

# Whispers in the Wind

## Chapter 1: The Arrival

They say, "Life is like a box of chocolates." That is, until you choke on one and die. I like to think life is like a heroin addict waiting for the next hit. Then you don't wake up. What a twist! At least that's what my favorite movie writer would say. Now I don't want to sound like a morbid bish. Though I'm slightly sadistic, Extra scalpels in your liver. Just enough to make it hurt and not burst. Just the tip: No Diddy?. At least that's what the degenerates at my old school would say.

Oh, Sup? You hear to worship the dark lord and spill innocent blood, or hear my story? It doesn't matter; we can do both on this journey. Now this is the story all about how my life got swallowed up like babies at a frat house. Damn, tough crowd? Fine, let's just get into it. But I have to warn you. This story is blazing, like if Snoop Dogg rolled it—I mean, wrote it.

The day we arrived in what everyone else calls Gallows Creek, for my progenitors latest engineering conquest, I already knew this town was going to be a tough pill to swallow. Correction: Swallows Creek, as I affectionately mispronounce it every time, much to my silent amusement. Moving from the bustling chaos of Los Palo to this eerie hamlet was like stepping into a time warp. The eery scene of Victorian houses frozen in time and the street silent save for the squeaks of dark, aged wood made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. Even the trees loomed over us like somber sentinels, casting long shadows that stretched out like bony fingers across the cobblestone streets.

Progenitor, aka my father, had landed a job overseeing some renovation project—I couldn't be bothered to remember the specifics—in the heart of this dim, unnerving town. Spawn point. Aka, my mother, ever the supportive wife with her eternally optimistic outlook, gushed about the "quirky charm" and "community spirit" of Gallows Creek. She hadn't yet wandered to the outskirts, where the atmosphere grew thicker, heavier with stories whispered by the wind.

As for me, I was less than thrilled. Being a seventeen-year-old mixed Egyptian queen who had been uprooted from her social life (what little I had in Los Palo, at least) was about as appealing as wearing last year's Halloween costume to school. Speaking of which, my fashion sense was about as conflicted as my feelings towards this town. I liked to call it "Eloquence of the Damned," a style that mixed lace collars with dark, flowing skirts and combat boots. It was my middle finger to anyone who dared to stereotype.

To make matters better or worse—depending on how you viewed it—I found myself employed part-time at the local cemetery. Yes, you heard that right. While other girls my age were making milkshakes or babysitting Tiffany's, I was helping tend graves and deciphering the faded names etched into weathered tombstones. Morbid? Maybe. But there was something strangely comforting about the silence of the cemetery, broken only by the occasional crow's caw or rustle of leaves. It was where I found solace in the stillness, where I could ponder life and death with equal parts... It's also where I found Drake's career after Kendrick mutilated it. West Coast for Lyfe!

Jokes aside, you should know my mind is like a blend of morbid curiosity and a penchant for dark humor that often leaves people either amused or slightly uncomfortable. It's like the perfect mix between damn, she's so cool and, ew, stay away from me that I longed for.

So here I was, the teenage misfit in Swallows Creek, navigating between my father's dreams of architectural splendor and my mother's rose-tinted Kanye West glasses full of visions of community bliss (all while still shockingly in awe that T-Swift won the 2009 Best Female Video Award). In a town where everyone knew everyone else's business, I stood out like a raven in a flock of doves. And despite my initial disdain for this place, there was an undeniable allure to its mysterious charm—a feeling that whispered of secrets waiting to be uncovered beneath its fluorescent facade.

## Chapter 2: Shadows of Swallows Creek

Swallows Creek was turning out to be more peculiar than I'd imagined. The shift from Los Palo's perfectly manicured lawns and tech-driven parents to the eerie calm of Gallows Creek was like going from an overpriced latte to a lukewarm cup of mystery soup. Sure, it had its charm—if you were into foggy mornings and the occasional tumbleweed. Every morning I lay in bed, staring at my engraved ceiling with sharp ripples of what looked like dead tree branches spreading like a viral disease. As I finally rose from the dead like the count's daughter, I placed my feet on the rustic-looking wood flooring in my boudoir. I walked to my Victorian-style bathroom connected to my room, looking at a reflection of what I thought was the face of death. "Damn, she looks hot," I thought. Her hair was a majestic wine, her eyes a hazel glow like sand in the sunset, and her face was as pale as a snowdrop in cashmere.

