



MELISSA de la CRUZ STUDIO

LIE
UNTIL
IT'S
TRUE

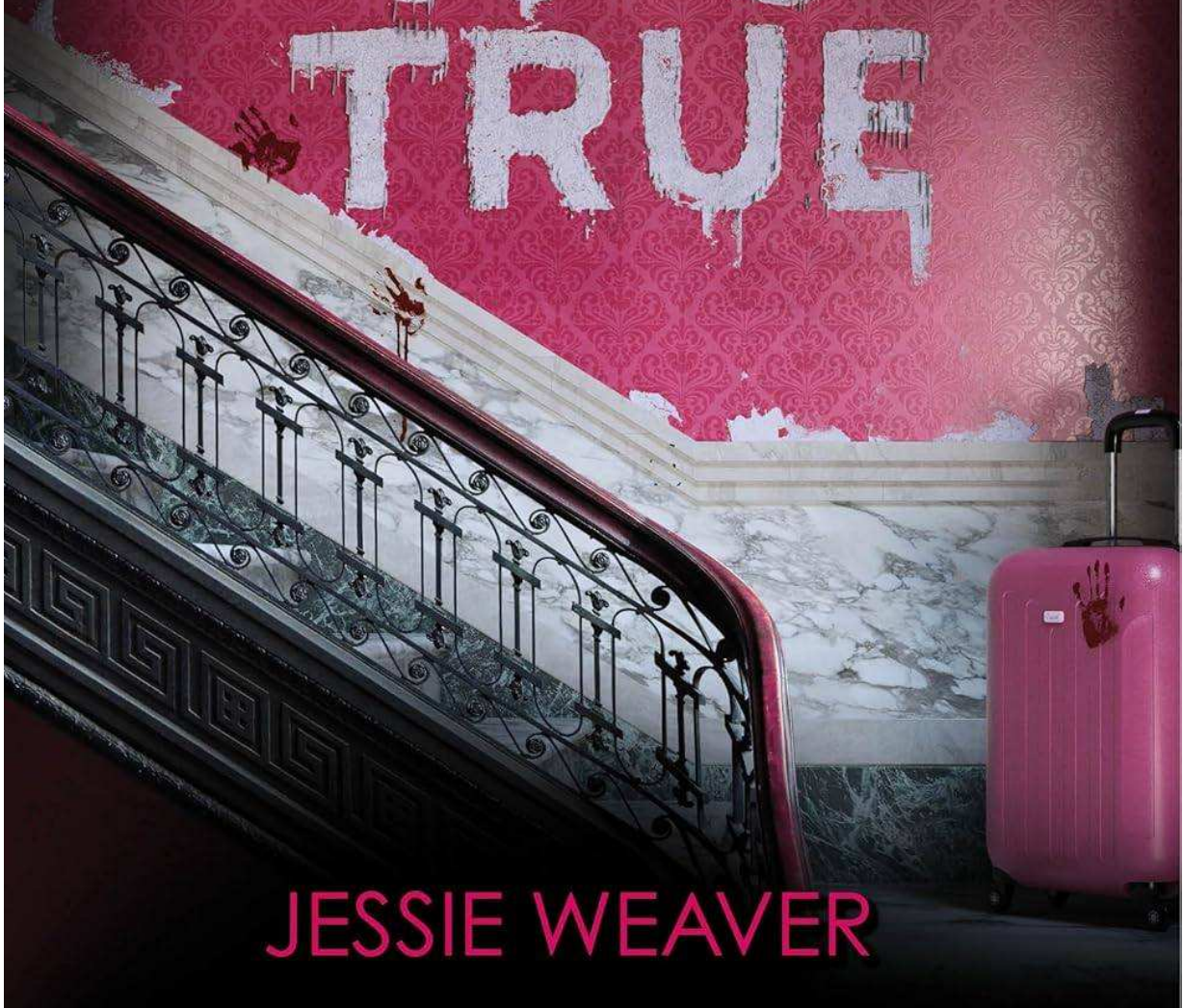


JESSIE WEAVER



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Acknowledgments

About the Author

Dear Reader,

Guess what? I'm beyond thrilled to announce the release of *Lie Until It's True*, Jessie Weaver's sizzling follow-up to her wickedly addictive *Live Your Best Lie*. Brace yourself for a journey through a twisty mystery that will have readers second-guessing every character's moves! This book is a delightful roller-coaster ride of suspense, with fun and quirky characters you'll love getting to know. Publishing *Lie Until It's True* fills me with so much pride. From the enigmatic protagonist to the sly supporting cast, Jessie keeps us guessing until the very last page.

This time, Jessie takes us to a fancy resort in the woods of Colorado, where a terrible tragedy has taken place, and a group of teens all hold different secrets. Does the past inform the present? You'll have to read *Lie Until It's True* to find out!

I hope you find it as unputdownable as I did!

xoxo
Mel

Melissa de la Cruz



MELISSA de la CRUZ STUDIO

For every girl who's ever needed a second chance

PINNACLE PARK TRAIL GAZETTE

Billionaire Royden Das Murdered on Christmas Eve, Suspect in

Custody

By Janine Markham

Posted December 25, last year

Christmas festivities turned tragic last night at the Summit Hotel, a local historic landmark. Billionaire Royden Das—known for his booming tech company, his art collection, and his encyclopedic knowledge of Baroque art—was shot to death on the eve of his annual charity gala. According to rumor, Royden Das hinted at a big reveal at the gala. Tickets sold out in a record thirty-seven minutes.

However, less than twenty-four hours before the reveal, a Summit Hotel concierge found Royden Das shot through the head in a fourth-floor suite. According to the official press release, police arrested suspect Mariana Sanchez, a Pinnacle Park artist and mother, who was found with a gun at the scene of the crime. At the time of the murder, Mariana Sanchez was staying at the Summit Hotel courtesy of the victim to paint an original portrait he had commissioned. An inside source claims the police never recovered the portrait. Mariana Sanchez's motivation remains unknown.

