THE DAY IT HAPPENED

DREW

IT WAS ME who took the order. It could have been anyone. I don’t know why I feel guilty. But it was me.

“Pete’s Pizza. This is Drew,” I said, and winked at Kayla. She blew the black bangs out of her blue eyes and smiled. Even in that stupid white baseball cap Pete makes us wear, she looked hot. I wondered if she knew that. Probably. Then Kayla picked up a handful of pepperoni. She weighed it on the small silver scale and started laying the circles out on the pizza skin. She had already put down the sauce and cheese.

“Yeah,” a man said. “I’d like to order some pizzas to be delivered.” There was nothing special about his voice. The cops have asked me over and over. Did he have an accent? Did he sound drunk? Calm? Angry? Was he old? Young? Did he sound like a smoker? Did I recognize his voice?

For each question, I have the same answer. I don’t know.

I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know. I haven’t been able to tell them anything useful.
Each time I say that, they sigh or shake their heads and then ask me another question. Like if they ask it enough times in enough ways, I’ll remember something important.

But I never do.

I pulled an order form toward me and grabbed a pen. “Okay. What kind do you want?”

“Three larges. Hey, is the girl in the Mini Cooper making deliveries tonight?”

He meant Gabie. Kayla had traded with Gabie so Kayla could get Friday off. Kayla and I were the only two on. Miguel had clocked out at seven thirty, after the dinner rush was over.

Kayla was on delivery because I don’t have a car. She had only gone out once that night. It was a Wednesday, so it was slow. And it was already eight. We close at ten.

Pete’s Pizza is in a little strip mall. On one side is a florist and a Starbucks and a Blockbuster. On the other is a Baskin-Robbins and a Subway. Kayla used to work at the Subway. But Pete pays fifty cents more an hour, plus extra for deliveries. And then there’s tips. Kayla always got a lot of them. She always said she liked to make deliveries.

Says. She always says she likes. I shouldn’t use the past tense.

Kayla says.

I thought the guy must have flirted with Gabie the last time she delivered a pizza to him. Jealousy pinched me. It wasn’t like I was dating Gabie. We just worked together. I wasn’t dating anyone. But this guy, this guy felt confident enough to flirt with the pizza delivery girl. He
could probably stand behind a cute girl in a movie line and when he got to the window he’d be buying tickets for them both.

I didn’t answer him directly when he asked about Gabie. Instead I just said, “One of our staff members will deliver your order in forty-five minutes.”

The fact that he asked about Gabie is the only thing I’ve been able to tell the cops, but it doesn’t help. Gabie hasn’t been able to tell them anything either.

“So what kind do you want?” I asked.

“Three Meat Monsters.”

Meat Monsters are gross. They have sausage, pepperoni, ground beef, and linguica. After you eat a slice, your lips feel slick. And if you look in the mirror later, you’ll find an orange ring around your mouth. Even if you use a napkin.

He told me his name was John Robertson. He gave me his phone number and his address. I told him it would cost $35.97 and hung up the phone.

“Order in!” I joked, like it was a busy night. Then I grabbed three pizza skins from the cooler. Kayla and I got to work. We stood hip to hip, not working fast, but not slow, either. Just a steady, comfortable rhythm. We’ve worked together enough that we didn’t have to say much about who was going to do what. At one point we both reached for the Alpo—otherwise known as sausage—and our hands touched. We looked at each other and kind of smiled. Then I pulled my hand back and let her go first.

I think about that a lot now.

Was I the last friendly, normal person to touch her?
**TRANSCRIPT OF 911 CALL**

**911 Operator:** 911. Police, fire, or medical?

**Drew Lyle:** Um, police.

**911 Operator:** What seems to be the problem?

**Drew Lyle:** I, uh, I work at Pete's Pizza. And my coworker went to deliver some pizzas, and she hasn't come back, and she doesn't answer her cell.

