

**Excerpt from REASONS TO LIE by Emily Listfield**

**From:** Jerome Nederlander, Headmaster

**To:** Dearborn Parents

**Date:** Saturday, October 11

**Subject:** A tragic loss on class trip



Dear Parents,

It is with profound sadness that I must inform you of a tragic incident that occurred on the junior class trip to the Forest Valley Camp in Clearview, New York last night. Despite our commitment to ensuring the safety of all students, we have experienced the loss of one of our own.

At this moment, we are not at liberty to disclose the identity of the student out of respect for the family's privacy.

The safety of your children has always been our highest priority, and we are taking every measure to support these efforts. We are working closely with Forest Valley and local authorities to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death.

We understand this news will be distressing. A crisis team will be in place Monday morning to help any students who may need it.

We look forward to sharing more information in a fully transparent manner as details become available.

Sincerely,  
Jerome Nederlander  
Headmaster  
Dearborn Academy

**PART ONE**

## Chapter 1: ABBY

*Twenty-two days before the murder*

*Thursday, September 18*

The first morning I walked through the double-height red doors of Dearborn Academy and saw the brass plaque inscribed “Established 1857,” I realized what a vastly different world it was from the one I grew up in. I thought, in time, I would come to feel at home here. Accepted, even. I hoped, at least, it would tip the scales for my daughter, Rachel.

The opposite has proved true.

I shift my legs under the desk as Mrs. Rafferty scribbles computations on the whiteboard, a sexual flush brought on by the wonders of Precalculus 2 rinsing her pale Irish face. All around me, parents are taking notes in pebbled leather journals and snapping pictures of the whiteboard. Curriculum Night at Dearborn is taken very seriously indeed.

I dig my fingernails into the soft flesh of my palms.

I’m lucky to be here.

I tell myself that every time I walk into the twelve-story building with its NASA-worthy labs and sun-drenched studios.

How lucky I am.

How lucky Rachel is.

And yet.

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The minute the bell rings, there’s a mad dash for the door, the mothers’ laughter ricocheting down the broad hallway as they catch up on who let the summer’s rosé go to their hips, locked in the best SAT tutor, or found the genius new Pilates instructor, while their husbands nod smugly to each other. All the fathers have to do to win is show up.

I slip through the scrum, looking for Kara, who rescues me again and again on nights like this. When I can’t find her, I make my way to the white-linen-covered table groaning with platters of gluten-free cookies and grab one, not stopping to deliberate between oatmeal and chocolate chip. It’s generally agreed on by Dearborn mothers that the act of eating is a sign of

moral and physical weakness. Food is, on the other hand, of utmost concern when it comes to their children. Last year, a committee was organized to ensure that lunches not only are organic and locally sourced but also reflect ethnic diversity.

I'm hurrying down the hallway with my contraband when Bill and Marci Carter sidle up beside me.

"Crazy that the girls are in junior year, isn't it?" Bill says. "Before you know it, they'll be leaving for college." He oozes slippery charm, his curling chestnut hair long enough to signal he doesn't work on Wall Street but has some creative-adjacent job—media, tech, something Hollywood-on-the-Hudson-ish.

A piece of dry cookie lodges in my throat. It does, in fact, seem crazy. All the clichés are proving true—how quickly your children change without you noticing until suddenly they're teenagers hungry for separation, practicing it in ways small and large. Some safe, some definitely not.

I turn to Marci. "How was your summer?"

As a single woman, it's best to make myself as unthreatening as possible. Smile at the other mothers. Avoid eye contact with their husbands. It infuriates me that the default assumption is that I'm the one on the make. Especially here. With Bill and Marci Carter.

Marci, all cheekbones and moneyed hauteur, sized me up on the first day of kindergarten, ascertaining my address, vacation spots, and school affiliations, and silently dismissed me. The CIA could learn a thing or two about the art of soft interrogation from Marci Carter. "Too short," she deigns to reply.

"Amanda said Rachel worked as a camp counselor?" Bill remarks.

I'm surprised Amanda has mentioned Rachel; they exist on such different social planes. Amanda is not the prettiest or smartest girl in the class, but her sheer confidence allows her to wield a lacerating power. I used to think the Amandas of the world got their comeuppance in the end, but Dearborn is filled with former Amandas.

"Rachel was a CIT at Forest Valley."

"Isn't that the godforsaken place they're going to in three weeks?" Marci asks, alarmed. "I can't believe the school is going ahead after what happened there last year. Are they waiting for someone to die there?"

“I’m sure they’ll put extra safety measures in place,” Bill assures her offhandedly.

“Let’s hope so, because next time, they may not be so lucky,” Marci retorts, annoyed by her husband’s dismissive tone.

She shakes her head and walks off in search of more fertile ground, leaving me alone with Bill. Who I absolutely do not want to be alone with. I spot Kara and tear off after her.

“Help.”

She glances back at Bill Carter. “You can’t be serious? Still?”

“Bathroom. Now,” I hiss. Then in a more public voice, “What class are you coming from?”

“Ceramics.”

“I didn’t know Olivia is interested in ceramics.”

“Olivia is interested in anything that doesn’t involve homework.” Kara groans. “My only goal is to have her survive this year.”

The disparities between our daughters are something we tread lightly on. Olivia, sparks shooting out in every direction, constantly daring the world. Rachel, a straight A student who never misses curfew and isn’t invited to parties, at least not the ones that matter.

I push open the bathroom door and peer under the stall doors to make sure no one is there while Kara checks herself in the mirror, grimacing as she wipes a smudge of mascara.

“I keep thinking I’m tired, and then I realize this is the new normal. It’s like your face plateaus for a few years, then you wake up one morning to find everything dropped and you’ve landed on the next level down.”

“You look fine,” I assure her. As we do.

“That’s easy for you to say.”

At thirty-nine, I’m seven years younger than Kara, a flaw she only grudgingly forgives me for. Not everyone here does.

“What was that in the hallway?” she asks, her voice tinged with revulsion. “I thought Bill stopped baiting you.”

Kara, ensconced in a happy marriage, Midwestern probity embedded in her veins, is continually shocked by men’s bad behavior in a way that I’m not.

“He did,” I assure her. “I’d like to keep it that way.”

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