

## Little girls lie

### Carrie

The scent of brewed coffee hangs thick in the air, creating a sense of warmth in the cafe. This small coffee shop is the perfect place to be in Port Manren, watching the sun glisten over the ocean, watching it dance along the peaks of the waves. The heat coming to rest on your arms as you sit by the window enjoying your breakfast or more realistically, brunch. It reminds me of the summer days that I enjoyed when I was little. My Mum and I would go to the cafe near our house that's a lot like this one, she would get a coffee, and I would get a chocolate cake. We would then sit in the park across the street and watch the ducks run across the grass. When I got tired, I would lay down on her lap, the sun colouring my skin, and I'd listen to her stories, those days smelling like coffee on her lips. I would lay like that for hours listening to her tales about Port Manren that made me dream of the day that I'd be able to experience them.

For years I dreamed about this place that was tucked away into the smallest corner of coastal Australia. Where you would know your neighbours and your existence smelled of melted ice cream and saltwater.

I sit as an observer of this postcard of a town far away from its gritty past. Behind these pretty stories, my Mum would tell me was the mystery of Melissa Dorsey, she mentioned it once, and it has haunted me ever since. The mystery of this vanishing girl itched at my skin, needing to find an answer. The peace of the sunny Sunday morning almost covers the harsh reminder of a teen not found. The crumbled missing person's poster hangs on the corner wall, Melissa Dorsey watches as I drink my coffee, the world moving on without her. What strikes me is how young her face appears. I was always told I looked young for my age, did people tell her that same thing? Or was she really that young when she vanished?

I swirl the remainder of my coffee that begs to be finished despite the gross feeling in my gut, but I gulp the gritty, cold dregs down, the rich taste burning the back of my tongue. As I get to my feet, I feel a hand on my arm, pulling me back to my chair. A pretty blonde girl occupies the seat across from mine, her soft hand pulling away from my skin once she gets my attention. She begins to talk to me like we've met before, but the familiarity is lost on me.

"I'm sorry, but have we met before?" She asks, slipping right into the conversation as her eyes scan my face for an identity she may know.

“I don’t think so,” I answer her politely, hiding the uncomfortable feeling crawling up my back.

“Are you sure? You look very familiar.” She comments, becoming very confused.

“Well, I just moved here.”

“Where from?” She questions, clasping her hands together like she’s judging me.

“Sydney.”

“Oh nice, I have an uncle that lives in Newtown.”

"How fun for you," I comment, looking away, seeing two boys looking our way. They look away from me embarrassed, going back to their intense conversation.

"That's my boyfriend Brad and his boyfriend, Damien." She waves her hand at them, and they shy away, looking back at each other, talking in hushed tones.

"So they're close." I laugh, and she jokingly rolls her eyes."What are they doing?" I say watching the boys huddle over their laptops and shuffle around papers.

“Get this, they think they’re going to solve the Melissa Dorsey Mystery,” She says laughing to herself and waving her hands to say ‘ooh’ like a child.

“You don’t think it’s possible?”

“What’s the mystery? It’s not like she’s alive somewhere.” She speaks like she is so sure of herself and I can’t help but feel a little pissed off, but she talks a mile a minute. I can’t give her my opinion.

She corners me long enough to learn that her name is Hailee Moore and that she's a force to be reckoned with. She insisted that I walk with her to school tomorrow, I felt like I couldn't say no.

The boys from across the cafe pull themselves away from their conversation long enough to join us. When they do, the small one called Damien bombards me with questions about myself, and I try to answer them all, but I start to feel a hot stress rash break out across the back of my neck. It doesn't take him long to ask me If I've heard about Melissa Dorsey itching to pull another person into an in-depth conspiracy theory. I tried my hardest to not fall for it, already

feeling Hailee tensing up next to me. I make a small comment about how weird I think the whole situation is, and then I try to change the subject, but Damien latches on.

