

# THE CRITRUN



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First published in Great Britain in 2015 by Latoya Lovell  
London, England

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Typeset by D2MEDIA, London, England, [d2media.co.uk](http://d2media.co.uk)

# *The Critrun*

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# *The Dream*

## **Chapter 1**

Ellie stared at the gold chain; twirled it between her fingers. It didn't look normal to her – but nothing ever did.

She put that down to her eyes. For as long as she could remember Ellie had different coloured eyes, one green and one blue. She had no idea if that meant she saw things differently, but she often thought it did. Her parents told her she was born with two blue and then one day her right eye turned green. It made her different.

Ellie liked being different.

It was just like her birthmark. It was on the bottom of her foot and she always thought it looked like a scorpion but everyone said that she was imagining it. She knew she was special; after all how many people could say they had different coloured eyes and a scorpion shaped birthmark on the bottom of their foot?

She looked down at the chain and turned it over; it was gold and had a square locket that was engraved with a circle made up of her initials, *E.S* for Ellie South. It was a beautiful piece of jewellery and she loved the detailed and intricate way it had been engraved, but it did feel strange holding something that belonged to her late father. A man she barely knew.

With a sigh she handed the chain to Rosa and asked her politely to put it on for her. Rosa took it and Ellie started pulling back her long blonde hair, lifting it from her neck. She looked in the mirror and she didn't feel sixteen anymore; her life had changed so much over the last month that she barely recognised her own reflection. The olive skin around her eyes looked puffy from the lack of sleep although her cheeks were as flushed as ever. She looked up and watched Rosa's reflection as she opened the clasp on the chain. Their eyes connected momentarily; Rosa's lovely brown eyes stared back at her. They were almond in shape and Ellie always thought Rosa had eyes that someone could get lost in. She never wore eyeliner like the rest of the girls at her school and she did not need it because her eyes like Ellie's were prominent and had a sparkle to them. Rosa had caramel brown skin but was slightly taller than Ellie when they stood next to each other. She had an afro which was her favourite feature and she constantly hid things in there to make her friends laugh. Her little brother, Tristan, had been the one who had started the trend; he loved playing *what's in Rosa's hair?*

Rosa was slim like Ellie and so they were constantly borrowing each other's clothes, they even wore the same shoe size but when it came to personality they were very different. Rosa had a fire about her that meant she was fiercely protective of her friends, whilst Ellie would always let things go and right now she could see that passion in her eyes. Rosa's beauty seemed to grow with age. Ellie thought she was stunningly beautiful but one thing that she loved about her was that she was also humble.

As Ellie looked again at the chain she thought about her father; he had left her this chain. She remembered it like it was yesterday.

It was June 1<sup>st</sup>, Ellie's house phone was ringing; her mother's number flashed onto the screen. "Hey Mum," she said.

"Ellie, I don't know how to tell you this... but... your father

has been in an accident and he wants to speak to you.” Ellie did not respond; she squeezed the phone tightly and felt her eyes sting. *Don't you dare start crying, Ellie you will not give him the satisfaction.*

“After fourteen years what can he possibly have to say? Can we just talk about this when you get home?”

“But Ellie, he’s—”

“Goodbye Mum.”

Ellie hung up quickly. *Why now? What did he want?*

Ellie had no memories of her father, just a battered old shoe box with a few birthday cards tucked inside, the last one was sent when she was two. She flicked her nails against each other; a nervous habit. She sighed. *Now what do I do?*

When Ellie’s mother came home she sat Ellie down in the kitchen with her step-dad. Ellie looked from one to the other. *Surely he can't agree with this?*

“Ellie your father has been in an accident and, well... he’s dying.”

Ellie could not remember the rest of that day. Or the one after that, or the one after that, barely sleeping, barely eating, barely speaking. She’d ground her teeth so much her jaw ached; her nails were broken from all the flicking. Numerous people offered advice; her mum and dad told her to do whatever made her happy. It took her two days to decide; to find out what he wanted to say to her but when she finally found the courage to call the hospital, it was too late. Her father had passed away early that morning.

Ellie remembered hanging up the phone and feeling numb. She vowed she would attend the funeral and pay her respects. Even though he had not been around he was still her father and without him she would not be here.

“Ellie can you actually lift your hair rather than just holding it?” Rosa had finished fiddling with the clasp on the locket and had now opened it.

“Done it,” she said finally as she fixed the clasp together. Ellie stared again at her reflection and the new piece of jewellery around her neck. Until today she had never worn jewellery. It felt like a foreign object and she was unsure how long she would keep it on. She opened the locket again and looked at the reflection in the mirror.

Ellie’s father lived in California and so she had to fly to attend the funeral. Her mother offered to go, but she knew she didn’t really want to.

