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# 1

# Fantasy

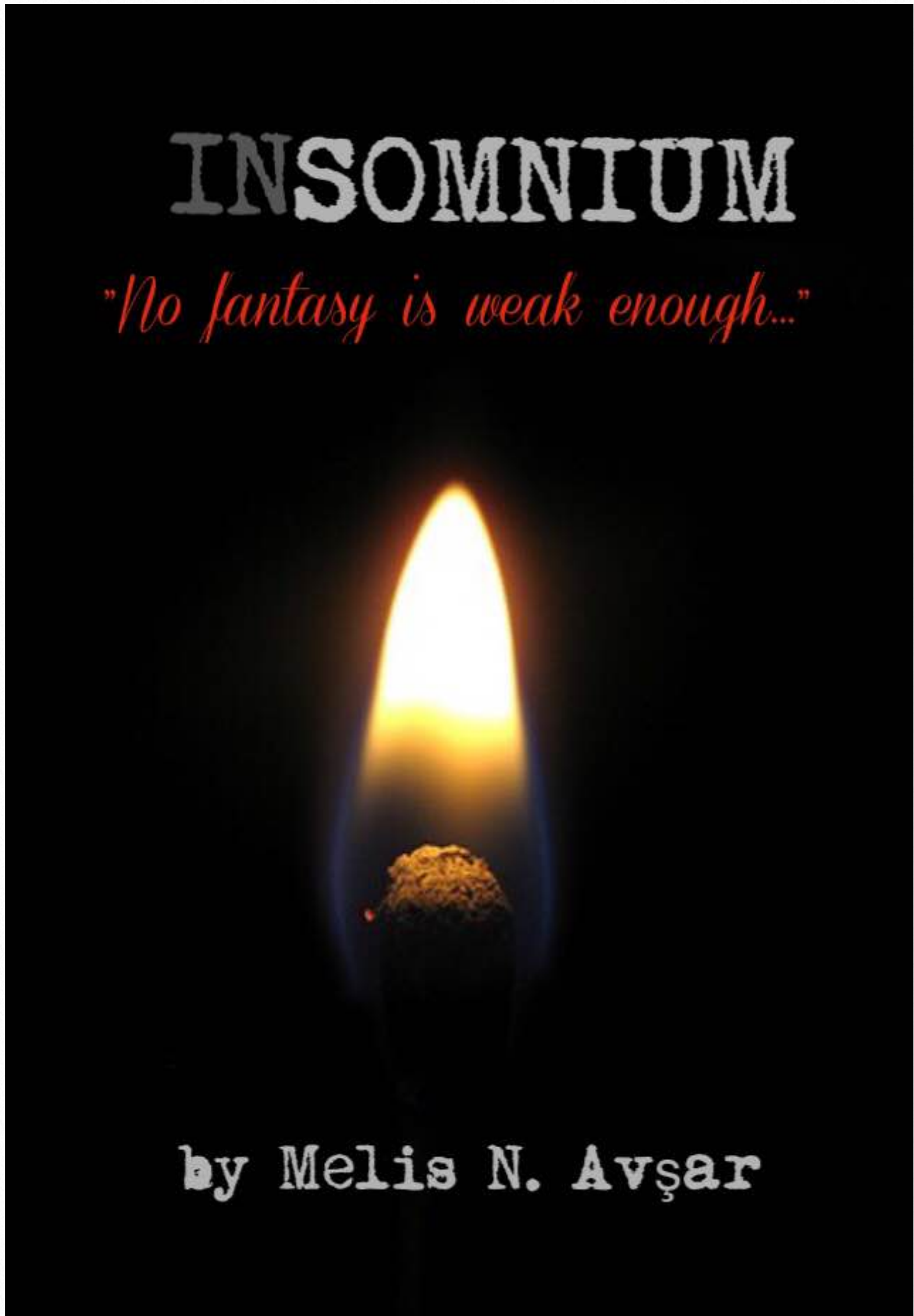
**“I like nonsense, it wakes up the brain cells. Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living.”**

*– Dr. Seuss*



# Insomnium

by Melis Nisan Avsar



## 1. Memento

Happiness was never a choice for Livya. Yet, satisfaction was.

“Get back here!” one of the king’s soldiers shouted.

“Stop breaking the rules and try to be a proper young man!” the other one added.

Livya didn’t stop running. It was tragicomic that they still thought she was a boy.

“Try to lose some of that fat. Then you can catch me and teach me a lesson.” she responded.

They would give up. Eventually.

Her life story was the most exciting one among all the others’ she knew by far. She had lost her parents fourteen years ago, when she was two. In a territory of towns, theirs was the weakest. When another town invaded their town, she was taken away from her parents. A young neighbour named Rhoda took her with her, then she escaped from the prison they were kept in.

Rhoda was a nice girl. Livya started to live an ordinary life with her, and surprisingly, it was close to a happy life.

“Give that book back right now!” the fat soldier shouted again, trying to force his untrained lungs to hold on for just a couple more minutes.

Livya felt the rough cover of the book. It was pretty old and it was nothing odd. It had a black cover with a small title on it, the smell and the golden pages of an over-used book. She had found it earlier that day, in a blind alley no one arrives. It was nothing but trouble, yet, she wanted to keep it. Maybe because she was looking for some adventure, or maybe because the little homeless boy who insisted on giving the book to her was pretty cute.

“I thought your king hated books. Why do you want them now, you need some fuel?” she said, then chuckled.

The previous king didn’t have any problems with books. Though, the new king, the king who had been ruling the town for six or seven years was unusually obsessed with them. He let the citizens keep the library, but he always encouraged them to do sensible things instead of reading those ‘little lies that will take them nowhere but the delirium.’ That was the main reason of the odd and curious looks the ones who went to the library received. If you went to the library, that could mean only three

things; you could be searching for a cure for a dreadful illness, you could be another wise man they will never understand, or you could be a stargazer building your way to delirium.

Livya was smiling, from the outside and the inside. “Don’t say it, the king doesn’t pay you enough, right? Maybe you should try to steal sometime, it’s better for your health than anything else! It keeps you fit and alive, it helps you develop lying skills and-”

“Enough of your nonsense you sneaky brat!” the other soldier shouted. “We hate books or not, that thing in your hand is the library’s, ergo the king’s property!”

Stupid man, little he knew, books could exist outside libraries too. But if Livya told her the book she was taking with her was not from the library, the tag would never start!

“That guilt is too heavy for me to carry.” she shouted.

Then, she jumped from the lowrise roof.

The soldiers looked down at the place Livya would fall if she really jumped. It was as empty as their brains.

It was the blind alley the tag had started. Livya made them run in a circle.

“What did that crazy boy just do?” Livya heard the fat man say. “He disappeared!”

“He used his magic skills to fly! That’s what he had done.” the other soldier explained. He breathed out loudly. “We won’t catch him. Besides, it’s just a bloody book!”

“That witch...” the fat soldier said. Then, they walked away.

Livya was satisfied with the adjectives the men used for her. Although she used a non-magic way like getting in a little crack her petite body could fit in to hide from the soldiers, she was proud to be a ‘witch’ as they named her, and magic had always been a big part of her life.

Her caretaker Rhoda’s dream was to become a Charmcaster. Charmcasters were the wizards of the towns, and every town had one to four Charmcasters, excluding the Apprentices. Apprentices were the skilled youngsters whom were accepted as a student and a heir by another Charmcaster, and they were not trusted with big issues like healing and weather control, due to their lack of experience.

“One day, I will go to Astralis and meet The Warlock. Who knows, Livya, maybe he could let me be his Apprentice!” Rhoda always said. The Warlock was the best Charmcaster of Astralis, another town that was far gentler against Charmcasters. He was the best one in all the territories, in Rhoda’s opinion.

In the past, Charmcasting was one of the most respected and liked jobs in existence. Then, people started to think of it as a work of the Devil. Obviously, after that Charmcasters were still respected, but out of fear rather than admiration.

The people of the town always looked at Rhoda in a different way. It was a look that became scary from time to time. Mainly because they meant more than anyone thought. Livya sometimes heard the whispers of the citizens saying: “Why is this young woman wasting herself like this? There are plenty of young men around that will happily start a life with her!”

And sometimes: “Fear the silent one, this woman is the Devil’s envoy!”

When the tragic news of the queen of the neighbour town getting killed by her floating hairpin reached the town, the mercy for the young charm loving lady disappeared completely. Without the power to judge

sensibly, many ignorant minds united for one brutal purpose.

Rhoda’s house was burnt down when she was still inside, and the young woman suffered, feeling the smell of the smoke burning her lungs until she finally reached her death. Livya was close to a window, so she managed to escape, but the horrific images of the fire stayed with her, along with the huge burn that started from her left cheek and went all the way down to her shoulder.

She was only seven when she escaped from her town, and she had nowhere to go except that Astralis Rhoda had always been mentioning.

After that, she was all by herself. She was skilled in Charmcasting, no doubt to that. She was accepted as an Apprentice by The Warlock, and she discovered that the old man was actually not as great as Rhoda thought, and the town was not that gentle against Charmcasters. The Warlock was isolated from the others, because nobody wanted to be cursed or influenced by that odd mind.

When she decided she didn’t want anyone to control her skills, she quit her job. She remained as an Apprentice with intermediate skills, kept improving herself and

never got rid of her navy blue Apprentice cloak.

Being a homeless 16 year old with only one outfit sounds miserable, but it was not for Livya. She was one of the most respected people in town, because she was brave enough to annoy the king's soldiers every day, stealing everything she wants and making soldiers run after her. She lived in the big clock tower of the town, however it was one of the places she rarely visited, because she spent her days in an old cellar which she used to keep her materials and practice charmcasting. However, she hadn't visited the cellar for almost a year, then. She had decided to take a break and focus on living a bargain's life instead.

And nights... One of the best things in her life was the cold, starry nights of Astralis. Nights were like her hideaway. Taking a walk around the city, using the roofs as a pavement, and when every single soul extinguish their candles, feeling that the night belongs to her... It would be the worst to go back to that room in the clock tower (although the view was resplendent) and try to fall asleep, ignoring the blinking of the stars whom she considered as her best friends.

That was who Oblivia, known as Livya was. An escapist, an independent, yet lost soul. The nightingale of the city of golden cages.

She was satisfied with her life. Yet, happiness was never a choice for Livya.

## 2. Raison D'entre

"Read it." the homeless boy had said.

"What is your name?" Livya had responded.

"I don't know my name."

"That's odd. You know how to read, but you don't know your own name?"

"Read it." the homeless boy had repeated. "Read it and you will see. This is more important than my name, or your name, or anyone else's name." Then, he had tried to give the book to Livya for the tenth time.

Livya had looked at the little boy. There was dust on his face and his golden hair.

"Can I call you Dusty?" she had said.

"Yes. But only if you read this."

“You’re keen on books, right? Aren’t you afraid of the king or his soldiers chastising you?”

“No.” the little boy responded. “This is more important than the king, and his soldiers, and the kingdom-”

“Okay, I will read it!” Livya had laughed. “If it’s that important.” she had added sarcastically.

“I need to go now. Just promise-”

“I promise, I will read it.”

Dusty had smiled. Then he had skipped away.

Now, again in the dead end she met Dusty, Livya was sitting and observing the book’s cover. Why was the book so important for him? He was just a boy, perhaps it was just another childish fantasy of his. However, as she opened the cover tentatively, she felt like it was just a little more than that.

Somnium.

That was what’s written on the first page. Right at the middle of the page, with italics. It looked like nothing special.

She turned the page.

See this little dog? The little dog is hungry. Why don’t you feed the dog Knitsman? Come on, feed it Knitsman, help it Knitsman, you’re the man!

“What is this nonsense?” Livya thought. The book turned out to be a nursery rhyme. She turned the page, then another page, then another, then she checked the last pages of the book. She saw nothing but blank pages.

She closed the book, and started gazing at the blue sky. She chuckled.

“Wow, Knitsman. How cruel you are not feeding that poor little dog.”

She closed her eyes. The wind was blowing, it never stopped blowing in Astralis. She cringed in the Apprentice cloak and let the wind mess with her hair. As the wind kept blowing, she felt her scar feel the cold more than any part of her body, due to the wind making the piece of hair that hid the scald float in the air.

She reached for her cape and tried to hide the scar.

“When are you going to leave me alone!” she shouted.

She truly hated that scar.



As she felt the hands of the wind touch the scar, she gave up and stopped trying to hide it.

She was awestruck when she realised the hands didn't belong to the wind.

"Do not be ashamed, young man. You are special and unique!" someone said.

"Stop touching me you old hag!" she shouted. She stood up and reached for her pocket knife.

She dropped the pocket knife when she saw the owner of the hands.

"Don't be appalled, I was not touching you young man, it was just the naughty wind blowing as hard as ever!" that someone said, smiling kindly.

It was a dream. It couldn't be real!

It could be real. It could be the work of a Charmcaster.

The Warlock was not able to create such a huge creature, was it from another town?

It was -he was- smiling at her!

Livya stared at the huge 'thing' for a while before being able to think reasonably again.

It was a creature, a male one most likely. He was wearing a funny suit, with black and navy blue stripes. He had a body as thin as a tree branch and legs as thin as Livya's fingers. He was the tallest human-like creature Livya had ever seen, he was almost as tall as the house next to them. He had two eyes that were round like the moon and black like the night. He resembled a huge doll.

He observed Livya for a while, then raised his brow with embarrassment.

"Excuse me, young lady, for calling you a man! It's my old eyes..." he apologised. He took one of his eyes out and cleaned it with the sleeve of his jacket, then put it back to its enormous hole.

"Who are you?" Livya asked with doubt, and with terror.

"I am Knitsman." the man answered.

Livya looked at him cautiously. The fear was fading away, perhaps it was not fear, but perplexity.

"You are the savage man who didn't feed that poor dog, ha?" she asked sarcastically.

"You are wrong, mam." Knitsman responded. "The dog needs to exist, in order

to be fed. I suppose you don't see a dog at all."

"Well, I don't see a dog, but I see you."

"It must be confusing for you. Let me explain it all. The book you've been handed is not an ordinary book at all! Somnium is the home of dreams, it is the home of us, Reveries! We are the citizens of this very book, me and my friends who will show themselves when you understand everything. We show ourselves only to the people who mind to touch the book, taking it to their own hands, and then reading at least one word. You deserve to see us, and now, we shall turn your life into a living dream!" he concluded.

"I don't think I want my life to turn into a living dream."

"It's not as scary as you think it is! We are only able to change reality for one's eyes. Whenever you want us to leave your world, we shall remove the illusions from your life, and leave until you want us back in your life again."

"So, you're able to create mirages only I will see--"

"Mirages appear after great pain. We won't give you any pain at all. Let's say

that you will see things, pleasant things that don't exist."

Livya was puzzled. "I think you tried to say that I'm going crazy."

"You are as crazy as every human who is strong enough to dream, m'am." Knitsman responded.

Livya backed off and prepared to flee.

"I don't want to see things that don't exist! That's what loonatics do! In addition, I'm not as stupid as you think. I won't let some cursed book rule my life. I've- I've heard stories like this, actually I hear them all the time. I'm an Apprentice and I can tell it when you are about to conquer my soul or whatever! Go find another chump!"

Then, she turned her back to the man.

"Don't give up on us so easily, young miss!" Knitsman shouted from her back.

"Us? Now you're a group? Ha! Why don't you just leave me a--"

She froze as soon as she turned to face Knitsman. She cursed herself for complaining about one weird creature. There was a throng of them now!

“This is Harlesable,” Knitsman said pointing at a fairy-like creature who was black all over. “And this is Opal,” he continued as Opal, the woman made of diamonds waved at Livya. Knitsman introduced some other Reveries but Livya didn’t listen. She headed back and started to run towards the clock tower. Deep inside, she knew running was a bad idea, I mean, a throng of magical creatures could easily catch a little human being and do whatever they wanted to do to her. However, if their intention was to hurt her, they would’ve been done with her already.

She was lost in her own mind. She was so confused that she couldn’t even think of a charm that will make the Reveries go away. She was probably not able to cast such a strong spell, though. Or was she?

She just kept running, without being able to think reasonably.

She knew about the bewitched books, but she had never seen one before.

“A bewitched book must obey its owner. After it’s owner is dead, it could be used by anyone who manages to find a way to make it work.” The Warlock had told her. Somnium was clearly bewitched, and Livya had found the way to make it work.

“Touching and reading is actually a pretty easy way to make a bewitched book work.” Livya thought to herself. Then she remembered that in Astralis, people holded the books as they were knives on fire, and the number of the ones who were willing to read them was equal to the number of fingers in a person’s hands.

Livya kept running until a huge leg passed over her head. It was Knitsman, he wasn’t even running but he could easily catch up with Livya thanks to his stick-like legs.

“Please, young lady, don’t ignore us. We are not able to leave you, so even if you keep on living like we don’t exist, we can’t leave your side...”

Livya didn’t respond, she just kept running and jumped on the next roof.

“We were thinking, if you try to love us as much as we love you-”

“I am not a person to be loved, you weirdo! How can you love me? You don’t even know who I am!” Livya yelled at him.

“No matter who you are, young lady, we love you. Because without you, we are nothing! We only exist to satisfy our master. You are our master now, ergo our *raison d’entre*.”

The last sentence made Livya slow down.

“Okay, so if you want to satisfy me, just go and find another master. That’s my first and last order!”

“We already have more than one master, miss-”

“SO GO AND BOTHER WHOEVER YOUR OTHER MASTERS ARE AND LEAVE ME ALONE!”

“Okay, young lady. Let’s make a deal. Let us show you what we are capable of, just for once, try to get lost in your dreams. Then, do whatever you want to do with us. You can make us do your dishes, or hurt your enemies, though we can’t hurt people but you can make us, as I see from your cloak, you’re an Apprentice-”

Livya stopped short and pointed her finger up at the sky, at Knitsman’s huge, black hole eyes. She reached for the old, golden pocket watch that was chained to her belt and tied to her vest.

“You have fifteen minutes. Then, you will leave me alone.”

Knitsman placed a warm, yet still scary smile on his face.

“Only fifteen minutes, young lady. Then, it’s over, unless you want more.”

“Whatever.” Livya grumbled. Knitsman was waiting for the other Reveries to arrive. Livya rolled her eyes.

“The clock is ticking.”

Knitsman nodded, then shouted using his huge, thin hands like a tube.

“Stop lingering friends, the young lady gave us a chance!”

The cheerful gigglings of the Reveries echoed through Livya’s ears. Just a second after that, all of the creatures were in front of her, leaving a breeze of the cold wind they’ve just pierced through.

Livya was dizzy, for the movement was so sudden and unexpected. Knitsman tried to put his hand on her shoulder, but his hand passed through the human flesh like a ghost. His face darkened with sudden sadness when he remembered the unfortunate disability of his. Reveries could not touch human beings.

“Splendid! Now, let’s go to the clock tower young lady and let us take you to a town tour. This will be your biggest adventure!”

Livya grinned with disdain, for adventure was her middle name. “I highly doubt that.”

Then, she started following Knitsman to the clock tower. What a coincidence, one of the roofs they were hopping on was the town bakery, and as Livya was chatting with Knitsman, the baker and his closest friend tailor Joan had overheard them.

