

ONE

“YOU DON’T WANT TO KILL ME,” I SAID.

“Of course I don’t, Clare. But I have to.”

If I wasn’t already bleeding, with the room tilting and swaying, I would have slapped myself. I never saw this coming. I had let my personal feelings cloud my judgment. And now I was looking down the barrel of a gun.

I never thought it would end like this, me on the hardwood floor in my house, propped up on my elbows, begging for my life. On my right was the crumpled body of a guy I hadn’t fully realized the depths of my feelings for until I saw the bullet rip into him.

I tried to use reason again. To buy myself just one more minute of life. “This isn’t you,” I said, pleading. “You’re not a murderer.”

“A couple weeks ago, I would’ve said the same thing. But you should know more than anyone how people surprise you. People can do things you never imagined they would. You think you know someone and then . . .”

My would-be killer shrugged and cocked the gun.

Then the world went black.

TWO

NINE DAYS EARLIER

“SHE’S A SUPER FREAK! SUPER FREAK! SHE’S SUPER-freaky, yow!”

Billy Rawlinson and Frankie Creedon popped up on the other side of the 7-Eleven aisle singing Rick James, their heads peeking over the cereal boxes like prairie dogs. I rolled my eyes, and they burst out laughing in that cackling, annoying way that two losers with low IQs do best. You’d think we were in elementary school by the way they teased me. But no, I was sixteen, and it was the summer before my junior year. Billy and Frankie had graduated from high school a month ago, but I still wasn’t free of them. They’d been teasing me since kindergarten, and they hadn’t broadened their repertoire much. I’d been serenaded by “Super Freak” lyrics over a dozen times.

I took the high road, ignored them, and brought my selections up to the counter. Unfortunately for all of us, they followed me.

“What are you buying, Clare?” Billy asked. “Candles? Crystals?”

Actually just a twenty-ounce Diet Coke and a package

of powdered donuts. The breakfast of champions. I kept my back turned and continued the silent treatment as I pulled a ten out of my shorts pocket and handed it to the cashier.

“Hey,” Frankie’s nasal voice implored. “We’re talking to you, freak.”

He poked me in the shoulder blade.

And that was his mistake.

I’m willing to overlook a stupid comment here and there. But poking me? Nuh-uh. I lifted my elbow up and brought it back hard into his gut.

Frankie let out an *oomph* as he doubled over.

I twirled around with a sweet-as-pie smile. “Oh no. Did you catch my elbow in your stomach while I was putting my change in my pocket? Sorry, Frankie. You should learn not to stand so close to people.”

Frankie was busy trying not to puke, but Billy narrowed his eyes at me and said, “You’ll regret that.”

I took my bag and left the store, head held high. This wasn’t the first time I’d had trouble like this, and it wouldn’t be the last.

I’ve had 666 scrawled across my locker at school. You’d think my given name was “Freak” by how often it was used in the halls. Snickers, whispers, and pointing fingers followed me into classrooms more times than I could count.

I’d done nothing to deserve this treatment. Contrary to popular belief, I was not a devil worshipper, nor a spawn of Satan.

But I *was* different.

And apparently different was bad.

In Eastport, a tourist town on Cape Cod, lives a family of freaks. My family. I'm a psychic. My brother's a medium. My mother's a telepath. Tourists love us. Townies scorn us.

My name is Clarity "Clare" Fern and my brother is Periwinkle "Perry" Fern. What were our parents thinking? Apparently where their next tab of acid was coming from. My mother's name is Starla, though Perry found her birth certificate one day and we discovered she was born "Mary." That find didn't go over well with her, and if we valued our lives we weren't going to share that tidbit with anyone else.

We live in a grand Victorian house in the busy section of town near the boardwalk. My parents bought it when they got married and left the "spiritualist community" they'd both grown up in. It's a lovely old house, with no permanent ghosts, and we use the first floor for our family business: readings. Not the bookstore kind.

Perry was waiting for me in the 7-Eleven parking lot, and as I slid into the passenger seat, I breathed a sigh of relief that his car was still idling. It was an eight-year-old black Civic with 120,000 miles on it. Perry wanted a new car, but Mom would never agree to that while this one worked fine. So he started it each morning hoping for the *click-click-click*, but the little metal box refused to die.

I checked the mirror to make sure the two stooges weren't following us in their pickup as Perry turned onto the main drag.