

Two
Sides
to
Every
Murder

DANIELLE VALENTINE

putnam

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, New York



First published in the United States of America by G. P. Putnam's Sons,
an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2024

Copyright © 2024 by Rollins Enterprises, Inc.

Penguin supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin to continue to publish books for every reader.

G. P. Putnam's Sons is a registered trademark of Penguin Random House LLC.
The Penguin colophon is a registered trademark of Penguin Books Limited.

Visit us online at [PenguinRandomHouse.com](https://www.PenguinRandomHouse.com).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN 9780593352052 (hardcover)

ISBN 9780593857243 (international edition)

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America

BVG

Design by Rebecca Aidlin
Text set in Arno Pro

This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Other names, characters, places, and events are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or places or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

To Sawyer Rollins

—D. V.

Two
Sides
to
Every
Murder

JUNE 13, 2008

7:17 p.m.

Gia North's lungs ached as she tore through the trees. The woods pushed in around her, hiding the cabins and Camp Lost Lake lodge from view. It felt like she was in the middle of nowhere.

It's not too late, it can't be too late, she thought, willing her short legs to move faster. The muscles in her calves screamed.

She leapt from the grass to the hard, packed earth of the trail—

Her foot slipped out from beneath her. She felt a sharp crack through her chin and tasted dirt in her mouth before she even realized she'd fallen.

It was the worst possible time to trip.

She pushed herself off the ground, catching sight of her hands as she did. They were splayed in the dirt, and her fingers, her knuckles, her wrists—every inch of visible skin was covered in blood.

“Get up,” she told herself, her voice ragged. “Get *up*, Gia.”

She was tired and panicked and terrified, but lives depended on whether or not she found help.

She stood.

Gia, breathing hard, noticed her camera on the ground; it had

fallen out of her pocket and skidded across the path. That camera was probably the most important possession she had right now. The police would want to see the footage she'd just taken. She needed to put it back in its hiding place, where she could get to it later. She glanced over her shoulder, into the woods she'd just run through. Did she have time for that?

Making a quick decision, Gia snatched her camera off the ground and stuffed it back into her pocket, hurrying to her hiding place, past the trees and up the stairs to the camp director's office, stopping at the window. Hands shaking, she removed the faulty piece of trim no one but her knew about, pulled the camera out of her pocket and stowed it in the little hole in the siding, then slid the trim back in place.

She exhaled, relief flooding through her. *There*. At least that was done.

She had started to turn back toward the stairs when she noticed something lying at her feet. It was the camp key card she'd been carrying around for the last two days. It must've also fallen out of her pocket when she pulled the camera out again. She leaned over to pick it up—

And froze. From where she was standing, she could see all the way across to the archery range.

It was starting to get dark, but she could just make out the shapes of two figures standing in the field. She was about to lift her arms, to call out to them for help, but something stopped her. Were they arguing? Gia squinted, trying to see who they were. That was the blond hair and tall, broad-shouldered build of Jacob Knight, the camp's archery instructor, but she couldn't tell who the other person was. They were slender and shorter than Jacob—

probably a woman, Gia thought. But there was something wrong with her face. It looked misshapen, old, haggard, with green-tinted skin and long, stringy gray hair, and her eyes were black, sunken, surrounded by deeply lined, rubbery skin, her nose long, hooked, covered in warts—

A mask, Gia realized. The woman's face looked so messed up because she was wearing a mask.

As Gia watched from her perch outside the office, the woman in the mask plucked an arrow out of the nearest target and lunged for Jacob, stabbing him through the throat.

Jacob grabbed at the arrow protruding from his neck, blood spurting through his fingers. A spasm jerked through him. He fell to his knees in the dirt. A moment later, his body crumpled to the ground.

Gia released a choked scream. She pressed her hands over her mouth to muffle the sound, but she was a beat too late. Her voice was already echoing through the woods.

And now the woman was lifting her head. She was looking right at Gia.

No, Gia thought. She turned, grabbing for the office door. Her hands were shaking badly, still slick with blood, and it took her two tries to get the knob to turn.

Before she could throw the door open, Gia glanced over her shoulder. The woman had picked up a bow from the ground and loaded an arrow. She aimed—

The air whistled as the arrow flew, with perfect aim, at Gia's face.

Olivia

I was ten years old when I first heard the story of the Witch of Lost Lake.

