

Prologue

2013

Martha's Vineyard, Cape Cod, USA

She lay on the ground with her cheek pressed flat against the Persian rug, her mouth stirring sporadically, as if she were about to speak. Her hands were tightly balled fists at her sides and her breathing was laboured and shallow. Outside, amidst the muffled noise of running feet and barking dogs, a child cried out: David, perhaps, or Joshua? She couldn't tell. Whoever it was, he was hurriedly picked up and hushed. It was nearly six p.m. and the hard, high ball of fire that was the sun had started slipping towards the horizon. It was only May but already the days were long and hot. A week ago, just before her guests arrived, she'd ordered the covers off the swimming pool. Every morning, the servants unfurled the large white patio umbrellas and plumped up the blue-and-white striped cushions, making the shimmering turquoise pool the centre of the day's activities. Every day, including today. *Today*. Her skin began to crawl.

For the hundredth time, her mind skittered over the hours that had passed since that morning, trying to make sense of it all. The day had begun like every other day. She'd gone out early, just as dawn was breaking, drink in hand – orange juice, with the barest splash of vodka – just enough to get the day going. She'd dipped her feet in the heated water at the shallow end, enjoying the early-morning quiet. Toys, the debris of games begun and abandoned, lay scattered around the grey birch decking that ran all the way around the house. *Toys. Children's toys*. At the thought of the toys, her lips began to tremble all over again. She moved her head a fraction and the rich, dense colours of the carpet rose up to meet her half-closed eyes. Yellow: *pomegranate, chamomile, egg-yolk*. Red: *blood, wine, burgundy, ruby*. Black: *walnut, bark, night*. It was a beautiful carpet. Large and soft, it stretched from one end of the study to the other. Expensive, too. She'd lied to Adam about the price, of

course, knocking off a few thousand dollars, though she'd no reason to – it was *her* money, after all. But Adam was so unpredictable these days, especially where money was concerned. Her stomach gave a horrible, twisting lurch. Oh, God, Adam. He would be back from New York any minute now. What would he say? He would blame her, of course. Everyone blamed her and why the hell shouldn't they? It was her fault. She was to blame, no one else.

Her mind began to wander uncontrollably again, darting back and forth over the day's events but without any sense of order. *When* did it happen? Before or after breakfast? After she'd come in from the pool? Had she *really* told Clea to take a break? 'No, no, *you* have an afternoon off, Clea. I'll look after them. Come *on*, four kids . . . it's not rocket science!' She'd grinned at her. Clea. Lovely Clea, the cousin of one of the girls who worked for the Lowensteins, her neighbours. Betty Lowenstein introduced them soon after Tash arrived; she'd hired her on the spot. She seemed so nice. And so capable. It was *she*, Tash, who wasn't capable.

You've got to get up. Her own voice. She tried to lift her head. It felt wobbly, as though it wasn't properly attached. Footsteps approached suddenly; someone was coming up the stairs. Heavy. A man's tread. It must be the inspector. No, not inspector – detective. Wasn't that what they called inspectors over here? Detectives? Officers? Sergeants? No idea. The steps slowed and he came to a stop. She could hear his breathing through the door. She held her own breath. *Please don't come in. Not yet.* A minute spooled slowly by, then another, and another. She waited. Just when she thought she might scream at him to go away, she heard him turn back. She exhaled very slowly, the breath leaving her body in short, sharp gasps. He was wary of her; she'd sensed it straight away. Something in the way he couldn't quite hold her gaze, despite the seriousness of the occasion. His eyes kept slipping away from her to the cars parked in the driveway, the enormous house, the works of art, the furniture and the Persian rugs and the servants who kept flitting in and out like lost bees. She knew exactly what he was thinking. *Rich bitch. Rich, foreign bitch.* The line dividing the residents of the luxurious holiday homes along the water's edge from the locals who lived in Edgartown was clear. *Them and us. Rich and poor. The idle and working classes.* But he knew nothing. He knew nothing about her, where she'd come from, what she'd done. He had no idea. And, idle or not, rich or not, the absolute worst had come to pass. Tragedies can happen anywhere, to anyone. She, of all people, should have known that.

