



MISSING

by Kathleen Glasgow

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WERE FOUR: DORSEY, ANGIE, Kate, and Kim. They all attended Wellington High, an unassuming brick building in the middle of an unassuming town that bled crisp red and orange leaves in the fall, delivered postcard-perfect snow in the winter, warm and soft rain in the spring, and summers filled with lemonade and lakes and broken hearts at the county fair.

Oh, and Lissy. Lissy was there, too, but it was easy to forget Lissy. Everyone always forgot about Lissy. *Mouse*, the girls whispered at Lissy's school. *Freaky little mouse*.

When Kate opened her front door, backpack slung over her shoulders, she wore an irritated expression.

"Lissy's coming," she told her friends.

The three girls peered at Kate's little sister, who was shrinking against the wall of the tiny apartment. The apartment

smelled like unwashed clothes and over-boiled pasta noodles, the kind that come in a cardboard box.

Dorsey held up a finger, the nail as bright as blood. "Absolutely not."

Angie said, "We can't take a little *kid*."

Kate said, in that same flat voice she'd been using for the past year, "My dad got called into a shift. I have to take her."

Kim said, "Why can't your mom—ow!"

Dorsey had elbowed her sharply. Kim looked at the ground, realizing her mistake. No wonder the apartment smelled bad, but still: Kate's dad should have stepped up by now. It had been a *year*. She looked around Kate to Lissy. Lissy's pants were frayed at the hems and too short, showing her knobby ankles. Her hair was choppy, like something done in a kitchen with sewing shears. Kim frowned. A girl's life was hard enough and Lissy's dad was sending her out looking like *that*?

"Okay, then," Dorsey said, and sighed. Dorsey was big on sighs. "But I'm not watching out for her."

"*Fine*," Kate answered. She snapped her fingers.

Lissy pushed herself off the wall and squeezed by her sister and went to stand with the older girls in the hallway.

It's funny, Kate thought, as she locked the door to the apartment, how quickly everyone forgets when a mother has died.



Dorsey's car rattled on the old road. They were heading to the outskirts of town, where hills rose and fell like breath and the trees stretched out like hands with very long fingers. Dorsey cracked her window and lit a cigarette.

"That's so disgusting," Kim said, rolling down her window.

"I can't go home smelling like smoke," Angie said, cracking her own window. "My mom will kill me."

"Calm down," Dorsey said. "Let me live my life."

"You won't have one if you keep smoking," Kate warned.

Lissy said, "I saw a commercial on television and the woman smoked and her cancer spread all through her face skin and they had to take it all off. She's lopsided now."

Lissy was sitting on Kate's lap. Kate dug her nails into Lissy's thighs, pressing through her thin jeans, and it hurt, but Lissy refused to let her sister know it.

Dorsey took a deep drag on the cigarette and threw it out the window. In the rearview mirror, her eyes were glossy and dark. Lissy looked away from them. She found Dorsey mean and eerie, with those eyes that seemed to see you and not see you at the same time.

"Fun fact," Dorsey said cheerfully. "The place we're going? They put women in there just for smoking. Punished a whole lifetime just for a moment of pleasure. Can you imagine?"

No one wanted to.

They sat in the car. The Bedford Lunatic Asylum for Women loomed before them, a vast, ornate gray building, like something out of a book about castles. It seemed to glow against the bleakness of the night sky. It was September. Rain drizzled slowly down the windshield.

"The night is dark and full of terrors," Dorsey whispered.

She turned abruptly in her seat and shouted, "Boo!" The girls jumped. Lissy whimpered but stopped when she felt the sharpness of Kate's nails again.

"Why is it so *big*?" Kim asked. "I mean, how many crazy women could there *have been* back then?"

Dorsey was all business, checking her backpack for supplies.

"That's the thing," she said. "Most of them *weren't* crazy. They put you here for the stupidest, most sexist reasons. Like not wanting to do your husband. Or reading. A woman was put in here for reading *novels*. Her husband thought books were giving her too many ideas! So he called a doctor and the doctor was, like, why are you reading all the time? And the woman got angry, because whose business is it if she reads a damn book, so in she goes, never to come out. The records called it *intellectual aggression*, whatever that means."

Angie sucked in her breath. She'd finished four books just this week. "I'd be in here, for sure," she murmured.

Dorsey looked around the car at all of them.

"All of us would," she said. "Angie for getting big ideas from books, me for complaining about my bad periods, which, by the way, was called being 'menstrually deranged,' and Kate for excessive grief."

Kate flinched.

Kim said, "What about me?"

Dorsey thought for a moment. "Probably for liking sports too much. As in, not being ladylike."

Kim shrugged. "You have a point." She looked down at her nails, painted a glossy pink, a color that made her inexplicably happy. She liked pink nails and she liked to run *fast* and she wondered why those things weren't allowed to coexist.

"What about me?" asked Lissy.

"No one cares about you," Kate said, opening the car door and shoving her sister off her lap and out into the dark.

