

# REVELATION

A NOVEL BY  
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## NOT AGAIN

The dread was like smoldering black embers right in the pit of my stomach. I knew the sensation well. Used to feel it every day after school as I approached my house in Croton, Pennsylvania, not knowing what might be going on inside. Never knowing in what condition I might find my mother. Passed out with a bottle of pills spilled on the floor? Manically cleaning the kitchen in her pajamas? Angrily waiting to scold me for something I hadn't done? Yes, I knew dread all too well. I had just never felt dread like this upon my return to Easton Academy.

It was the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend, and, thanks to my Billings House fund money, it was the first time I'd flown back to Easton. When I had said goodbye to my parents that morning at the airport I had actually felt a pull to stay. It was so ironic. Now that my mother was better, leaving home was the hard part, and it was coming back to school that was giving me the dry heaves. But who could blame me, considering the pariah I had become at Easton?

The cab driver pulled up in front of Bradwell, the freshman and sophomore girls' dorm. I paid him and struggled out of the car with my backpack, duffel bag, and laptop. It was frigid outside, and a cold wind whipped through the trees along the drive. I had expected the campus to feel more alive since all the students were supposed to be returning from break. But though there were a few lit windows dotting the brick facades of the three girls' dorms on the circle, there wasn't a soul in sight. I took a deep breath and started along the cobblestone walk between Bradwell and Pemberly, my heart pounding with each heavy step as I drew closer to the quad.

I didn't want to go back to Billings House. I so wasn't ready.

When I reached the far side of Bradwell, I paused and gazed across the quad at Billings, the tallest dorm on campus. Instantly, the embers of dread burned brighter. It had been just over a week since the Billings fund-raiser in New York City—the event that should have been the most amazing night of my life. Instead it had been the most humiliating. It had been the night when a video of me and Dash McCafferty getting all gropey at the Legacy had been sent out to every cell phone and BlackBerry at school. Everyone had seen me and Dash—my best friend Noelle Lange's boyfriend—kissing. Touching. Taking off each other's clothes. Everyone knew what I had done. And no one had talked to me since.

Except Sabine DuLac, my roommate in Billings.

Where Noelle had all but banned me from the Billings table in the dining hall, where Portia Ahronian had organized a Billings shopping trip and excluded me, and where even Kiki Rosen had switched

seats in the library so she wouldn't have to acknowledge me, Sabine had remained loyal. At least I had one true friend left. One person who had been willing to listen to my explanation. Although, she had always hated Noelle. She probably would have taken my side if I'd shot the girl dead. But maybe now that a few days had passed, some of the others would come around as well. Maybe I could even get Noelle to listen to me.

It was a stretch, I knew. But I was going to have to try.

Halfway across the snow-covered quad, lit only by the quaint, ground-level lamps lining the pathways, I stopped and took a deep breath to steel myself. I was going to march into Billings and I was going to make Noelle listen to me. I didn't care if I had to scream the whole apology to her through her closed dorm room door. She was going to hear my side.

My life at Easton depended on it.

A bitter gust of wind whipped my dark hair back from my face and got me moving again. Knees quaking—not from nerves, I told myself, but from the cold and the weight of my bags—I turned up the walk to Billings. That was when I saw a dark figure move toward me. I froze.

"Reed. Good. I'm glad I caught you."

It was Detective Hauer. The King of Bad News. Just what I needed.

"Detective," I said. He was all bundled up in a dark wool coat that seemed one size too small for his stocky frame, a tweed hat pulled low over his brow, hiding his dark, usually unkempt hair. His wide nose was red from the cold, and there were visible bags under his brown eyes. The way he looked at me—like a doctor probably looks at

a patient right before he diagnoses inoperable cancer—made me want to run inside, even though I dreaded facing my friends.

“What?” I said finally.

“I just wanted to give you the heads-up,” he said, holding his hat as another gust of wind nearly knocked me off my feet. “Since you’ve been so cooperative during this . . . uh . . . tragedy.” Hauer hesitated, his eyes darting away from my face.

What was with this guy? He was an adult and a police officer. He was not supposed to feel nervous when talking to me.

“We’ve found new evidence,” he said. “Your friend Cheyenne Martin . . . She was definitely murdered.”

His words sucked all the air from my lungs and I clutched the handle on my duffel bag, as if that would keep me from fainting dead away. This wasn’t possible. Not again. Not another murder. Cheyenne had OD’d. We had all been there to find her. We had all read her suicide note. She had even sent me an e-mail saying I was the reason she killed herself—an e-mail that had haunted me for months now. Plus, no one had heard a struggle. There’d been no blood, no bruises, nothing broken in her room. How could this be possible?

