

LIBRIS

We know
books

ALSO BY JENNIFER HILLIER

Creep

Freak

The Butcher

Wonderland

Jar of Hearts

Little Secrets

Things We Do in the Dark

HEART OF GLASS

JENNIFER
HILLIER



LIBRIS

We know
books

PART

ONE

All we are is the result of what we have thought.

—BUDDHA

Criminal Confessions, Season 7: The Carnival Killer

EPISODE 1—UNEDITED INTERVIEW WITH SAMUEL FIGG

Location: Washington State Men's Penitentiary, Walla Walla, WA

JANA JONES [PRODUCER, OFF CAMERA]: Let's start with a self-introduction. Could you please look straight into the camera and tell us who you are?

SAMUEL FIGG: You want just my name? Or what I'm in for?

JONES: How about both? Would you like to practice it first?

FIGG: Nope, I got it. [looks into camera and smiles] I'm Samuel Figg—

JONES: Maybe don't smile. It looks . . . weird. Like you're not taking this seriously.

FIGG: I'm not taking it seriously. I've agreed to be in some documentary I won't even get to watch in here, which won't change a damn thing anyway.

JONES: Just try it again with a neutral expression?

FIGG: [looks into camera] My name is Samuel Figg. I'm fifty-four years old, and I was born in a small town in Arkansas I guarantee you never heard of.

JONES: Keep going.

FIGG: I'm serving five consecutive life sentences for first-degree murder here in the Washington State Penitentiary, where I've been incarcerated for the past twenty-five years. I'm a long way from home. [lifts arms and rattles the chains handcuffing him to the table]

JONES: Are you guilty?

FIGG: Fuck yeah, I'm guilty.

JONES: Why did you agree to be in this documentary?

FIGG: Because you're so pretty and you asked so nice. [laughs]

JONES: [sighs] Try it again.

FIGG: I agreed to talk to you because I've been in here for almost half my life and I'm going to die in here. And so I got nothing to lose by telling the truth.

JONES: And what is the truth?

FIGG: That I murdered four women in the summer of 2001.

JONES: [pause, sound of papers shuffling] You mean *five* women.

FIGG: I said four.

JONES: You pled guilty to five murders, Mr. Figg. You're serving five life sentences.

FIGG: I know what I'm serving, pretty lady. But you said you wanted the truth. I killed four women, not five. That's the truth.

CHAPTER 1

THE MAN WHO'D INTRODUCED HIMSELF to them as "Sam" twenty-five years ago hadn't looked like a serial killer. That had just been a terrible stroke of luck.

Barb Bonifacio has tried her best to move on from that fateful night Lorelei died and everything changed suddenly and irrevocably. It isn't easy to do, especially living in Seaside, where memories of her best friend are everywhere. For instance, the particular stretch of beach she's standing on now has a clear view of Wonderland's infamous skyline, and Wonderland is where they all met Sam.

She forces herself to look away from the amusement park in the distance. The woman she's interviewing deserves her full attention, and she holds her phone closer to Edna Sparrow's chin so her voice memo app doesn't miss anything.

"From a distance, I thought it was a piece of driftwood," Edna Sparrow says with a shudder. "But it wasn't. Not even close."

Barb nods, inwardly stifling a yawn. It's not that the discovery of a detached foot on the beach isn't interesting, but Barb's become a bit desensitized to stuff like this, especially since she started working freelance for the *Chronicle*. It's Seaside. Macabre stuff happens here all the time.

"I sat right over there on that picnic table, drinking my morning coffee and watching the sun come up like I always do." Edna points to a spot closer to the water, just beyond the yellow crime scene tape. "Then O'Henry starts barking and digging at something in the sand. Turned out to be a shoe. I

didn't think much of it at first. Random objects wash up on this beach all the time. There's something about the direction of the tides and water flow at certain times of the day that causes things to float toward—"

"Right," Barb says, hiding another yawn by fake-coughing into the crook of her arm. "And when did you realize it wasn't just a shoe?"

"When he dropped it at my feet and I picked it up," Edna shudders again. "My finger touched something goopy and I looked inside it and then—"

"Screamed bloody murder," Eileen Sparrow cuts in. Barb had almost forgotten that Edna's identical twin sister is standing nearby. "She screamed so loud I could hear her from the damn porch, and you know we live half-way up the hill."