**911 Operator:** What time did she leave?

**Drew Lyle:** Around 8:45.

**911 Operator:** This evening?

**Drew Lyle:** Yeah. Only, she hasn't come back. She should have been back here at least an hour ago.

**911 Operator:** Okay, sir, we're dispatching an officer to your location.
THE SECOND DAY

GABIE

BEFORE SCHOOL STARTS Thursday, Drew comes up to my locker, which is weird. We both go to Wilson. We get along okay at work, but we’re not really friends at school.

“Gabie,” he says, and then for a minute he doesn’t say anything else. He looks terrible. His eyes are like two bruises, and his sun-streaked hair is even messier than usual. I wonder if he’s been out partying and never went to bed. Finally, he says, “Did you hear about what happened to Kayla last night?”

It sounds bad. “No. What?” Kayla asked to switch nights with me. Maybe she cut herself slicing Canadian bacon on the Hobart. Pete’s always after us to cut the meat thinner so we can weigh it out to the microgram. Three ounces on a small, no more, no less. Pete doesn’t cheat anyone, but he doesn’t give anything away, either. And when you use the Hobart, you have more control if you don’t use the metal pusher part. The part that protects your fingers.

“Kayla went to deliver a pizza, and she never came back.” He bites his lip and looks up at the ceiling. His
gray eyes fill with tears. It surprises me so much that for a minute I don’t take in what he said. Drew Lyle. Crying. I didn’t think he really cared about anything.

And then it sinks in. Kayla didn’t come back? Pressure fills my chest, making it hard to breathe. “What did you do?”

“After close, I kept waiting for her. You know, Kayla doesn’t even have a key, and her backpack was in the break room. I called her cell a bunch, but no one answered.”

I imagine Kayla running a red light or a drunk driver plowing into her. “So she was in an accident?”

Drew shakes his head. “No. I mean, I don’t know. Right now, nobody knows. She never came back. She just disappeared.”

Could Kayla have run away? For about one second, I consider the idea. But Kayla has a lot going for her, probably more than most people. This fall, she’ll be heading to Oregon State on a softball scholarship. Even before she broke up with her boyfriend, Brock, lots of guys would come in and buy a slice just so they could talk to her. So I figure it’s not like she’s lonely. She didn’t tell me why she wanted Friday night off, but I thought maybe there was a new boyfriend.

Besides, if you were going to run away from your life, wouldn’t you just call in sick to work and then drive off into the sunset? Why go through all the trouble of pretending to make a pizza delivery?

So what happened to her? Then I remember a news story from a few years back. “Maybe she swerved or something and rolled the car down a steep hill like that one
girl did up in Washington a couple of years ago,” I tell Drew. “You know, like maybe Kayla’s in a ditch, but no one can see her car from the road.”

Drew blinks, and a single tear runs down his face. This can’t be real. I can’t be watching Drew Lyle cry. By now, it’s like we’re in a little bubble. I no longer see the kids hurrying past us or spinning their locker combinations and reaching in to yank out their books. I only have eyes for Drew, his long nose that bends to the right at the tip, his teeth that press into his lower lip, and his silver eyes welling up with tears.

“The police don’t think so. The phone number the guy called from, it turned out, was really a pay phone miles from where he said he wanted the pizzas delivered.” Drew makes a sound like a laugh. “He must have found the last pay phone in Portland. And the address he gave me—there’s a real street called that, but the houses are like a mile apart, and none of them have that number.” He takes a deep, shuddering breath. “The police think Kayla might have been kidnapped. Or worse.”

Does he mean, like, dead? I try to picture it, but something inside me just says no way. Kayla’s always goofing around, laughing, dancing, bumping hips with whoever’s working next to her, taking up more space in the kitchen area than I ever will. Her last name’s Cutler, but she looks like it should be O’Shaughnessy—black hair, huge blue eyes, skin as pale as milk. She’s pretty, so pretty she could be a model. Everybody always says so.

Maybe that’s why they took her. I’m suddenly glad for my dirty blond hair and my face that still breaks out even though I’m seventeen.
“So have they asked for a ransom?” I ask.

