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Glass Shadows

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Introduction

There is no sound more alarming to a person who has spent a lifetime running from her past than the phone ringing on a sleepless night. For Alice Monroe, it was the final thread unspooling after years of calculated distance—an unexpected summons to the place she had sworn to leave behind. As a journalist, Alice had made a profession of chasing other people’s secrets, trespassing gently into the broken places of their lives. But when the news came that her twin sister, Eva, had vanished without a trace, the skills she wielded so skillfully with strangers threatened to fail her entirely at home.

Alice’s early years in Lakemont were shaped by silence—a town where suspicion was currency and every family nursed their own hidden wounds. The Monroe home was no different: a beautiful shell scarred by grief, crippled by mistrust. As girls, she and Eva had been inseparable in body but not in spirit, divided by the silent traumas no one dared confront. Time and distance failed to ease the ache; instead, it festered, twisting their bond into something brittle, easily shattered by careless words and forgotten promises.

Her departure from Lakemont a decade ago had felt like survival. Alice buried herself in work, gaining renown for her incisive reporting and unvarnished truths, but her instincts for danger never dulled. Trauma left its marks in odd places—a twitch when the shadows lengthened, a cold knot in her stomach as anniversaries ticked by. Still, she had assumed her fears belonged to her alone—until Eva’s disappearance yanked the lid off everything Alice had suppressed.

Returning meant facing all she had tried to outrun: Eva’s haunting absence, her mother’s wary eyes, the claustrophobic embrace of a community that never forgot and rarely forgave. But Alice also brought something new—her relentless need for answers. Peeling back the layers of her sister’s life, Alice could not help but see echoes of her own—their adolescent secrets, the dangerous curiosity, the invisible damage.

It was easier to dissect the psychology of strangers than to trust her own fractured memory. In Lakemont, even daylight felt distorted, filtered through glass smeared with old lies and regrets. Unreliable recollections haunted Alice at every turn, distorting the line between what she remembered and what she desperately hoped to forget. The urge to expose the truth became indistinguishable from the compulsion to destroy what little peace she clung to.

As her investigation begins, Alice is keenly aware of how treacherous memory—and family—can be. Each secret she uncovers draws her deeper into a shadow world

where nothing is as it seems, and the price of survival may be higher than she ever imagined. Her only certainty is this: to bring Eva home, she will have to risk shattering not just the fragile illusions of Lakemont, but the carefully constructed defenses of her own heart.

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CHAPTER ONE: Shadows on the Water

The last time Alice had driven this stretch of highway, the leaves had been a riot of orange and crimson, a defiant blaze against the creeping chill of autumn. Now, a decade later, the trees stood skeletal and stark, their branches clawing at a sky the color of bruised slate. The odometer on her rented sedan ticked over, each mile a silent countdown to a place she'd spent ten years trying to forget. Lakemont. The name tasted like rust and regret.

She gripped the steering wheel, knuckles white. The faint scent of stale coffee and newsprint clung to her clothes, a comforting residue from her life in the city, a life that suddenly felt impossibly far away. Alice Monroe, journalist extraordinaire, fearless truth-teller, was reduced to a bundle of frayed nerves, her meticulously constructed defenses crumbling with every familiar curve in the road.

The phone call from her mother, clipped and devoid of any real warmth, replayed in her mind like a broken record: "Eva's gone, Alice. The police... they're saying foul play." Foul play. The words had hung in the sterile air of her Brooklyn apartment, an absurd echo of the true crime podcasts she sometimes listened to for research. Now, they were real, attaching themselves to her twin, to Eva, who was supposed to be safe, somewhere Alice couldn't reach.

The town limit sign, faded and pockmarked, materialized through the gloom: *Welcome to Lakemont - A Community Built on History and Heart*. Alice snorted. History, maybe. Heart? That was a generous stretch. Lakemont was built on secrets, brick by silent brick, sustained by a collective amnesia that served to bury the inconvenient truths just beneath the manicured lawns.

She navigated the familiar main street, a narrow ribbon of asphalt flanked by brick storefronts that looked exactly as they had a decade ago. The antique shop with its dusty window display, the diner emitting the faint scent of fried grease, the hardware store that had sold her father the nails for a project he never finished. Nothing had changed, and yet everything had. The world had kept turning, but Lakemont felt caught in amber, a perpetual shadow play of the past.

A chill seeped into the car, not just from the dropping temperature, but from the realization that this was it. She was back. The decision had been instantaneous, driven by a primal need she couldn't articulate. Eva. Her twin. The sister she'd fought with, resented, loved fiercely, then deliberately alienated. The chasm between them had widened with every year of silence, until Alice wondered if there was anything left of the bond they once shared. Now, all that mattered was finding her.

The first stop, predictably, was her mother's house. A two-story colonial with peeling paint on the porch and a garden that had seen better days. It was the house Alice had grown up in, the stage for so many unspoken dramas. She pulled into the driveway, the crunch of gravel under her tires sounding deafening in the unnatural quiet.

Eleanor Monroe met her at the door, a woman etched with more lines than Alice remembered, her usually immaculate silver hair slightly disheveled. Her eyes, the same shade of hazel as Alice's own, held a familiar wariness, a shield against emotion. There was no embrace, no tearful reunion. Just a tight nod, a hesitant flicker of something that might have been relief, quickly suppressed.

"Alice," Eleanor said, her voice thin. "You came." It wasn't a question.

