



PROLOGUE



At night, cornfields looked like the ocean. When clouds covered the moon, the vast darkness on either side of the road could be glassy bodies of water stretching into the distance. All they could see, driving home that night from the party in the farmhouse, was the road ahead, narrow and straight.

This was a game Miranda liked to play sometimes, even though she was sixteen and old enough to know better. She imagined that the country road was really following a rocky shoreline, that if they stopped the car and opened the windows, they'd hear nothing but lapping waves. They'd be in a different state — one that gazed out onto the Pacific or the Atlantic — not stuck in the middle of the country, in the sticky center of a dead-hot summer.

Maybe Rob, her older brother, liked to play the game as well. Maybe that night he'd forgotten that the darkness surrounding them wasn't the black water of a quiet bay. It

was a forest of tall corn, brown and wilting during the day, rustling in a late-night hint of breeze. He couldn't see through that dark thicket. He couldn't see the other car speeding along another road. He couldn't hear it, either: Miranda and Jenna had turned up the radio because they'd finally found a song they liked. Jenna was in the front seat. She always liked sitting next to Rob, though she was Miranda's friend — the only real friend Miranda had made since their parents dragged them, a year earlier, to live in a small college town surrounded by cornfields.

Jenna turned her head to say something to Miranda. She'd bent forward, reaching to turn down the radio. The song had ended. Jenna was laughing.

There was a brightness, what seemed to be a spotlight piercing the passenger window. And then something slammed into them: The sound was like iron jaws crushing the car, crunching it. Everything was spinning, blurry. They were tumbling in the air — bumping, then tumbling again. Miranda remembered closing her eyes. She didn't remember screaming. She didn't remember the glass of her window cracking.

When Miranda opened her eyes, she was curled upside down, the seat belt barely holding her in place. Her face was stinging. Her neck, pressed hard against the roof of the car, ached. She didn't know how to breathe, let alone speak. Her shaking hands and legs felt so feeble, so useless, she wasn't sure if she could unfasten the seat belt.

But somehow she did. She stabbed at the seat belt lock until it clicked open, grabbing at the strap so she wouldn't

drop onto her head. And somehow she managed to shimmy out of the shattered window and onto the hard ground. Even the guys in the sheriff's car, when they eventually got there, were impressed. They told her she'd done good. It took them much, much longer to cut Rob out of the driver's seat. They had to send for a man with a truck. They kept telling Rob to hang in there because help was on its way. Any minute now, they said: You just have to hang in there, buddy.

It was a hot night, but Miranda was cold. She sat in the dust, a deputy's jacket over her shoulders, the corn whispering around her. There was another car, a red car, upside down in the intersection. Men talked on radios. One of them gave her a half-empty plastic bottle of water. They said her brother was going to be okay, once they got him out of there. They said that when they got them to a hospital, someone would pick all the pieces of glass out of Miranda's face. They said the red car must have flown through the stop sign. They said they were real sorry to tell her this, but the other girl in her car was dead.

Miranda knew this even before they told her. She could see Jenna, small and squashed, upside down in the front seat, her fair hair illuminated by headlights. Jenna's eyes were closed, and her mouth was open. She had been about to say something, Miranda wanted to tell them. They'd been singing along to the song on the radio, mainly to annoy Rob, and then Jenna was about to say something. Now there she was, hanging in the front seat, the door smashed in around her.

Miranda shivered: The breeze had turned cold. She hung her head, blinking back tears. Someone was walking toward her, footsteps scuffing the dirt. When Miranda opened her eyes, she could see right away that it wasn't one of the deputies. It was Jenna, in jean shorts and blood-smearred Blondie T-shirt, her charm bracelet glinting at her wrist. She didn't have any shoes on: She'd taken them off in the car, Miranda remembered, because the straps were hurting her.

Miranda opened her mouth to cry out: She could still see the Jenna in the car, buckled and squashed and bloodied. But here was this other Jenna walking toward her, smiling. She drifted her fingers across Miranda's scalp, brushing Miranda's hair back from her stinging forehead. Jenna's touch was gentle, but it felt like the iciest winter wind.

Jenna took another few steps into the field and disappeared, dissolving into the darkness. Miranda called out her name. She staggered to her feet, the jacket falling off her shoulders, calling Jenna's name over and over again. The corn rustled back at her, keeping its secrets. One of the deputies got her to sit down again, and to drink some water. Miranda heard them saying that it would be better if she sat with her back to the car so she wouldn't have to stare at her friend's body trapped there in the front seat.

That night was the last time Miranda saw her friend alive. The last time Rob could sit in a car — or any confined space — without having a panic attack.

The first time Miranda realized she could see ghosts.