



1. Jackie — Last Year

On the coffee table next to my *People* magazine sat a Papa John's pizza box with day-old grease stains. Except for the garlic packet, I had eaten everything, even the limp jalapeno peppers. Beside the cardboard box were six napkins, one for each Krispy Kreme I had devoured. I had kept the donuts in the freezer as a way to ration them, but 15 seconds in the microwave took care of that. As if in a trance, I thawed them one at a time until they were gone. Besides, once the floodgates were opened, what was the point of restraint?

In hindsight, I should have joined the other paralegals for happy hour instead of spending my Friday night binging on pizza and Netflix. But after a long week at the law firm, I looked forward to vegging out alone on the couch.

I surveyed the aftermath of my mindless indulgence. Maybe it wasn't as bad as it looked. I headed down the narrow hall to the small bathroom of my one-bedroom apartment. As I stepped onto the cold tile floor, my guilty eyes fixated on the oval white scale in front of the bathtub.

Holding my breath, I stepped on it and looked down.

My spirits sank.

I stepped off, let it reset and tried again. But the number didn't change.

Dejected, I trudged into the bedroom and flipped on the TV. A skinny blonde with perfectly coiffed hair and sparkling white teeth was robotically reading the morning news on CNN. If the camera added ten pounds, then she really had to be anorexic. How I wished to be her just for a day, to be seen as beautiful, attractive and perfectly put-together. I was sure people didn't sneer at her when she bought a cup of coffee with extra cream and a few donuts.

The reporter continued in her cut-glass voice, "We have breaking news in the case of the Snapchat Killer. Local artist Aaron Slater was arrested last night for the murder of Catherine Snow. Slater was at his residence and art studio, where authorities made the arrest. We're told they've found compelling evidence and expect to have DNA results in the coming weeks."

I gasped, seeing the familiar face of the boy I knew in high school, though his sunken eyes and weathered face were a much older version

of the Aaron I remembered. Still, not even a police photo could mask his curly brown hair and chiseled jawbone. His ever-present dimples, the ones that had made every teenage girl swoon, enhanced his good looks. Besides Lindsay Lohan, Aaron was the only person I'd ever seen who managed to look like a movie star in a mug shot.

By contrast, my appearance was hardly as glamorous. My XXL T-shirt draped like a tent from my neck and shoulders, my red hair was starting to frizz and the inflamed blemishes on my jawline looked like a mild case of chicken pox. What a cruel joke that my acne still flared in my late twenties.

The anchorwoman cut to a live feed of the local reporter bundled in a winter coat and scarf outside Aaron's art studio in Decatur, Georgia. Several vans, camera crews and other reporters were all trying to get a jump on the story. The reporter on the scene provided some details of Aaron's biography, one I knew well.

In our small hometown of Columbus, Georgia, everybody knew everybody. My high school graduating class had only sixty students. Aaron had been my best friend and the only kid in our class who had treated me with a shred of decency. Well, decent in his own way. When some of the "mean girls" had spread rumors that I had lice, *which wasn't true*, Aaron brought a bottle of lice-killing shampoo to school and slipped it to me in front of my locker.

"Even if you don't use it," he had said softly, "just show them the bottle and maybe they'll stop saying that stuff."

I had thought only the girls were talking about my alleged lice so I was doubly devastated when I learned that the boys were gossiping about me, too. But Aaron was different. Although he didn't advertise or acknowledge our friendship, not in public anyway, he had always helped me in private, like with the shampoo.

How could Aaron Slater be guilty of murder? He couldn't hurt a fly—could he?



A. Me — Before Conviction

You don't notice me at first, but I notice you. Let's start with your clothes—the hiked-up miniskirt and yellow tank top. You're going to freeze your ass off. Legs streaked with fake tanner, you look like a zebra. A refined lady sips her liquor, but not you. You slam the free booze from a secret admirer. Sure, you look around the bar to see who might have sent it. That's when I take a piss, to stay out of sight. But the more the shots keep coming, the less you care who sent them. Spoiled bitch. Daddy's princess.

Is your ugly sidekick going to stay sober and stick with you? Why the loyalty, ugly girl? Hoping to get the leftovers from Birdie? Sure enough, ugly girl lasts awhile, but when she can't convince you to leave by midnight, she bails. My move—chicks can't resist these dimples.

You're drunk but you don't refuse another shot. You like the attention of a real man, not a college boy. You casually rub my forearm, admiring my muscles and my expensive TAG watch—both are appealing. You like to flirt, and when I play it cool, you try even harder, probing the bottom of the shot glass with your tongue. Yeah, I noticed.

That's when you make your first mistake. I ask to take a selfie of us using your phone and you foolishly let me. My digital infiltration begins.

Now the tricky part. I have to jailbreak your smartphone. You wouldn't understand how to download outside applications, but I do. I shift from taking selfies of us to pics of just you. You imagine you're a Victoria's Secret supermodel and I'm your prize photographer. As I rapidly snap your picture, you eat it up. In reality, I'm not taking any photos at all. I'm working my magic to invade your life.

"Excellent," I encourage. It doesn't take much. "Now give me your best sexy look. You got it. Don't stop."

You continue to giggle and pose like a slut while I download and launch my spyware on your phone. You writhe like a worm, wrapping your leg around the brass bar railing. You think you're so hot. I play along, all the while pretending to take pictures of you.

For my invasion to be complete, the phone must be rebooted. I deliberately turn it off and then stare at the device as if it has betrayed me.

“Your phone is crap,” I say, as I hand it back. “It just died on me. I hope I didn’t lose all those great poses.”

You take the phone and gape at the dark screen. I wait. Can you possibly be this dense? You finally figure out the obvious solution to try the power button.

“It works fine for me,” you slur. “Must be user error.”

“Must be,” I admit. And with the finesse of a world-class thief, my spyware is live. Not that it was a particular challenge—you don’t even use a password, you stupid girl.

With my monitoring software installed, I’ll track your calls, look at your photos and read all of your texts and emails. With access to your calendar and GPS, I’ll watch your every move and know exactly where you are, all without leaving the comfort of my favorite chair.

You continue to flirt, leaning in closer and placing your sticky fingers on my leather jacket. Sloppy bitch. You want me to kiss you, to whisk you away to my bed, but that’s not the plan, not tonight. First, I need to invade your digital life.

I grab the nape of your neck and whisper that I have to go. You lean in more, expecting me to ravish you right there in public, but I don’t. Instead, I leave you at the bar—horny, intoxicated and rejected. I almost offer to drive you home, just to be sure you’re safe, which is the ultimate irony.