It was at Maeve Lewis's slumber party, of all places. That was the year Maeve decided she didn't like me—for reasons I never understood, despite putting a considerable amount of research into the subject—and I could tell something was up within minutes of getting to her house with my overnight bag. She kept shooting me sideways glances, smiling like we were good friends, which, by the way, we *weren't*. Even now I feel a chill straight down my spine whenever I think about it.

Maeve waited until we'd all gotten into our pajamas, a dozen tween girls in *Frozen* sleeping bags, then she'd loaded up this fake crackling fire clip on her iPad and told the story of the Camp Lost Lake murders.

"The woods around here have been used as campgrounds for, like, a hundred years," she'd said, looking right at me as she added, "owned by the same family the whole time."

She was talking about my family, of course. Everyone knew the D'Angelis owned Camp Lost Lake. This used to be a badge

of honor, or so I'm told. Years ago, the camp was beloved in our small town. Every local business had the words HOME OF CAMP LOST LAKE proudly printed on its signs, usually along with a WELCOME, CAMP LOST LAKERS! banner that hung in its windows or doorway every summer. Once upon a time, the camp was a big moneymaker. Half the residents of Lost Lake, New York, worked there and nearly everyone attended for at least a year. It was most people's first job, their first night away from home, the place where they had their first crush.

At least, that's what my older sister, Andie, told me. Andie's a lot older than me, so she actually got to go, but the camp's been closed since that night back in 2008. Now, most of us only know anything about it because of stories like Maeve's.

"Get to the story already," my best friend, Hazel Katz, told her, and I shot her a small smile of thanks. Hazel's been my ride or die since we were in kindergarten. Even at ten, she didn't tolerate bullies.

"Fine," Maeve said, rolling her eyes. "So there's this story that a witch lives out in the woods. The witch sleeps all day and only comes out at night, and if you happen to be in the woods after dark, she'll kidnap you to use in her *spells*."

At ten, we loved stuff like this. The other girls all squealed and covered their eyes, but I just swallowed. So far, this wasn't too bad. "So, the witch is sort of like the boogeyman?" I asked.

"Totally," Maeve said. "Just like the boogeyman. People think the camp counselors made her up to keep the little kids from sneaking out at night. But then, ten years ago . . ." Here, Maeve lowered her voice. "Those . . . *murders* happened. And people say the woman who did it, Lori Knight, was wearing a witch's

mask when she stabbed her husband through the neck.”

No squeals this time. The group was dead silent. We were young, but most of us had already heard bits and pieces of the story from older siblings or friends. We knew all about how Lori Knight lost it and took on the Witch of Lost Lake persona, donning a cheap witch’s mask and killing her cheating husband, Jacob, with his own bow and arrow. And when she saw that some nosy camp counselor, a teenager named Gia North, had been watching her, she killed her, too.

At first, people thought those were the only two people she’d killed. Until they realized that Lori’s son, seventeen-year-old Matthew Knight, was missing, too. Blood and signs of a struggle at the top of the lighthouse made most people assume he was pushed out the window and drowned in the lake below, but they never did find his body.

Three murders in just one night. This town hadn’t seen anything like it before or since.

“People say Lori *became* the Witch of Lost Lake that night,” Maeve continued. “They think she killed Gia because Gia was misbehaving. She was out in the woods at night when she wasn’t supposed to be, so Lori punished her, just like the witch did to the kids in the story. The cops never caught Lori; she could still be out in the woods today, waiting for another kid to wander back into her camp to kill them, too. But there’s another part of the story, a part not many people know . . .”

“Stop it,” Hazel said, glancing at me. She must’ve already figured out where Maeve was going with the story. I thought I knew, too.

I’d heard the story before. I thought I knew every detail. My mother, Miranda D’Angeli, had been the director of Camp Lost

Lake back in 2008. Lori was her assistant. I already knew my mom was at camp that night, that she'd told the cops she'd seen Lori running from the scene of the crime covered in Gia's blood. I figured that's what Maeve was going to tell everyone.

But Maeve shocked me by adding the part of the story I didn't already know, the part my own mother had neglected to tell me for ten years:

"The trauma of witnessing a *murder* caused Mrs. D'Angeli to go into early labor," Maeve said, smiling right at me. "She had her baby right there, in the Camp Lost Lake parking lot, just seconds after the most gruesome crime this town has ever seen."

A dozen sets of eyes turned to stare at me. Because, of course, *I* was the baby Maeve was talking about.

Maeve was probably hoping I'd cry. I cried pretty easily back then, whenever I got a bad grade on an assignment or saw a sad movie, or when someone said something mean to me or anyone else, really.