"Of course, I came, Mom. It's Eva." The words hung awkwardly in the air. Their relationship was a carefully maintained edifice of polite distance, built on years of avoiding uncomfortable truths. Now, the foundation was shaking.

The inside of the house was cool, almost sterile. The air hung heavy with the scent of lemon polish and a faint, cloying sweetness Alice couldn't place. Every piece of furniture was exactly where she remembered it, a museum of their shared, fractured past. The floral couch where her father had read the newspaper, the ornate wooden clock on the mantelpiece that had ticked away countless silent dinners.

"The police have been here, constantly," Eleanor continued, leading Alice into the living room. "They ask the same questions over and over. What was Eva doing? Who was she seeing? As if I'm supposed to know everything." Her mother wrung her hands, a rare display of agitation. "She was so private, Alice. You know how she was."

Alice did know. Eva had always been the quiet one, the observer, cloaking her thoughts behind a placid exterior. While Alice had chafed against the small-town constraints, Eva had seemingly embraced them, content to blend in, to exist in the shadows. Or so Alice had always believed.

"What exactly have they told you?" Alice asked, trying to keep her voice even. Her journalist's instincts were kicking in, a familiar armor against the raw fear clawing at her. She needed facts, timelines, anything concrete to ground her.

Eleanor sank onto the edge of the couch, her shoulders slumped. "Just that she left her car at the lake, near the old boat launch. Her purse was inside, her phone. Nothing else." She waved a dismissive hand. "They dragged the lake, of course. Found nothing. Just cold, dark water."

The lake. Lake Lakemont. A vast, dark expanse that had always held a certain

ominous beauty for Alice. As children, it had been their playground, their secret world, but as they grew older, its murky depths seemed to mirror the secrets the town itself held.

“And no one saw her?” Alice pressed, her gaze scanning the room, as if answers might be hiding in the dust motes dancing in the slivers of weak afternoon light. “No witnesses?”

Eleanor shook her head. “Not really. A couple of fishermen saw her car, but no one saw *her*. It was early morning. Foggy.” Her voice trailed off, a familiar note of defeat creeping in.

Alice stood by the window, looking out at the bare branches, the slate sky. The small-town claustrophobia was already tightening its grip. Every corner of this house held a memory, a ghost. The silence in the room was heavy, laden with unspoken accusations and unresolved grief. This wasn't just about Eva; it was about the fractured family they were, the lies they'd lived with.

“Have you spoken to anyone else?” Alice asked, turning back to her mother. “Her friends? Did she have anyone new she was close to?” Eva had always been a creature of habit, her circle small.

Eleanor looked away, fiddling with a loose thread on the couch. “She was seeing someone, I think. I didn't know him, Alice. She kept it quiet. You know Eva.” The deflection was typical. Eleanor had a knack for deflecting, for keeping the world at arm's length.

A male friend. That was new. Eva had always been guarded, especially after... well, after everything. Alice filed the information away. A new lead, however vague, was something.

Later, as the light faded and the house grew colder, Alice found herself in Eva's bedroom. The door had been left ajar, as if Eva might walk back in at any moment. The room was meticulously tidy, a stark contrast to Alice's own chaotic existence. The bed was made, a stack of books on the nightstand, their spines uncracked. A single photograph on her dresser: a faded picture of her and Eva as children, smiling, arms linked, before the shadows had truly fallen.

Alice picked up the photo, tracing the outlines of their younger selves. Twins, identical on the surface, but so fundamentally different within. Eva, serene and introspective. Alice, restless and questioning. What had happened to that effortless bond? When had the invisible cracks started to appear, widening into an unbridgeable canyon?

She ran her fingers over Eva's desk, the smooth surface cold beneath her touch. A few

pens, a stack of blank paper, and a small, leather-bound journal. Alice's breath hitched. Eva had always kept a journal, a private space where she documented her thoughts, her observations. Alice knew this because she, too, had kept one, years ago, before the words became too painful to commit to paper.

Hesitantly, Alice opened the journal. The first few pages were ordinary, mundane entries about daily life in Lakemont. But then, as she flipped further, a shift. The handwriting became smaller, more cramped, the language subtly more coded. Mentions of "the project," "the anomaly," and a recurring symbol: a jagged, broken line. It looked like a shard of glass.

A prickle of unease snaked up Alice's spine. This wasn't the Eva she thought she knew, the quiet, unassuming sister. This was someone else, someone with a hidden life, a secret agenda. And whatever she was involved in, it had something to do with her disappearance.

Just as Alice was about to delve deeper into the cryptic entries, a loud knock rattled the front door downstairs. She snapped the journal shut, her heart hammering against her ribs. Footsteps sounded on the stairs, then Eleanor's voice, hushed but firm.

"Detective Reynolds, a word, please?"

Alice put the journal back, her mind racing. Detective Reynolds. She remembered him, a burly, stoic man who'd been on the Lakemont police force for as long as she could remember. He'd been the one to question her after... after the fire. A shiver ran through her. This town, these people, they remembered everything. And they were watching.

She walked out of Eva's room, a new resolve hardening her features. The journalist in her was awake now, fully engaged. Eva hadn't just vanished; she'd been on the verge of uncovering something. And Alice, despite every instinct telling her to flee, was about to step into the darkness her sister had left behind. The shadows on the water weren't just memories; they were a warning.

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