The ground was cold and wet, seeping through Lissy's thin shoes, and she shivered.

Dorsey got out of the car and slung her backpack over her shoulder. Her voice was determined. "Let's go."

She started walking, then stopped when she realized they weren't following. She turned to face them.

"Come *on*," she urged. "Stop being such babies. It's midnight and the GhostConnector only has six hours of battery life."

Dorsey's smile was a shiny, electric thing that made Lissy's spine shiver.



Dorsey . . . was Dorsey. A planner. An idea-haver. A schemer. When they were ten, it was a lemonade stand, only the lemonade had a little extra kick courtesy of Dorsey's parents' liquor cabinet. "They won't miss it," she'd promised the girls. "My dad has me mix his drinks all the time. It makes people goofy."

But Dorsey must have poured too much in by accident—or maybe not, who could know with Dorsey—because they soon had quite a crowd of older kids lining up. It was kind of funny until a neighbor noticed a bunch of teens stumbling around in the street and the vomit splattered in her rosebushes.

When they were twelve, it was selling a contraption she called "The Bust-Master," a thick rubber strap guaranteed to increase your breast size within three weeks. She made quite a bit of money at first, and then a lot of enemies when customers' chests remained stubbornly uninspired after weeks of exercises. On and on, until this.

"We'll be famous," she'd said in her room one night, telling them about the GhostConnector, a strange device she'd

ordered online. "We'll go find some ghosts, record them, tell their stories, and splash it everywhere."

They were sitting on their sleeping bags, pumped full of Cheetos and Sprite and several hours of *Real Housewives* on the giant flat-screen in Dorsey's room.

"But *why*?" Angie had asked.

"Why not?" Dorsey answered. "It's wrong that women were locked up for life for the worst reasons. Most of them weren't even *ill*. They just weren't acting the way men thought they should act. Also, it will be fun. And cool. Let's do something. We never *do* anything."

"Do you even believe in ghosts?" Kim had asked her. She was doing scissor kicks. She was the fastest sprinter on the Wellington track team and determined to sprint her way out of their town to a good college.

"I do," Dorsey had answered proudly. "My grandmother came to me once. Out at her old place by Pelican Lake two summers ago. I woke up and saw this weird shape at the foot of my bed."

"Oh my god," Kim said. "That's scary."

"Did your grandma *say* anything?" Angie asked. She felt a little sick.

"Yep," Dorsey answered. "She told me to goddamn stand up straight. That's how I knew it was really her. Old bat." She was sitting on her windowsill, blowing smoke out into the night.

Kate had felt anger surging within her, listening to Dorsey. It wasn't fair that Dorsey would get a visit from her grandmother, a woman she claimed to despise, when Kate's own mother, whom she missed so much it made her bones ache, remained resolutely

silent. Once, a few weeks after the funeral, Kate had even tried a Ouija board, her fingers trembling as she placed them gently on the wooden planchette, whispering and waiting, her heart like a bird with a broken wing in her chest.

Where are you? she'd whispered. *Come back.*

Nothing had happened. Kate threw the board against the bedroom wall, which roused her father from his chair in the living room, where he watched television late into the night. In the dark room, he picked up the cracked board and looked at Kate, his face shifting into something that made the fluttering bird inside her go still.

"Stop," he'd said. "Please stop. She's not there."

He didn't notice Lissy, hidden in her blankets on the bed on the other side of the room, watching.

Kate heard him drop the board in the trashcan in the kitchen. He went back to his chair and the sound on the television got louder. Kate went to bed and cried.

It had been a whole year without her mother and still the wound inside her would not heal.

At Dorsey's, Kate had jammed herself in her sleeping bag, pressing her face against her pillow. Death was unfair in so many ways.

"I don't care," she'd told them, her voice muffled. "Whatever. I'm in."



They stood in front of Bedford. The sign said *PROVIDING SUCCOR FOR GOD'S HELPLESS CHILDREN* and was in remarkably good shape, only a few letters worn and faded. The asylum had been

closed a decade earlier, Dorsey had told them, and they'd transferred the last fifteen or so patients out of state.

"Why isn't this place boarded up?" Angie asked. The glass on Bedford's windows was mostly intact, though dirty, save for a few broken panes.

"They're starting development in a few weeks and will probably put up fencing then," Dorsey said. "Turning it into condos. It does have a great view of the lake."

They all turned to look at Cascade Lake. The moon gleamed on the surface.

Lissy watched the water ripple. She found it transfixing. She and her mother had taken a paddle-boat ride once, on another lake outside of town, on a day when Lissy had a doctor's appointment. She was always quieter than usual after the doctor, because they asked her so many questions, and made her do strange things, like draw a house, or play with small plastic dolls, and her mother always took her somewhere nice after, like for ice cream, or a movie. On the paddle-boat day, they had a few hours before Kate would be home from school. "Just us," her mother had said, conspiratorially. "No fussy Kate. Just me and you and the water."

