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Shadow Over Glassmere

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Introduction

Glassmere was the kind of town you might miss if you blinked—a cluster of houses edging the steel-blue lake, hugged on all sides by dense forests and gentle hills. To a bystander, it appeared peaceful to the point of being uneventful; a picture-perfect dot on the map where children rode their bikes along tree-lined streets and neighbors greeted each other with warm familiarity. Yet beneath its tranquil facade lay a tapestry woven with unspoken histories, grudges left to simmer, and secrets carried in the hush of twilight. This was the Glassmere that Callie Monroe knew, even as memories of her childhood felt hazy and distant, half-erased by the passing of years and the weight of her new life.

Callie never expected to return. Ten years in the city—ten years building a reputation as a sharp, unyielding detective—had been enough to convince her that the small-town rhythms and rituals of her youth were best left in the review mirror. Yet, when her father's sudden illness called her back to Glassmere, she was forced to reconcile the person she'd become with the place she could never fully forget. Glassmere had changed, and so had she, but the undercurrents of the past still tugged at her with surprising force.

The uneasy reunion with her hometown is abruptly overshadowed by a chilling discovery: Eloise Harwood, the town's cherished librarian and quiet confidant, is found drowned in the whispering waters of Glassmere Lake. What initially appears to be a tragic accident soon flashes with hints of foul play. The town's familiar faces—the ones who had tutored, scolded, or comforted Callie as a girl—now look to her for answers, their trust edged with expectation and fear. Reluctantly, Callie steps into the role of investigator, haunted by memories and aware that every question seems to uncover new layers of unease.

As the investigation begins, she senses that Glassmere is not as it seems. Conversations veer away from the heart of matters, sidelong glances replace candid answers, and old alliances resurface in subtle ways. The town's annual traditions and tight-knit community bonds are both comfort and camouflage—a shield for secrets as old as the lake itself. Callie's search for the truth will demand not only her detective skills but also a reckoning with her own tangled past in this lakeside enclave.

With each interview and late-night walk along the shoreline, Callie begins to see Glassmere anew. The town is both familiar and foreign, brimming with warmth and yet shadowed by suspicion. She finds herself re-evaluating not just the townspeople around her, but also her own place in the story: the daughter returned, the outsider within, the hunter and—perhaps—the hunted. The death of the librarian stirs

memories Callie thought she had left behind, and soon, her investigation threatens to expose more than just a murderer.

In the pages that follow, the unseen tensions of Glassmere will surface—old grievances, hidden loves, and betrayals carefully buried. Each chapter unravels another thread in the tightly knit fabric of this community, drawing Callie, and the reader, ever closer to truths that some would do anything to keep hidden. This is the story of a town poised on the edge of revelation, and of a detective chasing shadows—both over the lake, and within herself.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Return

The scent of pine and damp earth hit Callie the moment she stepped out of her slightly mud-splattered sedan. It was a smell she hadn't consciously registered in years, yet it instantly transported her back to scraped knees and summer evenings chasing fireflies. Glassmere, even with its muted autumn palette, was exactly as she remembered, and utterly foreign all at once. The modest two-story house on Birch Lane, her childhood home, seemed to have shrunk, or perhaps she had grown too big for its familiar confines.

Her father, Arthur Monroe, a man who had always seemed as immutable as the granite outcrops around the lake, was frail. His once booming voice was now a raspy whisper, a consequence of the unexpected pneumonia that had brought Callie racing back. He was resting, her aunt had said on the phone, but the urgency in her voice had been unmistakable. Callie had driven straight through the night, a silent, tense journey, her mind replaying snippets of conversations with doctors and the hushed tones of her family.

The porch swing creaked rhythmically as Callie approached, as if waiting for her return. A terracotta pot of faded chrysanthemums sat on the steps, a small, stubborn splash of color against the darkening wood. She paused, taking a deep breath, the chill autumn air biting at her cheeks. This wasn't a sabbatical; it was an emergency leave, a jarring interruption to the relentless pace of her life in the city, where concrete canyons had replaced whispering trees.

Inside, the house smelled of antiseptic and something warm and vaguely comforting – perhaps her aunt's famous pot roast. Aunt Clara emerged from the kitchen, her kind face etched with worry lines Callie hadn't noticed before. Her embrace was tight, familiar, and almost brought a lump to Callie's throat. "He's been asking for you, honey," Clara whispered, her voice thick with unshed tears.

Callie spent the first few days in a blur of hushed conversations, hospital visits, and the quiet rhythm of Glassmere life. Arthur was slowly improving, but the recovery would be long. He was stubborn, Clara assured her, and that stubbornness would see him through. Callie found herself slipping back into routines she thought she'd forgotten: morning walks by the lake, the familiar faces at Miller's General Store, and the oddly comforting drone of the local radio station.