"Of course, it's weird. This town is a septic tank of lies and secrets, especially in perfect families." Damien says passionately, slightly nodding his head towards Hailee who flips him off. That's when Brad takes over the conversation, and the boys talk among themselves. I sit awkwardly next to Hailee who is still burning a hole in the window, it's hard to know what to do when you just met someone new, so you just have to wait for someone to include you.

"Cute ring," She comments, touching the ruby stone of my finger.

"Thank you, it was a gift from my Mum," I inform her, and she nods. "Speaking of parents, I should get home. I'll see you guys later," I say getting to my feet and collecting my handbag as they wish me goodbye.

I leave the cafe with more than I came in for, a stomach full of coffee and heart full of hope. I cross the street, looking out towards the horizon, everything feels like it's falling into place for once. I look back towards the cafe watching the tableau of people in the window. They talk among themselves, and I feel determined that we will find Melissa, it's time she came home.

#### Four weeks later

We have been researching about Melissa for four weeks, and we've got nothing. After school, the boys and I would go to the library and comb through public records and every little bit of available evidence, and it was a whole bunch of nothing. We've been lying to Hailee for nothing. Brad likes to keep her away from this stuff because it's a popular opinion among the townspeople that her Dad had something to do with Melissa's disappearance.

As we began to lose faith, Damien suggested that we should look for evidence closer to home, specifically Hailee's home. When I said popular opinion, I meant the only thought these boys can come up with. He said that we should look through Mr Moore's Melissa memorabilia that he keeps in their linen cupboard, he had found it once when looking for towels. This had Damien foaming at the mouth, but I distinctly told them it wasn't a good idea and to think about how badly we could hurt Hailee, and I thought that was the end of that.

But today I was woken up to the sound of my phone buzzing, and when I picked it up, it was a text from Hailee asking where I was. I was confused so I asked her what she meant and she told me that she and the boys were waiting for me to make it to brunch at her house that Brad organised. I got dressed furiously grabbing my handbag, storming out the front door towards Hailee's house, the morning still thick on my breath. As I walked, I thought about what I would

say to them when I got there, by the time I reached the door I only had to 'scream and cry until they feel bad', but that's too dramatic.

When Hailee opens the door, I'm greeted with a Stepford family photo of my friends happily brunching the day away. Freshly squeezed orange juice being poured into wine glasses and the dining room smelled of pancakes and bacon. I felt like I was in an overly polite Air wick ad.

“Carrie you made it!” Damien cheered, seating me across from himself at the dining table. I glare at him to let him know that I'm pissed off. Brad passes me a plate of pancakes like the head of the household, freshly groomed, Hailee lovingly cooing over this image. Imagine if she knew what he said behind her back ‘Dramatic, bitchy, spoiled.’ I pour some syrup onto the pancakes listening to the casual conversation being forced in the large dining room, then my phone buzzes. It’s a message from Damien.

**DAMIEN: Keep Hailee busy, would ya? Brad and I are going to slip upstairs.**

I raise my eyes and look at him, no phone in sight, but he's smiling.

**CARRIE: I would, but I remembered I'm not an asshole, unlike yourself.**

**DAMIEN: What’s up your ass?**

We text furiously back and forth, the phone’s under the table, unaware that it was noticeable until our phones buzzed with a Message from *Brad*.

**BRAD: Would you two stop!**

“What's going on?” Hailee asks us, three phones under the table texting furiously. The boys look at me, and I throw the look right back at them, then Hailee reaches over and snatches my phone from my hands. She reads the messages and then drops my phone on the table and storms out. It doesn’t take the boys long to dart up the stairs, leaving me among the wreckage of our ambitions and feeling guilty.

I leave the room to find Hailee, and I find her sitting outside in the garden. I sit down next to her, but she doesn't make a move to acknowledge my existence, I wait for her to lose it.

“We weren’t trying to hurt you,” I say.

"I just want a day where something is about me, no hidden agenda or Dad's dead ex-girlfriend haunting my house. You know my Dad almost named me after her. I have to compete with a dead girl for my Dad's love. How screwed is that?" She speaks, not looking at me.

