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This is a work of fiction. All characters, organizations, and events
portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's
imagination or are used fictitiously.

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For my mother, my beloved,
who deserves every happiness.

"History is a little man in a brown suit
trying to define a room he is outside of.
I know history. There are many names in history
but none of them are ours."

—Richard Siken, "Little Beast," *Crush* (2005)

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Readers,

This Book Will Bury Me is a book about true crime, born from my honest fascination, sympathy, and occasional horror with the ways true crime communities respond to unfolding crimes. As such, parts of this book draw from real-life cases in which there has been both a significant true crime and media response, as well as a willingness by the loved ones of victims to speak to media and to communities of amateur sleuths, to have their loved ones' stories told widely and to hopefully see justice delivered. Some of these cases include the University of Idaho, Gabby Petito, Golden State Killer, and Abraham Shakespeare cases. Any readers who are sensitive to details about these cases should please proceed with caution.

Because I became aware of the University of Idaho case while I was grieving the loss of my father, it struck a particular chord with me. At a time when I was grappling with losing my dad at an age I deemed too young, I found myself fixated on the tragedy of four precious lives lost much, *much* too young, as well as overwhelmed by the bizarre responses of some of the worst actors in the true crime community, and inspired by the way the families and friends of the victims were talking to media, sharing stories about the people they'd loved and lost and the complexity of their grief. Their openness about the case, as well as the openness of many other survivors, writers, and other

artists about grief, made me not only feel less lonely but made me feel that the subject of private tragedies turned public stories, and all the complicated, messy fallout of that—the "true crime phenomenon"—was worth tackling. While *This Book Will Bury Me* is not meant to be nonfiction, it is my utmost wish that I've reflected details of the cases referenced in this book accurately and respectfully. In the University of Idaho case, which is still ongoing, I pray that the courts deliver justice.

In addition to drawing inspiration from real cases, readers should know this book deals with the loss of a parent and includes scenes of violence and discussions of weight loss. Please take care of yourselves.

Sending much love,
Ashley Winstead

PART ONE

Here in the Dark,

We're No Longer Strangers

1

If you're reading this, chances are last year you flipped on the news and saw me getting shoved to my knees in the dirt, hands wrested behind my back, gun-toting FBI agents swarming like ants around me into that three-story house. God only knows what the headline below my face must've read. Something about murder, something about shocking twists, underground conspiracies tied to the most famous crime spree in America. It was a provocative introduction, no doubt. It's not surprising you have questions. Especially since the story that's unfolded since that day has been riddled with plot holes, full of inconsistencies and unanswered questions. It's probably driven you more than a little bit mad.

You want me to break my silence and tell you the truth. Trust me, I know—I've gotten your letters, your pleas, and your death threats. Your hunger is legible and familiar. You want what I once wanted, that insatiable longing for answers, the most human of urges. It's what started my journey, too, after all. Our desire to order the unknowable, touch the unreachable, shine a light on what's hidden—it's universal. We're uncomfortable with ambiguity, with living suspended in the mess of the world.

Those people you saw the FBI shove to their knees beside me? They wanted answers as badly as I did. We used to live in the true-crime forums, typing away at our theories, poring through forgotten records, speculating about the angle of a knife strike or a bullet. We were like those Enlightenment scientists of old,

pushing knowledge into a new era, so confident in the human mind, our own possibilities. That's why we read and posted and tracked and obsessed. We thought we were edging closer every day to that shining city on the hill where all would be revealed and we would finally be at peace. Call it the City of Heaven, or Justice, or Absolution. Trust me, we really thought we'd get there. All the way up until the bitter end, when our experiment went so darkly south, exploding in our faces.

But I've gotten ahead of myself. A lot of people who weren't close to the story have been getting famous spreading lies, and you deserve the truth. Maybe you're a vulture, reading this simply to pick over my bones. Or maybe you're one of those rare people, curious and open-minded. Either way, I'm going to tell you the whole sordid thing. That's the point of a tell-all, isn't it? Time to let all the skeletons out of the closet.

But I'm going to do it my way. I promise it's for the best. Remember, I used to *be* you. I know you don't just want the cold, dry facts shoveled into your brain. You want to know *why,* how, what the weather was like that day. What kind of mood was in the air. The shoes they were wearing, what they ate for breakfast. Who they hated and who they crushed on. What the first blow must've felt like, the first sting of betrayal. You want to find the causal roots, trace them all the way back and all the way forward, treasure every detail. When it comes to stories like the one I've been holding—when it comes to mysteries like these, the kind they call crimes of the century—you want to savor it. You want as much color as you can get.

Trust me, by the time we're through, you'll bleed color.

Now let's begin.

My story starts with a body, just not the one you might expect.