

# PROLOGUE

## *Alicia Berenson's Diary*

JULY 14

*I don't know why I'm writing this.*

*That's not true. Maybe I do know and just don't want to admit it to myself*

*I don't even know what to call it—this thing I'm writing. It feels a little pretentious to call it a diary. It's not like I have anything to say. Anne Frank kept a diary—not someone like me. Calling it a “journal” sounds too academic, somehow. As if I should write in it every day, and I don't want to—if it becomes a **chore**, I'll never keep it up.*

*Maybe I'll call it nothing. An unnamed something that I occasionally write in. I like that better. Once you name something, it stops you seeing the whole of it, or why it matters. You focus on the word, which is just the tiniest part, really, the tip of an iceberg. I've never been that comfortable with words—I always think in pictures, express myself with images—so I'd never have started writing this if it weren't for Gabriel.*

*I've been feeling **depressed** lately, about a few things. I thought I was doing a good job of hiding it, but he noticed—of course he did, he notices everything. He asked how the painting was going—I said it wasn't. He got me a glass of wine, and I sat at the kitchen table while he cooked.*

*I like watching Gabriel move around the kitchen. He's a graceful cook—elegant, balletic, organized. Unlike me. I just make a mess.*

*“Talk to me,” he said.*

*“There’s nothing to say. I just get so stuck in my head sometimes. I feel like I’m wading through mud.”*

*“Why don’t you try writing things down? Keeping some kind of record? That might help.”*

*“Yes, I suppose so. I’ll try it.”*

*“Don’t just say it, darling. Do it.”*

*“I will.”*

*He kept nagging me, but I did nothing about it. And then a few days later he presented me with this little book to write in. It has a black leather cover and thick white blank pages. I ran my hand across the first page, feeling its smoothness—then sharpened my pencil and began.*

*He was right, of course. I feel better already—writing this down is providing a kind of release, an outlet, a space to express myself. A bit like therapy, I suppose.*

*Gabriel didn’t say it, but I could tell he’s concerned about me. And if I’m going to be honest—and I may as well be—the real reason I agreed to keep this diary was to **reassure** him—prove that I’m okay. I can’t bear the thought of him worrying about me. I don’t ever want to cause him any distress or make him unhappy or cause him pain. I love Gabriel so much. He is without doubt the love of my life. I love him so totally, completely, sometimes it threatens to overwhelm me. Sometimes I think—*

*No. I won’t write about that.*

*This is going to be a joyful record of ideas and images that inspire me artistically, things that make a creative impact on me. I’m only going to write positive, happy, normal thoughts.*

*No crazy thoughts allowed.*

# PART ONE

He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may  
convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret.  
If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips;  
betrayal **oozes** out of him at every pore.

—SIGMUND FREUD, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*

## CHAPTER ONE

ALICIA BERENSON WAS THIRTY-THREE YEARS OLD when she killed her husband.

They had been married for seven years. They were both artists—Alicia was a painter, and Gabriel was a well-known fashion photographer. He had a distinctive style, shooting semi-starved, semi-naked women in strange, unflattering angles. Since his death, the price of his photographs has increased astronomically. I find his stuff rather slick and shallow, to be honest. It has none of the visceral quality of Alicia's best work. I don't know enough about art to say whether Alicia Berenson will stand the test of time as a painter. Her talent will always be overshadowed by her notoriety, so it's hard to be objective. And you might well accuse me of being biased. All I can offer is my opinion, for what it's worth. And to me, Alicia was a kind of genius. Apart from her technical skill, her paintings have an uncanny ability to grab your attention—by the throat, almost—and hold it in a viselike grip.

Gabriel Berenson was murdered six years ago. He was forty-four years old. He was killed on the twenty-fifth of August—it was an unusually hot summer, you may remember, with some of the highest temperatures ever recorded. The day he died was the hottest of the year.

On the last day of his life, Gabriel rose early. A car collected him at 5:15 a.m. from the house he shared with Alicia in northwest London, on the edge of Hampstead Heath, and he was driven to a shoot in Shoreditch. He spent the day photographing models on a rooftop for *Vogue*.

Not much is known about Alicia's movements. She had an upcoming exhibition and was behind with her work. It's likely she spent the day painting in the summerhouse at the end of the garden, which she had