After putting myself together—and by that, I mean the splash of water here and there—I made my way to the kitchen through a cynical funhouse of mirrors and pictures, down a decrypted hallway that spun into a narrow staircase. At the end of the stairs, there stood a statue of a handsome iron knight. "Oh, hi! Come here often." I said, brushing his iron with my finger tips. No Diddy! I strolled into the kitchen like a model from my own perspective to find an audience of zero. Besides, if you count the piece of toast on the counter and, "Oh, look at an avocado,"!

Munching my way to school like Ice Spice, I noticed not a lot has changed within the week of living in Swallows. The town itself felt suspended in an eternal autumn, with leaves crunching underfoot and a perpetual mist hanging in the air. My fit today was a crop top black hoodie and split plaid leggings. Maybe a bit to Los Palo, but if there's one thing I learned from living there, it's dressing comfortably. I passed my newly found job opportunity, aka work, on the way to school, thanks to my father. How silent and eerie the graveyard sat in the mist with an iridescent backdrop that makes you remember the start of your favorite cheesy horror movie.

Speaking of which, I began to feel like I was the star of my own as a low, rumbling truck creepily pulled up beside the curb I was 10 feet from. Glancing over, I saw a middle-aged man with a cap so low it might as well have been a mask. He rolled down the window, and before I could react, he delivered a line that could make even TikTok streamers cringe. "Well, hey, there's brown sugar," he delivered with a raspy, hoarse voice, emphasizing the brown and the prolonged sugar part. YIKES. I felt myself gag a bit and turned back to walk forward. He proceeded to pull forward, revving his truck as it roared like an overgrown kitten. "Let me ask you something, girl. Is your dad in prison? Because if I were your daddy, I'd be in prison." He snarled, chuckling behind his dirty windows and low ball cap. Now, I'm normally not confrontational... "Fuck it," I thought, glancing over with a small grin. "You clearly can't spit, so you obviously must swallow". I hissed back, picking up my pace a bit more after the punch line. The truck lay sputtered in neutral, as I'm sure he gathered his three brain cells for a comeback. "You should watch that attitude, girlie," he sneered. "You never know who you're messing with." He growled as he once more revved his truck like a kitten in heat, speeding off a putt-putt. I walked about a block more, just on the cusps of the school yard. I still had that image of the low ball cap, Snaggletooth. If you touch my truck, you'll need a tetanus shot, eff'n creep. I thought to myself that Swallows Creek might have charm, but it also had its share of characters straight out of a B-rated movie.

Now I wish I could say school was as eventful as the creep encounter, but I'd be about as truthful as Trump on trial. I slouched against my locker, finding my eyes rolling as I observed my surroundings for 5 minutes. The school loomed like a caricature of suburban perfection, but you could tell that one pink slip and a chipped nail later, you'd hear the buzz of helicopter parents crashing into the school board. "Designer," if I had to use one word, and no, I'm not talking about the rapper. The sound of Yeezy slides squeaked, and Louis bags banged. It was like the start of a hard trap beat, but all you heard were mumble raps by the Island Boys. Is it awful that the only thought in my head was Chief Keef saying, "Fake Gucci, that's the shit I don't like"? Seriously, these kids think they're in an episode of some teen drama. I sat back, my lips perched, and RBF was on full display. "I wish I was a comedian," I thought, and this place would be a goldmine.

I know you're probably thinking, "Don't judge a book by its cover," but the teachers weren't any better. Mr. Thompson, the overly enthusiastic history buff, launched into lectures like he was auditioning for Broadway. I had to admit that I stifled a laugh at his attempts to make the Oregon Trail sound thrilling. "Yeah, sure, dying of dysentery is a real adventure," I thought. But truthfully, Ms. Henderson took the cake this week as my perky English teacher, who gushed about Shakespeare as if he were her personal spirit animal. I couldn't help but create my own dark reinterpretations of her dramatic readings. "What you egg?" Come to my woman's breast; I have given suck! - No diddy isn't needed in this case, as these are lines cooked up in McBeth. Thanks for this true gem, Shakespeare and thank you Ms. Henderson for taking the pain away.

As the final bell rang, signaling the end of another trivial day and the end of my first week at Gallows Creek High, I made a beeline for my locker. My boots squawked with every step, as if I were stepping on dry loogies. The stares and whispers followed me like a shadow, but this wasn't anything new to me. I was the epitome of not fitting in with the suburban crowd that roamed these halls, and let's face it. I am that bee.

