

**CAUGHT  
IN THE  
LONG  
GRASS**

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Archie's shed*

“I don’t know how I let you talk me into these things, man,” said D’Angelo, shaking his head.

Jamie had just finished the first week of college, and they’d been to the pub to celebrate. On their way home, Jamie had convinced D’Angelo they needed to find out why Archie’s behavior was so weird on the morning following his father and mother’s public spat.

“I tell you; he was up to something. He didn’t want anybody to see what he was doing,” Jamie said. “I bet it’s to do with the coppers nosing around his place asking questions.”

He’d snuck over to do a quick reconnaissance of at the shed yesterday but couldn’t see anything because the windows were filthy, and the door was still padlocked.

“There’s been quite a few burglaries around Craiguelea lately. If Archie’s hiding stolen goods, like jewelry or silverware or something, we can tip off the cops anonymously. Wouldn’t you like to see Archie get what’s coming to him for a change? It’s time for some payback, D.”

It was now past ten o’clock, and they were poised to clamber over the fence and into the Stewart’s backyard.

They were dressed in dark clothes, fit for the occasion, but neither had anticipated the light mist that hovered over the ground nor the full moon that illuminated the area eerily. If anyone was looking out their window tonight, thought Jamie, they'd get a hell of a scare to see two boys creeping about like ghouls.

"Hold on," said Jamie, looking at the sky. "The moon's about to pass behind a cloud. We'll be right to go in a second." He watched the cloud eclipse the moon, and the yard receded into the gloom. "Okay, I reckon we've got a good ten minutes before the moon comes out again. Let's go."

He heard D'Angelo curse under his breath as they ducked under the wire fence and crept into the next yard. Jamie stopped every ten yards with his hand up to check the neighbors' windows, but so far, there was no movement at any of them. He could hear D breathing hard behind him. "Just another few yards. Nearly there." He grinned to himself. He was enjoying the clandestine adventure but knew it was torture for his pal.

"If Archie spots us, I'm going to shit myself," said D'Angelo.

Both boys giggled nervously.

They neared the rusty tin shed and crept around to the side facing away from Archie's house. The outbuilding was about twelve feet by ten with a concrete base. The door stood at one end, while a small slatted window looked towards the Stewart house.

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“Now what, eh?” D’Angelo hissed. “The door is still locked, and you said you can’t see through the window.”

Jamie grinned and pointed towards a corner of the shed. When he’d sneaked over on Monday, he’d noticed a breach where the rivets had rusted away. From beneath his jacket, he took the small crowbar he’d borrowed from his dad’s toolkit, inserted one end into the gap, and gave it a push. The rasp of metal on metal broke the silence of the night.

“Jesus, here!” whispered D’Angelo. “Let me do it! You’re making enough noise to wake the dead. You keep a lookout.” He took off his jacket and wrapped it around the crowbar, pushing it against the metal shed and effectively smothering the sound.

“I’m impressed,” said Jamie. “I didn’t realize you were so skilled at breaking and entering.”

“Yeah, well. You learn a few things as an apprentice carpenter,” said D’Angelo, giving one last heave on the crowbar and pulling up the corner of the shed wall. “That should do it. You go first.”

D’Angelo kept watch while Jamie crawled through the gap.

It was dark in the shed, and the concrete felt cold and damp. He stood up hastily, wiped his hands on his jacket, then banged his head on a shelf, and yelped in surprise.

D’Angelo snapped, “What are you doing? Keep it down, for God’s sake!”

“Hit my flaming skull on something. It doesn’t half hurt,” said Jamie, rubbing the top of his head. His eyes adjusted to the blackness, and peering around, he was able to make out vague shapes in the gloom. “I can’t see much,” he whispered. “I wish I’d brought a torch or something.”

“A torch?” echoed D’Angelo. “Maybe I’m wrong, but I thought the whole idea of creeping over here in the dark was so we didn’t attract attention? Feel free to light a fire if you want, but wait until I’ve gone, eh? I’d rather not be here when Archie arrives.”

D was becoming tetchy, thought Jamie. He’d better wrap this up quickly and get out of here. He moved crab-like, with his back against the wall, feeling with his feet and hands as he went. His foot clacked against the blades of a lawnmower, and his outstretched hand found the handle. He stepped around the machine and continued forward, trying to make sense of everything. Spade...rake...bike...

“Anything?” asked D’Angelo.

“Nothing yet.” He felt disappointed because he was positive Archie was hiding something. His outstretched hand knocked against a shelf attached to the wall. He felt around but couldn’t identify anything unusual.

“Something smells off, though.” He sniffed but couldn’t identify the stench. As he moved away, his foot struck a solid object on the floor. He lost his balance and stumbled forward. Instinctively, he reached out and caught hold of the shelf, bringing it down on top

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of him. Cans, tins, bottles, tools, and a bag of fertilizer crashed onto the concrete floor at the same time he did. Alarmed at the racket he'd made, Jamie scrambled to his feet and hit another shelf, which banged against the tin wall on its way down. Abruptly he realized he could make out his surroundings because light was suddenly flooding through the window.

