

ONE

DON'T BELIEVE WHAT you hear about me.

I don't rob people. Robbery means taking something with force. I hate violence, and I've never used a weapon in my life. Besides, I'm too good to need force. If I take something of yours, you won't know until it's gone, and you'll never know it was me.

I'm a thief. A great thief. Or I was.

But right now I was a woman waiting in the rain for her brother.



Dean and I pretty much raised ourselves. After our parents' funeral, we went to live with our aunt Jessie. She owned a bar and restaurant with a small apartment on the second floor. The place is called Kidd's. Dean runs it nowadays and still lives upstairs.

My brother has always been interested in the restaurant business. I think that's because to him Kidd's is home. Dean loves to cook. Tonight, for my first meal after getting out of prison, he promised to make me something called cassoulet. I told him a burger and fries would be all right. But like I said, he loves to cook.

Me, I'm good at other things.

For two summers Aunt Jessie had a boyfriend named Paul. He installed alarms

for a security company. Houses mostly. Some businesses and office buildings. I helped him with his tools, and he taught me about the security business.

When a company installs a house alarm, they let the homeowner set the code. But things go wrong. Homeowners forget. For that reason the company sets its own code too, in case of emergencies. Installers like Paul are supposed to pick a unique or random set of four numbers—7093 or 2851. Something like that. They enter this code in their computer so the office has it on file if the owners ever need it.

But installers have bad days too. Some are lazy. Paul liked to get home early, so he would always set the same code. Four zeros.

I was fifteen when I learned this. For a fifteen-year-old, that was a lot of knowledge. Half the houses in our neighborhood had stickers in the window from Paul's security

company. They had the same alarm code. All I had to do was find an open window and I could be inside.

Sometimes I didn't even need an open window. Paul showed me a little about locksmithing. Not *lockpicking*—that was illegal. He showed me how to use a tension tool and a lock pick, but said they should only be used if somebody got locked out.

I would practice after school. Or instead of school. Working with Paul *was* my school.

At that time I didn't want to take things. I just liked the challenge of getting into places. I wanted to open any door, defeat any alarm, know every code. That was my fantasy.

Being a thief means mastering a lot of skills. I learned to climb by practicing on empty buildings around town. When I was eighteen I worked part-time at a gym that had a rock-climbing wall. After cleaning the

floors and emptying the trash, I'd practice climbing, building strength and confidence. Soon I could almost walk up walls.



The first building I broke into on my own was my high school. But not to steal anything. To get something back for my brother.

Dean was always tall and heavy for his age. Other kids liked to bully him. They called him Big Guy or Heavy D. If he fought back, the teachers would get mad at him. He was bigger, so he should *act* bigger.

At lunch one day there was a fight on the baseball diamond. Two kids had knocked Dean down. A bat was being swung. Dean fought back, and just when he stood up and threw a punch, the lunch monitor spotted him.

Dean was sent to the principal's office.