

Chapter One

The police are at my door at 3:00 a.m.

I watch from the top of the stairs as Dad goes stumbling through the house, tying his checkered robe. He flicks on the porch light and squints out the window. Then he jerks his head in surprise. He moves so quickly to open the door that he stubs his toe on the wooden hedgehog in the entranceway.

He greets the police officer while standing on one foot like a giant plaid flamingo.

The officer doesn't smile. "Dr. Forester?" he asks. "I'm Officer Wells. I'd like to speak with your daughter for a moment."

"Jen?"

"There's been an accident at the Klassen house. I'm hoping she might answer some questions."

I'm wide awake. I'd climbed into bed when I got home, only to stare at the ceiling. I've spent the last two hours wondering if the doorbell would ring.

"What kind of accident?" Dad asks. "Jen was involved? Are you sure?"

When he's finally given time to answer, the officer sounds calm but firm. "Your daughter's not necessarily involved, sir. We're questioning everyone who was at the Klassen house this evening."

I don't want to hear him describe the accident. Without waiting for Dad to call me, I start down the

stairs. For a minute I think I'm going to throw up. Instead, I take a deep breath and try to look sleepy and confused.

Dad motions us to the dining room table. Then he steps into the kitchen to make coffee. Despite the banging of spoons and cups, I can tell he's listening.

Officer Wells leans toward me. I feel like I've been sucked into the TV and I'm in an episode of *Law & Order*. I almost giggle. Then I almost throw up again. I tell myself to calm down. Breathe. This isn't nearly as easy as those TV criminals make it look. Those gold bars on his uniform and the baton in his belt and his coffee breath washing over me are all a bit intimidating.

"Miss Forester, we're dealing with a very serious case here. I'm sure I don't have to tell you how important it is for you to be completely honest."

"Of course." I'm thinking calm thoughts. Still breathing. And I have an excellent innocent look.

I open my eyes wide and look straight at Officer Wells. This strategy works wonders with my math teacher.

“You were at Ian Klassen’s house party this evening?”

I nod.

“Could you tell me about it?”

“Georgia Findley and I went together. Another friend dropped us off. She had to be home before eleven, so she didn’t stay. The party wasn’t too exciting. We mostly sat around in the kitchen and talked all night. Jerome drove me home.”

“What time did you leave?” he asks.

“About quarter to one. Curfew,” I say, with an explanatory jerk of my head toward the kitchen. We can still hear my dad rummaging around.

“And Jerome is?”

“Jerome Baxter. My boyfriend.”

He takes notes on all of this, then asks if I know Ted Granville.

“I don’t think so. Why?”

“He’s tall, red hair, about forty. Did you see anyone like that at the party tonight?”

“No. What happened?”

“He was badly beaten—may not survive.”

I expected that, but I put on my most shocked expression. It’s not entirely fake. “It was all kids there, I think. I was in the kitchen for most of the night, not by the door. I didn’t see anyone like that come in.”

It’s true, what I tell official Officer Wells, leaning toward me like we’re buddies from way back. Technically, it’s all true.

But there’s more to it. I had run upstairs with everyone else after Candi Bherner had run down screaming. We weren’t expecting much. Candi’s younger than me, and I don’t know her well, but she seems totally flaky. A mouse could have made her scream like that.

It wasn’t a mouse. It was a redheaded man sprawled across the floor in Ian’s parents’ room,