Drew shakes his head again. “No. Pete stayed there all night in case they called. But nobody did. And the kidnapper hasn’t contacted her parents either.” While I’m still taking all this in, he touches my shoulder. “There’s something else I wanted to talk to you about before the police did.”

“What?” I wonder if he wants me to lie for him. Not tell about him and Kayla smoking weed in the cooler that one time.

“They asked for you first,” Drew says, interrupting my thoughts. “The guy who called asked if the girl in the Mini Cooper was delivering.”

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

One of the most critical aspects in the search for a missing child is the gathering of evidence that may hold clues about a child’s disappearance or whereabouts. The mishandling of evidence can adversely affect an investigation. Similarly, the collection and preservation of evidence are key to finding a missing child. Parents play a vital role by protecting evidence in and around the home, and by gathering information about persons or situations that might hold clues. Following are some tips on what you should do to help law enforcement conduct a thorough and complete investigation.

Secure your child’s room. Even though your child may have disappeared from outside the home, your child’s room should be searched thoroughly by law enforcement for clues and evidence. Don’t clean the child’s room, wash your child’s clothes, or pick up your house. Don’t allow well-meaning family members or friends to disturb anything. Even a trash bin or a computer may contain clues that lead to the recovery of the child.

Do not touch or remove anything from your child’s room or from your home that might have your child’s fingerprints, DNA, or scent on it. This includes your child’s hairbrush, bed linens, worn clothing, pencil with bite marks, diary, or address book. With a good set of fingerprints or a sample of DNA from hair, law enforcement may be able to tell whether your child has been in a particular car or house. With good scent material, tracking dogs may be able to find your child.
IT’S SO STUPID, but you can’t buy fireworks in Oregon, or even have them in your possession. At least, nothing that’s any good. Nothing that goes more than six feet along the ground or twelve inches into the air. Which pretty much leaves those black tablets that grow into ash snakes after you light them.

Oh, and sparklers. Lame-o.

Say you still want showers of sparks, cascades of shimmering color, bottle rockets and M-80s, Monkeys Violating Heaven, Assault Choppers, Alien Abductions, or Barracuda Fountains. Then you have to cross the state line to Vancouver, Washington, around the Fourth of July or New Year’s. You have to find a stand that doesn’t care about your out-of-state plates and just hope the occasional police sting doesn’t nab you once you’re back on the other side of the river. And if you’re smart, you buy enough fireworks to last all year—not only for the Fourth of July, but also for New Year’s and Labor Day and just screwing around.

Which is what Todd and Jeremy are doing. Messing
around. They have two six-packs of beer on the floorboards and they’ve already decided to blow off school tomorrow. They’ll drive out by the industrial section next to the river, where at night there will be no witnesses. No one to pick up the phone and tattle. No one to fret that a spark will land on the roof of their McMansion.

Everything is dark and quiet. Except for one thing. A little light shines dimly to their right, closer to the river. Without discussing it, Jeremy turns the wheel. The pickup follows the narrow track that leads toward the light. If it hadn’t been night, if they hadn’t been on that empty road, Jeremy and Todd wouldn’t have seen it.

In the headlights of the truck, this is what they see: a red Ford Taurus. On top is a plastic triangular sign, like a taxicab’s, that reads Pete’s Pizza—Free delivery with a phone number. The driver’s door is open, and they can see inside. The overhead light is on. A black leather purse rests on the passenger seat. The keys dangle from the ignition. But there is no one in the car.

And scattered on the ground are three pizza boxes and a white baseball cap.
FOUND ON KAYLA'S DRESSER

fortune cookie message:

You are about to embark on a most delightful journey.
THE THIRD DAY

GABIE

I’M IN ADVANCED ENGLISH when my name comes over the loudspeaker. “Gabie Klug, Gabie Klug, please report to the office.”

Someone in the back of the room says “ooooh!” like I’m in big trouble, but it’s more like they’re mocking me. I’ve never gotten in trouble for anything.