"And that's when you called 9-1-1?" Barb asks them.

"No, she called me first," Eileen says. "My sister is not good in a crisis."

"I needed to make sure I was seeing what I thought I was seeing before I called the police," Edna retorts. "Didn't want to be making a fuss over nothing and wasting valuable resources the town barely has."

"There was definitely a whole foot inside that shoe," Eileen says to Barb. "Once you see it, you can't unsee it, know what I mean?"

The Sparrow sisters have shared a house inside the private gated community known as Legacy Sands for as long as they've been alive. One is a retired high school principal; the other still cuts hair at a salon on Main Street. Back in the day, when one was a blonde and the other a brunette, it was easy to tell them apart. But now both women have let their hair go gray and are dressed in similar-looking Bermuda shorts, running shoes, and pastel-colored sweatshirts.

"I did think she was messing with me about finding a foot when she first called," Eileen says. "But it turns out that's exactly what it was."

"I wouldn't joke about finding a human body part," Edna glares at her sister. "There's nothing funny about that."

"Of course there isn't," Eileen says. "But you make stupid jokes all the time."

Barb clears her throat. "And while you were both waiting for the police to arrive, that's when you discovered the rest of the body?"

"We didn't find it," Edna points toward a tree where two Bernedoodles are napping despite all the commotion. "The dogs did. When Edna called,

I brought Snickers down to the beach with me. He and O'Henry are from the same breeder—"

"Got them at the same time, though they have different mothers—" Eileen says.

"And that's when they started barking and going crazy," Edna finishes. At least Barb thinks it's Edna. She's lost track. "That's when we saw part of a leg sticking out from behind the log. At first we thought it might be detached, too—"

"Thank god it wasn't—"

"But then we saw the rest of the body, and that's when we called 9-1-1."

"I called 9-1-1," Eileen says. "You were too frazzled."

"Well, considering I'd just been holding a human foot with no body attached to it, I'm pretty sure *frazzled* is a normal human reaction," Edna snaps. "Wouldn't you agree, Barbara?"

Both women turn to her.

"I would, Ms. Sparrow," Barb says. *Definitely Edna*, she thinks, her mind flashing back to that day in June more than two decades ago when Principal Sparrow had addressed her graduating class from a podium on the Seaside High football field. *Some of you will leave this town for your next great adventure . . .*

And some of them wouldn't. Barb thought she'd be writing best-selling novels from a penthouse in Manhattan by now instead of churning out two-hundred-word articles for a small-town newspaper hardly anyone reads anymore. But her dreams died the same night Lorelei did.

"It's actually more common than you think," Eileen says, her tone matter-of-fact. "Feet washing up on the beach, I mean. I watched a documentary recently that explained how the feet—"

"Dammit, the dogs are all twisted up," Edna says, pointing again to the tree where the Bernedoodles are tied. They're awake, their leashes tangled together. Just like their owners, the dogs also appear to be identical.

Eileen waves to a tall man who's currently working at untangling them. "Thanks, Morris!"

Though Barb doesn't say so, she knows exactly which true crime show Eileen Sparrow is referring to, because she watched that one, too. Human feet washing up on the shores of the Pacific Northwest are actually nothing

new. Over the past two decades, nearly two dozen detached feet have been found along the coastline at beaches just like this one.

But as gruesome as that sounds, none of the instances have been ruled foul play. Forensics analysis have determined that each foot was separated from the body it belonged to as a result of natural decomposition. Because it was encased in some type of shoe or boot, the foot was able to stay afloat until it reached shore. And other than a few that were never conclusively ID'd, almost all the deaths were the result of an accidental drowning or suicide. It was sad, but not suspicious.

Today, however, was different. Because not only was a detached foot found, the body it might have been attached to was found as well.

"I thought we were finally past all this dark stuff," Edna says, and her sister nods. Finally something they can agree on. "It felt like Seaside had finally turned a corner. With all the new construction, and the young families moving in, and Wonderland's grand reopening—"

"I'm telling you, it's *because* Wonderland is reopening," Eileen says. "It's drawing all this bad juju back here. They should have torn it down completely after the scandal instead of selling the park off to some foreign investors and slapping a makeover on it."