“Odd.” the baker said. “Was she just following that orange leaf?”

“I guess she talked to it too!” Joan yelled.

“Stop yelling Joan!” the baker chastised him. “She can still hear us!”

Joan shook his shoulders. “I don’t mind it if she hears it. I guess it would be for her own good. If the soldiers see her day-dreamin’ like this, she will get in a big trouble.”

The baker covered his eyes with his hand and stared at Livya, still following the orange leaf.

“Charmcasters.” he said. “Never seen a normal one of them.”

### 3. Somnium

The town wasn’t looking any different than usual. The door of the clock tower was at a higher point than most of the buildings, so the roofs were all in Livya’s, Knitsman’s, and the other Reveries’ sight. It was almost dawn, and the rays of the sun was dancing with the crimson bricks. The roofs and the sky were one. It was beautiful, as always.

Some of the buildings were old, yet none of them were beaten by years. Some of the buildings were covered with pink, lilac and blue flowers. The flowers were all over the walls, and they had captured the houses like cunning, colorful snakes. Some of the young men were picking up flowers to crown their ladys’ hair. The air was smelling like a fragrance made of cakes, bread, and all kinds of vegetables. People were walking, selling their products, getting their groceries and repeating the circle of life. The wind was blowing, as always.

The Warlock was there, just a few buildings away. Livya could recognise him, for the old man was wearing a large, tyrian purple coat and he was making people dart to the sides of the road like soap makes pepper flakes dart to the sides of a pan.

The Warlock saw Livya. He turned the other way around. Livya ignored him, as always.

As she was looking at her town with the creatures willing to change her vision, Livya recognised something about the town she had never gotten to see before.

Astralis could use some change.

“You have ten minutes left.” Livya reminded Knitsman. “Better work your magic.”

“Don’t worry, young lady, you know we can move around in seconds!” Knitsman responded with joy.

Livya glared at him. “But I can’t.” she declared. “And stop calling me young lady all the time, although I’m honored for you have perceived I am a female, you need to call me Livya.”

Knitsman shook his head like a father of a rebellious youngster.

“Okay, Livya young lady.”

Livya facepalmed. “We will need to work on the naming.”

“We will, later.” Knitsman whispered. “But now, it’s time to fly, like that beautiful but-

terfly.” Livya turned her head to the direction Knitsman’s needle-like index finger was pointing.

A butterfly was flying to the sun. It was not beautiful, it was not special. It was only a brown, plain butterfly. Perhaps it was not even a butterfly, it was only a moth reflecting the orange rays of the sun.

Livya stared at it for a while. She just watched it float in the air like a paper plane.

Then, the butterfly exploded.

In an instant, it fell into pieces, like a firework exploding right in the heart of the sky, it turned into a spark; a flying fire, a piece of the sun. A sparkly ray of a charm dismantled the butterfly into a million fireflies, the fireflies flew away, they left a trail behind them, a trail that soon fell on the bare path before Livya, and turned into a beautiful, red carpet made of pure magic.

It was like nothing Livya had seen before. She had been trained as an Apprentice, she had worked for a Charmcaster for years, yet, she didn’t remember seeing such beauty in anything.

Knitsman, seeing that Livya was overwhelmed, smiled gently.

“I suppose you would like us to go on, right young lady Livya?”

Livya couldn't take her eyes off the crimson road before her feet, waiting for her to take step and walk into a pure dream no one had dared to dream yet.

“Too bad this is only a work of my own mind.”

Knitsman's face brightened with enthusiasm.

“That doesn't mean it's any less real than anything, does it?” He paused to observe Livya, then went on. “Now, what can we do for you?”

Livya was having a hard time to stop staring at the red carpet. It was like her eyes were nailed to it. She gasped, and responded without thinking.

“Can you make those lovers look less disgusting?”

The Reveries glared at her, while Knitsman kept smiling.

“Love is not a disgusting thing, young lady. It is just distant to you, hidden somewhere, waiting for you to find it.”

“I've already found it.” Livya responded, trying to keep a straight face. “His name is Jonathan Jonathansmith. He is like the most handsome man ever, I'm so in love with his blue eyes and purple hair!”

Knitsman was puzzled with this sudden confession. “That's really wonderful, young lady, but how come he has purple hair?”

Livya grinned. “Because I've just made him up.”

Reveries glared at her, even with more disapproval.

“Come on. That was obvious.” Livya intoned.

“Anyway,” Knitsman engaged Livya's attention by flicking his huge fingers. “I think I can grant your wish...”

He flicked his fingers once again, and a speck of dust appeared right at the middle of the road. The speck grew and grew, finally it took the shape of a human being. A human being with the bluest eyes and the purplest hair. That human being was equally disgusted with lovers. He kept making faces at them, he tried to pull the girls' hair, and when he failed, he ended up imitating what the young men said in a funny tone.

Livya giggled.

“That Jonathan Jonathansmith is acutally cooler than I thought.” she declared. In an instant Jonathan Jonathansmith appeared before her. He bowed down and muttered:

“A bachelor’s life is a king’s life.”

Livya repeated in a clearer, louder voice.

“A bachelor’s life is a king’s life!”

Jonathan Jonathansmith nodded. After saluting the other Reveries, he got his place at the middle of the street. He clapped his hands once, became a speck of dust again and disappeared.

Livya placed a fake expression of sadness on her face.

“I wish he stayed.”

Knitsman started walking down the crimson road.

“If you liked this, young lady -I mean, young lady Livya- I believe you will not be disappointed with our little talents.”

The tour was a magical ride. Livya forgot the time as she was watching what the Reveries were doing. First, the flowers turned into fairies, flying to the crimson bricks which were foxes from then on,

ghosts of the past were lingering around the street. Every blue surface was an ocean, inside the oceans were sirens, singing to the dragonflies flying to the stores which were modified by Knitsman to be as unique and absurd as possible. He always tried to make things a little more different than usual, saying that thinking outside the box is not enough, one must learn how to get out of the box.

When they found themselves right in front of the library, Livya stopped for a moment to observe it.

The old building was the ugliest one in the street by far. It was made of nurse logs, it didn’t even have a sign. The scent of obsolescence could be felt. It was obvious that the library was the king’s, ergo the town’s least favorite building.

“Poor building.” Knitsman said. “It looks like it had died at least a hundred times!”

“Well, it’s a miracle that it’s still not wrecked.” Livya responded. “The new king hates the library. Not that he has a problem with the building, of course. He hates it when people read stories, fairy tales or anything that will make them become more complicated. He wants simple people in his kingdom, narrow minded people, just like himself. His soldiers take shifts to



spy on people who look like stargazers, and when one is too 'unique', they arrest them! That's complete nonsense. What if someone is mentally ill? I don't think that matters for them. They just want to get rid of people with more colorful minds!"

"Looks like you don't like this king." Knitsman guessed. That made Livya talk and talk.

"Well, it's true that I'm not a big fan of his. He is a bragger, he always acts like he is a wise man that will lead his citizens to the light, but he's just an ignorant- anyways, he made people hate their closest friends and neighbours. Thanks to him, anyone who reads, or becomes interested in Charmcasting, or just dares to talk about their dreams are outcasts. I hope he doesn't eat his brain one day mistaking it with a nut! He always tells the citizens to stay away from anything unreal, he leaves them no place to-"

"Dream?" Knitsman interrupted.

Livya paused and thought about it for a while. Dreaming, that was the word she was looking for. She always thought the king was constricting people's minds for no reason than fulfilling his own ego, and she always hated that. However, when Knitsman said it like that, she started

doubting her thoughts. Couldn't a person live without dreaming?

"I guess that was the word I was looking for... Dreaming. Not that it's really important."

The Reveries gasped at once. Knitsman stood out.

"Of course it is important. Life without dreaming is just-"

"A normal life?" Livya asked, folding her arms.

Knitsman too folded his arms. "A normal life is never good enough." he said.

"Then change it." Livya dared.

"I am not the one to change your life, young lady, you are-"

"I don't mean the life, come on, change the library."

Then came an uncomfortable silence.

"You changed every single thing, excluding the library." Livya explained.

The Reveries smirked, all at once. It looked very unnatural, yet comforting.

“We thought you already knew this place doesn’t need any magical touch to become magical.” Knitsman laughed.

Livya kept a straight face. “It even needs magic to become decent.”

“I don’t think you get it. Have you ever tried reading a book?” Knitsman asked with patience. “Not a one for your training, not a book about rules. Have you ever read a tale?”

Livya tried recalling her memories including books. She remembered reading lots of books about Charmcasting. She remembered burning some of the rule books, once she made a goat eat one, just to piss the soldiers off. All in all, she didn’t remember reading a fiction.

“That’s surprising.” Knitsman concluded after waiting for an answer. Silence was obviously a negative answer.

“Why?” Livya said with anger. “Am I not allowed to be a normal citizen like anyone else? Do you think I’m too...”

Remembering every time she was called a witch, beast or a boy, she didn’t feel like finishing the sentence.

“Of course you are allowed to be normal, like everyone else. We just hope you don’t prefer that.” Knitsman said.

Actually, she never had the chance to prefer anything. Her life was designed to be odd. Her interests were odd, her behaviour was odd, even her appearance was odd, thanks to her nasty scar and manly eyebrows. Although she had more important things to think about in her spare time, sometimes she too wished to fit in. Not in the boring world of the real humans, but in a world where the ones like her subsisted.

“I don’t.” she finally declared.

“So, what are you waiting for? Enter.” Knitsman encouraged.

Livya could feel the unpleasant eyes nailed on her. However, she never once doubted. She entered the library. She had nothing to lose anyways. The soldiers already hated her, the citizens had already isolated her. In a world of butterflies, she was already known as a moth.

As she entered the old building, a cold breeze licked her face. The library was almost empty. The librarian was sitting, in fact lying on his chair. His eyes were almost closed, and there were white orbs on

his eyelashes. Livya soon found out, they were dust particles.

She started walking around tentatively. She came across an old lady reading a huge book with a nymph on its cover.

She kept walking around. She saw a weird looking man with funny, harlequin clothes. He was probably on his way to 'delirium'.

She sat down next to a shelf and picked a random book. Without even looking at the cover, she started to read.

Before she finished one single sentence, she heard a familiar voice.

"You brought them here."

She looked up to face the owner of the voice. She smiled.

"How did you just appear, lil' guy, learned to transport?" She took a break to take a look at the Reveries. "You should have warned me about them. I was freaked out at first!"

Suddenly, Knitsman appeared right before them.

"Very pleasant to see you, master little boy." He vailed in respect.

"Call me Dusty from now on." the little boy ordered.

Livya was shocked once again due to the sudden movement.

"Man!" she yelled. "Stop transporting! I am not useful for anyone if I have a heart attack!"

"No transporting from now on! Roger, young lady Livya!" Knitsman shouted with joy.

"Young lady again." Livya thought. She gave up and decided to let them call her whatever they like.

"You started reading?" Dusty asked, sitting down on the floor, right next to Livya.

"I think so." Livya responded. "These guys are pretty convincing."

"They are not convincing." Dusty declared. "It is about you. You were ready to believe in..." He couldn't finish the sentence. "I don't know what we are doing is called. Yet, I'm sure it's beautiful."

"Wait, wait now-" Livya put the book down. "How do you know I was ready to believe in, you know 'whatever we are doing now?'"

Dusty blushed and answered quietly. “I watched you, especially at nights. You look like a crow, like a raven. You fly!”

“I just jump around the roofs, nothing more.” Livya said.

“Nobody else jumps around the roofs for fun or living. That makes you an odd one.”

“Do you think being the odd one is good?” Livya asked after a few seconds.

Dusty reached for the book Livya put on the ground and opened the cover, putting his head on Livya’s shoulder.

“I like it.”

That short conversation left questions on her head that were going to keep her mind busy for at least a week.

After a couple of hours in the library, Livya had read a many short stories; she could read fast thanks to her reading practices from her training days as an Apprentice. To be honest, the stories didn’t make a big change.

The day after, they went to the library once again. Once again the day after that, and the other day after that. Dusty was always very enthusiastic about reading and watching The Reveries work their magic. The

Reveries were also happy to be a part of their masters’ lives. Yet, it took Livya some more time spent with reading, dreaming and experiencing differences to step outside the box.

She observed the people around her, and realised once again, all were so similar, so simple and so shallow. With the new feeling of freedom growing inside her, she didn’t mind people isolating her or trying to stay away from her. She preferred living in her own world including The Reveries, Dusty and the power of unchained human mind.

She was surprised that she changed so quickly, though. She always thought that she was at the middle of the line; not so simple, yet not a stargazer. After thinking about it, she learned a new fact about herself. Actually, she was the maddest one in town. Her mind was different, she was an alien, she was a lunatic, and she was proud of herself.

She had finally perceived that, all of this was not about reading or daydreaming; it was about revolting against the chains of the mind.

#### 4. Delirium

Astralis was different. The citizens had a different feeling of concern, a different kind of caution when walking around the streets, going to the clock tower, and locking their windows at night.

There was a madman around them.

Not that they didn't suspect before, now it was so certain that it was surprising. That young girl was finally out of her mind.

"Did you see her around?" Ms. Johanson had asked her neighbour, Ms. Vang.

"Not today, but I saw her yesterday morning." Ms. Vang had groused. "She was talking to the wall again!"

"I saw her the day before, she had that little boy with her too-"

"I don't know why she's playing with that poor boy's mind and filling it with fantasies."

"Clearly she's mad."

"So why don't we report her? The soldiers are already looking for her! She is on her way to the delirium-"

"Don't shout! She can hear us."

"What can she do even if she hears us? Do you think she will murder our families,

sneak into our houses, steal our garbage? Ha! You mark my words, she will jump off a roof following her imaginary friends and break her neck, soon, oh so soon!"

Ms. Johanson had sighed. "She is an Apprentice, Vang. A skilled one, on the top of it..."

Ms. Vang had soured, then she had continued cutting the malevolent weeds that ruined her flowers.

The baker had gathered all the curious telltales in his modest bakery.

"First one to see her go to Crazyville people! Me and dear Joan, we saw her follow an orange leaf, a leaf and nothing more!" he had said, standing on a chair, pointing at random people.

The telltales were asking questions and commenting on the situation.

"Do you think she was cursed?"

"I bet it was the library!"

"Oh, what will happen if the king hears about this?"

"I want her to be punished!"

Behind the throng, far away from everybody, tailor Joan was watching the chaos,

feeling a little guilty. He had gone to the library a few times, without telling no one, including his family. The fact he even hid from himself was that he liked it in the dream emporium.

“We can’t know if she has a special reason to act funny.” he had said, almost whispering. “You know she’s a magician or something like that.”

The baker, seeing Joan move his lips had yelled.

“What d’you say, Joan?”

Joan had shrunked inside his jacket, trying to disappear.

“Nothing.” he had answered. He didn’t think they would understand even if he told them about it. He could even be the next one to be talked scandal about all around the town.

Livya was considered a mad person, and there were other ‘madmen’ who approved what Livya did.

“She doesn’t have a bright future if she stays here.” the librarian had said to the old lady.

“She must flee.” the old lady had responded.

“No! It would be the worst if she left!” the man with the funny clothes had said. They called him Harlequin. “She is the bravest person in town. Remember the time she tried to explain Peter Pan to the soldiers in front of almost everyone in town? What a memory!”

“She is a hope for all of us, that’s true.” the librarian had said.

“She’s a hope for those ignorants.” the old lady had said, glaring at the ‘normal’ citizens out the window. “Even though they don’t know what they are missing.”

Harlequin had grunted with vexation. “That brat who calls him the king. He’s the worst, you know. Do you remember the time he came to the library and told us to pull ourselves together. Oh, and that other time he went to the town alley and bossed everyone- It’s wonderful that Livya’s around, maybe she can teach a lesson to that son of a-”

“Watch your language, Harlequin.” the librarian had interrupted.

The old lady was still looking out of the window. “Nah.” she had exclaimed. “She can’t make a change. All she’s trying to do is telling people stories. She can’t make those ignorants change their minds by tell-

ing them stories. We need something more real than that.”

More compliments, more praisings, more gossips every day. Livya knew about all of them, thanks to her little rat Dusty, and The Reveries, the ones who lost their ways.

One day, Dusty started a deep conversation after telling everything he heard to Livya that day.

“We see both see the Reveries and their creations. They think you’re mad, but they don’t blame me for anything. Why?”

“Because you are a kid, it’s normal for kids to go crazy at times. In addition, it’s not your fault that I’m ‘playing with your mind.’” Livya answered.

“But you are not playing with my mind. I like spending time with you and Knitsman” Dusty responded. “Actually, I played with your mind...”

“And I’m more than glad that you did it. Thanks to you, I am what I’m really made of.” Livya said.

“How can someone be not what they are made of?”

Livya paused. She was looking for the sincerest answer she could give. Didn’t take her long to find it.

“Treasures are buried deep down, and if nobody digs the ground, they stay there forever.”

“There are corpses underground too. What if they find a corpse instead of a treasure?”

“That depends on the place you dig. If you dig the wrong place, you find a corpse. If you dig the right place, you find a treasure.”

Dusty stared at her in wonder.

“You are awesome.” he said.

Livya flattered herself.

“I am.” she said. “So are you.” she added. “A little less awesome than me, but more awesome than the others.”

Dusty giggled. His face was dirty, but his smile was pure white and innocent.

Even though they didn’t talk about anything too deep, Livya could feel the connection between her and this little boy which was growing stronger day by day.

The Reveries were also aware of the situation around the town, and they frequently

tried to make Knitsman talk to Livya about it. Knitsman always rejected stubbornly, pointing out that she was their master and what happens in her private life was none of their business. Still, Knitsman and Livya sometimes sat on a high roof at night, when nobody's around, and started to talk about their troubles like old friends.

It was one of that nights. Livya and Knitsman were sitting on the roof of the library. The stars were shining bright, the clock tower was shining even brighter, God knows why. Livya had left the huge window at the third floor open, so she always felt like she must keep an eye on it. She wasn't in the mood for chasing little thieves stealing her precious books to use them as fuel.

"You look more beautiful than ever today, young lady Livya."

That was what Knitsman said to start a conversation. It was not a good start in Livya's book, but since she knew the man was obsessed with kindness, she decided to go with it.

"That's because you let me wear my cape and scarf." she answered, keeping an eye on the open window.

"And what difference shall that make, miss?" Knitsman asked despite he already knew the answer.

"You don't see the scar when the scarf is around." Livya answered, smirking. The scar was not tragic for her anymore; it was tragicomic.

Knitsman was offended with the answer. "I remember asking you not to victimise yourself like this when I am around. You are not ugly in any ways, young lady."

Livya grinned, and she even laughed a bit. "Right. I am not ugly." She showed her face off. "The most handsome boy in town."

Knitsman choose to remain quiet, while Livya was laughing.

Livya didn't feel like the pessimistic and hateful person she usually was that night. She felt like she was on the clouds, without knowing why.

As Knitsman refused to say another word, Livya brought up a more serious topic.

"They call me mad." she said, closing her eyes and smiling.