He walked down the stairs, his heels clipping out a sharp, crisp rhythm that slowly faded to silence. Somewhere on the ground floor a door opened; there was an exchange of voices but she couldn't hear what was said. There was the short, staccato burst of a walkie-talkie or a radio. A car swept into the driveway, scattering gravel; the dogs barked wildly. More voices. The house was beginning to fill up with people. More police. She struggled upright. Her knees and hands were shaking; her mouth was bone dry. It was time to call Rebecca.

PART ONE
TEENAGERS

'Adolescence: a stage between infancy and adultery.'
Ambrose Bierce

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1993

TATIANA BRYCE-BRUDENELL

Chelsea, London

With the sort of anxious concentration that only teenagers can muster, seventeen-year-old Tash Bryce-Brudenell carefully examined herself in the tiny bathroom mirror. Things weren't looking good. Mousy brown hair pulled back into a ponytail (a style she'd sported since the age of six); pale blue eyes (set much too far apart); short, barely there eyelashes (blonde, not brown, highlighting their absence even further). At least her skin was reasonably clear – a few spots, a few freckles – not as bad as some of the girls in her class. Not Annick, though. Or Rebecca. She sighed. What kind of malicious deity had made *her* so goddamn plain and her two best friends so goddamn pretty? She had no answer.

She soldiered grimly on, baring her teeth in an approximation of a smile. She grimaced. Her teeth were dreadful – too many, too long, too crowded, too crooked. Smile *only* when absolutely necessary. Chin? Weak, but at least it wasn't receding. She'd been lucky there. She'd never met her father but in the few photographs her mother had shown her, he had an unmistakably receding chin. She turned slowly sideways. Her nose now came into its problematic own. It was large and long with an uncomfortably high bridge that made it difficult to keep her glasses on. Another typical Bryce-Brudenell feature (or so her mother said).

'Tatiana?' Her mother's voice came barrelling through the door. '*Chto ty tam delaesh?* What you doing in there?' As ever, Lyudmila said everything twice, once in Russian and then (as if Tash didn't understand) in English.

'Nothing,' Tash yelled back unconvincingly. 'I'll be out in a second.' She hurriedly turned on the taps.

'My budem pozdno. We gonna be late.'

We're going to be late, not we gonna be late, Tash automatically

mouthed. Not that Lyudmila would take any notice. She'd lived in England for almost twenty years but her voice, syntax and grammar had lost none of their sensual, throaty Russianness.

'What you *doing* in there?' Lyudmila asked again, exasperated. Hers was a voice that could penetrate lead.

'I'm *coming*,' Tash hissed. She rinsed her hands and yanked open the door. 'What's the bloody rush?' Her eyes narrowed suspiciously as she surveyed her mother. Lyudmila was dressed as though ready to go out – a long, floor-sweeping fur coat that, although it had clearly seen better days, was still impressive; black high-heeled boots and a soft black beret over her blonde, waist-length hair. Almost every penny of the meagre allowance that came through every month from the Bryce-Brudenell family solicitors in Edinburgh was spent on clothes – Lyudmila's, not Tash's. Lyudmila spent *more* than enough on Tash's school fees, she lamented. Daily. 'Why you not ready, *dushen'ka*?' she asked, impatiently tugging on her gloves.

'Ready? What for?' Tash frowned. 'Are we going somewhere?'

Lyudmila rolled her eyes. '*Dushen'ka*, I *told* you. We have invite. Lady Soames invite us. You and me. We must to go *now*.'

Tash groaned. 'Oh, God, Ma, no! Not Lady Soames! Why do *I* have to come? No one'll even notice if I'm not there. Why don't you go by yourself?'

Lyudmila shook her head firmly. '*Nyet*. I promise her you coming. Hurry up. You know she doesn't like it when we is late.'

'When we *are* late,' Tash corrected her sulkily.

Lyudmila shrugged. 'Is. Are. No difference. Come. Where is coat?'

'Where I left it.' Tash sighed. She followed her mother reluctantly down the corridor. Lyudmila was up to something; she could tell by her excited, distracted air.

'*Dushen'ka*, why you always so *nezgovorchivaya*?' Lyudmila paused to view her reflection in the mirror before opening the front door. *Nezgovorchivaya*. Disagreeable. It was her favourite word, especially when it came to Tash.

'Because that's the way you made me,' Tash said, tightening her ponytail defiantly.