Before it fell out, her mother's hair had been smooth and soft, a dark brown cape that tickled Lissy's cheeks when she bent to kiss her.

Lissy watched the lake, a hot feeling spreading in her chest. They'd had a good day, that day. Maybe one of the last ones, before her mother had to stay in bed all the time.

Dorsey continued in her raspy voice. "My dad says the fear of ghosts is probably what keeps most people out, so there isn't

really a need for security. They'll lock it up soon, though, so we need to do this now."

Dorsey's father worked for the city. None of the girls knew exactly what he did, only that Dorsey had excellent clothes, a big two-story house, and a kidney-shaped swimming pool with a slide.

"Look," Kate said, pointing.

To the right of the hospital was a spindly-looking iron fence with a gate that hung off its hinges. Headstones and crosses poked out of brush and weeds.

"Oh," Angie said nervously. "I guess . . . they buried them here."

"It doesn't look very big," Kim said. "I mean, should it be bigger? When did this place open?"

Dorsey frowned. "1918. That's . . . not a lot of gravestones, for the amount of women that were here."

"Maybe their families came to get them, after they died? Buried them at home or something?" Kate had a weird feeling in her chest. She'd seen the bill for her mother's funeral and burials weren't cheap.

Dorsey said, "Maybe they buried them somewhere else?" But her voice was unsure.

The girls were quiet.

"Onward," Dorsey finally said. "We're on a mission."

They were at the front doors when Kate looked around.

"Lissy," she hissed.

Lissy jumped. She'd walked to the edge of the lake without realizing it. Her shoes were inches from the water.

"Come *on*, or we're leaving you outside," Kate said.

Lissy ran toward the girls. Dorsey took a breath, reached her hand out, and grasped a handle on one of the immense double doors. The door stuck and she grunted, pulling harder. It finally opened with a musty creak. Something skittered up the door and disappeared inside a crack.

"Holy . . ." said Angie.

As they slowly walked inside, Lissy looked back at the shimmering, dark lake.

Ever so slightly, in the middle, the water surged, as though something had pushed it from beneath.

Lissy ran inside.



Inside it smelled like dust, wood, and urine. Above them, the ceiling rose to a tall, octagon-shaped tower of windows, moonlight beating down through the cracked and dirty glass.

Kate was glad for the windows, because the room wasn't completely dark. Dorsey dug in her backpack, handing each of them flashlights. "You can use your phones, too," she said. "These are just for an emergency." She handed Angie a camcorder.

"You're the cinematographer," she said.

"Why me and why can't we just use our phones?" Angie asked.

Dorsey shrugged. "This makes it more old school. Like we're making a real film. And you have the steadiest hands."

Angie was an artist, creating amazing pots out of mounds of clay on a spinning wheel. Angie would go to art school in a big city someday, and live in a cute loft, and make her pots, and fall in love with people in disheveled clothes who could recite

poetry from memory and sleep on bare mattresses and spend all their money seeing drowsy-eyed bands in tiny clubs. All of the girls would envy her for it, even Dorsey.

Angie took the camcorder.

Lissy looked around. The room was cavernous, splintering off into hallways that went in different directions. It was like being inside a spider, like each hallway was a leg. Her fingers crept for Kate's.

Kate jerked away. "Stop it," she said. "You know I don't like that."

Lissy folded her hands together. The thing she missed about their mother most was the warmth of her mother's hand in hers, leading her into school every morning, straight to her classroom door, her head held high. The rest of the day, without her mother, was filled with whispers of *Mouse* and spitballs in her hair.

Her father didn't walk Lissy into school, after her mother died. He said he had to get to work and she needed to be brave.

"Time to grow up," he'd said.

Lissy's body suddenly felt very small and empty.

Dorsey glanced around. "We need to find a good spot farther in," she said, turning on her flashlight. The long beams swept the entries to the hallways. "Somewhere deeper, where they lived more. This is just the lobby. Or waiting room? What do they call it in a psych hospital, anyway?" She turned the beam on Kate. "Kate, you should know."

The girls looked everywhere but at Kate.

Kate glared at Dorsey.

"Just a little loony bin humor," Dorsey said. "Don't be so sensitive."

Kate wondered what would happen if she cracked her flashlight against the side of Dorsey's beautiful head. What then? Would she get put away again for *excessive grief*? Sometimes she was so angry she felt her whole body might split apart.

Dorsey angled her flashlight around the room, catching the gleam of broken glass, shards of wood, a lopsided couch with stuffing spilling out like white guts.

She started walking and they followed.

Kim whispered, "I'm not sure I'm feeling this, anymore." But she didn't turn back.



The hallway Dorsey had chosen was long and there were benches against the whole length of wall.

"Seems like a pretty big waiting area," Angie said, turning in a circle, panning the hallway with the camcorder.

Dorsey said, "Not many people came to visit. If you were put here, it was because your family didn't want anything more to do with you. I read somewhere that they brought the patients out at six o'clock in the morning and put them on the benches and kept them there until six at night."