The Das family asks that the public respect their privacy during this difficult time. The family of the suspect declined to comment.

ONE

Tuesday, May 30

4:09 p.m.

The Summer of Sixteen

When cameras flash outside her car window, Amanda flinches. She always does now. Even though the paparazzi are shooting her sister Cora, not her, Amanda is always in the background. If she could cover her eyes and plug her ears and pretend like it wasn't happening, she would, but that pathetic image is the last thing she needs on the cover of the *National Enquirer*.

Usually, Cora is edgier than Amanda, but today, Cora rolls down her window to smile and wave at the paparazzi. Her charm bracelet catches on the cuff of her button-down, an outfit that her legal defense team argued about for weeks. What was the best way to make Cora Pruitt, alleged killer, look young and naive and sweet, and most importantly, innocent? Peter Pan-collar shirts apparently.

"Do you think I should say something to them?" Cora gestures to the line of paparazzi and journalists stretching their microphones out to shout questions like "Cora, how does it feel to have the world know you're innocent?" and "Any theories on who sent that letter?"

"Roll up your window." Their mother presses her hands together in her lap almost like she's praying. "Your father says the lawyers will set up an official press conference in a day or two."

Amanda's shoulders relax a little when the tinted window is back up. Lately, she's been nervous, not sleeping, imagining stalkers around every corner. Maybe now that a jury of Cora's peers has decided she's not guilty of killing influencer Summer Cartwright, the paparazzi will leave Amanda alone.

But probably not. The anonymous confession letter containing details only Summer Cartwright's killer could know that was mailed to the LAPD last week whipped the paparazzi into a frenzy. Did it determine the judge's ruling? No. Despite how bad it looked for Cora a few weeks ago, she would have been declared not guilty anyway. Reasonable doubt. But the letter sure as hell swayed public opinion. Honestly, at this point, Amanda doesn't care who killed Summer as long as the press finds *that* person to bother instead of her family.

