

FIVE

SURVIVE

ALSO BY
HOLLY JACKSON

*A Good Girl's
Guide to Murder*

*Good Girl,
Bad Blood*

*As Good
As Dead*

PLUS NOVELLA . . .

Kill Joy

FIVE

SURVIVE

HOLLY JACKSON



To Harry Collis, who at 100 years old is probably
the oldest Young Adult reader in the world . . .



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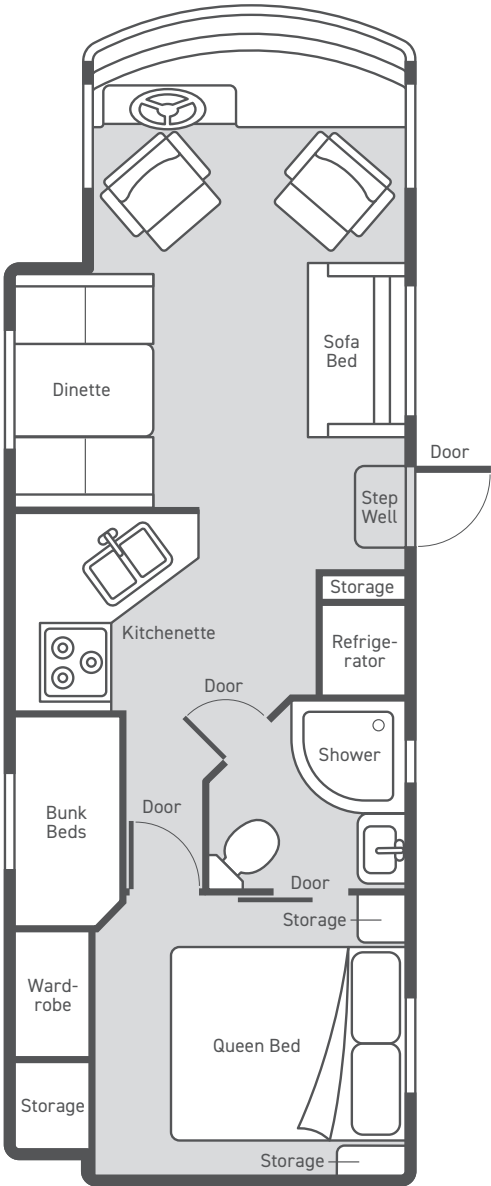
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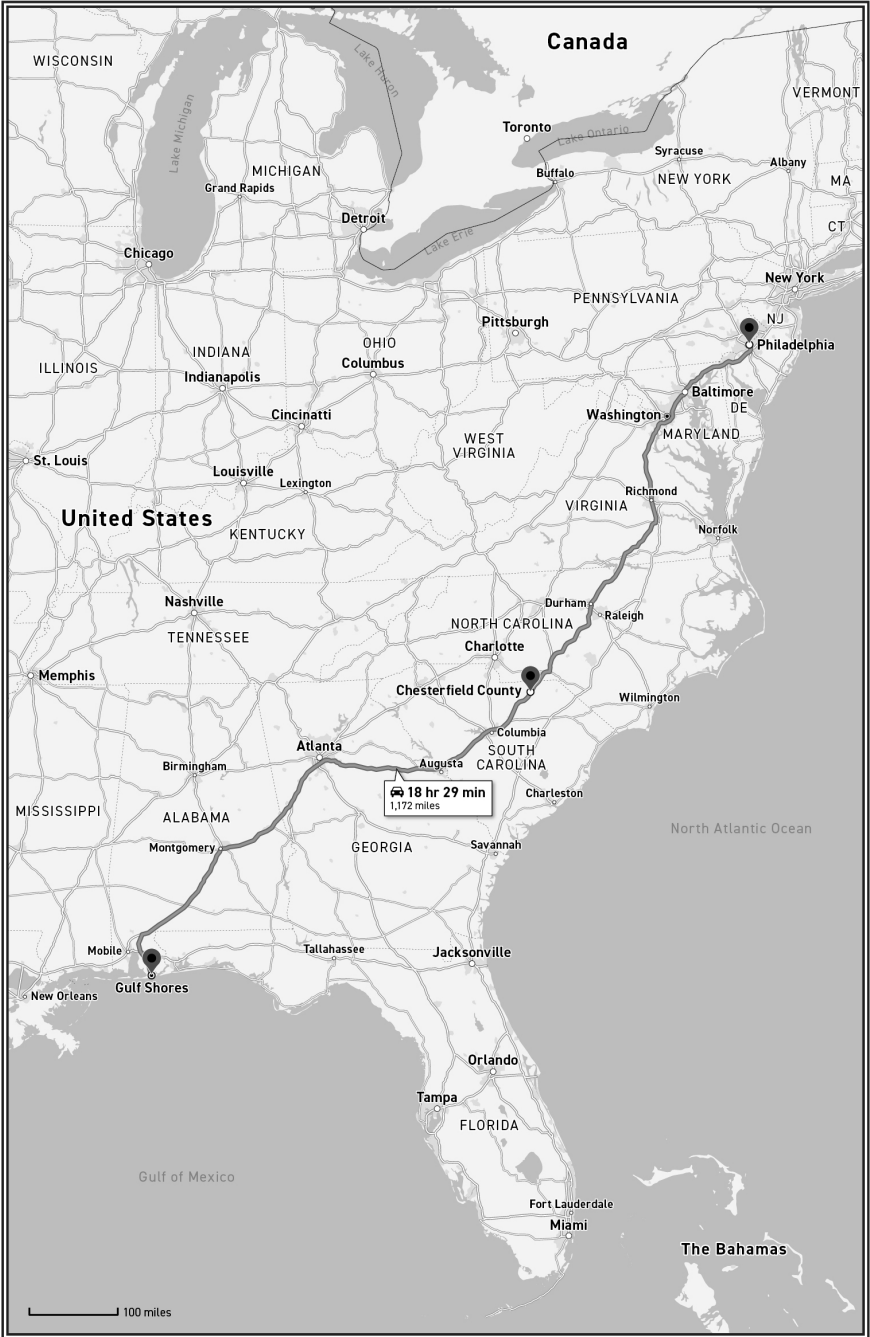