"Wait," Kate said. "They just sat here, all *day*?"

Kate thought back to last year, when she'd had to go to a hospital for a few weeks. Her mother's death had been slow and agonizing and it seemed when she finally died, she took most of Kate's heart with her. All Kate did was stay in bed, wordless. Her boyfriend Mick had come by and sat on the edge of the bed, texting and watching YouTube videos.

She'd watched him not watching her, all the words she

wanted to say piling up inside her like nails, needful and sharp.

Finally, he'd looked up and said, "How much longer is this going to go on?" and the pain that rose up in her sent her hands to Mick's face, the face she'd once loved so deeply she could imagine it, perfectly, with her eyes closed. Her fingers were claws on his skin.

After that, her father drove her to a hospital in another town, where she stayed with other sad-eyed kids and painted and wrote in a journal and sat in a circle and listened to everyone's sadness. It wasn't bad, and she felt better when it was done, but she still had darkness inside, and she knew it would never go away.

Kate looked at the benches. The hospital she went to wasn't fancy, but it wasn't horrible, and there were rules, but at least they never made you sit on benches all day, just staring into nothingness. Imagine, having to wake up only to be told to sit for twelve hours until it was time to go to bed again? Were the women here even allowed to talk to each other? Kate had liked most of the other kids at the hospital. After a while, it seemed like they all belonged to the same club, one made of sadness and hurt, and she could tell them things she could never tell these girls.

Dorsey held the flashlight under her chin. She was so pretty, all round cheeks and snub nose and dark eyes.

"It was supposed to be therapeutic." She pointed to the windows opposite the benches. "See, they could look outside all day and ruminate on why they excessively masturbated or read novels all day. Really, it was just a way to keep them in line. If they fell asleep or talked, they got hit with a baton."

Kate frowned. It sounded more like a prison than a hospital.

"That would drive *anyone* loopy," Kim said.

"Exactamundo," Dorsey said. "If you weren't loopy when you came in, you were by the time you died here."



They came to an area where it was darker, and colder, and they could no longer see the octagon-shaped room they'd walked from, or the moonlight from any windows. Something scuttled in the corner and Kim jumped. "*Jesus*," she muttered.

"Mice," Dorsey said. "Always underfoot."

Lissy frowned.

"Well," Dorsey said, "we might as well get the GhostConnector up and running." She fished in her backpack.

Kim said, "I just lost service. Anybody else?" She tapped her phone.

"Yep," Angie said, holding the camcorder in one hand and peering at her phone in the other.

Kate beamed her flashlight down the corridor. There were some framed photographs hanging on the walls and she walked closer to look at them. One was of an unsmiling old man with comically bushy eyebrows, but his eyes weren't happy, or kind. They simply stared out of the frame, as though at something only he could see. "Dr. Irving Braithwaite," she read out loud. "Well, you are a creepster, Dr. Braithwaite, that's for sure."

Kate walked to a doorway and shined her flashlight in.

There were sinks along the back wall and, in the middle of the room, what looked like a dentist's chair attached to a machine by a series of plastic-looking tubes. She shined the flashlight on the floor. Scattered among papers and rectangular

trays, like the kind they give you at the doctor's office to vomit in, were odd metal objects, things that looked like pliers or wire-cutters.

"Dorsey," she called. "What else did they do here? What is this room?"

Dorsey walked in. Her flashlight picked up the dull, faded green color of the walls, the paint peeling like sunburned skin.

"Some places did experiments, like lobotomies. You know, the old icepick in the eyeball to calm your brain down. Other things, probably, too. Who would know unless they kept records? You had all these women basically at the mercy of a bunch of male doctors who didn't have degrees in psychiatry."

"This is getting creepy," Angie said, sweeping the camera around the room, the little red light like an eye. She stepped gingerly over pieces of broken glass.

Dorsey smiled. "Voilà," she said, holding something up.

The GhostConnector was hardly bigger than a game console, and looked like one, with a screen, dials, and buttons. It looked like a toy and Kim said so, a hand on her hip.

Dorsey said, "A thousand-dollar toy, then, I guess, complete with an electromagnetic frequency reader, data storage, a thermal flashlight that changes color when the temperature dips or rises, and an application that turns environmental readings into real words, also known as making sense of phonetic activity."

She sounded like she'd memorized the pamphlet.

The girls stared at her.

Dorsey sighed. "In dipshit language, that means if a ghost is near, the temperature will change and this thing will alert us. If the ghost makes a sound—*ooohhh!*—this machine has a

mechanism to recognize the speech pattern and turn it into a word we can understand."

Kate looked at the GhostConnector. "Do you honestly think that thing is legitimate?"

Dorsey's face closed in a way Kate didn't like. "Why, Kate? What are you afraid of? A bunch of dead lady ghosts? Afraid this might work better than your Ouija board?"

