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**NOTHING  
MORE  
TO TELL**

**KAREN M. McMANUS**



PENGUIN BOOKS

## CHAPTER ONE

BRYNN

“Do you have a favorite crime?”

The girl sitting beside me in the spacious reception area asks the question so brightly, with such a wide smile, that I’m positive I must have misheard her. “A favorite *what?*” I ask.

“Crime,” she says, still smiling.

Okay. Did not mishear. “In general, or—” I start cautiously.

“From the show,” she says, a note of impatience creeping into her voice. Which is fair. I should have known what she meant, considering we’re sitting in the middle of temporary office space for *Motive*.

I try to recover. “Oh, yeah, of course. Hard to pick. They’re all so . . .” What’s the right word here? “Compelling.”

“I’m obsessed with the Story case,” she says, and bam—she’s off. I’m impressed by all the rich detail she remembers from a show that aired more than a year ago. She’s obviously a *Motive* expert, whereas I’m a more recent convert to the true-crime

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arm of journalism. Truth be told, I wasn't expecting to land an interview for this internship. My application was . . . unconventional, to say the least.

Desperate times and all that.

Less than two months ago, in October of my senior year, my life was fully on track. I was living in Chicago, editor in chief of the school paper, applying early decision to my dream school, Northwestern. Two of my best friends planned on staying local too, so we were already dreaming about getting an apartment together. And then: one disaster after the other. I was fired from the paper, wait-listed at Northwestern, and informed by my parents that Dad's job was transferring him back to company headquarters.

Which meant returning to my hometown of Sturgis, Massachusetts, and moving into the house my parents had been renting to my uncle Nick since we'd left. "It'll be a fresh start," Mom said, conveniently forgetting the part where I'd been desperate to leave four years ago.

Since then, I've been scrambling to find some kind of internship that might make Northwestern take a second look at me. My first half dozen rejections were all short, impersonal form letters. Nobody had the guts to say what they were really thinking: *Dear Ms. Gallagher, since your most-viewed article as editor of the school paper was a compilation of dick pics, you are not suitable for this position.*

To be clear, I neither took nor posted the dick pics. I'm just the loser who left the newspaper office door unlocked and forgot to log out of the main laptop. It doesn't really matter, though, because my name was in the byline that got screen-shotted a thousand times and eventually ended up on BuzzFeed

with the headline WINDY CITY SCHOOL SCANDAL: PRANK OR PORNOGRAPHY?

Both, obviously. After the seventh polite rejection, it occurred to me that when something like that is your number one result in a Google search, there's no point trying to hide it. So when I applied to *Motive*, I took a different tack.

The girl beside me is still talking, wrapping up an impressively in-depth analysis of the Story family saga. "Where do you go to school?" she asks. She's wearing a cute moto jacket over a graphic T-shirt and black jeans, and it comforts me that we're dressed somewhat alike. "I'm a sophomore at Emerson. Majoring in media arts with a minor in journalism, but I'm thinking about flipping those."

"I'm still in high school," I say.

"Really?" Her eyes pop. "Wow, I didn't realize this internship was even open to high school students."

"I was surprised too," I say.

*Motive* wasn't on the list of internships I'd compiled with my former guidance counselor's help; my fourteen-year-old sister, Ellie, and I came across it when we were combing through Boston.com. Until we did a Google search on *Motive*, I hadn't realized that the show's host, Carly Diaz, had temporarily relocated from New York to Boston last summer to be near a sick parent. *Motive* isn't a household name, exactly, but it's a buzzy, upstart true-crime show. Right now the show only airs on a small cable station, but there are rumors that it might get picked up by one of the big streamers soon.

The Boston.com article was headlined CARLY DIAZ MAKES AND BREAKS HER OWN RULES, accompanied by a photo of Carly in a bright pink trench coat, standing arms akimbo in the

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middle of Newbury Street. She didn't look like the kind of person who'd judge you for a public setback; she looked more like the kind of person who'd expect you to own it.

"So do you work for your school paper?" the girl asks.

Way to twist the knife, Emerson Girl. "Not currently, no."

"Really?" Her brow furrows. "Then how—"

"Brynn Gallagher?" the receptionist calls. "Carly will see you now."

"Carly?" Emerson Girl's eyes widen as I scramble to my feet. "Whoa. I didn't know she was doing the interviews herself."

"Here goes nothing," I say. Suddenly Emerson Girl and her endless questions feel like a safe harbor, and I smile at her like she's an old friend as I loop my messenger bag over my shoulder. "Wish me luck."

She gives me a thumbs-up. "You got this."

I follow the receptionist down a short, narrow hallway into a large conference room with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Back Bay. I can't focus on the view, though, because Carly Diaz gets up from her chair at the end of the table with a megawatt smile, extending her hand toward me. "Brynn, welcome," she says.

