



LUCY KLINE, NECROMANCER

Tom O'Donnell



WEDNESDAY BOOKS
NEW YORK



CHAPTER ONE

LUCY KLINE WAS ASLEEP WHEN THE TAP CAME AT THE WINDOW.

TAP.

The noise was subtle at first. Easily mistaken for a tree branch brushing against the glass.

TAP . . . TAP . . .

Lucy didn't want to look. She never wanted to look. But the sound was more insistent now.

TAP TAP TAP . . .

The tempo and urgency increased until she had no choice.

TAPTAPTAPTAP—

Lucy sat bolt upright in her bed, and the noise stopped. It was the middle of the night. And, standing outside her bedroom window, she saw herself.

At first glance it appeared to simply be Lucy's own reflection in the windowpane. But the angle was wrong. Something about the eyes wasn't right either. The sockets weren't merely shadowed. They were voids. There was no glint of life from that darkness. The mouth was moving, but all Lucy could hear was a mumbled whisper, like a breeze through dry leaves.

That's not me, Lucy realized. She had this same stupid realization every time the ghost came: She had to remember that another person had her face. At least, another person used to have her face.

"Louisa," said Lucy.

The ghost answered in a quiet hiss, barely louder than the rasp of a fingernail on paper.

"What do you want?" The fear Lucy always felt at first was gone. She wasn't scared of the ghost anymore. This was a different kind of nightmare.

"... *help me* ..."

"How?"

"... *help me* ..."

"Just tell me what I can do. Please."

She said something like this to the ghost every time. But the ghost never told her. Louisa never told her anything.

"I'll do anything, Lulu."

This was how it always went. Her dead sister stood outside in the night, a pane of glass between them, and silently pled for help that Lucy could never give. Lucy felt herself starting to cry—

She opened her eyes and saw bright sunlight streaming in through the curtains. It was 7:39 AM, which meant that, in fact, she'd somehow already hit snooze on her phone alarm. A restless spirit from beyond the grave had visited her in the nine minutes since she'd tapped the button.

Lucy rolled out of bed feeling exhausted and found enough clean clothes to properly call an outfit before making her way to the kitchen.

The Kline house was not a happy place. It hadn't been for a long time. Two years, to be exact.

Both Lucy's parents had already left for work—her mother, Sharon, to her job at the bank, her father, Steve, to the IT company where he was a network engineer. Yet even when no one was home, the unhappiness persisted, like how the smell of cigarettes lingers in curtains.

It was easy to blame them for the sadness. But it wasn't like Lucy was all sunshine and roses, herself.

She sighed as she saw that nobody had made her breakfast. Not that she was expecting it, really. As a rule, nobody *ever* made her breakfast (or lunch, or dinner, or any other meals, for that matter).

But today was her birthday.

“Who gives a shit,” muttered Lucy. It was half declaration, half question. She wasn’t even totally sure that she, herself, did. What the hell was a birthday supposed to be, anyway? It was random. Arbitrary.

Normally, Lucy would’ve eaten a big bowl of nothing on the way out the door to school. Maybe she’d grab a banana if there happened to be one.

Today, though, she felt a nagging obligation to do something more.

Her own birthday was whatever. But today was Louisa’s birthday too. Or it would’ve been. The day they both turned seventeen. So Lucy decided to make her sister’s favorite breakfast, despite the fact that school was starting in—Jesus, eleven minutes.

Lucy burned the first pancake. She always burned the first pancake.

“See you in hell,” she said as she chucked it into the kitchen trash.

The next six came out okay, though. Lucy plated them in two even stacks, one at her place at the table, one where Louisa used to sit. Nobody sat there now.

She drenched the pancakes with syrup and even put a square pat of butter on to make them more iconic.

“Happy birthday,” said Lucy. She was about to dig in when she said, “Fuck it. Wait a sec.”

She went to the junk drawer and found the old box of perennially reused birthday candles. She lit two off the stove and put one in her short stack and one in Louisa’s.

"Now it's a happy birthday. Make a wish."

Lucy blew out both candles.

"I wish I could talk to you again." Lucy frowned. Then she shrugged and snapped her fingers. "Whoops. Just told you my wish. Guess it's not coming true now."

She took a bite of her pancake.

"Is this why you haunted me, bitch? You just wanted pancakes?"

Lucy took another bite. The house was quiet.

"Sorry," she said softly.



"Wow," said Ms. Rosalie Smith-Durnbaugh. "Forty-five minutes late?"

