

"An uncommonly fine mystery writer"
—New York Times Book Review

WHAT HAPPENED TO NINA?

A NOVEL


DERVLA MCTIERNAN

**#1 Bestselling Author of
THE MURDER RULE**



WHAT
HAPPENED
TO NINA?

DERVLA
McTIERNAN

 HarperCollins *Publishers*

DEDICATION

For Kenny, Freya, and Oisín. Always.

EPIGRAPH

“A mother’s love for her child is like nothing else in the world. It knows no law, no pity. It dares all things and crushes down remorselessly all that stands in its path.”

—Agatha Christie, “The Last Séance”

CONTENTS

Dedication

Epigraph

Prologue

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Twenty

Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter Twenty-Two

Chapter Twenty-Three

Chapter Twenty-Four

Chapter Twenty-Five
Chapter Twenty-Six
Chapter Twenty-Seven
Chapter Twenty-Eight
Chapter Twenty-Nine
Chapter Thirty
Chapter Thirty-One
Chapter Thirty-Two
Chapter Thirty-Three
Chapter Thirty-Four
Chapter Thirty-Five
Chapter Thirty-Six

Acknowledgements
About the Author
Also by Dervla McTiernan
Copyright

PROLOGUE

My name is Nina Fraser. There's a good chance that you know who I am. You've probably seen my picture online, and heard my story, and if you have I guess you've already judged me. I mean, not in public, because victim-blaming is a bad look, but in the privacy of your own head, some quiet part of you probably thinks I was stupid or weak or both. Maybe you think that if I'd just stood up for myself, if I'd just walked away, everything would have been okay. I'm not going to argue with you or try to convince you that you're wrong. I just want to say, a thing can be crystal clear with hindsight, but just about as clear as mud when you're actually living it. Also, sometimes it's the walking away that gets you in trouble.

So. Like I said, I'm Nina. I'm twenty years old. I have a sister, Grace, and two parents. And I'm a climber. You know all of that already if you've read my story online. Here's some stuff people don't know. I have calluses on my fingertips, a scar on my knee, and another on my elbow, both from falls. I love to climb. When I am on the mountain, I can't think about anything except my fingers wedged into a crevasse and my feet balanced just so and the route ahead. I never think about what lies beneath me. When I reach the top I sit and I breathe and I look out over the valley. I look back over the route and I work out how I could have climbed it better.

If you know anything, you know that I have a boyfriend named Simon Jordan. Simon and I met in school when we were five years old. In middle school we became friends. When we were sixteen we fell in love. It's important to me that you know that it was really good between us. I won't say that Simon was perfect, because no one on this earth is perfect, but if there were such a thing as a perfect first boyfriend for an awkward girl who did not know who she was, then he was that. He laughed at my jokes. He was always interested in what I had to say, even when his friends were around. He never played games, never made me feel like some other girl

was better. With him I felt pretty, which matters, way too much, when you're sixteen. We slept together for the first time on his eighteen birthday, and it was awkward and a little painful but also funny and beautiful and I was sure, down to my bones, that I would never love anyone the way I loved him. After things started to go wrong, I spent a lot of time thinking about the way we used to be. I looked at our old photos and spent time with friends who had known us from the beginning. I needed to believe that I hadn't imagined everything. That I was holding on for something real.

When we finished high school, Simon went to Northwestern and I stayed at home in Waitsfield and went to UVM. Simon and I didn't think the long-distance thing would be a problem for us. We were solid. And the first year was okay. We came home a lot, and we Face-Timed every day, sometimes two or three times a day, and we emailed. My friend Allie told me that it couldn't last. She said Simon was too good looking, plus his parents were loaded. He'd meet a hundred girls who wanted him, a hundred girls who were more sophisticated, more experienced, and more exciting than the girl next door. Allie can be a bitch like that. I didn't want Simon to dump me, but I'm the kind of person who likes to prepare for the worst, so I put a lot of mental energy into getting ready for the inevitable. I studied hard, and tried to make new friends, and went climbing pretty much every weekend, and I kept waiting for the ax to fall.

But instead of dumping me, Simon just seemed to get more intense. Instead of calling me a couple of times a day, he started calling four or five times. Sometimes he wanted me to "carry him around in my pocket." Which meant FaceTiming him and then muting my phone and taking him with me to lectures or just propping the phone beside me on my desk while I was studying. Simon came home every other weekend, and he wanted to pay so that I could fly out to Illinois to see him too, but I couldn't do that. I had to work in my mom's inn on the weekends. Also, taking his money and spending it like it was mine would have felt weird. He didn't understand. He was really angry and really upset.