I’m glad Drew warned me yesterday. I would have been so freaked out to be called from class to see a cop standing in the office. He’s about the same age as my parents. He even wears a uniform like they do, except theirs are surgeon’s scrubs. And of course, neither of them would ever wear a black gun in a holster.

If Drew hadn’t warned me, I would probably think something had gone wrong at the hospital, maybe a crazed patient had taken my parents hostage and demanded a heart transplant, stat.

The cop tells me to go into a little conference room off the main office. Kathy, the secretary, doesn’t take her eyes off us. She looks like she would give anything to follow us right in.
“I’m Sergeant Thayer,” he tells me, taking out a notebook. “And you’re Gabie Klug?” He pronounces it wrong, so that it rhymes with glug. Which is kind of annoying, because he just heard Kathy say it over the loudspeaker.

“It’s like clue with a hard g on the end. Klug,” I tell him. “Have you found Kayla?” I want to know but am scared to hear the answer.

“Not yet. But we did locate her car last night. In an industrial area down by the Willamette River.”

“So it was just parked down there? Did she have a flat tire or something?” Maybe Kayla went off to try to find a gas station.

“No.” Sergeant Thayer looks grim. “The car’s mechanical condition seems fine. The keys were in the ignition, and her purse was on the seat. But the door was open, and there were pizza boxes scattered on the ground.”

It takes me a minute to figure it out. “So somebody took her? Like, kidnapped her?”

“It looks that way.”

I start to tremble, imagining what happened to Kayla after that. “But they really wanted me. They had asked for me.”

Sergeant Thayer screws up his face. “Who told you that?”

“Drew.”

“Well, we have to look at the facts here, Gabie. And the facts show that Kayla was the one who this guy targeted, no matter what Drew thinks he heard on the phone. She set her emergency brake, which she wouldn’t have had time to do if she were in a panic. She left her purse on
the seat and her keys in the ignition. Are those the actions of a girl who is afraid? Of a girl who sees a stranger outside her car?” He answers his own question. “No. We think Kayla was stopped by someone she knew. She got out of the car and then he forced her to leave with him. Maybe he didn’t know Kayla that well, but we believe he did know her. And that she knew him. Has she talked about anyone making her nervous, another student or even a customer?” He steeples his fingers and looks at me over them. I can see his impatience in how he taps his index fingers together.

“Kayla didn’t exactly confide in me. We just knew each other from work. We didn’t hang out or anything.”

He continues as if I haven’t said anything. “Maybe even a couple of guys together?”

“No. She never said anything. And she never acted like anyone made her nervous.” Kayla always seems to have a good time at work. The truth is, I always like working with her. Sure, it’s still work, but she makes it fun, too. I kind of wish Kayla was my friend. But even though she’s always nice to me, she already has a bunch of friends at school.

“Now, we understand from your boss that you switched schedules with Kayla so that she worked on Wednesday when you normally would have. Whose idea was that?” His eyes drill into me.

I feel guilty, even though it wasn’t my idea. “Kayla wanted Friday off. I was fine with it, because I didn’t have plans.” Which is an understatement.

He makes another note. “So she was going on a date?” “She didn’t say, but I thought she was.” Kayla had
pursed her lips and smiled after she asked me if I could do her a “big, big favor.” Looking like she had a happy secret.

“Then you don’t know who she was going to go out with?” Sergeant Thayer raps out. “Do you have any guesses?”

“Half the school and half our customers wouldn’t mind dating Kayla Cutler,” I say. I’m still trying to take it in. The pizza boxes scattered on the ground. The car door open, but nobody there. I try to think of Kayla dead. But it’s impossible. I can see her in my mind’s eye, make her tip her head back while she laughs, hear her humming an old Green Day song, see her bend down to get something from the cooler while half the customers appreciatively watch her butt. If you stand right next to her making pizzas, mixed with the smell of tomato sauce and pepperoni is Kayla’s own faint scent, a sweet smell like vanilla.

I knew Kayla a little from school, but it was only at Pete’s that I really got to know her. You can’t help but know Kayla. She talks nonstop. Not just about herself. She also wants to know about you.