"I'm not forty-five minutes late." Lucy nodded at the clock on the wall. "I'm forty-seven minutes late."

Ms. Rosalie sighed. "Any explanation?"

"I love being tardy," said Lucy in her typical deadpan. "It makes me feel powerful. With this small act of rebellion I hope to inspire a revolution. Who's with me?"

This got a hint of an awkward chuckle, but drew just as many eye rolls and whispers from the other kids in the English class.

"Just take your seat, please," said Ms. Rosalie, who looked more disappointed than anything.

Lucy could feel the mean girls staring at her as she made her way toward an empty desk at the back of the classroom. She caught a look of malicious glee pass across Shana O'Reilly's face as she whispered something to Carrie Whiteman that made the other girl snicker.

Class was boring. Ms. Rosalie dragged twenty unwilling seniors through a forced conversation about *Hamlet*. Lucy

didn't care about Hamlet even though she knew she was supposed to.

The bell rang and the other kids got up to go. Lucy emerged from the cocoon of her own thoughts to see Ms. Rosalie looming over her.

"Can I help you?"

"I'm grading the *Tempest* essays," said Ms. Rosalie. "And I can't help but think that you could've done better."

"I didn't turn in that essay."

"That's exactly my point," said Ms. Rosalie, sitting down at a desk near Lucy. She was a kind-faced woman in her mid-thirties, with tired brown eyes.

Whatever this conversation was, Lucy didn't want to have it. "You know what? You're right. You've inspired me to try harder. Thank you."

"You use sarcasm as a shield, I think."

"Really? If so, it's a pretty bad shield. A lot of stuff still seems to hit me, you know?"

"I *do* know," said Ms. Rosalie meaningfully.

"Do you?" Lucy cocked her head and looked Ms. Rosalie right in the eyes. It was enough to make the teacher turn away.

"No, I—I guess I don't. But I believe in you. And I may just be your English teacher, but I do care about you."

Lucy had had Ms. Rosalie in ninth grade as well. Back then, she would have called Ms. Rosalie her favorite teacher. Now? Well, the question didn't really mean anything, did it?

"Okay, so you care about me," said Lucy, with a shrug. "That's your problem."

Ms. Rosalie sighed. "I know that you're an extremely intelligent young woman. Nothing we're doing here is beyond you. If you put in a fraction of the effort that you're capable of, I think you could be a straight-A student again."

"Gosh. That would be *awesome*."

"I think you owe it to yourself."

"Why?" asked Lucy.

"Because by giving up, you're only sabotaging your future."

"And what if I don't care about my future?"

Ms. Rosalie blinked. She didn't seem to have a ready answer to this question.

"Well, maybe one day you will. I get why today must be especially hard for you."

"Not sure what you mean?" Lucy stared at the floor and silently willed the conversation to end.

"It's your birthday, isn't it? Which means—"

"Yep." Lucy cut her off. "Happy birthday to me." She did not want to be talking about any of this.

"If you ever want to talk—"

"I don't."

"Okay. I know this whole . . ." Ms. Rosalie seemed like she was struggling for the right words. "This, um, *situation* must be affecting you."

Lucy was used to people speaking in euphemisms around her. For the past two years she'd heard so many—passed away, resting now, gone on to a better place—she'd lost count. But she couldn't quite decode this one.

"What situation are you talking about?"

Ms. Rosalie's eyes went wide. "Oh. I just assumed you'd heard."

"Heard what?"

"About the girl who's gone missing."

Lucy's mouth went dry. She had a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach.

"Lyra Franklin," said Ms. Rosalie after several seconds of silence.

"I don't know who that is."

"She's a senior here at Cedar Grove. She only transferred in

at the beginning of the year. Anyway, it seems that she disappeared three days ago. The police are looking for her but . . .”

“Excuse me. I need to go.” Lucy stood and quickly collected her things.

“Wait,” said Ms. Rosalie.

But Lucy was already out the door. The moment she stepped into the hall, she felt her knees go weak. Her breath was short. Her head was spinning. She put a hand on the wall to hold herself up.

It had happened again.



CHAPTER TWO

LUCY KLINE SOMETIMES THOUGHT ABOUT HOW THE LUCY from two years ago would not have recognized the person she was today. She probably would've rolled her eyes and crinkled her nose along with the rest of them, scoffing at the weird girl in black who had no friends and a massive chip on her shoulder. The old Lucy probably would have been the one Shana O'Reilly was whispering to about what a bitch/freak/loser this unpleasant New Lucy was. And to be absolutely fair, it was a two-way street. The Lucy of today would have found her former self insufferable.