Looking back, I can see that that was when our relationship started to change. After I said no to coming to Illinois, Simon had a permanent attitude. Like he had the moral high ground. Like he was the perfect boyfriend and I was the bad, unreliable girlfriend. He made jokes about it, but I could see that behind the jokes his feelings were hurt, so I did

everything I could to reassure him. Nothing seemed to be enough. He was rougher with me, in bed and out of it. He would grip my shoulders or hips so hard that I had bruises—purple finger marks on my skin. He bit me, a few times. It really hurt, but I didn't tell him to stop. This is going to sound insane, but I was worried about embarrassing him. I figured that he thought it was sexy or something (it so wasn't), and because everything was weird between us I was afraid that if I told him I hated the biting, that would hurt his feelings too. I told myself that Simon was just going through an insecure stage, that I knew the real him and that we'd get back there again if I could just make him understand how much I loved him. I was stupid, but then, I was a lobster in a pot. The water warmed up so gradually that I didn't realize I was boiling until it was too late.

Simon came home for the October vacation during our sophomore year. He'd wanted to go to Hawaii with friends, and I had to stay home to work, so he came home too, but he was really angry about it. Nothing I did seemed to make him happy, until I finally agreed to blow off work at my mom's inn and take off for the whole week with him. I called my mom and of course she was upset and angry, but Simon seemed to finally be himself again and the relief of that was so intense. I hadn't realized how much I was stressing about us until I thought I could stop.

Simon's parents had just bought a new house near Stowe. It came with four hundred acres, a small lake, unmarked trails, and climbing routes. He wanted us to go there, just the two of us, to really focus on our relationship. So we went. We hiked and climbed and walked and talked and things really weren't any better. I felt like we were faking things. Pretending to be close but not really. I wanted to talk to him about the bruises and the hurting, but every time I tried my throat closed up. On Friday, Simon wanted to go climbing again. My body was complaining. My fingers were sore, and my right shoulder was hot. I felt like I needed a rest day, but I said yes anyway.

"Let's climb that crag we saw on Wednesday," Simon said. We were eating breakfast. He reached over and smoothed my hair back, tucking it behind my ear. He cupped his hand around the back of my neck. His hand was warm and dry and gentle. For some reason I wanted to cry.

"Sure," I said. "That looked good."

We ate, we dressed, and we hiked out. It was a short hike to the crag. Simon chatted the whole way there, and I smiled and answered and took his

hand when he offered it, but I had tears just under the surface the whole way. I hated feeling like that, and I tried to shake it off. I started to cheer up when we got to the crag. It really did look like an awesome climb, maybe eighty feet of granite, with some nice holds at the beginning to get us started. And the weather was good. It was chilly but sunny, and there was no real wind. I dropped my pack and started to take out my gear.

“This was such a great idea,” I said. “I’m so glad we’re here.”

“Better than cleaning another bathroom?” He gave me a little jokey shove that set me off balance.

“Understatement,” I said. He picked me up, put his hands on my butt, and pulled me in close. He kissed me. I kissed him back. The messed-up thing is that the kiss felt good. Simon let me go, and we both did our prep and started our climb. I didn’t think about us as I climbed. I just zoned out and thought about my holds and my route and I started to feel like me again. I felt stronger.

We got to the top, sat on the edge, and took in the view.

“You okay?” Simon asked.

“Sure. Yes. A little tired. Hungry too.” I searched in my pack for the sandwiches I’d made that morning. They were chicken salad, which was his favorite. He unwrapped the sandwich, took a couple of bites, made a face, and handed it back to me.

“Think the chicken might be off, babe. Got any chocolate?”

I had chocolate. I handed him a bar, silently. He ate it. There was nothing wrong with the chicken salad. I’d cooked the chicken myself the day before and made up the salad with all fresh ingredients. I started to feel pissed. A small ball of fuck-you showed up at the bottom of my stomach. I kept eating my sandwich.

“You can’t eat that,” he said. “You need to throw it away.”

“It’s fine.”

He stared at me. “Okay, but when you’re puking tonight don’t call me to hold your hair.”

I shrugged. His shoulders stiffened, and he turned away from me. Which was my cue to pack up the sandwich, to say sorry and kiss him and thank him for looking out for me. But no. The fuck-you wasn’t going anywhere. In fact, it was starting to grow.

