



EXCERPT

Suddenly I didn't like being alone in the vast, shining kitchen. I hurried out into the corridor, and all but ran past the dining room and the other adjoining rooms. My bare feet pattered on the hardwood floors, softened when I hit carpet, then pattered again. It was so quiet—

where was everybody?

I had reached the foyer and was standing uncertainly at the bottom of the stairs when I got a very strange feeling, and almost felt my hair stand on end. Someone was standing nearby. Someone was watching me.

I'd no sooner realized that than all the lights went out.

I clutched at the banister as though it were a life preserver on the *Titanic*. I tried saying to myself, "Be calm—you're in no danger, nobody wants to kill you!" But it's hard to be reasonable in the pitch black where a near murder just occurred, and somebody is close to you and isn't saying anything.

I heard a whisper of movement. It was enough to send me bolting in a blind panic down the hall. I felt my way along the walls until I came behind the stairs. There was a doorknob. I twisted it, thinking I'd found a closet, and tried to squeeze myself inside. My hand encountered a large, wobbly object, and I realized the room was too small to accommodate even my slight frame—slight as opposed to skinny, which is what certain people call me. Leaving the door open, I fled further down the hallway and darted into one of the larger rooms. I recognized a solid, black object as a big desk, and knew I was in the study. The window seat!

I could barely make out the curtains at the windows. Soundlessly, I scurried toward the window seat, opened it, and got inside. I had to lie on my side and bring my knees up almost to my chest. My heart was hammering so hard I couldn't hear anything. I brought the heavy top down as softly as I could.

You're being ridiculous, I told myself, but that didn't stop my teeth from chattering. Again I thought, Nobody wants to kill me. I don't know anything about what happened to Brianna, so nobody has any reason to want to hurt me.

My heartbeat began to slow a little. I thought I heard a quick rush of footsteps go down the hall, and my heart quickened again. But a long time went by and I heard nothing else. Then a little beam of light shining through a crack in the wood told me the electricity had come back on.

Still, I waited. I remembered a poem I'd read in one of the books I was always checking out of the school library, about a young bride of long, long ago who had teasingly hidden from her husband in an old chest. "*And Lovell, be sure thou art first to trace, The clue to my secret lurking place*". The impulsive young woman hadn't been able to get it open—and it was in a huge castle or something and the groom couldn't find her, even though he had everybody in the place searching. Many years later, the brideless groom—or somebody—had opened the old trunk to find a skeleton wearing a wedding dress.

A cheery story for a kid's book, I thought at the time.

What if I couldn't open the window seat? Only the prospect of suffocating gave me the courage to raise the lid, barely enough to peek out.