

When she arrived at the foot of the stairs, the front door rattled. Fear, cold and stark, rose up in her throat and choked her as she heard the lock snap and watched, rooted to the floor, the creaky old door jiggle in its frame. The anticipation mingled with fright, produced a potent, sick feeling churning inside her like the bad horror movie she'd recently viewed on late-night cable television.

After what seemed an eternity, the door flung open. The first thought entering her brain was a ghost had entered her home. A younger, blonder visage of Morgan stood in the threshold. Before she could utter his name, a second, more coherent thought followed; a ghost wouldn't use a key.

The man in the doorway took one step inside and stopped abruptly, clenched his jaw, and stared. The familiar stranger invading her new home could only be one person.

"My goodness, you're Ben! You're Morgan's son!" she exclaimed.

"Well, we know who I am. Now who the hell are you, and why are you trespassing in my house?"

"Your house?" she asked with disbelief. "This is *my* home. Morgan gave it to me!"

"I don't know who you are, lady, but I suggest you get a move on it. I'll give you five minutes before I call the police." He pointed to his platinum-cased wristwatch for emphasis.

"Don't bother waiting." She reached into her handbag and removed her cell phone. With shaking fingers, she punched in 911.

The line connected after the second ring. "911, what is your emergency?" asked the female dispatcher.

"My name is Josselyn Adler. I'm the new owner of 22 Little Pine Road. A man has let himself into my home and is now threatening me." Although she was quaking on the inside, she strove to keep her voice and demeanor strong and confident.

"I have an officer on the way, Ms. Adler. Would you like to stay on the line with me until he arrives?" she offered.

"No, thank you. I'll be fine," she assured her.

As she disconnected her phone, Ben's gaze burned into her. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction of showing any fear. While growing up, she had dealt with her share of tormentors. One forty-year-old, blond-haired bully was not going to intimidate her or drive her from a home that was rightfully hers.

"Very nice performance," he said snidely.

"Excuse me?" She furrowed her brow and made eye contact. Ben Parnell had his father's glacial, blue eyes.

"Any moment one of Unity's finest will be arriving to play knight in shining armor and save the poor maiden from the big, bad wolf."

Before she could utter a word in reply, a black patrol car came to a screeching halt on the street. An officer threw open the car door and made long, quick strides to the house. His uniform and Unity Police Department baseball cap matched the color of his car.

A lump formed in her throat. As she was growing up, a police car in front of the house and an officer at the door meant her father was in some sort of trouble yet again.

"Good evening, Miss. I'm Officer Smith." He looked to Ben. "It's certainly been a long time since you've been around, Ben." Not waiting for an answer from him, he turned his attention back to Josselyn. "What seems to be the problem tonight?"

He knew Ben by his first name. They looked to be about the same age, and in this small town, it was likely they knew each other growing up. Although Officer Smith seemed friendly enough, would he side with the hometown boy rather than with the stranger girl?

"This is my house. Morgan Parnell left it to me in his will. Now he..." She paused and pointed at Ben. "He thinks it's his house."

"I have a will, too," Ben loudly interrupted. "And mine is legitimate!"

His deep voice vibrated through her, causing her head to ache. Flustered, she pulled an envelope from her handbag. Morgan's

attorney gave to her a copy of the will a few days earlier. She handed it to Officer Smith. To her dismay, Ben also produced a document from a briefcase.

*This is very bad.*

She hoped Ben had been bluffing.