

**ALL IS**

**NOT**

**FORGOTTEN**

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## Chapter One

**He followed her** through the woods behind the house. The ground there was littered with winter debris, dead leaves and twigs that had fallen over the past six months and decayed beneath a blanket of snow. She may have heard him approach. She may have turned and seen him wearing the black wool mask whose fibers were found beneath her nails. As she fell to her knees, what was left of the brittle twigs snapped like old bones and scraped her bare skin. Her face and chest pressed hard into the ground, likely with the outside of his forearm, she would have felt the mist from the sprinklers blowing off the lawn not twenty feet away. Her hair was wet when they found her.

When she was a younger girl, she would chase the sprinklers at her own house, trying to catch them on a hot summer afternoon, or dodge them on a crisp spring evening. Her baby brother would then chase her, buck naked with his bulging belly and flailing arms that were not quite able to coordinate with his little legs. Sometimes their dog would join in, barking so voraciously, it would drown out their laughter. An acre of green grass, slippery and wet. Big open skies with

puffy white clouds. Her mother inside watching them from the window and her father on his way home from places whose smells would linger on his suit. The stale coffee from the showroom office, new leather, tire rubber. Those memories were painful now, though she had turned immediately to them when asked about the sprinklers, and whether they had been on when she ran across the lawn to the woods.

The rape lasted for close to an hour. It seems impossible that they could know this. Something about the clotting of the blood at the points of penetration, and the varied stages of bruising on her back, arms, and neck where he'd changed his method of constraint. In that hour, the party had continued the way she'd left it. She would have seen it from where she lay, lights glaring from the windows, flickering as bodies moved through the rooms. It was a big party, with nearly all the tenth grade and handfuls of kids from ninth and eleventh making appearances. Fairview High School was small by most standards, even for suburban Connecticut, and the class divisions that existed elsewhere were far looser here. Sports teams were mixed, plays, concerts, and the like. Even some classes crossed grade boundaries, with the smartest kids in math and foreign languages moving up a level. Jenny Kramer had never made it into an advanced class. But she believed herself to be smart, and endowed with a fierce sense of humor. She was also a good athlete—swimming, field hockey, tennis. But she felt none of those things had mattered until her body matured.

The night of this party had felt better than any moment in her life. I think she may even have said, *It was going to be the best night of my life*. After years of what I have come to think of as adolescent cocooning, she felt she had come into her own. The cruelty of braces and lingering baby fat, breasts that were too small for a bra but still protruding through her T-shirts, acne and unruly hair, had

finally gone away. She had been the “tomboy,” the friend, the confidante to boys who were always interested in other girls. Never in her. These were her words, not mine, although I feel she described them quite well for a fifteen-year-old. She was unusually self-aware. In spite of what her parents and teachers had drilled into her, into all of them, she believed—and she was not alone among her peers in this—that beauty was still the most valuable asset to a girl in Fairview. Finally having it had felt like winning the lottery.

And then there was the boy. Doug Hastings. He had invited her to the party on a Monday in the hallway between Chemistry and European History. She was very specific about that, and about what he was wearing and the expression on his face and how he seemed a little nervous though he acted nonchalant. She had thought of little else all week except what to wear and how to do her hair and the color of polish for her manicure when she went with her mother Saturday morning. It surprised me a bit. I am not fond of Doug Hastings, from what I know of him. As a parent, I feel entitled to have such opinions. I am not unsympathetic to his situation—a bully for a father, his mother quite feeble in her attempts to parent around him. Still, I found it somewhat disappointing that Jenny had not seen through him.

The party was everything she had imagined. Parents out of town, kids pretending to be grown-ups, mixing cocktails in martini glasses, drinking beer from crystal tumblers. Doug had met her there. But he was not alone.

The music was blaring and she would have heard it from the scene of the attack. The playlist was full of pop mega hits, the ones she said she knew well, the lyrics the kind that stuck in your head. Even through the music, and the muted laughter that was wafting from the open windows, she would have heard the other sounds that were closer, the depraved sighs of her attacker, her own guttural cries.

