

# POSSESSIONS

NANCY HOLDER



Possessions

RAZORBILL

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To those who walk in darkness.  
There is light. I promise.



# October: The Search

*All our possessions are as nothing compared to health, strength,  
and a clear conscience.*

—Hosea Ballou

*The man who seeks revenge digs two graves.*

—Ken Kesey,

*Sometimes a Great Notion*

# one

**October 28**

**possessions: me**

Tibetan prayer beads

Mem's UCSD sweatshirt

used black leather boho bag (thrift shop in Poway)

Converse high-tops (from Target)

Dad's socks (too big, but they're his)

tattered jeans (origin forgotten)

tortoiseshell headband (plastic)

NO makeup

five single-subject notebooks

regulation Marlwood Academy planner

ditto binder

six #2 pencils, one missing eraser (panic attack)

pens (unlimited)

cell phone (no bars, no reception here AT ALL)

Jason's St. Christopher medal (thanks, Cuz!)

me, Lindsay 2.0 (or so I hope)

*haunted by:* my past

*listening to:* my heartbeat—too fast again! *don't forget to breathe.*

*mood:* frozen to death (not a mood?!)

**possessions: them**

oh.

my.

God.

is there anything they DON'T have???

*haunted by:* not seeing any haunting

*listening to:* each other

*mood:* excited? they can pay for any mood they want.

Fog had crawled up the mountain, like a wounded animal on pine-tree claws, and bled all over the campus. I stopped and squinted at my map with its handy printed stats—a hundred developed acres that included hiking paths and bike trails; thirty buildings, including a brick gym with a plaster frieze, which really needed updating, of ancient Greek athletes (male)—who could also have used some underwear, if I remembered the picture correctly.

The campus was rolling in white mist, and I wasn't sure of the way to the classrooms, which were clustered on the north side of the campus. I had thought there was a shortcut through

Academy Quad, my quad, but it was hard to be sure when I couldn't see more than ten feet ahead of myself.

Then a stiff wind blew, thinning the fog. Sure enough, my building loomed on top of the small hill to my left. Grose was a creaky, scary-looking rectangle made out of brick, with a slate roof. Another dorm, Jessel, crouched at the bottom of the hill like it was waiting to pounce. It was three stories tall with a slight-L-shape, where a back porch jutted out like a hunchback.

Jessel was prettier than Grose. It had towering stone columns on either side of its brightly painted red front door, and four turret rooms, one on each corner, covered in slate shingles. The windows of the turrets were arched, completing the castle-tower effect.

Everyone else in both Grose and Jessel had already moved in, made friends, and started right on schedule—September 5<sup>th</sup>. I couldn't believe they'd let me start so late. Maybe nervous breakdowns came with benefits.

I was here to reinvent myself in a major way. No one here *knew* I had gone bonkers. No one here knew me at all. I could be anyone—Lindsay Anne Cavanaugh 2.0. I really hoped I would like the remix better. I was optimistic; I had started out well as a person—had normal friends, liked animals, did pretty well in school. I used to kick butt on the cello. Okay, my mom died. And Jane Taylor seduced my boyfriend. In our house. On the throw I knitted for my mom in the hospital.

And yeah, I'd pretended I didn't care. I'd acted like it was no big deal. Because I wanted to be one of Jane's cool chicks.

That was called cognitive dissonance, when you wanted two



opposing things—such as self-respect and popularity. A broken heart and a shot at riding in Jane’s limo to Homecoming.

A second chance and all my insecurities begging me to get the heck out of here. . . .

Sometimes, wanting those two opposing things made you fracture, like two tectonic plates crashing together beneath the surface of the ocean.

“So what do you think, Botox? Or a deal with the Devil? I heard Ehrlenbach’s sixty-eight.” A girl’s voice wafted out of the billows of horror-movie white. I placed her at maybe twenty yards to my right—my Jessel side, where a private hedge hid their front yard from view. Dr. Ehrlenbach was our headmistress, and I had yet to meet her.

“Did you spend your summer in rehab? No one does Botox anymore,” someone else shot back. “But if she’s really that old, my money’s on the Devil. My dad would do her in a heartbeat. I’ve heard him say so. All right, blindfold her.”

I blinked. Slowed. Waited to hear more.

“That’s too tight. Ow,” a third voice protested.

“You know, Keeks, you don’t have to do this,” the second voice said, but there was a silent *but you’d better* tacked on the end, sharpened with the familiar edge of an accomplished bitch. I knew then and there that I was eavesdropping not only on a mean girl, but a leader of same—a queen bee. I was an expert on queen bees. Unfortunately.

*Nothing to see here, Lindsay, I told myself, as my face prickled from memories and apprehension. Move it along. Even better, run.*

They could have their fun. I was not there to have fun of any kind, especially that kind.

“I’m not so sure about this.” That was Keeks again.

“Tie her hands.” Her Majesty.

*Yow.*

“Maybe we’d better wait.” The first girl I’d heard. Not in charge.