I managed not to cry that night. I waited until all the other girls got distracted braiding each other's hair and discussing which boys did and did not have cooties, and then I did what I do best: my homework.

I slipped Maeve's iPad off her sleeping bag, and I read all about the Camp Lost Lake murders.

Maeve hadn't been exaggerating. My mother had given birth to me in the parking lot right outside her office while Lori Knight ran through the woods to escape the cops.

After the sleepover, I made Mom tell me everything about the night I was born. I know how far along she was—thirty-seven weeks—and how long she was in labor—two hours. I know

the camp groundskeeper, Henry Roberts, helped deliver me before my dad arrived, and that they couldn't even call an ambulance because Lori had cut the cord to the landline. The only place at camp with any cell service was the top of the lighthouse, and no one wanted to leave Mom alone. I know I was born at 7:37 p.m., after just ten minutes of pushing.

I know everything, every last detail of my birth story.

Or I thought I did.

And yet here I sit, sixteen years after the night I was born, staring down at my phone and grappling with a pretty big gap in my knowledge. I hold my breath as I reread the latest email from the genetic company for the twelve-thousandth time. Particularly the part that reads *probability of paternity*.

I keep expecting it to change, but it doesn't.

It started with my history class final. The assignment was to "trace your family's ancestry as far back as you can and make a prediction about what their lives would've been like a hundred years ago." I sent my DNA sample to one of those online ancestry places; I planned to pick a region in Italy to focus on once I got the results back. My dad's entire family is Italian, and I was sure I'd find some ancestors from the Tuscan Valley, or maybe Naples or Rome. It was going to be perfect. My schoolwork was always perfect.

Only I couldn't complete the assignment, because my ancestry results came back, and it turns out I have zero Italian in my blood. Not a single drop.

I didn't understand. My name is *Olivia D'Angeli*. We have the actual trunk one of Dad's great-great-great-grandmothers brought to Ellis Island when she immigrated from Sicily two hundred years ago. Every weekend Dad makes a Sunday gravy and

meatballs using my nonna Mia's recipe. Two summers ago, we visited his cousins outside of Genoa. I *know* we're Italian.

I'd written back to the company and calmly explained there'd been an error. The list of regions on my profile were clearly only from my mom's side of the family: England, Sweden, Norway, Wales, etc. It was like they'd left my dad off entirely. They'd invited me to submit again. Which I did. *Three* times.

I only did the paternity test to prove to them that they were still getting it wrong, that there was a mistake.

The results of the test came in this morning.

Probability of Paternity: 0%

The DNA place hadn't made a mistake. *I* had. The man who'd spent hours helping me research my first computer and taught me how to choose a ripe tomato; the man who shares my love of travel documentaries and ethnic food; the man who makes me spin the little globe in his office every year on my birthday, close my eyes, and point to some new, distant place I'm going to travel to once I graduate, *that* man isn't really my dad.

Tears blur my eyes. I want to print out the results so I have something to rip into a million pieces. I want to throw things. I want to scream.

"Olivia?"

I flinch. My dad's voice. No, not my dad's—*Johnny D'Angeli's* voice. I blink a few times to get the tears out of my eyes before I turn.

"You coming down for lunch?" Dad (I'll never be able to think of him as Johnny) asks, leaning in through my bedroom door.

A lump forms in my throat. Does he know he's not my real

father? If he doesn't, the truth will kill him. And as angry as I am, as betrayed as I feel, I refuse to be the one to do that. Not if I don't have to.

I click out of my email account, forcing a smile. "Yeah," I tell him. "Be down in a minute."

Downstairs in the kitchen, I notice an old Polaroid of my mom and dad taped to the door of the refrigerator. In it, Mom's waving her hand at the camera, a tiny purple gemstone sparkling from her ring finger, and Dad's got his arm around her, beaming. They're standing behind the counter of Dad's restaurant, the Lost Lake Diner. He proposed by dropping her engagement ring into her morning matcha latte—which they didn't even have on the menu, but he learned to make just for her. Mom said she was so surprised she spilled the whole cup down her shirt. If you squint, you can see the green stain.

The picture has been on the fridge since I was born, but I find myself studying it as though seeing it for the first time, noticing all these little details about my mom that I never thought about before. Like the PTA T-shirt she got when she ran the bake sale at Andie's school; the fancy, solar-charging hiking watch she bought herself for her thirtieth birthday; the heart-shaped locket she wore, which contained a picture of Andie as a baby—she added a picture of me, too, after I was born. Even the engagement ring is a little clue about who she is. It's not a diamond but an amethyst, which is her birthstone, because diamonds are too expensive and not always ethically sourced.

