

Chapter I

Annie

When I moved away from home at twenty years old, away from boring-ass Lake Aurora, Illinois, population 2,330, and went to the big city of Chicago, the only experience I had to put on a job application was babysitting, cashiering at Jensen's Hardware, and buttoning and folding stiffly starched shirts at Lili's Laundry and inserting them like love letters into cellophane envelopes.

It's not like I grew up privileged or anything. It's just that my dad believed that everyone had their roles. It was the man's job, he said, to bring home the bacon. Women took care of the house and kids, did the laundry, and had dinner on the table when the breadwinner got home from a long day at the office. He used terms like that: *bring home the bacon* and *breadwinner*. And kids, he said, should be kids (well, *kid*, there was only the one, me), so I had no real responsibilities around the house.

He got enlightened as he got older, after my mom died, but back then, to earn my allowance, all I had to do was hang my coat on the hook in the foyer, leave my mom alone when she suffered her migraines, and pick up

the apples that fell from the tree in our backyard. I loved climbing that tree. I did not love picking up the fruit, which was mostly rotting and dazzling to the bees.

But that's life, right? You learn as you go. It would have made my life a lot easier, though, if I'd known how to perform some simple domestic duties.

Apple-picking did not come in handy when I was looking for a job in Chicago. Neither did the year and a half I spent at Lake Aurora Community College, where I majored in drama. In spite of my shortcomings, though, I landed a pretty good job as an administrative assistant in a bank. It was boring. And my boss was kind of a lech. But it paid the bills. Anyway, I saw it as just an interim thing until I got into Steppenwolf or Goodman or Victory Gardens Theatre, and then made it to Hollywood.

Kidding. I didn't have delusions of grandeur. But I did think I might eventually be able to make a living in the great theatre community in Chicago. I always loved making shit up (lying), and I was good at it. Nothing would happen in Lake Aurora, that was for sure. There were no Hollywood scouting agents in the audiences of the few college productions I was in, even though one of them was *The Diary of Anne Frank* and the local theatre critic said I was astounding in the title role.

I found an apartment in Chicago with a roommate who was the sister of someone I knew, not very well, from drama classes. And it turned out that sister knew someone at Steppenwolf so...cherry on top.

I was starting to feel like an adult. All I wanted was to turn the page, be my own person, and I felt like I was going in the right direction.

It would have been really helpful if someone had taught me to do laundry before I left home, though. I was

a grown woman and didn't know how to turn on a damn washing machine. Not to mention the intricacies, like separating the whites from the darks, the towels from the socks.

Emma, my roommate, patiently showed me where the Tide was, and then took me to the basement of our building, a high-rise with twenty-four floors and a laundry room with three long rows of washers and dryers. She showed me how to put money on the card, how to use it to start the machine, and then how much detergent to add.

Even after the tutorial, though, I let dirty clothes collect in scattered piles on the floor of my closet until I'd reused my towels beyond any measure of sanitation, had worn every pair of jeans in my closet twice, and had grown tired of hand-washing panties and bras.

If I'd just done my laundry sooner, none of this would have ever happened. If I hadn't been stupidly anxious about doing it on my own, I wouldn't have been there at the same exact moment in time as Charlie Phillips, and I wouldn't have fucked up his life.