Knitsman sat up straight. The resentful expression on his face left its place to a softer, a more tolerant one.

“I and my friends are truly sorry for doing this to you.”

“You really are?” Livya said. “I thought it was your job. To make me see the person I really am. Does it really matter what they think?”

Knitsman didn't answer.

“We shall leave, if you fancy.” he requested.

“I know I can make you leave. You are my servants,” Livya paused and took a deep breath. “Or maybe the creations of my own mind.”

Knitsman faced her. “Excuse me, young lady?”

Livya took another deep breath. “Maybe the book was not bewitched. That means you don't really exist and I am really mad.” She opened her eyes and smiled hysterically.

“No, madame. I can assure you we do exist. Mater little boy sees us too.”

Livya sighed. “I don't know, he's just a boy. Kids imagine things and you know- maybe he's trying to keep up with our little game, and- I see, maybe he's also a creation of my own mind.”

She faced Knitsman with a peaceful manner. “But that doesn't mean it's any less real than anything, right?”

Knitsman smiled once again, however, his smile was gloomy.

“Yes, master young lady Livya. That's the most accurate thing I've ever heard.”

Livya smiled peacefully and closed her eyes again. Knitsman waited for a while, and repeated his previous question.

“Do you want us to leave, young lady Livya?”

Livya made a wry face and shook her head. “Don't leave. I guess I like you guys. You are my friends. All in all, I only have you, master little boy and the stars.” She looked at Knitsman in a thankful way. “Besides, I've never been closer to happiness.”

Knitsman was happy about the answer. Being abandoned by an owner would be a disaster. Yet, that last sentence puzzled his mind.

“What do you mean close to happiness, madame? Why not completely happy, but close to happiness?”

Livya opened her eyes and started thinking for an answer. It was hard for her to find one right away. This was the question of a lifetime for her. What was keeping her from being happy?

She didn't find the energy to find the right answer. So, she gave a random, yet accurate one. “The people, Knitsy. They are so shallow, so simple, so blind and boring...”

“Indeed.” Knitsman nodded.

“I wish they understood. I wish they could see how the king is penetrating into their minds and killing every single worthy cell in their brains. I guess they just don't want to understand.”

Knitsman remained silent.

“I guess I won't care about them anymore. They can call me mad if they wish. The soldiers can haunt the people if they enjoy it. I'll still be enjoying being exclusive. All in all, both the citizens and soldiers are not doing anything wrong, except being completely and miserably ignorant.”

“Let sleeping dogs lie, young lady Livya.” Knitsman said. “If you think that will bring

you happiness, it's not our business to interrogate.”

“It won't bring me happiness.” Livya said, almost laughing. “As long as you keep calling me anything but Livya, I won't be completely happy!”

Knitsman apologised with some fancy words, but Livya didn't listen to all of them. She continued looking at the stars, forgetting to keep an eye on the open window. With a quick, random decision, she let it go.

She was going to keep ignoring them, just like she ignored all her other problems. The loneliness, the scar, the gossips about her. That was the only way they could be gone. She was not going to tire herself trying to make them think like her, she wasn't like king, she wasn't always in need of force. Besides, it was none of her business!

Thoughts floated around her mind non stop. She tried to clear her her mind from anything rational, for her aim in life was to dream, and only dream.

Deep down she knew that wasn't a real purpose; she was still as aimless as usual. Yet, she pretended it was, ignoring the big-

gest problem in her life: living without a *raison d'être*.

“Let sleeping dogs lie.” she thought. “Just let them lie.”

All in all, that philosophy always satisfied her.

## 5. Feint

“Is it my queer eyes or is that the general over there?” Ms. Vang whispered to Ms. Johanson’s ear, pointing at the bodied man standing right before the bakery, just opposite the grocery store the ladies were standing in front of.

“Yes, that is him! Look, he’s armed!” Ms. Johanson gasped. “Why do you think he’s here? You know he is quite aggressive, he usually flares up. Oh, what was wrong with the plain soldiers?”

Ms. Vang looked at her friend with arrogance. “Effortless to understand. They were not capable of catching and punishing a teen lunatic!”

Ms. Johanson turned right. Livya was sitting right there, on the ground, with a thick book sitting right next to her. She was mumbling.

“She’s right there,” Ms. Johanson whispered, keeping an eye on the general who was glaring at the bakery and observing it. “If their purpose was catching her, they would’ve caught her.” She paused, then went on with a lower voice. “Besides, she is not quite guilty-”

“Not quite guilty? Have you been visiting the library recently, honey?” Ms. Vang asked scoffingly.

Ms. Johanson shrugged. “Right. She stole lots of little things... That must make up for one big thing, I suppose.”

Ms. Vang rolled her eyes. “She believes in lies and tries to make us believe in them, too.”

At that point, Ms. Johanson wished to tell her friend that choosing to believe in lies better than the reality was not a crime. She really longed to tell her friend that she sometimes dreamed of a world where the colour orange doesn’t exist. It was an odd thing to dream of, but she hated orange so much that it affected her fantasies.

Yet, she chose to remain silent. Ms. Vang wouldn’t understand.

“Right.” Ms. Johanson finally grumbled.

Like all the other people in the town, Livya saw the general too, and so did Knitsman and a few more Reveries sitting beside her.

“Don’t you plan to flee soon, master young lady?” Knitsman asked anxiously.

“Nah.” Livya answered carelessly. “They can’t arrest me for anything. I’ve returned most of the things I’ve stolen, therefore they have no proof.”

“Why did you do that, madame?” Knitsman asked with a higher pitch than usual.

“You see, it was never about owning things.” Livya answered. “It was just to have some fun with those fatties. I mean, the soldiers, and that weirdo called the king.” She shrugged. “Maybe I can’t be the dragon that burnt his kingdom down, at least I can be the mozzie ruining his sleep because of the buzzing.”

Knitsman decided to stop pondering on Livya’s actions.

“You humans are very queer at times.” he admitted.

“When do you think master little boy will go out?” Livya asked, changing the subject. “I don’t want these weird gazes on me.”

She looked around, trying to avoid eye contact with the people glaring at her.

This was the glare she saw before, the glare people had on their faces while they were burning Rhoda alive.

“Just leave the book to the baker, he could give it to Dusty for us.” Knitsman requested.

“I don’t trust that old fart.” Livya refused. “It will take him no longer than five minutes to burn the book to flare his fire up.”

Knitsman stood up. She went closer to the bakery, and waved.

“Greetings, master Dusty! We were waiting for you!” he shouted. “Master Livya brought you the book you’ve been trying to borrow for weeks but the librarian didn’t give it to you because you’re too little!”

Livya stood up suddenly with anger. “It was supposed to be a surprise!” she shouted.

At once, everybody looked at her. She was going to make up an excuse, but then she remembered she was allowed to talk nonsense. She was ‘mad’ anyways.

The general and the two soldiers were also looking at her. The two soldiers were mur-

muring and trying to delate Livya. The general was standing still, looking at Livya, motionlessly, as he was a stone figure.

Livya felt like the man was using his eyes as muskets to open numerous holes in her body.

She looked away with discomfort.

“Master young lady!” someone shouted at her. It was Dusty. He waved at her, then legged towards her.

Livya smiled and kept the eye contact, until the general stopped Dusty and stood right between him and Livya.

“What do you have there, young man?” he asked with a cold, motionless voice.

Dusty took a look at his book, then faced the general.

“It is a book, sir.”

The general grimaced, then reached forth to the book.

“That is not an appropriate object, especially for your age. Now, be a good and hand it over.”

Dusty was holding on to the book as it was a buoy right at the middle of the ocean. He

looked at the general, puzzled, scared and irritated at the same time.

“Why would I do that, sir?” he dared.

A crowd of people was aligning as a circle around Dusty and the general without noticing.

The general answered with a cold, menacing voice. “Those things are highly disapproved by our king, for they are fatal conspiracies-”

“I don’t understand, sir. I don’t think anyone is weak or stupid enough to build their life around a fairy tale, I mean it. We just add some colour to our lives by reading these-”

“The thing you call colour is damage to your and the society’s mind.” the general said, even with a colder tone, and this time with a palpable flicker of anger. “Actually, I don’t need to explain anything to you. You are giving that book to me, because I said so.”

Livya stood up and tried to see Dusty. She was already short, so a huge throng of people in front of her didn’t help.

“That’s not how communication works.” Dusty responded. “You can’t tell me what

to do, that's rude, you need to use the magic word-

The general interrupted with rage. "Listen to me kid, I can tell you, and everyone in this town what to do, I am the supreme employee of the king. I am his mouth and his eyes, therefore my words are law!"

"That doesn't matter." Dusty declared. "Because this-" He raised the book high above his head. "-this is more important than everything. Just read for once and you will see. This is more important than you, me, and the king."

Livya moved around and tried to push her way through the people around her. She raised her head and finally managed to see the general's head. The man's face was crimson, and it was contorted with anger.

"What are y'all staring at?" she she shouted. "Do something! You know this man goes crazy when you turn his brain! Plus, it's very easy to turn his brain!"

No one answered, and no one moved.

"How dare you compare this filthy piece of garbage with our glorious king?!" he shouted.

"Why not? Isn't he just blood and bones like all of us? In addition, I don't think he's a very knowing piece of blood and bones."

Livya could feel her heartbeat in her throat. This was a kind of concern she had never tasted before; she was concerned that someone she cared about was going to get in trouble.

None of the people was doing something. So, as a last ditch, she called out for the Reveries.

"Knitsman!" she shouted. "Where in the hell are you when you are needed?"

Knitsman appeared right next to her, piercing through the people like a ghost. He looked as concerned as Livya.

"You know I can't do anything to stop the mad man, young lady. You know I can't touch humans-"

"So go talk to Dusty! Go and tell him to back off!" Livya shouted at him.

"MIND YOUR LANGUAGE OR YOU WILL BE HURT!" the general shouted.

"I am not saying anything wrong, sir." Dusty said with bathed breath. "I am only telling you what I think-

“YOUR OPINIONS ARE WORTHLESS IN THIS KINGDOM FOR YOU ARE NOTHING MORE THAN A RAT! YOU AND YOUR FOOLISH FRIENDS ARE THE BIGGEST WASTES OF SPACE EVER CREATED!”

Dusty was more confident and angry this time. The fear and confusion seemed to fade away.

“If you don’t want any wastes of space around, why do you keep hiring fat man to be soldiers?”

The general got hold of Dusty. “Do you know what I do with boys like you? First, I smack them until they learn to hold their tongues. Then, I release my hounds to chase them to their homes and give them nightmares for weeks.”

Dusty was acting foolishly brave. Livya was proud and mad at the same time.

“Do not respond! Dusty! Do you want to get smacked? I’ll tell you that it doesn’t feel good!” she yelled. Dusty didn’t seem to hear anything.

“If you are too ‘strong’ to believe in reality, then why are you weak enough to brave in nightmares?”

The general lost his temper. He was so mad that even his soldiers were trying to

soothe him. However, they couldn’t even get close to him because the man seemed like he was going to burn everyone that was close to him.

“YOU PIG! GIVE THAT-”

The general leaned on the little boy to grab the book. Although, it was not as easy as he thought. Dusty was holding on so tightly on it, that one could only grab it by breaking his arms of. The general managed to do that too, evidently, he failed.

There was a fight going on, but still, the people was watching motionless.

The smacking had started. Livya was still trying to fight her way through the crowd, and she was halfway through.

“STOP IT! GO MESS WITH SOMEONE YOUR OWN SIZE YOU DISHONORED-”

“Please mind your language, young lady, you’re not helping-” Knitsman started.

“SHUT UP!” Livya yelled at him once again. “DO YOU WANT HIM TO BE COVERED WITH SORES FOR WEEKS?”

“Of course not, madame, but-”

“SO BE USEFUL FOR ONCE AND DO SOMETHING ELSE THAN MAKING BUTTERFLIES EXPLODE!”

The general’s grunts and Dusty’s cries were like an unpleasant symphony echoing all around the street. Livya couldn’t see anything, yet she could feel the tense atmosphere.

The people had started to become a bit uncomfortable. Seeing a little child get beaten must have broken their hearts. Some of them were trying to tell the general to stop, some of the people at the front row were almost brave enough to get closer and try to break up the unfair fight.

The same voices roamed around the streets recurrently.

The sound of a fist hitting a stomach.

The scream of a middle aged man following a biting.

A few people declaiming, asking for the man to stop.

Livya shouting at everyone she could spot, Knitsman trying to remain optimistic.

The sound of the pages tearing, feet kicking the ground, nails clawing bare skin, the sound of the familiar wind blowing.

“YOU’VE REALLY DONE IT THIS TIME YOU PIG!”

Then, one sound to end them all; the sound of an explosion.

Livya miserably prayed for it to be Knitsman with the butterflies again. She desperately tried to hold on to the dreams.

Because the compass of truth was certainly pointing at a gun being fired.

Everyone was silent still, including Livya who was unable to contain herself as before.

The general breathed heavily. He was turning one way and another like a raging bull. The front row was moving away from him, even his soldiers were trying to keep a certain distance.

The man started to roar. “SEE? SEE WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU CROSS THE LINE? You are free to do whatever you want. Do what the hell you want, this is a free world! WHERE ARE WE, IN PARADISE? HEAR ME?”

He waited for an answer. Few people nodded.



“Good.” he went on, in a lower but equally menacing voice. “I don’t care if you are a little brat or a old hag, I don’t care if you are tradesman or a damned street person...”

He stopped to look daggers at the citizens around him, then continued. “If you climb too high up at the clouds... If you insult me, my system or my king... If you cross the line in any ways... I swear to you, if your toes go out of that damned line, I will make you pay.”

He looked at everyone once again, and he faced a crowd of frozen figures and horror-struck faces.

“Now disperse!

He signaled his soldiers and left the place like a bull at a gate.

Livya never felt this nervous in her life. It was like there was a huge stake sitting in his stomach horizontally. As the people started going back to their business, it became easier to go through them.

With a huge, imaginary burden on her back, she rushed to the front rows.

She thought to herself, did she ever feel this terrified, this helpless or this small?

Never. Never once in her life an image had made her fall down on her knees and break down in tears.

He was facing the orange sky, with tears in his eyes, but a smile on his face. His golden curls still as bright as the sun, his once hazel eyes dark brown with emptiness. He was still holding on to the book, pressing it against his chest, despite it was damaged, torn, and soaked with the pain coming out of the hole in his bosom.

The Reveries were silent. The sirens had stopped singing, the fairies were crying, for the red carpet made of pure magic was even a darker red with the blood of an innocent fantast.

Livya tried to stand up, but ended up crawling towards her best friend’s corpse. She never remembered being so angry. She didn’t care about anyone who was glaring at her. They were not important at all. They could all go to hell, and she wouldn’t care a bit, but the damned man had to shoot the only one she cared about!

She tried dragging the body to a more comfortable place than the middle of the street, but she only tried, she was not strong enough. She just ended up sitting on the ground, weeping in rage and sor-

row, with the little boy's head on her lap and the books on the ground.

She would like to comfort him before he met his angel of death. She would love to tell him everything was okay, but it was not. She was late, way too late. The pulse... Where had the pulse gone?

Why didn't the stupid crowd let her just pass? Why did everyone just stop? What was wrong with that damned man?

The questions roamed around her head. She raised her head to take a look at Knitsman. He looked sad, but not as sad as her.

For an instant she hated Knitsman for not doing anything. He was capable of creating fairies, foxes and imaginary people, but he couldn't stop a simple man with such power and enormousness? That was nonsense!

She blamed Knitsman too, just like she blamed the crowd and the general, but the only thing she was really trying to do was soothing her guilt. Deep down, she knew this was her fault.

She was not going to care about them. She was going to let the ignorant people do whatever the hell they wanted.

"Let sleeping dogs lie." she thought to herself. "What a lie!" That was her plan, and she thought it could not harm her in any ways, she planned to ignore. She thought that ignoring was the way to abstract the problems.

Now, her troubles and the pain was as real as the blood on her hands.

## 6. The Burden

Five days and fives nights had passed already, and Livya didn't even get a little bit of sleep. She felt more tired than ever, but whenever she closed her eyes, there was that horrible image again.

A few people including the library people who didn't witness the event but came to help after hearing it had carried Dusty's corpse to somewhere safe. Maybe they buried it, maybe they cremated it, or maybe they just hid it in a closet. Livya didn't know, she didn't want to know, so she never asked.

The guilt of being so blind, ignorant and stupid was driving her mad. Only if she did something to make the soldiers believe dreams were harmless, or maybe tried to change the policies. Not being able to change anything was not an excuse, for

everyone could make a change, small or big, everyone could make a change.

The only person she blamed more than herself was the general. She was so lost in her anger, that she found herself once again standing at the front door of her Charmcasting quarters, the old cellar.

Her feet had somehow dragged her there.

The Reveries were still not the same old joyful folks, they too were grieving for their little master, and seeing Livya get lost in thoughts was painful. She was like the shadow of her former self who never really felt any other emotion than hate, anger and disgust. She had stopped mocking them, she hadn't talked sarcastically for days. The Reveries frequently lost her; she disappeared at noon, and reappeared in the evening. After that, she usually remained silent, she refused to answer open end questions, and all she did was walking around the roofs.

In a night much like the others, Knitsman caught her sitting on a random roof and looking at the stars with blank eyes.

He slowly got closer, with small, tentative steps. He knew it would take him forever to reach where she was like that, but he remained patient for the sake of his master.

Livya heard the obscure sound of the footsteps and turned her head to Knitsman.

The huge man froze. He couldn't dare to go further, but he really didn't wish to back off.

Livya looked at him, motionless. The wind kept blowing. Then, she worked hard to place a smile on her face. She was sure all she could do was smirking.

"Come here. Don't be afraid." she told him. "I am not a rabbit."

Knitsman was relieved. He smiled, then rushed to sit next to Livya. Livya still couldn't find out how a huge, scary, nightmarish creature look so much like a father, or maybe a brother.

"Feeling better, young lady?" Knitsman asked nervously.

Livya looked at him, equally as empty as the time she was staring at the stars.

"Can't you tell?"

Knitsman waited a while to find the right, comforting words.

"Tragic, it was. However, we need to get over it." he said. "It's going to be all right, madame."

Livya turned to the other direction and put her head on her knees. “Nothing will be all right if unless I do something about it.”

Knitsman was puzzled. “What do you mean, young lady?”

Livya turned at him and spoke with anger. “I can’t just sit here and there, waiting for the pain to fade away! It doesn’t! That was what I’ve done when Rhoda died, and what I’ve done when people insulted me, called me mad, that was what I’ve done when-”

She didn’t go on. She could feel the tears of rage burning her eyelids, trying to burst at any moment. She didn’t want Knitsman or anyone to see her cry again. The previous time, it felt very embarrassing.

“Being optimistic is not wrong-” Knitsman started, but Livya interrupted.

“I see, I am as ignorant as them. I’ve let them stay unchained. I had the key, but I didn’t unchain their minds. How could I be so stupid?”

Knitsman shrugged. “Everyone makes mistakes, dear master.”

Livya stared at space with stiff eyes.

“My mistake cost him his life.” she whispered.

Knitsman looked at the young girl with compassion.