“It tastes good, actually. Mmm.” I thought he might lose it. Maybe I wanted him to. But he just stood up.

“I need to take a piss.” He walked away and took a leak up against a tree. I finished my sandwich and packed everything up in my bag again. Simon started to prepare for the rappel down.

“Let’s simul-rap,” he said. He had a gleam in his eyes. A challenge. Simultaneous rappelling is when two climbers use one rope to rappel, relying on each other’s body weight, with the single rope rigged through a central rappel anchor. It can be dangerous if one climber loses focus or control, but people do it sometimes if they want to get down quickly. We weren’t in any rush. We had the whole afternoon to make our descent, and I could have just said that, but I saw that challenge in his eyes and I didn’t feel like backing down.

“Fine.” I tied on, then tied my stopper knot, which would make sure that my end of the rope couldn’t slip through my gear, always the worst-case scenario with this kind of rappelling. If the rope slipped through my gear it would also slip through the rappel anchor, which would mean that Simon would fall. I watched him prep.

“Did you tie your stopper knot?” I asked.

“Of course,” Simon said mildly. He showed it to me.

We started down. It wasn’t fun. Simon’s progress was jerky and unpredictable, which meant that, on the other end of the rope, mine was too. He was doing it on purpose. I gritted my teeth. Decided that I was done pretending that things were okay. When we got to the bottom we were going to get everything out in the open. The rappel didn’t take that long. Half an hour, maybe, including the time we needed to detach our gear as we progressed. Simon reached the bottom first. I had about twenty-five feet left to descend. I kicked off, landed, and bounced lightly off the wall, letting the rope slip through my gear. I pushed off again, the rope slipped through, and then it happened. The rope went slack. Completely slack. I had nothing to hold on to. I was falling.

It’s the most sickening thing in the world, losing the support of your rope. It had happened to me only once before, in a rock-climbing center in Boston, when an auto-belay apparatus failed. But that was indoors, and I’d only been about five feet up, and there’d been foam mats below me. This was different. I just . . . fell. There was no scrambling, no grabbing for a

tree branch or an outcropping. There was nothing to reach out for but air. I fell, I think, maybe ten feet. Not far, but far enough. I landed on my back, on dirt. There were rocks either side of me. Any one of them would have broken my back if I'd landed a foot to my left or right. My head hit the ground hard. I was wearing a helmet, which saved me, I guess, but I still blacked out for a minute. When I woke up, I couldn't feel my body, which must have been shock, and then the pain came flooding in and with it the need to vomit. I couldn't roll to my side. My body wouldn't obey me. I was sure that I was going to choke, and then Simon was there.

“Oh my God! Nina. Jesus.”

He turned me onto my side, one hand supporting my neck the whole way. I vomited up my chicken sandwich. When I was done, he rolled me back and ran his hands down my shoulders and arms, and my legs down to my feet.

“Are you okay? Is anything broken?”

I tried to take a mental inventory. Everything hurt. Had I broken anything? Maybe some ribs. My ribs were on fire. I tried to move my legs. They responded. I clenched my fists. That worked too.

“I think I'm okay.”

“Don't get up,” he said. “Don't even think about it. My God. What the hell were you thinking? You just let go. Did you think you were down already?”

I hadn't let go. Had I let go?

“Can I roll you back on your side again? I want to check your back, that you didn't land on anything.”

I said okay, and Simon rolled me. His hands were very gentle, but everywhere he touched hurt.

“Jesus, the back of your helmet is completely fucked. It's cracked right across. Good thing you were wearing it.”

I started to cry, though it was a weak sort of noise, a kind of whimper. I was too sore for howling. Simon rolled me over again and took off my shoes and my helmet. He gave me orders—wriggle my toes, my fingers, touch my nose, follow his finger. He was completely confident, like he knew exactly what he was doing, and I did everything he told me to do. At last, he sat back.

“I think you’re going to be all right. You got so lucky. You scared me. You really did.” He asked me to sit up, and I did. He packed away my climbing shoes and put my boots back on my feet and laced them up tightly. He picked me up off the ground and asked me to try standing. I was sore and shaky, but I could do it. He picked up both packs, took my hand, and led me away from the crag. I think I was still in shock. The pain in my ribs and head was pretty bad, but I just held on to Simon’s hand and kept limping along while he chatted and made soothing noises. His mood had changed completely. He was . . . cheery. At the house he brought me upstairs, helped me undress, and tucked me into bed. He brought me painkillers and water and kissed my forehead and told me we would have to go to the doctor the next day but for now it would be better to rest.

