

Chapter One

[Sound fx: Click. Rattle.]

ANNELIESE: Hi! It's me, Anneliese. Okay, I already feel stupid. Sitting here at my kitchen table talking to my cell phone. I mean, I know people talk to phones--that's what phones do--but usually somebody's on the other end. Not that you're not somebody. I just don't know if you're ever going to...well, you know what I mean. Anyway I feel stupid. I'm not even sure this is recording. The little red light is on but it's not flashing. Should it be flashing or should it be on, like, steady? Maybe flashing means paused. I can't ever remember. I don't know if I've got this microphone thing hooked up right. Let me stop and play this back.

[Sound fx: Click. Rattle.]

Okay, cool. Red light means recording. Flashing means paused. Got it. Let's start again.

[Theme music. Opening credits.]

Hi! It's me, Anneliese. I'm dictating these notes sitting at my kitchen table, surrounded by boxes, watching dust float in sunlight that's slanting through my window. The table is the same one I sat at last time I tried to do this, but it's in a new apartment. I moved in Saturday. Today's Monday. Leah and Scott and Bailey helped me get all my stuff out of the other place Saturday morning and we schlepped it all across town in Scott's pickup and Leah's hatchback. Nothing's unpacked, and everything's dusty, and the place is basically a shambles right now. But I love it. I really really love it. The windows are old glass, you know how old glass is kinda wavy? My kitchen windows are like that. Like funhouse mirrors. So the light comes through them kinda shaky, like it's not sure it should be there. Very relatable. I can see the world out there--well, I can see the gravel parking lot by the house--but it's shaky too, and it changes when I move my

head. Rippling. Like a mirage in the desert. Like it's not really real. It's one of the things I love about this apartment.

Actually I love *everything* about this apartment. I wish you could see it. It reminds me of the old buildings in the neighborhood where you used to work. This place is out a ways from downtown, though. The building is called the Hawthorne House and it really is a house. It's a big old gray house that's been divided into four apartments--two up and two down. I'm in the bottom right, as you face the door. There's a big covered porch and a huge yard with big old trees in it. There's also a garage apartment, a tiny detached house with steps leading up to it, off of the parking lot. I don't know if anybody lives there or not. It's cute. I can see it from the kitchen window. There's a rug or something hanging over the railing, and some Buddhist prayer flags over the door, so probably somebody lives there. I haven't met them, though.

What was that? Oh man, sorry. I thought I saw somebody disappear around the corner of the house, and it freaked me out. Geez, Anneliese, jumpy much? It was out of the corner of my eye, and like I said it's all wavy and shaky out there.

[Sound fx: Laughter]

Oh, okay, it sounds like somebody's kid. I can hear them laughing, from the back yard. Maybe Buddhist yoga people have a kid? I thought everybody in the house itself was single. But now that I think about it, I don't know why I thought that. Well, as long as nobody's running around overhead or messing with my stuff, we're cool. And there's something nice about kids playing in the yard.

So, anyway, *my* apartment. It's so cute. I'll give you a quick tour. Imagine a big oak door. That's the first cool thing--that big door. It's solid and heavy and. I don't know, grown up. You'd think at twenty-six I wouldn't be thinking things like that, but that's what it feels like--a grown-up

door. The door opens onto a big living room. High ceilings, crown molding, the whole deal. Windows on two sides looking out on the porch and the parking lot. There's a little fireplace, but it doesn't look like it works. I need to poke around and see what it looks like up in there. Then there's an arched doorway leading to the kitchen. It's small. Like really small. But it's got all the kitchen stuff you'd want--stove, oven, refrigerator. Tiny tiny pantry with a folding door. And the table. There's no dining room, so my little glass-topped table from the old apartment is all I have room for. Which is fine since Rhys kept the big table.

Okay, we're *not* talking about Rhys.

Wow. I'm rambling. I knew I'd ramble. It's why you told me to do this, right? Because I avoid talking about it. Because I don't want to remember. That's what you say, anyway. That I don't want to remember Claire. Or at least that I don't want to remember what happened to Claire. But I don't think you're right, as I've told you. I remember Claire. Sometimes remembering Claire feels like the only thing I ever do. But you are right about one thing--I do think writing it down will help. So I'm trying this again.

But I haven't finished the tour! Moving towards the back of the house from the kitchen there's a short hallway with a bathroom off to the right and an empty room to the left that the realtor called a "bonus" room. It's really a smaller second bedroom I guess. Right now I've got all my books in there, in boxes, and a bunch of clothes I might give to Goodwill. I may set up a studio in there and start painting again. Only it doesn't get any light. It's on the interior wall, so no windows. There's a door to the basement in there too. All the tenants are allowed to use the basement for storage, but apparently I'm the only apartment with actual access. I only went down there for a minute. It's a dingy little place with a dirt floor. I can barely stand up in it. I don't foresee spending a lot of quality time there.

And then at the end of the little hall is my bedroom. It just barely has enough room for a double bed and a nightstand. My dresser fits in the closet, with not much room for anything else. But it's got windows on two sides like the living room, looking out over the parking lot and the back yard. I haven't checked out the back yard yet. It's got a fence and some trees, but that's about all I know.

Have I said I loved it yet? It's got hardwood floors throughout--they creak when I walk on them, and if you run in your socks you can stop and slide really far. Not that I've done that. But I bet you could.

I still have to get some furniture. I brought some stuff from Rhys' place, but I left some stuff, too. I've saved up a little money over the past year, and I'm going to the thrift shop this week and look for a sofa. And a bed frame--I'm sleeping on a mattress right now and it feels like college. That's not necessarily bad, but it's time for a real bed. Leah said she'd go with me. We're gonna make a day of it.

