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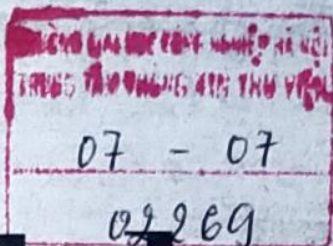
*ELIZABETH
GEORGE*



the **Edge** of
Nowhere



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GEORGE



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How Things Began

On the last day of Hannah Armstrong's existence, things were normal for a while. She made a 94 percent on a math test, and she accepted a movie date for later in the week.

She walked home, as usual. She didn't use her hearing device since she didn't really need it outside of school. This gadget had the appearance of an iPod, but it didn't play music. Instead it played a form of static that removed from Hannah's hearing the disjointed thoughts of other people. Since babyhood, she'd heard these broken thoughts of others, which she'd learned to call whispers. But they came into her head like a badly tuned radio; she could never tell exactly who the whisperer was if more than one person was present; and they made school a nightmare for her. So a mechanism that her mom called an AUD box had been manufactured for Hannah. She'd worn it since she was seven years old.

When she arrived home, she went to the stairs. She headed up to her room, only to see her stepfather come stealthily out of it.

They locked eyes. *Damn . . . what's she doing . . . why didn't . . .* came into Hannah's head from Jeff Corrie as whispers always did, disconnected and seemingly random. She frowned as she heard them, and she wondered what her stepfather had been doing in