“Thank you,” I said. “I’m really sorry.”

“I’m just glad you’re okay.” He leaned down to kiss me and then he left the room. And left me with something to think about. When he’d leaned down, I’d caught his eye, and in it I’d seen not concern, but . . . pleasure? Just a tiny hint of joy? Or triumph? I couldn’t nail it down.

I rubbed at my forehead with my left hand. With my right I cradled my sore ribs. What had happened on the mountain? I hadn’t let go of the rope. For sure, I hadn’t. Could the rappel anchor have given? Yes, a possibility, but hadn’t I seen the rope, hanging slack but still suspended, from my place on the ground? So the anchor couldn’t have given. The only other explanation was that Simon had completed his rappel, then let the rope go from his end. He would have had to untie his stopper knot first. It couldn’t have been a mistake. Could he have done it on purpose? Had he wanted me to fall? I told myself that was ridiculous. I told myself that I was being crazy and *of course* Simon hadn’t done that, would never do that, would have no *reason* to do that. But it was like I was going through the motions in the privacy of my own head, for no one’s benefit. Because I knew, for sure, that he had.

I got out of bed and went to the bathroom. I took off my top and looked in the mirror. There were marks on my body, old and new. A lot of them. Bruises on my shoulders. A bite mark on my left breast. I pushed my pants down. The bruise on my hip was yellowing. I turned, twisting to look over my shoulder. My back was a mess of black and blue. There was blood too, from a new cut on my shoulder blade that I hadn’t even felt.

I put my top back on and walked back to the bed. I sat there for a long time, looking down at my toes. I thought I had a decision to make, but when I sat down I realized the decision had already been made. All that remained was to decide how to do it. I searched for the fuck-you deep in my stomach, found it, and fed it. I wanted to be angry. For months, for half a year, he'd made me dance around, trying so hard to please him, trying so hard not to upset him. He'd *wanted* me to be afraid, and I was done with that. I started to get dressed. I put on my jeans and my boots and my sweater. I tied my hair back. I took my clothes from the wardrobe and my toiletries from the bathroom. I packed my bag. And then I went downstairs to tell Simon that we were over and that I never wanted to see him again.

CHAPTER ONE

Leanne

On Sunday afternoon, I went to find Andy in the barn. He's not supposed to work on Sunday. We'd made an agreement that we would take at least one day of the week for family, but since I hadn't even come close to sticking to that promise, I couldn't really give him a hard time about it. I could hear the chain saw going as I crossed the courtyard. There are two doors to the barn. The double doors at the far end, which Andy uses to drive in his mini excavator and dump truck to get them out of the weather, and a small side door that Andy put in a couple of years ago. I went to the side door and pushed it open. Andy was hard at work, cutting a log down into firewood. He was wearing ear protectors, and his back was to me. I decided to wait, rather than tap him on the shoulder while he was operating the saw. I sat on a stool, breathed in the smell of sawdust, which I love, and waited.

Five years ago I applied for a barn-preservation grant from the State of Vermont. The frame of the building is red oak, and that's always been pretty solid, but the roof and sidings and floor were all in bad shape. Andy used the grant money to replace the roof and the sidings and to put down a brick floor. I love the barn. I love that it's open right up to the rafters and I love the way the light comes in through the small windows. I love the smells of machine oil and cut timber, and the way everything in it is so neatly lined up and organized, from the bags of fertilizer and peat moss to the pallets with landscaping stone and the stack of railroad ties in the corner.

Eventually, Andy turned off the saw. He pushed back his ear protectors and started stacking the wood.

"You need some help with that?" I asked. I'd startled him, and he jumped a little. "Nina still hasn't called me back," I said. I had my phone in

my hand. I looked down at the screen, as if it might show something new. “I called her twice this morning. Both times it went through to voice mail. I sent her a text and nada.”

Andy returned his ear protectors and the chain saw to his tool bench. He checked his watch, took off his work gloves, and leaned against the wall opposite me.

“Well, Lee, she’s probably pissed. And I guess, maybe, she’s returning the favor.”

He was referring to the fact that Nina had called me three times that past week, and I’d been so mad at her that I hadn’t answered or returned any of her calls.