She chucked Kate under the chin with a finger. Kate ducked away, sorry she'd ever told Dorsey about the Ouija board. She didn't like Dorsey all that much, truthfully. She wasn't planning to keep in touch when Dorsey went away in a year to whatever pretty college she chose and Kate had to stay home, working at a call center or something. That would be her life: sitting in a cubicle listening to strangers complain about dishwashers not washing and recliners not reclining.

Dorsey and the other girls left the room. When Kate went to follow, her shoe crunched on something. She shined her flashlight down. Tiny, yellowy-white stones were strewn across the floor. She bent down to get a closer look, but Lissy scooped them up and held them close to Kate's face.

"Teeth," Lissy said. "Like me." She opened her mouth, exposing the gaps. She was nine, and the teeth she did have hung like mini-stalactites.

Kate's stomach heaved and she pushed Lissy's hand away, hurrying after the others.



Dorsey stopped at another room. "Hold on," she said. She held the GhostConnector up. A faint blue, blinking line.

"The temperature is dropping." Dorsey sounded excited.

Kate rubbed her arms. "It's getting cold."

"Yes," Dorsey said. "Spirits suck the energy, as in heat, from an area, when they're close."

She held the GhostConnector up to the doorway. It pinged faintly and the blue line got bluer.

Angie said, "If you're pranking us, I will kill you. No joke."

Dorsey licked her lips and stepped into the room. The GhostConnector whirled.

Kate followed nervously. She thought of Dorsey's grandmother visiting her. If ghosts could return to a place, then surely it *was* possible they were here. Or maybe Dorsey had been lying about her grandmother. Dorsey lied about a lot of things.

There were metal tables and file cabinets, sinks and a strange chair mounted to a pole with a lever in the middle of the room. The chair had straps and metal cuffs.

Dorsey whistled.

"I didn't think I'd see one of these," she said. "So, one thing they did was put patients in this chair and strap them in and then raise them up," Dorsey said, pointing to the lever. "And then spin it." She walked around the chair to a machine with knobs and buttons. She pressed some of the buttons. Nothing happened.

"Spin it?" Kate asked.

"Yes, really fast. It was supposed to clear the bad thoughts from your head."

Angie circled the chair with the camera. "Someone should get in," she said, grinning. "I mean, it's for posterity."

Lissy said, "It's freezing," but no one heard her. She had

slipped the teeth into the pocket of her pants and she felt for them now, jiggling them in her fingers to comfort herself.

Dorsey said, "Kim. Get in."

"No way." Kim backed away. "I have a meet next week and I'm not getting hurt for this crap."

"It doesn't work. There's no electricity here. See?" Dorsey made a big show of pressing buttons, turning knobs.

Kim shook her head.

"I'll give you fifty bucks. Here." Dorsey dug in her backpack and handed Kim the cash.

Kim held the money in her hand. She hated that Dorsey bribed them all the time. Kim once accepted twenty bucks from Dorsey to walk up to Dean Cooper at a party and kiss him and sure, she did it, she'd had a beer or two, and Dean was extremely cute, but the kiss made him think they'd be doing more, and it took her some time to get out of that. That's why boys sucked. Nothing could ever be fun. It always had to be *more*.

Kim handed Dorsey the money. "Nope."

Dorsey turned to Angie. "You do it."

Angie hesitated. She could always use money for art supplies. It could be interesting, being in the chair. Artists were always testing limits, after all. She watched a video once of an artist who sat in a store window for twelve days straight, naked in a chair, staring at the strangers gathered on the sidewalk to watch. Her expression never changed. She didn't eat, she didn't sleep. "I'm on display," the artist had said in a statement. "Women are always on display."

Angie had watched as much of the video as she could, keeping it on real time on her laptop, looking away for homework

or to go to school or to sleep and always, when she came back, there was the woman, looking at her. In time, her body stopped being naked, stopped being boobs and bush, and more of a thing, a rooted, strange, immovable object. Kind of like the women on the benches must have felt, Angie thought suddenly.

"Fifty more when we get out of here and I'll do it," Angie told Dorsey.

Dorsey nodded. Angie handed Kim the camcorder and climbed onto the chair. Puffs of dust erupted around her, creamy in the beam of Dorsey's flashlight. Kate strapped Angie in.

"Don't put the cuffs on," Angie warned. She tried to steel herself. This was for *art*, after all.

Lissy's teeth began to chatter.

"Happy now?" Angie asked, as Kim filmed her. She tugged at the straps. "Okay, I'm getting off. Help me. Are these tangled or something?"

"Your machine's making a noise," Kate said to Dorsey.

Dorsey held the GhostConnector to her ear. "No, quiet as a kitten."

But they all heard the whirring. The chair began to rise.

Dorsey's mouth opened in a perfect O, but it was Angie who began to scream as she was lifted in the air. *Stop it, let me down, you said it didn't work, this isn't funny.*

We didn't touch it.

