

## Chapter 1

*"In 1996 we interviewed David Laurier about the sudden change he and his wife made to their lives that sparked a new lifestyle trend. Recently, we had the opportunity to sit down with their daughter, Regina Laurier to discuss Lyvenslowe and how this small movement has gone global."*

"Ryan! It's on," Mom shouted. Already dressed in her surgical scrubs, she moved past me for the living room where she had on some Sunday morning news show. That's odd. The only TV Mom and Dad normally watch is the news, and even then it is more so background news.

Rolling my eyes, I went to the fridge to pull out milk to make my own cup of coffee.

"Woah. Close that," Dad muttered, still reading some affidavit or whatever as he sidestepped the open fridge door.

*"... and I was burned out."*

My jaw clenched when his voice spewed from the television and assaulted my ears.

*"I had only worked in the New York Stock Exchange for three years and I was miserable. But I needed money to support the lifestyle we were being told we should live."*

Cradling the warmth seeping out of the ceramic mug, I moved to lean against the doorframe to watch the grainy, discolored interview with a younger version of David Laurier. His slicked back, dark hair and relaxed, baggy button-down made him look like a Wall Street guy pretending to be the 90's version of cool.

*"At the time, my wife worked as a professor in sociology at Columbia,"* David Laurier continued talking in that charming way he does in all his interviews. *"One night, she was telling me about her research on the way communities have changed due to consumerism. Besides the*

**Commented [CS1]:** This is an interesting set up—just a thought, some grounding detail might be really helpful before the talking?

Might be a me thing, but I don't have any context for who is talking or why or what.

**Commented [CS2]:** Who is talking? Is this a dreamy, why is something happening that doesn't usually or a real life, why is my mom watching this type of thing?

growing rift between the rich and poor, the art of mastering a particular craft was dying thanks to mass production edging people out and forcing them to take factory or office jobs.”

The camera cut to some middle-aged reporter wearing a boxy gray suit. “And then you gave up the safety and security of your careers?”

“No. Not right away at least,” David Laurier shook his head with a laugh. “We lasted only a few more years, the whole time mulling over this idea before we finally took that leap of faith.”

The clip cut off, changing to a clearer footage of an older female report with a perfectly angular bob. “That leap of faith seems to have worked out for your father?”

My fingers tensed around the mug as Regina Laurier appeared on screen. She was in a green, floral dress that looked like something one of the princesses from the British royal family would wear. Based on the pictures, she looked more like her mother with her delicate features and perfectly wavy auburn hair. But there was something about the way she smiled, the way she spoke that was enough of her father to make my skin crawl.

“I’d say.” She acknowledged with a delicate chuckle, exposing her bright, white teeth. “However, I think when my parents first decided to leave the fast-paced, consumerism lifestyle nearly twenty years ago, they did not expect the interviews that would follow or the book deal or the requests to create the coaching program that would become Lyvenslowe.”

“Nor the communities that have popped up?”

“No.” Regina’s eyes widened in mock shock as she continued to smile at the reporter. “They definitely did not expect that.”

“What? They didn’t expect to be a cult either?” I grumbled into my cooling coffee.

**Commented [CS3]:**

**Commented [CS4R3]:** Why should we care about this? This could work if the MC is doing something to show why it’s important, or just that it IS important.

**Commented [CS5]:** Nice detail

“Did you say something, honey?” Dad rested his elbow on top of the couch, angling towards me, although he kept his eyes on the TV.

“Yeah.” I straightened. “Why isn’t anyone exposing Lyvenslowe for the cult it is?”

I flinched when Mom whirled around and gave an intense glare.

“Raelynn,” she reprimanded. “You are getting too old for this.” Then turned back to the television.

**Commented [CS6]:** Why are they so into the report when she obviously isn’t/

Blinking away the tears pricking my eyes, I slumped against the doorframe again. No matter what I have done since then, they still automatically think I am making shit up.

I was about to slink off to my room when the camera cut from stock footage of the main Lyvenslowe community to Diana sitting beside Regina.

Maybe it was the lighting or the camera altering her coloring, but her light brown hair came across as nearly blonde, making her dark brows more severe and her eyes extra green. Still, she looked like my sister. Yet she didn’t.

It has been a year since we last saw her. These days we were lucky she even called between visits. Not like when she first left for college five years ago. Back then she would come home at least one weekend a month and called me every Tuesday and Thursday. But then she began to postpone our calls. Not long after, she stopped coming home so regularly.

**Commented [CS7]:** Ah her sister joined a cult at the highest level?

It didn’t help that our brother left for college around the same time, leaving me completely alone.

“Miss Laurier.” I refocused on what the interviewer was saying. “*Is it safe to assume that you are responsible for the recent increase to Lyvenslowe’s popularity?*”

“Oh definitely not,” Regina gave a smile that reminded me of a politician, all perfect but hollow. “*There are so many of us involved. We have our wonderful group of ambassadors who*

*share the ideas of living a slower lifestyle and educators who offer classes to learn how to hone these 'old-fashioned' hobbies."* She bent her fingers into air quotes. *"Then there is everyone who lives in the communities, showing that this lifestyle is feasible. We,"* Regina glanced at my sister and then twisted to acknowledge the guy and girl sitting on a slightly elevated platform behind her. They all looked to be no older than maybe early-thirties and were dressed casually, but clean and pulled together. *"We are only one spoke in the wheel."*

*"What Regina is too modest to say,"* Diana cut in, *"is that she was the one to suggest we offer our classes and lectures to college students."*

*"Tell me more about that,"* the reporter prompted.