“Seriously?”

He shook his head.

“Andy, come on. She was completely out of line.”

“Not saying she wasn’t.”

“It sounds like that’s exactly what you’re saying.”

He smiled. One of those slow smiles that tug right at the center of my stomach. He crossed over to me, took my hand, and pulled me up to standing.

“She was supposed to be back yesterday,” I said. “She said she’d be here by nine A.M. at the latest.”

“College don’t start until Tuesday. My guess is she’ll come home tomorrow.”

Andy had a stronger accent than I had. He still flattened some of his vowels and swallowed his *t*’s in the Vermont way. “Until” became “Un-ill” in his mouth. I used to have the same accent, but a little more than a year in college in Boston had been enough time for me to shed my heritage like it was a bad smell, and I’d never been able to get it back. I liked Andy’s accent. It was a sign of his character, that he didn’t feel the need to change for anyone.

“You want me to pick up Grace?” he asked.

I’d completely forgotten about picking up Grace. Our younger daughter. Fifteen years old and horse crazy. After eight years of regular begging and pleading, we’d finally given in and bought her a seven-year-old quarter horse named Charlie. The plan was that we would build a stable at one end of the barn and clear some trees for a paddock. In the meantime, Charlie

was stabled at Grace's friend Molly's house, which meant that Grace now spent all her time there and the only time we saw her was when we were picking her up or dropping her off.

"I forgot," I said. Andy wrapped his hand around the back of my neck. His hand was warm and comforting. He stroked the back of my head with his thumb.

"Don't worry about it. Stop worrying, period. Nina's fine. Simon would have called us if she wasn't."

He took his jacket from a hook on the wall. I followed him out of the barn, across the courtyard, and into the kitchen. Our dog, Rufus, was half-asleep on his bed near the stove. He looked up hopefully when we came in. Rufus is nearly ten now, and slowing down, but he loves a walk.

"Andy?"

"Hmm?"

"Do you think I've been too hard on her? I mean, generally speaking. Do you think I expect too much of her?"

Andy thought about it. "Maybe, a little. She's a good girl. She deserves to have some fun."

"Okay, but she left me completely high and dry. It's not like I can call around and get someone else at the last minute. It doesn't work like that, and she knows it. So I had to do my work and Nina's work too, while she's off having fun with her boyfriend."

"That's true."

"Andy . . ." He turned to look at me. "Which is it?"

"It's both. Nina was out of line to blow off her work, and maybe, sometimes, you're a little hard on her." He kissed me briefly on the mouth, found his keys, and left.

I made coffee and took a mug into the living room. The fire had burned a little low, so I added some wood, then I sat on the couch with Rufus curled up at my feet. I opened Instagram and went to Nina's account. She hadn't posted anything new since Thursday. Her last post was a close-up of a red-bellied woodpecker sitting on a branch, head turned to the camera. The one before that was a picture of Nina and Simon together, in climbing gear, on the top of a cliff with deep green forest in the background. They had their arms wrapped around each other and they were grinning.

I put my phone away, picked up the TV remote, and found a season of *Love Is Blind* that I hadn't seen yet. I turned on the first episode, then spaced out completely during the intro. I took out my phone again, opened Nina's Instagram, and liked two of her recent posts. There. She'd see that and know that I wanted to be friends, and she'd call me. The thing about Nina is that she doesn't hold grudges. Also, she's a hard worker. It really wasn't like her to blow off work.

The thought had been nagging at me. Nina had been two years old when I bought the inn. Back then, the only reason I was able to afford the place was because the roof had a huge hole in it, and because the plumbing didn't work. Also because the previous occupant had been a hoarder and the realtor had been so grossed out by the place that he'd taken the first, lowball offer, which had happened to be mine. Even at two years old, Nina had been a tough little girl. It had taken me months of hard work to clean the place out, scrub it, paint it, and make it habitable. I didn't have the money to pay for childcare, and I didn't have family to help, so Nina came with me, every single day. Every day I'd give her some little task to do, to keep her occupied, and she took it all so seriously. She wore her overalls and her little headscarf, and she ran around the place with her small broom or scrubbed at the stone steps with her scrubber. She was always so proud of herself for helping me. When she finished, she'd lean back and press her hands into her lower back and survey her work, like she was a tiny grown-up. And that attitude had never changed. Grace hated working in the inn. She did everything she could to wriggle out of even the small commitments she made. Whereas when Nina said yes, she showed up and followed through.

