

THE HONEYYS

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PUSH

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CHAPTER 1

My sister wakes me with a whisper.

“I love you, Mars.” Her voice crumbles in her throat. In the moonlight from my window I can see the gleam of tears streaked over her jaw. She hovers so close I can smell her. Not her usual shampoo, but an unright odor. The rich sweetness of decay, like molding flowers.

“Caroline? You’re back?” I’m confused. The summer night swells with cricket song and the curtains billow against her hunched form, like the outside is trying to take her back. I used to leave that window open all the time when we still snuck out onto the balcony connecting our bedrooms. On nights like tonight, I used to wait for Caroline to *tap tap tap* on the glass, a book and a flashlight ready. But Caroline and I haven’t met on our balcony in a long, long time.

It’s her, though. Only Caroline would know I still keep the window unlocked, just in case.

“Caroline?” I ask the shadow. The overripe stink.

No answer.

“Why are you home?” I’m too sleepy to hide the hope in my voice. Despite everything from this past year, I’m happy to see my sister. I’ve waited so long for her to come back for me.

She lifts something above her head. I recognize the shape, the catch of soft moonlight on rough metal. It’s my iron sundial. She must have grabbed it from my bookcase. I use it as a bookend because it’s so heavy.

She stifles a sob, heaving the sundial high. I reach for my phone on the nightstand.

“Caroline, what’s going on—”

“Forgive me,” she sobs.

Caroline brings the sundial down on my hand, crushing nail and bone into metal and glass. I’m about to scream when she lifts it again, and this time she brings it down on my head.

Pink lights.

Pink walls.

The blood in my eye turns the clean brightness of the upstairs hallway into a rosy nightmare as I run from my room. From crashing and chaos.

I am slow and I am stumbling. I cradle one hand with the other, feeling familiar skin bent into unfamiliar carnage. The knuckles of my hands don’t match anymore, their twin-hood out of alignment. Like Caroline and me.

She storms behind me. She’s so close her stink overwhelms me. All I can hear is her screaming.

Mars. Mars. Don’t go. Don’t go.

It’s not her voice. It’s not my sister. It’s something wearing her skin, filling her flailing body like a pressurized water hose. She overtakes me before I’ve made it to the stairs, and the pink world whirls as we hit the floor. Upside down, I see the door to our parents’ room open, see Mom in her nightshirt halt. Gasp. Scream. Dad calls up from downstairs.

I barely dodge the next hit, the iron sundial smashing into the floorboards beside my head. I blindly drive a hand upward into a slippery jaw and the sundial tumbles away, down the stairs with gunshot thuds. My vision is fucked up, but in the brightness of the hallway I can see Caroline now. She is filthy, her brown hair clumped with dust and debris. Her clothes cling to her, black with mud, but the plastic Academy logo still shines on her uniform’s sleeve. She pulls something from her waistband and holds it over us.

A knife. My sister has brought home a knife.

But what scares me more are her eyes. Later, I will try to convince myself that there was no sign of my sister in that wild stare. But my dreams will replay this moment with cruel clarity; trap me within it like a bug preserved in amber. I will want to believe I am being killed by a monster, but in the stare of my attacker I don't see monstrosity. I see my Caroline. Lucid. Herself. So recognizable that my agony—even my shock—dissolves into relief. This is the first time since this awful year began that I've looked into her eyes and seen her—seen *her*—looking back.

Caroline cringes, and it's all the warning I have before she plunges the knife toward my face. I twist but a seam of fire rips open in my ear. Now I scream, but I can't hear it, can't hear anything through the white-hot pain. I feel the house tremble under my back as Dad hits the top of the stairs. I feel Caroline get dragged away. I roll to my side and use my good hand to heave myself onto the banister. I stare into the chandelier that hangs into the great drop of our entryway. The lights are still pink, the world still blurry. The whole house spins beneath me like I'm the center of an unbalanced carousel.

I am powerless as I watch Caroline kick and bite at our dad. Not Caroline. Not our dad. Strangers. Actors. Unreal characters that have broken into my life for this improvised horror. Mom stands in her doorway, another imposter. She claps both hands over her mouth, frozen. I want to scream at her. Want her to help. To fix this.

Caroline sinks teeth into the meat of Dad's hand. He's a big man; he flings her off with violent disgust, driving her into the mirror at the top of the stairs. The glass shatters over her, but she never stops moving. Not for a second. She plunges toward me, the carpet twisting beneath her shoes as she tries to get her footing. But she's too close, too out of control. I know what will happen before it happens.

Caroline trips. She falls into me, arms hugged tight around my shoulders. The banister snaps and we hurtle backward. Then down. The ceiling

fills my view. We fall through the chandelier; then the chandelier is falling with us. Like dancers, we spin in the brief infinity of the drop, a storm of light and crystal and blood.

When we hit the floor, Caroline hits first.

She breaks beneath my body. I'm close enough to hear her snap, to feel her stiffen, and to know she's gone too still. I am wrapped in her arms, her hair, in the sweet stink she brought home. The silence and the stillness scare me more than anything else.

I struggle free, broken crystal biting flesh from my naked thighs, my knees. In the wreckage, I stand.

I look at my sister.

She's covered in my blood. Her body curls into itself. Her face is the last thing to stop twitching. One eye half-lidded, the other flung wide open like a doll.

Caroline is looking at me when she dies. And she is smiling.