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LYING SEASON

BOOK FOUR IN THE EXPERIMENT IN TERROR SERIES

∞KARINA HALLE∞



\m/ Metal Blonde Books \m/



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Publisher's Note: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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For the dogs of my life, Duke, Ellie and Muffin

CHAPTER ONE

"Tell me about the accident, Perry."

I barely heard what the doctor said. I was busy staring out the window of his office, watching the leaves of the oak tree outside waver in the spring breeze. It wasn't quite five o' clock but the sun was already setting, creating a harsh orange glow behind the buildings of downtown Portland. It caught the edges of the tiny symmetrical leaves, making each one look like they were tinged with flames, that slow burn towards the middle.

But they weren't on fire, were they? No, they only looked like it.

"Perry, where are you?"

I tore my eyes away from the window and gave Dr. Freedman the nastiest look I could muster. His skinny, narrow face was aglow with the fiery light, but like usual, I couldn't tell what he was thinking. He had that stupid noncommittal look of a psychiatrist; that

patient, patronizing stare that never gave anything away. All of that was scribbled away on his notepad.

"Where the fuck do you think I am?" I sneered at him.

He merely nodded and looked down at his precious notepad. "Just checking, Perry."

"You're always saying my name," I said, and looked back at the window. The sunset's flames had turned each new, green leaf into a burst of crimson. I could figure out why he was always saying my name; I guess shrinks thought they had to constantly remind their patients who they were. Well, I knew who I was. What I didn't understand was why I was there. Why I was really there. No pretenses.

"So, tell me about the accident," he said, careful to leave out my name this time.

The accident. The accident. Always this Goddamn "accident."

A strand of my neon blue hair fell down in front of my face and I examined it carefully. It looked dry and brittle; the bleach job I did a few months ago had done nothing but damage the core. That was the first thing my mom had said, "Not only do you look like a punk, but you've ruined your gorgeous hair forever." I was glad it hurt her more than it hurt me. It was her fault that I was here. Not some accident.

I looked through my hair; it created a gauzy blue curtain and I liked the fact that I couldn't see Dr. Freedman clearly through it. It made it easier to deal with him.

"You tell me about the accident, doctor."

He nodded again to himself. I wished he was the one on fire, not the leaves outside.

"Who is Jacob?" he asked.

I flinched. I didn't know why.

"Jacob is a friend of mine. Well, he was a friend of mine."

"Why is he no longer your friend?"

"You know why. He turned creepy. After the party..."

"After the party? Last time you said he got 'creepy' before the party."

"Did I?" I asked absently.

"How did you first meet?" he continued.

The last time I was here, he asked me the same question. I don't know why I always had to repeat myself and I didn't understand his fascination with Jacob. It really wasn't that interesting.

I took in a deep breath, letting him know how annoyed I was with my sharp exhale and told him the story. Again.

"Jacob was..."

Jacob was a skid. Jacob was 18-years old. Jacob failed the 12th grade probably a million times. Jacob had a really tall black Mohawk that was held together by numerous packages of Knox Gelatine. Jacob always wore a studded denim vest with a black D.O.A patch on the back. Jacob was kind of always D.O.A himself. He was always in trouble with the police, with his parents, with his schoolmates or with his friends. And he thrived on this trouble. He'd wear black lipstick to school and try to kiss the jocks. Jacob was always asking to get beat up. He was a martyr to the skids and I'm pretty sure he thought he was a martyr to humankind. But the truth is, even though there were parts of me that admired him, that respected his nature to piss off authority, to be true to himself, and be fearless (there were even parts that found the black lipstick to be sexy), Jacob was just kind of an idiot.

"Were you in love with him?" Dr. Freedman asked, so casually, as if the topic of love was as important as whether I preferred chocolate ice cream or vanilla.

"No," I said adamantly. That was the truth. I barely knew Jacob. Like I said, I admired him a bit and when he talked to me, at first anyway, I would get giddy about it. But I got giddy when any guy looked my way. It was so easy to overlook the fat girl.