Andy was right. I must have pushed her way too hard. She was a sophomore now. Maybe she needed more time to study. Maybe we could make some changes. We could look at hiring someone to lighten the load. Not full time, but a few hours would make a difference. I'd talk to Nina about it.

After she apologized.

By the time Andy and Grace got in, I was half-asleep. It used to be that Grace came straight to me for a hug if we'd been apart for any length of time. Sometime in the last couple of years that had stopped. I knew that new distance was a necessary part of Grace's growing up, and mostly I respected

that, but sometimes you just need a hug. I got up from the couch and went to her. I kissed her head; her hair smelled like sweat and horses.

“Did you have a good time?” I said.

“The best.” She pulled away. “I’m so tired I might die. And I’m starving. What’s for dinner?”

“Leftovers.” Her answering groan was predictable. I started to follow her to the kitchen. There was plenty of food in the fridge, but if I didn’t put something together for her she’d eat cereal and chips. Andy was leaning in the living room doorway. He put out his hand to stop me before I could leave the room.

“Got a minute?”

His tone was serious.

“Sure.” I called after Grace, “No cereal, okay? There’s lasagna in the fridge. Warm it up.”

Grace waved a hand at me over her shoulder. She took out her phone and started to play music through the kitchen speaker. Dua Lipa. “Levitating.”

Andy pulled me back into the living room and closed the door quietly.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“I had to go down there to the gas station to fill up before I picked up Grace. I got talking to Patrick.”

Patrick worked at the gas station, and he was a talker. He saw it as his duty to gather up every bit of information about everyone who lived nearby, from Waitsfield to Warren, and pass it on.

“Patrick says that Simon came back from Stowe on Friday night. He’s been home for two days. Patrick says that Simon came home alone.”

“Simon came home alone. What does that mean?”

Andy shook his head.

“What are you thinking? That she’s gone off somewhere else? With friends?” My anger, which had pretty much dissipated, bloomed again. My phone was on the coffee table. Andy leaned down, picked it up, and offered it to me.

“Call her,” he said.

“I’ve called her twice already. And messaged her.”

“Try her again.”

I dialed the number. It went straight to voice mail. I held the phone up so that Andy could hear Nina's bright, breezy voice telling me to leave a message, then I brought the phone back to my ear.

"Nina, call me." My voice was sharp. I tried to think of something else to say but everything that came to mind was angry. Andy was leaning against the wall, his arms crossed, watching me with serious eyes. I ended the call.

"What?" I said.

"I don't like this."

"I'm hardly ecstatic about it myself. You've got to be kidding me. Where did she go now? New York City, for a shopping trip? Or no, Paris, perhaps."

"Leanne."

"What?"

"Maybe we should go over there, to the Jordans' place," Andy said. "Drop by and make sure she's okay."

The tone of his voice slowed me down. It was calm, steady, and sensible, because that was Andy. But there was something else that was less normal for him—a small hint of worry.

"Don't you think that's a little over the top?"

He shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not. They're only ten minutes away."

"I could just call her. Jamie, I mean." I didn't want to call her. Jamie Jordan didn't like me, and she seemed to enjoy making that very clear. I didn't care what other people thought about me. I wasn't a particularly social person. I had my home, my family, and my business, and I didn't need anything else. But Jamie had finely honed the art of making people feel off balance, and I wasn't completely immune. I called her number. It went through to voice mail.

"Jamie. Hi. It's . . . uh . . . It's Leanne Fraser here. I'm just calling because we haven't heard from Nina." I laughed, and hated that I sounded nervous. Ingratating. "I just wondered if she's with you, by any chance. Or if you've heard from Simon. I'm sure everything's fine, but if you could give me a call and fill me in, I'd feel a lot better. Thanks, Jamie. I owe you one!" I finished brightly, like she and I were just the best of buddies. I ended the call and looked at Andy.

"Let's go over there," he said.

We left Grace at home. Andy drove, and we didn't talk much. I wasn't worried about Nina, not really, but I could feel his tension, and it bothered me. I shifted in my seat. The Jordans' house was on Sharpshooter Road. Simon's father, Rory, owned a precision-tool-machining company that supplied pharmaceutical companies and other high-tech businesses. He'd had help getting started. His own father had had a small custom-tool-machining business. Then Rory had gone to college to study industrial engineering, and he'd come home with ideas. Brilliant ideas, which he'd turned into profit-churning machines. These days the company was worth fifty or sixty million, if you believed the rumors. I'd met Rory many times over the years, at school events, but I'd never warmed to him. He was clever but cold. He could also be ostentatious. The Jordans' house was very large, easily four times the size of the inn. It was set well back from the road and protected by a wall and a cast-iron gate, neither of which are remotely necessary in this part of Vermont, where most people still leave their doors unlocked and wouldn't think twice about leaving their keys in their car.