I was no more than 7 paces from my locker when I heard "cute outfit" coming from a voice behind me, dripping with saccharine sweetness that made my skin crawl. I normally would just ignore it, but I figured I had time today. I turned to find Ashleigh; she was one of the skunks in my English class. I have very few words to describe Ashleigh; other than that, she's the self-righteous popular girl who looks like an escort that advertises on Groupon.

I raised an eyebrow, not impressed by her brand of cryptic compliments. "Thanks," I replied dryly. Ashleigh leaned in, her voice lowering conspiratorially. "It's so unique," she drawled, her eyes flicking up and down as if assessing curiosity in a museum. I couldn't resist." Oh, Ashleigh. "You really think you're the shit," I shot back, matching her faux sincerity with a grin. "But you're not even a fart."

Her smirk faltered for a moment, then she laughed lightly, as if my jab was merely amusing. "You're a riot, Anuk," she said with a shake of her head. "Just remember, though, you might want to watch your back in my town." "Well, that's good to know." I jarringly replied. "I'll also let everyone know where I found Carmen San Bernardino. I heard they were looking for you." With that parting remark, I grabbed my bag out of my locker, turned the corner, and turned up the volume to Biggies, "Who shot you?" through my air pods.

"I'm so good at making friends."

### Chapter 3: Gravedigger

The dinner table was a somber affair that evening, the air thick with the aroma of roast chicken and unspoken tension. My parents, ever the optimists, tried their best to fill the silence with stories of their day—my father's latest architectural musings and my mother's adventures in exploring the local community center. I picked at my food, barely registering the taste, lost in my thoughts about the week.

"So, Anuk," my father said, breaking the silence. "Tell us about your week at Gallows High." "Yeah honey," My mother chimed in. "Did you make any new girlfriends"? I took a deep sigh. My parents already knew I was amazing at making friends, and this age-old question after the start of every school year was becoming quite benign. "I did. In fact, they are going to come by the cemetery tonight as we worship the dark lord and drink cattle blood in the moonlight." My father put his fork down and, with a stern look, said, "Honey. I've told you, child blood is much tastier than sheep. I don't know why you settle." With a prompt response, I stated, "I haven't found a child worthy of denomination. Unless you know of one"? My father began to chuckle as I had a solemn smirk on my face.

My mother, on the other hand, was less than impressed. "I don't know why you encourage such behavior, Darius." She said it with a discouraging face. "Everyone knows infant blood gets you in direct contact with the Dark Lord and is far fresher than a child's." I nearly choked on my food at her response, as this was completely out of her norm. "This is the way." My father promptly responded, raising a toast with his wine glass. I took a larger-than-normal bite of my dinner and mumbled, "I have to get ready for work," while stepping away from the table. "Oh". My father shouted out from the kitchen as I was heading towards the stairs. "And don't bring any ghosts home with you. They not like us." He said with a chuckle.

I rolled my eyes, turning the corner. As annoying as every 17-year-old finds their parents to be. I couldn't help but appreciate their open, quirky love, even through my sarcastic ratchetness.

After a serious wardrobe change—and by that, I mean jeans with a Michael Myers t-shirt and some grave-digging boots—I was off for my first shift. I was set to work from 6 to 10 p.m. with what I was sure to be mostly orientation stuff in showing me how to do the job. After stepping out and walking for what felt like ages, thanks to the scorching sun, I came upon the cemetery. I've passed it religiously on my way to school each morning, but for some reason, this time felt different. Maybe it was due to the dehydration from this hotter-than-normal day or because this was the first time entering through the rustic steel gates. The beginning of the road into this fine establishment was crooked and filled with dead branches on each side. Weeds grew from the cracks in the concrete, and the first few headstones I saw looked like they hadn't been manicured since the Salem witch trials. "Jezzabelle," one read. That's a hot girl's summer name, I thought to myself.

As I approached the small office building just inside the entrance, I saw a sign that read "Henderson & Sons Cemetery Services." Mrs. Henderson was the one I was reporting to tonight. The rumor was that she was a no-nonsense woman who had been managing the cemetery for decades. Supposedly, she knew every plot and every story imaginable about the ones 6 feet under. Making my way to the office door about to turn its antique knob, slowly etching the door open, I overheard a voice yelling over the speakerphone. "I don't give a damn if he's been dead for two weeks. It's going to take us 3 days to get the burial plot open." "In-audible dialogue from another voice" "Well, I don't get paid to figure that out now, do I? " Clang! "I'm surrounded by idiots," the female voice blurted out.