“No. It’s something I have to do alone,” Ellie said.

When she arrived a couple of days before the funeral, she went straight to her hotel; where she was staying alone. Here she remained until the day of the funeral when she put on a lovely black dress which her mum had picked out for her. It had a short capped sleeve and rounded neck. It reminded her of a skater girl dress and cut just above her knee. It was a lovely dress; but one she knew she would never wear again.

She called a cab to take her to the funeral where numerous people told her stories about a man she had never known.

*Do I have a right to cry?* Ellie thought as she dabbed tears from her cheeks, *if only I had decided quicker I could’ve spoken to him and found out what was so important.* Her visit to California was short but at the funeral she met her brother Trent for the first time. He was eighteen; unlike her he had dark brown wavy hair and bright green eyes. He had similar Olive style skin but was very tall; when they had gone to take a picture she tiptoed so she could be seen on the camera. She spent the rest of her holiday with him and when he took her to the airport she hugged him for a long time. *I do not want to let go.* At the

airport Ellie noticed Trent flicked his nails too and she smiled.

“What you smiling about big head?”

“How many times, Trent? I have a peanut head you, however, have a big head.” She giggled and then stuck her tongue out. He put his hand in his pocket and handed Ellie the locket and a letter. *This is beautiful* she mused as she looked at the locket, pushing the clasp on the side and opening it up. It was the photo Trent had taken of the two of them together. The other half of the locket was empty. She turned away, sliding the letter unopened into the pocket of her flight bag. She did not want Trent to see the tears. Then she hugged him; held him for too long before standing back and softly giving him a kiss on the cheek. He kissed her on her forehead, “Goodbye Ellie and safe journey.” Ellie couldn’t say goodbye. All she did was turn and watch him walk towards the exit.

She had kept in contact with him via letters; finally no longer an only child. Now she finally knew what it feels like to have a sibling.

Rosa tapped Ellie’s shoulder. ‘Ellie, are you okay? You look spaced out?’

Ellie snapped out of her trance and flicked her head up to look at Rosa. ‘I’m fine,’ she said and mustered a half smile. She looked at the envelope propped up against her dressing table mirror. The letter given to her by Trent at the airport, her name written in lovely cursive handwriting. Ellie remembered opening the envelope on the plane. *What on earth?* Her eyes widened as she looked at the single sheet of blank paper. Her cheeks flushed, her eyes filled with tears again; the blank paper infuriated her. But still she kept it; because the envelope had been sealed and clearly had her name on it. Maybe one day she would understand but for now it would just remain on her dressing table until she figured it out.

Rosa followed Ellie's gaze. 'I've already told you what I think about that letter Ellie,' Rosa said, 'throw it away, it's not fair that he has left you a blank letter and it's playing on your mind!' Ellie looked at Rosa and frowned, ever the protective friend, she knew her friend had her best interests at heart but this was one topic they continually disagreed on. *I have no energy to argue with her I need to distract her.*

"Let's just go to Marie's house," she said as she stood up and walked over to the door where her black leather jacket was hanging on a hook. She teased her arms into the sleeves; the jacket worn in from the years of constant use – like an old friend. It was her favourite jacket and went with everything, like the jeans she was wearing today. She picked up her black trainers, lowered herself onto the bed, and carefully pushed her feet into them. As she knelt forward the chain dangled and felt heavy around her neck. It did look pretty with her outfit; not too bulky. It was something she was sure that she would be able to get used to, after all most girls wore jewellery but then again, she did like being different.

Rosa stood behind Ellie and put her coat on; Ellie lead the way out of the bedroom. She walked slowly to the top of the stairs and made her way down to the front door. When she turned around Rosa was still at the top of the stairs, watching her. Then she took the stairs two at a time until she was standing next to her. Ellie turned back towards the mahogany door and reached for the metal handle. It felt cold. She pushed it downwards and grunted, the door always felt heavy. It was raining. Ellie loved the rain, she found it very peaceful and she loved the way the water glistened and cast odd reflections. Ellie could picture another whole world when she saw raindrops and tonight almost felt magical because there was a red moon and this meant the raindrops had a pink hue to them.

Rosa on the other hand did not like the rain. 'Ellie, tell me you have an umbrella here?' Ellie looked at the coat rack in the corner and noted the household umbrella was gone; her mum must have

taken it. She shook her head.

‘Great,’ Rosa said, ‘I hope Marie’s hairdryer’s working’

‘Oh hello,’ Marie said as she opened the door, curly hair framing her face. She was smiling, her small button nose was scrunched up and she had a natural glow about her because of her mixed race skin. Her brown eyes, which usually looked deep in thought, were lit up and sparkling and you could tell she was trying to stifle a giggle at Rosa’s appearance. She stood in the doorway as Rosa ran straight past her dripping wet all over the wooden flooring.