“So is it true what I heard—that you’re going to Stanford?” she asked me one slow Saturday afternoon. It was too late for the latest lunch and too early for even old people to eat dinner.

“Yeah.” I duck my head.

“I hear so many people apply there that they take the stack of admission forms and throw them down a flight of stairs,” she says. “And they only look at the ones who make it to the bottom.”

I can’t tell if Kayla really believes that, but it makes as much sense as anything. I shrug.
“And major in premed?”
“I guess.”
Kayla tilts her head. “You don’t sound really excited.”
“It’s just that I’m not sure I want to be a doctor.”
“Because of all the blood and guts? You’re a vegetarian, right?”
“That’s not it.” I’m surprised she remembers. “It’s more that my parents are surgeons, and that’s their whole life. They don’t have room for much else. I’d like to design stuff, like the things we use every day, you know, like forks and light switches, but my parents say that’s not a real job.”

Her brows pull together. “Why not?”
“I guess they don’t want me to be a starving artist. They say I could always make stuff on the side.”
She looks skeptical. “While going to medical school? I’ll bet there’s not any time on the side for years and years. How long do you have to go to school for, anyway?”
“Four years to get your undergrad, then four of med school, and then at least two years as a resident.”
“Ten more years?” Grinning, Kayla shook her head. It was clear that she wanted to be someplace real in ten years, not just starting out.

But now what? She must be dead, or she will be soon. That’s what happens when a girl gets taken. Maybe her body is already in a shallow mountain grave. Isn’t that what they always call it in the paper? A shallow mountain grave. Kayla won’t be laughing or humming anymore. And her smell will be of something else.

Only I don’t believe she’s dead. Something inside of me says No. But that’s just stupid. I hear my mother’s
voice. *It’s irrational.* The greatest sin, in my parents’ eyes—being irrational. Of course Kayla is dead. She must be.

The shaking is getting harder. My arms are trembling no matter how hard I squeeze my hands together. Sergeant Thayer’s eyes bore into me.

“What about Brock Chambers? We understand Kayla had recently broken up with him. Do you know if he was angry about that?”

“Brock? I just know who he is, that’s all. I’ve never even talked to him. Kayla didn’t seem like she was upset or worried or anything, though.”

Sergeant Thayer asks me a few more questions, but it’s clear I don’t know anything, and it’s also clear he’s getting frustrated.

When I walk back into class, everyone stares at me.

And I keep thinking about what Drew said. About how the guy asked for me. It should have been me, down by the river. It should have been my purse on the seat, my hat on the ground. He wanted me. I don’t care what Sergeant Thayer said. This guy wanted me. The girl in the Mini Cooper. He wanted me first.

Maybe he still wants me.
FOUND ON KAYLA'S DRESSER

To Do

No more chocolate!
Call Sami
Get pink streaks?
Drink more water
Buy extra-long sheets for dorm
Practice guitar
Don't worry if people think you're a nut
Sign up for 10K
Practice French
### Evidence

**PORTLAND POLICE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property class:</th>
<th>Evidence ☒ Found ☐ Inmate ☐ Safekeeping ☐ Destroy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- **Case number:** CTO-Q 5-11 149  
- **Badge number:** 431295  
- **Initials:** RB

- **Date of Collection:** MAY 9  
- **Time of Collection:** 1:32 p.m.  
- **Collected by:** RANDALL BOYD

**Description of Evidence:**

- **Bloody Rock**

**Location of Evidence:**

- Bank of Willamette River, 200 yards from Kayla Cutler's car

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**PORTLAND POLICE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- **Case number:** CTO-Q 5-11 149  
- **Badge number:** 431295  
- **Initials:** RB

- **Date of Collection:** MAY 9  
- **Time of Collection:** 3:47 p.m.  
- **Collected by:** RANDALL BOYD

**Description of Evidence:**

- Toothbrush for DNA testing

**Location of Evidence:**

- Kayla Cutler's bedroom