"The investors are Canadian, which is hardly foreign—"

"Yes, but they're based in *Quebec*. They speak *French*. And now, with the *Criminal Confessions* thing coming out, it's all just . . . too much." Eileen waves a hand.

"Speaking of which, you aren't going to be in the show, are you, Barbara?" Edna asks, her eyes wide.

"You're making it sound like a musical. It's not a show, it's a *documentary series*," Eileen turns back to Barb. "I nearly choked on my muffin when I saw that the next season is going to feature the Carnival Killer. We heard the producers were hounding you for an interview."

Of course they heard. Barb had only mentioned to a couple of people that a producer from the show had reached out, but that's all it took in Seaside.

"I told them no," Barb replies. Her actual words had been *Fuck no*, but she can't say that to the Sparrow sisters.

"And they asked Nicolette, too," Edna says. "Do you know if she agreed?"

Barb blinks. "Nicolette? We, uh, don't get a chance to catch up that often."

It's an understatement. She hasn't spoken to Nicolette in nearly twenty-five years.

"You poor girls," Eileen says, even though Barb and Nicolette are both on the verge of turning forty. "All that documentary will do is remind everybody that bad things happened here."

But bad things did happen here, Barb thinks. It's only when the sisters stare at her in surprise that she realizes she actually spoke the words out loud. She clears her throat. "I usually do enjoying watching *Criminal Confessions*, but it's probably best that I skip this season. Anyway, thank you both for your time."

The sisters wander off to chat with their neighbors, most of whom are milling around watching the police activity. The entire community of Legacy Sands must be down here at their beach now, the flashing red and blue lights from the police cars drawing the residents out of their homes at a time when they'd normally be having coffee and watching *Good Morning America*. Several golf carts are parked at the edge of the sand, as the road leading down to the beach is quite steep. The gated community is made up of about seventy-five homes, most of them owned by retirees whose families have lived here for generations.

Through the crowd of onlookers, Barb catches a glimpse of the Seaside police detective who'd avoided her earlier. She'd like to tell herself it was because she's a plucky reporter fishing for information the police aren't ready to give, but it was more likely because they'd gone on a few dates a couple months ago until she'd maybe/kind of/definitely ghosted him.

Dating is hell when you live in a small town. It's impossible to not shit where you eat.

"Cam," she calls out.

The detective's head turns in the direction of her voice. When he sees her, he grimaces and looks away.

"Cameron," she says again, louder as she approaches. "*Detective Wallace*."

With a sigh, Cameron Wallace finally turns all the way around. He's dressed in plain clothes—mirrored aviator sunglasses, navy golf shirt, gray slacks, his gold shield hanging from a lanyard around his neck. It was clear

why she agreed to go out with him in the first place; he's a single, good-looking dude, and there aren't exactly a lot of those in Seaside who also have decent jobs. But physical attractiveness only goes so far. In their case, that was six dates in as many weeks, and then a couple of hours in his bed before she faked a work call and left in a hurry. It wasn't that the sex was bad; it was actually great. It was because he'd just made detective, and his sister was throwing him a party to celebrate the promotion.

"I'll, uh, check my schedule and let you know," Barb had said to him as she scrambled around his bedroom half naked, plucking her clothes off the floor. Realizing she'd accidentally thrown his old Nirvana T-shirt over her head in her rush to leave, she moved to take it back off.

"Nah, wear it," he'd said with a relaxed grin, watching her from the bed. "You look sexy as hell."

They hadn't seen each other since.

"Barb." Cameron's smile looks forced. "Been a while."

By her calculation, about two months, which included four unanswered texts and one long-winded voicemail asking what he'd done to upset her. The last one was a drunk dial he may not even remember making. "How've you been, Cam?"

"Good, Barb, I've been good. Work's been busy, you know how that goes . . ." His voice trails off and he looks around, but there's nobody nearby to rescue him. He finally looks down at her and sighs. "So what can I do for you, Barb?"