‘Stupid rain,’ Rosa said as she looked up at Marie’s face, ‘don’t you dare,’ she added, wagging her finger. Marie covered her mouth but Ellie could still tell she was giggling behind her hand. Rosa did look quite funny; her usually perfect afro had shrunk into wet curls. Ellie loved when her hair looked like this and often just liked playing with Rosa’s Afro but Rosa said that her hair was a nightmare to dry. Ellie turned her attention back to Marie. ‘Where’s your mum?’

Marie looked at Ellie finally and gave her a big hug. ‘She’s gone out tonight I’m not sure what time she’ll be home, so we have the house to ourselves.’ Ellie smiled, whenever the three of them were left alone they always ended up doing something crazy. They were notorious in school for pulling crazy stunts and doing boyish activities like paintballing. But Ellie’s favourite was the Karaoke night at her house, the week before; Rosa had blown up the microwave by leaving foil on the bowl of food. Marie was usually the klutz of the group but more recently Rosa was starting to take the crown.

‘What’s for dinner then?’ Ellie asked.

Marie frowned at her, ‘I’m not your maid Ellie, we can all cook together.’

Ellie could not lie; she loved to cook but Marie was the mother of the group and was constantly cleaning and cooking for her.

Sometimes Marie would just come to her house to help her tidy her room. Rosa laughed, 'I'm going to dry my hair, call me when dinner is ready,' and with that she disappeared upstairs. Rosa hated doing any form of domestic chores and would usually find an excuse. Marie looked at Ellie's neck. 'The necklace looks pretty Ellie, I'm glad you decided to wear it,' she said, smiling before she turned around and led the way to the kitchen.

Ellie thanked her as she followed behind noticing a new picture on the wall. All the pictures were of Marie and her mother and they could pass for sisters. The only difference was that Marie's mum wore make-up and Marie did not and in the pictures Marie's hair looked shorter. It had grown now and was just below her shoulders. Marie's mum was actually mixed race and her father was white but she was darker than them both. The girls often joked that she had inherited her grandfather's genes. Marie and Ellie were around the same height and Rosa constantly called them midgets although she was only about two inches taller than both of them. When they reached the kitchen Ellie sat down on a chair whilst Marie peered at the pans in the cupboard. Marie's mother had very modern taste and the kitchen demonstrated this perfectly, all the cabinet doors were black gloss and mahogany with black marble worktops. The only colour in the kitchen was from the purple accessories which Marie was pulling out of the cupboards now. Marie looked in her refrigerator and mumbled something under her breath which Ellie could not hear but guessed it was about the lack of ingredients as she then suggested, 'Let's make omelettes.' Ellie nodded. Marie took out the eggs, bacon, mushrooms and cheese and left everything next to the fridge apart from the eggs which she took over to the cooker with her. She cracked them open and started to whisk them together.

'Ellie can you pass me the bacon and mushrooms please?'

Ellie stood up and went over to the fridge to collect the rest of the ingredients; she looked at the door of the fridge and noticed that

Marie's mum had left one of her alphabet messages on there again. The current one said 'I love you' but there had been some crazy ones in the past. Ellie smiled as she remembered the time when she had put 'The aliens have taken me'. She walked over to Marie and handed her the bacon and mushrooms and Marie started to cook the omelettes. Ellie thought it would be good to get the cheese ready so went to the cupboard and retrieved the grater. She was half way through when Rosa walked back in, hair looking perfect again and smiling. 'Marie,' she said in a sing song voice, 'you never told us you and Tony write each other letters.'

*I don't know what's going on but this is going to be trouble.* Ellie felt her stomach knot as she looked from Rosa to Marie and knew her face was the picture of confusion. Tony was Ellie's best friend; he was tall dark and handsome in every sense of the word and Ellie used to have a massive crush on him growing up. He had short cut hair and hazel eyes that looked like you could go swimming in; he was about an inch taller than Ellie and was a friend to all three of them. It would not make sense that Marie would hide this from her and Rosa unless there was something going on. Ellie looked back to Marie and noticed she had gone bright red.

'Rosa,' she said through pursed lips, 'were you going through my drawer?' Rosa softened her expression and she replied hesitantly, 'Not intentionally, I was looking for the hairdryer and found the letters in the drawer, I never read all of them; just one or two to see who they were from.' She quickly walked over to Ellie and grabbed a handful of the grated cheese, pushed it into her mouth. Ellie shook her head, Rosa was always troublesome but she had the innocent look rehearsed well and right now she had put it in full force. 'So anything to tell us?' Rosa asked. Marie turned her back on both the girls and ignored them whilst she carried on cooking.