Anyone who didn't know her back then would be forgiven for not believing it, but Lucy used to be, for lack of a better term, *normal*. She used to be an honor roll student (she'd even skipped eighth grade). She used to be the class treasurer (great stepping stone to president). Hell, that Lucy Kline was a cheerleader for the JV boys' basketball team. Remembering those days almost made Lucy laugh. Almost.

Rather than approaching the world through a toxic cloud of sarcasm and bile that repelled human connection like citronella repelled mosquitoes, her old personality might have been described as cheerful, sunny, even. Lucy Kline had once possessed that most coveted and elusive of high school virtues. She'd been popular.

But there was an impassable chasm separating the two Lucys, past and present. That rift tore open the day her sister was murdered.

The story was complicated. The simplest version: One night, Louisa had snuck out to see her boyfriend and never came home. The next day, Lucy's parents realized that their daughter was missing. They called the police, who still, to this day, had never found Louisa's body.

Of course, everyone thought her boyfriend was responsible. Chuck Fox had a reputation for being a druggie and a criminal. Lucy fully shared this opinion and had often told her sister as much. After they'd started dating, she'd pestered Louisa to break up with him, just like their mother had. Louisa didn't listen. She was in love with Chuck and didn't particularly care what anyone thought.

Lucy and Louisa were identical twins. Despite the fact that they shared approximately one hundred percent of their DNA, they had always been different. It was Louisa who'd had the edge. It was Louisa who'd fought with their mother (and by extension their father) all the time. It was Louisa who'd called out hypocrisy and unfairness when she saw it; Louisa who went against the grain and didn't do things purely because everyone expected her to do them. People liked her but she'd also made enemies. Old Lucy had often described Louisa's behavior as "just being difficult." That she'd dismissed the best part of her sister in this way was almost too painful to contemplate.

The night Louisa disappeared was etched forever in Lucy's memory, something she often revisited in her darkest hours. That night she knew her sister was planning to sneak out to see Chuck. They were going to meet up at Livingston Park, the place where every teenager in Cedar Grove instinctively went when they didn't want to be found. Earlier that afternoon,

Louisa and Sharon had had a terrible screaming fight that ended with Sharon forbidding her daughter from ever going out with Chuck Fox again. Louisa didn't care.

"Mom's a dumbass," said Louisa to Lucy.

"She's looking out for you," said Lucy. "Chuck's got no future. He's going to end up in prison, just like his dad. Mom doesn't want you to go there too."

Louisa sighed. "You don't know anything about Chuck, Lulu."

"He got in a fistfight with Trevor Swearingen," said Lucy.

"Trevor Swearingen is an asshole," said Louisa.

"He is not an a-hole!" said Lucy, indignant, but unwilling to swear. "Trevor's the captain of the basketball team."

Louisa rolled her eyes like she didn't have the patience to explain to her twin sister how the two things had nothing to do with each other. Instead she threw open the window. Lucy and Louisa shared a room on the ground floor of their small house, so sneaking out didn't require any special feats of athletics. No climbing down trellises or leaping off roofs. It was just a short three-foot drop to their yard outside.

"I'll be back later," said Louisa. She threw her leg over the window sash. "Don't wait up."

Lucy crossed her arms. "I'm going to tell Mom."

Louisa turned to face her sister. "You better not."

"Why do you have to be like this? Why don't you just *listen* to her?"

"I don't follow rules that don't make sense."

"You act out because you want attention."

"I don't care about attention," said Louisa. "Mom doesn't like Chuck because his family is poor. That's bullshit."

"What are you talking about? Every year, Mom does the coat drive for the church. Why would she do that if she has something against poor people?"

“She doesn’t like poor people, because *we’re* poor.”

“We’re *not* poor!” said Lucy, incredibly offended now.

“Yeah, I agree. We’re not. We’re just not as rich as our neighbors, which is what Mom is obsessed with,” said Louisa. “Anyway, it’s a bullshit thing to care about, and a bullshit thing to judge other people for. Fuck our neighbors. But also, with all due respect, fuck Mom. She’s mad at me because she wishes I was you.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing,” said Louisa. “Doesn’t matter.”

“You’ve always been a selfish brat. You just do what you want and you don’t care how it affects other people.”

