

Never Leave

"You know I will never leave you"

My heart sinks as the memory of my sister's reassuring words pop into my mind. Today marks the two-year anniversary of the day she did, in fact, leave me. She disappeared one night during our annual family trip to the Cape. The police presumed that she drowned during a night swim, but they never found a body—only one of her lucky heart-shaped earrings.

I shake the thoughts out of my head. Today, I'm going to let go of the past and finally get my life back. "This party is going to be crazy!" Violet, my best friend, exclaims making wild gesticulations with her hands. I take in my surroundings: a secluded stretch of sand with rocks and shells littered across. To my left lies a minuscule campfire with bright orange embers, barely lighting up the clearing. I can barely distinguish the vast blue ocean through the darkness. A chill runs down my spine. *In that ocean, you could never find a body.*

I attempt to push the thoughts away and take a deep breath. "Come on, Claire, I haven't heard you laugh in months." Violet grabs my hand and leads me toward the party. She's not wrong, the last time I laughed was during the night before Serena died. *No more thinking about her*, I tell myself myself. *It's time to move on at last*

I survey the people scattered around the beach. I must not have gotten the memo about a costume party because they are all wearing masquerade-like face coverings with their drab, casual clothing. The fifteen or so people look like typical teenagers, but their skin seems to... glow. No, that can be right. It must be the moonlight. They look to be caught in deep conversations, yet their eyes are glazed over, housing vacant expressions. The hair on my neck stands up.

RUN, a tiny voice in my head tells me, but I try to ignore it. I'm just paranoid being in close proximity to water, after what happened to Serena. I adjust the folds of my favorite lilac sundress. It has so many pockets to hide all types of things in. I start to make my way toward a group of people but quickly realize that Violet is no longer by my side. She must have wandered off while I was consumed in my thoughts.

As I walk, I catch a glimpse of something shiny out of the corner of my eye. I turn my head in that direction and spot a girl. She meets my gaze with sharp, laser-like focus. Unlike the rest of the party, she seems fully acute and aware. Her pin-straight, shiny black hair frames sharp angular cheekbones drawing attention to her thin, crimson lips. She's wearing a mask of the deepest shade of black adorned with tiny, glittering pearls. My pulse quickens as she walks toward me. She flashes me sweet smile of pearly white teeth that puts me a bit at ease.

"Hi!" she says in a cheery voice. "Are you enjoying the party?"

"Umm... I guess," I reply, hoping Violet is nearby.

"I didn't know to bring a mask."

"Oh, it's fine." She waves her hand. Something about her voice seems familiar. "It makes you stand out. It's like I was meant to find you." I get a glimpse of her eyes through the mask—dark, lifeless, beady, cold.

RUN NOW there's that voice in my head again. I need to find Violet and get out of here fast. "Have you seen my friend?" I ask her.

"Oh, Violet," she smiles again. "She's by the dock. Come with me; I'll take you to her."

I hesitate. She knows Violet's name so she has to be telling the truth. Right? I tentatively trail after her, away from the party and to the dock.

She leads me onto the platform. My footsteps creak on the weathered wooden floorboards. The girl angles her head toward the ocean, and I catch a glimpse of an earring. My entire body goes cold. Not just any earring—a heart-shaped earring. The exact same earring that my sister was wearing the night she died. That must have been the shiny thing that caught my attention.

"Ser—Serena," I choke out. Her gaze sweeps to me, and her expression changes. Her sweet smile turns into a cold, callous smirk that sends chills through my body.

"Took you long enough, Claire," the shrill laugh that escapes her lips doesn't sound entirely human. "But h-how?"

"You know I would never leave you." Those familiar words echo through my mind. Suddenly, I am stricken with panic. "Where's Violet?" My voice comes out high-pitched.

"Oh, it is quite unfortunate," she starts. "Poor Violet was walking across the dock with me, looking for a soda—when suddenly, she mysteriously falls into the water, and some unknown force chokes her beneath the surface. It's tragic, really," she grins.

"Why would you do this?" I attempt to keep the tremble out of my voice.

"Oh, I think we both know why." She takes a step toward me. "As I was dying, I made a deal—a deal with the devil—to keep me alive in order to extract my revenge. I set this whole party up, spread the word, even possessed those innocent people, all to lure you in. And now I finally have you to myself."

"What do you even want from me?" I muster my strength, angling my body towards her. She scoffs, her back facing the ocean.

"I know your secret to what happened that night." She removes her mask, revealing a sallow, pale face, with beady eyes and twin red horns on top of her head. She was truly from the depths of hell. "And now you're going to die for it."

She takes another step back, and I put my hand in my pocket. "I did in fact go for a night swim, except I didn't drown—somebody held me under. But not just somebody, you" She practically growls at me "Now I'm going to make you pay".

She takes one final step back. I feel a slow grin spreading across my face. I remove the shiny silver dagger from my hidden pocket. "You know it really is a shame," my lips quirk as I stab through her heart.

I twist the knife pushing it deeper, black blood oozes out.

"that secrets die with the people who keep them." She takes one final breath, then her face goes blank.

I push my sister's limp body into the sea.

For the first time in years, I laugh hysterically as her body disappears under the deep blue waves.