stomach sink.

So this is how you leave our house in the morning? he said. *Looking like a pigsty?*

To be fair, the rest of the house was immaculate. I had cleaned every inch myself, because Derek did not want to hire a housekeeper. He hated the idea of having a stranger in our house and insisted it was my responsibility. So in addition to my full-time job, I did all the cooking and cleaning and shopping.

I push aside the memory of the way Derek screamed at me that day. I stare down at the blankets on the bed, seized by a sudden irrepressible urge to mess them up, just to spite him.

But no. No time for that. I spited him enough by murdering him.

Even though there's precious little time, I spend ten minutes stripping off all my clothing and jumping into the hot shower. There's so much blood in the kitchen. More blood than I thought possible for somebody to have in their body, and I can't risk having a drop on me. Wherever I end up, I have to look sweet and innocent. Bloody hands and crimson-speckled cheeks are not an option.

I turn the shower up as hot as it can go. Scalding. I let the water run over me, immune to the pain. Every time I shut my eyes, I see him coming at me.

You've made a fool out of me for the last time, Quinn.

His fingers closing around my neck, compressing my windpipe. Flailing around with my right hand until it made contact with the knife rack on the kitchen counter...

I swallow, and with trembling fingers, I turn up the water temperature as hot as it will go. My nerve endings are screaming, but I welcome it.

When I get out of the shower, my skin is bright red. I wrap a towel around my body and stare at myself in the mirror over the sink. Unsurprisingly, I don't look great. My eyes are sunken in their sockets. My blond hair is plastered to my skull, cascading down my shoulders in limp clumps. Even though it's wet, I can see the dark roots growing in—he pointed it out to me last night. *Time to get to the hairdresser, Quinn.* When I first met Derek, my hair was shoulder length and brown, but he liked my hair long and blond. But even after years of being blond, it never felt like me.

Well, that's one thing I can change now.

I can't do anything about the color—at least not yet—but it doesn't have to be so long. I pick up the pair of scissors from inside the medicine cabinet. Before I can overthink it, I slice my hair off at chin length. I don't spend too much time making sure it's even, and also, my hands won't stop shaking, which doesn't help matters. The entire process takes about sixty seconds. I flush all the hair down the toilet so nobody will know I did it.

There. I look a lot different with my hair so short. It's not enough, but it's a start.

I pack a bag as rapidly as I can—I toss in some shirts, bras, underwear, and pants. I take all my jewelry, figuring I could hock it if I need to. I also open the shoe box in the back of the closet where I've been stashing money whenever I can, as well as my passport. Somehow I knew I would need it for a day like today. The money isn't much, but it will get me through a few weeks, at least. I can also hit an ATM or two, but I have to be careful about that. Every time I withdraw money, I'll be leaving a trail the police will follow.

I get a sick feeling just thinking about it. This is my life from now on. Hiding from the police. I'll never see my home again. I'll never see my sister again.

But it's that or life in prison.

After my bag is packed, I hesitate at the top of the stairwell, my stomach fluttering. I was up there too long. Too many wasted minutes. What if Scott came back to check on me? What if he didn't really believe I was watching the movie *Scream*?

What if the first floor of my house is crawling with cops, waiting to drag me away in cuffs?

My sensible sneakers thump on the steps. I take them slowly, watching to see if anyone is waiting for me. My heart is pounding. I was stupid to spend so much time up there. I should have grabbed whatever I could and run.

But the living room is silent. Just like I left it.

Thank God.

I won't make the same mistake again. I don't bother to look around the living room and make sure I've gotten every last thing. Everything I own is expendable. Anyway, what would I take? A picture of me and Derek from one of our trips? No way. I want to forget his perfect, handsome, smug face.

So instead, I go straight to the garage. My blue Toyota Corolla is sitting there, waiting for me. We have a two-car garage and Derek's Porsche is right next to my Corolla. He never understood why I didn't want a fancy, expensive car like he had. Why would I keep the same crappy Corolla I drove back when I was single?

He didn't get it. This car is *mine*. I paid for it myself, unlike our ridiculously extravagant

house and furnishings. It's the last thing I own that still feels like me.
I climb in my Corolla and start up the engine.
And I run.

CHAPTER 3

I have no idea where I'm going.

It's not like I did this with any kind of well-thought-out plan. I didn't wake up this morning and say to myself, *Hey, I'm going to kill my husband today!* If I had done something like that, I would have filled up my gas tank beforehand, for starters.

I also would have picked a better day to do it, weather-wise. December has been unseasonably warm this year, but of course, today would be the day we get blessed with freezing rain. That lovely combination of rain and snow is slowly coating the roads and obscuring my windshield as I travel as fast as I dare. And all the while, the sun is dropping in the sky, making it harder and harder to see.

It's like Derek is already haunting me from beyond the grave.

