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Chapter 2

HE WAS A liar. Lying was what kept him safe, alive, and relatively sane when he was little and his mother would crawl into his bed. When he became older and she continued to crawl in.

He lied about everything and to everyone: his wearisome, red-faced manager at the Winn Dixie, the employer at his second job, the filthy sister who he'd been forced to care for. Anyone he encountered while he was outside the house, anyone he'd ever met. Sometimes, when he was lucky, he even managed to lie to himself.

He was sure that people liked him because of the person he pretended to be, and that if they knew who he really was, they'd be terrified. They'd fear for their lives. They'd hurt him. The thought unsettled him almost as much as the terror trapped inside his head.

Some people thought they were close to him. They weren't. He made sure of it. If. . . they only knew.

It was dark now in the woods. Very still. A sharp contrast to what was transpiring inside his head. A slew of horrid, dangerous thoughts like fireworks, exploding, overcrowding his skull.

He felt far from at peace and always had. But something about this summer in particular had stirred him. His mind was a pressure cooker that desperately needed release.

Screaming at the pond wasn't enough anymore. They'd begun to scream back.

Brushing away a low-slung limb, he trudged forward. A pair of yellow eyes studied him from within the tall grass and his heart skipped a beat.

It was the sickly stray cat that he'd named Ian. It followed him everywhere these days: to the pond, through the woods. Its heinous face even peered through his tiny bedroom window at the worst of moments. Over the months, Ian's eyes had turned evil and he wanted nothing to do with the revolting animal. "Leave me the fuck alone, Ian," he seethed. But the cat didn't budge. It just stood there, intimidating him. "Fuck off, I said!" He lunged at it. It shrieked and shot into the darkness.

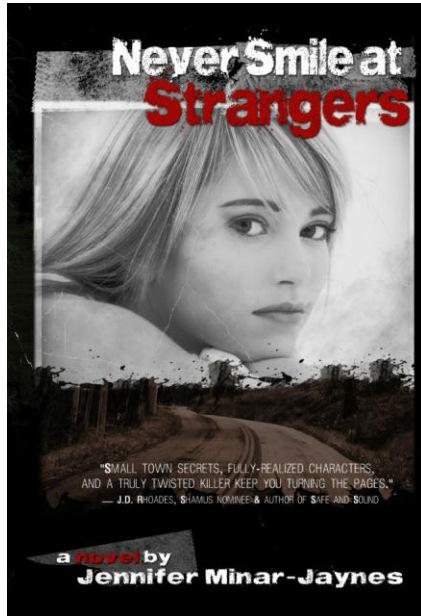
He headed back to the small house he shared with his sister. But he knew he wouldn't be able to stay there for long. He avoided it as much as possible. It'd been hers, his mother's. Inside it, he was still a terrified, angry little boy.

Outside of it, he could usually fake who he was and become almost normal. The lies were his salvation. But not in the house, a place that would remain a cruel part of his life until his sister graduated high school. Either then, or until he was forced to destroy her.

But when he neared the house, he couldn't bear to go in. The light in his sister's room was switched off, which could only mean that she was out. But she wasn't the only one he had to worry about. Some nights his dead mother's presence just felt too strong.

He decided to take a drive.

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