“It’s not your fault.”

Livya rolled her eyes. “If I had tried to change those ignorants’ minds about dreaming, about obeying that stupid man’s rules, about anything, they would help Dusty. Maybe if I tried to order the soldiers and the general to unchain their minds, they would believe in me. Even if they don’t, they would kill me instead of him.”

Knitsman was still trying to comfort her, despite he knew he was not helping at all. “Don’t be sorry, miss. Even if you did try anything, believe me, it wouldn’t work. I’ve been around this little town and many others for years. Some people know to step outside the box, some people don’t.”

“I don’t care if you can dream or not anymore! That’s none of my business!” Livya yelled. “Didn’t anyone other than the ignorants try to change the society? Didn’t at least one stargazer stand out for themselves and tried to change people’s minds?”

Knitsman shook his head. “Some had tried, I guess. Some brave ones tried to show the others how their minds were chained to the grim reality. They tried to tell soldiers tales, and they placed books in their neighbours’ gardens.”

“Telling the soldiers tales.” Livya repeated. She jeered. “I tried that once, only once, just to mess with their minds.” She nailed her eyes to the clock tower far away, and took a deep breath.

“I can’t be complete unless I make a change. Even a small one is enough.”

“Maybe you can even be happy after that, huh mam?” Knitsman asked.

Livya shrugged and remained silent. Then, in an instant, he stood up and turned to Knitsman.

“Hold my hand.” she ordered.

Knitsman just stared at Livya’s pale hands in wonder, then faced her with confusion.

“You know I can’t, young lady.” he said quietly.

Livya was motionless, but her voice was warm. “Just try.”

Knitsman trusted her master, but the request was odd. Now, the hand looked like hedgehog to him, as it could throw quills on him in any motion.

He raised his hand but before reaching forth, he examined the queer, small human hand. It was only as big as a mouse compared to his, and the fingers were five times as plump as his fingers.

Livya rolled her eyes. It would take Knitsman forever to just touch her hand. So, she reached forth and took his hand, and squeezed it. She highly regretted it afterwards, though.

“Dear, your bones are really sharp, and do you even have some flesh on you? It was something like leather and fabric, don’t say it, are you actually only a really gigantic doll? ”

Knitsman didn’t look at her, he didn’t answer, he didn’t even hear what she said. He looked at his hands. The warm feeling of a human being’s skin was still heating his nonhuman skin, it was not as queer as he imagined. It was only a little warmer than his, and there was a little moving, flowing, flickering thing. It was probably what the others called pulse. It was not as queer as he imagined, yet it was as magical as he wished for it to be.

“This-” he started. “-how did this happen?”

“You liked it?” Livya asked.

Knitsman nodded. “Indeed. It is a beautiful ability.”

“The other Reveries have it too.” Livya declared. “You’ve been asking where I’ve been, and here’s my answer. I was inside this building-” She kicked the roof with the heel of her boots. “-this building where I practice Charmcasting.”

Knitsman looked at her with awe. “You did this?”

“Yes.” Livya answered. “It wasn’t that hard, actually. Your book was already bewitched, so I just had to add up some-”

“I thought you were only an Apprentice, young lady.” Knitsman interrupted.

“A talented Apprentice, Knitsy.” she acknowledged.

Knitsman looked at his hands once again. “Does this mean...” he started, then paused and he moved his index finger towards Livya’s cheek with the scar. Slowly, he kept approaching to his destination, then touched Livya’s scar slowly with his finger tip.

“Ha! Ha!” he giggled. “Your cheeks are so squishy and fluid, they’re almost creepy, madame. Don’t they get mixed with your food when you chew?”

Livya reached for Knitsman’s huge face and knocked on his huge, black eye. “Your eyes are as tough as the king’s heart! That’s what I call creepy.”

“Let me check yours-” Knitsman tried to touch her eye, but Livya stopped him before it was too late.

“That’s not a good idea! They are, how to say it, disgusting, really. Plus, it really hurts when someone puts their finger in my eye, especially if their fingers are crochet needles.”

Knitsman backed off with disappointment. Then, a weird smile appeared on his face.

“I wish I could touch master little boy’s hair. It always looked so soft, it looked like cotton candy, but a golden kind of cotton candy.”

Livya’s half smile erased from her face. Only if she could open her eyes a bit earlier, Knitsman could touch Dusty’s cotton candy hair...

She was about to get lost in thoughts once again, but she awakened herself. She had no time to waste.

“You know why I gave you this ability?” she asked Knitsman.

Knitsman thought for a bit. “I suppose that’s because you’re a nice person, young lady.” he answered.

“Very bad guess.” Livya told him. “I gave you this ability, because I need you to do something for me. Now, listen. Do you hate that general and his chubby soldiers as much as I do?”

Knitsman nodded. “I don’t think they are kind people, young lady. Not at all.”

“Exactly! I hate all of them, so much that if I could just find them I would tan their hides so bad... Sadly, they are huge, worthless men with guns and more sadly, I am short as hell and all the weapon I own is a pocket knife.”

Knitsman remained silent and listened.

“I want you to tan their hides. For me.” Livya ended.

Knitsman felt an uncomfortable thing that confused him, he couldn’t name it but he wanted it gone.

“Can’t you use your Charmcasting skills, young lady?” he asked.

“I am not trained for that! I can work in my cellar but I still have trouble using charms outside. I can’t vent my spleen with my own bare hands.”

Knitsman was still confused. He knew he or any other Reverie could grant this specific wish of their master’s, so he avoided giving an answer, he created many more excuses, and asked many more questions before Livya lost his temper.

“Why are you still talking nonsense, give me a proper answer!” she yelled.

Knitsman leaned forward and tried to explain. “You don’t see it, young lady, I don’t think you’ll like the answer.”

“There is no chance your answer is no, right?” Livya asked. “I am your master and you do what I tell you to do, therefore the answer is yes, therefore I am happy-”

“No.” Knitsman interrupted her. “Our answer can’t be and won’t be no if your wish is in within bonds of our abilities. However, we can’t grant this wish of yours.”

“Why not?” Livya asked. “You are all kind of creepy, for example you are gigantic,

your fingers are like blades, it should take you a few seconds to choke someone-”

“Do not say that young lady!” Knitsman backed off with sensitivity. “How could you think I would choke someone?”

Livya rolled her eyes. “I didn’t say you would, but you could. Anyways, I don’t ask you to choke anyone, just punch them once or twice-”

“Being physically capable is not enough, young lady.” Knitsman interrupted her once again. He took a deep breath. “I am sorry for not me or any of my friends can grant your wish. We might look like monsters to you, but we were not created to hurt human beings.”

Livya walked up to him with anger. “Not created to hurt human beings? Excuse me, but did I give you the right to choose? That man shot an innocent little child! He has no heart! He deserves to get hurt! Didn’t you care about Dusty, even a bit?”

Knitsman tried to soothe the young girl by speaking with a compassionate voice.

“Of course I did care about Dusty, ma-dame. In addition, I do think the cruel man needs to get hurt, but even though I want to slap him, kick him, or even choke him, I

can’t. Me and my friends were created to help our owners create a universe of their own. We were built with pure intentions, therefore, we are not capable of hurting anyone, unless someone bewitches the book again and changes a few rules.”

Livya lost her head in an instant. She sat down, and mumbled.

“I don’t understand. How can someone just... If you want to hurt someone, why can’t you just-”

“This is another mystery of a life, ma-dame.” Knitsman answered. “Some people are not made for certain things. I can’t hurt people I hate, and you can’t get rid of the fate without happiness you hate.”

Livya looked at Knitsman’s gigantic face. “Nice example.” she murmured.

Knitsman was upset, for he had disappointed his master. Yet, he didn’t wish for her to keep those wild thoughts.

In an instant, he asked “Do you really want to beat those soldiers up for some kind of relief, young lady? That didn’t sound very mature to me.”

Livya shrugged with anger. “What do you recommend me to do? Should I just stand



here and do nothing? Don't you want them to pay?"

Knitsman tried explaining it in a simple way. "People do nasty things all the time. If the bigger people didn't exist, we would all be enemies. One should learn to forgive, or at least, dare to be the bigger person and refuse responding to the evil that tries to take over."

Livya looked away, and murmured like a little child. "But it's not fair."

"It's fate, you know." Knitsman told her. "Sometimes, the fate knows the best."

"I thought I changed you. How can you still be so kind?" Livya asked.

"You just changed me physically, madame." Knitsman answered. "You just gave me the ability, but not the spirit. I am still that old doll that pets dogs, and I don't think a spark of evil exists in me. Even though I'd love to be serving you, I simply cannot beat them up for you, until you destroy my personality and change my soul."

Livya soured and she didn't answer.

"If you're really determined, you can change me once again. I will beat those soldiers up for you, if that's what you wish

for. Just tell me Livya, is that what you really want?"

Livya looked at Knitsman. Her eyes were vaporous.

"I don't understand it. You just told me you were not able to hurt people unless I bewitch you. Are you just praying for me to leave you pure?"

"No, not at all." Knitsman answered. "You can do anything you want to me. All in all, I am not a human being; my remorse is not like yours, and my consciousness is a lot different. You can change me, you can make me evil. That won't matter, as long as I grant your wish. After I grant your wish, you can bewitch the book again, and I'll be as pure as ever."

"I know all of the rules, you know." Livya whispered.

"You can fix me anytime you want." Knitsman went on. "However, once you go wicked, it will be extremely difficult for you to fix yourself. Sadly, changing humans is not as easy as everybody thinks."

"If it was, Dusty would be still alive." Livya agreed.

"Correct." Knitsman nodded. "I feel like you are about to go through a big change,

and your priority must be dealing with your own change, not mine. If you wish for it, I must be, and I would be wicked for you, for you are my master and I am not free. Fortunately, you don't have a master. Unfortunately, you have no excuse for your corrupt actions. For nobody forced you to become evil, it will be your decision, therefore your burden to bear. I don't want you to get wasted for nothing, so before making any decisions, just ask yourself: are you ready to become the tyrant you are fighting against?"

Powerful words had gotten out from Knitsman's mouth. Not only they were powerful, they were correct.

She was never a pure good person, but she had never been a nefarious beast either. She always tangled around that neutral line, where right and wrong didn't mean anything but benefit. Being completely white was always disgusting for her, because she knew how rotten the world and the people were. She never once bothered to be a saint, but now, as she was getting further away from the neutral line, being completely black scared her.

All in all, there was still hope for her. She was still dark gray.

She had never seen Knitsman lack the feeling of happiness. Maybe, the key to happiness was being a decent being. Her zenith might be lying amidst the waterfalls of hope, loyalty and forgiveness.

As the uncomfortability of change started to grow in her, she started doubting her decision. For it might be her kingdom come, for it might lead to the mistake of a lifetime. In addition, the plan required effacing her best friends' souls. No matter how hard he tried to hide it, Livya could easily see the apprehension in Knitsman's face and voice when the subject was serving for the wicked. He too was afraid of a changing.

She thought about the king, and the chains he put on the citizen's minds, destroying their colours forever, turning them into fabrications of the same, boring breeds of ignorance.

Only a tyrant would take one's personality away by force.

Livya was silent again, staring at the stars with blank, blurry eyes. Knitsman touched her shoulder, admiring his new talent.

"I hope I succeeded to convey the reasons of my anxiety to you."

Livya shook her head, but didn't respond.

Knitsman thought she was crossed with him, for he had never seen her so silent and serious.

"If you give me a logical reason to me evil, I can swear, I will become The Devil. If you can't, then you are just trying to wear a robe that's too big for you." He paused, and took a deep breath. "You know I only care about your own good, Livya. Nothing more."

Livya turned to Knitsman's enormous head, and saw the expression of pain and benignity on his face.

He actually looked a lot like a raving harlequin. If he could only knit his brows a bit more, and speak with a scarier voice...

He was creepy, really creepy. He had always been that way. He could easily rip one's throat with those machete hands.

"But not with that heart." Livya thought. Being cruel was a matter of choice, and he would never make such a choice.

Livya didn't have any of the scary physical details. She was not muscular, or tall, she didn't have a sign of creepiness on her, excluding the disgusting scar.

All in all, the darkness always dwelled inside the soul.

Livya looked at Knitsman again.

If you could try to know him slightly better, and convince yourself that he can't cut you in pieces, he was pretty cute.

"I will think about it." Livya responded at last. Then she smiled.

Knitsman who saw she was not crossed with him at all smiled back.

Then, silence beckoned. The two kept sitting on the roof and watching the constellations blink at them from distant lands. The night was a beautiful, astral symposium. Actually, it could be the only beautiful thing in the ugly real world.

She said she'd think about it, but she really wasn't planning to do that. As she felt the power of the good warming her heart, she decided that beating a few men up was certainly not the correct solution.

When she cleared her mind up from all the deep thoughts, she found out about an unnoticed miracle on the surface of her brain.

"Hey, Knitsy." she whimpered.

“Yes, Livya?” Knitsman responded.

“You finally used my name in a sentence!”

## 7. The Awakening

Forgiving and forgetting was not easy, and it never felt right, but Livya was determined to become a better person. That was the only way out she could imagine, and probably the only thing she never tried.

Beating up was not a good idea for convincing, so she decided to ‘rebel in a kinder way.’

She started walking around the streets and disturbing people, telling them stories about everything they could or could not imagine.

“Excuse me sir,” she had said one time. “Do you have any time to talk about Peter Pan?”

“Try to look at the bigger picture, miss, just try to unchain your mind,” she had said to Ms. Vang. “You don’t understand how ‘you know who’ is restricting you! Once you get rid of your chains, you will step into a better, a stronger world!”

The woman had chased her with a broomstick and threatened her with numerous things, including delating her to the whole royal family.

She had taken a book with her when she was about to talk to tailor Joan.

“Keep it, read it, set your mind free!” she had advised. “It’s not only about dreaming sir, it’s also boycotting against the cruel rulers of the town who restrict our minds!”

“Take it back! I don’t want it!” Joan had shouted after she left the shop. “Take it or I’ll cut it with these very scissors!” he had went on, reaching for the big scissors of his.

However, when Livya looked back at him, she hadn’t seen him doing what he had promised to do. Instead, Joan had observed the book, then when he was sure no one was around to see him, he carefully put it inside his bag.

There was still hope for the town.

A few people, including Joan, were about to find the right path. This was nice and all, but none of the ‘future dreamers’ were brave enough to show themselves.

Most possibly, they were all scared of being outcasted, or murdered.

The hope was growing, but it was a weak light of hope; it would probably be extinguished before it grew to become the spark of a revolution.

The good way wasn't working as planned.

"What else could I do?" Livya asked herself whenever she remembered this well known fact. "Beating a few men wouldn't make a big difference either. I must follow the path my fellow dreamers created. Someday, we will reach victory, someday..."

She never remembered trying to believe in something that was so unsuitable to her. Even a single thought made her feel like an imitation of herself.

"I'll just do whatever they did. It is the best way, despite it failed every single time..."

She tried to shoo the pessimistic thoughts away, but they never went away, for they were the works of her real mind.

"Some day it will work." she always repeated. "What else could I do?"

As nobody joined her in her passive revolution, she started to offend the soldiers' eyes once again. For her fellow citizens were more than convinced that she was mad, and the gossips spreaded all around the kingdom like waves, eventually her reputation in town reached the king's ears.

It wasn't hard for him to get a name, for Livya only had a name and no surname, for he was a king, and for some people were already looking forward to spying on the mad child in town, serving for their beloved kingdom.

The king had been waiting, waiting for the ignition of hope to fade away, but Livya didn't seem to be giving up. Therefore, he decided to meet the bravest one in town in person.

It wasn't hard for Livya to intuit something odd was going on; the town seemed to be working perfect that day. Every shop manager was on task, the library people were not around and the door of the library was locked. The town alley was quiet, only the sound of a man lecturing the air could be heard.

Despite she knew what was going on she got curious, and started walking towards the town alley tentatively. She stopped at a

distance she could hear what the man was saying, and started listening.

“Listen to me, good people of Astralis,” the man shouted. “I am not asking for much. For she has been an infection in our town, she is a threat for all of us.”

“What are you going to do to her, dear majesty?” Ms. Vang asked the king. Then she bowed down and backed off. It was obvious that she adored the man.

“As you know, I am not a cruel man. I know she is a confused young lady, you know youngsters get confused very often. I find it suitable to give her a chance; I will talk to her and maybe her reprobate mind could find the right track...”

The soldiers behind the king seemed unhappy with this decision; it seemed to Livya the only thing they wanted to do was to shed blood.

“So, please, my dear citizens, bring her here, or if you know where she is, share her place with me.” He paused to make eye contact with the people around him. “Serving your kingdom and dear majesty should be enough of a prize for you; in addition to that, you will be rewarded with a humble amount of gold.”

Livya grinned with anger. He was just going to talk to her. If so, why were the soldiers standing there like musketeers?

Lots of people were willing to spy on her, and she couldn't let them earn money over her. Her courage was not for sale.

She slowly got out of the corner she was hiding in, and she greeted everyone with a smirk.

“No need for middlemen, dear majesty.” she told the king. “I would be delighted to chat with you.”

The king turned to Livya that was standing right behind him. He was a young man, he was no more than thirty. He really had the face of a ‘jerk’ for Livya. He was not exactly ugly, but he looked like a combination of a fox and a snake. His nose, chin and cheekbones were pointed.

“Welcome, dear.” he greeted her with a fake smile. “I am glad you are willing to talk this out. What was your name again?”

“Lil Beaver, yours truly majesty.” she saluted the king. People murmured with disapproval.

“Her name is Livya. No surname.” Ms. Vang declared with disgust. Then remem-

bered she forgot to bow down, and she backed off. “Your majesty.”

The king glared at Livya. “It seems like you love jokes.” he said.

“Indeed.” Livya responded. “That’s why I love your system.”

Fortunately, the soldiers were too dumb to understand the joke. However, the king’s face changed with a ray of anger, then the annoyingly calm expression came back in an instant.

“Look at me, my child. You have been led astray, or possessed by the devil.” the king declared, like a wise man who knew everything. The crowd gasped.

“Better than being possessed by you, your majesty.” Livya responded.

The crowd gasped once again, with discomfort. The rays of anger on the king’s face had started to become clearer.

“Mocking me won’t earn you anything, my child.” he told her. “I won’t cry in the corner for you have mocked me.”

“I know.” Livya responded. “You kill innocent children instead.”

The soldiers moved uncomfortably.

“I heard about the event.” the king said. “Rather tragic. He too was possessed by the fantasies of lies, and now he is in heaven. We served our kingdom and creator.”

Livya yelled at the king with rage. “Like it was your duty to send him to heaven!”

“It’s my duty to put the ones who were led astray right-”

“He didn’t do anything wrong, you fool!” Livya shouted. “If refusing to be your mind’s slave is a crime, we should have been hanged side by side! Why do you let him do this people?” She turned to the people around. “Can’t you see he’s taking away the most beautiful things from you? There’s nothing wrong with dreaming. He only wants you to stay simple and ignorant to make you easier to control! Why are you so blind? Can’t you see, he’s a dictator and nothing more!”