The way he's saying her name is a little disconcerting, considering that the last time they were together, they were naked and he'd said it very differently. In the reflection of his sunglasses, she can see her own face staring back at her, small and moon-shaped under her casual topknot. She finds herself wishing she was at least wearing lip gloss. Tapping her voice memo app, she holds her phone toward him. "Wondering if you can share any details about the body that was found?"

"It's too early to comment on that."

"Any idea how the woman died?"

"Who said it was a woman?"

Actually, nobody, but she had to take a shot. "Can I take a quick look at the body?"

"Hell no." The detective grunts. "They're prepping her for the morgue."

So it *was* a woman. Barb looks over to where an ambulance has reverse parked onto the beach. The back doors are open, and the tarp-covered body is being lifted onto it by three EMTs. The front of the gurney hits something, and the jostle causes a lock of stringy black hair to spill out from under the tarp. Barb's breath catches in her throat.

Kylie?

Kylie Kahl has been missing for six years. The reality star was known for her long black hair, though it wasn't her natural color. Barb never knew her personally. The TikTok sensation who'd starred on a reality show called *Trophy Wives* had vanished on a hiking trail in Seaside a couple of months after the first season premiered. Despite a massive manhunt funded by her billionaire husband, she has never been found. She was twenty-six when she went missing; she'd be thirty-two now. The conspiracy theorists Barb interacted with on Reddit had differing opinions about what might have happened to her.

Seaside: the Bermuda Triangle for pretty young women.

"So as soon as we know something, we'll put out a statement," Cameron Wallace says. His jaw is tight. "That's all I can tell you."

"But what about her approximate age?" Barb asks, her mind working. "Was she young? Old?"

"I can't comment on any of that, Barb."

"Any distinguishing characteristics? Tattoos? Birthmarks?" Kylie had one tattoo, a finely inked word that ran vertically down her neck from her earlobe to her collarbone like a dangly earring. *Serenity*, in cursive. She'd made a whole TikTok about it a month before she was never seen again.

"Barb." The detective pulls her over to a quiet spot. She's never disliked hearing her name so much. "We're doing our best to keep this out of the press; that's an order directly from the chief. It's bad enough there's a crowd of people with their cell phones out, because the timing is fucking terrible. Work with us on this, okay?"

With Wonderland's soft opening tomorrow and the official grand reopening to the public happening this weekend, the last thing the amusement park needs is to give the public any reason to stay away. What hurts the park hurts the town. Seaside PD is probably going to refrain from commenting on

today's discovery until next week, and even then, this is a fire they'll want to put out quickly.

"Got it," Barb says. "But you have to give me something I can write up, Cam. Otherwise the public speculation will be much worse."

Sighing again, the detective glances around. He takes off his sunglasses and looks down at her. She forgot how blue his eyes are. "Okay, fine, I can tell you this."

Instinctively Barb leans in, catching a whiff of Cameron's aftershave. It's the same stuff he wore during the brief time they were together: spicy, clean. She inhales, wondering now how she could have written him off so quickly.

"A little closer," he says.

She leans in closer. The detective bends down slightly, his lips brushing the hair near her ear as he lowers his voice. A shiver runs through her.

"I want my fucking T-shirt back." Detective Wallace takes a step back and puts his aviators back on, his volume returning to a normal level. "Feel free to quote me on that. *Barb.*"

CHAPTER 2

EVEN THOUGH IT HAPPENED TWENTY-FIVE years ago, Barb still remembers everything about the night Lorelei died, from the pine-scented crown air freshener mounted to the dashboard that gave Nicolette a headache, to the cartoon hot dog that danced on the screen during intermission, to the sounds of heavy breathing coming from the backseat where Lorelei was making out with a man twice their age in a car so big it took up nearly one and a half parking spaces at the drive-in.

With its burgundy exterior and chrome detailing, the well-preserved tricked-out Lincoln Continental was a showy ride, a curious choice of vehicle for a serial killer. But then again, do serial killers even know they're serial killers? Or do they only realize it once the media gives them their nicknames?

A week after she was last seen at the Starlight, Lorelei's body was found floating in the flooded cranberry bog a quarter of a mile from the drive-in. The next day, Samuel Figg—who by then had been dubbed the Carnival Killer—confessed to her murder, along with four others.

