Chapter One

I woke up exhausted. Rolling over lazily in bed, I glanced up at my clock: 4:12 A.M. The faint buzzing in my room lulled me back to sleep.

The sharp ping of the alarm clock startled me out of my seemingly deep sleep. 6:00 A.M., as usual. I stumbled through my dark, messy room as my hand skimmed the wall, searching for the light switch. As the overhead lights flickered on I darted across the hall to the bathroom I shared with my brother, Nick, and grabbed my toothbrush and toothpaste. I did a little dance while brushing my teeth in order to get my school uniform on my body, and in a whirl I was out the door, bagel in hand, speed-walking to the desolate stop sign where my bus picked me up. The bushes in my neighbor’s lawn rustled, and I glanced in their direction out of instinct. All I saw were the three stationary rosebushes that were tended to with such great care. The school bus rounded the corner and I stepped onto it, greeting my bus driver and then maneuvering my field hockey bag and backpack with me to the back of the bus, where I put in my earphones and shut out the world.

The remainder of the day was just as uneventful as it started. School went by in a blur of notes and brief glances exchanged with classmates I was close with but didn’t know at all. Dinner with my family was superficially pleasant and generally terse. I periodically stared off into space, and couldn’t shake the feeling that something just wasn’t right, until my overbearing father shook me out of my trance and resumed my forced participation in the dull conversation.

As I drifted off to sleep that night, the shadow of a man was imprinted into the back of my eyelids. I was scared of him, but not alarmed that he was there.