Andy pressed the intercom button on the gatepost. After a moment, the gate swung open. We drove slowly up to the house. It was a modern building, low slung and vast, with contemporary timber and concrete sidings and minimalist landscaping. From the front, it was like a fortress. The entrance door was solid timber and oversized, and the windows to the front were slim, almost like arrow slits in an old castle. I'd been in the house only once, for a party the Jordans threw for Simon's high school graduation. I knew that inside the house the fortress feeling fell away quickly and the low-slung look was misleading. From the front door you stepped down into the building, through a series of terrace-like entrance spaces. The ceilings in the main living areas were so high that the house felt light and airy, and there were vast floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the rear of the property, offering incredible views of Camel's Hump. A lot of wealthy people build second homes in this part of Vermont, so we have more than our share of luxury properties, but the Jordans' place was on another level.

When we pulled up in front of the house there were no cars parked out front, but the house has a six-car garage, so that didn't tell me much of anything. Andy hung back a little as we approached the door. I rang the

doorbell. We heard footsteps coming from inside and saw a shadow approaching on the other side of the glass. Jamie opened the door. She was barefoot, dressed in blue jeans and a pink blouse, open at the throat to display a light tan and a gold necklace with a round medallion. She looked, as she always did, very pretty. Jamie had the kind of body that no woman over forty has without obsessive focus and absolute discipline. Very thin, and toned to perfection. Her toenails were painted neon yellow, and her hair and makeup were perfect. She looked like she'd just walked off the set of *Selling Sunset*. She looked at *me* like she'd never seen me before. Suddenly I felt like we'd overreacted.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Jamie. I hope we haven't interrupted your dinner?"

She raised one perfectly groomed eyebrow, folded her arms, and said nothing. Even by Jamie's standards, this was rude.

"I'm looking for Nina," I said, a little more abruptly. "Is she here?"

"Why would Nina be here?"

"She told me that she and Simon would be home on Saturday. Yesterday. And I haven't heard from her. I've been calling, but . . ." I let my voice trail off. "Look, Patrick at the gas station said that Simon came home from Stowe already. Is that right? Is he home?"

Jamie let out an impatient sigh. "Simon and Nina broke up. She's not here."

My mouth fell open. I searched for words.

"If she's not with Simon, where is she?" said Andy.

"I don't know. Probably with her other boyfriend. Now, if you don't mind, we're eating dinner. I'm going to have to say good night."

Before either of us could react, Jamie Jordan closed the door in our faces.

I looked at Andy. I could feel my cheeks flushing with anger. "Other boyfriend?"

Andy shook his head. I stepped forward and rang the doorbell again. I leaned on it hard and long. A minute passed, and the door opened again. This time it was Rory Jordan. Six foot three. Handsome despite his broken nose. He didn't look angry. He looked sympathetic.

"Folks," he said. He held his hand out to Andy. It sat there for a second, until Andy took it and shook. "Jamie tells me you're worried about your

girl?”

“She was due home yesterday,” I said. “We’ve been calling, but—”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Rory cut across me, shaking his head. “Sorry we can’t be more help. But like Jamie told you, the kids broke up. Bound to happen, they’re so young. Simon’s all cut up about it, to tell you the truth. I’m not sure it was his idea, you understand? But he hasn’t spoken to Nina since Friday. They broke up, so he came home. Wish I could be more help, but that’s all we know.”

I felt so stupid in the face of his confidence. I was a terrible mother. Nina and Simon had broken up and I hadn’t even known about it. She hadn’t called me. *She’d* broken up with *him*? But she loved him. Talked about him all the time. Structured her whole life around him. This didn’t make sense.

“It’s not like Nina not to call her mother,” Andy said. “You sure Simon don’t know where she is?”

“I’m sorry,” Rory said, firmly. Then he waited for us to leave.

“Thank you,” I said, mechanically. “We’ll call her again.”

“Tell her we wish her all the best,” Rory said. And he closed the door.