"That's not true." I try to comfort her, but she rants on.

"I only have friends because you wanted dirt on my Dad," She speaks passionately ", Nobody cares about me," She whispers to herself looking to the ground. I see a light glister of tears on her cheek.

"I know a thing or two about not feeling wanted by your own family. It's hard, but you come to realise that it has nothing to do with you. Even if you didn't exist, they would still be the same people as they are now, and it's not your job to fix them. It's their job to realise their mistakes and pay for them." I tell her, reliving the past in my mind not knowing if running as far as Port Manren could save me. She looks at me, and I see her connecting with my words.

“Is your family haunted by *your* Dad's ex-girlfriend?" She asks me, laughing through the tears.

“More like haunted *by* him." I half-smile at her, and she says she's sorry ", aye what's a little emotional trauma among friends. Also, don't worry about the boys, they're fuckwits," We laugh together at that, but I still see that she's a little sad.

“I just hate feeling like this.” She says to me.

" I'll tell you something my Mum used to tell me," I say, taking my ring off and putting it on her finger. "She'd put this ring on me and say, look at this stone, it seems perfect and put together, but it doesn't start this way. When you look closer, you see the small scratches and tapered edges that made it what it is, something precious." This made Hailee smile, and she gave me a long hug. We stay like that until Brad runs out into the garden with a pink sparkly diary and Damien trailing him looking sick.

“Look what we found,” Brad says like a child on Christmas shoving it in our faces, we got to our feet to have a closer look.

"What is it?" Hailee asks him, but grabbing it from his hands anyway and begins to flick through it, causing a picture to flutter out from the first page to the floor, I reach down and pick it up.

"Who's this?" I point to the guy in the photo with Melissa and Mr Moore.

"That's Ronnie Sutherland. Remember the guy who had a photo of Melissa in his wallet and used to stalk her? That's him. He's Mitch's Dad." Brad informs me as Hailee continues to flick through empty pages until the first entry pops up in black gel pen. I remember reading about Mr Sutherland and how he would stalk Melissa when they were young. I also heard a story about how he supposedly threatened to kill himself if she didn't go out with him. His son Mitch hangs out with us sometimes, I'm not sure why I hadn't connected them before they look so much alike.

The 23rd of February, 1998:

*I almost told Michael today. We were sitting in his car talking about his Dad's cricket game that he lost on the weekend. He looked at me for a comment, and I just froze under his intimidating gaze. He asked me if I was okay.... Was I just supposed to tell him?*

*Last week he gave me his grandmother's ring, he was supposed to save it for when he wanted to get married, but he gave it to me. I feel a little strange wearing it when I haven't been totally honest. It's beautiful though, there's this nice inscription on the inside 'our love will guide us'. If only that was true for us.*

"Your Dad proposed?" Damien asks Hailee who hands the book back to Brad and sits down on the ground, trying to process what she just heard about her Dad.

"Most of them are torn out," Brad says, going through it until he lands on an aggressively written entry.

The 1st of April 1998:

*Fuck Michael Moore and his stupid fucking family. His Mother's a mole, his father's a dickhead, and Michael is..... A fucking psychopath. If I never see him ever again, it'll be too soon. We're better off without him.*

"Jeez, that's quite the change," Damien comments to himself. We all stand together, not really knowing what to think or to say. What would invoke this sudden change of emotions? *A fucking psychopath*, could Damien have always been right?

"What do the rest of them say?" I ask Brad, and he flicks through a couple of notes about some books, and the very last page is torn in half, but it begins with, *'I'm afraid.'* Brad gets freaked and drops the journal to the ground, and a piece of paper flutters out from the back of it.

"What's that?" Hailee says, picking it up and opening it. It was an old receipt for a prescription for Folic Acid.

"It's dated the 7th of April 1998," Brad observes, and we all look nervously at each other with a hot flush running up my back.