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THE GETAWAY VISTA 2017 31B FLOOR PLAN





10:00 P.M.

ONE

Here and not. Red and black. One moment there, another gone. Her face in the glass. Disappearing in the light of oncoming headlights, reappearing in the dark of outside. Gone again. The window kept her face for its own. Good, it could keep it. Back, the window didn't want it either.

Red's reflection stared through her, but the glass and the darkness didn't get her quite right, blurring the details. The main features were there: the too-pale glow of her skin and the wide-set dark blue eyes that weren't hers alone. *You look so much alike*, she used to hear, more than she cared to. Now she didn't care to hear it at all, even think it. So, she looked away from her face, their face, ignoring them both. But it was harder to ignore something when you were trying.

Red shifted her gaze, looking instead at the cars in the lane beside and below. Something wasn't right; the cars seemed too small from up here at her window, but Red didn't feel any bigger. She watched a blue sedan edging forward to pass, and she helped it along with her eyes, pushing them ahead. There you go, bud. Ahead of this thirty-one-foot-long metal can, speeding down the highway. Which was strange when you thought about it; that you traveled *down* a highway when *high* was right there in the name.

‘Red?’ The voice opposite interrupted her thoughts of lowways and highways. Maddy was looking at her through the dimmed inside lights, skin screwed up around her sandy-brown eyes. She gave a small kick under the table, jabbing Red in the shin. ‘Did you just forget we were in the middle of playing a game?’

‘No,’ Red said, but yes, yes she had. What had they been playing again?

‘Twenty Questions,’ Maddy said, reading Red’s mind. Well, they had known each other all their lives; Red had only gotten a seven-month head start and she hadn’t done a lot with it. Maybe Maddy had learned to read her mind in all that time, more than seventeen years. Red really hoped not. There were things in there no one else could ever see. No one. Not even Maddy. Especially not Maddy.

‘Yeah, I know,’ Red said, her eyes wandering to the other side of the RV, to the outside door and the sofa bed – currently sofa – where she and Maddy would sleep tonight. Red couldn’t remember; which side of the bed did Maddy like again? Because she couldn’t sleep if she wasn’t on the left side, and just as she was trying to read Maddy’s mind back about that, her eyes caught on a green sign outside in the night, flying over the windshield.

‘That sign says Rockingham, aren’t we getting off this road soon?’ Red said, not loud enough for anyone at the very front of the RV to hear, where it would have been more use. She was probably wrong, anyway, best to say nothing. They’d been driving on this same road for the past hour, I-73 becoming I-74 and then US 220 without much fanfare.