Kate and Dorsey tried the buttons and knobs but nothing worked. They jumped for the chair, but it kept rising, Angie struggling in the straps that criss-crossed her body.

And then, with a violent bump that shook Angie's body, it stopped.

"Get me down!" Angie cried.

The chair began to spin, slowly at first, with a great, creaking groan, throwing Angie's cries around the room, and then faster, garbling her words. She spun like a top.

Dorsey's GhostConnector gurgled, but only Lissy noticed. She stepped closer to Dorsey as Angie's cries intensified. Kim finally threw down the camera and ran under the chair, trying to find something to stop it.

Angie vomited from up high, spraying chicken noodle soup around the room.

Make it stop, thought Lissy, pressing her hands to her ears. Make it *stop*.

The chair stilled.

Angie slumped forward. Kate and Kim got hold of the bottom of the chair and wrenched it to the ground. Angie's face was bloated. Tiny chicken pieces clung to her cheeks.

Kate undid the straps. They weren't tangled at all, like Angie had said.

"I'm so sorry," Dorsey whispered. She tried to wipe off Angie's face, but Angie shoved her, hard, knocking Dorsey to the ground, and got out of the chair. She wobbled, her legs buckling for a second before she straightened herself.

"I hate you so much right now," she whispered to Dorsey. She reached into her pocket and threw the money on the glass-littered ground.

And then she ran.

The girls stood, stunned, until Kim finally spoke. "I think we should go," she said. "This is too weird."

"No," Dorsey said. "This is exactly what we came for. I

mean, what *was* that? What did that? She'll be fine. She'll wait in the car."

Lissy pulled on the sleeve of Dorsey's pink hoodie. "What is it, Mouse? You scared? This is an adventure."

Lissy pointed to the GhostConnector. "Voice."

Dorsey sucked in her breath. She pressed a button, replaying the gurgle.

Kim bent down and grabbed her knees. "Oh, god, I'm so freaked out right now." But she picked up the camera, anyway, and turned it back on.

Dorsey said, "So then, we press this . . ." She pressed a tiny green button. "And the GC searches a database of vocal patterns to find . . ." She turned a dial.

Kate felt like she might faint. Angie had been like a ride at the fair, spinning and spinning. Lissy stepped closer to her. Her body was ice cold and Kate flinched. "For god's sake, I told you to bring a jacket, you *jerk*."

Kim frowned. "You don't need to be so mean, Kate."

"Shut up, Kim. You don't know—"

Dorsey held up her hand. "Listen."

The sound from the GhostConnector was muffled, like a voice coming through cloth.

Hurts.

Hurts.

The next thing they heard was the camcorder hitting the ground, Kim's head smacking the tile next to it.

Lissy fanned Kim with paper she found on the floor. Kate splashed drops of water from a bottle onto Kim's face. Dorsey tried to piece the camcorder back together.

Kim's eyes fluttered.

"Hurts," she said.

They all flinched, even Dorsey. Kim's eyes were glassy.

"We should go," Kate whispered. "This has gone far enough."

"I'm not going," Dorsey said firmly. "If you guys want to wait out by the car, in the dark, until I'm done, that's fine. But we have something and I think we can get more. Someone *spoke*."

"Probably just your stupid machine," Kim said haltingly. "Piece of crap somebody uploaded with voices to fool you."

"Doesn't explain the chair, though," Kate said quietly.

"It's busted," Dorsey sighed, shoving the camcorder in her backpack. "But we have the GhostConnector and the data is saved and we can use our phones to film. I'm going to keep going. Anyone with me?"

Kate helped Kim up. There was a thin trickle of blood at Kim's temple and Kate tried to wipe it away. Kim pushed her hand down.

Dorsey shined her flashlight on them. "Agreed?"

They nodded, following her to the door.

Lissy trailed after them. She looked back at the chair and for an instant, she saw a woman in a loose gown, her head lolled to the side, her eyes wide and frightened.

Lissy's heart jumped. She rubbed her eyes. When she looked again, the woman was gone.



They walked the corridor in silence, their shoes shuffling. Some rooms were filled with beds, the empty metal frames like webby

carcasses. Bedpans piled in corners. Lissy found a hairbrush and petted the hairs that hung from it. That was the thing that made her parents send her to the doctor. The hair thing. The girls at school in the bathroom, always brushing their hair, leaving tendrils in the sink, which Lissy wrapped in paper towels and put in her pocket. Sometimes, when she couldn't help herself, when a girl with particularly pretty hair, soft and silky, was near, she would reach out and gently tug some strands away. She had a sewing kit she kept in her closet and that's where she made the dolls. Cut out patterned fabric for dresses, built bodies out of cotton balls and twine, buttons and yarn for eyes and mouths. Then she sewed the hair on and that was it. Instant friends with real hair she could pet. It made her mother cry when she found them. She was sorry when her father threw the dolls away.

Kate took the brush from Lissy and threw it down the hall. Something yowled.

Two eyes gleamed at them. The girls screamed. Dorsey laughed.