I feel my chest tighten. I thought I knew who my mom was, a responsible woman who loved the outdoors and her family, who cared about the environment, who thought of Dad's diner as a second home. Now, those details feel like a costume, like she's trying to convince me and the rest of the world that she's this good person. But how much of it is really true? Is *any* of it true?

"Olivia, honey, is that what you're wearing?" Mom asks. I hadn't heard her come into the kitchen behind me, but the word *LIAR* flashes bright neon in my brain at the sound of her voice. I pull my eyes away from the photo and turn to face her.

I look like my mom. My older sister, Andie, and I both do, which makes sense since Johnny isn't Andie's dad, either; my mom had her right after high school. The three of us are bird-boned, with big, heart-shaped faces. We look like the people in the restaurant who are going to ask you if you could please turn the heat up, it's getting cold in here.

Mom has the same blond hair as me and Andie, but she wears hers in a blunt bob that falls just under her chin. She's short and trim and close enough to my size that we could share clothes if I suddenly developed a taste for Eileen Fisher and artsy clogs. We never had one of those angry, shouty relationships like you see on TV. I always trusted her. She was the person I called to bring me a fresh pair of jeans when I got my period during junior high study hall, and she was the only one I told about my crush on Simon Collins my freshman year or when I accidentally walked out of the general store without paying for my dark chocolate sea salt KIND bar. When she realized I was more into books than the outdoors, she made a point of mapping out the nearest bookstore whenever we took the camper out for the weekend and, in return,

I made a point of taking a break from reading to go on a hike with her every once in a while.

Does Mom know Dad's not my real dad? I wonder. *She has to, right?* I run through the most likely explanations for what happened. Maybe they couldn't get pregnant the old-fashioned way? Maybe they used a donor?

Or maybe she cheated.

The thought turns my stomach. The image I have of my PTA-shirt-wearing, environmentally conscious, outdoors-loving mother breaks apart in my head.

Maybe I don't know her at all.

"Olivia," Mom says my name slowly and a touch louder than usual, like she sometimes does when she's asked me a question a couple of times but I'm too in my own head to hear her.

"Uh . . . you said something about my outfit?" I glance down at what I'm wearing: basic V-neck T-shirt, jean shorts, cardigan tied around my waist, work boots. My hair's pulled back in the same no-nonsense ponytail I wear daily, except on special occasions. I don't usually give my clothes a ton of thought, and today the only thing I worried about was putting on something I could work in. "What's wrong with it?"

"Andie wants everyone in their Antlers polos, in case of press." Mom's already wearing hers, I notice. I instantly recognize the logo my sister designed for her new coworking space: a pair of deer's antlers curving out of a wreath of twigs and flowers, the word ANTLERS weaving through them in elaborate script. It's cool and classy, like everything Andie does. On the back of the polo are the words: WORK. WELLNESS. PLAY.

"Are you coming with us to the campgrounds?" I ask, frowning. Antlers is taking over the old Camp Lost Lake grounds, the first

time that place has been open to the public since the murders.

Mom smiles. “Just wearing the shirt in solidarity so your sister knows how much we all support her.”

I give her a thin smile, though I can’t imagine a world in which Andie doesn’t realize how much our family supports her.

Mom’s checking out my boots now. “Maybe think about changing the boots, too,” she adds. It’s the voice she uses when she doesn’t like something but won’t actually come out and *say* she doesn’t like it. Heaven forbid she express a negative opinion.

“They’re *work* boots,” I say, the annoyance obvious in my own voice. “You know, for *working*? You’re the one who’s always telling me how important it is to wear the right gear.”

To be fair, I’m pretty sure she was talking about being sure to wear hiking boots that fit correctly and appropriate helmets and protective equipment when playing sports. But I feel like starting a fight.

Mom folds her arms over her chest, seeming confused by my tone. I don’t usually argue with her. I’m a pretty typical people-pleasing perfectionist. I’d do anything for a metaphorical gold star.

“Honey, is something wrong?” she asks. “Are you feeling okay?”

I’m about to continue our argument when a crunch of tires in our gravel drive cuts me off. Mom’s eyes light up. “Andie’s here,” she says, clearly relieved for a natural end to the great work boot argument of 2024. “Hurry, go change.”

