

JENNA

Gardiners Bay at dawn is my secret. There's a moment, right before the day starts, when the ocean is bathed in amber light. That first golden breath of morning. Everything is still, apart from the pelicans gathering near the water, their plump bodies shuffling along the shoreline. Sometimes I sit on the promenade for hours with my legs suspended over the pebble beach below, just watching the night turn to day. Watching the darkness turn to light.

It's often like this, just me and the birds. The only other people I tend to cross paths with at this hour are fishermen wearing heavy-duty gear and hugging their thermoses. They sit on the benches and swig their hot drinks while skimming the daily newspaper. Then they leave. A little while later, their boats drift out onto the water.

Today, though, I'm the only one here.

I raise my camera and adjust the focus, capturing the new light as it spills over the ocean. In the muted daylight, the silver tide is a murky, dull gray and frothing as it slaps against the shore.

"Help! I need help!"

My eyes dart across the shoreline. There's a boy on the stretch of beach at the foot of Rookwood Cliff. He's kneedeep in the water, fully dressed.

He shouts again.

I spring to my feet and run along the promenade. Ducking beneath the boardwalk railings, I jump down to the pebbled cove.

The soles of my feet sting at the impact of the stones beneath my Converse. I scramble toward him, my footing slipping on the damp pebbles.

It's then that I recognize him.

Adam.

His jeans are soaked to the thigh. He's wading through the shallows, his legs tangled in fishing net and seaweed. And a body lies limp in his arms. A girl. She's swollen, her skin has turned purple, and one arm is swinging downward with the momentum of Adam's labored movements.

I press my hand to my mouth.

"Call an ambulance," he shouts.

But all I can do is stand there, paralyzed by the sight. He lowers the girl onto the sand and begins CPR, breathing into her mouth.

It's too late, I want to tell him.

She's already dead.

Excerpted from *This is Why We Lie* by Gabriella Lepore, Copyright © 2021 by Gabriella Lepore. Published by Inkyard Press.