

SHE THOUGHT SHE HAD HER LIFE BACK.
SHE WAS WRONG.

THAT'S NOT MY NAME



MEGAN LALLY

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For my dad.

*You would have been the most excited about this. I miss you
always.*

ONE

GIRL

DAY 1

I think I might be dead.

I try to gather my bearings, but I can't see. I feel *nothing*. Not even my own body. The lack of sensation, the way the silence wraps me in a hug and squeezes—it's unnerving. I want it to stop—

Until the pain comes.

It hits like a full-body punch. My mind scrambles to catalog what hurts, but it *a//* hurts.

My hand twitches against something scratchy beneath me. I'm lying on my stomach, and something pointy presses into my ribs. I move my chin, and my cheekbone drags against damp earth. It smells like decay and old leaves.

Fear kicks up my pulse.

I'm outside? How the hell did I get here? I try to look around, but my eyelids scrape like my lashes are made of glass and nails. They slam shut before I can see anything.

An engine roars and I tense, pain shooting down my arms. My hair blows across my face as a vehicle whips past, then it's quiet again.

I'm beside a road. Did the driver see me? Why didn't they stop? I make another desperate attempt to see. My eyes flood with tears this time. I blink to clear my vision and shake the hair from my face.

Holy shit. It's *so* dark.

No streetlights, no houses. There aren't even stars in the sky.

My eyes slowly adjust. No wonder the car didn't stop. I'm lying in a long ditch, sunken into leaves and bracken. Twigs twist up into the air like claws. The ditch clings to the side of a narrow dirt road that runs straight out ahead of me, then disappears in a wobbly blur of trees.

Panic nests in my throat, and my mind fills with more questions I can't answer.

Where the hell am I?

How did I get here?

Am I in danger?

Why does everything hurt so bad?

I need to get up. I don't know where I'm going, but moving seems safer than lying here. My fingers dig into the dirt as I try to drag my knees beneath me. And for the first time, I notice how cold I am. I can barely feel the tips of my fingers.

My arms threaten to buckle, but I push myself to my feet.

Bruises stretch around my bones, and an involuntary wail escapes my mouth. For a moment, I forget how to breathe. The pain is everywhere. My heartbeat pounds in my ears, and it's at least eleven *ba-dubs* before I can draw in another breath.

Tears spill down my face, stinging my cheeks. I lift my icicle fingers to my nose. It feels hot. Swollen. My fingers come away dark and wet. I taste blood.

Fuck. My nose might be broken.

I have to get out of here.

The road looks the same in the other direction, only dirt and trees. I slowly make my way out of the ditch. Briars scrape at my bare arms. I duck to pass under a tree limb, and its branches pull at me like hands.

An image soars through my mind without warning. Tiny square doors with keyholes in a box by the road. A cluster mailbox, maybe? A burned-out streetlight. Big hands reaching for me.

I recoil and stumble into the middle of the road.

My heart rattles against my rib cage until my chest muscles hurt.

What the actual fuck was that?

Did someone grab me?

They're simple questions, but my mind supplies zero details. It just throbs. Like there's a wall between me and understanding what's happening. I clench my teeth and force another step. I need help. Maybe another car will pass or I can find a house. I have to keep moving.

I don't know how long I stumble along, but it feels like hours. My mind zones out and snaps back so many times that I wonder if I'm losing consciousness.

Maybe I already have. Maybe this progress is all in my head, and I'm still in that ditch. Or worse, maybe I *am* dead and this is hell. An endless purgatory of pain and solitude I'm doomed to wander until the end of time, looking for help that will never come.

Red and blue lights flicker on behind me, filling the road with color. A *whoop whoop* from a police car almost startles me to the ground, but sheer relief keeps me standing. Someone's going to help me. Tires crunch as they come to a stop and the lights create a me-shaped silhouette in the dirt. I start to turn—

"Do *not* move. Hands where I can see them!" a man shouts.

My hands go up automatically and a moment later a door slams.

What is this? Did I do something wrong? Is that how I ended up here? Am I running from the cops?

Should I run *now*?

"Turn around!"

I do, squinting into the bright headlights of the patrol car. An officer stands beside his vehicle, face in shadow, hand on the gun in his holster. I feel whatever blood's still in my face drain away, because when I glance down at myself in the light, all I see is dirt and blood.

There's *so* much blood.

"Jesus, you're just a kid," the officer says, taking his hand off his weapon. He creeps forward. "What happened to you? Did someone do this?"

I open my mouth to answer, but my knees give out and I drop. The cop tries to catch me, but we both hit the dirt hard.

He grabs at the radio receiver on his shoulder, but I can't hear what he says over the roaring in my ears and the caged animal thrashing around in my chest. I stare at my hands, my jean leggings, the front of my light gray T-shirt—covered in blotches of dried mud and dark rivers of blood.

Hands grip my shoulders. I look up at the officer. His words defog in my mind.

"Can you hear me? Paramedics are on their way, but I need to know who you are," he pleads. "What's your name?"

My name?

I blink at him and reach for the answer, but no matter how hard I try, I hit that wall in my mind every time. What's my name? How is that a hard question? I try to breathe but it's too much. I start hyperventilating. Fresh tears pool in my eyes.

What's your name?

I grab my throbbing head. "I don't know!"