“If you tell on me, you’re not my sister,” said Louisa quietly.

“If you sneak out and expect me to lie for you, you’re not *my* sister!” snapped Lucy.

Louisa gave Lucy a sad shrug. “Guess that’s how it is.” Then she dropped out the window onto the grass and disappeared into the darkness.

Those were the last words that they ever said to each other.

Despite her threats, Lucy didn’t tell on Louisa for sneaking out. In the years since, she tortured herself over that decision. Maybe if she had gone to her mom immediately, Louisa would still be alive today.

By eleven the next morning, it was apparent that Louisa was gone. Sharon and Steve and Lucy all tried her cell phone and got no answer. The calls went straight to voice mail. Finally, Lucy told them everything she knew—at this point, she was still much more worried about getting in trouble than her sister’s well-being. Sharon was furious with her. It wouldn’t be clear for some time to come, but this was a turning point in their relationship.

Around noon, the Klines called the Cedar Grove Police

Department. Cedar Grove was an upper-middle-class suburb of Pittsburgh. Aside from swiped porch packages and the occasional stolen catalytic converter (always blamed on people who had come in from “the city”), crime in the town was almost nonexistent. The CGPD didn’t get many missing persons reports and the detective they spoke to, Paul Giordano, was reluctant to take the Klines seriously. He assumed that, after a big argument with mom, the rebellious teenage daughter had decided to sleep over at her boyfriend’s house.

But when he heard that the boyfriend was Chuck Fox, the son of Ronald Fox, he immediately sent a squad car to the house Chuck shared with his grandmother and had him arrested.

Chuck claimed he had nothing to do with Louisa’s disappearance. Just like Louisa had said, he was supposed to meet up with her at Livingston Park—the text messages on his phone confirmed that—but according to him, she never showed up. He waited around at the park for hours, texting her well into the night.

The cops didn’t buy it. They held him in custody, interrogating him for hours at a time. At some point, he asked for a lawyer. It was during the next few days that a subtle shift happened in how the police seemed to approach the case—Louisa Kline had somehow gone from missing to murdered.

Chuck was their number one suspect, of course. When a woman is killed, odds are it’s a man who was close to her who did it. Everyone in town knew Chuck was a bad kid from a bad family. After all, hadn’t his old man already gone to jail for armed robbery? The rotten apple doesn’t fall far from the tree, they reasoned. It wasn’t much of a leap to turn a juvenile delinquent into a straight-up monster.

This period of time was agony for the Klines. Louisa was

gone, yet since no body had been found, they hoped and prayed that she was somehow still alive. Every second of every day felt like slow torture. Lucy sent more texts to Louisa's phone than she could count. Lucy blamed herself for what had happened—just as she suspected her mother blamed her. In text after text to Louisa, she begged her sister for forgiveness and pleaded with her to come home.

Volunteer search parties were organized. Under the direction of the police, groups of citizens combed through the woods near Livingston Park, making sure to spread out no more than two arm-lengths. Lucy was there with them, kicking through the dried leaves, looking for anything that might lead to her sister. They mostly found litter. Old beer cans and empty vape cartridges and used condoms from the generations of young people who had gone to the woods to escape their parents.

Lucy was with them when they found it—a perfect circle about three feet wide scratched into the dirt, with a few gibberish words scrawled around the edge. They called it a pentagram (though it wasn't). The discovery started a ridiculous rumor in town: Satanists had killed Louisa Kline. The absurdity of it irritated Lucy. The circle meant nothing. Indeed, it wouldn't mean anything to Lucy for a long time to come.

The days dragged on. Friends and family flooded the Klimes' house. They brought trays of lasagna and Tupperware containers full of meatballs and they tried to comfort them, but they always ended up saying the wrong things. Lucy retreated to her room, which wasn't much of a sanctuary because it was also Louisa's room. Her sister's posters were still on the wall; her dirty clothes were still strewn on the floor, a hundred excruciating reminders of the void Louisa had left when she disappeared.

No one understood what the three of them were going

through. Even the Klines themselves didn't understand it. The pain of this loss was unimaginable, even to those who were experiencing it.

Though she kept up the pretense of hope for Sharon's benefit, deep down, Lucy had started to accept that her sister was dead. She kept on texting Louisa, though, because maybe she was wrong?

Lucy watched her parents unraveling. When Sharon wasn't out searching for Louisa in the woods, she was at church. She'd always been more religious than her family, but now she was going to services two times a day, seven days a week.

