

D I P
R I P
ELIZA
HADT

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Ellie Sokoloff is attending Ventana Ranch School in Big Sur, because she
hopes that the wide-open setting will cure her claustrophobia and she was
delighted to find Eliza Hart her childhood friend also in attendance; but Eliza
has changed and for no apparent reason starts spreading rumors about Ellie,
until one day she is found dead—now Ellie must find out what happened to her
one-time best friend, and who killed her, not least because she herself is
everybody's chief suspect.

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ELIZA

sirens

Sirens. Like in the *Odyssey*. Calling attention, drawing eyes. They're coming to find me.

I've decided to amend what I said before. It's possible that dying isn't painful for *everyone*. If you're in a coma and they unplug the machines, it might not hurt because your consciousness is already gone. Or maybe some people really do die in their sleep at a ripe old age after a long and fruitful life.

But to tell you the truth, I don't think life ever slips out of us peacefully. I think it twists and pulls and rips itself away, as violent as being skinned.

I never imagined my life beyond being a teenager. I don't mean I was planning this all along. I just never really saw past what was right in front of me.

In kindergarten, I couldn't see past learning my ABCs to reading actual books.

Third grade, I couldn't see past my multiplication tables to long division.

And sophomore year, I couldn't see anything past filling out the application for the Ventana Ranch School in Big Sur.

On some level, I must have understood that I was filling out the application so that I could actually, you know, *go* there the following year. I just couldn't see that far, like some kind of psychological nearsightedness.

Did I know all along that I'd die young, like a tragic character from a book they made us read in school? Did I know this was coming for me?

The sirens keep wailing, keening, moaning—bringing students away from their dinners and out of their dorm rooms, wondering what's going on.

All because of me.

I thought I would get to sleep. But the sirens are keeping me awake. Not that quiet has ever made it easier for me to sleep.

I've never slept. I mean, I *slept*—but not like normal people sleep. Never through the night. Even as a baby, my mom said they tried everything but I still got up and cried every night. I wasn't hungry and I didn't need to be changed.

I just didn't sleep.

Once I was old enough for a big-girl bed, I climbed out of it. Crept down the hall to my parents' room. Stood on my mom's side of the bed until she woke up. I made her get out of bed and play with me.

At first, she begged me to go back to sleep:

Little girls need sleep to grow up big and strong.

You'll get sick.

I'll *get sick*.

Eventually, she brought me back to my room and sang me lullabies and rocked me back and forth, waiting for my eyelids to grow heavy and close.

After a while, she gave up. Soon, our midnight play sessions became routine.

We were always careful not to wake my dad. *Let him sleep*, Mom would whisper. *He needs his sleep*.

More than you do? I'd ask.

She never answered.