"That's two days after she went missing. If she was taken like everyone thinks, why would she have a prescription for Folic acid?" Damien questions, the words falling from his salivating tongue.

"Why would she even need it?" Brad asks. I pick up the journal and flick through the two entries thinking about what this could all mean. Then I got it.

"She was pregnant." They look at me with shock, as Hailee gets to her feet and bolts inside, saying that she feels sick. Brad follows after her.

Damien and I waited for a while holding the evidence in our hands, not saying a word, what feels like hours tick away... Brad comes back out to us and tells us to go home because Hailee wants to be alone, but he was going to stay to make sure she was okay. Damien puts the evidence in his bag, and we walk home together past the beach to watch the sunset and talk about what we had just found out.

"Poor Hailee, she doesn't even know her own family," Damien says out of character.

"Wow, I didn't know you had a sympathetic function for her," I comment and he nudges my arm as we sit down on the sand, in the amber light.

"I just feel bad because I was actually right about her Dad." He says, digging in the sand as the sun begins to set over the ocean.

"You really think he killed her?" I ask him like it's the funniest joke I've ever heard. It's kind of presumptuous and out of character. I've never met the guy but judging from the shoes, he leaves around the house, what kind of murderer wears sandals?

"All I'm saying is where's the baby? Dead, with its Mother." He says so easily like he's talking about a show he's watching. I can't stop imagining Melissa, running away from her boyfriend to only be killed by him. It doesn't make sense, it shouldn't be so obvious.

"This is doing my head in so we can just watch the sunset." We watch as the sun sets closing the day, for now. As the orange tones fade to black, I begin to wonder how we're going to figure this out. What's the truth? Can we even trust those around us? I feel like I'm the only one asking questions while the boys chase the infamy of Melissa.

We begin to walk back down the beach in the new darkness, but then we see something huddled on the shore. At first, we think it's a wash-up whale, but as we get closer, we come to recognise it as Mitch Sutherland, our classmate and Ronnie Sutherland's son. Laying on the sand, Dead.

"Oh my God," Damien says, reaching for his phone. I stand looking at him unsure what my role is, but then I catch a glimpse of Mitch's hands he's holding something. I bend down and gently open his fist to see a ball of paper. When I open it I recognise the handwriting, it's the missing diary entry along with a new one. Melissa Dorsey was most certainly alive, and she was out for blood.

The next day like the one before happens in a blur, the whole town going into mourning about Mitch Sutherland, his father Ronnie inconsolable. Brad's Mother had sent over flowers that morning, and by night they were still on his front veranda, I saw them as I walked past to get to Hailee's house. I had been holding onto this diary entry for almost a whole day, and it was time to share the news with my friends, who were called for a movie night at Hailee's. When I got there, we sat at the dining room like last afternoon, and I put the crumpled pieces of paper onto the table.

"Mitch was holding it when we found him," I say, and they all looked a little freaked out. Brad takes it upon himself to read it for the table, Damien too tired and Hailee was worn out with the many changes to her life.

*The 4th of April 1998:*

*[I'm afraid] that I don't give a shit about Michael's threats. He refuses to tell his parents about the baby, and he said to me that they'd rather see me dead before I have his baby. I would be lying if I said I wasn't scared of him, the way he said it didn't seem like a figure of speech but like a promise or a threat.*

*I think it would be best if I just disappeared. That'd be a neat trick.*

He moved on to the second piece of paper, the writing much more mature but noticeably Melissa's.

*Sutherland's spawn won't be the last. There's only one Moore, I want to see dead.*

We all freeze and look at Hailee who doesn't look phased, she tells us that nothing was going to surprise her anymore, but I could see the fear behind her eyes or maybe I'm just projecting.

No matter what Hailee told us we needed to make a plan.

"Hailee, you need to pick up your clothes from the bathroom floor," Mr Moore says coming into the room, I quickly stuff the pages into my pocket as we all sit rigidly.

