

Instantly, Ali's happiness was flattened by guilt, by a grinding sense of obligation planted in her years ago. When she was a little girl on her way to birthday parties and sleepovers. When her parents' constant refrain was "*What about Morgan? You wouldn't want her going off and leaving you all alone. Be a good girl. Take care of your sister.*" That lifelong guilt about Morgan's loneliness was what had made Ali agree to share a room with her this weekend, instead of being where she wanted to be, with Matt.

Ali opened the book on the bedside table, a romance novel. On the inside cover, her sister had written her full name: Morgan Marie Spencer. The same way she'd written her name in every book since she was six—like she was relentlessly hanging on to being a child.

Ali glanced toward the closed bathroom door, thinking: *Everybody in the wedding is staying in this mansion tonight. The place will be full of parties. You're twenty-seven, Morgan. All grown up. Go out... have some fun.*

But the truth was that Morgan had nowhere to go. She didn't know how to find her own fun. She'd stubbornly refused to learn.

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In years to come, the seemingly random events taking place in the mansion that night would lead to brutal, unexpected violence—and to the discovery of something so bizarre it would be heart-stopping. No one could have known this.

But if Ali had a choice, would she have wanted to know? Would she have appreciated advance notice on the identity of the person who would someday shatter her life? What would be less painful? To find out it was a stranger? Or someone close? Someone she'd slept beside or danced with? Maybe even somebody she loved?

Was it for the best that, in a future place and time, things happened exactly the way they did? Hitting her out of the blue. Without warning.