*My sister glanced over at Regina before straightening in her seat with a smile. "College can be stressful and we want to help students learn that it is okay to take a moment to step back. I know for myself, I reached a point where I was exhausted but could barely sleep with all my anxiety. Not to mention the other aspects of my life suffering from the burnout that was making me consider dropping out of college if I hadn't been convinced to take a Lyvenslow class. Spending an hour once a week, learning how to knit with others helped me to forget about the stress while feeling fulfilled when I had a final product to showcase."*

*"Then I think things sort of organically blew up,"* Regina jumped in.

*"What do you mean by that?"* The reporter tilted her head.

*"Well, social media is definitely more of a thing now than it was when my parents first began Lyvenslowe,"* Regina explained with Diana nodding beside her. *"Students started posting pictures and videos of them in class or their final products, hashtagging Lyvenslowe lifestyle. It felt like almost overnight we were trending and people wanted to join in."*

*"Including celebrities?"*

**Commented [CS8]:** Is she deferring? Is it mechanical? Is she passionate about it?

“Yes,” Regina chuckled alongside the others. *“That took all of us by surprise. But we are thrilled that more people want to get involved and are willing to learn there is more than our current fast-paced, consumerism-focused lifestyle.”*

Pushing off the wall, my frown deepened as I stared at the screen. Something bothered me every time the camera cut to Diana.

“Her eyes,” I muttered. Ditching my coffee cup, I rushed to get a closer look.

“Rae, you gotta move, you’re blocking the screen,” Dad called out.

“But look!” Spinning around, I pointed a finger towards where Diana sat, a perfect smile plastered on her face as Regina continued to talk. “They did something to her eyes. Where’s her white dots?”

**Commented [CS9]:** Im not sure what this means or why its such a big problem

“I don’t know, sweetie, maybe it went away.” Mom loudly exhaled, giving Dad a here-we-go-again look. “It did randomly appear. It probably just disappeared.” Waving her hand, she ushered me to move.

I couldn’t understand it. They made such a big deal when Diana was seventeen and the white dots first appeared in her eyes. I always thought they looked like someone had taken a white marker and poked a spot right where the iris met the pupil. Mom practically went crazy dragging her to a bunch of her doctor associates to make sure it wasn’t a sign of something worse. Meanwhile, earlier this year she was unfazed when I woke up with two white dots in my eyes, even though it never happened to our brother.

**Commented [CS10]:** huh

Digging my nails into my palms, I darted upstairs. With a huff, I flopped onto the bed with my laptop and pulled up a search browser. If our parents weren’t going to do anything, then I will have to be the one to save Diana from the clutches of this cult.

**Commented [CS11]:** why is this the catalyst?

**Things we like:**

- Great visceral descriptions of the MC's reaction to the people on TV!
- "What, they didn't expect to be a cult either?" is a great line and really piqued my interest.
- I'm loving the premise of needing to rescue a sibling from a cult. Hoping it goes sci fi and it's Body Snatchers or pod people or something haha But I'd be happy if it was a thriller, too, played straight same!
- Some fun voice moments "affidavit or whatever"
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**Things that might need a second look:**

- It takes us a couple paragraphs to get to the main character. A better strategy could be to have the MC present from the very first line.
- Though we get interesting information from the TV interview, it leans more towards info-dump than "necessary in the moment" info. I agree--I was really interested in trying to figure out how the MC felt by what she was doing...but she isn't doing anything. Does her sister look normal? Is she eager to see if she's okay? Is she trying to avoid watching by doing something else and unable to because she misses her sister so much? Her blocking and what's happening inside her builds a lot more story than the news clips.
- Small technical thing--watch tenses, they're a little jumbled here and there
- I think it would be helpful to know why the MC's family is interested in watching this interview earlier. There's a lot of angst from Raelynn about it, but we don't find out that it's because her sister is part of them until what might be too late--if you connect that angst to a reason quicker, it will be easier to follow for readers (and more tense, I think!) agreed
- Wasn't clear how old Regina is
- Small voice/character thing, but Raelynn comments that all of the people on the platform behind Regina are young "no older than maybe early-thirties." This is totally, definitely young--but not to a high schooler. Once you're over 25 you're *old*. Consider framing it as such?
- Interesting thing about the white spots on Diana's eyes—but the way it's presented is so casual it's a little jarring. It's odd that both Diana and Raelynn have them, which I assume will be important later, but it felt a little like a gorilla in a phone booth to me at the time
- If Diana's been part of this cult for a long time, what's changed that makes Raelynn decide she has to rescue her *now*? Why not any time earlier than this? Is it just that now it's made the news? I'm not sure that feels like a strong enough reason. I had the same reaction. What changed?
- I'm not sure why she thinks it is a cult--her sister seems to have put distance between herself and the family, but what harm is coming to her from participating with this company? There's a moment where Regina lets Diana talk and I was really interested in the dynamic between the two of them because it seemed a little bland--is Diana deferring to Regina? Is she mechanical? Is she passionate about the company? I'm not sure why she's even on the program, much less how she feels about it. I am confused about the stakes, I think?