



SINCE 1926

Ms. Gray,

I'm turning to you because I'm out of options. My son, Teo, has been arrested for the murder of his girlfriend, Katie Dunn. Her body was discovered inside the ride our family owns on the boardwalk here in Brittany Beach. *Scream-a-Rama* is one of those old-school haunted house rides, but all the plastic skeletons and ghosts with glowing eyes feel like a cruel joke after what happened to Katie.

Teo was the one who found her. He always does a walk-through before he opens the ride for the day, just to make sure things are running smoothly. He said he might not have noticed her at all, if it hadn't been for the junk on the floor. There was an old keychain lying there, next to a souvenir tin with a lock on it and a bloody popcorn bag full of pieces of paper. At first he thought it was just trash, but then he saw Katie, slumped behind some tombstones in the section of the ride we call "ghosts in the graveyard." He said he tried to help her, but it was already too late.

Teo asked me to hide the stuff he found near Katie's body, along with a napkin with some nonsense scribbled on it. He was terrified the cops would use it against him. I don't know what he thought the police would learn from a random assortment of junk, but I did what Teo asked. I'm still not sure I was right, but what mother wouldn't try to protect her son? After Teo was arrested, I tried to show everything to his lawyer, but he said he didn't want to hear about me withholding evidence from the police. I even tried to open the tin myself, but I couldn't work out the combination to the lock—and then I started to think maybe I didn't want to know what was inside. I know it doesn't look good. Nothing about this situation looks good.

Teo was right to be afraid the cops would blame him for Katie's death. They took their time getting around to him, but they never saw Teo as anything other than a troubled kid up to no good on the boardwalk. And, look, I'll be the first to admit that nobody who works here is exactly what you'd call an upstanding citizen. We've all looked the other way over a case of midway prizes that "fell off a truck," but that doesn't mean we're bad people, not in the ways that really count.

When I first started working here, Stella Park was a pretty nice place. But these days, most of us are struggling just to stay afloat. We look out for each other because we're the only ones we can trust. The tourists think we exist only to take their tickets and clean up their trash, and Stella Park's management exploits us every chance they get. As for the authorities, they're all perfectly happy to write us off as lowlifes and thieves.

The thing is, I can see why the police suspect Teo. Isn't that a terrible thing for a mother to admit? It doesn't mean I agree with them, but I can't deny that Teo's got a record. He's done plenty of things that aren't strictly legal. He's hurt people before. And he's not making it easy to believe he's innocent. He refuses to tell anyone where he was the night Katie died. I know he's hiding something, I just wish he'd tell me what's really going on. Whatever he was doing, it could be the key to clearing him of Katie's murder.

I don't want to believe he could be capable of killing someone he loved. To me, Teo will always be the shy kid who won first place in his school's art show but refused to go up and accept his award because he was afraid people would make fun of him. Somewhere along the way, that sweet little boy grew up to be full of so much anger that it poisoned him. I don't know where I let him down, only that I can't do it again.

There has to be something that will help his case. With his court date coming up, I'll take whatever hope I can get. I've been asking around on the boardwalk, trying to see if anybody remembers something about that day, but there's only so much I can do on my own. That's where you come in. I need someone who can look at all this evidence and put it together in a way that makes sense. Maybe then you'll be able to work out what really happened.

I have to know I'm doing everything I possibly can to help my son. I'm trusting you to do the same.

*Maria Pallis*