“Just do it, Lara. Oh, forget it. Give me the rope and—”

“God, Mandy, chill. I’m on it.”

Mandy. How typical. I wondered if Mandy was half as mean as Jane; and if she was, I pitied Lara just for being there almost as much as I pitied Keeks, whoever she was, for agreeing to be blindfolded and tied up in the middle of a fog bank when they should be in class. Obviously, Keeks had to prove herself to get into their exclusive little club. So not worth it.

By then I was at the hedge. *Just a peek*, I told myself, *just to make sure she’s okay*.

The privet leaves were wet and small, covering branches that grew together as dense as an actual fence. I smelled wet earth and my own sugar-free cinnamon gum. Wind toyed with my crazed ringlets as I raised myself up on my tiptoes in an attempt to peer out of a thinned-out space above my head. I’m only five-foot-two, and it was out of my reach. I crept to my left, still unable to see anything.

“Let’s get started. Breathe in, breathe out, center. We gather to welcome you. Kiyoko, let go, let go of yourself, and become one of us.” Nervous laughter drifted from a thinned section in the hedge, a circle of broken branch endings that looked as if someone had clipped them, like wire cutters on a chain-link

fence. The opening emitted fog—as if *it* were breathing—and it creeped me out. I hugged my UCSD sweatshirt around myself as I moved in quietly and peered through. My high-tops sank into mud.

“Come to me, come to me,” Mandy urged.

The fog rolled and churned; then I saw them. Two girls flanked a third, who was blindfolded. The tallest wore her light, nearly white-blond hair in a messy bun. She had to be Mandy. Her full lips were curved in a smile I knew well—calculating, cruel, enjoying the distress of her victim.

Maybe-Mandy’s neck was fashion-model long, and she was wearing glittering diamond earrings as big as pencil erasers. I assumed they were real. Her clothes were so fine—a long black coat hung open, revealing a knee-length black cashmere sweater-dress over black pencil-leg woolen trousers above high-heeled boots—and I saw a thick gold bangle around her wrist as she smoothed a wisp of hair away from her cheek. Everything looked designer and real.

“Become one of us,” Mandy said again, her voice papery, and she exhaled, sending condensed breath all over the blindfolded girl’s face.

“Become one of us,” the other girl—Lara—chanted. She was grinning like a coyote that had stumbled on a nest of baby rabbits. Her emerald eyes (definitely contacts) gleamed as Kiyoko stood statue-still. Lara was a classic redhead with ivory skin and a few cute freckles, her hair short and her clothes tasteful but boho—a man’s plaid suit jacket in olive green and chocolate-brown, an extra-long white shirt, and the skinniest of skinny dark jeans.

Standing blindfolded in the center, Kiyoko's hands were tied behind her back, which was the part that made me extra-uneasy for her. It was going a little too far.

Kiyoko was rail-thin, the kind of thin that was too thin even for a model, and black silky hair cascaded over her shoulders. A gorgeous silvery sweater grazed the thighs of her gray jeans, but it hung too loose on her. Her legs were like sticks. She was chewing her lower lip; her golden-hued features displayed her concentration and eagerness.

"Become one of us," Mandy and Lara whispered together, their breaths spiraling up toward the sky.

Fog rushed all around me, wrapping me up in cold sheets of blank whiteness, and I couldn't see a thing. The chill seeped through my clothes straight through to my bones, and I shivered, hard. It felt as if the cold were creeping under my hair, straight into my *brain*.

I shuddered, and for a few seconds, I couldn't even think. For a quick moment, I thought I smelled . . . smoke? Then the sensation passed. Another strong wind whipped through the fog and thinned it out again—just as Mandy and Lara both stiffened and quickly inhaled. Their faces went slack, with their eyes still open.

I wondered if they were having some kind of infectious seizure. I waited for them to exhale, but it wasn't happening. Then I realized *I* was holding my breath, too, and forced myself to let it out. I felt shaky and weird.

I almost called out to see if they needed help. Before I went nuts, I had done some lifeguarding, and I was still certified in CPR.

Slowly, Mandy turned her head in my direction, as if she knew I was there. Probably not a good thing, spying. Before I realized what I was doing, I stepped to the right, where the branches grew closer together, blocking her view, although I could still see her sick little game.

Mandy's forehead creased in apparent frustration. I squinted as more fog rolled between us; when it wafted out of the way, her eyes looked completely black. No pupils. No white. No color. Just black.

Whoa, how high was she?

"Number Three," she intoned, and her voice sounded different. "Come to me." Higher, shriller, with a little Southern accent. Her laugh was high-pitched, and a tad OOC . . .

"Number three, come to me," Lara added, and her voice didn't sound the same either. Maybe a little lower . . . meaner . . .

"I'm here," Kiyoko murmured. She sounded unsure, more like she wanted to please them than anything else.

A deep chill ran through me, the fog moist and cold on my face. What exactly was I witnessing?

Then someone tapped me on the back, and I gasped and whirled around.