"What do you think about Cabo to celebrate?" Cora leans her head onto Amanda's stiff shoulder. "Get our tan on?"

Their mother presses her lips into the expression that for the last three years has doubled as her smile. "Whatever you want."

"Aren't we broke?" Amanda asks. Cora's legal fees skyrocketed the moment the case exploded onto national news. They've been cutting and budgeting for the last year. "Or are we not talking about that anymore?"

"Enough, Amanda," her mother says sharply.

Cora watches Amanda with wide eyes that ask, *Aren't you happy for me?*

Amanda is happy for Cora, and she isn't. Her life—all their lives—has revolved around Cora since the moment the police clapped handcuffs around her wrists and Amanda became the crime world's Pippa Middleton to Cora's Kate. And Amanda can't even complain because it's her fault that Cora got arrested. Amanda is the one who gave the police Cora's diary containing evidence that she hated Summer Cartwright. Until last week, even though Cora's arrest ruined their lives, Amanda never regretted what she did. If Cora killed Summer, she deserved to pay. Amanda believes in justice, black and white, no room for gray areas. Since the letter, though, every shred of the certainty that got her through the last three years is gone in a puff of smoke. It was all for nothing.

She was wrong.

Amanda leans against the car window, unlocks her phone, and opens TikTok. With her ear against the glass, she can still hear the clicking

cameras as their driver, hired a few months ago when the paparazzi grew so crazed the Pruitts needed someone trained in defensive driving, pulls away from the courthouse for the last time. She pops AirPods into her ears to block out the sound.

Sometimes Amanda wonders if the paparazzi hate themselves as much as she hates them. Other times, when she forces herself to stay calm as they snap pictures of her taking out the garbage or biting into a burger, she closes her eyes and imagines that the bright LA sun through their camera lenses lights their faces on fire. Amanda's therapist says intrusive thoughts are normal, and it doesn't mean she wants to act on them for real. Her therapist also says that Cora's trial and its resulting infamy classifies as a trauma, but Amanda doesn't feel traumatized. She feels rage hot enough to light fires with a touch, guilt heavy enough to suffocate her, bitterness like poison spreading through her body.

She scrolls through her For You Page on TikTok, looking for anything to distract her, but like usual, nothing does. Instead, Amanda angles her phone away from Cora to click through the thousands of notifications on her last post: footage of the judge reading Cora's verdict.

If her mom and sister ever find out she's UntilProven, the TikToker who posted Cora's entire trial and vetted true-crime theories about Summer Cartwright's murder, they'll never look at her again. It's why she refuses to show her face or speak without a voice filter. Amanda never meant for her TikTok to blow up this way, and it's not like she ever claimed Cora was guilty or innocent. She just posted facts. Videos. Ideas. But in her heart, she knows what she did was shitty. She's always known. For a while, though, she didn't care.

Amanda hoped that posting the not guilty verdict would at least sway public opinion in Cora's favor like the letter did, but her heart sinks when she scrolls through the comments.

MollyMael: I cannot believe this. That letter is so fake. Cora Pruitt is guilty AF. 🤢🤢🤢

AllVibesandSunshine: Omg that letter showing up in the nick of time??!!
#MajorMotionPicture #pls

Justice4SummerC: I hope Cora Pruitt gets hit by a car.

MollyMael: Yeah, but at least we all know her life will suck forever @Justice4SummerC. She'll never get into college.

Beside Amanda, Cora googles all-inclusive resorts in Mexico, her face alight with relief and excitement. What if Cora can't move past this? Will any college take her now? Amanda feels sick.

Malligator24: Finallyyyyyy!!! It's over! 😊 Check your DMs.

Amanda opens the DM from Malligator24, her friend Mallory Alderfer. In Mal's profile pic, her curly red hair is pulled into a messy bun, and she's standing in front of the Summit, her family's historic Colorado hotel. Back before Cora's lawyers put the kibosh on any travel, Amanda and Cora used to stay at the Summit every summer with their aunt Amy, who is the hotel concierge. By far, those summers hold Amanda's happiest memories.