A gray, matted cat hissed and ran at them, the teeth it still had bared and sharp. Kim tucked Lissy behind her. Dorsey's GhostConnector emitted a soft *ping*. The cat turned right and disappeared down another long, dark corridor.

Dorsey fiddled with the GhostConnector.

Can't have it.

Kim frowned. "Can't have what?"

Dorsey shrugged.

The machine whirred. *Hurts.*

"Just one more room, okay?" Kate asked. The cat had spooked her, but she had other feelings, too, like something

that was not Lissy had been touching her. The air was weird in this part of the asylum, thicker, and when she walked, it felt like moving through spiderwebs, sticky and unsettling. She said this out loud.

Dorsey nodded. "I felt that. The GC was making noises, registering heat. I mean, ghosts are supposed to draw energy from people. Maybe there are . . . more in this part? Moving around us."

"I cannot believe you aren't scared," Kim said. "I feel like I'm going to pee myself."

"Think about it," Dorsey said. "People die everywhere. They probably died in the house you live in now, way back when. They're everywhere. Why wouldn't they be? We just choose not to listen."

She looked at the GhostConnector. "It's going crazy."

Indeed, the toylike machine was emitting beeps and clicks at a rapid rate. Dorsey held it in front of her, and turned into another room.

Lissy's hand slipped into Kim's and Kim let her. She felt sorry for the kid, really. All that messed-up stuff at school and her and Kate's mom dying. She had no idea what she'd do if her mother died. Her mother meant home-baked cookies, a heating pad when Kim's periods were awful, Bollywood movies on Friday night. It had always been just the two of them. If she lost her, what then? She hoped her mother would come back to her, maybe say something about where she was and what was happening there. She'd like that.

Lissy's hand in Kim's was warm. Kim gave it a squeeze. Kate didn't need to be so mean to her sister.

Lissy held tighter, her fingers growing hotter. Kim shook her hand free. "Let go, kiddo," she said. "Too tight." Her hand was burning up, the skin stinging in an awful way.

But Lissy was across the room, standing in front of a series of shelves with glass jars, and Kim's hand was empty.

Kim's heart flailed. She held her hand in front of her face. Blisters bubbled on her palm.



Angie had run so fast and so blindly that when she stumbled, she slid halfway across the floor on her stomach, her body raking broken glass. She had pushed herself up, glass grinding into her palms, and tried to remember which way the front doors were. When she finally found them, she gasped in the cool night air, soft rain falling on her face. She slammed the doors shut.

Dorsey hadn't locked the car and Angie sat in the driver's seat, breathing heavily, staring at Bedford. She tried to send a text to her mother, but there was still no service. She tried to calm her breathing, but every sound, even her own body moving, startled her.

Just calm down, she told herself.

She started to cry, great heaving sobs that echoed in the small car.

When she finally looked up, the windows of Bedford were alive with movement.

Angie screamed into her hands and closed her eyes.



When she opened them, the window movement had stopped, but she heard screaming from the building. "Please stop," she whispered. "Please just stop."

It was Kim screaming, flinging open the big double doors and running toward the car with her strong sprinter's legs, her eyes wide. She slipped and fell in the rain.

Angie's body drained in a cold way. There was something following Kim from the building, a cloud-like wave pouring from the doors that undulated and shuddered.

Angie had always thought ghosts, or whatever spirits were, would be white, but this wasn't that and there wasn't just one cloud, it was a series of them, pinkish and long, rippling like the lake's water.

"Get up," Angie whispered. "Get the hell up and shut the doors, Kim."

But Kim couldn't hear her. She stumbled up and ran for the car again, the pink waves swimming around her. She yanked open the passenger-side door and slammed it shut. Her face was caked with mud and blood.

"My hand," Kim stuttered. "My hand. Burning."

The blisters were the size of quarters. Some of them had burst, the gooey liquid pouring down Kim's palm and onto her wrist. Angie grabbed Kim's backpack, where she always kept creams and bandages for track practice. Kim said, "Gotta get out."

Angie stared at her. The voice that came from Kim didn't sound like Kim.

The voice repeated *gotta get out, gotta get out* in a low growl. Angie slapped Kim's face.

"Help me," Kim whispered, in her own voice now. Hands shaking, Angie spread cream on the blisters as Kim cried.

The car began to rock, at first gently, and then hard.



Dorsey shook her head. "Two down. Only the brave remain."

She had a file cabinet drawer open and was reading from a medical record. Lissy and Kate stared at the rows of specimen jars and the objects that floated within.

"Beatrice S. complained of stomach ailment. Appendix removed, found healthy. Refer organ for further testing. BS deceased, infection of wound."

Kate looked at a blob in a jar, her flashlight catching the porous pinkness of it. It was perfectly preserved, floating in a netherworld.