“What?” I heard myself say as the wind whistled overhead. “You can’t be serious.”

A couple of weeks back, Detective Hauer had told me the case was going to be reopened at Cheyenne’s parents’ request, but at the time, even he had still thought it was a clear-cut suicide.

“Unfortunately, I am,” he said, shoving his hands in his pockets.

“I don’t understand,” I said, my mind racing. “What new evidence?”

How can there be new evidence *now*? She died months ago. She was cremated. Her room's not even a crime scene—Noelle's been living there for weeks. What could you have possibly found?"

The detective cleared his throat. "I'm afraid that information is classified."

"Classified? Is this a government conspiracy now?" I blurted, frustrated.

He leveled me with an admonishing glare. "It's not for public consumption," he clarified sternly. "But you should know we're going to be reinterviewing everyone of interest," he added, standing up straight. He sounded surer of himself now, and fixed me with a steady-eyed gaze. "If there's anything else you want to tell me, now is the time."

"Anything else?" I stood there, unable to think. Unable to breathe. Unable to move. Cheyenne had been murdered. I was going to have to tell the rest of Billings about this. Yeah, right. If they'd even stay in the same room with me for five seconds.

"Yes. Anything at all," he said.

Behind Hauer, I saw a group of girls walking in a huddle toward Pemberly. One of them noticed us and lifted her chin, and another girl turned.

Ivy Slade.

Her coal-black eyes fixed on me, and a cold bolt of ice slammed into my heart. She looked at Hauer and a sly smile lit her pointy face. Clearly she was already calculating how quickly she could spread the news that the cops were talking to me, but I didn't care. All I could

think about was her story. Her hatred of Billings. Her promise that she would bring us all down.

After the Billings fund-raiser she had told me everything. How the Billings Girls had forced her and the other Billings hopefuls to break into her grandmother's house her sophomore year to steal a family heirloom. How they had tripped the alarm, which had caused her grandmother to have a stroke that ultimately killed her. How Noelle, Ariana, Cheyenne, and the other Billings Girls had left Ivy there to cope with the tragedy herself.

If Cheyenne had definitely been murdered, then Ivy was, in my opinion, suspect number one. The girl had motive seeping out her pores. She had practically told me straight out that she was going to get revenge on Noelle as well as destroy Billings. Plus, I already knew she was capable of very bad things. Ever since Cheyenne had died, someone had been stalking me. Leaving artifacts from Cheyenne's life tucked around my room for me to find. Taking that video of me and Dash and sending it to the entire student body. It was Ivy. I was sure of it. My certainty, of course, had nothing to do with the fact that she'd stolen the love of my life, Josh Hollis.

"Ivy Slade," I said under my breath, as the girls turned and continued on their merry way.

"What was that?" Detective Hauer asked, curving his shoulders against the wind.

"Ivy Slade," I said more loudly.

The detective sighed and blew on his chapped hands. "Reed, we already talked to her," he said finally. "She's not our girl."

"Talk to her again," I told him through my teeth.

"Reed, we can't waste our time on—"

"I'm telling you, Detective, it's not a waste of time," I said, my blood racing now. "That girl is capable of murder. I know she is. And she hated Cheyenne. Last week she even threatened Noelle."

This caught his attention. "Threatened to kill her?"

"Well, no. Not in those words, but—"

Suddenly, the detective looked extremely tired. "Look, unless you have some real evidence against the girl, there's nothing I can do."

His tone was condescending and impatient. Like I was just some stupid kid spreading rumors. I retightened my fingers around the strap of my duffel bag.

"You haven't gotten the whole story," I said, trying to keep my voice even. "Believe me."

Hauer blew out a sigh and looked up at the starless night. "How about we start with your story?" he suggested. "I know we already talked about the . . . uh, letter, you received from Ms. Martin's e-mail account the night she died and your contentious friendship with her. But I need your official statement. Where you were at the time of Ms. Martin's death . . . who you were with. . . ."

I felt fire burning from my eyes. He needed *my* statement when a psycho like Ivy was strolling around campus free and clear?

"You want my statement? Fine. Here it is," I said, drawing myself up straight. "At the time of the murder I was asleep in my bed while my roommate was asleep in hers. I woke up to the sound of screaming and ran down the hall to find the president of my dorm dead on the

floor of her room. That's all I know. Now why don't you go interview someone with, oh, I don't know, a motive?"

Hauer gave me an exasperated look, but I no longer cared to humor him. I turned around and stormed up to Billings, suddenly feeling more confident than ever that I could take on Noelle and the rest of my friends. Had to love a good adrenaline rush.

At least Detective Hauer was good for something.

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