I'm still rambling. I know this. But I thought you might like to know that I've got some friends and that I have a new place. And I know you don't need me to say you were right about Rhys. But you were right about Rhys. You would be proud of how I changed my situation, just like you always said I could.

Look, I know the whole purpose of this is to talk about Claire. Or to talk about how I feel about Claire. Or to talk about Claire being the "central trauma of my life." And I know I just said that all I do is remember Claire. But the truth is, I don't really think about Claire day to day. Not all day every day, anyway. And--you'll be happy to hear--Claire doesn't talk to me any more. I know she can't. So I hope you're not still worried about that. I know Claire is dead. I know when she died and I know how she died. And I know why I had to start talking to you about it. Even

though it does seem a little ironic--the way to stop obsessing over my dead sister is to talk obsessively about my dead sister?

Right here is where you would ask me something like: "So Anneliese, if everything is going well, and if you're not fixating on Claire any longer, why have you suddenly started recording these tapes again?" I don't know if it's more irritating that I have to imagine your side of the conversation or that it's so easy to know what you would say. You love words like "fixated."

I don't really know what to tell you. I like the idea of writing it all down. And so maybe that's what this is--notes for a memoir. I just find myself thinking about it more since I broke up with Rhys. Maybe because there's no one here to fill the space.

Here's a memory for you. Claire's favorite game when we were growing up was called "Mirrors." We both loved the Marx Brothers, and the game started out with us trying to learn the whole mirror scene from *Duck Soup*. Do you know that scene? Groucho thinks he's in front of a mirror, but it's really Harpo dressed up like him. Groucho tries to catch him out, and tries more and more outlandish movements to trip Harpo up, but Harpo always matches him. Claire and I tried to do that. It was easier for Groucho and Harpo, because it was scripted, or what would you call it, choreographed. And Claire being two years older meant we weren't really matched up, heightwise. But I've always been tall for my age, and as we got older it worked better. We got really good at it. We played constantly. I'd catch Claire's eye across the room and we'd start, matching move for move. When we were in the zone, it was like we each knew what the other one was going to do, no matter how crazy or unexpected. One time we did a full dance routine in unison, move for move, completely spontaneous. It drove mom crazy. And Jackson hated it. In his annoying little brother way, he didn't want to be left out. He was always trying to play

mirrors with one of us. But he sucked. That's not fair. It's just, I don't know, he couldn't get inside my head like Claire could.

Even after Claire got sick, we'd play Mirror. Laying in the hospital bed, raising one arm and then another. One of the last times I saw her smile was playing Mirror in the hospital room. My whole junior year of high school was in that hospital, or at least that's what it felt like. So little moments like that, Claire smiling while we played Mirror, they stand out.

So maybe that's part of it. Now when I raise my hand, no one copies me. I'm dancing solo. My mirror has been empty since Claire died.

Okay, wow. Morbid. And not true. I've got friends. I have a job and a life and an awesome new apartment. And the sun is shining through the awesome wavy glass in my kitchen, and there's a little boy laughing in the backyard--or there was, he seems to have wandered away--and I have very little to complain about.

Oh here's something fun. Leah was saying...

[Sound fx: doorbell]

Oh, damn. Somebody's at the door. Hold that thought.

[Sound fx: Click. Rattle.]

[Pause.]

[Sound fx: Click. Rattle.]

Sorry about that. That was my upstairs neighbor, Bri. She wanted to leave her bike on the wall next to my door, and was making sure it was okay. She seems nice. She looks closer to my age than Mrs. Aickmann across the hall or Mr. Blackwood on the other side upstairs. Very impressive dreadlocks. She helped Leah and me carry the mattress in on Saturday.

She said it was nice to finally have somebody move in downstairs. I get the impression that Mrs. Aickmann, who lives across the hall from me, keeps to herself. She looks kind of sour and grumpy, and her dog hates me. Or maybe it hates everybody--it's a big Dalmatian with a really pissy disposition. But Bri seems pretty cool. I think I'm gonna invite her down for coffee or something, once I've got things settled. Maybe that'll give me an incentive to unpack sooner than later.

See, I'm putting myself out there. Quit worrying.

And oh yeah!--what I was about to say when the doorbell interrupted me. Leah's throwing me a housewarming party next week. I think I'm going to invite some folks from the bakery--Bailey, Scott. It's been nice getting to know Leah again over the past year. We weren't really close in college, but she's been really sweet to me since I moved here. The city, I mean, not this apartment, obviously. It's really touching that she wants to throw me a party. Maybe I'll invite Bri too. So look at me being social. I've come a long way, right?

Now I'm standing in the living room, looking through the front window. It looks out over the porch into the yard. It's a big, wide yard, and there's a big old oak tree on the left about halfway between the house and the road, so like I don't know, fifty feet? It's so nice. Tranquil, you know. I think I can be really happy here.

[Sound fx: Door slamming.]

Shit! Wow. The bedroom door just slammed--I've got the window cracked in here, and the wind must have pulled it shut. I really am jumpy. I guess the house is kind of drafty, but that's what old houses do, right?

Hey--there's the kid again. It's a boy, he's peeking around the oak tree in the front yard. Not at me, just like, playing hide and seek, or something. I don't see any other kids out there. Maybe he's a neighbor? He's cute.

I hear all the questions you would ask. And I know I should answer them. I know I need to talk about Claire. And I suppose it would help to process what happened with Rhys, although it's boring, just like Rhys. I promise I'll tell you everything. But what I wanna do right now is drink my coffee and look out my new old windows before I have to be at work at 2.

It's gonna be good here. I can feel it.

[Closing theme. Credits.]

