

CHARISE JEWELL

Regrets Ever After  
*FROM THE  
JOURNAL OF  
CORNELIUS MICHAEL*



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## 6. February. A Year Ago. / Cornelius

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I want to write but every time I open this book and see that last entry I just can't. I shut down. I wish I could talk to someone about it. I don't know how people make friends and talk about feelings. Allow themselves to 'TRUST' and be VULNERABLE. The camp therapist used those words and told me to work on it. We only ever had one conversation though so he wasn't exactly helpful. Sounds great in theory, but how do people connect enough to share secrets and VULNERABILITIES?

I don't know how to explain that short story, the one I wrote last time. The things that happened at camp weren't exactly like that, so I don't know where it came from. I mean, parts of my story were true, or based on things that were true. ALLEGEDLY. The camp lawyer taught me that word and a few others. I was not there during 'THE INCIDENT'. Nobody was. That was part of the problem for the girl: no witnesses. Her name wasn't Annie and his wasn't Bradley, but I couldn't use real names in my modified version. It feels wrong to make their story into a short story, and even worse to use their actual names. I don't know. It feels disrespectful. Bad karma or something. Also, giving them fake names helps me to keep some distance, like I made it up for an assignment. I don't want to think about what actually happened. It makes me feel sick. I don't want to think about her being alone. I should have helped her. I don't think anybody did.

But to set it all down honestly, with no lawyers watching, in real life the girl I named Annie showed up barefoot in the camp dining

hall that morning with blood on her face, ripped clothes, and no explanation. No words at all, not at first. She sat with her friends but didn't respond when they talked to her or brought her food. She didn't say anything until Bradley (fake name) walked in acting all superior and smug, like usual. Then she stood up and found her voice. I'm going to write this part exactly how I remember it. Fake names but everything else is true.

*"How could you?" Annie says. Her voice is loud and she sounds more confident than she looks. I've been watching her since she first walked in, so I saw her lips twitch, the words starting to form, when Bradley arrived. I saw the fury on her face before she stood up.*

*He doesn't answer. Doesn't even glance her way. He must know, at least subconsciously, that the best way to insult somebody is to ignore them. Make them feel irrelevant. But Annie will not be ignored.*

*"You heard me. Look at me," she yells. Everyone hears her now, even Bradley. He turns, slowly, makes eye contact, and lifts one hand up to his chest. One of the senior staff members starts to stand, presumably to take control of the situation, but Bradley waves him down. No other counsellor has this kind of authority, but Bradley is related to the camp owners. He knows he's untouchable.*

*"Are you talking to me?" he says with his stupid phony voice. "Do I know you?"*

*Annie stares at him, projecting pure hatred.*

*“Yes. You know me too well.” She moves away from her table and towards him, until they are face-to-face. He glances at nearby kids with a smirk, like, who is this crazy girl? The kids are silent—everybody in the hall is silent—but hold their hands up to their mouths to hide their smiles. To them, this is great entertainment. To Bradley, too.*

*“You’re the guy who just raped me.” Annie says the words with such force that she spits on him and he recoils, as though her spit is more disgusting than her accusation.*

*Up until now, campers and staff have been frozen, waiting for this exchange to play out. The word ‘rape,’ changes everything. Murmurs and questions start out as whispers but quickly escalate until the buzz in the dining hall is louder than the cicadas outside. Loud. The staff finally get over their shock and start to move, instructing everyone to clear their trays and return to their cabins. These orders are ignored. Someone disappears to find the Warden, and another counsellor approaches Annie and Bradley, putting one arm around her shoulders to turn her away. She flinches and glares at him with eyes that scream, “Do I look like I want to be touched?” but he’s not paying attention. And he doesn’t care. No one puts an arm around Bradley. No one dares to try to remove him from the scene.*

*“Where are my shoes, Bradley? Those were new shoes.”*

*They lead Annie, yelling and swearing, out of the hall. Bradley gets to stay and eat breakfast with the handful of campers and counsellors who stuck around. I watch him laugh and make fun of Annie as he sits down. A plate of food is placed before him, like he’s a king, and he starts to tell his version of THE INCIDENT, complete with gestures. His admirers react appropriately, with*

*exaggerated expressions and laughter. At one point, Bradley glances my way while reaching for something on his tray. We make eye contact, and he pauses before lifting his glass. Then he raises it in my direction like he's making a toast, and winks.*

That goddamn wink is what gets me, every time I remember that morning. What a prick. I wish I'd walked across the dining room and punched him right there. I would have been kicked out but it would have been worth it. Besides, everything about that camp was bad and it only got worse after that day. It would have been better to get kicked out before it got so LITIGIOUS.

Aunt Geena was the one I called later on, to explain what had happened. She listened to the whole story without interrupting, even understood me through my stupid crybaby tears. She's the only person I know who never interrupts me. Sorry, Mom, but you interrupt me all the time and it's really annoying. Also, stop reading this. Also, nothing that happened at camp was my fault. Ask Geena, she knows the details. She was there when I gave my statement and those lawyers never called me back to testify anyway.

Okay, so, let me try end on a lighter note. School is okay, I guess. I've been doing my homework and I'm still behind but I'm catching up. Not sure why I'm bothering. I think the teachers know about camp even though no one said anything to me, because they like to be stupid positive and pretend nothing bad every happens to avoid difficult, potentially life-changing, conversations. Anyway, I think they want to help me because they

know it's been hard. Seems like they're on my side for a change. I wish people didn't lie, keep secrets, or interrupt me. Not much of a lighter note to end on but there it is. That's all I have to say tonight.