The lake, a constant presence in Glassmere, held a peculiar allure. Its surface could be glass-smooth and reflective one moment, a turbulent, slate-gray expanse the next. She'd spent countless hours by its shores as a child, skipping stones and dreaming of

a life beyond Glassmere's gentle embrace. Now, staring out at its seemingly placid surface, a sense of unease, faint but persistent, settled over her.

It was on her third day back that the news broke. Not through official channels, but through the swift, invisible network of small-town gossip. Eloise Harwood, the town librarian, found drowned in Glassmere Lake. The words hung in the air, heavy and unbelievable. Eloise, with her spectacles perched on her nose and her quiet, knowing smile, a fixture of the town for as long as Callie could remember.

Initially, it was assumed to be an accident. Eloise, everyone agreed, was meticulous, but also a bit frail. Perhaps she'd stumbled while walking along the shore. The local sheriff, a man named Brody, who had been a deputy when Callie was a teenager, was handling the preliminary investigation. Callie knew Brody. He was a good man, earnest and hardworking, but Glassmere didn't exactly boast a high crime rate. Their biggest cases usually involved a missing pet or a rowdy deer hunter.

Callie found herself unable to shake a growing sense of disquiet. A drowning in Glassmere Lake was rare, especially this time of year. And Eloise Harwood? The woman practically lived for her books and her quiet routine. The thought of her falling into the chilly waters seemed... uncharacteristic. She tried to dismiss it as big-city cynicism, a detective's trained eye seeing shadows where there were none.

But then came the whispers, carried on the autumn wind and through hushed phone calls. Not just a drowning, but a *suspicious* drowning. Someone mentioned a strange mark on Eloise's wrist. Another hinted that her glasses, which she never took off, were missing. These tidbits, innocent in isolation, began to form a mosaic of doubt in Callie's mind.

Later that afternoon, Sheriff Brody called. His voice, usually steady, had a strained quality to it. "Callie," he began, "I know you're on leave, and I know your dad... but I was hoping you might spare an hour or two. Just to look over some things." He didn't have to elaborate. Callie knew what he was asking. He was out of his depth, and a former Glassmere girl, now a seasoned detective, was right here.

A part of her bristled. She was here for her father, not for a small-town drowning. She'd left the grit and grime of police work behind, temporarily at least. But another part, the professional part, the part that had spent years honing an instinct for truth, was already intrigued. "What's the situation, Brody?" she asked, her voice calm and authoritative, a tone she usually reserved for hardened criminals.

Brody explained that the medical examiner had found some irregularities. Nothing conclusive, he stressed, but enough to warrant a closer look. A slight discoloration around the neck, consistent with... well, he trailed off. Not consistent with a simple fall. "We're interviewing folks who saw her last," he said. "Just trying to piece together her

movements.”

Callie agreed to meet him at the sheriff’s office, a small, unassuming building next to the town hall. As she drove through Glassmere’s main street, the familiar storefronts seemed to hold new secrets. The bakery, the hardware store, the diner where everyone knew everyone’s business—they all appeared normal, yet she felt a subtle shift, a barely perceptible tension hanging in the air.

At the sheriff’s office, Brody was a picture of polite desperation. He laid out the preliminary findings, the sparse notes from the scene, the list of people who had last seen Eloise alive. The mark on Eloise’s wrist, he confirmed, looked like a faint bruise, though it could have been from anything. The missing glasses, however, were perplexing. Eloise was practically blind without them.

“She was found in the shallow cove near the old boathouse,” Brody explained, pointing to a spot on a laminated map of the lake. “A couple of kids out fishing found her.” He sighed, running a hand through his thinning hair. “Good kids. But they’re pretty shaken up.”

Callie studied the map. The old boathouse was a dilapidated structure that had belonged to the Harwood family for generations. It was a private, secluded spot, not a place Eloise would typically walk unless she had a specific reason. “Any signs of a struggle?” Callie asked, her eyes scanning the sparse incident report.

Brody shook his head. “None that we could find. The ground was wet from the morning dew, but no scuff marks, no disturbed foliage.” He hesitated. “It just doesn’t make sense, Callie. Eloise was careful. Always.”

Callie spent the next hour reviewing the limited evidence, asking Brody pointed questions that he seemed relieved to answer. She could see he was trying, but his experience was limited to a town where the most exciting event was usually the annual pumpkin festival. This was different. This felt... off.

As she left the sheriff’s office, the setting sun cast long, skeletal shadows across the street. The quiet of Glassmere, once a comfort, now felt heavy, almost oppressive. The familiar faces she’d greeted earlier in the day now seemed to hide something. The small town charm, the sense of community, was suddenly tinged with a subtle, unnerving chill. Eloise Harwood’s death was more than a tragic accident; it was a ripple in the placid waters of Glassmere, and Callie Monroe, whether she liked it or not, was about to be pulled into its depths.

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