Malligator24: You coming to Pinnacle Park this summer or what??

Amanda almost laughs. She'd give anything to go back, to see her summer friends again, but after that billionaire got murdered at the Summit Hotel last Christmas? Yeah, right. The last thing she needs is to get tangled up in another murder investigation the moment her sister is finally in the clear.

UntilProven: Why exchange one shitshow for another?

Malligator24: 😊 Bc you adore and miss us??

UntilProven: You know Vince hates me now. He hasn't talked to me in months.

Malligator24: Give him a break. His mom is in jail.

Malligator24: The police won't even consider another suspect. But maybe if you posted about the case to all your followers, there would be pressure for them to keep looking.

UntilProven: Isn't this case pretty open and shut?

Malligator24: It doesn't have to be.

Amanda snorts. According to police and to every eyewitness, Vince's mom, Mariana Sanchez, shot billionaire Royden Das through the head. After years spent in Ms. Mariana's summer art classes at the Summit's Child Care Camp, the thought is almost too ridiculous to believe. Still, it's a slam dunk for the prosecution, no room for reasonable doubt like in Cora's case. Ms. Mariana was found with blood all over her, holding the gun at the scene of the crime less than a minute after the shot was fired. There was gunpowder residue on her hands, too. What other explanation could there be?

Another message pops up from Mallory.

Malligator24: Look...I know you can't be feeling good about turning in Cora when she was innocent all along. This is your chance to put something good back into the universe!

Amanda glances at her mom and Cora, who both lean over Cora's phone as she scrolls through the travel deal site. Somehow, neither of them has a clue how Cora's trial has affected Amanda. They never bothered to wonder. Amanda got asked to prom a dozen times by people who were weirdly into the whole sister-of-a-killer thing, because it's totally normal to go to prom with someone you think might Lucrezia Borgia you on your sofa. Amanda said those exact words once to a dude who DM'd her on Instagram to ask her out, and his only response was a string of smirking emojis and the word *dirty*. It got worse and worse until Amanda deleted her personal social media accounts altogether.

Malligator24: If you want to fix things with Vince, this is how. I have a plan. Help us to exonerate his mom.

There's a long pause before Mallory continues.

Malligator24: Come on! Help us. Use your pseudo-fame for good. Karma or whatever.

UntilProven: I don't believe in karma.

Amanda jumps out of the car the moment her family's driver parks in front of their house. All she wants to do is curl up in her bed with a true-crime podcast and a vat of ice cream, but as she reaches for the front door

handle, a flash blinds her. When her vision clears, a middle-aged paparazzo with a potbelly is lifting his camera to take another picture.

A wave of revulsion rolls over Amanda, so powerful she could scream. He wants her to lose it. She knows that.

“This is private property.” She forces herself to speak calmly. “Get away from me.”

“Amanda, come inside,” her mother says from the doorway.

The paparazzo raises his camera again. “Who do you think wrote that confession letter? One of Summer’s friends? A family member?”

Amanda clenches her fists at her sides. “What is wrong with you? Leave us alone!” Blood pounds in her ears, and she imagines wrapping his camera strap around his neck and pulling. “Go away!”

Her mother yanks her backward. “Control yourself. The trial is over. Don’t give him more material.”

But Amanda has been under control for the last three years. To hell with control. She’s done stuffing everything down inside until she constantly feels ready to explode. “You’re scum!” Her voice is raw, ugly. She lifts her hands like she might shove the paparazzo. “You know that?”

“Scum with a ten-thousand-dollar photo.” With one final shot, the paparazzo hops their fence and disappears.

Cora blinks as she gets out of the car, her face open and naive enough that her lawyers would be proud. “He’s probably the last one we’ll see, don’t you think?”

“I do.” Mrs. Pruitt slides her key into the door and beckons for Cora to follow her. “It’s over.”