‘Red Kenny, focus.’ Maddy snapped her fingers, a hint of a

smile on her face. It never creased, though, Maddy's face, not even with the widest of smiles. Skin like cream, soft and clearer than it had any business being. It made the freckles on Red's face stand out even more, side by side in photos. Literally side by side; they were almost the exact same height, down to the highest-standing hair, though Red's was dark blond where Maddy's was more light brown, a shade or two separating them. Red always had hers tied back, loose bangs at the front that she'd cut herself with the kitchen scissors. Maddy's was untied and neat, the ends soft in a way Red's never were. 'I'm the one asking questions, you're the one with the person, place or thing,' Maddy prompted.

Red nodded slowly. Well, even if Maddy also liked to sleep on the left, at least they weren't on the bunks.

'I've asked seven questions already,' Maddy said.

'Great.' Red couldn't remember her person, place or thing. But really, they'd been driving all day, setting off from home around twelve hours ago, hadn't they played enough road trip games? Red couldn't wait for this to be over so she could finally sleep, whether left side or right. Just get through it. They were supposed to arrive at Gulf Shores around this time tomorrow, meet up with the rest of their friends, that was the plan.

Maddy cleared her throat.

'And what answers did I give, remind me?' Red said.

Maddy breathed out, an almost sigh or an almost laugh, hard to tell. 'It was a person, a woman, not a fictional character,' she said, counting them off on her fingers. 'Someone I would know, but not Kim Kardashian or you.'

Red looked up, searching the empty corners of her mind for the memory. 'No, sorry,' she said, 'it's gone.'

‘Okay, we’ll start again,’ Maddy said, but just then, Simon stumbled out of the small bathroom, saving Red from more Organized Fun™. The door bounced back into him as the RV sped up.

‘Simon Yoo, have you been in there this whole time?’ Maddy asked, disgusted. ‘We’ve played two whole rounds.’

Simon pushed his black, loosely waved hair away from his face and held an unsteady finger to his lips, saying, ‘Shh, a lady never tells.’

‘Shut the door, then, jeez.’

He did, but with his foot, to make some point or other, almost overbalancing as they hurtled along the highway, changing lanes to pass. Wasn’t their exit soon? Maybe Red should say something, but now she was watching as Simon waded forward, leaning on the tiny kitchen counter behind her. In one awkward motion, he slid onto the booth beside her, knocking his knees on the table.

Red studied him: his pupils were sitting too large in his dark, round eyes, and there was an incriminating wet patch on the front of his teal-colored Eagles shirt.

‘You’re drunk already,’ she said, almost impressed. ‘I thought you’d only had, like, three beers.’

Simon moved close to whisper in her ear, and Red could smell the sharp metallic tang on his breath. She couldn’t miss it; that was how she knew when her dad was lying to her, *No I didn’t drink today, Red, I promise*. ‘Shh,’ Simon said, ‘Oliver brought tequila.’

‘And you just helped yourself?’ Maddy asked, overhearing.

In answer, Simon balled both his fists and held them in the air, yelling: ‘Spring break, baby!’

Red laughed. And anyway, if she just asked, maybe Maddy wouldn't mind sleeping on the right tonight, or for the rest of the week. She could just ask.

'Oliver doesn't like people touching his things,' Maddy said quietly, glancing over her shoulder at her brother, sitting just a few feet behind her in the front passenger seat, fiddling with the radio as he chatted to Reyna in the driver's seat. Arthur was standing just behind Oliver and Reyna, now shooting a closed-mouth smile as he caught Red's eye. Or maybe it was actually Simon he was smiling at.

'Hey, it's my RV, I have a claim to anything in it,' Simon hiccupped.

'Your uncle's RV.' Maddy felt the need to correct him.

'Weren't you supposed to have a driving shift today too?' Red asked him. The plan was to share the drive equally among the six of them. She had taken the first two-hour shift, to get it out of the way, driving them out of Philly and down I-95 until they stopped for lunch. Arthur had sat with her the whole time, calmly directing her, as though he could tell when she was zoning in and out, or when she was panicking about the size of the RV and how small everything looked from up here. Mind readers everywhere, clearly. But she'd only known Arthur six or seven months; that wasn't fair.

'Reyna and I swapped,' Simon said, 'on account of the beers I'd already drunk.' A wicked smile. Simon had always been able to get away with anything, he was too funny, too quick with it. You couldn't stay mad at him. Well, Maddy could, if she was really trying.

