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The Missing Session

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Introduction

The ferry's engines pulse beneath my feet, their rumble coiling with unease in my chest. Seattle is receding behind fogged glass, city lights smearing the dusk into bruised reflection. Rain pecks at the windows, clinging to my coat as I lean into the cold, carrying a USB drive that shouldn't exist. I found it in my mailbox half an hour ago, tucked inside a plain envelope with my name written in block letters. No note. No sender. Weightless, and yet impossibly heavy with whatever it contains.

I'm careful—meticulous by reputation, maybe obsessed if I'm honest. As a trauma therapist, boundaries are scripture; confidentiality is the air I breathe. But now the very rules that protect me feel brittle in my hands. I slide the USB into my laptop, shielding the screen from the few commuters scattered across the cabin. The file name is blunt: SESSION_ONE.mp3. My finger hesitates. One press, and my life might cleave into before and after.

The playback begins with the faint scrape of a chair, then a patient's voice fractured by panic. "Dr. Linden... we both know what you did at the lake." She calls me by name, "Dr. Linden," and though her voice is shaken, it's the next voice that chills me to the bone. My own—unmistakable, professional, soothing—responds, "Ivy, tell me everything you remember." I freeze. Because I recognize the cadence and phrasing, but I have never treated a patient named Ivy. Still, there I am, guiding her through memories that sound like secrets I have never—would never—share in session.

Outside, the storm snaps against the hull, muffling the world to gray noise. I listen as "Ivy" confesses, describing a murder at a familiar lakeside path, painting the shoreline with echoes of my childhood nightmares. She names a victim—a name once whispered in old news stories, now dredged from the mud of a cold case I never touched. Through the rain-streaked window, I see nothing but shifting shadows, the ferry slicing through darkness as my own voice on the recording calmly leads an anonymous woman to her confession.

My skin prickles with the violation of hearing myself say things I never said. My code of ethics—what I built my career on—now seems paper-thin, feeble armor as I wonder how such a recording could exist. Who made it? Why? There are only a handful of people who know anything about those old, buried nights at the lake, and none could have accessed my therapy files or memories. Unless someone wants to destroy me—or convince me I'm losing my mind, one fabricated word at a time.

By the time the ferry lists toward the dock, I've only just begun to understand how completely my world is about to unravel. Evidence doesn't care about memory. My

voice, even weaponized, does not lie. Except—maybe, in this new world, it does. What I know for certain is this: that isn't my session—because it never happened.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Envelope

The ferry shuddered, docking with a groan that seemed to mirror the one building in my own chest. My hands, usually so steady, fumbled with the laptop, snapping it shut with a clack that echoed too loudly in the emptying cabin. The USB drive, still plugged in, felt like a tiny, toxic arrow. I slid it out, pocketing it as if it were contraband, then joined the shuffle of commuters heading for the ramp. Each step felt heavy, burdened by the phantom confession I'd just heard.

Outside, the Seattle air was a slap of cold and damp, the kind that sinks into your bones. Rain-slicked pavement reflected the neon glow of a coffee shop across the street, blurring its edges into an impressionist painting. I pulled my coat tighter, hunching against the elements, but it did little to ward off the chill that had nothing to do with the weather. The voice on the recording—my voice—kept replaying in my mind. "Ivy, tell me everything you remember." The words felt like a violation, a twisted echo of my own professional practice.

My car, a sensible, charcoal-gray sedan, was parked a few blocks away. The walk felt endless, each storefront I passed a reminder of normalcy I no longer felt part of. People hurried by, their faces obscured by umbrellas, lost in their own worlds. I wondered if any of them had ever listened to their own voice confessing to a crime they didn't commit, or guiding a stranger through a fabricated memory. The absurdity of it warred with the chilling reality.

Reaching my car, I fumbled with the keys, my fingers stiff. Inside, the familiar scent of old coffee and leather offered a brief, fleeting comfort. I started the engine, the hum of the heater a low counterpoint to the frantic buzz in my skull. I needed to go home, to dissect this, to understand how a piece of audio could feel so intimately familiar and yet utterly alien.