Amanda doesn’t follow them inside. She can’t stand the lies her mother tells Cora. She’d rather be in pain and know the truth than marinate in syrupy falsehoods. It won’t end, not when it’s such a juicy story, which means her rage will only keep growing and twisting her inside until she’s unrecognizable even to herself.

It will never end, and she’s helpless to stop it. And if the paparazzi and the assholes at her school and the perverts on the internet don’t leave her alone, she’s scared of how she’ll react. Her therapist can say all she wants that Amanda’s wrathful thoughts are just intrusive, but Amanda knows better.

She has to get out of here, and not to Cabo with her family. Maybe Mallory is right. She could go to Colorado to stay with Aunt Amy, escape

the paparazzi, do something right for a change, work on herself, and never, ever, ever tell anyone what she did to Cora.

What else can she do when for years, she was positive she was the hero, and it turns out she was the villain all along?

TWO

Monday, June 5

4:58 p.m.

The Summer of Sixteen

Vicente Sanchez-Reyes narrows his eyes at the sunburned customer standing at the checkout in his family's art gallery. She's clutching a moose-embroidered throw blanket to her chest with one arm and fumbling in her purse with the other. It's the sixth blanket of this sort he's sold today since he took over his dad's shift. It's supremely ugly.

"I know my card is here somewhere," the woman says. If Vince had to guess, she's in her midthirties but trying to look twenty-one in a way that makes her look forty-five. Her face brightens when she finds her credit card in the bottom of her bag. "Ah! Here. This will look so great on the back of my sofa, don't you think?"

"Quite the conversation piece." Vince gives her a thin-lipped smile and rings up the blanket. Two hundred bucks.

"Are you a local?"

Vince nods. "Lived here all my life."

"Could you give me a recommendation for dinner?" She leans in conspiratorially. "Something less *touristy*, you know?"

After suggesting the Summit Hotel Café, the most touristy place to eat in Pinnacle Park, Vince feels a moment of guilt for selling tourist crap and always recommending the Summit. But he and Mallory Alderfer made a deal a while ago. He boosts her family's hotel business, and she boosts his

family's art gallery. They both need the money after all the shit that's gone down in the last six months. He shakes off his pang of guilt before it can settle deeper than his skin. People don't come to Pinnacle to feel like a real local. They don't want to know the pressure of living in a tourist town that basically shuts down for the winter since it's not a ski destination, and they don't want to feel the weight of owning a family business that's barely surviving.

Tourist crap is what's keeping the Galleria Reyes afloat, and he'll do just about anything for his family, including but not limited to hawking moose blankets. As he slides the blanket into a paper bag for the woman, already anticipating the sweet relief of being able to lock the doors behind her since the gallery is closing, the woman looks up from her phone and smiles sheepishly.

"I wasn't going to ask, but I'm so curious. I heard the Reyes family still runs this gallery? Like the Sanchez-Reyes crime family?"

Crime family? For the past six months, Vince has ignored comment after comment from people online and in the gallery; he's defended his mom whenever he can, even though he's running out of words to frame what happened in a way that makes her look not guilty, but my god. If this lady doesn't back off in the next minute, Vince will be the next criminal Sanchez-Reyes. "We're not the Mafia."

"Well...the hit on Royden Das..." the woman says, parroting one of the favorite internet conspiracy theories—Mariana Sanchez was actually a hit woman hired by billionaire Royden Das's daughter-in-law so she'd get her inheritance sooner. Absolute bullshit, especially because everyone knows he was killed with his own pistol. What type of assassin has to heist a pistol off the victim? "Wait." The woman leans forward on the counter. "Did you say...we? Are you related to Mariana Sanchez? Sorry, I'm so into true crime lately."

Isn't everyone? "Yep." He gives her his full name, something that feels more and more like a statement lately. "Vicente Francisco Sanchez-Reyes."

"That's so cool, to have such an interesting family. Would you mind if I ___"

"Yep." He stares straight at her until she backs off whatever asinine question she was about to ask and loops her bag over her arm. "Have a nice day."