The door crept as I opened it, blasting my face with heat from the inside, giving my RBF a discomforting look. "You lost"? The older lady in the sauna room called out with a cigarette on the side of her mouth, clothes drenched in sweat, and a head so nappy you couldn't help but think trailer park trash. I quickly examined the room, which looked like nothing more than an overgrown shed with papers piled up on the table, the left window cracked with duct tape running across it, and a computer that had to be first generational. "Nah, I'm Anuk," I replied, rustling my stuck sweaty shirt from my body. "Ana, who?" she replied quickly. "I don't know any Ana's, and you Ana-be out of here now." Her reply caught me off guard. I was impressed with her wordplay, but I couldn't help but roll my eyes at the mispronunciation of my name. "ANUK!" I said louder. "And I'm the new hire, so unless this isn't Henderson and Sons Cemetery, I think I'm in the right place." I swiftly replied with a side of snark.

The lady now had her full attention on me, with a stoic face and a cigarette holding on for dear life as it was clenched by her pencil-thin lips. She paused for what felt like 5 minutes before speaking. "Well, are you going to take a seat or just stand there trying to be pretty?" I let out the world's most silent sigh, pulling back a wooden chair that scraped the floorboard. "Who said I was trying"? I replied, taking a seat and crossing my leg over the other, sitting back. "You always have an attitude, or is it just that time of month for you, Ms. Pretty?" She asked. I sat in silence at the question, appearing unamused. "Regardless, I'm Beth Henderson. To you, it's Mrs. Henderson. I've looked over your resume; well, what little experience you have listed. So tell me, my pretty. What makes you interested in this position?" I looked at her with a curious face before answering. "If I tell you, do you promise not to laugh?" I asked. "No," she grimfully responded, while lighting another cigarette with the one still in her mouth. She looked at me, taking the cigarette still burning in her mouth, placing it into the already-filled ashtray, and replacing it with the one she recently lit. "Fine," I said, giving up on any attempt at a joke. "I like money, and this is the only place I don't have to deal with living people to make it." She snarled at my reply, showing interest in my charismatic attitude. "C'mon, then let me show you around."

We took our first step out of the sauna, and I could feel the brisk breeze of the night air. The cemetery spread out before us in a maze of weathered tombstones and winding paths, shaded by ancient oak trees whose gnarled branches cast eerie shadows on what was left of the fading daylight. Beth, or Mrs. Henderson, as she insisted on being called, led the way with purposeful steps, her boots etching their soles sharply on the cobblestone path. I trailed behind, taking in the solemn atmosphere that surrounded us. "You don't need to live here your whole life to know this is the only cemetery in town. It's got a combination of the 12th and 21st centuries, or, in other words, that are recognizable to you. Pretty and ugly." She snarled, looking back at me. I rolled my eyes and continued to walk behind her on the rough trail. No longer than 5 seconds had passed before she started in, rambling about my job duties. "Weeds are growing back; those will need to be plucked; after those are plucked, the grass will need to be cut; if you're mowing the grass, then the headstones will need to be cleaned; if you're cleaning the headstones, why not do the outside of the mausoleums? And if you're doing the outside of the mausoleums, you might as well go inside." "And make sure you open the casket and polish the deceased bones with both hands, and make sure you (huak tuah) and spit on that thang for extra polishing," I sharply interrupted. Mrs. Henderson stood there with a stone face, her cigarette again hanging on for dear life. "What you do in your free time is TMI, kid." She wittingly replied. We continued for what felt like hours around each headstone and four mausoleums. Who knew a cemetery would have so many dead people. We ended the tour back at the sauna, where only Mrs. Henderson went in, pulling a book that appears to have been archived since the dawn of man and a set of keys that looked like they opened the 7th portal to hell. "I'm assuming you can read having applied for this job. Be sure to scan over the book and be here at 10 a.m. Keys will open the office. My husband, John, or Mr. Henderson to you will be here already tending to the grounds. He'll show you how to properly cut grass and get those purple nails of yours to turn green." I looked at her with a small smirk. "As long as you turn my pockets green, I'll be here." I said, taking and dusting off the book and sliding the keys in my back pocket before throwing up the deuces.

The chilly walk home was a nice change from the hot sun that's been beating my cheeks since we moved. Looking east I saw the town. Dimly lit with little life after 9 p.m. I couldn't help but think of the iridescent change from Los Palo to Gallows Creek. It truly felt as if my life changed from a Bob Ross painting to an Edgar Allen Poe novel. Unironically I've always wanted a place that lingered of mystery and the smell of rain. This place weirdly had neither though. The vibe it gave off was more psycho ex mixed with the stench of cat piss.