When he was finished and had slipped away into the darkness, she used her arm for support, lifting her face from the brush. She might have felt then the air hit the newly exposed skin of her cheek, and when it did, maybe she had felt that her skin was wet. Some of the brush on which she had been resting stuck, as if her face had been dipped in glue that had since begun to dry.

Propped up on her forearm, she must have heard the sound.

At some point, she came to sit upright. She had tried to clean up the mess that was all around her. With the back of her hand, she wiped her cheek. Remnants of dried leaves fell to the ground. She would have then seen her skirt bunched up around her waist, exposing her naked genitals. Using both hands, it seems she got on all fours and crawled a short distance, possibly to retrieve her underwear. They were in her hand when she was found.

The sound must have grown louder because eventually it was heard by another girl and her boyfriend, who had sought privacy in the yard not far away. The ground would have crackled and popped beneath the weight of her hands and knees as she again crawled toward the perimeter of the grass. I have imagined her crawling, the inebriation hindering her coordination and the shock freezing time. I have imagined her assessing the damage when she finally stopped crawling and came to sit, seeing her torn underwear, feeling the ground against the skin of her buttocks.

The underwear too torn to wear, everywhere sticky with blood and dirt. That sound growing louder. Wondering how long she had been in the woods.

Back to her hands and knees, she began to crawl again. But no matter how far she moved, the sound grew louder and louder. How desperate she must have been to escape, to reach the soft grass, the clean water that was now upon it, the place she had been before the woods.

She moved another few feet before stopping again. Maybe it was then that she realized the sound, the disturbing moan, was inside her head, then in her own mouth. The fatigue came over her, forcing her knees, then her arms, to buckle beneath her.

She said she had always considered herself a strong girl, an athlete with a formidable will. Strong in her body and her mind. That was what her father had told her since she was a little kid. *Be strong in your body and in your mind, and you will have a good life.* Maybe she told herself to get up. Maybe she ordered her legs to move, then her arms, but her will was impotent. Instead of taking her back to where she had been, they curled up around her battered body, which lay upon the filthy ground.

Tears falling, voice echoing them with that horrible sound, she was finally heard and then rescued. She has asked herself again and again since that night why nothing she had inside her—her muscles, her wit, her will—had been capable of stopping what happened. She couldn't remember if she tried to fight him, screamed for help, or if she just gave up and let it happen. No one heard her until it was over. She said she now understands that in the wake of every battle, there were left conqueror and conquered, victor and victim, and that she had come to accept the truth—that she had been totally, irrevocably defeated.

I couldn't say how much of this was true when I heard it, this story of the rape of Jenny Kramer. It was a story that had been reconstructed with forensic evidence, witness accounts, criminal psychologist profiles, and the disjointed, fragmented scraps of memory Jenny was left with after the treatment. They say it is a miracle treatment—to have the most horrible trauma erased from your mind. Of course, it is not magic, nor is the science particularly impressive. But I will explain all of that later. What I want to express now, at the beginning of the story, is that it was not a miracle for this beautiful

young girl. What was removed from her mind lived on in her body, and her soul, and I felt compelled to return to her what was taken away. It may seem the strangest thing to you. So counterintuitive. So disturbing.

Fairview, as I have already alluded, is a small town. I had seen pictures of Jenny Kramer over the years in the local paper, and in school flyers about a play or tennis tournament posted at Gina's Deli down on East Main. I had recognized her walking in town, coming out of the movie theater with friends, in a concert at the school that my own children attended. She had an innocence about her that belied the maturity she so coveted. Even in the short skirts and cropped shirts that seemed to be the style these days, she was a girl, not a woman. And I would feel encouraged about the state of the world when I saw her. It would be disingenuous to say that I feel this way toward all of them, the herd of teenagers that sometimes seems to have stolen the order from our lives like a swarm of locust. Glued to their phones like brain-dead drones, indifferent to any affairs beyond celebrity gossip and the things that brought them instant gratification—videos, music, self-promoting tweets and Instagrams and Snapchats. Teenagers are innately selfish. Their brains are not mature. But some of them seem to hold on to their sweetness through these years, and they stand out. They're the ones who meet your eyes when you greet them, smile politely, allow you to pass simply because you are older and they understand the place of respect in an orderly society. Jenny was one of those.