I'm so flustered that I almost say *You're welcome* in return but manage to catch myself just in time. "Thank you," I say, grasping her hand. "It's so nice to meet you." The phrase *larger than life* springs to mind, even though Carly would be tiny without her four-inch heels. But she radiates energy, like she's lit from within. Her dark hair is impossibly thick and shiny, her makeup is impeccable, and she's wearing such a simple yet elegant dress that it makes me want to throw out my entire wardrobe and start over.

"Please, have a seat," Carly says, settling back into her chair as the receptionist slips into the hallway. "Help yourself to a drink if you'd like."

Glass tumblers are in front of us, on either side of a pitcher that's filled to the brim with water and ice. I weigh my slight thirst against the strong possibility of spilling the pitcher's contents all over myself or, worse yet, the laptop beside Carly. "No thanks, I'm good."

Carly folds her hands in front of her, and I can't help but notice her rings. She's wearing one on almost every finger, all bold designs in rich gold. Her nails are glossy with dark red polish and perfectly shaped, but short. "All right," she says, smirking a little. "You know why you're here, right?"

"For an interview?" I ask hopefully.

"Sure." The smirk gets bigger. "We received almost five hundred resumes for this internship. Mostly local college and grad students, but a few willing to relocate for the opportunity." My heart sinks a little as she adds, "It's hard to stand out when there's that much competition, but I have to admit, I've never come across an application quite like yours. One of my producers, Lindzi, saw it first and forwarded it right away."

Carly presses a button on her laptop, angles the screen toward me, and—there it is. My email, all nine words of it. *Not my best work*, I wrote, underlined with a link to the BuzzFeed dick pic article. *Thank you for your consideration*.

My cheeks warm as Carly says, "You did some interesting things with that email. First, you made me laugh. Out loud, once I clicked the link. Then I actually went searching for articles you'd written, since you hadn't bothered to include any. I took fifteen minutes out of a very busy day to look you up."

She leans back in her chair, fingers steepled under her chin as her dark eyes bore into mine. "That's never happened before."

I want to smile, but I'm not entirely sure she's complimenting me. "I was hoping you'd appreciate the honesty," I hedge. "And the, um, brevity."

"Risky move," Carly says. "But bold, which I can respect. It's bullshit that you got fired for that, by the way. Any idea who posted the pics?"

"I know exactly who it was," I say, folding my arms tightly across my chest. I'd been working on a new story about rumored grade-fixing involving a few players in our state-champion basketball team. Their captain, a mouth-breather named Jason Pruitt, cornered me at my locker after English one day and said the only two words he'd ever spoken to me: *Back off*. I didn't, and a week later the dick pics happened, at almost exactly the same time that basketball practice ended. "But the guy denied it, and I couldn't prove it."

"I'm sorry," Carly says. "You deserved more support than that. And your work is excellent." I relax my rigid posture and almost smile, because this is all going a lot better than expected, but then she adds, "I wasn't planning on hiring a high school student, though."

"The job description didn't say you have to be in college," I point out.

"That was an oversight," Carly says.

I deflate, but only briefly. She wouldn't have brought me in if she weren't at least considering waiving that requirement. "I'll work twice as hard as any college student," I promise. "I can be in the office anytime I'm not in school, including nights

and weekends." *Because I have no life here*, I almost add, but Carly doesn't need that much context. "I know I'm not the most experienced person you're talking to, but I've been working toward becoming a journalist since I was in middle school. It's the only thing I've ever wanted to be."

"Why is that?" she asks.

*Because it's the only thing I've ever been good at.*

I'm from one of those families where people are effortlessly talented. Dad is a brilliant research scientist, Mom is an award-winning children's book illustrator, and Ellie is practically a musical prodigy on flute. All of them knew from birth, pretty much, what they wanted to do. I flailed around for most of my childhood trying to find my *thing*—the talent that would define me—while secretly worrying that I was another Uncle Nick. "He just doesn't know what he wants out of life," my dad would sigh every time his much younger half brother switched majors yet again. "He never has."

It seemed like the worst possible trait for a Gallagher, to not know what you want. As much as I love Uncle Nick, I didn't want to be the family slacker, part two. So it was a relief when I reached eighth grade and my English teacher singled me out for my writing. "You should work on the school paper," he suggested. I did, and for the first time, I found something that came naturally to me. It's been my identity ever since—"Brynn will be anchoring CNN one of these days," my parents like to say—and it was terrifying to lose that last fall. To see something that I'd worked so hard for, and been so proud of, turned into a joke.

I don't know how to explain that in an interview-friendly

sound bite, though. "Because you can make a real difference with every story, and give a voice to people who don't have one," I say instead.