Lucy's father didn't go with her. Never the most talkative man, he now descended into a silence so profound that it bordered on catatonic. Steve seemed to close himself off from the world entirely. He started sleeping on the couch in the basement instead of the bedroom. Whenever Lucy saw him, he was silent, staring at nothing. He didn't cry like Sharon and Lucy did, and Lucy started to hate him for it.

For her own part, Lucy felt like she was losing her mind with worry and grief and regret and anger. But most of all, guilt. Neither of her parents was any comfort. And some part of her believed that she didn't deserve to be comforted.

Soon the daily searches stopped. No one had found anything in the woods. Detective Giordano's updates on what excellent progress the police were making became less frequent.

By now, they had taken the extraordinary step of charging Chuck Fox with murder (despite the lack of a body). Under the advice of his lawyer, Chuck stopped talking. In Detective Giordano's candid opinion, which he freely shared with the Klines, the boy was "stonewalling," a clear indication that he was guilty.

That's what Lucy believed too. As the torturous weeks crawled by, she thought endlessly about Chuck. She spent

hours every day fantasizing about his painful, violent death. She thought that vengeance could somehow heal the wound that he'd torn open in their lives. If he suffered as much pain as he'd inflicted, somehow the scales would be balanced. But imagining every form of cruel and unusual punishment being inflicted upon Chuck didn't make Lucy feel any better. In fact, it made her feel worse.

So instead, she started to ask herself why.

Why would Chuck Fox kill Louisa? She remembered how Louisa had described her new boyfriend—a good kid with a bad home life. Lucy hadn't believed it then. And she didn't know Chuck. She'd spoken to him all of five times, and she'd honestly probably been pretty rude on those occasions.

It wasn't until three weeks after Louisa disappeared that Lucy remembered her sister's diary, which Louisa had always kept hidden at the bottom of her sock drawer. But there's no way to truly hide anything in a bedroom you share with your twin.

Tears flooded her eyes as Lucy read her sister's private thoughts. Louisa didn't indicate that she and Chuck were having any problems at all. In fact, Louisa described feeling happier than she could remember. The main thing that troubled her was her increasingly difficult relationship with her mother.

Why would Chuck Fox keep texting Louisa all night after he had killed her? Just to try to confuse law enforcement? Chuck was violent, perhaps, but Lucy never took him for a criminal mastermind.

So she began scouring the internet for anything she could learn that might be useful about Charles Lane Fox. There wasn't much. Chuck wasn't a big social media user. Lucy learned his parents had split up early and then his mother had died of cancer when he was eight, at which point he moved in with his grandmother. Even his father's armed robbery conviction wasn't

as bad as it might have been. Not that any armed robbery was great, but Ronald Fox had actually used a fake gun. The guy wasn't intending to hurt anyone.

Lucy even looked into the infamous fistfight that Chuck had had with Trevor Swearingen. It, too, was more complicated than it initially seemed. Lucy had it from Tabby Barden that Chuck had only hit him after he'd said something about Chuck's dead mom. Three weeks ago, Lucy might not have understood why someone would respond to that by throwing a punch, but now, she got it.

Lucy kept searching. Instead of answers, she came back with more questions. The cops didn't seem interested in answering them. When the Klines pressed Detective Giordano on anything, he responded with empty platitudes about hope and perseverance. It took "genuine legwork to put the bad guys behind bars." Eventually, he started screening their calls.

Lucy felt her anger growing, and to her surprise, it was no longer aimed at Chuck Fox.

A month after Louisa disappeared, her case was, for inexplicable reasons, suddenly picked up by the national media. It is a sad truth that people go missing and are murdered every day, but Louisa was pretty and the town the Klines lived in was wealthy (even if the Klines themselves were not). Maybe it was just a slow news day? In any event, cable news reporters descended on Cedar Grove like locusts and started to ask uncomfortable questions.

At first, this seemed like a godsend to Lucy. Obviously more attention on her sister's disappearance was better than less. But instead of breathing new life into the investigation, it turned the case into a circus. Suddenly everyone on social media had a theory about the crime. The police tip line was flooded with useless calls and outright lies. Somebody claimed they'd seen bright lights in the sky; Lucy had been abducted by aliens. And

one day, after Steve gave a particularly inarticulate answer during a cable news interview, Lucy saw that online commentators started to accuse her own father of Louisa's murder.

