

Although the beautiful house in the woods looks peaceful, there is something about it that seems very wrong. The three locks on the front door have all been unlocked, and the door itself is open just a crack. Inside, everything is eerily silent. A heavy stillness hangs over the living room, which looks, for the most part, perfectly average. A large TV occupies one wall, with a cozy white leather sofa facing it on the other wall; the pillows and cushions are all arranged in the most impeccable order. On the floor beside the sofa, an empty box for a brand new home security camera lies open, alongside a pair of scissors.

Above the sofa, the wall is covered with framed pictures of Nadia and Jonathan from over the years. He is a tall African American man with a bright, friendly smile, and she is a petite young Indian woman with long black hair and shining eyes. One picture shows the two of them in graduation gowns, looking no more than 18 years old, hugging each other and waving their diplomas. Another picture, taken some years later, depicts a snowy mountain landscape, with Jonathan and Nadia in the foreground bundled up in thick parkas; Jonathan is planting a kiss on her cheek, while she smiles in the middle of a happy laugh. Other pictures feature the two of them from various family gatherings, holidays, parties and vacations. In each one, they are always embracing, holding hands, or kissing each other, happy just to be together. A gorgeous wedding photo, taken only about a year ago, occupies a large portion of the wall space. However, beside the wedding photo is an empty space where one picture has been taken down.

The missing picture is sitting on the coffee table in front of the couch, removed from its frame. It's a very recent photo of Jonathan and Nadia relaxing at the beach, but in the background, barely visible, a strange figure appears to be watching them from afar. The figure is a dark-haired man with glasses and an angry scowl on his face; his eyes are fixed on Jonathan and Nadia with hate. Next to the photo, an old high school yearbook lies open, revealing a

collage of pictures of the football team. In one of the pictures, a young Jonathan can be seen, wearing his football uniform and embracing a young Nadia, who is dressed as a cheerleader. In the background of that picture, the same dark-haired boy with glasses — younger now — can be barely seen among the crowds, glaring at them. His face has been circled in permanent marker. Beside the yearbook, a small laptop sits open, and a Facebook chat window is still visible on the screen, even though the conversation ended half an hour ago. The last few lines of the conversation read:

Nadia: “It’s him, Eva. He found me.”

Eva: “You sure?”

Nadia: “Yeah. I don’t know what to do.”

Eva: “Call the cops if something happens! Does Jon know yet?”

Nadia: “I don’t think he’ll actually do anything to me. Hes just a major creep. But
yeah I’ll talk to Jon about it when he gets home.

Eva: “K stay safe! Love you.”

In the dining room, all the chairs except one are still in their place. There are two plates lying out, both with Caesar salads and chicken alfredo, which is now getting cold. One plate is still untouched, with a full glass of merlot standing beside it. The other plate has been partially eaten, and the fork has fallen on the floor. The wine glass beside this plate is tipped over, splattering reddish-purple wine across the white tablecloth, and the chair that was nearest to this plate is now lying on the floor, completely on its side.

On the far side of the kitchen, which is adjacent to the dining room, the door to the backyard swings wide open with a broken handle. A trail of muddy footprints travels from the open door, through the kitchen, through the dining room, past the living room, and down the

hallway toward the main bedroom of the house. Along the path of the footprints, a piece of torn black lace lies discarded, followed by a diamond earring. The hallway is lined with broken vases and broken pictures, and near the end of the hallway, a streak of blood is smeared along the wall.

The body of a petite young Indian woman, wearing a torn black lace dress, lies facedown in the open doorway of the bedroom, with a knife in her back. Her phone has been flung all the way to the opposite side of the bedroom, its screen cracked; a small dent can be seen in the wall, just above where it lies. After a moment, the screen lights up, and a new message appears:

Jon: "Hey babe I'm on my way back. Sorry for having to work so late. See you soon! I love you."