



From the MixCache.com library

SAMPLE COPY

Shadow Lies

MixCache.com

SAMPLE COPY

Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1:** The Letter in the Mailbox
- **Chapter 2:** Fraying Edges
- **Chapter 3:** Shadows from the Past
- **Chapter 4:** In Plain Sight
- **Chapter 5:** The Wrong Questions
- **Chapter 6:** Beneath the Surface
- **Chapter 7:** Old Friends, New Threats
- **Chapter 8:** Tangled Threads
- **Chapter 9:** The Doctor's Alibi
- **Chapter 10:** Ghosts in the Hallway
- **Chapter 11:** Breaking Point
- **Chapter 12:** Doubt
- **Chapter 13:** Under Watchful Eyes
- **Chapter 14:** Red Herrings
- **Chapter 15:** Close to Home
- **Chapter 16:** Isolation
- **Chapter 17:** Thin Walls
- **Chapter 18:** A Town on Edge
- **Chapter 19:** The Missing Piece
- **Chapter 20:** Fractured Memories
- **Chapter 21:** Confrontation
- **Chapter 22:** Betrayals
- **Chapter 23:** The Final Puzzle
- **Chapter 24:** The Truth Unveiled
- **Chapter 25:** The Last Lie

SAMPLE COPY

Introduction

In the quiet heart of Maplewood, rows of identical houses line streets named after flowering trees. From the outside, the town offers all the trappings of security and comfort: manicured lawns, friendly neighbors, children winding their way to school in tidy uniforms. Yet behind each shuttered window, stories are kept hidden, woven together by silent compacts and memories best left undisturbed.

Kate Jennings never expected to return to this world of whispered secrets. After her marriage imploded under the weight of betrayal, Maplewood became both her refuge and her prison—the place to heal from wounds nobody else could see. As a school counselor, she devotes her days to helping others pick up the pieces of their lives, hiding the fragments of her own pain in the process. Each morning, she reminds herself that putting one foot in front of the other is an act of courage.

But beneath the sunlit routine, Kate feels the pulse of unease. There are nights when old nightmares slip in uninvited, when a stray glance or a familiar melody yanks her back to a past she thought she'd left behind. She cultivates composure carefully, even as her life—so carefully rebuilt—shakes on illogical foundations. Friends tell her she's strong. She doesn't feel it. Not when the air itself sometimes bristles with tension she can't explain.

Maplewood wears its serenity like armor, oblivious to the rot beneath, and the community's history is a garden overgrown with rumors. Sometimes, stories resurface: the missing girls, the police investigations that never led anywhere, the persistent sense that not everything was as it seemed. Kate has always tried to keep her distance from gossip, but it's impossible to ignore the weight of what remains unspoken—a hush that grows heavier each time she passes a certain house, a shiver that tricks her into checking the locks on her doors twice.

As summer gives way to autumn, Kate tries to find comfort in routine. She meets with troubled students, exchanges pleasantries at the market, and walks circles around her own cautious hope for the future. Still, an old question nestles at the edge of her mind, refusing to be dismissed: What does it mean to truly know the people closest to you? The past, she's learning, is never far behind.

Here, in a place where smiles hide secrets and memory is slippery as dusk, Kate must face the possibility that the greatest danger isn't lurking in the darkness, but rather in the fragments of her own recollections—and the lies we tell to survive.

CHAPTER ONE: The Letter in the Mailbox

The crisp autumn air held the scent of woodsmoke and decaying leaves, a comforting perfume that usually settled Kate's nerves. Not today. Today, the familiar crunch of gravel under her sneakers as she walked up her driveway felt amplified, a prelude to something unsettling. The sky was an indifferent canvas of muted grey, mirroring the unease that had been clinging to her all morning, a faint static hum just beneath her skin. She'd dismissed it as post-divorce jitters, the lingering phantom ache of a life uprooted and replanted, but as she approached her mailbox, a different kind of tremor started.

Her mailbox, a rather charming, rustic wooden box perched on a weathered post, usually contained only the usual: bills, junk mail, the occasional flyer for a local pizza place. But today, nestled amongst a grocery store circular and an overdue utilities notice, was a cream-colored envelope. It was thicker than normal, and the paper felt substantial, almost formal, yet the address was handwritten in an uneven, almost childish scrawl. No return address.

A prickle of apprehension traced its way up her spine. Most of her correspondence was digital these days, and anything arriving in such an anonymous fashion felt inherently suspicious. She hesitated for a moment, her fingers hovering over the flap. Her mind, ever the school counselor, immediately conjured up scenarios: a distraught parent, a troubled student, perhaps even a bizarre prank. But none of those felt quite right. This felt... deliberate.

Taking a deep breath, she pulled it out. The paper was heavy, expensive even. As she turned it over, she noticed a faint, almost imperceptible watermark – a small, stylized bird, wings outstretched. It meant nothing to her. She tore open the flap with more force than necessary, a small rip echoing the fraying edges of her composure. Inside, there was no cheerful greeting, no explanation. Just a single sheet of paper, folded in half.

The message was typed, in a simple, almost bland font. No capital letters, no punctuation other than the period at the end of the single, stark sentence.

he is still here. the one who took them.

Kate read the words once, then again, her breath catching in her throat. The "them" could only refer to the Maplewood disappearances, the cold cases that had haunted the town for years. Three teenage girls, gone without a trace over a decade ago. The cases had eventually gone cold, whispers and theories fading into the background

noise of everyday life, occasionally resurfacing in hushed tones at PTA meetings or in hushed conversations over coffee. It was a tragedy the town had never quite shaken, a stain on its pristine facade.

