

## November 3

Will dreamed again.

He was trudging downhill through snow, grimacing as the wind's tiny teeth grazed his face. He lost his footing, sliding down the mountainside as ice crags slashed at his skin.

He stood. A large lake stretched before him. A young woman was standing there, but her hair was black, not blonde.

"Sophie?" Will scowled. "What are you doing here?"

"Billy?" she replied. "What's—"

"Don't call me Billy."

Sophie's hands went to her face. "But she called you—"

"Exactly," Will said. "*She* called me that."

Water lapped at the shore. The sun dipped behind the mountains.

Sophie's hand bunched up the skin near her left eyebrow. "But what..." her voice was strained as she began to pull down. "...what are you doing in my dream?"

The flesh fell away like cooked meat, separating from yellowed bone.

\* \* \*

Will's hands were still shaking from the nightmare when he called: "Yes, this is Mr. Carrow. My son isn't feeling well, so he won't be in school today."

He had made sure to charge his phone while he showered, grabbed a few granola bars, and filled his water.

Now, a couple hours later, his skin was crawling with centipedes. Before him on Table Rock was a bouquet of crimson spider lilies.

Will teetered, then sank to the crystalline surface.

*Most likely a coincidence. I had the dream, someone else put flowers here. Or, if not, maybe it's like that thing where someone takes a sleeping pill and then drives to Taco Bell.*

Will stood, turning in the direction Anna had pointed in the dream. *But where would I find spider lilies around here?*

He closed his eyes, re-visiting the stand of cattails in his mind, then began walking.

*“Extraordinary events call for extraordinary evidence.”* The birds had gone silent. *Third possibility: I somehow created these flowers. They were there because I dreamed them into existence.*

Dead leaves crunched underfoot as he approached the copse of trees and the stand of cattails. His abdominals clenched as his hand froze, clutching a group of the reeds.

*Anna is dead. She has been talking to me. She asked me to come here...*

Will got out his phone and started recording. “Hey, this is Will Carrow, I...think I found something about the Anna Davenport case, and, um...Mom, I love you, and I’m sorry if...”

His voice caught. He emailed the unfinished recording to himself, shivering in the clammy air. Blood throbbed in his ears.

Behind the cattails was a corridor created by the trees, bending off to the right. He braced himself against the trunks as he moved through the marshy ground, balling up his toes to keep his shoes from being sucked off into the mud.

Will knew what he was going to find, but hoped he would be wrong. Moments after he rounded the corner, his breakfast splattered onto the muddy earth. Fist clenching a branch for support, he had turned his head to not get any on Anna’s body. He squeezed his eyes shut.

*Seven times four is twenty-eight.*

Her blond hair was splayed around her and tarnished with mud.

*Eight times six is forty-eight.*

She was lying on her side but Will could see half her face was missing

*Eleven times eleven is one-hundred twenty-one.*

He was dry heaving, the last bits of half-digested granola bar trying to sneak out through his nose.

*Four times nine...*

Will backpedaled, stumbling, a branch scratching his shoulder.

He staggered aimlessly amongst the trees. Clouds rolled in, further attenuating the sunlight reaching the forest floor.

*The police. I need to tell the police I found her body.*

Discolored welts in the shape of a crude, angular spiral marred her back.

*But first... what was I doing here. I'm supposed to be home sick. How did I know...*

For some reason he could imagine Sophie kneeling in the mud, hear her shrieking "No!" as her body convulsed with sobs.

Will pulled out his phone. *No service*. He scanned the trees, as though a suited man on his way to work would stroll by so he could ask him for help.

Table Rock was about fifty feet away.

Will came into the clearing. A figure, dressed in black, was sitting on Table Rock. As he approached, it stood, turning to face him.

There was a flash of green light, and in the darkness, all Will could hear was Sophie's voice, repeating the words *you shouldn't be here* over and over again.