'Hey, Reyna's really cool, by the way,' Simon whispered to Maddy, as though she had some claim over the coolness of her

brother's girlfriend. But she smiled and took it anyway, a glance over at the couple, picture-perfect, even with their backs turned.

A break in the conversation; now was the time to ask before Red forgot.

'Hey, Maddy, about the sofa bed –'

'– Shit!' Oliver hissed up front, an ugly sound. 'This is our exit right here. Move over, Reyna. Now! NOW.'

'I can't,' Reyna said, suddenly flustered, checking her mirrors and flipping the turn signal.

'They'll move for you, we're bigger, just go,' Oliver said, reaching forward like he might grab the wheel himself.

A screeching sound, not from the RV but from Reyna, as she pulled the hulking vehicle across one lane. An angry Chevrolet screamed on its horn, and the guy at the wheel threw up a middle finger, holding it out the window. Red pretended to catch it, slipping it into the chest pocket of her blue-and-yellow-check shirt, treasuring it forever.

'Move, move, move,' Oliver barked, and Reyna swerved right again, making the exit just in time. Another horn, this time from a furious Tesla they left behind on the highway.

'We could have just come off at the next one and worked it out. That's what Google Maps is for,' Reyna said, slowing down, her voice strange and squished like it was working its way through gritted teeth. Red had never seen Reyna flustered before, or angry, only ever smiling, wider each time she checked in with Oliver's eyes. What was that like, to be in love? She couldn't imagine it; that was why she watched them sometimes, learning by example. But Red should have said something about the exit earlier, shouldn't she? They'd made it almost all day without any raised voices. That was her fault.

'I'm sorry,' Oliver said now, tucking Reyna's thick black hair behind her ear so he could squeeze her shoulder, imprinting his fingers. 'I just want to get to the campsite ASAP. We're all tired.'

Red looked away, leaving them alone in their moment, well, as alone as they could get in an RV with six people, thirty-one-foot long. Apparently that extra foot was so important they couldn't round it down.

The world on her side of the RV was dark again. Trees lined the road, but Red could hardly see them, not past her own reflection and the other face hiding beneath it. She had to look away from that too, before she thought about it too much. Not here, not now.

The truck in front slowed as it passed a speed limit 35 sign, its brake lights staining the road red ahead of them. The color that followed her wherever she went, and it never meant anything good. But the road moved on, and so did they.

Oh, wait, what was it she needed to ask Maddy about again?

TWO

A strange yawning in Red's gut, the sound hidden by the wheels on the road. She couldn't be hungry, could she? They'd only stopped for dinner at a rest stop a few hours ago. But the feeling doubled down, twisting again, so she reached out for the bag of chips in front of Maddy. She removed a handful, placing them carefully in her mouth one by one, cheese dust coating her fingertips.

'Oh yeah,' Simon said, standing up and sidling out of the booth, heading toward his bunk beyond the mini-kitchen. 'And youse all owe me seven bucks for the snacks I got at the gas station.'

Red stared down at the chips left in her hand.

'Hey.' Maddy leaned over the table. 'I'll cover you for the snacks, don't worry about it.'

Red swallowed. Looked down even farther to hide her eyes from Maddy. Not worrying wasn't a choice, not one Red had anyway. In her darkest moments, those winter nights when she had to wear her coat to bed, over two pairs of pajamas and five pairs of socks, and still shivered anyway, Red sometimes wished she were Maddy Lavoy. To live in that warm house as though it belonged to her, to have everything

they had and everything she didn't anymore.

Stop that. She felt a flush in her cheeks. Shame was a red feeling, a hot one, just like guilt and anger. Why couldn't the Kennys heat their home on guilt and shame alone? But things would get better soon, right? Real soon, that was the plan, what it was all for. And then everything would be different. How freeing it would be to just do or think, and not have to double-think or triple-think, or say *No thank you, maybe next time*. To not beg for extra shifts at work and lose sleep either way. To take another handful of chips just because she wanted to.

Red realized she hadn't said anything yet. 'Thanks,' she mumbled, keeping her eyes to herself, but she didn't take any more chips, it didn't feel right. She'd just have to live with that feeling in her gut. And maybe it wasn't hunger after all that.

'No worries,' Maddy said. There, see, she didn't have any. Maddy had no need for worries. She was one of those people who was good at everything, first try. Well, apart from that time she insisted on taking up the harp. Unless Red was one of Maddy's worries. It did seem that way sometimes.

'Are we in South Carolina yet?' Red said, changing the subject, one thing *she* was good at.