Nobody agreed with her. Nobody moved a finger. Her words were worthless, for she was nothing different from the other stargazers. She told people crazy stories, she rebelled against the king, and remained optimistic that someone, somehow would make a change.

All of the others of her kind had failed; why would people listen to her now?

“Listen to me, young lady.” the king called her with a strict voice. “Don’t infect my beloved citizens with this virus, or I’ll make you pay. I always enjoy serving for my kingdom.”

Livya turned at the king and laughed hysterically. “There was a child’s corpse lying on the ground, you man alive! What kind of a tyrant could enjoy seeing an innocent soul fade away? If you enjoy killing children, I respect that. Ha!” She turned at the citizens once again. “If you want your spoiled brats to be lying on the ground with a hole in their hearts, go ahead and worship this tyrant!”

“Who are you to reason my ways, you peasant!” the king blazed. The angry monster inside his shiny shell had just showed up. “That rat was infecting the system. No matter who you are, rich or poor, young or old or mad or even if you are a damned fly, you will be punished for the crimes you committed! Is that clear to you?”

Livya backed off with great anger. “You will pay... Someday you will understand. You’ll change your mind when- you will see-”

The king spit the words out in great anger. “I will never see anything, for nobody is strong enough to make me, and I will never change my mind!” He was moving non stop, he was making countless gestures. “More importantly there will never be a filthy corpse of a bloody rat in my very castle! My beloved son will live long enough to take my place, and slay hundreds more of your kind, if needed! Thanks to God he’s only eight, but his brain is still clearer and probably bigger than yours!”

“You filthy man!” Livya yelled, trying to keep the tears in her eyelids. “You are a murderer!”

The soldiers had enough of the disrespect against their king; they both moved forward with their weapons turned towards Livya. However, the king raised his hand in an instant, telling them to stop.

“Wait a minute.” he murmured. The soldiers backed off.

The king’s anger seemed to soothe. The annoyingly calm expression was back again, now with a tense, nasty smile.

“Don’t blame her for everything she had just said. All in all she’s mad! Every single one of her abominable kind is mad!” He smiled viciously.



The king had realised a fact, that Livya too suddenly perceived. There was no chance for her to win a battle by speaking, for her words were worthless. No matter how true they were, her words were nothing against the king's according to most of the people. All in all, she was a mad callow witch, and her rival was a man who could end anyone's life any time he wished.

"You will pay. You will... Somebody will make you pay..." Livya repeated again and again.

"Oh really?" the king responded with a fake expression of astonishment. "Hear it my people?" He turned at the citizens. "The one before her, and the other one before her, all of them were also talking about this someone. Do you know that someone? I don't! Do you, ha?"

A few people shook their heads, a few whispered "No."

The king nodded wildly. "That's right. I don't know that someone either, he never bothered coming around and saying hi!"

He turned to Livya with a victorious expression on his face. "Maybe that's because that someone never existed, and will never exist! Your 'someone' is only as real as your filthy dreams!"

The man was right. There had been fighters, soldiers, survivors and martyrs of this war, yet, none of them were to stand up and try to make a real change. Everyone waited for that someone, that someone who always failed to show up.

"Don't say it, are you that saviour?" the king asked Livya. "If you are, let me tell you, your strategies are not really well chosen. Nobody will ever believe in your stupid stories, nobody will hear the call of your 'let's dream of a better world and hold hands' cliché!"

Livya couldn't feel her tears in her eyelids anymore. They somehow disappeared. She didn't feel any kind of destructive anger either. She was more cold blooded than ever; her heart felt ice cold.

The king went on and on. "Just hope that someone will make me pay one day. Clearly, that someone is not you anyway. Not with that dirty cape, not with that feeble body, and not with that poisoned mind."

Livya remained silent. She locked her eyes at a spot behind the king, at the road to her old cellar.

"I have an army, a castle with insuperable walls, numerous trained soldiers..." the

king hissed. "All you have is a weak fantasy."

Livya started running towards the point she was staring at, and started to go towards the attic. She could hear a few people, including the king and the soldiers shouting from her back. Most of the things she heard were insults about her cowardness, for she had ran away so quickly and didn't die like his little friend.

She was planning to return that insult and tuck it inside all of their throats.

She stopped when she finally made it to the old, almost invisible door of the cellar. She didn't reach for it. First, she checked if anyone was spying on her.

She saw a few curious people glaring at her. Just a few, but enough people.

She backed off, and started going the opposite way, to the clock tower.

She paced up, then started running again. She ran through the town alley like a lightning. She jumped on the awnings of the shops, and climbed on the roofs. As she made sure no one was close enough to watch her, she sat down.

She wasn't so sure the thing she was going to try would work, but all in all, the man

was magical. Who knew, maybe he could hear her.

"Knitsman!" she called.

The man appeared right beside her.

"At your service, lady." he said.

Livya wasn't surprised with the 'transporting' at all. Guess she was finally over it.

"Just as I was starting to get used to them." she thought. "No! This must be done. No excuses this time. No waiting for someone!"

Knitsman looked at his master. She didn't seem willing to say something. So, he decided to start speaking.

"You know, I heard the things that dolt man said-"

"I was hoping you did." Livya interrupted. "Maybe that will make you forgive me easier after hearing what I'll do."

Knitsman looked at her with doubt and wonder. "What will you do?"

Livya took a deep breath. She still felt a little cruel and guilty about saying what she was about to say.

The words were on the tip of her tongue, yet, they were struggling not to come out.

“Being ‘kind’ doesn’t work. It never worked, it never will.” she declared.

Knitsman’s smile was erased. He was trying to keep a straight face, not succeeding at all. “I suppose you are right, but maybe... Maybe if we remain patient, maybe if we try harder...”

“Everyone before me worked harder and harder, and all of them became either isolated, imprisoned or dead.”

Knitsman looked at her perturbedly.

“If it was still beating a few men up, I wouldn’t bother disturbing you, but now the plan has completely changed, and I can’t make it without your help.”

“Say, you want to bewitch the book.” Knitsman responded.

Livya nodded. She observed Knitsman for a while, and felt the need to explain some things.

“I know you don’t want to change, but-”

“Remember what I said. I want to change, me and my friends would change for you anytime. Think about yourself.”

Livya stood up with anger. “You stop talking about that nonsense again! The power of good, the light of hope igniting people’s paths! Lies! Stop trying to make me feel sad for myself, because I can tell whenever I want to go wicked or not!”

“I am not trying to reason with you Livya. I am not warning you. I just want you to think of a logical reason to go wicked. That’s not because I am always at the bright side. There are a million reasons to go evil, and if you have found the right one, I will become The Devil for you. Just tell me, and make me sure you are ready for the change. All in all, malignancy is an art, and even in the very dark grey people’s hands, it becomes a child’s toy. Only the deep black ones can remunerate it.”

“Why do you care so much about me being ready for the change?” Livya asked.

Knitsman went on with the patience of a father. “Because as I told you, some people are not made for certain things. You can torture them, drive them mad, but you can’t make them do things they are not meant to do.”

Livya glared at Knitsman. She was still feeling the coldness that had placed in her chest when she was talking to the king.

She could something there in your heart dwelling, growing, taking over.

“You can’t, unless you contort their personality and feed on their souls. Break their spirit. Ruin their beliefs. Destroy everything they dared to love, and then rub all of this in their face . If you take everything they’ve got, leaving them no one to become, no soul to dwell, no shoulder to cry on and no heart to trust, then you can make them change forever.

Everybody has a line. As you said, until you reach the line you can torture them, call them mad, call them ugly, freak, witch, or whatever, but whenever you cross the line... That’s the moment you pay for it.”

Knitsman was impressed with the things he heard. There was no sign of that extremely angry and desperate young girl.

“They crossed your line.” he concluded.

“They did.” Livya confirmed. “That’s the worst thing they have ever done for themselves, really. Because now ‘someone’ knows how to make them collapse.”

She paused and smiled hysterically. “That stupid man gave me inspiration. What had he said, nobody will ever believe in my ‘let’s dream and hold hands’ cliché?”

Well, some people could. They refused to do so. If the bright way didn’t work, it’s clearly time for ‘someone’ to make a change.

Weak fantasy he had said...” Livya paused again.

“No fantasy is too weak to flunk at enlightening one’s life.” Knitsman said.

Livya looked at him with a hideous smile on her face.

“No fantasy is weak enough to fail at making someone’s world collapse around them.”

Knitsman stood silent still. He was confused, impressed, happy, and sad at the same time. He could see how certain events had changed the fire inside this young girl to pure ice. He was unable to understand, how could humans do this to each other, without using any curses?

Anyway, he was completely sure that the ice in her heart could handle every kind of evil.

“That was all I wanted to hear.” he said placidly. “Let’s go to the cellar, then you can send me to the dwelling of those soldier gentlemen-”

“We have nothing to do with the soldiers anymore. The plan changed.” Livya interrupted.

After an empty silence, she explained.

“If they wanted a battle of soldiers, they would have killed a soldier, not an innocent child. The war is in a whole different level now.”

Knitsman didn’t reason with her. They spoke no more.

The rest was so simple, that it was disturbing. Knitsman called his fellow Reveries, told them everything. The other Reveries pointed out that they would be glad to serve their master. However, they didn’t forget to ask Livya what exactly she was going to do.

“You’ll see.” she answered. “It would be better if I told you after you’ve gone completely malevolent.”

No more questions came.

Livya went to the cellar, and opened the door. She didn’t care about the people glaring at her this time. First, she let all the other Reveries in first. As Knitsman was entering, he hesitated for an instant. He stopped, and looked at Livya.

“Livya. Please remember me as a good man.” he requested. “No matter how correct they are, villains are never praised.”

Livya smiled painfully. “Same for you, Knitsy.” she answered.

“Perhaps, when we are done, you can fix us. To be pure again.”

Livya sighed, then shrugged her shoulders. “Sure. If I stay alive after all of these, why not.”

The words echoed in the Knitman’s head. “If I stay alive.”

After that, he didn’t ask any questions. After that, being completely nefarious, for it meant feeling no pain after his best friend’s death, didn’t sound bad at all.

As he got in from the creaking door, he couldn’t help thinking about death. The end of all disorder, and all pain.

“Death.” he thought. “What a gift death might have been.”

## 8. Insomnium

Livya worked for a few days and a few nights. She avoided making contact with the Reveries, knowing that soon they would be completely different. She didn’t

talk, she didn't cry, didn't say goodbye. When the big day came, she was not feeling any pain at all.

The Reveries had changed. There was no place for fairies, foxes, red carpets, or dreams anymore. They were now the creeps they always resembled.

Livya didn't know the other Reveries very well, yet, she could clearly see the change Knitsman had gone through. The man had forgotten to smile. His brows were usually crossed, even the way he walked had changed. He wasn't walking joyfully, facing the warm sun anymore. He was walking with head facing the ground, like he was always walking up to someone or something. He had tried cutting rotten cow meat with his bare hands, and he was a natural talent.

He didn't talk to Livya until the big day came.

"We are all ready, master." he said with a distant, cold voice. "Shall we return to the book?"

Livya looked up at her friend one last time, and in her frozen heart, a heat wave wandered, bringing an acrid kind of sadness.

She kept a straight face.

"You know what to do." she said.

Knitsman nodded. Then, with a blink of an eye, the room became empty. The Reveries had returned to their original dwelling, the book.

Livya read the title *Somnium*, and thought about everything she went through.

The Reveries might have been works of her imagination. She might have gone mad. Her plan could fail.

She shooed all the scary thoughts from her mind until it became a ghost town.

She was going to go to the king's castle, get as close as she can get, then she was going to drop the book somewhere, waiting for the Reveries to work their magic.

It was going to be fine.

"It must go fine." she thought.

She hid the book inside her cloak.

Just as she was leaving, someone knocked the door.

She would simply use the window if the cellar had one. Her only way out was the door, so she opened it.

In front of her were two soldiers.

“Hello Livya ‘No Surname’,” one read from a paper.

“You have been reported by your neighbours.” the other one continued.

That was certainly not on the plan.

She was going to do what she had mastered. She was going to flee as fast as possible.

“Simple obstacles.” she reminded herself. “I can pull this through.”

There was no room for hopelessness or fear anymore.

The soldiers continued.

“For you are mentally unstable, you cause great danger for them, and we are here to-”

The men were tossed with a sudden dash.

Livya shouldered the men with all her strength, and started running as fast as she could.

The soldiers were shocked, but it didn't take them long to gather themselves up, and run after Livya. By the seat of Livya's pants, they were absolutely fast for their age.

Livya kept running as she tried to draw the town's map in her head. She couldn't go to the town alley, there was an open bazaar, and it would only slow her down. She needed to take the road to the clock tower.

She paced up and kept running. Some people who evidently hated her tried to slow her down. She managed to get rid of all of them.

She couldn't quit! She had gone through so much, and if it all went to waste at that point, it would be the worst thing ever.

“Stop running!” one soldier shouted.

“All the ways are blocked. You have nowhere to go.” the other continued.

Livya looked ahead, and saw that all the roads were blocked by soldiers and citizens. There were clearly more than one person that reported her.

She desperately looked for a way out. She couldn't let them stop her. Not when she was so close to happiness.

The familiar blaze of the town went through her hair.

She finally perceived why she never found her zenith. She had wandered around, being useless all her life. She never once

cared about someone, tried to save a life, make a child smile. Never once, she tried to make a change.

She kept going towards the wall of people.

She knew why Reveries were so happy all the time. That's because they had a master to serve, a person to satisfy, a duty to live for. They had their rasion d'entre.

She had never felt closer to happiness, for she too found the reason of her existence.

She existed to make sure no other innocent child died just because they dared to dream.

She existed to show the ignorant people how powerful the will to step outside the box be.

She existed to sacrifice everything in order to unchain people and set them free.

She existed to make a dictator pay.

She existed to become the 'someone' everybody has been waiting for.

She could not fail. Not with so many reasons to succeed, not with that unstoppable will to be complete, and not with that ice cold heart.

She kept running. The wind kept blowing.

All she needed was a way out.

A relief, a hope, a door...

Or perhaps a window. A huge window.

She could get inside the clock tower using the huge window in the third floor.

The window was high above, but still reachable.

She smiled unintentionally, and then jumped on the tight awning of the tailor's shop. In a second or two, she was running on the roofs, jumping around.

She thought the soldiers would fail, but the two men were still following her without getting tired.

She could feel a match glowing inside her lungs, she was starting to get tired. Still, she kept running. She couldn't give up. Not after all those sacrifices, and not with that heart.

She jumped in the clock tower from the open window, and started climbing to the top floor using the stone stairs without losing any time. She could jump to the other side of the tower using the little window at the top floor, and the soldiers couldn't fit in it. Perhaps it would be a little too high to



jump, but she could find another way. She always did.

She could hear the footsteps of the soldiers. They were coming closer and closer. She kept climbing.

“Come here you sneaky rat!”

She felt she was close, oh, so close to making it.

As soon as she made it to the top floor, she closed the gate between the stairs and the big room she lived in. She leaned a chair on the door, tucked some small, useless objects in the keyhole and did everything she could to keep the door closed.

“You think you can get away like this? What are you going to do now, jump?”

The soldiers kicked the door once or twice, they knew it was a piece of cake to open it by using a little force. Livya quickly reached for the window and opened it. She put her feet on the sill.

The door opened before she could think of anything logical.

She reached for the book and got it out from the huge pocket inside the cloak.

Before the soldiers grabbed her, she looked at the book.

“You know what to do.” she whispered. “I trust you.”

She made sure the pages weren't falling apart, then she went towards the window.

As one of the soldiers pulled her back from her waist savagely, ignoring the pain that divided her body in half, she pushed herself forward and threw the book out the window before they grabbed both of her arms.

Then she felt being dragged across to floor, to the center of the room.

“The tag is over.” one of the soldiers whispered.

“We could be merciful against you if you cooperated, but I guess this was your fate.” the other one added.

Livya was on her knees. She couldn't use her arms, she couldn't stand up. Her waist was aching horrifically, and her lungs were burning. She was struggling to breathe.

It was the easiest for her to let go right at that moment. She wanted to let herself go, she wanted refuse to move a muscle. She

just wanted to hang from the soldiers' arms like a puppet with its wires cut.

A fever flowed through her veins at the time she most needed it. Her blood was boiling, forcing her to move. She couldn't let go, not with that heart, no way. She had to see, she had to see if she was ever going to be complete, she had to look out of the window and she had to witness a miracle.

She was tired as hell, but in her sixteen years of sleep, she had never been so awake.

She struggled to stand on her knees and she threw herself forward. She wildly crawled towards the window, pulling the soldiers behind her too, with the outstanding power she felt in her in that instant. The soldiers were still trying to pull her back, but constantly failing. Livya's arms were about to break off, her spine was stinging her back like a wasp, yet she didn't give up until she could see the blue sky out of the window.

"What are you doing, you crazy witch?" one of the soldiers asked her.

"What are you staring at?" the other added, and the soldiers started staring at the blue sky too.

It was going to make it, Livya could feel it in the heat flowing through her veins. She kept waiting.

Then the sun was blocked, there came a sound of flapping.

The soldiers looked at the sky until they both froze with sudden terror. It was like nothing they had seen before. It must be a dream! A daydream! Was it a virus the mad girl was spreading? Were they infected?

"Do you see it Aldric?"

"See what? Don't say it-"

"See that floating-"

"Hell, yes, God, I wasn't dreaming!"

"That girl was-"

"Just tell me this-"

"Is that book flying?"

Indeed it was. The book was floating in the air, flapping its covers, flying like a beautiful vulture.

"Flee!" Livya shouted. The book waved a cover at her.

The rest was blurry. She remembered laughing, laughing until she was almost choking in her own laugh, then letting her body go, falling on her back, for the soldiers were so busy freaking out, they forgot holding her from the arms and waist.

She had finally made it. The book was going to fly away to the castle, and nothing was going to be the same. She didn't feel useless anymore, nor ugly or hopeless.

The soldiers were not holding her, but she didn't wish to run. She didn't need to run. They could do anything they wanted to her. She would bear it all, for she had served for her purpose. She was complete, there was no more running, no more hiding and ignoring.

She was not mad, she was never mad! The soldiers saw the book too. It was as concrete as everything she had gone through. As the relief filled her, she lost the ability to think, to feel, and even to imagine.

“Eye for an eye!” she shouted with the last of her strength.

The book waved a cover again, then started flying towards the king's tower. It cut the air like a dart and like a silent kite against the blue rays of the setting sun, it faded away.

Livya could feel her arms and lungs aching. More than that, she had the worst headache ever. She couldn't feel her legs, the thoughts were hitting her cells and veins, making her suffer. She was in great pain. Yet, a thing was still making her smile, and sometimes laugh hysterically and unintentionally. The soldiers were more than sure it was madness, but Livya had a different name for the new heat wave taking over her veins and growing inside her soul.

It was called happiness.

## Epilogue

Just a day later, the town was shocked by the tragic news spread around by officials. The king's only son was found dead in his room. The only suspicious object in the room was a book, whose pages were filled with illustrations of a hideous, slender beast and covered in a red liquid, that matched the blood dripping from the young boy's violently torn and ripped off throat.

