

NOELLE W. IHLI

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *ASK FOR ANDREA*

FORGET YOU SAW HER

A STANDALONE
PREQUEL TO
ASK FOR ANDREA

“TAUT, DEVASTATING, AND ELECTRIFYING.”

—FAITH GARDNER, author of *THE MIRROR HOUSE GIRLS*

FORGET YOU SAW HER

NOELLE W. IHLI

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www.noellewihli.com

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PRAISE FOR NOELLE W. IHLI

"A propulsive story that haunts and mesmerizes."

—Karin Slaughter, *Sunday Times* bestselling author of *We Are All Guilty Here*, on *Ask for Andrea*

"As pulse-pounding as it is poignant. Do yourself a favor—clear your schedule and crack open this novel!"

—Lisa Gardner, *Sunday Times* bestselling author of *Before She Disappeared*, on *Ask for Andrea*

"Ihli keeps readers walking a tightrope of emotion while brilliantly exploring very human, visceral conflicts within the hearts and minds of each character. Stunning."

—Lisa Regan, *USA Today* and *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of the Detective Josie Quinn series, on *Such Quiet Girls*

"A true classic in the genre."

—Lisa Jewell, *Sunday Times* bestselling author of *None Of This Is True*, on *Ask for Andrea*

"This terrifying and breathtaking thriller has everything we've come to love from Noelle Ihli's novels: true-crime-inspired stories and brave, unforgettable heroines."

—Faith Gardner, author of *Like It Never Was*, on *Such Quiet Girls*

"Noelle has mastered the art of keeping readers on the edge of their seats."

—John Marrs, bestselling author of *The One*

"Utterly gripping ... I couldn't put it down."

—Nicola Sanders, author of *Don't Let Her Stay*, on *Ask for Andrea*

"What could be better than a thriller AND a ghost story? Left me equal parts terrified and haunted."

—Ellery Kane, author of *The Good Wife*, on *Ask for Andrea*

MORE THRILLERS BY NOELLE W. IHLI

*The Thicket
Ask for Andrea
Run on Red
Room for Rent
Gray After Dark
None Left to Tell
Such Quiet Girls*

Content advisory: This book includes descriptions of domestic abuse, death of a child, and non-explicit references to sexual assault. Read with care.

For Cathy, Alexis, and Kathleen.

JULY 31, 2015

Dear Ms. Turpin,

The Ogden Utah Police Department recently recovered the body of a seventeen-year-old girl. Despite our best efforts, the condition of the remains has made it difficult to identify the individual using standard methods.

That said, based on certain physical attributes and personal effects recovered with the body, we have reason to believe that the remains may belong to Andrea Beaumont, who was reported missing three months ago.

In order to confirm or rule out this possibility, we are requesting a DNA sample from you for comparison purposes. Your timely cooperation in this matter will greatly assist us in our investigation.

Enclosed, you will find a DNA collection kit along with instructions for its use. Please return the sample using the prepaid envelope included in this package as soon as possible.

Should you have any questions, you may contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Detective Monte Barker

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SABINA TURPIN NESKOWIN, OREGON

August 18, 2015

I'd been tracking my mail deliveries for two weeks now, clocking the postal vehicle's daily arrival with the intensity of a child waiting for Christmas morning.

Except the only thing I felt was slick, stomach-turning dread.

Don't let it be a match. Please, God, don't let it be a match.

My palms prickled with sweat every time I heard the hum of tires coming up our private lane. Whenever it was a package delivery driver, I breathed through the rush of nausea and forced my gaze back to my computer screen, where the landing pages I was supposed to be designing blurred and swam in front of my eyes.

When it was the postal service truck, I tensed and counted the seconds until I could get my hands on the mail.

Today was no different—at first.

When the mail truck appeared around ten a.m. like a boxy white ghost materializing through the ever-present coastal fog, my heart rate spiked as if I'd just downed a caffeine pill. Like always, I crept downstairs and waited beside the front door until the driver had deposited the day's mail in the box at the end of the driveway.

My husband, Joel, was shuffling papers around on his desk down the hall. I knew he was watching, too. The second I came back inside with a handful of letters, he would open his office door and wait while I sorted through the envelopes, ready to place a hand on the small of my back if one of the return addresses read, OGDEN POLICE DEPARTMENT.

I pressed my wedding band into the skin of my finger until it hurt, watching as the postal worker straightened the thin pile of envelopes in his hand

before placing them carefully into our box. He frowned, rubbed his mop of stick-straight gray hair, then ducked back inside the vehicle.