Dorsey made a strange sound. "Oh, wow. Listen to this: 'Annabelle Carpenter, seventeen, received April twenty-second, 1921. Extreme mania, refuses nourishment. Mania resulted from broken engagement and refusal to return ring. Patient'—"

Dorsey stopped. Kate looked over at her.

Dorsey's face was pale and she was blinking fast. The GhostConnector began to beep, a soft sound trickling from it.

Kate said, "What?"

Dorsey cleared her throat. "'Patient secured medical shearing device and removed hand at wrist during unmonitored activity. Hand located in lower level of institution several days after severing. Patient deceased April twenty-second, 1962.' She cut it off, my god, she cut it off."

Dorsey didn't have to press a button this time, because clear as day, the GhostConnector said

Give it back

Dorsey dropped the file. Kate dropped her flashlight. The room erupted.



Angie and Kim were soldered together in the front seat of the car when Dorsey and Kate ran from Bedford, Kate helping Dorsey in the muddy grass. Dorsey was screaming, which scared Kim, because Dorsey was always cool as a cucumber. The car had stopped rocking, but the windows of Bedford were alive with lights of all different colors.

Dorsey shoved Angie out of the driver's seat and into the back. She started the car with Angie's feet still half in the front, over the gearshift. The car lurched, and Angie's head hit the back passenger window. Kate pulled her to a sitting position.

From the corner of her eye, Kate saw movement on the lake.

It was no longer still, like it had been earlier in the night. It was roiling, waves undulating in pinkish bursts, and when she looked to the doors of Bedford, what she saw made her heart stop.

Angie was screaming at Kim. *You let them out. You let them goddamn out.*

Dorsey peeled across the grass and down the dirt road, Angie's screams shattering her ears.



They were flying down the road, parallel to the lake, rain plastering the windshield, Dorsey swearing, Kim crying, and Angie moaning, when Kate felt it.

An absence.

She patted around the backseat, looked at the floorboards. Her heart calved in two.

"Stop," she said. "We have to go back. We forgot Lissy."

Dorsey said, "No."

Kate felt the car heave forward as Dorsey pressed the gas. She said Dorsey's name.

When Dorsey didn't answer, Kate lunged forward and grabbed the steering wheel, turning the car to the right.

The car flew through the trees toward the gleaming, hungry lake.



In the specimen room, Lissy picked up the GhostConnector.

Home

Hurts

Give it back

Hurts

She didn't mind the voice, or voices. Maybe there were several, she couldn't tell. The room wasn't dark, anymore, like when Dorsey and her sister, Kate, ran away. There were a lot of lights now and they were very pretty, pink and purplish and white, like the watercolors she made at the doctor's office. She put the GhostConnector back on the floor, the words floating around her.

The jars were full of liquid and fleshy objects. Round things. Twisted fleshy tubes. The objects hung in the liquid, still and perfect.

Home

Soon, Lissy answered. She didn't say it out loud. She knew they could hear her. It felt kind of nice this way. Talking without opening your mouth. The way her dolls talked to her.

At the far end of the wall, she found it.

The hand, suspended, the fingers tipped upward toward the top of the jar, as though reaching for it. A gold ring circled one finger. The hand looked soft and delicate, like her mother's.

Her mother lotioned her hands every night and sometimes she put just a spot of lotion on Lissy's nose, rubbing it in gently.

Lissy could almost feel that now, the sweet press of her mother's finger on her nose.

She put her hand on the glass jar, matching her fingers against the fingers inside, like pat-a-cake. She wasn't frightened at all when the fingers inside the jar twitched.

"I know," she said, softly. "I know."

Hurts

Home

The glass of the jar was growing warmer beneath Lissy's palm. She closed her eyes. She liked the voices. She wished she could keep them.

Hurts

When the jar shattered, spilling the hand on the floor, Lissy didn't startle or scream. She just looked at her palm, and her arm, now dotted with flecks of glass and blood. She looked around for something to wipe the blood away with, but it didn't matter.

She could feel them, other hands, patting her clean and safe.

Good girl

She picked up Dorsey's backpack and rooted around inside, throwing out the cigarettes and makeup pouch and sparkly phone case. She dropped the GhostConnector inside and stood up.

Home

The hand lay on the floor at her feet.

Very slowly, the forefinger touched the toe of Lissy's thin shoe.

"Okay," she said. "Home."



Outside, the rain had gone away. The lake was rippling, releasing pinkish-white and violet shadows that hovered over the surface of the water. Over the soft hills, the glow of the sunrise was beginning, and Lissy watched the women of the hospital step carefully on the dewy grass, holding their gowns up over their ankles. Some of them couldn't walk very well, so others helped them. Were they smiling? She thought so.

Lissy thought a long walk would be fine. She wasn't afraid. She would follow the road and perhaps someone would stop for her, or Kate might remember her, and come back, or not, and that was fine, too. She wasn't alone. She'd tucked the hand inside her sleeve, so her wrist matched Annabelle's wrist and Annabelle's fingers were firmly clasped in her own. Lissy wasn't worried about what would happen to her, anymore.