But I've got to keep going. I have to put as many miles as I can between me and the house where I murdered my husband. Because I don't have long.

I'm going to head north. I need to get out of the country. And I'm far closer to Canada than I am to Mexico. Hopefully at the border, they won't look too carefully at my passport and just wave me through.

I've been driving less than twenty minutes when my phone rings. The display in my car pops up the name Claudia Delaney.

It's my sister.

I hesitate, not sure if I should take the call. It's not that I don't have some friends and coworkers that I like, but the only person I'll really miss will be Claudia. She's four years older than me, and she's always looked out for me, especially after our parents died when I was only fourteen. When she finds out what happened, she's going to be worried sick.

I've got to talk to her one last time. I need to let her know I'm all right.

I press the button to take the call. "Hi, Claudia!" I say in a voice that is so ridiculously chipper, I'm convinced she'll know instantly something is wrong.

"Hey, Quinn," she says. "Where are you? Are you free?"

I almost laugh at how ridiculous the question is. "Not at the moment. I'm... still at work."

"What time do you get off? Do you want to grab dinner?"

"No, I..." I squeeze the steering wheel until my knuckles turn white. "I have to work late tonight."

"Again?" She lets out a huff. "They work you way too hard at the bank."

"Yeah," I mumble.

Claudia clucks her tongue. "Tell you what. How about if I come over tonight with a bottle of wine? We can watch something on Netflix."

"No!" The light turns red, and I have to jam my foot on the brake to keep from crashing into the car in front of me. That's all I need right now. "I mean... I've got a headache and I... it's not a good night. I don't feel like socializing."

There's a long silence on the other line. "Quinn, are you okay?"

“Fine!” My voice cracks on the word, and I have to clear my throat. “I’m totally fine, Claudia. Really.”

“Are you sure?”

I grip the steering wheel tighter, picturing my sister’s round face, Cupid’s bow lips, and dark hair cut into a bob. I wish I could tell her the truth. I want more than anything to tell Claudia what happened and what I’ve done. If there’s any person in the world who would understand, it’s her.

But if I tell her the truth, she’s going to try to convince me to come back. She doesn’t want to lose me, so she’ll tell me to come home. And that’s the wrong thing to do. She doesn’t know the extent of the connections Derek’s family has. And even though she doesn’t like Derek, she doesn’t really understand quite how bad he is. I’ve been afraid to tell her all the details, because I thought she would beat him to death with a rolling pin—she’s very protective of me. And truthfully, I didn’t understand *quite* how bad he was until today.

“I’m fine,” I say. “I promise.”

“Do you triple dipper promise with a cherry on top?”

That’s something we always used to say when we were kids. Because the ice cream store down the block had a triple dipper cone with a cherry on top, and it was our favorite. “Yes. I triple dipper promise with a cherry on top.”

“Fine.” I hear the pout in her voice. “But you owe me dinner out. Tomorrow night, Rob and I are going out... how about Sunday?”

I swallow. I can’t agree to Sunday. Because when I don’t show up, she’ll go to my house. I don’t want her to be the one to discover Derek’s body—I can’t do that to her. “How about Monday?”

“Deal. Let’s meet at Donatello’s at seven. Don’t be late!”

“I won’t.” I hesitate, desperately wanting to say the words, *I love you*. Claudia is my only family, and I may never see her again. I want to tell her I love her, but if I do, she will for sure know something is wrong. It’s not the typical way we end conversations. So instead, I say, “Bye, Claudia.”

“Bye! Remember—don’t keep me waiting!”

We end the call, and I sit there for a moment, staring at the freezing rain hitting my windshield.

“I love you, Claudia,” I say to the windshield.

And then I start to cry.

Ironically, the first time I met Derek, I wasn’t attracted to him at all.

It’s strange because of... well, how handsome he is. *Was*, I should say. He walked into our little New Hampshire bank, lighting up the entire room with his gleaming chestnut hair, deep brown eyes, and perfectly chiseled features. He filled out his Armani suit like he was poured into it. Every item I owned in the world combined, including my freaking *car*, was worth less than that suit.

Melody, who sat at the desk next to mine, nudged me hard and licked her lips. I was secretly hoping Derek would sit down in front of Melody’s desk. But no. He chose mine.

Derek explained his situation to me. His family owned a rather large Boston-based business and was looking to expand to the rest of New England. When he said the name of the company,

my mouth fell open. My first instinct was that our bank was too small and he was too big a fish. But he was hoping for the personalized service that our small bank would provide.

That is to say, he hoped we would fall all over ourselves to help him.

The vice president of the bank came out to meet with him personally. When he found out that I was the one dealing with Derek, he gave me a meaningful look. *Be really nice to this one, Quinn.*

So when I had finished setting up an account for Derek and he asked me out for drinks after work, I said yes. After all, I had to be *nice*.