Her first instinct was disbelief. This had to be a cruel joke, a macabre prank from someone with a twisted sense of humor. Who would send something like this? And why to her? She wasn't a detective, she wasn't involved in law enforcement, she was merely a school counselor trying to put her life back together after a humiliating divorce. She had enough real-life problems without delving into old mysteries.

Yet, a part of her, a tiny, insistent voice, wouldn't let it go. The sheer specificity of "the one who took them" felt unsettling. Not "a killer" or "the culprit," but "the one." It implied a singular, known entity. And then the second part of the sentence reverberated in her mind: "might be someone you know intimately."

That line struck her like a physical blow. Intimately. The word pulsed with a dark, suggestive energy. Her immediate thought, of course, was David, her ex-husband. Their divorce had been messy, a landscape of accusations and betrayals. He was charming, manipulative, and capable of hiding a great deal beneath his polished exterior. He'd always had a knack for keeping secrets, a shadowed part of him she'd never quite understood. Could it be him? The thought was absurd, monstrous, and yet... it settled like a cold stone in her stomach.

She walked inside, the letter clutched in her hand, feeling the unsettling weight of it. The familiar scent of her living room, a mix of lavender and old books, offered no comfort. She sank onto her worn armchair, the letter spread out on her lap, the simple words taking on a menacing quality. Could this be someone from her past trying to mess with her? Someone who knew her history, her vulnerabilities?

Her mind began to sift through faces, names. David was the obvious candidate for "intimately," but there were others. Dr. Maxwell Thorne, the respected family physician who'd been so kind after her divorce, perhaps a little *too* kind. He'd offered unsolicited advice, checked in on her more frequently than was strictly professional. And he'd lived in Maplewood for years, long before the disappearances. He knew everyone.

Then there was Sarah, her childhood friend, now estranged. Their friendship had fractured years ago, an unspoken bitterness lingering between them after a misunderstanding Kate couldn't quite recall the details of. Sarah had always been fiercely protective, but also prone to dark moods and resentment. Could she be harboring something?

And what about the newcomer, Mark Harrison, who'd just moved into the house two doors down? He was quiet, almost reclusive, but his eyes held an intensity that made

Kate felt oddly exposed. He always seemed to be watching, though she couldn't quite pinpoint why. He was a stranger, but perhaps not as much as he seemed.

The air in the room felt heavy, suddenly charged with unseen possibilities. Kate tried to rationalize, to dismiss it as a prank, but the sheer malevolence of the letter felt too real, too targeted. The implication that someone she knew, someone she might even trust, could be responsible for such horrific crimes was a chilling thought. It made the familiar walls of her home feel less like a sanctuary and more like a trap.

She stood up, pacing the length of her living room. The letter lay abandoned on the armchair, a silent accusation. She had to do something. But what? Go to the police? They'd dismiss it as a crank letter, a product of a troubled mind. Besides, the cases were cold. They wouldn't reopen them based on an anonymous, vaguely worded threat. And what if the sender was right? What if she truly did know him? The thought sent a fresh wave of nausea washing over her.

She picked up her phone, her thumb hovering over David's contact. Her ex-husband, the man she'd shared a bed with for ten years, the man she'd thought she knew inside and out. The man who had, in the end, proven himself to be a stranger. Could he truly be capable of such darkness? Her stomach clenched at the thought, a raw, primal fear that transcended logic. She put the phone down. No, not yet. She needed to think. She needed to understand.

Kate spent the rest of the afternoon in a haze, the words of the letter replaying in her mind like a broken record. Every creak of the floorboards, every shadow cast by the setting sun, seemed to hold a new meaning, a hidden threat. She peered through her windows, a growing sense of being watched settling over her. Had someone seen her open the mailbox? Was the sender close by, observing her reaction?

That evening, as dusk bled into night, Kate found herself standing in front of the old photo albums she kept tucked away in the back of a closet. She rarely looked at them anymore, the images a painful reminder of a life that no longer existed. But tonight, she felt compelled. She needed to see the faces, to search for clues, for anything that might connect the happy memories to the terrifying words of the letter.

She flipped through faded photographs: childhood birthday parties, awkward teenage dances, college graduation shots. There they were, the faces of her past: Sarah, with her mischievous grin; David, handsome and charismatic, his arm around her; even Dr. Thorne, a younger, less distinguished version of himself, at a community picnic. She stared at their smiles, their laughing eyes, trying to reconcile the images with the monster suggested by the letter.

A chill snaked up her spine as she paused on a photo from a summer camping trip years ago, one that included David, Sarah, and a few other mutual friends. Everyone

was laughing, sun-kissed and carefree. Yet, as she looked closer, she noticed a subtle tension in David's jaw, a flicker in his eyes that she'd never registered before. Or was she just imagining it, projecting her current fears onto an innocent memory?

The thought that someone close to her, someone she had once trusted implicitly, could be a monster, was almost unbearable. It chipped away at the fragile sense of security she had painstakingly built since her divorce. The quiet suburban town, her refuge, now felt like a stage, and she, the unwitting protagonist in a horrifying play. The game, it seemed, had begun. And Kate, whether she liked it or not, was already playing.

SAMPLE COPY

This is a sample preview. Purchase the book to read the full content.

Visit MixCache.com to purchase the complete book.

SAMPLE COPY