## Chapter 4:

The cemetery morphed into a dreamscape under the cloak of night. Shadows twisted between the tombstones, as if alive, while the wind wove through the trees, whispering secrets that beckoned me forward. The air was thick with an otherworldly energy, pulsing like a heartbeat against the stillness of the night.

I approached the first mausoleum, an ancient structure wrapped in a shroud of ivy. The door groaned as I pushed it open, the sound echoing like a mournful sigh in the silence. Inside, the atmosphere enveloped me—a heavy blanket of stale air, mingling the scent of damp stone with an undercurrent of decay that made my stomach twist.

With my flashlight piercing the darkness, I swept the beam across the interior, illuminating alcoves that held forgotten treasures: faded photographs and trinkets, remnants of lives once vibrant. Each item whispered a story, begging to be heard, transforming the mausoleum into a museum of memories, each grave a portal to another time.

Suddenly, a noise shattered the stillness. A soft shuffle echoed from the far end of the mausoleum, freezing me in place. My heart thudded in my chest as I tightened my grip on the flashlight. “Yo?” I said into the dark void. I could feel my voice tremble as I swallowed a huge gulp. No diddy!

The sound came again, more insistent now. Curiosity tinged with dread pulled me closer. “This is how the cute girl dies, Anuk,” I said, moving closer cautiously, with each step being an act of defiance against the rising panic I felt. As I rounded the corner, my flashlight beam landed on a figure bent over a small, unmarked grave, digging furiously with a spade that glimmered ominously in the light.

My breath hitched, my heart plummeting as I took in the scene. “Are you good?” I whispered, the words barely escaping my lips. The figure didn’t respond, lost in their frantic task, hands caked in earth as if they were searching for something precious.

Compelled by a benevolent force, I stepped closer. As my flashlight caught a face, I was met by the delicate eyes of a woman. She didn’t say anything, which made my mind race, grappling with confusion and dull fear. She moved her hands with a swift motion, gripping mine. Oddly, I felt a rush of warmth as she slowly turned to me with hazel eyes. “He’s not who they think he is. You must uncover the truth.” Her eyes burned with an intensity that rooted me like a mark on a map. I was caught between reality and the fever dream of a place where the past clawed its way into the present, begging for acknowledgment. I shivered awake feeling soaked and not in the way that you think. “Drugs are bad kids” I muttered, finding strength with the morning sun bursting through my windows to get up.

I dressed slowly, feeling the weight of the dream pressing down on me. I chose a dark hoodie and a pair of black skinny jeans—ya know, the kind that doesn't have holes. I trudged downstairs; the smell of burnt toast wafted through the air. My parents were already at the table, animatedly discussing a new community project that my mother was spearheading.

“Good morning, sleeping beauty!” My dad called cheerfully, his eyes crinkling at the corners as he offered me a plate of charred toast. “You're just in time for breakfast! Or what's left of it?”

“There's a reason you're a lego builder and not a Gordon Ramsey ,” I replied, grabbing a glass of orange juice instead. I took a seat and tried to tune into their conversation, but my thoughts kept drifting back to the dream.

“Anuk, are you listening?” My mother's voice cut through my reverie.

“Yeah, totally,” I said, taking a drink of OJ.

“Your father was just saying he might have a project lined up for Gallows Creek's town square,” she continued, a hint of excitement in her tone.

“Sounds interesting,” I replied. “Are they giving you access to the town dungeon as well”? I asked snarkily. My dad chuckled while my mom huffed away on her broomstick. “Don't have too much fun with dead people today,” my father said before placing a coffee kiss on my forehead.

The walk to the cemetery felt different in the daylight. The path was now illuminated, revealing the vintage beauty of the aging headstones and twisted oaks. I arrived at the gates, their rusting hinges creaking ominously as I pushed them open.

Inside, the cemetery was quiet, a stark contrast to the chaos in my mind. I spotted Mrs. Henderson's office and made my way inside. The air was heavy with the scent of stale cigarettes and old paper, and the faint sound of a radio crackled in the background.

“Late!” Mrs. Henderson's voice sliced through the stillness as she looked up from her desk, a smirk playing on her lips. “I don't tolerate slackers here, kid.”

“What's the rush? They're not going anywhere fast,” I replied with my head nodding into the cemetery, my mind still half awake with my thoughts still pondering on the lady in my dream.