D'Angelo's head popped through the opening. Bloody hell! Get out, man. Get out now! He's seen us!"

Jamie dived for the floor and wriggled through the gap, ripping his jacket on the ragged edge. He scrambled to his feet, panting. "Quick, give us a hand to push back the corner. We don't want him to know someone broke into the shed."

"Are you mad?" said D'Angelo as Jamie strained to close the gap. "He knows already, doesn't he? I saw him looking out his window. He'll be here any minute. We've gotta go." He pulled at Jamie's arm.

Jamie pushed one last time before they scampered into the adjoining yard as though the devil was at their heels. They scurried through the ground floor landing of the building opposite the Stewart's house, emerging into Logan Drive. When they reached the intersection with Ferguslie Park Avenue, they slowed to a walk, gasping for breath and looking over their shoulders to make sure Archie hadn't followed them.

"That was too close, man," said D'Angelo, panting. "I don't think my heart could take much more of that. Don't ask me to do anything so stupid ever again, Jamie.

All for nothing, too. I bet there wasn't anything to see in the shed."

The moon came out, and Jamie could see his fright mirrored in the face of his friend. "You're wrong, D," he said, swallowing hard. He pulled up his jacket collar and pushed his hands into his pockets. "Something was there. I stumbled over it as I fell. That's why I made such a racket in the first place. When the light switched on, I could see it was a large sack, and there was something inside it."

"What was in it then? Did you get a look?"

"Didn't have enough time before you started yelling at me," said Jamie, "but I reckon I know what it was anyway." He paused and looked uneasily at his pal.

"Well, come on then, what was it? Don't hold out on me now."

"You'll think I'm nuts."



"You're having me on. You just want to scare me is all..." D'Angelo fidgeted in his seat. They'd walked to the Sherwood to have a coke and settle their nerves before going home. The place was almost empty as it was near closing time, which meant they could talk freely. D'Angelo wrapped a handkerchief around a cut on his hand that he'd received when trying to drag Jamie's arm free of the shed. "How do you know it was a body if you didn't see it, and anyway, what would a body be doing in the Stewarts' shed?"

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“I don’t know for certain, but I touched it as I fell over. It...it sort of felt hard and knobby, like elbows and feet were sticking out...and...and it smelled foul.”

“But you didn’t see anything, did you? It could have been a bag of moldy spuds or cabbages or even old clothes.”

“It wasn’t vegetables, D! It stank like rotten meat. I don’t know what to think. It’s hard to imagine something like that happening so near us. But, still...” The horror that swept over Jamie when the sack was revealed in the light wouldn’t go away.

“Okay, let’s suppose for a minute it was a body,” said D’Angelo, beginning to calm down. “What would it be doing there, and who do you think it could be?”

“Well...” Jamie picked up his drink, then placed it back on the table. “Archie looked pretty mad at his mum and dad the other night.”

“Oh, for God’s sake!” D’Angelo rolled his eyes. “So now Archie has murdered his own parents? Man, you’ve lost the plot.”

“Okay, okay! I told you you’d think I was nuts. Let’s forget it.” He was feeling a bit stupid because he still thought there was a body in the sack, but with no proof except his intuition, he couldn’t expect D to believe him, and if D didn’t believe him, what chance was there the police would?



It was after midnight, and the moon and stars were

obscured by clouds. Archie stole into the backyard and checked to see whether any of his neighbors were awake. All the houses were in darkness.

He unlocked the shed door and surveyed the mess made by the two boys he'd spotted earlier. He shook his head, muttering, "fucking amateurs." Archie made little noise as he hauled the hessian bag out of the shed and dragged it along the ground to the large steel cylinder that was the communal rubbish bin. Mounting the concrete steps, he opened the heavy lid, heaved the sack onto the rim, and pushed it over the edge. It fell with a thud onto the bags of garbage already there.

The boy leaned over the top and spat into the dark.

He whispered, "You never bought me a present. Never told me I'd done well at school, never played games with me, or shared my few pathetic toys, and never once did you tell me you loved me. You never whispered stories to me while I was in bed, never comforted me when I was terrified of the dark, or encouraged me to dream of a better future. All you ever did was beat me, shout at me, and tell me I was stupid and lazy. Good riddance to bad rubbish."

The weekly collection arrived the next morning around seven. Archie watched from his bedroom as the massive eight-cylinder Dennis truck trundled along the purpose-built concrete pathway towards the rubbish bin. The vehicle pushed its front lifting forks into the slots on each side of the steel cylinder and raised it over its head, flipping the contents into its belly. Once

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it completed the round, Archie knew the truck would empty its load at the local tip, along with a dozen other vehicles servicing the Paisley and District area. With a bit of luck, they wouldn't find anything until long after he'd gone.