

CHRISTINA
BAKER KLINE

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

PLEASE

DON'T

A THRILLER

LIE

and ANNE BURT

"Unsettling, atmospheric, and propulsive—I couldn't put this one down."
—MARY KUBICA, *New York Times* bestselling author



PRAISE FOR *PLEASE DON'T LIE*

“Getting away from it all has never looked more sinister or ill-advised than in this deliciously dark version of the small-town idyll.”

—Ruth Ware, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Woman in Suite 11*

“Christina Baker Kline and Anne Burt take suspense to the next level with a creepy small-town setting, shady characters, and an unpredictable, twisted web of deceit. Lock the doors, grab a blanket, and settle in—you won’t be able to put this one down anytime soon. *Please Don’t Lie* is unsettling, atmospheric, and propulsive.”

—Mary Kubica, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Local Woman Missing*

“Psychologically rich and bone chilling, Christina Baker Kline and Anne Burt’s serpentine and timely thriller *Please Don’t Lie* will make you question everything you think you know about those closest to you, and make you wonder how vulnerable we all are—in our weakest moments—to deceit, manipulation, and a surrender of control.”

—Megan Abbott, *New York Times* bestselling author of *El Dorado Drive*

“This twisty-turny tale spins the riveting story of Hayley Stone, a newlywed who leaves New York to move to the idyllic Adirondacks with her husband Brandon. But what happens there plunges her into a mystery underlying her marriage, as well as her tragic past. It kept me breathless until its surprising ending. I loved it!”

—Lisa Scottoline, #1 bestselling author of *The Unraveling of Julia*

“*Please Don’t Lie* ratchets up the tension, twist by twist, until the suspense is almost unbearable. It will make every woman ask herself: ‘Do I know who I really married?’”

—Tess Gerritsen, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Summer Guests*

“*Please Don’t Lie* is a nail-biting, fast-paced thriller that had me on the edge of my seat from start to finish! Just when I thought I had it all figured out, another shocking twist caught me by surprise! I highly recommend.”

—T.R. Ragan, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Best House on the Block*

**PLEASE
DON'T
LIE**

ALSO BY CHRISTINA BAKER KLINE

The Exiles

A Piece of the World

Orphan Train

Bird in Hand

The Way Life Should Be

Desire Lines

Sweet Water

ALSO BY ANNE BURT

The Dig

**PLEASE
DON'T
LIE**

A THRILLER

**CHRISTINA
BAKER KLINE**
and **ANNE BURT**

 **THOMAS & MERCER**

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the authors' imaginations or are used fictitiously. Otherwise, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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Published by Thomas & Mercer, Seattle
www.apub.com

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EU product safety contact:
Amazon Media EU S. à r.l.
38, avenue John F. Kennedy, L-1855 Luxembourg
amazonpublishing-gpsr@amazon.com

ISBN-13: 9781662524394 (hardcover)
ISBN-13: 9781662524400 (paperback)
ISBN-13: 9781662524417 (digital)

Cover design by Caroline Teagle Johnson
Cover image: © alvarez, © Angus Clyne, © Eric Stark / 500px, © John Rensten, © Sergey Ryumin, © Tony Anderson / Getty
Trees used throughout: © Baks, © Yulyu / iStock / Getty Images

First edition



To our sisters, in family and in friendship

CONTENTS

[EPIGRAPH](#)

[PROLOGUE](#)

[SEPTEMBER](#)

[ONE](#)

[TWO](#)

[THREE](#)

[FOUR](#)

[FIVE](#)

[SIX](#)

[SEVEN](#)

[EIGHT](#)

[NINE](#)

[TEN](#)

[ELEVEN](#)

TWELVE

THIRTEEN

FOURTEEN

FIFTEEN

OCTOBER

SIXTEEN

SEVENTEEN

EIGHTEEN

NINETEEN

TWENTY

TWENTY-ONE

NOVEMBER

TWENTY-TWO

TWENTY-THREE

TWENTY-FOUR

TWENTY-FIVE

TWENTY-SIX

TWENTY-SEVEN

TWENTY-EIGHT

TWENTY-NINE

THIRTY

THIRTY-ONE

THIRTY-TWO

THIRTY-THREE

THIRTY-FOUR

THIRTY-FIVE

THIRTY-SIX

THIRTY-SEVEN

THIRTY-EIGHT

THIRTY-NINE

TWO YEARS LATER

FORTY

[ACKNOWLEDGMENTS](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHORS](#)

Above all, don't lie to yourself.

—FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

(tr. Constance Garnett)

PROLOGUE

November 2023

The wind blows into Hayley's face as she stumbles forward in the darkness, half blinded by snow. Heart racing, panicked and terrified, she can't get her bearings. The familiar bluestone path between the main house and the guest cottage is completely obscured. Every direction looks the same: a swirling white chaos. Icy flakes sting her unprotected neck and shoulders.

A guttural shout, muffled by the wind, sends a wave of fear through her. Glancing over her shoulder, she sees a shape moving toward her through the shadowy gloom. She thought she was safe on this beautiful property, where she has lived for the past two months. Safe with the man who loved her.

The smokehouse comes into view, its outline barely visible. Hayley is determined to get there. As she runs faster, struggling to keep her balance, she slips and falls on a sheet of ice. A stab of pain shoots through her ankle. She scrambles to her feet, limps forward, falls to her knees. She pulls herself up and stumbles again. *Don't look back.* She hobbles as quickly as she can, despite the sharp jab each time her right foot hits the ground. Hayley senses, rather than hears, footsteps in the snow behind her. She lunges for the handle of the smokehouse door and pulls the iron ring, then scrambles inside. A ladder against the wall is all she can find for a barricade. Desperately, she grabs hold of it. Her arms strain as she tips it over with a grunt, wedging it against the doorway. Her breath comes in ragged gasps as she stands in the dark.

As her eyes adjust, Hayley looks around the shed her husband built so meticulously earlier in the fall, with its hand-planed two-by-fours and

wrought iron hooks to hang the wild game he'd hunted and cured for the long winter ahead.

A weapon. I need a weapon. She scans the shelves stocked with tools and spies a metal spade.

Gripping the wooden handle with both hands, she waits for the pounding on the door.

SEPTEMBER



ONE

Two months earlier

“Could today be more perfect?” Hayley gazes out at the majestic peaks of the Adirondacks.

“Oh, this is nothing.” Brandon grins at Hayley from behind the wheel of their new cherry red Jeep. She loves his smile—it lights up his entire face. “Wait till a month from now, when it’s prime leaf season.”

With her hand over his, Hayley shifts her attention to the nearly empty upstate New York highway stretching ahead. The road twists and turns, flanked by towering pines, as they wind their way higher into the mountains. The sky is a brilliant blue, the air crisp and clear, with just a hint of chill. A hawk glides overhead on outstretched wings.

“Look at how this baby handles the road,” Brandon says as the Jeep hugs a curve. “Just what we’ll need up here in the snow.”

She nods. Autumn is one thing, but the thought of winter and the isolation it will bring worries her. They only started coming up here to Crystal River in June. For the past few months they’ve been renovating Brandon’s childhood home, commuting back and forth between his remote rural property and Hayley’s West Village apartment. Now that the renovation is nearly complete and her apartment has sold, they’ve pulled up stakes for good.

Hayley’s window is down, and her auburn ponytail flutters behind her. She looks at the ravine far below, a blur of dusky green with a few pops of yellow and orange. The air is thick with the scent of pine and damp earth. As the Jeep darts in and out of dappled shadows, she pushes away her doubts.

This, right now, she reminds herself, is the new start she’s been longing for.

She steals a glance at her new husband. Brandon is lean and muscular, with a tight dark beard and a glint of intensity in his blue eyes. His skin is burnished bronze in the afternoon light. She still can't quite believe this man is now her husband.

Hayley had been in the depths of grief when her sister, Jenna, died two years ago back in Florida, where they grew up. After the funeral, Hayley spent the afternoon hiding out in the clubhouse kitchen at Platinum Shores Estates with the caterers to avoid perfunctory condolences from their distant relatives and Jenna's so-called friends. Brandon Stone, who'd worked as a contractor for her parents, literally stumbled into her, spilling his IPA down the front of her black silk dress. His profuse apology, and his awkward attempt to pat her dress with a napkin without touching her inappropriately, made Hayley smile for the first time since Jenna's death.

Now, as the Jeep rounds a corner, the grade steepens dramatically. Hayley grips her leather seat. These mountain roads are a far cry from the Manhattan grid she knows so well.

Brandon looks over at her. "Been on these mountains my whole life," he says with a smile. "You're safe with me."

Hayley has been a thoroughly urban creature ever since she left Florida for NYU. With relief she'd traded away her parents' vast McMansion for the close quarters of her Washington Square Park dorm, three to a room. She loved the vibrant chaos of life in the city—the wail of sirens and honking horns in the wee hours, the constant hiss of steam through the radiators, even the garbage piled high on the corner of East Ninth Street after a long weekend. She swore then and there, as a first-year college student, that New York City would be home forever. Her roommate, Emily, a born-and-bred Manhattanite, claimed that an hour in Central Park was as much nature as anyone needed. Hayley, laughing, agreed.

But that was before.