The drive through the winding suburban streets felt like navigating a dream. Streetlights cast long, watery reflections on the wet asphalt. My mind raced, trying to find a logical explanation. A prank? A sophisticated hack? But who would go to such lengths? And why me? My practice was built on discretion, on the quiet, often painful work of healing. I wasn't high-profile, not famous enough to warrant such elaborate sabotage.

Except for one thing. The lake. The specific path "Ivy" described. It wasn't just any lakeside path; it was the one I knew, the one from my childhood, where the moss grew thick on the ancient firs and the air always smelled of pine and damp earth. A place I hadn't visited in years, a place where a ghost of a memory still lingered, a long-ago

accident I'd tried to bury.

I pulled into my driveway, the headlights cutting through the gloom, illuminating the rain-lashed porch. Our house, a charming 1920s craftsman, usually felt like a sanctuary. Tonight, it felt like a trap. Theo would be home soon, probably already there, lost in his ER-induced exhaustion. How would I explain this to him? My logical, grounded husband, who dealt in tangible diagnoses and verifiable facts. "Someone cloned my voice and put it in a murder confession, honey!" It sounded insane.

As I walked up the porch steps, the wind whipped around me, carrying the scent of blooming jasmine from a neighbor's yard. I paused at the front door, the cool metal of the doorknob grounding me for a moment. I thought about the anonymous envelope, the plain white paper, the block letters of my name. It had been slipped into the mailbox, not mailed. Someone had been here. Someone close.

Inside, the house was quiet, save for the hum of the refrigerator. Theo wasn't home yet. A small mercy, for now. I shed my coat, dropping my bag and keys onto the console table by the door. The USB drive felt like a burning coal in my pocket. I pulled it out, placed it on the polished wood, and stared at it. It was so small, so innocuous, and yet it held the potential to shatter my entire existence.

I walked into the living room, flipping on a lamp. The soft glow did little to dispel the gloom that had settled around me. I sank onto the sofa, running a hand through my damp hair. The more I thought about it, the more details from the recording surfaced, pricking at the edges of my professional composure. The specific rhythm of my breathing between sentences, a subtle clearing of my throat before asking a particularly difficult question. Those tiny, unconscious mannerisms that only someone who had spent considerable time listening to me, or to recordings of me, would know.

My mind reeled. Supervision tapes? I had dictated countless hours of case notes over the years, all stored securely within the clinic's system. But those were private, protected by multiple layers of security and HIPAA compliance. Only a handful of people had the highest level of access. Dr. Julian Halden, my mentor and clinic founder, was one. Kayla Ortiz, my loyal but financially struggling clinic assistant, was another. And the IT team, of course.

The thought of someone weaponizing my own clinical voice, twisting my ethical practice into a grotesque confession, made my stomach churn. It wasn't just a violation; it was a perversion. Everything I stood for was being turned against me. And the murder itself... the cold case victim named on the recording. A young woman, found near the lake years ago, a case that had haunted the local news for months before fading into obscurity. The details "Ivy" recounted, though vague, matched the snippets I recalled from old headlines.

I stood up, pacing the length of the living room, my gaze falling on the framed diplomas on the wall—my doctorate, my certifications. They felt like flimsy paper now, easily torn. How could I prove this wasn't me? My own voice. It was irrefutable. And yet, it was refutable. Because it wasn't me. Not truly. Not in that session.

I reached for my phone, my thumb hovering over Theo's contact. No. Not yet. I needed to think, to strategize. To understand what this was, before I dragged him into the maelstrom. My mind flashed to the patient who had called me "Dr. Linden" at the start of the recording. "We both know what you did at the lake." It was a threat, a veiled accusation, a subtle twist of the knife.

The lake. My childhood. The accident that wasn't a murder. A shiver ran down my spine, unrelated to the damp chill of the house. Someone was pulling threads from my past, twisting them with a current crime, and weaving them into a narrative of my undoing. And the anonymous nature of the delivery, the lack of a discernible motive, only amplified the fear. Was this personal? Professional? Or something far more sinister?

The rain intensified outside, hammering against the windows, a drumming prelude to the storm that was gathering, not just in the sky, but around my very life. I looked at the USB drive on the console table, a small, dark object containing a manufactured truth designed to destroy me. I picked it up, clenching it in my hand. Tomorrow, I would take this to Julian. He would know what to do. He had to.

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