After the tragic events, with an order of the king, the library was wrecked and all the Charmcasters who they could find were hanged. The citizens were asked to bring all the books they own to the town alley, in order to burn them all.

Most of the citizens followed the rules, so most of the books were gone.

Yet, there were some people who refused to follow the order. Some of them knew how to read tales from the crib, some had never touched a book, however, their minds were ignited with the same light of hope that was rather hard to extinguish.

They have finally perceived that, all of this was not about reading or daydreaming; it was about revolting against the chains of the mind.

-The Beginning-

# Pause

by Naz Karaismailoglu

Pause



Naz Karaismailoglu

## Part I

She pushed the play button and found herself in a graveyard, knelt beside a chest, circled by stone angels marking the bodies, just like the cover of the album. Right now, Rosie was testing the limits of her iPod, she had always been scared of this song, she didn't know what it would bring. Being inside it wasn't like being inside Dancing Queen, which was way more fun, this was just creepy. Perhaps trying a metal song wasn't the best idea on the first day, she didn't want her adventure to end so quickly, and it wasn't just her.

This morning hadn't been too different from any other, after breakfast her dad had taken her to get the iPod nano 4th generation she had always wanted, it was a green one with a video camera. She had been trying to convince him for weeks to get it and finally today they had went to Best Buy. She had browsed through all the different iPods until deciding the blue one was too dark, and choosing this one instead.

"Isn't this also dark? The ones in the catalogue don't look like these." she had said while waiting by the registers.

Her dad had thought for a moment and answered "Well, photos aren't always the same as the real thing."

There was no particular reason she had chosen that present, all she knew was that her sister had gotten a new phone instead. That wasn't a problem for her, especially after opening the white case and connecting the shiny iPod to iTunes. At that moment she had seen a glitch waver over the computer screen, but hadn't thought much about it. No, a wave would be too artificial, maybe she had seen a light come out when she connected the cable?

After uploading the first few songs, Rosie was ready to test it out. She scrolled down to find an Imagine Dragons song and clicked play. Immediately she found herself inside the song, it wasn't too hard to understand since it looked just like the video clip. Olivia paused for a moment, she was hungry. Immediately Rosie found herself inside the song, it wasn't too hard to understand since it looked just like the video clip but a slightly different version. She wasn't scared, she looked around and recognized the lead singer, she approached him wondering if she could talk to him, maybe he could explain how this being in a song thing worked, but she couldn't talk, Rosie couldn't even open her mouth.

"Olivia come put away your clothes, they are on the bed." Olivia had been walking with her through the song and got out

when she reached the bedroom, clicking pause in her mind so Rosie couldn't keep walking without her.

Seeing the words of the songs fly past her had been a great experience for Rosie, but now she couldn't even open her mouth, she was standing beside the singer, or was it the lead guitarist?

Still clutching the iPod tightly since it was probably the only way out, she tried to find the source of the music. It wasn't coming from the original members of the band nor the device, it was coming from the air itself. She decided it wouldn't be a problem to stay for a while but it didn't take long to find out she was very wrong. The song was coming to an end and time seemed to go slower, soon some parts of the clip started to become frozen, items frozen in the air. Rosie understood it was time to leave and clicked the pause button. Would it work?, she had waited till the last moment to try, her legs started getting heavy. She saw her reflection on the iPod screen and felt herself being pulled in, into her room where the computer was still open.

After that experience she had tried a few more songs, always cheerful ones, not wanting to get trapped inside because of a ghost. Now she was in a Nightwish song, it

wasn't her favorite band or anything, her friend Amaranth had made her listen to them. Others might have even thought that she was a wannabe but that didn't matter, maybe I should get salad for lunch at school monday, Amaranth never gets salad, Amaranth wasn't really the kind of friend you could always count on to be with you.

Back in the Nightwish song she didn't know if the iPod was creating what she imagined about the song or if it already had a set image for every song. Every song ever written?, she thought, what happens when a new song is written? Rosie got out long before the song ended and marched up to her computer. Pausing to finish her homework, Olivia started looking for her computer. Rosie clicked pause long before the song ended and marched up to her computer. She had gotten a great idea, she opened Quicktime and recorded her own song saying random words in a melody close to a Taylor Swift song. She exported it into the device and clicked play, she half hoped it wouldn't work, what if she got stuck inside?

She closed her eyes and opened them to find herself in a dream world just like the ones she saw when she slept at night. The ones she couldn't remember when she

woke up, just like now. She was trying to remember what she had seen in the recording but could only gather pieces of colorful images in her mind. Rosie wanted to remember, wanted to understand what had happened but she didn't have time to try again, Olivia couldn't wait until tonight.

Was there someone with her? Would someone knock the door or grab her arm as she was going in another song? No, she had a better idea after breakfast. She scrolled down to find Gold and clicked play, she saw everything she touched become shiny metal. She saw the band again, all off them together behind the glass of the recording studio. She saw the band again, all off them together behind the glass of the recording studio, laughing, laughing at her. Rosie couldn't touch them, but she didn't need to, her dream had started coming back to her. The singers in all the songs she had went into yesterday had came to haunt her, they were angry at her because she had paused all of them while coming out, now they were forever stuck in the music. They were angry at her but that was just a dream, one that reflected into the songs, but what had happened in Gold was even more terrifying, the iPod had also turned into gold.

Now the song was coming to an end and Rosie would soon be stuck in it forever. She was trying to click pause but the keys were frozen, she tried running away from the setting of the song but couldn't get anywhere. Her legs were stuck on the ground and her eyes and fingers were the only things moving. Her body was already numb and she could feel her chest tightening, her lungs weren't able grow with the inhaling of oxygen. Soon there was no blood left circling her body, and her brain shut down. That was the end of Rosie, the police came and find her body on the ground, they couldn't determine how she died, at least what happened first.

They took her away as Olivia clicked the imaginary stop button in her mind, not the pause button with 2 lines but the square one, she didn't want to see anymore of her. This story had lasted 2 days, 2 real days and one night for dreaming, though it had only been one afternoon for Rosie. Olivia opened her notebook and recorded this story, it hadn't made much sense and wasn't a very creative one, she would probably soon forget.



## Part II

It was Monday, Olivia walked to school. She was entering the main building when she saw Jessica coming from the other side and waved back. She went upstairs to her classroom and sat beside Kyle who was apparently very popular in the social media world, she kept dinging and it was slowly getting annoying. “Can you pass me Cal?” she asked Jessie, she slowly reached to the bottom of the screen and pulled out Cal. Olivia saw that she had writing class next, she would need to work on her story. Too bad Mabel was very tired, she needed her through the whole day. She wondered if Bob had a charger, he opened his mouth and she pulled out one. She connected one side to Jessie and the other to Otis who always looked sad for some reason.

Olivia looked outside the classroom and saw Connor sitting in his. He had opened Lynx and was playing a game on the internet before the teacher came.

Olivia sat back down, this time beside Jessie, and asked “Is Natalie feeling better today, can she come?”.

“She should be better, but you can never be sure while using Lynx”, Jessie reminded her of what had happened last time, “Eve-

rything had disappeared, that was a disaster”.

Olivia knew Lynx couldn't be trusted, that's why she needed Natalie to remind her to have salad with Kyle today instead of hanging out with her, Lynx could have lunch with Connor today, and...

“Wait, I don't understand this story” Abby told Claire pausing their game. “What don't you understand?” Claire asked. Abby hadn't understood anything and wanted Claire to explain the characters.

Claire started “Well, Lynx is the Internet, Jessie is the Mouse, Kyle is Whatsapp and Mabel is the computer itself. So some characters in this story are computer parts that have come to life and some are computer users like Olivia and Connor”, they continued playing.

Lynx could have lunch with Connor today, and everyone else in the world that used her in their classrooms.

“Lynx may cause problems from time to time, but it's not her fault” Connor remarked, he was standing right outside the entrance, “It is Uriah you should beware, one step in the classroom and it will take over forever, like a more disgusting version

of MacKeeper, it hides and devours from the inside”.

One step?, Uriah had come so close before, sitting in her seat. She had quickly replaced it with a new one but it showed how far it could go.

It was soon almost the end of the day, Olivia picked up Mabel and took her to the lab for science class. They were going to film the rap battle they had been working on. She got Jessie to bring Tiffany, found the rap beat and clicked pause immediately to wait for the rest of the group.

“Claire, it’s almost time for Abby to leave” Claire’s mother was calling to her from the living room. “Okay, give us a few more minutes...”.

Arthur took the last pieces of green paper from the table and stuck in on the whiteboard to make the greenscreen for the background of the video. Olivia glanced at the clock, they didn’t have much time left before the bell rang. Their group was the last to go, the teacher told them to hurry up and picked out one of the iPads to begin the filming. Just as they were starting, the bell rang and people started coming out of the classrooms. One of her teammates quickly closed the door and as she was giving the final instructions to Da Vinci

and Alan Turing, Uriah, who happened to be near her classroom of people, set his finger on Jessie and clicked play.

At that moment everything seemed to go quite, Olivia couldn’t hear the rap beat or see the teacher filming with the iPad anymore, everything was dark except her, Uriah and her classroom. She was scared of what would come next, Connor had warned her and now this virus had infected her computer, just one touch was enough.

Abby listened Claire attentively as she kept on narrating, “Jessie was the first to drown, suffocating in disgust as the infection spread from the spot Uriah had touched, through the surface of Mabel, leaving no place undevoured”.

The ones at the bottom of the screen were next, they easily crumbled into ash in the hands of this strong, intoxicating monster. Soon there was no one left except Olivia, crying because she didn’t have an antivirus program she could install with her at school. The fall of Mabel was remembered and written in History as the loss of one of the most important...

Abby’s mother was waiting outside the door, “Come on, it’s time to go, Claire has to go to ballet anyway”, she said laughing

in that way mothers do, at their childish imagination gone wild with a few dolls and a laptop. Claire glanced one last time at Olivia before stopping the game and seeing all her characters die.

### Part III

Claire was 10 years old, she lived in Lexington, South Carolina with her family and she loved to dance. She wanted to open her own dance school when she grew up, but for now, she was stuck going to school every morning and to Ballet Class only on weekends. She was trying to convince her mom to also sign her up for Jazz, her mom was having a hard time since it was on Thursday, who would take her there after school?

After Abby, her best friend since kindergarten left, she got dressed for the class starting on 5 o'clock. She had had lunch with Abby so she didn't have to wait for her mom to prepare her some snacks before they left. Yet she was anxious to go, her mom was taking way too long to get ready, they were going to be late.

Claire always had to wait for her mom whenever they went out, this usually resulted in them having to panic in the car

and try to go faster, once they had entered a shopping mall parking lot to hide from the police since they had past the speed limit, and again she had been late.

She checked the iPhone sitting on her mom's drawers to see what time it was, she guessed they didn't have much time left until 4 and the road would take at least an hour. Pause. Play. Finally her mom came, she grabbed her bag and together, they walked to the car. Claire opened the door to the backseat and threw her bag inside before getting in herself. Her mom handed her the blue handbag to carry while she was driving and pulled out from the garage into the driveway.

As Claire was checking her mom's iPhone again to see if she would make it in time today, someone called and she slid the lock screen open. She had recognized the name as her aunt who lived in Chicago, she was probably calling to ask their christmas plans. Pause. Play. Her mom reached out her hand to grab the phone, stopping at the red light right before the bridge that linked Lexington and Irmo together.

She was driving slowly across the bridge, "Yes, the kids can stay at home by themselves and we'll go out", Claire thought it

wouldn't take them too long after this to get to the small mall where the dance classes took place.

They soon reached the end of the bridge and Claire started to wear her coat and gather her stuff. She didn't notice the black dressed woman watching them but she saw the black sign with the same design as the owner's shirt, pointing to the small, one floor building behind the mall. Her mom stopped the car and they got out, it was 4:56 pm, Claire was happy they got there in time.

This isn't right, the woman thought as Claire started talking to her friends, I won't go back as a failure and risk losing the appreciation of my mentors, no one ever tells me anything now, but soon... Pause. Rewind. Play.

She was driving slowly across the bridge, "Yes, the kids can stay at home by themselves and we'll go out", Claire thought it wouldn't take them too long after this to get to the small mall where the dance classes took place.

Right at the end of the bridge, a young woman with a black car got out of her lane and came speeding towards them. Claire was thrown forward and her chest pressed against the driver's seat, her mother had

hit the breaks but it was too late. First her ribs got crunched and she started crying from the pain, she couldn't feel it but her skull had also cracked. She looked at her mother for help but saw that she had fainted and was suffocating from the air-bag her head had fallen on. Claire fell back to her seat, passing out and soon dying before anyone even noticed the car crashed.

The young woman got out from the black car, smiling with content, she was wearing a black coat like in the Matrix and metal rings with shiny gems. Her name was Jo, Jo grabbed a rifle from the back of the car and walked towards the family's large white car. She opened the front door first, the woman wasn't dead so Jo killed her with a single shot to her head. She went to the back door next, the girl was what she'd wanted all along, she pulled out a hancher and started cutting her open.

No blood came, just like her mentors had said, the girl wasn't human. She cut through the skin until she hit the metal cage protecting the battery, then she carried the young girl to her car and drove away. Finding this girl had been her mission, one they had thought was impossible, but achieving it didn't earn her anything. Jo's reputation as untrustable

wouldn't change, it was too late for that.  
Stop.

#### Part IV

Princess Soon-To-Be-Queen Nebula woke up inside her cozy bed and jumped up to go to the library, she had dreamt of another world, another universe, and not just one. She was anxious to learn the rest of their stories but she didn't know how. "Good morning Your Highness.", Joanna, the Duchess of the North greeted her, Nebula didn't even notice and pushed her aside. By now, Joanna had learned not to bother thinking about the young girl's rudenesses.

Why she was rushing to get to the library? Because she wanted to speak to her teacher. Princess Nebula was the only Princess in the 5 kingdoms that had control over the Skies instead of the Earth, and the only person they thought could teach her anything was The Hatter, a Half-Prince that had ran away to study star formations and planets instead. The Hatter spent most of his time in the library with the books written by the older civilizations that had found the magic the royalty now used, sometimes he wrote his own books.

Nebula walked past the guards and pushed the large oak door, her teacher was sitting inside mapping out a new constellation to hang in his bedroom.

"I had a dream, I had a dream of another place!", she said rushing to his side, "Please, I want to see it again, I want to learn the rest of their stories".

The Hatter looked up at her for a moment then grabbed her hand and dragged her out of the library and out to the castle's garden.

The Princess saw something glitter in his hand, he spoke in a low voice "If your dream is one of a different universe, then it must have had a linker, someone that links the dream into this world. Did you see anyone familiar in it?".

"Joanna, at the end Jo killed..." she was responding when he cut her off saying he didn't want to hear it and asked her to bring The Duchess.

The Hatter calculated the star shapes and positioned Joanna right under Leo, he also sprinkled some of the glittery substance on her hair. Duchess seemed bothered that she was not being told anything, but remained still following Nebula's or-

ders. Finally when the sun's position was right, the young girl casted a spell.

After Joanna finally stopped asking questions and went to lunch, they came up with a plan. The Hatter had watched her dream and said that this was a sign, The Duchess wanted to kill the Queen and her daughter.

That night Nebula went to Joanna's room with a sword she had borrowed from her great-grandfather's collection, she slid past the guards and opened the curtains so the moonlight could come in. She cut Jo's head off with a quick slice first, before she could get a chance to scream and then started cutting through her skin just like she had seen her do in the dream. The Hatter was right, no blood came out. The young girl continued to cut until she heard the sharp sound of metal hitting metal, she pulled out the sword and put her hand in instead. She was trying to find the battery that powered The Duchess, she was told it was dark magic, she was going to ask Princess Lava, her youngest sister, to destroy it.

The next morning Princess Nebula was found dead in her bed, they lifted her body and put it in a coffin so they could take it to the family mausoleum, but her soul was in a different place. Last night she had fi-

nally found the battery and as soon as she had touched it, she had drifted out of her Princess body that kept her magical powers, to the stars, passing through all the planets and to the end of this universe. She hadn't ever known The Hatter too much, but the first thing she'd thought had been that he had tricked her. How had her family decided to trust this runaway Half-Prince that caused her death, she couldn't find the answer.

Eventually she had reached darkness, pure darkness and nothing else. She had come to a place with no right and no wrong, no happiness or sadness, no hunger but no satisfaction, a place where gods lived and planned the destiny of the little creatures living under them.

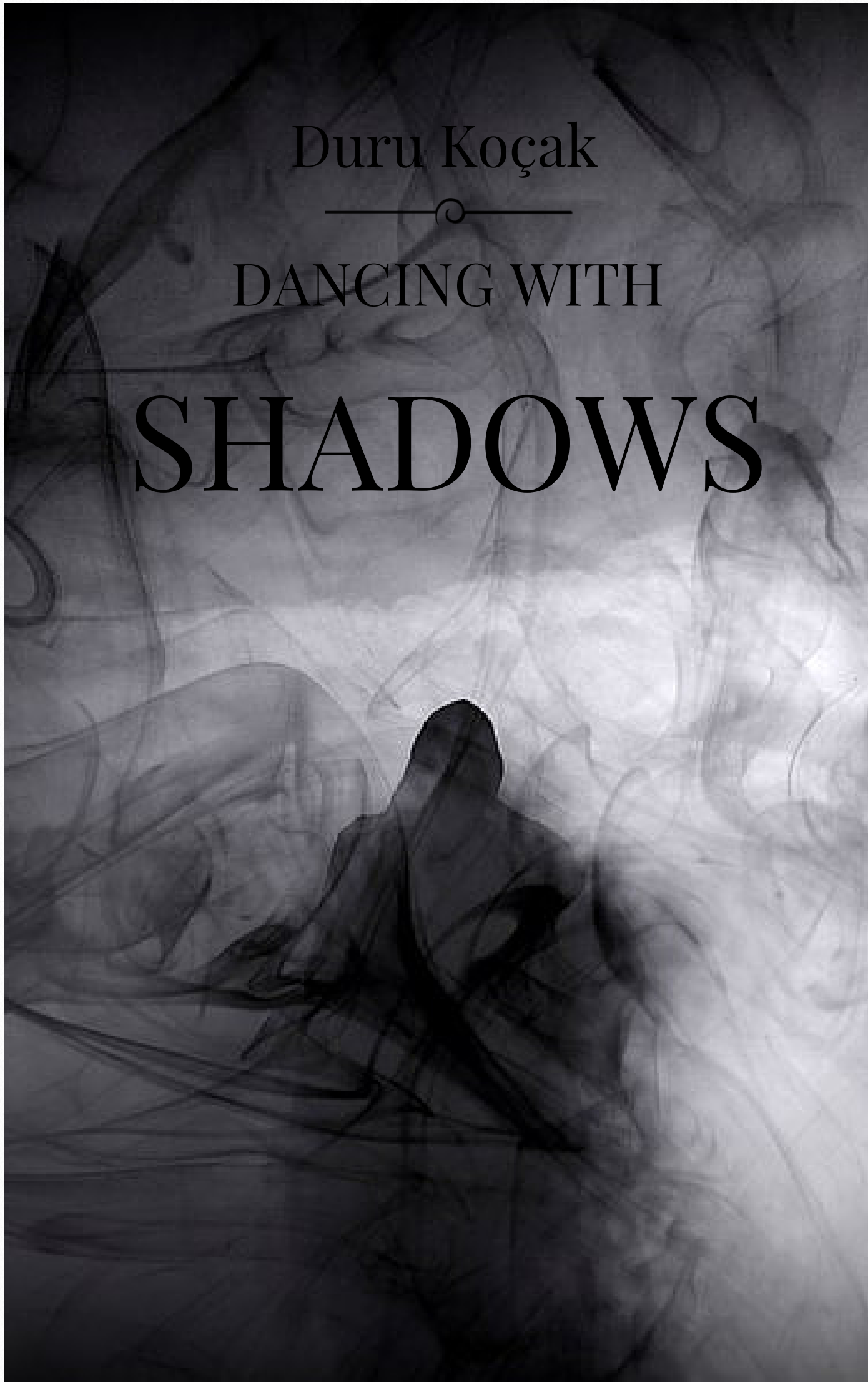
Nebula learned more from these gods than she could ever on Earth and she even created her own universe. Her little dwellers, she called them Imagineers, had been the first to be born on this world. The first was Claire and then Abby, later Olivia and Jessie. Rosie was the last Imagineer to be created by Nebula other than The Wisher. The Queen of the Imagineers had created, or perhaps called from Earth, The Wisher to look after her people in her absence. She wasn't sure how much The Wisher could be trusted but he had shown her the

way here, to her dream. Yes, she had thought The Hatter had tricked her but actually it was him who lead her to the place where she could learn the rest of the story, just like she had wanted.