When Barb's mother woke her up to tell her that the police were downstairs because Lorelei had been murdered, her first thought was, *Good*. It was a terrible thought, one that formed while she was still half asleep and well before she understood that her mother wasn't being dramatic just to get her out of bed early. Becky Bonifacio did tend to say things like that—*The house is on fire! Get up!*—but not this time. Nevertheless, the guilt and shame that

hit Barb later would stay with her for the next two decades, shaping her as a person in every imaginable way.

"You're very lucky," the police officers had said to Barb back then. "It could have been you."

Now, sitting across from her therapist, Barb is thinking about those words again. Dr. Leto charges two hundred dollars per session to help her process her trauma, but he hasn't been able to help her heal from this. But that might be because she hasn't told him everything, and probably never will.

"I'm not surprised that today's discovery of a dead body would trigger these memories." Dr. Leto is peering at her from behind rectangular-shaped spectacles. "What are you feeling right now?"

"The police told me I got lucky." Barb plucks a Kleenex from the garishly colorful box sitting on the coffee table between them. "As if I was supposed to feel grateful that my best friend got killed instead of me."

Dr. Leto's brow furrows. "I assumed they were referring to Samuel Figg's physical type, because the other victims looked more like you than Lorelei."

"I mean, obviously I'm glad I didn't get murdered by the guy who turned out to be a serial killer," Barb snaps. "But is there any nice way to say, 'Gee, thanks,' without sounding like a dick?"

Her monthly sessions with Dr. Lero—first name Alexander, though she's never been invited to call him that—take place in a room at the back of his townhouse. It's a warm and comforting space, filled with worn leather chairs and pieces thrifted from antique stores and, of course, Marvelous, the therapist's Siamese cat. Marv doesn't see well, but he hears everything, and whenever Barb's upset, he'll plop into her lap and purr until she calms down.

She strokes his fur. Right now, Marv sounds like a rusty motor.

"The part that people don't understand when they tell me I'm lucky, or that it could have been me, is that it was *never* going to be me." Barb twists the tissue into a thin rope. "I was never the girl who got asked to homecoming. I was never the girl who got invited to the cool parties. I was never the girl whose picture appeared in the yearbook more than once."

She was also not the girl who caught the eye of the man at Wonderland who had no business looking at girls their age. Lorelei was the third victim in a killing spree that started in Sacramento, passed through Portland and

then Seaside, and ultimately ended in Seattle. It had been surreal to see her best friend's picture on the front page of the *Seattle Times* a month after her body was discovered, where the photos of all five of the victims were printed under the booming headline CARNIVAL KILLER CAUGHT. She remembers whispering the headline to herself at the kitchen table as her mother made pancakes, appreciating the alliteration of the hard *kuh* sounds at the back of her throat, making the words as dramatic to say as they were to read.

Of the five women, Lorelei had been the youngest by a few years, and she was the only blonde. The other four were brunettes, like Barb. They all had brown eyes, like Barb. But they were all fresh-faced and unselfconscious, which was decidedly *unlike* Barb, who'd been plagued with a hapless awkwardness for as long as she could remember.

"Such an unimaginable tragedy," Becky Bonifacio had said mournfully, looking over her daughter's shoulder at the newspaper as she stirred the pancake batter with a long wooden spoon. "Those poor girls and their families. You're so lucky. What if he'd picked you?"

Barb knew she was supposed to express sadness or grief in that moment, or any emotion that might demonstrate an understanding of the horrific thing that had happened to her best friend. But as her clammy finger smeared the grainy newsprint image of the victim's faces, all she could feel was sorry for herself. Despite her being more his physical type, Samuel Figg hadn't chosen her.

She wasn't even pretty enough to get murdered.

She never said this to her mother back then, of course. And she doesn't say it to Dr. Leto now. Because it's a terrible thought, and she's a terrible person for thinking it.

After Lorelei's funeral, the grief came in waves over the following year, often hitting Barb when she least expected it. Eventually, it passed. The nightmares did, too. But the guilt lingers, the secret heavy even after all these years. She wonders if it's the same for Nicolette, but there's no way to know; they haven't spoken since the day Nicolette left town.