Hurry up and go, goddammit, my mind screamed. But I stood silently on the cold entryway tile, staring through the blinds that covered the window beside the door, like I was the woman from *Rear Window*.

After what felt like days, he leaned back out of the mail truck's cutout and deposited one more letter in the box.

Somehow, I knew it was *the* letter. As if my desperation had finally mounted so high, I'd actually made that letter appear out of thin air.

The letter that would tell me whether my own DNA matched the girl whose body was so badly mutilated that the police in Ogden, Utah couldn't identify her without my help.

The letter regarding the girl whose name had been a whisper in my ear during quiet moments for the past seventeen years.

Andrea.

When the mailman finally closed the lid of our box and gunned his truck back up the lane, I didn't even take the time to put on shoes as I yanked open the door, rushed down the driveway and pulled down the sun-warmed metal flap.

And there it was. Right on top of the stack, the words OGDEN POLICE DEPARTMENT stamped in bold black letters in the upper left corner.

The detective I'd spoken to two weeks earlier said that someone would call me when his department received the DNA results. I wasn't banking on any calls, though. "I apologize in advance if the letter from the lab reaches you by mail before I get a chance to touch base ..." he'd said, like we were talking about the results of a yearly physical. Like the letter I'd received asking for my DNA with a cheek swab was really that clinical. Just cells and DNA.

Then again, cells and DNA were the only things that tied me to the six-month-old baby girl I'd voluntarily given up for adoption when I was sixteen.

The girl would be seventeen now. I had no claim to her anymore, legally or otherwise, but I'd never stopped thinking about her.

Something sharp bit into the ball of my bare foot as I hurried back up the walkway toward the door I'd left open. Warm liquid oozed between my toes, but I didn't stop walking or even look down.

Joel was waiting for me in the kitchen, standing with his arms crossed and a crease running between his hooded blue eyes. "It's here?" he asked, and

reached out a hand as he stepped toward me. When he read the look on my face, the hand fell to his side and he didn't come any closer.

I swallowed, grateful and guilt-stricken that he'd understood without me saying the words. I needed to open it by myself. It wasn't fair to shut him out, but some part of me needed to be alone in this moment. As alone as I'd been when I held my baby for the last time in the lobby of the Oregon Department of Health and Welfare Child Services.

Joel wasn't Andrea's birth father. Her father had been a senior at a neighboring high school who'd signed the adoption papers as fast as he could grab the pen from my own father. I wouldn't meet Joel for another decade.

Hands shaking, I moved into the open laundry room, tore open the top of the envelope and blinked. The faint smell of fried eggs and hashbrowns lingering downstairs, comforting a few minutes earlier, now made me sick.

"Sabi?" Joel asked softly after a few seconds, knocking on the laundry room door.

I stared at the single sheet of paper unseeing, letting the words blur and swim in front of my eyes.

When Andrea went missing three months ago, I hadn't been notified by the police—or her adoptive parents. It had been a closed adoption, which meant that nobody had my contact information readily accessible. So the first time I'd learned that my daughter had disappeared was when I read Detective Barker's letter two weeks ago, requesting my DNA.

"We didn't have a way to contact you at first..." The detective had trailed off when I'd called the number in the letter and demanded to know why it had taken three months to notify me. The police had started tracking down the court adoption records, but it took them a while. It was clear enough that notifying me of her missing-person status wasn't a priority. Not until the police found that body and needed my DNA.

There was also the fact that Andrea wasn't necessarily missing, Detective Barker explained. She was presumed to be a runaway. And while she was technically still a minor, there was every reason to think she'd left of her own accord based on what her adoptive parents had said.

This theory—that Andrea had merely run away—should have been slightly comforting, if I'd heard it three months ago. But hearing it while Detective Barker was backpedaling to explain the letter requesting my DNA offered me little hope. There was a dead young woman lying in a morgue

somewhere, who might or might not be the daughter I'd given up so she could have a better life.

The words *missing, remains, impossible to identify* had burned themselves into my brain like brands.

“Sabi?” Joel asked again as he pushed the laundry room door open. “What does it say?”

I gripped the edges of the letter, vaguely aware of how slowly I was reading the words. Words I'd been waiting for with every waking moment since I'd provided my DNA sample.

My eyes landed on the bold phrase in the center of the letter: **Not a match.**

A strange, wolflike whimper escaped my lips. I read the words again and again, desperate to be sure I wasn't misunderstanding.

Not a match, not a match, not a match.