As her world grew and her Imagineers became old, Nebula became immortal, she watched The Duchess sometimes, the young girl had thought Joanna had been an important character, but now she seemed merely human. Joanna hadn't died that night, she wasn't even injured in the morning, spending long time in the end of the universes had made her realise that. The soon-to-be-Queen Princess had eventually become a Queen, one that sat in darkness for the rest of Eternity. Stop.

# Dancing With Shadows

by Emine Duru Kocak





## Prologue

Believe it or not, humans are very similar to apples. You will realize that after living about a couple of centuries. They both stay healthy if they are in (or on for an apple) their mother's embrace. However, if they fall or get separated they will start to rot slowly. Some are thrown to the ground and left there with a bruise, some are sitting on the table waiting for their death and some are eaten. You see, apples and humans always end up the same; dead, though humans are more entertaining than apples. They roam around the streets, thinking they know and see everything but they are blind. For an example, let's talk about the blond woman sitting on the bench 10 meters away from me. She knows it's minus five degrees outside and it's snowing. She knows it's winter, her house needs wood and she needs money to make her children happy. But she doesn't know how beautiful snow looks like when you lie down and watch it just for five minutes. She doesn't know how much her children loves her and wish to spend a little more time with her. She doesn't see death nearing her or the shadows dancing around. Well, I'm glad I see them; I like shadows more than humans. First thing you should know about them is they don't die, they just change their shape and find

another human or object to follow if their former one dies. Even though they are cold and black, they are actually really fun to be with. They are the most silly and hyperactive creatures you can find these days. Even though they look a bit scary with their black eyes that reads your soul and intangible body that leans towards you and looks like it will possess you, they're cute and harmless. Well, for me at least, it's been awhile since I got scared of something. You see, I've been living for a long time, way longer than I should. Lots of things lost their meanings to me. I already experienced everything that's pleasurable and always end up hurt because nothing good can last forever. Everyone dies, everything changes but people like me stay the same. You can say I stopped interacting with people, I got hurt way too many times to do so but I'm bored. Living is boring and I have to do something about it, seriously I'm going crazy. Maybe that's the reason I'm writing this story-diary-journal thing. I can feel it things are about to change, I'm about to change. For good or bad, we just have to wait and see.

## Chapter One

I woke up in my big fluffy bed like every morning and did my business in the bathroom. Walked back to my room, changed into a comfy outfit and ate the food Samantha made me. I know, I know you thought I don't interact with people right? Well, Samantha is a shadow, specifically my house's shadow. She looks after the house and makes me dinner as long as I keep her entertained. She's old, as old as a shadow can get. You can understand that from her color, she's greyer than most of the shadows. She doesn't talk, generally listen and nods once in awhile to show that she's listening. I would prefer if she speaks though, I don't like looking at people's eyes. But today I have to meet with an old friend. I should be there in about fifteen minutes. Oops I'm going to be late again. Well who cares, I have all the time in the world. I wonder if I should change my outfit, the sun is shining but it's still a bit cold since we are in spring. The flowers already start to bloom and the streets have a faint smell of them though it's not recognisable because of cars and all the factories. It was better in the old days, everywhere was filled with the sweet smell of flowers. The wind would make you feel calm and bring you happiness. Now the only thing wind brings is dust. Humans managed to dirty the wind. I really hate humans sometimes. Especially the way they look at me

when I walk past them. They always stop and stare. So what if I have emerald green eyes and black hair all the way down my back, I won't eat them. They should go and mind their own business. Their lives are too short to care about unimportant things. Just ten more minutes, you can do this they are just stupid humans. I was about to start running when an old man came.

"Honey, are you okay? You look like you're going to faint in a minute." he said with a scrubby voice. He was about seventy years old. He was wearing old clothes probably as old as he is. Death was nearing him, he would be dead in a few weeks. I shouldn't talk to him, maybe he will go away if I don't answer.

"Hey, kiddo. Is something wrong?" he asked wide eyed as if he was scared of something happening to me. We just met old man, I was just thinking. Why aren't you going away?

"I'm okay" I mumbled, walking fast towards my way. He was about to say something when I start running to my friends house.

His house was easy to find, it was big and colorful. Well, too colorful for my liking. Even though he's my only human

friend, we are complete opposites. He liked big and shiny things while I go with small and meaningful. For example; I like cupcakes, he likes big cakes. Not like he can eat them now. He should be too old to eat cakes. How old is he now? Sixty, Seventy maybe eighty? I'm losing track of time maybe I sh—

“You're late again.” Definitely sixty; wrinkled skin, tired eyes, white hair. At least he's still fit though, he still has that deep voice and serious face.

“It's been awhile Justin.” I said. His eyes soften and a small smile tucked his lips.

“Indeed it has Aurora.”

## Chapter Two

“So, you're basically telling me to help Shadow Hunters to capture evil shadows.”

“Uh-huh.”

“And I have to go to London, to Hunters main base.”

“Uh-huh.”

“And there's a possibility that they might want to dissect me and cut me to pieces.

“Uhh-Huhh”

“Say that again and I'll punch you right in the face.”

Justin and I have been sitting in a desk for two hours straight. He told me about the Shadow Hunters and how some shadows are causing trouble. Shadow Hunters are people who have special abilities to see shadows and know how to exterminate them. Since I am immortal and shadows have a twisted connection to that they might see me as a treat. So I have to go there disguised as a Shadow Hunter, help them and disappear as fast as I can.

“It's no big deal, I know you can do it”

Justin stared at me with a knowing smile. He knows I don't want to do it but will do it anyway and it seems like he's having quite a pleasant time seeing me struggle.

“The problem is not if I can do it or not, the problem is why do I have to help people I don't know kill the creatures I like.”

“Because you owe me.”

“I already paid you back.”

“No, you didn't.”

“Yes, I did.”

“NO YOU DIDN’T.”

“YES I DI—”

“WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE!!!”

Justin and I both whipped our heads to the direction of the voice. There was a middle-aged man with three boys and they were staring at us weirdly. Well, what would you do if you see a sixty years old man and a seventeen years old girl arguing like a five years old?

“Hahahaha, I better get going it’s lunch time already.” I sat up and tried sprinting to the door. I highlight tried because I was tackled to the ground before I can even reach to the door.

“Oh no! You’re not going anywhere honey. I don’t think we finished talking. Now meet the vice president of the Hunters school you’ll be going, don’t be shy sweetie say hi.” Ahh, amazing now they are looking at us like we’re some interesting new creature and they want to observe us. I don’t know if you remember but I really don’t like being observed/looked/talked by other people. So this situation doesn’t fit me and Justin is well aware of that. He’s grinning like the cheshire cat.

“Get off me, old man.” I gritted. I was hiding my face with my hair, struggling and try-

ing to get away. And you know what he did? He winked at me with a smirk on his lips.

I was about to throw a fit when the middle aged man spoke, “I was expecting someone more erhh... mature when you told me she’s really talented Justin.”

“I don’t remember saying anything about age Robert, but I can guarantee that she will be a good girl and help you out. Now why don’t you introduce yourself and the three young-men there to my dear Aurora.”

“I think you killed her, Mr.Justin.” said the guy in the middle. He seemed pretty chill with that lazy smile and soft eyes. I thought Shadow Hunters were tough and serious guys. Anyways, none of them really seem like Shadow Hunters, they were in normal clothes and they look just like everybody else in the street. Oohh they’re undercover. Cool.

“You have pretty eyes.” the guy-in-the-middle spoke again. I quickly hide my face, I must have raised my head while observing them. Maybe Justin will get up if I act like I’m dead and I can escape. Yeah, I’ll do that.

“What is she doing?” someone whispered.

“Do you think she really died?”

“I think-”

“Cut the act Aurora.” Why is Justin doing this to me?

“Will you get up?” I said, my voice just above a whisper.

“No.”

“Why not?” I was getting angry, maybe I should just throw him to the wall.

“Because I want you to talk to them honey. Why don’t you try that.”

“Because.”

“That’s not an answer.” Everyone was watching us with an amused look, laughing a little.

“You know, I would have agreed with you by now if you didn’t bring them here.” I murmured.

Justin bent down and whispered, “I know you would have but then you would just help them and get back to your life. I want you to be happy and currently you are not baby girl, just listen to me.” and then he got up and left the room.

Justin was my fatherly figure ever since he found me in a club drinking my sorrows away. He took care of me, well I was furious when I realized someone kidnapped me. I was not the same person back then; I was uncontrollable, wild and I had anger management issues. Even though I was like that he kept me in his house and made me a better person. No matter what I say and do, I can never pay him back.

I got up keeping my head down. They were waiting for me to start running. Well, I cannot do that after what Justin told me.

“So how are we doing this?”

### Chapter Three

The flight to London was long and it felt even longer when the guy-in-the-middle was talking nonstop. Apparently he likes sitting in the middle so he can communicate with both sides and his name is Jasper but he likes to be called Jas. He also likes chocolate chip cookies, friends, cartoons, knives and his family. The reason it felt painfully long was because these are the things that I learned at the first five minutes of the ride. He managed to tell me about his whole life and his friends’ life before the other guy who is Clayton finally re-

alized how painful it is for me and shut him up. Jas really reminds me of Casper the friendly ghost. He is goofy and talkative, like really talkative. But Clayton was way better than Jasper, he even apologized me for the way Jas is acting. He is calmer and quieter than Jas and he is definitely the bookworm of the group. On the other hand William (the other guy) is like the mixture of them, he is not as friendly as Jas but he is not as quiet as Clayton. He just flirts with everyone and always wears that smirk on his lips. I can't help but feel like he's faking that I'm the cool, tough guy act. They are fit, well what do you expect? They train every single day. And they think I will do that too. Hah, I will castrate them if they wake me up at six o'clock. Currently I'm in good terms with the group. I already told them that if they stare at me too long or start acting weird, I will leave the place/room/environment. They also agreed on not forcing me to do stuff so I don't really have a problem with them. But, Mr. Shelton the vice president of the school expect me to be on time everyday and get passing grades from my teachers at least for two months before I can help them. I also have to get my teacher's permission at the end to join any mission. That is just so stupid that I don't know what to say. I know shadows more than anyone, I know history more than anyone, I probably fought more

than anyone there and I am older than everyone. Well if there are no other people like me. I wonder if there are. Sometimes I think about it but never really put my plans to action because I have to learn about a person to know if they are immortal or not and learning about them contains me being familiar with them. And being familiar with people only hurts me so, it's a big NO NO. This is not the issues right now, I can manipulate shadow and make them do things. Why can't I just go and fix everything. Maybe it's because Justin don't want me to loose control again and attack random people. Yeah, I did that. I told you I am not the same person I was. But still I sometimes feel like my memories are too much for me to handle. It's funny how they expect so much emotion to fit a seventeen years old body.

"Aurora. Aurora. Hey, Aurora HEY!"

"What the fudge are you shouting for Jas."

"I have been calling your name for five minutes Rori, you're spacing out a lot."

"That's just your effect on me. And who give you the permission to call me Rori."

"Jeez. Calm down woman, I just wanted to tell you we'll be landing in 5,4,3,2,1. And here we are."

“Whatev-” Clouds. They were everywhere. We were in late spring so the clouds were white as cotton. They were magnificent, every one of them looked different from each other. Do you know that an old myth says that clouds are the people who have died and came back to give advice to their loved ones. I sometimes see my loved ones there, the clouds remind me that they are still with me, it makes me feel safe. But the clouds also remind me of my pain and my inability to go to them. So I only like the Cumulus, the white clouds we see everyday. The rain clouds makes me feel like they are my loved ones that’s grieving after me and throwing their anger up. That was a part of the reason why I don’t want to come here. They told me it rained a lot. I wonder why.

## Chapter Four

“Clayton, tell me about it.” I demanded.

“About what?” That’s the final straw. Why is no one taking me seriously? Even though I hate being in the spotlight. I hate being ignored too, in some situations. This is ENOUGH.

“Dude! I have been asking questions about Landon to these goofs for about fifteen

minutes now and I couldn’t even get a single acceptable answer from them. Mr. Shelton is talking with a phone. Apparently his business is more important than me so he is unable to respond. Can you Oh The Divine Clayton tell me a bit about London? I am superfluously sorry to take your time to ask such disgraceful question.” I was breathless at the end of my rant. I had talked non-stop, swinging my arms around crazily trying to show him my point. And it seems like he’s not the only one who got my point. The whole airport is staring at me, wide eyed. Probably half of it is wondering if I have a mental disorder or if they should keep their children away from me.

“OH MY GOD, I didn’t think you had that in you Rori. That’s like the longest thing you ever said to us.” Jas exclaimed. Jumping up and down, grinning like crazy. Will was still in shock from my outburst standing there mouth wide open. Clayton had dropped his books and he was blinking his eyes rapidly to see if I’m real or not. Even Mr. Shelton had stopped and cursed once at the end of it. Well, I’m pretty sure people will keep their children away from us after the group’s reaction. Oh, the situation is not awkward or anything. Everyone is just staring at me openly and people are acting weird. You hear that? That’s my cue to leave.

“I’ll figure it out myself. See you later!” I rushed to the entrance, blushing madly with my bag crashing to people as I run. I got out of the airport and start running around the streets. I could hear Will’s and Jas’ screams from where I was but I was so embarrassed that I just couldn’t stop running. Just when I turned right, I crashed into something and closed my eyes as I hit the ground.

“Ouch that hurts.” Why am I so clumsy, did I bump into a wall? No, it can’t be the wall is two meters away from me. It’s impossible for me to bounce back that much. Am I fat? No, I’m not bouncy neither. So what, ohh a shadow. A really big one. He’s gray, which means he is really old, he is almost unrecognizable since the sun is long gone and his building is as grey as he is.

“I’m sorry I didn’t mean to bump into you. I couldn’t see you since it’s dark and all. Yeah, haha.” Awkward. Just as I got out of an awkward situation, a new one has to come right? He is staring at my eyes like he wants to memorise them. Is that weird or is it something that British shadows do? No there’s something wrong with him, he seemed... he seemed lonely. I know it’s normal for humans to feel lonely but they are humans and they don’t understand the meaning of loneliness. Loneliness is when

you have no company or friend but you should realize that you’re the one who’s putting yourself in that I’m-all-alone-in-the-world situation when all you have to do is just go and say “hi” to someone and get over with it. Shadows live long, really long and they are never lonely because they know everything they should do to find a friend to themselves. This situation is rather odd because when I think about it, I never saw a shadow dancing around in here.

“What’s wrong with you? What’s wrong with everyone here?” I was starting to panic, what if this is something that will happen to all shadows adventually? They are my only friends, this can’t happen. They are not meant to be stuck with their object, they are meant to have fun.

“Who did this to you guys?” My voice cracked at the end of the sentence. Tears were streaming down my face when I think about living without my shadows. They are all I got, they are the ones that keep me connected to the world.

“It’s not your fault child” he whispered. His voice came out fragile and raspy like he didn’t talk for years. But somehow I could feel the smile in his face like he finally



found peace. I could feel his body relaxing a bit when I move closer to him.

“Why aren’t you moving?” I asked when I realized he hasn’t moved since I bumped into him. The shadows are active creatures they should move a lot.

“Because I can’t, I’m stuck to this house since the Hunters, claim the territory.” Why would they do that? Justin told me Hunter’s were doing something good. That’s why I’m here, to help them do something good. But keeping shadows chained to their object that is complete torture for people like me and shadows like them. No wonder why’s everyone so silent.

“I’m so sorry.” I moved closer to him. My hand was about to touch him when Will turned the corner and screamed “Don’t touch him!”

“I’m so sorry.” the whisper of the shadow was the last thing I heard before I was pulled into the darkness.

## Chapter Five

Chattering, footsteps, jingling of the cutlery. Making small talk with people once in awhile and always keeping a smile on the face. These are the things I’m way too fa-

miliar with. Trying to breathe with the tight corset and fluffy dresses. Always acting lady like and knowing how to dance. Always having makeup on, smelling good. Stand straight, chin up and walk gracefully.

“How are you doing my dear Aurora?” he asked with a soft and sweet tone. We were standing at the balcony of the ballroom. It was afternoon and sun was about to set. The wind was blowing softly and our clothes were moving slightly from it as I turned around with a smile to see him.

“Just admiring the scenery, my Lord. All the chattering becomes a nuisance after a while.” He smiled at me, his warm brown eyes twinkling with love.

“Indeed, it does. So would you like to have a dance with me?” he asked. Making my smile disappeared when realization dawned on me.

“It’s my pleasure, love.” I whispered with tears in my eyes. He can’t be real right? He died years ago. My dear Francis. If I can just stay a bit longer... But the pain is too much, my heart hurts.

“Shhhhh.” His arms wrapped around me as I fell to the ground. Tears were blurring my eyes, I whispered over and over again,

“Francis, Francis, Francis...”

“She’s crying.”

“Is she in pain?”

“Who the heck is Francis?”

“Who the heck is she?”

“Shut up Angelo.”

“Stop screaming you baboons.”

“You’re screaming too and who are you calling baboons.”

“UGH!” I opened my eyes and glared at Jas who was basically yelling in my ear. I took a deep breath and try to calm down.

“What happened to me?”

“Oh not much, I just saved you from a shadow that was about to possess you.” Will said sarcastically. Clayton was giving me a pointed look which was making me feel guilty. Jas was murmuring a song not caring about the current event and the other guy with black hair and green eyes like mine, Angelo had a sly smirk on his face like he’s enjoying the show.

“Uh, well shadows can really possess huh?” thought out loud.