Deep down, in the dark chambers of her heart where no therapist has yet reached, Barb can't help but secretly feel that Lorelei brought some of it on herself. The way her best friend flirted with abandon, utterly shameless. The way she stood near the Wonder Wheel between Barb and Nicolette

in her short skirt and cropped tee, her belly button ring flashing in the sun as she licked her strawberry ice cream cone. The way her pink-stained tongue trailed along her bottom lip as she made direct eye contact with the handsome stranger almost twice their age who was standing across the midway, observing them. The way her smile invited him over. The way he'd introduced himself as "Sam," his gaze roaming over Lorelei's body, and then Nicolette's, and then back to Lorelei, as if Barb weren't there, as if Barb didn't even exist. The way Lorelei climbed over into the backseat of his car later that night at the drive-in, forcing Barb and Nicolette to move up to the front. The way their heavy breathing fogged up the windows, making it difficult to see the movie that was playing on the giant outdoor screen.

Feeling unattractive is one thing. It's a whole other thing to feel invisible.

Dr. Leto is watching her, and he seems concerned and sympathetic. There's no way to confirm whether he actually feels those things. In Barb's opinion, therapists are terrific actors. She would know; she's seen more than her share over the years.

Her first therapist was Dr. Agar—first name Elizabeth—whom her mother insisted she talk to when Barb fell into a depression after Samuel Figg's conviction. The next was Dr. Chang—first name Marianne—whom she saw while she was doing her undergrad at Puget Sound State in Seattle. She liked Dr. Chang, but once she moved back to Seaside after college to take care of her mom, the three-hour drive made it impossible to continue working with her.

Over the next ten years, she tried out four more therapists, treating each appointment like a series of job interviews before finally landing on Dr. Leto, whose office was only fifteen minutes south of Seaside. She's been seeing him for six years now—since around the time Kylie Kahl disappeared, actually—and of all the professionals she's worked with, he's helped her the most.

Which is why she's devastated he's retiring.

He hasn't broken the news to her yet. But it's Barb's job to know things, and she's aware that Dr. Leto and his husband are planning a move to Portugal, where, during their vacation to Lisbon last month, they purchased a small three-bedroom house with a nice kitchen and partial ocean views. A recent photo from his husband's Instagram account, which Barb found not long after she and Dr. Leto began working together, shows the happy couple

sitting on a pair of scooters, wearing matching red helmets and pointing to the SOLD sign. Dr. Leto will soon be living his best life. How nice for him.

Everybody gets a best life except for Barb.

Dr. Leto is unbothered by long silences, a skill Barb wishes she could learn. He also has the most pleasant poker face she's ever seen on a person. Blank but interested. Neutral but compassionate. Nonjudgmental always.

"Is it crazy that I thought the body this morning might have been Kylie Kahl?" she asks him. "I know it's not healthy that I still obsess over her disappearance. It's not like I knew her."

"You watched her on that reality show every week," Dr. Leto says. "It's understandable you feel invested. But I wouldn't describe it as an obsession. It's more like . . . a distraction."

It was a little more than a distraction, but okay.

"I imagine that checking for updates on Kylie's disappearance gives you a sense of control that you didn't have with Lorelei," Dr. Leto continues. "There's no one way to process trauma; there's only your way. And you've done really good work these last five years we've been working together."

"Six."

"Six years, yes," Dr. Leto smiles. "You've come a long way. Which is how I know that you'll be okay."

Here it comes.

"This is not an easy thing to say, especially to longtime patients like you, but . . ." Dr. Leto pauses, and it's the first time Barb has ever seen her therapist express any kind of hesitation or trepidation. "Barb, it's time for me to retire from private practice. Your next regular appointment will be our last session together."

She knew this was coming, of course. But still. *Still.* The sting of yet another person leaving her behind is more than she was prepared to feel.

"I understand this is a surprise." The therapist's voice is gentle. "Do you want to talk about it, or do you need some time to process?"

Barb finds her voice. "Will you be available at all after our last session?" In her hands, the tissue rips in half. "Even for, like, an emergency Zoom?"

"I'm afraid not."

Ten seconds pass. Twenty. Then thirty. In her lap, Marvelous lifts his head, sniffs the air, and starts purring again.