I dig around in my closet for a few minutes, not even looking for my polo, just pulling clothes off racks, letting jackets fall to the ground, throwing shoes. I need to work my frustration out.

I should go right back downstairs, confront my mom, and make her tell me the truth. But she's already lied to me my whole life. She lied on my *birth certificate*, which . . . I don't even know if that's legal. And she probably lied to my dad, to Andie. Why would she tell the truth now?

No, if I ask my mom who my real dad is, she's just going to lie some more. She'll do it with a smile on her face while pretending to examine her trim, neatly manicured nails. I need proof. I can already hear how she might explain the DNA test away, telling me I used the wrong strand of hair—which is impossible. I got the hair from my dad's mustache comb, which no one else uses. I want the whole truth. No matter how painful it is.

I'm still in my head, running through the possibilities, when I walk in on my sister and mother in the dining room. They're hugging and . . .

I frown. Wait . . . are they *crying*?

Holding my breath, I duck behind the wall that separates the front hall from the dining room so I can observe without being super obvious about it. Andie's thin shoulders are shaking, her dark under-eyes stark against her pale skin, like she hasn't been sleeping much. She isn't making any noise at all, which is how she cries when she's really upset, big silent sobs like she's keeping all the pain locked up inside. Mom has her arms wrapped tight around her shoulders, a single tear rolling down her cheek, carving an unseemly line through her normally flawless, understated makeup. Andie's dog, Pickle Rick, is sniffing around their heels, whining a little, clearly stressed by their distress.

I feel a chill on my skin, watching them. We're not a family that cries. When I was in the middle of one of my preteen crying

bouts, I distinctly remember my mom pulling me aside and telling me I needed to calm down, that tears made people uncomfortable. She even let me use her handkerchief to dry my eyes. It was so beautiful, silk and floral and gossamer thin. I remember thinking it looked like it had never been used.

Something's up. I'm starting to wonder if I should back away quietly, pretend I never even saw them, but Pickle Rick catches my scent and turns, yipping as he trots up to me.

My mom pulls away from Andie, swiping the mascara from her cheeks. "Olivia," she says, laughing like I've just told a joke. "I'm sorry, baby, I didn't see you there."

Pickle Rick has his front two paws on my legs now, asking to be picked up and snuggled. I scoop him off the floor and give him a scratch behind the ears.

"Is everything okay?" I ask. I direct the question to my mother, but I'm staring at the back of Andie's head. Andie keeps her hair shoulder-length, like mine, but she flat irons it so it's pin-straight, the bottom edges cutting a sharp line across her shoulder blades.

"It's nothing," Mom says, touching Andie's cheek. "I'm just so happy to see my baby again, that's all."

"Oh," I say, frowning. It's not just tears that our family doesn't do. We all love each other and we're pretty close, but this outburst of emotion is unusual. Mom's way more likely to make a joke than sob when she's overcome. She didn't even cry when Dad proposed; she broke into laughter.

This is weird.

I keep staring at the back of Andie's head, willing her to look at me. When she finally does, her eyes are bone-dry, and there's not a hint of red on her cheeks. There wouldn't be. Andie's an expert

at appearing cool and collected, no matter how she feels below the surface. My whole life, she's been the model for how a "good girl" acts: effortlessly perfect.

"You ready?" she asks.

"Uh, yeah," I say. "Just let me grab a granola bar. I forgot to eat lunch."

"Okay! I'll be out in the car."

Back in the kitchen, my boot slips on something on the floor and I lurch forward, steadying myself against the wall. I glance down to see what I stepped on.

It's the photograph of my parents that had been taped to the fridge. I must've knocked it off the door when I stormed out of the room. I go to pick it up—

And then I pause, noticing something I never registered before.

There's another man in the frame with my parents. He's a little blurry, but I recognize him anyway.

Of course I recognize him. He's famous around here. Or notorious, I guess. The most notorious cheater in all of Lost Lake.

Jacob Knight, the husband Lori Knight murdered for cheating on her sixteen years ago, is sitting at the end of the counter where my newly engaged parents are standing. His tiny, blurry eyes seem to be fixed on my mother, and he looks . . .

Angry. He's staring at my mother with his jaw clenched.

Something cold fills my stomach.

There aren't a lot of reasons I would accept my mother lying to me about who my real dad is. But they never did figure out who

Jacob had been cheating on his wife with. Come to think of it, I don't even know how people knew he was cheating on his wife. But, if it was my mom, if she'd been pregnant with *his* baby the night Lori Knight turned into a witch . . .

Well. Maybe the lie was justified.