According to them, he was "acting weird." Being "evasive." He had "dead eyes." Lucy was disgusted.

The police couldn't hide that they were floundering now. Specially trained corpse-sniffing dogs were brought in from California and turned up nothing. In a moment of desperation (or stupidity), Doug Pinnick, the chief of the Cedar Grove Police—an elderly man who seemed to be days from retirement, if not death—invited a psychic to help with the investigation.

Some people mocked the police for this. But the announcement seemed to give Lucy's mother hope. Perhaps the Lord might make this woman his instrument? Her father's opinion, if he had one, was unreadable. But Lucy felt queasy in the pit of her stomach. A fucking psychic? Really?

This self-styled "forensic clairvoyant" was named Mina Cayce. She'd gained some fame for successfully locating a missing nine-year-old named Bobby Lin outside of Denver. According to the bio on her website, she had found dozens of other missing persons through the use of extrasensory perception. She boldly declared her record of accuracy to be somewhere between 87 and 90 percent.

By now, Lucy had found everything there was to find about Chuck Fox. To occupy her mind with something other than regret and despair, she turned her online attention to Mina Cayce. Bobby Lin had miraculously appeared in the background of a video that Mina was recording in the Denver suburbs and had been returned to his family. That much was true.

But Lucy was curious about the cases she'd solved. Her digging led her to a private Discord for skeptics and amateur sleuths called "URBI." The community here was different from

the others Louisa had encountered. URBI focused on empirical evidence rather than conspiracy theories and motivated reasoning. They held the average online sleuths out there (“true crime nitwits”) in contempt.

On URBI, she learned that Cayce’s track record was hardly the string of unbroken successes that she made it out to be. Outside of Bobby Lin, her “forensic clairvoyant” predictions had turned out to be useless, in the sense that the cases were still unsolved. Other claims she’d made were patently false. Mina Cayce once declared that a woman named Donna Ramirez, who’d gone missing in Arlington, Virginia, had been kidnapped and sold into an underground slavery ring in Japan. The woman’s remains were found a month later, two miles from the jogging trail where she’d disappeared.

With the help of the other URBI users, Lucy dug up old YouTube videos from local talk shows, where Mina Cayce—at that time, still going by Mina Castellano—claimed to be able to communicate with people’s dead pets. Lucy saw tears glistening in a bereaved grandmother’s eyes as Mina Castellano channeled her dead shih tzu, Marzipan.

Lucy felt sick. And furious. The woman was clearly a fraud. Worse yet, she discovered that Mina Cayce’s law enforcement consulting fee was \$1,000 per day.

She tried to tell her mother what she had found, but Sharon just told her that God had a plan. Maybe a psychic could help bring Louisa home. Her father merely grunted and mumbled something under his breath. Lucy wasn’t sure if it was intended to encourage her or dissuade her.

So Lucy called Detective Giordano herself.

He actually answered—probably because he didn’t recognize Lucy’s phone number. When he realized who was on the line, he seemed annoyed to be speaking to a teenage girl.

“This woman you’ve hired is a fake,” said Lucy plainly.

“Why don’t you leave this one to the professionals,” said Giordano, a hint of irritation creeping into his voice. “In a case like this, we’ve got to try everything we can.”

“You told us Chuck Fox was guilty. Why do you need a psychic if you know who the killer is?”

“Look, I know the TV shows make it seem like you can solve a murder in an hour, counting commercials. But it takes genuine legwork to put the bad guys behind bars.”

This was the exact moment when Lucy realized three things. The first was that the police had no idea what they were doing. The second was that she no longer believed Chuck Fox was guilty. And the third was that, despite being a fifteen-year-old who wasn’t even legally allowed to drive yet, solving her sister’s murder was going to fall to her.

So Lucy threw herself into the task with everything she had. She was methodical and slow. The first thing she did was print out a map of Cedar Grove and use a highlighter to mark out the route Louisa would have taken that night to walk the 0.93 miles from the Klines’ house at 2925 Hillhaven Drive to Livingston Park. Using this map, she started searching public records, compiling a list of the names of every property owner who lived between their address and the park.

She found out their phone numbers and called them herself. When they didn’t answer, she figured out where they worked and called them there. When they didn’t answer at work, she showed up at those workplaces—salons, banks, auto dealerships, restaurants—and talked to them in person.