"Okay, Dad. We'll finish this tomorrow at Brad's?" Hailee suggests walking to the bathroom, leaving us to let ourselves out, Mr Moore barely acknowledging us.

### Hailee

These past few days have felt like walking on a piece of string over rough waters, one slip and it could be over. I've tried my best to seem normal in front of my Dad which isn't hard when he barely comes out of his room which I always thought was sad, but now that I'm looking through the new lense it seems threatening. I would be lying if I said I didn't understand anything Melissa wrote in that diary about Dad. I could say that it's so out of character, but it's not. I've seen him flip the switch going from normal Dad to this stranger who had something dark brewing behind

his eyes. I don't even want to think about the sibling that may still be out there somewhere, the thought that this person could be anywhere and without someone makes my heartache for them. If I was ever to meet them, I would run away with them, and we could have a family far away from the lies and secrets. They'd be twenty-one years old, so they could adopt me, that's a bit weird.

Last night I tried to Facebook search anyone by the last name of 'Dorsey' and all that came up was fan pages and fundraising sites for Melissa that have gone dead. Whoever they were they weren't going to be easy to find, maybe that's the whole point. I try to push those thoughts to the back of my mind as I walk to Brad's house, I know I need to be included because if we don't find Melissa before she finds us, it could end badly. Still, right now, I would rather go back to bed.

When I get to Brad's house, we sit for a while in the living room to wait for Carrie, all of us flicking through our phones trying to pass the time with social media. When an hour passes, I start to feel sick and try to call Carrie again, but it goes to voicemail.

"Maybe she's still at home," Brad says.

"I walked past her house on the way here, and her car wasn't there, and it was pitch black inside. I thought she was already here," Damien commented, also becoming more worried as time ticked on.

"Should we call the police?" I ask them.

"It's only been an hour," Brad comments.

"But what if--" I stop myself, but the boys tell me to keep talking, so I do. ", Something bad happened like, Dorsey got her."

The boys don't seem to agree, but when a few more hours passed and we've heard nothing from Carrie, the reality of my suggestion doesn't seem so crazy. We decide to look for ourselves before telling anyone else, just in case it's nothing.

First, we go to her house, and like Damien said it's pitch black, we knocked on the door anyway but no answer. Her car was also gone, her Mum must be at work. Then we go to the beach looking along the shoreline to make sure we aren't reliving the Mitch incident, but we're only met with tributes to him, the candles flickering among the flowers on the sand. We walk in the middle of town looking in the restaurant windows to see if she was in there having dinner with her Mum but no luck. It was almost like she had vanished into thin air.

"This is starting to feel very creepy." Damien says getting antsy "Maybe we should tell someone. call her parents!"

“I’ve never met her Mum, so how am I supposed to call her?” I tell him, “She got to be around here somewhere.”

“Where do you want us to look, on the outskirts of town?” Brad yells at me, flicking his flashlight on and off. I roll my eyes at him until I realise how perfect his mind worked. I started to take off towards our small town's perimeter line, the boys running after me. We climbed up the windy pathway into the trees and at the end of the road, in the darkness was Carrie’s car crashed into a tree.

"Carrie!" I yell, running towards the car to only be met with an empty car.

"It's like Melissa Dorsey all over again, Can we call the cops now!" Damien says freaking out, running to the nestle of trees to vomit. Brad stands shocked, flicking his torch on and off, I tell him to knock it off. I drive into her car and start to rummage around for a clue, if this was Melissa, there would be a clue, right? She wants to be found. Gosh, I sound like a scooby doo character.

"Hailee, we need to get out of here." Brad says, trying to grab me out, "You're corrupting evidence." He pulls me by my waist, and I stop, coming out with a card with a picture of the old lighthouse on it.

“You’re corrupting evidence,” I mock him, handing him the card “, My ass.”

I pull Damien out of the bushes, and we walk back down the path towards town, Brad keeping up with us while looking at the postcard. My phone rings which makes everyone jump in the darkness. It's Dad, I answer it reluctantly.