'Not yet,' Oliver called behind, though he wasn't the Lavoy she'd asked. 'Soon. I think we should be at the campsite in around forty minutes.'

'Woohoo, spring break!' Simon yelled again in a high-pitched voice, and somehow he had another bottle of beer in his hand, the refrigerator door swinging open behind him.

'I got it,' Arthur said, passing an unsteady Simon in the narrow space between the sofa bed and the dining table, clapping him on the back. Arthur darted forward to catch the refrigerator

door and pushed it shut, the dim overhead lights flashing against his gold-framed glasses as he turned. Red liked his glasses, standing out against his tan skin and curly dark brown hair. She wondered whether she needed glasses; faraway things seem to have gotten farther and fuzzier lately. Another thing to add to the to-worry list, because she couldn't do anything about it. Yet. Arthur caught her looking, smiling as he ran a finger over the light stubble on his chin.

'Given up on Twenty Questions, have you?' he asked them both.

'Red forgot her person, place or thing,' Maddy said, and that made Red think: Wasn't there something else she'd forgotten, something she wanted to ask Maddy?

'Chip?' Maddy offered the bag to Arthur.

'Ah, I'm good, thanks.' He backed away from the bag, almost tripping over the corner of the sofa bed. A look clouded his eyes, and now that she was looking, was there a slight sheen of sweat on his forehead? Red didn't normally catch these things, but this one she did. Did that mean she looked at him too often?

'What's up?' she said. 'Deathly allergic to cheese puffs?'

'No, thankfully,' Arthur said, feeling his way as he sat down on the sofa bed.

Oh yes, Red needed to ask Maddy about which side she slept on. Shit, Arthur had just said something and she hadn't listened. Best to go with a well-placed 'Huh?'

'I said at least I don't feel as dizzy as Simon probably does.'

'Carsick?' Red said. 'Well, RV-sick?'

'No, it's not that.' Arthur shook his head. 'Probably far too late to be telling you all this, but I'm not that great with tight spaces.' He looked around at the crammed-in furniture and

the compact kitchen. 'I thought it would be wider –'

'That's what she said!' Simon interrupted.

'For god's sake, Simon, enough with *The Office* references,' Maddy said. 'He's been doing that since middle school, before he even knew what it meant.'

'I'm standing right here, Mads, don't third-person me.'

'Can you all shut up for a second?' Oliver spoke over Maddy's retort. 'We're trying to navigate over here.'

Red turned back to Arthur. 'Well, good thing you're not spending a whole week in this cramped RV. Oh . . . wait.' Red smiled at him.

'I know, right.'

Arthur was Simon's friend, really, but he was all of theirs by now. He didn't go to their high school, he went to one in South Philly, but he and Simon were on the same basketball team, both joined last year sometime. Red guessed Arthur didn't much like his friends at his own school, because he'd been coming to all their parties and hangouts since senior year began. And that was okay, because she liked having him around. He always asked how she was and how was her day, even though Red usually answered with lies or exaggerated stories with only faint traces of the truth. He showed interest when Red wasn't interesting at all. And there was that time he dropped her home after that New Year's Eve party and let her sit in his car, warming up in the dry air of the heater before she had to go inside the cold house and find whatever mess her dad had left for her. Arthur didn't know that was happening, he thought they were just talking, talking the night away at two in the morning outside her house. A small kindness he never knew he'd given her. She should give him one back.

‘We’ll be at the campsite soon, I think,’ she said. ‘You can get out and stretch your legs in the great big outdoors. I’ll come with you.’

‘Yeah.’ Arthur smiled. ‘I’ll be fine.’ His gaze dropped from her face to the table, where she was resting one hand. ‘I was meaning to ask earlier, but I didn’t want to distract you from driving. What does your hand say?’

‘Oh.’ Red blushed, raising the hand and rubbing at it self-consciously, realizing as she did that there was something written on the back of that one too. To-do lists everywhere, even on her own body. To-do lists and never-get-done lists. ‘I’ve got a two-for-one special for you,’ she said. ‘On our left hand, we have: *Call AT&T.*’

‘Ah, I see. Fascinating. What about?’ he asked.

‘You know,’ Red said. ‘Just to check in with them, see how they’re doing, whether they had a good day.’

Arthur nodded, a wry smile to match hers. ‘And did you do it?’

Red pursed her lips, looking at the empty box she’d drawn near her knuckle. ‘No,’ she said. ‘I ran out of time.’