Ellie wanted to know what was in the letters but she also knew

that if Rosa persisted this would turn into an argument and spoil their evening. ‘What did they say?’ she mumbled to Rosa under her breath. ‘The one I read said that he missed her and he couldn’t wait until they could spend time together again.’ Rosa put her fingers to her mouth as if she was going to be sick and Ellie decided it was best to just get Rosa to set the table before she started teasing Marie. She walked over to the fridge again and opened the door and realised that Marie’s mumbling must have been because there was so much food in the fridge. She was struggling to find the juice cartons that Marie’s mother always stocked up for them.

She finally found three orange juice cartons and took them to the table where Rosa had placed the mats, knives and forks ready for their meal. Marie handed them each a plate of omelette and toast. They sat and ate quietly; Ellie could sense the tension and knew that even without the argument the mood for the night had changed. They cleared up the table, Rosa did the washing up which she never did but Ellie assumed this was to appease Marie. Ellie held back a smile, although they would argue sometimes they were the best of friends and would do anything for each other.

Marie left the room and returned with a film for them to watch. No surprises, it was a scary film, Marie was a scary film fanatic and they usually tried to distract her when it came to the film choices but with Rosa washing up, Ellie had completely forgotten. Marie told them to go up to her room and wait for her there whilst she made some popcorn. They followed her instructions, grabbed their bags from near the front door and went upstairs and opened the door to Marie’s bedroom. It was spotless as usual; the only item out of place was the hairdryer that Rosa had left out. The bed was perfectly made with Marie’s traditional brown and cream coloured butterfly covers. The cream carpet felt spongy under Ellie’s feet and the TV on the wall was switched on already waiting for them to put the DVD on.

Ellie noticed that Rosa had left the wardrobe door open where

she had taken the hairdryer from and she had also left the mirror out that she had been using. Ellie could see an envelope sticking out of the top drawer of Marie's chest of drawers and she thought that must be where Rosa had found the letters. The girls both took their pyjamas out of their bags and by the time Marie came upstairs they were changed. They put the film on and all got into Marie's bed to watch it before going to sleep.

*Ellie couldn't make anything out in the moonlight, it was dark and she was walking down a street she didn't recognise. She was wearing a loose knit red jumper and jeans and black military boots. There were brick walls all around her and when she looked up she could not make out the tops of the buildings. The walls looked dark and dirty and she could see some fire escape staircases on the sides of some of the walls. There was graffiti on a wall in the distance but she could not quite read what it said as she was too far away. The only feature she could distinguish was the purple paint that had been used to scrawl it onto the wall. She paused for a minute and thought 'Where is it?' She furrowed her brow not knowing what she was looking for but she knew that she was looking for something and that she felt anxious.*

*She knew that until she found it the feeling would not go away. She carried on walking slowly through the dark alleyway towards the graffiti. She felt like it would help her figure out what she was looking for. She reached into her back pocket and found an envelope; she turned it over in her hands slowly and saw her name written in her father's handwriting. She felt like she had a lead pipe in her stomach whatever happened she needed to make sure that this envelope did not get lost, it was very important. She stared at the envelope for a while, and then she looked up again at the wall in the distance and walked towards it slowly. She was just able to make out the first few letters, "C-R-I-T-R-U-N, Critrun?" She frowned and looked back down at the envelope in her hand. It didn't make sense. She started walking towards the wall again and then she froze. She had heard something but it sounded far away. She leaned her head to one side to see if she could hear anything else but she couldn't. She was suddenly filled with dread*

– but why? She remained fixed to the same spot and strained to listen but the darkness and the silence engulfed her. She saw a bin a short distance down the alleyway so she tiptoed slowly towards it and knelt down to hide behind it. She looked at the envelope in her hand a final time and panicked. What if she never got the letter to her? She knew she needed to find a way to hide it nearby but she knew whatever had made that noise was dangerous and if she gave up her hiding place they were sure to find her.

She heard footsteps in the distance and realised they were getting closer and now she was running out of time. If only she had her necklace she could use the power to distract her follower but she had dropped it and it was now lost in the darkness around her. 'I'm sorry Ellie, I've failed you,' she said, but it wasn't her voice she recognised. The voice was deep and belonged to a male and she suddenly realised she was not in her own body. She reached up to touch her neck where the necklace should have been and touched the empty spot. Ellie could hear footsteps approaching and her neck started to burn, she could not move from where she was but her neck was searing in pain, what was happening? Was it the thing in the distance? Ellie felt like she was being strangled by a missing necklace and her neck felt like it was on fire. She gasped for air and clawed at her neck to relieve the pressure but the pain was too much and she passed out.

When she opened her eyes Ellie realised it had all been a dream but her neck was still burning like it had in her dream and it was emitting a soft glow in the darkness of Marie's room. The burning was starting to intensify and Ellie clawed at the necklace just as she had in the dream.



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