"Well stated," Carly says politely. For the first time since we sat down, though, she looks a little bored, and I flush. I gave what I thought was a safe response, but that was probably a mistake with someone like Carly. She didn't bring me in here because my application was *safe*. "You do realize we're not the *New York Times*, though, right? True-crime reporting is a very specific niche, and if you aren't passionate about it—"

"I am, though." It's a risk to interrupt her, I know, but I can't let her dismiss me. The more I looked into *Motive*, the more I realized that it was exactly the kind of opportunity I needed—one where I could do more than just check a box on my college applications. "That's something I wanted to talk to you about. I've done all the things you mentioned in the job posting—social media, copyediting, fact-checking, et cetera. I have an actual resume I can show you, plus references. But also, if you're interested, I have a story idea."

"Oh?" Carly asks.

"Yeah." I dig into my messenger bag and pull out the manila folder I carefully assembled in preparation for this interview. "An unsolved murder from my hometown."

Carly raises her brows. "Are you pitching me right now? In the middle of an interview?"

I freeze with the folder half-open, unable to tell from her tone whether she's impressed, amused, or annoyed. "Yes," I admit. "Is that okay?"

"By all means," she says, lips quirking. "Go on."

Amused. Could be worse.

The clipping I'm looking for is right on top. It's a photo from the *Sturgis Times*, captioned *Saint Ambrose Students Brynn Gallagher and Noah Talbot Win Statewide Eighth-Grade Writing Competition*. My thirteen-year-old self is standing between two other people, smiling widely and holding up the Olympic-style medal around my neck.

"Aw, look at how cute you were," Carly says. "Congratulations."

"Thanks, but I didn't hang on to this because of the award. I kept it for him." I tap my finger on the man in the picture— young, handsome, and smiling. Even in two-dimensional photo form, he's brimming with energy. "This was my English teacher, William Larkin. It was his first year teaching at Saint Ambrose, and he was the one who insisted I enter the writing contest. He also got me started on the school paper."

My throat thickens as I hear Mr. Larkin's voice in my head, as clear today as it was four years ago. *You have a gift*, he said, and I don't think he realized how much those words meant to me. I never told him, which is something I'll always regret. "He was constantly trying to get students to live up to their potential," I say. "Or see it, if they didn't think they had any."

I look up to make sure I have Carly's full attention before adding, "Two months after this picture was taken, Mr. Larkin was dead. Bludgeoned with a rock in the woods behind Saint Ambrose. Three of my classmates found the body." This time, I tap the boy in the picture, who's wearing a medal identical to mine. "Including him."

## CHAPTER TWO

BRYNN

I pause to let my words sink in, keeping my eyes on the photo of Mr. Larkin. He's wearing his signature lemon tie, its bright colors muted in the black-and-white photo. I asked him once why he liked it, and he told me it reminded him of his favorite motto: *When life hands you lemons, make lemon cake*. "That's not the saying," I told him, feeling a small thrill that I knew more than a teacher. "It's 'make lemonade.'"

"Yeah, but I hate lemonade," he said with a shrug. "And I love cake."

Carly crosses her legs and taps the toe of her shoe against the table leg before reaching for her laptop. "You said this is unsolved?" she asks.

My pulse picks up at her show of interest. "For the most part, yeah."

Her eyebrows rise. "That's usually a yes-or-no question."

"Well, the theory is that a drifter killed him," I explain.

"There was a guy who'd started hanging around downtown a few weeks before Mr. Larkin died, swearing and yelling at people. Nobody knew who he was or what was going on with him. One day he came by Saint Ambrose and started screaming at kids during recess, so Mr. Larkin called the police and they arrested him. He spent a few days in jail, and Mr. Larkin died almost right after he got out." I smooth a wrinkled edge of the clipping. "The guy disappeared after that, so people think he killed Mr. Larkin in retaliation and took off."

"Well, that's a tidy resolution," Carly says. "You don't believe it?"

"I used to," I admit. When I was in eighth grade, it made the kind of sense I needed. The notion of a violent stranger passing through town was almost comforting, in an odd way, because it meant the danger was gone. And that the danger wasn't *us*—my town, my neighbors, the people I'd known for most of my life. I thought a lot about Mr. Larkin's death over the years, but somehow I never applied a journalistic lens until I binged a season of *Motive* to prepare for my interview. As I watched Carly methodically break down flimsy alibis and half-baked theories, all I could think was *Nobody ever did that for Mr. Larkin*.

And then it hit me, finally, that I could.

"But I've been thinking about it a lot since I moved back to Sturgis," I continue. "And it feels too . . . well, just what you said. Tidy."

"Indeed." Carly is quiet for a few beats while she taps her keyboard. "I don't see much media coverage on this. Just your local paper, and a couple of brief mentions in the *Boston Globe*. Latest story was in May, a few weeks after he died." She squints