A few had seen a girl walking toward the park that night. But nobody had witnessed anything untoward happen to her. Two people mentioned seeing something peculiar the afternoon of Louisa’s disappearance: an older man walking through

the woods alone. It was only odd, they told her, because there wasn't a trail back there.

Lucy wrote down "old man in the woods." Maybe nothing? But maybe something . . .

To Lucy's great chagrin, none of the people she talked to had ever been contacted, much less interviewed by the police. She left several voicemails on Detective Giordano's phone, urging him to go and speak to them. Apparently, he was screening *her* calls now too.

Lucy expanded the radius by two blocks on either side of Louisa's route, tripling the number of people she needed to contact. She worked her way down the list, street by street, house by house, last name by last name. She did this from the moment she got up till the moment she went to bed at night.

That's how she found Larry Mayes, owner of the small ranch house at 2816 Carriage Court. When Lucy called him and asked him if he'd seen anything on the night of Louisa's disappearance, he muttered a remarkably vile string of profanities and hung up on her. When she called him back, he didn't answer.

The gravelly sound of the man's voice made Lucy's skin crawl. There was a cruelty to it that she could feel, even through the phone.

So Lucy started to dig. She easily found out that Larry Mayes was a handyman in his sixties who'd moved to Cedar Grove a decade prior. What wasn't as easy to discover was that the man had served nine years in prison in Michigan for murdering his wife. He had been convicted under his real name, Lawrence Mester.

The folks on the URBI Discord had even helped her pull up Mester's old mug shot. Not that you ought to judge a book by its cover, but the guy just looked like a creep. In the photo, his pale, bloodshot eyes almost seemed to glow with hatred.

Lucy took the mug shot back to the two people who'd said

they'd seen someone in the woods. Both of them agreed without a moment's hesitation: That was the guy.

A convicted murderer using a fake name and creeping around in the woods two blocks from where Louisa had disappeared. It was definitely something. So Lucy took it to the police. This time she skipped Detective Giordano altogether and went straight to the chief of police, Doug Pinnick.

She spent a couple of days calling his secretary and not getting called back. So on the third day, she ambushed him at the restaurant of the Figuiet Country Club. She found Pinnick at the table, surrounded by his golf buddies, and told him in front of everyone that she thought Larry Mayes might be involved in Louisa's murder. That night, for good measure, she called the cable news producer who'd arranged the interview with her parents and, off the record, gave her the same information.

It worked. The following day, the police brought Larry Mayes in for questioning. The day after that, they searched his house and found a tarp, ropes, a shovel, as well as several "implements consistent with disposing of a body." Most damning, Mayes had an illegal handgun.

Larry Mayes initially denied any involvement in the crime. But after two days in jail, he abruptly signed a full confession. He gave the police detailed information about how and where he had killed Louisa. He even provided specific directions to a burned-out house in the woods outside of town.

There, the police found traces of blood that matched Louisa's as well as a rope, a knife, and other implements of torture. What they *didn't* find was Louisa's body, and to this day, Mayes has never revealed where he'd hidden it. Perhaps his small way of continuing to inflict suffering on the people he'd already hurt so much.

The news producer Lucy had tipped off called her back and requested an on-air interview.

Lucy agreed. The host of the show—a prosecutor-turned-journalist who now transmuted murder victims into mid-afternoon cable news content—gushed over Lucy. Without her, said the host, Larry Mayes might have killed again. She declared that Lucy was a hero for what she'd done. Even worse, at some point during the segment, the host christened her a “kid detective.” The nickname made Lucy's skin crawl and she couldn't wait to stop talking to this human vulture.

The interview was a mistake. Lucy was ready to put it behind her, but other people weren't. They shared the clip far and wide and Lucy briefly became the social media story of the week: the kid detective who had solved her own twin sister's murder. She was invited on a number of other podcasts and TV shows. Lucy declined them all.

At some point, the charges against Chuck Fox were quietly dropped. Despite owing Lucy his freedom, he never contacted her, never said a word of thanks.

Mina Cayce, who had publicly declared that Louisa was still alive and had run away to Los Angeles, abruptly disappeared from Cedar Grove. Suffice it to say, she didn't put the case on her website.

Lucy had done what she set out to do. She had figured out who killed her sister and brought that man to justice.

And it meant nothing. It changed nothing. If anything, she felt worse now that she had no goal to animate her and drive her forward.

Louisa was still dead. And deep down, Lucy blamed herself as much, if not more, than Larry Mayes.

Occasionally Lucy dreamed of her dead sister.