I was single at the time. And Derek was so nice and charming when we went out for drinks. I didn't quite trust him, because how could you trust somebody with so much money who looked like *that*? You would have to be stupid not to have a healthy dose of skepticism. But over the evening, he wore me down. When he asked if I would have dinner with him on Saturday night, I agreed.

Only six months later, he asked me to marry him. Six months after that, we tied the knot. The entire year, it was like floating on a cloud. Derek was the most wonderful man I had ever met.

It wasn't until after we were husband and wife that everything changed.

Derek had been shopping for a new bank, but in retrospect, what he really had been shopping for was a wife. He took one look at me and decided I fit the bill. I still don't know what it was about me that drew him to me. Or maybe it was all just dumb luck. Maybe if he had sat in front of Melody's desk, she would be the one now speeding towards the state line.

I wish it could have been different. I wish Derek had been the man he promised to be. Or better yet, I wish I had listened to Claudia and stayed the hell away from him.

But it's too late now. I have no choice but to play with the cards I've been dealt.

CHAPTER 4

The gas tank is just about empty. There are usually twelve dots on the gas gauge, and I'm down to the last dot. I don't know how long one dot will last, and I don't want to know. I need to get some gas—now.

I've been on the highway for about half an hour, and I look for signs for the next rest stop. I'm looking for the tiny signs—the stops where almost nobody gets off, where I'm least likely to be spotted. Not that I think anybody is looking for me yet, but I don't know for sure.

When I see the tiny sign for Rocco's Gas Station, I pull off the highway. When I drive into the two pump station, I'm relieved to see it's exactly what I'm looking for. A quiet little self service station, with a tiny store attached and an elderly man sitting at the counter. There's only one other car at the station—a gray pickup truck that looks like it's seen better days.

I park my car at the remaining pump and pop the lid for the gas tank. I zip up my black coat and throw on my hood, then step out into the cold. Droplets of freezing rain immediately smack me in the face. I barely feel it though. I'm not feeling much of anything anymore.

You've made a fool out of me for the last time, Quinn.

I can hear his last words so loudly, it's like he is speaking in my ear. I can't stop imagining Derek coming at me. The rage on his face. He was convinced I was cheating on him, even though I never looked at another man. I was too scared to even *talk* to another man. Once Derek came to see me at the bank, and he “caught” me talking to an attractive male client—he was beyond furious about it that night. It didn't help that Derek himself had once been my client. Ever since then, I tried to send any male customers who weren't elderly over to one of my coworkers.

But I'm safe now. He can't get to me.

Never again.

I insert my credit card, select regular, and fill up my tank. This will be the last time I use my credit card. There's an ATM in the gas station store, and I'm going to take out as much money as it will let me. Then that's it. I'm going off the grid.

After my tank is full, I look into the store. That old man is still behind the counter, and the owner of the truck is moving around inside the store. I dig around inside my pocket and pull out my cell phone. I keep my eyes on the store as I drop the phone into the back of a pickup truck, below a blue tarp. I don't know if anyone can track me with my phone, but if they do, they'll track me to wherever this guy is going. Maybe that will buy me some time.

The first thing I see when I get into the store is the television monitor set up behind the counter. The old man is watching it to entertain himself. It's tuned in to the local news.

“Lousy weather we're having, eh?” the old man says. There's a glob of drool in the corner of his mouth.

I offer him a ghost of a smile. “Yes...”

I stand there for a moment, trying to decide if I should take my hood off or not. The hood conceals my hair and some of my face. But then again, I don't want him to remember me as the

lunatic walking around with a furry hood on indoors. After a moment of deliberation, I leave it on.

There are some sandwiches set up in a refrigerated area, but I don't know about eating egg salad from the gas station store. This egg salad might be older than I am. Instead, I stick with grabbing a few packs of trail mix and nutrition bars. Then I see a pack of cheese doodles. I love cheese doodles. I don't think I've eaten cheese doodles in the last two years. Derek kept a close eye on what I ate.

Stuffing your face again, Quinn? You're getting pretty chunky.

During dinner with some friends of his, he became enraged when I ordered a chocolate mousse for dessert. He marched me to the bathroom scale when we got home, and after that, we did regular weigh-ins. He would write the number each week in a little notebook. As I would step on the scale, I would hold my breath, knowing if my weight was even a pound higher than last week, he would go crazy.

I put back the trail mix and nutrition bars. Instead, I grab the cheese doodles and a pack of Oreos. To hell with Derek. He's dead anyway.

Before I pay for my purchases, I hit the ATM. My fingers are shaking as I type in my PIN number. The upper limit on withdrawals is only two hundred dollars. Not enough, although it will have to be. Dammit.

