



CHAPTER ONE

The picture they usually use is one from the Activities spread of the yearbook. Chloe's got denim overalls buckled over a white T-shirt and her hair's wound into these two loose braids. Like an even blonder version of the girl on the hot cocoa box. She's gleaming. Beaming. And then, of course, there's the sheep.

It's a picture we took at 4-H, so Chloe has a lamb cradled under one arm. The networks loved that — Chloe and her little lamb. In the original snapshot, Chloe's other arm is linked through mine and we're leaning toward each other. But when the story first hit the papers, someone picked out that photo and cut me out of it, so it looks like Chloe has her head tipped toward nothing. The way dumber girls do, like something's just so hilarious they can't even hold their heads up right. Laughing Chloe and her lamb. Lost little Chloe.

It's not like I took it personally. It was exactly the kind of picture that we figured the networks would use.

It was all part of our plan.



CHAPTER TWO

In the few days after Chloe disappeared, I paid more attention to my own face than I ever had before. I had to look confused and stunned and afraid. And the more I had to arrange my face to look that way, the more I felt that way. After the first little while, I realized it helped to picture what Chloe would look like, feeling those things. She and I probably knew the details of each other's faces better than we knew our own.

So I bit my lip a lot. I took noticeably deep breaths. Shook my head as if I was trying to clear my thoughts. The hardest face to put on was the puzzled one. Like when Chloe's dad rapped on our screen door, asking if she was upstairs with me. And when my mom grilled me on whether or not Chloe talked to any strangers online. Or later, when we all had to sit down with the police officer. I chewed on the inside of my cheek the way Chloe did when she was trying to remember something. I said, with what I hoped was a helpless look in my eyes, "I'm sorry — I just don't remember Chloe saying anything about going for a ride after school." And then I cried for

real, mostly because I was so scared, and that way I could cover my face with my hands and not have to look the cop in the eyes.

I had sort of figured my mom would keep me home from school. I mean, that seemed like the reasonable thing, especially since we'd been up almost the whole weekend, either with the Caffreys or making sandwiches for the mobs of people gathered with flashlights on our property. But that Monday morning, she called up to my room like it was any other day. At first, it felt like any other day. I almost forgot what we'd done, that my mom wouldn't be honking the horn on the way down the hill until Chloe came running out of the barn. Chloe wasn't going to comb her hair in the car.

Realizing it made me gasp. It felt like when you eat too much ice cream and your head hurts, except it felt like that in my chest. I went downstairs clutching my stomach, like I was faking a stomachache. My parents were already in Phase United Front, though. Mom used her gentle voice, but she said, "Your dad and I have discussed this and we think this is the best plan."

"Plan? How is it a plan?" In my head, I was thinking, *You don't even know what a plan is. Because we have a plan. We have a much better, more detailed plan.*

"Finn, honey, this isn't a debate. Your father and I have considered this very carefully. You need to be around your friends right now. And we don't know how

long this is going to go on. . . .” My mom trailed off and looked stricken. And then I made myself look stricken to cover for the fact that I knew exactly how long it would go on, and honestly I wouldn’t have minded an eleven-day vacation from school.

“Well, what if she comes home and I’m not here?” I said. Because that’s what a normal kid would wonder, right? That’s what you’d ask if your best friend had just vanished.

“Then we’ll come straight away and pick you up. Really, honey, your dad’s going to stay right by. I’ll be at the Caffreys’ most of the morning, and then I’m putting in a few hours at Dr. Winter’s house.”

Then, when I started to slink back up the steps, my mom said something weird. She said, “Finn, honey, there’s nothing to be afraid of.”

I *was* afraid. I was scared to look people in the eye at school. Every time the school secretary came over the intercom, I expected she’d call me down to the front office. They’d tell me that they’d found Chloe. The same cop who had coaxed me to try to remember whether anyone had been looking at Chloe strangely lately would show up, ready to cuff my wrists behind my back and duck my head into the squad car.