"But you liked him enough."

"I guess," I shrugged. I liked him enough when it was from afar. And I guess I liked him enough the first time he really talked to me, away from his friends and the rest of the skids.

I was walking home from the bus stop one day. Normally I would have taken my car to school but my parents had confiscated it from me. Something to do with drugs, I don't know.

Anyway, I was walking home, listening to my MP3 player, when a tall, spiky shadow appeared beside me. It was long because the nights were longer then and it was just getting dark enough to put me on my guard.

I could tell the person was speaking to me but I couldn't hear them above the music. I don't know why people have to talk to you when you've got headphones on; I mean, come on.

Finally I looked over and saw it was Jacob. I stopped, surprised and pulled out my earphones.

He was dressed as he always was. A true skid.

"What are you listening to?" he asked.

"Alice in Chains. *Music Box*," I replied, rather proudly, thinking he might approve.

"They're all right. I mean, they were all right. Kind of a shame about Lane though. That fucker is irreplaceable. But he was too smart for the band anyway."

I wasn't sure what was so smart about Lane considering he died because of drugs, but I hadn't been too smart either. Then I noticed Jacob's wrists. They were wrapped in thick bandages.

"You said Jacob had tried to kill himself?" the shrink asked me, his words cutting through my memory.

"That's what they said. Everyone at school," I told him. "Earlier that week, there were rumors that Jacob had killed himself. Killed himself over some girl. Some even say he burned himself in a car. Lit the fucking car on fire. And I never saw Jacob at all that week, so I

believed it. But then there was no news of a funeral or anything, no news anywhere really, so I started to think it was just a rumor. One probably started by himself, another martyr cry or something. He'd often disappear from school for even weeks at a time."

"But the wrists told you otherwise."

"Well, d'uh."

But even though I had proof in front of me that Jacob had tried to commit suicide, I didn't want to bring it up with him. It seemed in bad taste. And even though I liked that he was speaking to me, there was something about him that had me a bit on edge. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that it was getting dark and I was walking alone with only my schoolbooks to protect me. Maybe it was the fact that he seemed a bit on edge himself, more so than usual. Either way, it was enough that I thought I should start taking self-defense classes one day.

"And then what happened, Perry?"

I shrugged. "He walked me home. We talked a bit." "What about?"

"That day? It was just music. He went on about Lane, then Sid Vicious, then some dude I had never heard of. Then he said goodbye to me about a few houses down from my house."

"Did you know he lived in the area?"

"No. And I still don't think he does. I mean, he never did."

"You think he's still alive?"

I gave the doctor an odd look, confused. Where was he getting that information from? "Of course he's still alive. Why wouldn't he be?"

I could tell the doctor wanted to say something else but he stopped himself and said, "What did you guys talk about the rest of the time?"

I sighed and racked my brain back. I couldn't really remember all that well. I think most of it was nonsense. I mean, the dude had walked with me for three weeks straight, we talked about a lot of things

and I still had trouble remembering what happened yesterday. Still, there was something Jacob kept mentioning to me that the doctor would have loved to know. But it would only egg the doctor on and I'd be back for another session. I knew enough about psychiatrists at this point to know how they worked.

I gazed out the window again, letting my thoughts float away. Yes, the leaves were now certainly on fire. In fact, all of Portland looked like it was ablaze. If I looked hard enough, there was a strange shimmer to the horizon, a weird, warpy air that I had seen before. But the shimmer wasn't in the distance, it was close to me. It was like a mirage that stood between me and the window. And beyond that mirage was a raging fire that quickly turned the trees outside to tinder and the buildings into a merciless infermo.

It wasn't real though. I knew that much. It wasn't real this time. But when it happened the other day, at Adrianna Gee's house, it had been real. The flames were real that day. And had Jacob not been there when the whole party went up in flames, and those...things...came out, I wouldn't have been sitting in Dr. Freedman's office. I wouldn't have been anywhere.

And to think they called it an "accident."