“Where are you?” he sounds out of breath.

“Out.”

"You need to come home," I start to rebut, but he forces "Now, Hailee!"

"My Dad needs me, how about you guys check out the old lighthouse, I'll meet you there," I say to the boys, and we walk back into town and part ways.

I rush through the door, not bothering to wipe my feet on the front doorstep feeling like this is a needless task compared to finding my friend who could be in danger. I walk into the dining room and see my Dad sitting there waiting for me, I take a seat next to him, and he places

Carrie's ring in front of me. Is he trying to teach me a lesson about not giving my friends their stuff back?

"Where did you find this?" He asks me softly, glints of anger coming to his wet eyes.

"It's my friends," I say to him.

"What, friend?"

"Carrie, she was here the other day, I forgot to give it back to her."

"Where did she get it?" He asks me sternly.

"It's a family heirloom, I guess."

He looks at the ring, and I lose him again, he's always doing that. He gets to his feet and begins to pace the room.

"What's the big deal? I'll return it to her--" I stop remembering she is nowhere to be found at the moment.

"Because.." He stops and sits down holding my hand "I gave this ring to Melissa and haven't seen it since the last time I saw her."

"Are you sure?" I start to get a new feeling of worry. I pick the ring up and see the inscription 'Our love will guide us' etched into the inside of the gold band, the inscription matching what Melissa had described in her diary. I suddenly feel like I'm going to throw up again.

"Hailee, what's wrong?" Dad says, shaking my shoulder.

"I need to find Carrie," I say, getting up from the table and walking towards the door... Dad follows me to the front door.

"Where do you think you're doing with that?" He asks, trying to stop me.

"Get your hands off me," I yell at him pushing him back "I've been lied to my whole fucking life, and tonight it stops." I swing the door open, and I walk into the night, feeling the world swirl around me. Determined, I ran towards the old lighthouse to save my friends.

I hear my Dad's voice calling for me to come back, but I ignore him knowing that he'd understand later.

## Damien

As we creaked open the front door of the old lighthouse, I started to feel afraid, but I can't say that to Brad, he seems to be fine... We shine our torches into the corners of the small room not seeing anything until we move the light towards the back wall near the staircase where a small TV sits. We walk slowly towards the TV, and when we get close to it, it turns on, playing the Dvd that's already loaded.

It plays a video of Mr Moore and Melissa Dorsey outside this lighthouse before their year ten formal. The photos from this day had been splattered everywhere in the newspapers when Melissa went missing. Then it cuts to a home video from 2001 of a small baby taking her first steps.

“That’s Hailee,” Brad comments quietly recognising it from photos he had seen of Hailee as a baby.

Then it cuts to a video from November 1998 of Melissa Dorsey very much alive sitting in a hospital bed holding a baby. I can’t believe my eyes that we finally know that Melissa Dorsey wasn’t dead. We watch Melissa talk to the baby brushing its hair with her hand, then she looks to the person behind the camera, she beckons them closer. Something about her eyes makes my skin crawl, like watching an old movie where you know everyone in it is dead, but she is alive.

“Could you just get a video of her smiling,” The camera squares in on the baby’s face who wriggles in her Mother’s arms, she speaks to the baby. “C’mon Carrie smile for the camera.”

Brad and I look at each other, then the baby looks into the camera, and it cuts quickly to a photo of our Carrie. Then the TV shuts off, the front door swings open and we see Hailee running in.

"Carrie's.." She starts, but the door slam's shut, and we scream into the darkness, the last thing we hear before the room starts to fill with smoke. Flames fall around us, within minutes I'm taking my last breath. As my eyes close I think I see Hailee get to her feet.