As I'm pulling out my cash, I feel a pair of eyes on my back. I glance behind me—it's a guy around twenty-five who's nearly a foot taller than me with arms and legs like tree trunks. He's probably the owner of the pickup truck. He flashes me a smile, and I nod as imperceptibly as I can.

I go to the refrigerator and grab a couple of bottles of water, but I still feel his eyes on my back. Derek was always accusing men of staring at me, but right now I'm wearing a big puffy coat and my hood is on. Why is he looking at me?

I don't need this right now. I need to get out of the store and back on the road.

I'm juggling my water, cheese doodles, and the Oreos as I make my way to the counter. The large man follows me, his boots squishing as they make wet footprints on the ground. This time I don't turn to look at him.

I dump all my purchases on the counter. And I grab a couple of Twix bars for good measure. I'll pay with my credit card this one last time. I already used it at the gas station, so I might as well.

"That all?" the old man behind the counter asks me.

I nod. The gaze of the man behind me is boring into me. I've got to get out of here.

While the old man rings up my purchases, I glance at the television screen. It's still tuned to the news. The local news. I hold my breath as I wait to hear what stories they announce. They're talking about some sort of problem with the school heating system. That's good. They wouldn't be talking about a bunch of heaters if they found a dead body in a local couple's house.

But it's just a matter of time. They're going to find him.

"Here you go." The man slides a paper bag with my purchases across the counter at me. His eyes dip down to look at the name on my credit card. "Have a good day, Quinn."

I flinch at the mention of my name. But it's fine. I'm getting back on the road, and by the time the police track me to this place, I'll be long gone.

But as I head for the door, so does the man from the pickup truck. He's following me.

I rifle around in my pocket for my keys. All I can do is get to my car as quickly as I can. The

old man is still watching, so it's not like the guy is going to attack me.

As I step outside, a gush of cold smacks me in the face. It must've gotten at least ten degrees colder while I was in that store. The rain hasn't quite turned into snow yet, but it will soon. How much longer can I stay on the road?

And what's worse, I can hear the man's footsteps behind me.

I quicken my pace. I don't know what he wants, but it can't be anything good. There are about twenty feet between me and my car. I've just got to make it twenty feet. I hit the key fob and my car lights up. Almost there.

But then a brawny hand grabs my shoulder.

CHAPTER 5

“Quinn?”

He knows my name. This random stranger at a gas station is calling me by my name. Of course, the old man read it off my credit card, so he might’ve heard him. But as I whirl around to confront him, I see the recognition on his face.

“Quinn, right?” he says again.

“Um...” I look down at my plastic bag of groceries, then back up at his face. Despite the man’s size, there’s nothing menacing about his facial expression. “Yes...”

He grins at me. “I’m Bill Walsh. *Billy*. You used to babysit for me.”

My mouth falls open. That was the absolute last thing I expected him to say. “Oh.”

He rubs his hands together. “Do you remember me?”

I babysat a lot of kids when I was a teenager. The name Billy Walsh sounds mildly familiar. But I’m guessing this hulking man looks a lot different than he did when he was a kid. “Sure,” I lie.

His eyes light up. “You were my favorite babysitter. You always let me have as many cookies as I wanted.”

I’m not sure if that’s the way I want to be remembered, but it could be worse. But it’s troubling that even with my hair a different color than when I was younger and hacked into a bob and a hood mostly concealing it, he *still* recognized me. Apparently, I’m not quite as incognito as I had hoped.

“Also...” His eyes twinkle. “I had a *huge* crush on you. I bet you knew.”

It’s cold and raining, and all I want is to get back on the road. “No, I didn’t.”

“Huh.” He scratches at the back of his head. He’s not wearing a hood like I am or even a hat. Isn’t he cold? “Well, anyway, maybe we can get together sometime. Catch up on old times?”

My cheeks burn. I can’t believe this. I stopped at a gas station in the middle of nowhere, and suddenly I’m having a conversation with a kid I babysat for fifteen years ago, who is now inexplicably asking me out on a date.

“Actually,” I say, “I’m moving up to Vermont. So I won’t be local anymore.” I shrug. “But it was nice seeing you again, Billy.”

His face falls. “Oh. But maybe I could get your number and—”

“Sorry,” I say.

Without waiting for a response, I turn and walk the rest of the way to my car. I don’t hazard a look behind me until I’m at the driver’s side door. He’s still standing there, watching me.

Damn, I wish I hadn’t thrown my phone in his pickup truck. I had been hoping he was some guy from way out of town, in the opposite direction of where I wanted to go. I wanted that phone to take the police on a wild goose chase. But if he’s headed back where I come from, it will take them all of five minutes to figure out my phone is in the back of his truck.

Worse, he’ll be able to give the police an updated description of me. He can tell them I cut my hair. All the more reason I have to get hair dye as soon as possible. And maybe I need to