

# LOIS DUNCAN

THEY ONLY MEANT  
TO SCARE HIM. . . .

## KILLING Mr. Griffin

By the bestselling author of  
*I Know What You Did Last Summer*



# 1

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It was a wild, windy, southwestern spring when the idea of killing Mr. Griffin occurred to them.

As she crossed the playing field to reach the school building, Susan McConnell leaned into the wind and cupped her hands around the edges of her glasses to keep the blowing red dust from filling her eyes. Tumbleweeds swept past her like small, furry animals, rushing to pile in drifts against the fence that separated the field from the parking lot. The parked cars all had their windows up as though against a rainstorm. In the distance the rugged Sandia Mountains rose in faint outline, almost obscured by the pinkish haze.

I hate spring, Susan told herself vehemently. I hate dust and wind. I wish we lived somewhere else. Someday—

It was a word she used often—*someday*.

"Someday," she had said at the breakfast table that very morning, "someday I'm going to live in a cabin on the shore of a lake where everything is peaceful and green and the only sound is lapping water."



As soon as the words were out she had longed to snatch them back again.

"How are you going to pay the property taxes?" her father had asked in his usual reasonable way. "Lakeshore property doesn't come cheap, you know. Somebody's going to have to finance that lovely green nest of yours."

"A rich husband!" her brother Craig had shouted, and the twins, who were seven, had broken into jeers and laughter.

"Not too soon, I hope," her mother had said, turning from the stove with the frying pan in her hand. "Marry in haste, repent at leisure. That's what my grandmother always said. There's plenty of time for everything."

"For being an old maid?" the twin named Melvynne had offered, giggling.

"Don't be ridiculous," Mrs. McConnell had told him. "Nobody is ever an old maid these days. The term is 'single person.' Now, who wants eggs?"

Someday, Susan had thought, sinking lower in her chair, someday I am going to move out of this house and away from this family. I'll live all alone in a place where I can read and write and think, and the only time I'll ever come here is for Christmas.

"Are you going to be a single person, Sue?" the twin named Francis had asked with false innocence, jabbing his brother with his elbow, and Craig had grinned with maddening twelve-year-old self-assurance and said, "You've got to go out on dates before you get married, and Sue hasn't even started that yet."

"All things in good time," Mrs. McConnell had told them mildly, and Mr. McConnell had said, "On the subject of property taxes—" and they had been off on another subject.



And Susan, with her eyes on her plate, had told herself silently, someday—someday—

The dust stung the sides of her face, filling her nose and coating her lips. With a whir and a flutter, half a dozen sheets of notebook paper went flying past her like strange, white birds released suddenly from the confinement of their cage.

“Grab them!” somebody shouted. “Get them before they go over the fence!”

Susan turned to see David Ruggles running toward her, the slightness and delicacy of his bone structure giving him the framework of a kite with his blue Windbreaker billowing out beneath his arms, the wind seeming to lift and carry him. He sailed by her, grabbing frantically for the escaping papers, and Susan dropped her hands from their protective encasement of her glasses and snatched wildly at the air.

The paper she was trying for lurched suddenly to the ground in front of her, and her foot came down upon it, grinding it into the dirt. Susan stooped and snatched it up.

“It’s torn!” The dirty imprint of her shoe was stamped irrevocably in its center. “I’m sorry. I’ll copy it over for you.”

“It doesn’t matter.” David shrugged his shoulders and reached to take the paper from her hand. “The rest of it’s blown away anyhow. One ripped page isn’t going to make any difference. If it’s not all there, old Griffin won’t take any of it.”

“Is it a song for Ophelia?”

“Yeah. Tried to be, but Griffin would have called it something else I’m sure. I’ve never done anything right for him yet.”

“Neither have I. Neither, I guess, has anybody.”

Susan fell into step beside him, her heart lifting



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They only planned to scare their  
English teacher.

They didn't mean to kill him.

But sometimes even the best-laid  
plans go wrong.

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