## Carrie

My Mum was a very jaded person, you'd be the same if you ran away from home at seventeen and had to raise a kid on your own. I always think about her in times of conflict and change. I thought of her that morning when I watched my sister Hailee with her friends and how she represented everything that was taken from me. My Mum always told me about Port Manren and about those who wronged her. The people who would emulate her, who would suffocate her with their admiration; and of the one person who she couldn't seem to have that effect on. By now, you know Michael Moore, the doting boyfriend who got his sweetheart ripped from him so young, but only I know the truth. You see my father is a self-righteous nob head, and his daughter seemed to not have fallen far from that tree. He abandoned my Mum, telling her to leave before she brought disgrace upon his family name. Breaking her heart and letting Melissa Dorsey die in the public eye. What an asshole, right?

Our life together was exciting from that moment forward. We moved around a lot, always looking over our shoulder to see if we've been found out. My Mum would be gone for months on end sometimes, and I'd have to hide under blankets in our bedroom, watching old home movies of her and my Dad. I desperately wanted a family, and I even asked my Mum to take me to Port Manren to meet him. That was our last conversation actually, I was begging her to take me there, and she told me to shut up because the only reason we are here was that my Dad hates me. That night I found her dead in the bathroom, drugged out of her life, and my whole world crashed around me, I was alone. I packed my bags before the docs could take me away, I ran to Port Manren, hoping everything my Mum told me was a lie. I stood outside the Moore household and watched my Dad come home to his happy family. I watched as he hugged his new daughter, the better daughter in the front yard like he wanted to send a message. That day I decided everyone was going to pay. That's where this all began, for years I tricked my way through life saying it was going to be worth it one day when I finally hurt my father like he hurt me. I was always told I looked young for my age, so I used that to my advantage, It was strange going back to school at Twenty-one.

I think of my Mum as I stand at the front of the banquet hall at the memorial service for my friends, before the town that spat my Mum out and turned me into a monster. Even grieving, they looked perfect, saying the right things and wearing the right stuff. I know what I did was terrible, but we needed to be free. If only I could tell you how different everything actually is, what's right.

“Are you Carrie?” I look behind me and see Michael Moore standing there looking small.

“Yes,” I say to him. Unsure of why he would want to talk to me out of everyone willing to give him their condolences and sorrows.

“You were friends with Hailee? I think I met you once.”

"Yes, once," I say. Thinking of all the times I'd watched him from afar, he was actually quite ugly up close, fitting.

“She said that night that she needed to find you, why did she think that?”

“What?”, I ask, trying not to sound thrown off and confused, “, I was out of town that night.”

"I might be mistaken, I'm sorry." He said, turning away from me before turning back and taking a small box from his pocket and he gives it to me. "I thought you should have it." He watches me as I open the box, seeing the ring he gave my Mum all those years ago, the one I used to lure his daughter to her death. I look up into his sad eyes speechless, unaware of how much he knows.

“It’s umm--” I stop.

“How’s your Mother?” He whispers to me, his sorrowful face beginning to penetrate my heart, *stay strong*.

"Dead," I say firmly, and I watch his face drop even more like that was even possible. We stand in this moment looking at each other, before someone walks past and he disappears into the crowd, not looking back for me.

Abandoned twice, that almost never happens.

I walk out of the hall, leaving behind my crimes, through crowds of coffee staled mourners and into the salty air that's pulling me towards the ocean. I stand on the lookout edge, watching the sea crash against the jagged rocks letting the wind run through my hair, I close my eyes to listen to the water. Then I feel the same hand on my arm as that first day in the cafe. I turn towards the feeling and see a pretty blonde girl wearing a hat and sunglasses.

“People really do love you more when you’re dead.” She says.

We watch the tide as the day dissolves into night, the only light streaming through the light of the memorial service. When it's time to leave, we climb into my car, and as Hailee pulls

away, I watch the notorious Port Manren fade away in the mirror. As I lose focus on the reflection I spot two figures watching us go. I swing my head around to look out the back of the car's window to see who they were but they had disappeared. I slump further down in the passenger seat, a strange feeling settling in my gut. The remnants of a childhood dream achieved, that will haunt me wherever I go.