‘And hand number two?’

‘On hand number two,’ Red said, drawing out the suspense, ‘we have the very elaborate and detailed instruction: *Pack.*’

‘You must have done that one,’ Arthur said.

‘Just about,’ she replied like it was a joke, but she was telling the truth this time. Packed literally right before she left the house this morning, no time to even double-check her bag against her list. She’d been too busy making sure there was enough food in the house for her dad while she was away.

‘Well, if you did it, why haven’t you checked it off?’ Arthur

said, pointing to the small empty box on the see-through flesh of her hand. 'Here.' He stood up, grabbing one of Maddy's pens from the table that she'd used in an earlier game of Hangman. He uncapped it and leaned toward Red, pressing the felt-tip end against her skin. Gently, he drew two lines: a check mark in the little box. 'There you go,' he said, standing back to admire his handiwork.

Red looked at her hand. And it felt stupid to admit it to herself, but the sight of that little check mark did change something in her. Small, minuscule, a tiny firework bursting in her head, but it felt good. It always felt good, checking off those boxes. She held out her hand proudly for Maddy to examine and got the nod of approval she was looking for.

Arthur was still watching her, a look in his eyes, a different one that Red couldn't decipher.

'Brazil nuts,' Red said.

Arthur's face screwed up. 'What?'

'I used to be allergic to them as a kid, but I'm not anymore. Isn't that weird, that a person can just change like that?' she said, fidgeting with the front pocket of her light blue jeans. She'd been sitting here in this spot a long time now. Too long. 'My mo— p-parents had to write it on my hand, so I wouldn't forget. Also, does the pattern in the curtains remind anyone of something?' She touched the white-and-blue curtain hanging down next to her, running her hand between the pleats. 'It's been bugging me all day, can't work out what it is. A cartoon or something.'

'It's just a random pattern,' Maddy answered.

'No, it's something. It's something.' Red traced her finger over it. Like the silhouette of a character she couldn't quite

place. From a book she was read at night, or a TV show? Either way, best not to think back to that time, to when she was little, because of who else might be there.

‘Tomatoes,’ Arthur said, saving her from the memory. ‘Give me a rash around my mouth. Only when raw, though.’ He straightened up, as did the wrinkles in his white baseball jersey, navy on the arms. ‘Anyway, I think I better help with the directions. I’m sensing that Simon is being a hindrance.’

‘I’m doing a stellar job, thank you very much,’ Simon said, looking over Oliver’s shoulder at an iPhone with a marbled orange case; must be Reyna’s. There was a map on the screen, a blue dot moving along a highlighted road. The blue dot was them, the six of them and all thirty-one feet of RV. Thank god it wasn’t a red dot. Blue was safer.

Arthur sidled to the front, blocking Red’s view of the screen, her eyes falling instead to Maddy, who gave her a not-so-subtle wink.

‘Huh?’

Maddy shushed her silently, nodding her head ever so slightly in Arthur’s direction. ‘Checks all the boxes,’ she whispered.

‘Stop it,’ Red warned her.

‘You stop it.’

They both stopped, because just then Maddy’s phone rang, an angry-wasp buzz against the table. The screen lit up with the view from the front camera: the off-white ceiling and a sliver of the underside of Maddy’s chin. Across the top was the word *Mom* and *FaceTime video*, with a *slide to answer* button waiting patiently at the bottom.

Maddy’s reaction was instant. Too quick. She tensed, bones sharpening beneath her skin. Her hand darted out to grab the

phone, holding it up and away to hide it from Red.

Red knew that was what she was doing, she always knew, though Maddy didn't know she knew.

'I'll call her when we get to the campsite,' Maddy said, almost too quiet to hear over the wheels, pressing the side button to reject the call. Looking anywhere but at Red.

Mom.

Like Maddy thought Red would split open and bleed just to see the word.

It had been the same for years. In freshman year, Maddy used to take kids to the side and tell them off for saying *yo Momma* jokes in front of Red. She didn't think Red would ever find out. It was a forbidden word, a dirty word. She even got weird talking about the Mummers Parade in front of Red.

How ridiculous.

Except, the thing was, Maddy wasn't wrong.

Red did bleed just to see the word, to hear it, to think it, to remember, the guilt leaving a crater in her chest. Blood, red as her name and red as her shame. So, she didn't think it, or remember, and she wouldn't look to the left to see her mom's face in her reflection in the window. No, she wouldn't. These eyes were just hers.