To see her after, to see the absence of joy that once bubbled up inside her—it provoked rage in me at all humanity. Knowing what had happened in those woods, it was hard not to let my mind go there. We are all drawn to prurient incidents, to violence and horror. We pretend not to be, but it is our nature. The ambulance on the side of



the road, every car slowing to a crawl to get a glimpse of an injured body. It doesn't make us evil.

This perfect child, her body defiled, violated. Her virtue stolen. Her spirit broken. I sound melodramatic. Cliché. But this man ripped into her body with such force that she required surgery. Consider that. Consider that he selected a child, hoping for a virgin perhaps, so he could rape her innocence as well as her body. Consider the physical pain she endured as her most intimate flesh tore and shredded. And now consider what else was torn and shredded as he spent an hour torturing her body, thrusting himself into her again and again, perhaps seeing her face. How many expressions had she given him to enjoy? Surprise, fear, terror, agony, acceptance, and, finally, indifference as she shut down. Each one a piece of herself taken and devoured by this monster. And then, even after the treatment was given—because she still knew what had happened—every romantic daydream about her first time with a lover, every love story that swam in her head and made her smile with thoughts of being adored by one person like no other in the world. It was likely those things were gone forever. And then what was left for a girl as she grew into a woman? The very thing that preoccupies the heart throughout most of our lives may very well have been lost to her.

She remembered a strong odor, though she couldn't place it. She remembered a song, but it was possible the song had played more than once. She remembered the events that drove her out the back door, across the lawn, and into the woods. She did not recall the sprinklers, and that became part of the reconstruction of the story. The sprinklers came on at nine and off at ten, having been set to a timer. The two lovers who found her had arrived in the back to grass that was wet but air that was dry. The rape had been in between.

Doug had been with another girl, a junior who found him necessary

to her plan to make some senior boy jealous. It is hardly worth the effort to elucidate the vapid motivations of this particular girl. What mattered to Jenny was that a week's worth of fantasies, around which she had wrapped much of her disposition, had been shattered in a second. Predictably, she began to drown her sorrows in alcohol. Her best friend, Violet, recalled that she had started with shots of vodka. Within an hour, she was vomiting in the bathroom. This had led to the amusement of some others, and then to her further humiliation. It might have been a script from one of those "mean girl" shows that seem to be all the rage now. Except for the part that followed. The part where she ran into the woods to be alone, to cry.

I was angry. I won't apologize for that. I wanted justice for what had happened. But without a memory, without any forensic evidence beyond the wool fibers under her nails because this monster had taken precautions, justice was no longer on the table. Fairview is a small town. Yes, I know I keep saying this. But you must understand that this is the kind of town that would not attract a stranger to perpetrate a crime. Heads turn when someone unfamiliar walks the two small strips of our downtown. Not in a bad way, mind you, but in a curious way. Was it someone's relative? Someone moving here? We have visitors for special events, sports tournaments, fairs, things like that. People will come from other towns and we welcome them. We are generally friendly people, trusting people. But on an ordinary weekend, outsiders are noticed.

Where I am going with all this is the following obvious conclusion: Had she not been given the treatment, had her memory been intact, she might have placed him. The fibers under her nails indicated she had grabbed at the mask. Maybe she pulled it off, or up just enough to see a face. Maybe she heard a voice. Or was he perfectly quiet for an hour of raping? It seems unlikely, doesn't it? She would know how tall he was, thin or fat. Maybe his hands were old

or maybe they were young. Maybe he wore a ring, a gold band or a team emblem. Did he wear sneakers or loafers or work boots? Were they worn or stained by oil or paint or maybe they were perfectly shined? Would she know him if she stood near him at the ice cream shop? Or at the coffeehouse? Or in the lunch line at school? Would she simply feel him in her gut? An hour is a long time to be with another body.

Maybe it was cruel to want this thing for Jenny Kramer. Maybe I was cruel to pursue the wanting. It would, as you will see, lead to unexpected consequences. But the injustice of it all, the anger it provoked in me, and the ability to understand her suffering—all of it led me to a single-minded pursuit. And that was to give back to Jenny Kramer this most horrific nightmare.