'Not true,' Lyudmila said calmly. 'I try everything make you nice girl.' She opened the cupboard door and pulled out Tash's coat, a sensible black woollen schoolgirl number. 'Okay, here is coat. Come. We late.' She marched ahead.

We are late, Tash mouthed silently, crossly. She followed her mother disconsolately out the door.

'Taxi!' Only in Lyudmila's mouth could the word come out as 'texy'. A black cab on the opposite side of the road, spotting the long blonde hair and fur coat, turned immediately and screeched to an abrupt halt.

'Where to, love?' The driver looked Lyudmila appreciatively up and down. Tash hung back instinctively.

Lyudmila grasped the door handle and climbed in. 'Christchurch Street. You know where is it?'

'Christchurch Street? What . . . the one round the corner?' The driver sounded disbelieving. Tash's face began to burn.

'Yes.'

'You'd be quicker walking, love.'

'I like drive.' Lyudmila pulled out her compact and started powdering her nose. For a second, Tash caught and held the driver's incredulous gaze. She looked away. He pulled out into the traffic without a word.

'*Dushen'ka*, be nice today, hmm?' Lyudmila turned her attention away from her own face just briefly. She reached across and tucked a stray lock of lank hair behind Tash's ear. Tash only just resisted the temptation to smack her hand away.

'Why?'

'Because,' Lyudmila answered cryptically.

Tash turned her face back to the window. Yes, her mother was definitely up to something. She caught a glimpse of her own reflection. She looked down at her hands. It wasn't easy being Lyudmila's daughter, especially not her *ugly* daughter.

'Lyudmila! How *lovely* to see you, my darling! What a surprise! Do come in! Come in. It's absolutely *perishing* outside! And here's the lovely little Tatiana. How *splendid* of you to come! You know the way – of course you do!' Lady Pamela Soames stood in the hallway, practically (and inexplicably) rubbing her hands in glee. She looked like a cross between a sumo wrestler and a poodle, Tash thought to herself uncharitably. How on earth could it be a *surprise* when she was clearly expecting them? And who in the world would ever call her 'lovely' – or, even more ludicrous, 'little'? Her height was the only thing she'd inherited from her mother. At seventeen she was nearly six feet tall. 'How *are* you, darling?' Lady Soames looked up at her indulgently.

‘Who? Me?’ Tash scowled down at her and was rewarded by a sharp prod from Lyudmila.

‘Teenager,’ Lyudmila said helplessly, making it sound like a terminal illness. ‘What I can do?’

‘Oh, don’t I know it,’ Lady Soames said conspiratorially, tucking her arm into Lyudmila’s as she led them towards the conservatory. ‘It’s a dreadful time, absolutely dreadful. For *all* concerned.’ She lowered her voice. ‘Now, listen, darling. I’ve asked Rupert to come downstairs but he’s a bit reluctant, I’m afraid. You know what they’re like at his age.’

Tash stopped dead in her tracks. Rupert? Rupert was Lady Soames’ eldest son. So *that* was why she’d been dragged along. Oh, Christ. Lyudmila was playing matchmaker. A wave of embarrassment washed over her. She could have *killed* her! Wasn’t it enough that she had to endure the pitying glances of all Lyudmila’s friends? Did she have to endure their sons’ sniggers as well? She glared daggers at her mother’s rapidly disappearing back. Not that Lyudmila would notice. Or care.

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‘So what’s he like?’ Annick was eager to hear all the details. It was half past ten and the most embarrassing day of Tash’s life was finally drawing to a close. ‘Is he good-looking?’

Tash snorted derisively. ‘God, no! He’s about half my size.’ She wedged the phone between her chin and neck, attempting to talk and paint her toenails at the same time. ‘And he’s got ginger hair. He’s repulsive, actually. Besides, I don’t *want* a boyfriend, and even if I did, I’m hardly going to ask my mother for help. I’m perfectly capable of getting one on my own. *If* I wanted one. Which I *don’t*.’ She enunciated her words clearly, keen for Annick to get the point.

‘Darling, if we wait for you to sort yourself out in that department, we’ll be waiting for ever. You’re so bloody picky.’

‘I am not. Besides, I’d rather be picky than a slut.’ She grimaced. ‘Sorry. Didn’t mean that.’

‘Yes, you did. Anyhow, we’re not talking about me. Can we get back to the subject, please?’