“What did you said?” I just shrugged and got up.

“What was wrong with him? What did you do? He was not acting like usual?”

“Aurora, did you hit your head somewhere? What are you talking about?” Clayton asked.

“The shadow.”

“That’s how all shadows act like, they act friendly and attack you when you’re distracted.” Angelo guy said. He was staring at me cautiously as if he’s sizing me up and trying to figure out if I’m a treat or not.

“May I ask you who you are?” I asked irritated. I didn’t believe that shadows can do such cruel things.

“I’m Angelo.” Haha, thank you Captain Obvious we didn’t know that at all. Maybe I should be polite.

“Pleasure to meet you.” Neither of us spoke for awhile. The silence was uncomfortable and the other guys were fidgeting because of the angry aura that was surrounding us. Angelo and I were both getting angry from the lack of speaking.

“You’re affecting the shadows.” He stated. He had a smug look on his face, like he figured the most important thing in the world. Well, whatever. I turned to the boys.

“Where is Mr. Shelton?” Shouldn’t he be taking care of me? But I guess if there’s shadows that are possessing people he shouldn’t be thinking about me. Even though I still believe shadows are good creatures, there was something wrong with him. The one I met today and all the other shadows that was there. They were in pain.

“He’s in the school, waiting for us. Let’s go people we’re already late.” Jas shouted. He took my hand and start dragging me towards the entrance.

“And we came to an agreement that we shouldn’t let you out of our eyesight so someone will accompany you to the places you want to go.” Jas said as fast as he can. I stopped dead in my tracks. What did he just say?

“What?” I shouted. It was not my fault that the shadows here were different than the ones I know.

“It was my idea so don’t blame them. Now shut up and keep on walking.” Angelo said his eyes never leaving mine. He was mak-

ing me feel uncomfortable and nervous. It was just like he knew I’m different than them.

“Okay, let’s go.”

## Chapter Six

We were in front of an old abandoned building that looked like it will fall apart any moment. The fence was rusty and the door was broken. The garden was filled with junk and trash, the paint was faded. It was not what I expected from the number one Hunter schools in the whole world.

“Wow, what an amazing school you have here.” sarcasm was evident in my tone. No one acknowledged me and they kept on walking towards the door. I followed them and we went inside. Dust filled my eyes and the smell of trash burned my nose. Without listening my complaining they walked to a door and Angelo did something weird with the handle. He mumbled something under his breath and opened the door. Chattering filled the whole house.

“Really amazing right?” Everyone was grinning like crazy.

Jas quickly ran inside the door and shouted, “WE ARE HOME!” People just ig-

nored him. We walked towards an office. The corridors were similar to ordinary schools. There were lockers at both sides. The lockers were twice as big as the usual ones, there were photos on the walls and everyone was wearing the same uniform. These were the things I noticed before walking into the office.

“Mrs. Chambers, your uniform and timetable is in this box with the books you will need this semester. You should be aware that you will be expelled if you are not on time to classes and keep your scores under B. You should not show any disrespect to your elders and any other students. Please try to keep up. Your mistakes will not be tolerated since you are not a Hunter in the first place. In any situation if you held your classmates back we will be informed immediately. So please refrain from any mistake. You will start your lessons tomorrow.”

That was when my journey to hell started.

“Run 15 laps around the field and complete the assignments.” I barely made it to the first class and started to run immediately. I had forgotten that I was in school and supposed to wake up when my alarm goes on so I had frantically thrown my uniform on and ran to class. Combat class.

We changed our uniforms which consists a black skirt, white shirt and a dark green sweater.

Running have never been my strength so I was about to die in my tenth lap. If you're wondering where we are and how did we find a field in a house, well I don't know. But I figured that all the classrooms in this house were bigger than they look. I didn't have time to meet with anyone or even introduce myself to class so when a girl, Valeri, came and talked to me while running I was delighted.

“Hey, you're the new student right? I'm Valeri.”

“Hi, I'm Aurora. Do you always run this much every class?” I asked breathlessly. I was too tired to be shy in front of anyone.

“Yeah, we do. But don't worry you'll get used to it. You will love this class after you listened Miss. Madeline's Shadow classes. That woman sucks the life out of anyone she meets.” She shivered while thinking about her. What could be so bad? I have known all kinds of people, I can handle her.

“So... is... there... anything I should... know? Any... tips?”

“Umm, you... should be friendly to the history teacher so you will pass and you should stay away from the first main hunter team. They are really busy but since the things are not going well outside they are super angry and irritated. So don't mess with them okay?” Duh. I'm not planning on messing with anyone this whole year.

“Hmm... Hmmm... Oh God, I'm dying”  
Last lap, you can do it. Go Rori go. Justin I'm going to kill you when I get back.

“So which classes you have after this?” I was currently surrounded by girls who had finally realized my presence. I had finished the laps and the assignments and was being questioned by complete strangers about my identity, family, reason why I'm here and all the useless things that they have nothing to do with. Since I started to feel alive again after that run, I was feeling awkward and shy. But at the end I was saved by Jas who barged into the room, grabbed me and walked out of the room like a boss.

“You okay Rori? You were pretty helpless back there.” He looked at me with a pitying smile.

“Yeah, those creatures attacked me from behind.” He barked a laugh, a humorous twinkle in his eyes.

“Really, you call teenage girls creatures?”

“No I didn't.” I said offended. “I called teenage girls who is acting like paparazzi and has way too many time in hand, creatures. The other's are just fine.”

“Oh, what happened to the shy girl fidgeting back there?” He asked nudging me with his elbow.

“I just feel comfortable with you.” He raised an eyebrow at what I said. When I gave him an indifferent look he said,

“Then I'm glad.” We walked in silence after that. Yesterday he told me he will find me and we will walk to the class together after we learned we had most of the classes together.

“So which class are we going again?”

“Shadow language, the shadows don't talk much but when they do they have their own language. I'll give you my notes, are you good with languages?” Well, I know more than ten so you could say that. But wait, shadows talk our language.

“You could say that, so shadows don’t talk our language?”

“They don’t communicate with us, some say they do but I don’t really believe that.”  
Oh, okay.

“Hey, would you mind, showing me around. I think we have free hour after this.”

“Oh yeah, let’s explore the house.”

“I thought you’ve been here for two years.”  
How can he not know where everything is?

“Yeah, I’ve been here for two years but this place is full of hidden passages, rooms and creepy things. This should be fun.” As he said this an evil smile overtake his face and made me doubt my decision.

“I don’t know how fun it will be but I feel like we will learn something interesting today.

## Chapter Seven

The first thing we did was to inform the other boys that we won’t be joining them in the library. Second of all we changed our uniforms and wore black. After that we met at the main hall.

“So we’re going to explore down stairs first. You should touch, pull or poke every suspicious thing you find. You should open every door you think looked interesting and you should never ever get caught. Even if you do just tell them you got lost. Are we clear? Yeah, let’s go.” Wow, he was really excited about this exploring thing.

We got out of the room that contains the whole school and went down stairs. Some stairs were broken and the walls were cracked.

“Don’t worry Rori, the house won’t fall apart. They design the house to look this way. And before you open any door you should say, ‘Pās mann sculan fore eale gielde’ okay?” What, why should we say that, and isn’t it in Old English?

“Wait, wait isn’t that in Old English? Gentleman will pay for everything, isn’t it something like that?”

“Yeah it is and you know Old English that’s good. You will be useful now we can read the writings on the walls. Now let’s hurry up.”

Jas and I walked around the places, touching the doors, statues, stomping on the floor. We even poked the ceiling once. That was when I felt something different. There

was this feeling that telling me to run away and never come back.

“Hey Jas, what’s behind that door.” I pointed the big door that’s the same color as the wall and basically inside the door. It was almost invisible, there was no handle and it was tightly closed.

“How the heck did you even realize there’s a door there, that’s really creepy. I walked past here more than thirty times and I never realized it.”

“Jas, go and touch it.”

“No I’m getting a bad vibe from it.”

“Me too.” We looked at each other, silently. We were debating if we should open it or not.

“Together?” I asked feeling nervous.

“Yeah.” Jas said gulping. We both stand outside the door and put our hands on it.

“We’re pushing in 3,2,1. Push.” We closed our eyes, pushed the door and mumbled.

“Pās mann sculan fore eale gielde.”

“Did it work?” I whispered to Jas, still keeping my eyes closed. It felt like someone was watching us and it was really scary.

“I don’t know, why don’t you look?”

“Aren’t you looking?”

“No my eyes are closed.” We were silent again, our hands still on the door and us leaning on it. It was then, we felt a presence behind us.

“What are you guys doing?” We jumped and turn around in a second to see Angelo staring at us with a frown.

“What are you guys doing standing like that? Are trying to push the wall away or something?”

“We were trying to open the door and see what’s inside.” Jas said. I facepalmed. You just sold us out, congratulations.

“What door are you talking about?” Jas and I turned around to see a wall. Not a door, a wall. WHAT? There was a door there five seconds ago.

“The classes are starting in 3 minutes, you guys better hurry.” He said as he walked away.

“What just happened?” I asked wide eyed.

“W-we will talk a-about this later okay? Let’s don’t be late.” Jas said with a shocked expression.

We went to different ways and agreed on not telling this to anyone. We will talk this after school. My other classes went pretty well. The history was easy, science was about making explosions to destroy shadows that was pretty fun too. We had gymnastics and some other weird class to heighten our senses. The man blindfolded us and told us to write things we heard, smelled and heard. After those we had assembly that talked about the things that happened this week. Apparently the fight between the Hunters and shadows are not going to well and the shadows are coming dangerously close to our school. The assembly finished with a warning to be careful and we were finally free.

“I think the door has something to do with Angelo.” After Jas and I went to the dorm section of the house (Yeah a room opens up to a big dorm), told boys that we will be going somewhere, got commented on how friendly we are to each other and found a silent place to talk. That was the first thing I said with a straight face.

“I don’t think it is, maybe we were hallucinating or something. The door cannot move, how can we not see it?”

“I don’t know Jas but I want to control it again. You can keep an eye on the corridor

and I can open it.” Why fudge did I even said that! I am scared myself.

“Okay.”

We went to the corridor and looked at the door.

“Jas can you see it?”

“Yes.”

“I’m opening.” He nodded and didn’t say anything.

“Hey Rori.” Just when I was about to push the door open he stopped me.

“You know I will run if someone pops out of there right?” I didn’t say anything and pushed the door open, murmuring the words. I heard a click sound and a strong, disgusting smell filled my nose. It was so strong that it burned my eyes and my throat.

“Rori are we going in?” He said with a hoarse tone.

“Yeah.” and then we stepped inside the door.

Chapter Eight



The inside was filled with books. But they were not ordinary books, there were old curse books. The ones that you use to curse someone. The room was also filled with doors. Jas and I walked slowly towards the center. We were wary of our surroundings and we were trying not to make any noise. There were a lot of things that we should do and not enough time for it.

“I think we should see what’s in here before opening another door.” Jas said. He was getting his confidence back. I don’t know why but the thought of not realizing that there’s a door and Angelo finding us really freaked him out.

“Yeah, let’s try to learn who’s doing what in here.” Oh man, what an amazing first day I’m having.

We started to look at books and try to find something that will show the identity. The books were all cursing books about shadows. They might show why I’m this way, immortal. Just when I was about to find the page of immortality in a book Jas said,

“We should probably head back to the dorms.”

“Yeah.” We walked out of the door as fast as we could and started to run towards the dorms.

“So, are we telling the boys about this?” Jas thought for a moment. Then he nodded his head with a serious expression.

“There’s something wrong with that room and the boys will help us find it out.” After that we said our goodbyes. I thought about that book all the way to my room. What if in one of the books it said something about my curse? I got into my room and immediately fell down from the mess I made. My room was pretty simple with light blue walls, a bed on the right side, some bookshelves on the left side, a desk between them and a garderobe beside the door. It would have looked great if my stuff wasn’t scattered all over the floor. I was sleeping halfway to bed after my night routine was done. I fell asleep after I hit the bed and thought ‘What a day’.

## Chapter Nine

“No, stop. No. No. Nooo.” My screams were filling the darkness as people looked at me with pitying eyes. My screams grew louder at the sight of Rose being dragged by unknown people. Her eyes were filled with terror and her whole body was shaking. Her dress was torn apart and tears were streaming down her beautiful blue eyes.

“Let go of her, she doesn’t have anything to do with this. Let go of her!.” My voice was frantic and it was getting louder every minute. It was all my fault, I should have left. They were going to realize I was not growing at the end. Why, WHY?

“A-aurora, help p-please. I’m scared.” Her voice was shaking and she was sobbing uncontrollably. It was all my fault.

“It’s not her fault please, please. She has nothing to do with me. LET GO OF HER!” Please... Please...

“You shall not speak witch. The truth will be known after the trial is over.”

“AURORA, PLEASE HELP ME!” No no, they had tied me up. And I couldn’t get out no matter how hard I struggle. They tied her up and then, and then they burned her up. Her screams were terrible, heartbreaking. My heart was beating painfully and you know why it was so painful? Because it was beating even though I was on fire. It was beating even though Rose’s heart had stopped, it was beating even though my flesh was burning. And it was painful because no matter what happens it was still beating.

I woke up covered with sweat again. It had been the twentieth time this month. Yeah, I’ve been here for a month. The classes have been easy, excluding combat. The Shadow classes were incredibly fun. Everyone assumed all shadows are evil and will possess you. The students were all thought wrong. The only thing that was hard was still waking up this early. Everything had been great this month except the door. The boys joined our little exploring game as well. We had waited for two weeks to see if anyone is entering or not but no one was going in. By the time we finally went in the book, the curse book I was looking was gone. We had gone through most of the other doors. They were all filled with different potions and weird machines that we didn’t understand. But there was this one door we skipped. It was the door everyone got away from. We all knew there was something there, but no one dare to open it. Today we planned to open that door. My dreams were caused from that place. We should hope for the best.

“You ready for tonight?” Will asked to me with a worried look.

“You look extremely pale today, Rori. You had a nightmare again?” I had told them that I was having nightmares. They tried to help, told me they would listen but when

your nightmares are actually your past there's not much to do.

"Yeah, I'm alright. Let's get over with it."

"I think we shouldn't do it today, I don't think we're done with the other room."

Clayton said while walking beside me.

"Stop being such a scaredy cat Clayton"

Jas jumped onto Clayton and tackled him to the ground. Will and I just looked at them and kept on walking.

"I really can't believe I got used to Jas' stupid moves." I giggled slightly. Will just laughed and gave me a heart warming smile.

"You ready? We're opening in 3,2,1. Push."

This had become our usual door opening sentence. Jas just shouts this end we all push the door with all we have. We waited for the familiar click sound but it never came. Instead of that a creaking sound filled the room. We looked at each other nervously.

"Did everyone bring their weapon?" Will whispered fidgeting around. Everyone nodded their head.

"Would it be weird to ask if we can hold hands?" I said. Blushing from embarrassment but begging them with my eyes. No one said a thing for awhile. We just stand there by the door and then Clayton slipped his hand in mine. Then Will did the same, for the first time he dropped his mask and looked genuinely scared. Jas who didn't have any hand to hold just held onto my shirt. We walked in with really small steps. We were somewhere like a dungeon. There were chains on the walls and tables beside them. The tables were filled with potions little machines, knives and weird things. The only thing I can say is they didn't look pleasant. We slowly walked inside, jumping every time we heard a noise and holding onto each other tighter. We stopped when we saw something move inside a cage.

"What is that thing?"

## Chapter Ten

There was a shadow in there. Her body was not in a good condition, she was chained to the wall, there was disturbing things on the table next to her. It was just like they tortured her and glued her into a wall. The book I saw the first day was

there, opened. I realized they had cursed her.

“What is that?” Clayton was shaking, no I was the one who’s shaking.

“Oh God, what have they done to her?” I was staring at her wide eyed. The boys were still in shock from what they saw when reality sank in I rushed to her and cling to the cage.

“Are you okay? Are you dead? What have they done to you? Can you hear me?”

“Aurora she won’t reply stop trying.” Will’s voice was shaky and was keeping his eyes to the ground like he’s ashamed of what a Shadow Hunter has done.

“H-hhelp...” shadow whimpered. The boys’ eyes snap to her direction and they widened when they realized she was looking at them.

“Just hold on, I’ll help you okay? Calm down everything will be fine. You just have to tell me who did this to you. Can you tell me about who did this to you?”

“H-he... I-I-looked... like you...” She was stuttering but her description was enough.

“Angelo.” Jas whispered. Everyone just stayed silent for a minute. Even though I

predicted this, having a close friend doing this is never easy. I signed,

“Let’s find a way to get you out.” And the moment I finished my sentence the alarm went on.

“All the students should stay in a room and lock the doors, we are under attack. I am repeating we are under attack.”

The shadow smiled after hearing this, “They have finally come.”

“Will close the door, Clayton open the radio and Aurora take care of the shadow, I will help Will to lock the place down.” Jas ordered. He had a serious face and he ignored the fact that we stared at him dumbfounded for a few seconds. But follow the orders anyway.

I took my knife out and started to cut the cage open. They told me the knife has acid at the edges so it will cut everything. It sure is coming handy today. I quickly went beside the shadow and told her that I will get her out. I was waiting for a ‘thank you’ or at least a smile but what I got, really shocked me.

“You are pathetic, you cannot even die but you still care about these mortal trash. How are you planning on destroying them

without being able to kill someone? Oh I know, you already killed right? You killed a whole army. How old are you now, 500, 600? You can't even get over your past to start living the future." I was frozen the whole time. I didn't know what to do, did the boys even heard what she said? How dare she said something like that? Who do you think she is? Thoughts were running through my head and I was getting angrier every second.

"What is that shadow talking about Aurora?" The boys were standing behind me and staring at me intensely.

"She didn't tell you right? How did I forget that?" She giggled to herself. She stared at the boys with a grin.

"She's immortal."

"STOP, TALKING SHADOW. WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?" I yelled. Venom was dripping down my words. She started to tremble after she heard me, serves her right.

"Aurora. What is she talking about?" Clayton said. The boys were doubting themselves and trying to figure out if the shadow said the truth.

"Aurora, why aren't you talking? Give us an answer." Will whispered, almost begging me with his eyes.

"I... I am n-not like you guys." I muttered, keeping my head down.

"Rori, how old are you?" Jas talked like he was in pain. All the boys were looking at me like I disappointed them and betrayed their trust.

"Around 600." I was staring at my shoes and fidgeting in my place. They didn't say anything for awhile. They were waiting for it to sink in.

"Why didn't you tell."

"Oh yeah, it's really easy to tell people you will live forever and can feel when they will die." I started to laugh after saying that. I was either going to cry or laugh and laughing is way easier than crying.

"Are yo-"

"It's not the time for us to talk about unimportant things like this. There's a battle going on and we have to free the shadow." They were going to hate me, I knew that. So if I can just get away before they directly tell me that.

“Why are they attacking the school?” I turned to the shadow and asked her with an emotionless face.

“They’re here to save me and stop you from using curses on us again. This fight is all your fault. We tried making peace with you but you never listened. Now you should pay for the shadows you stuck to objects.” She hissed. Her eyes were filled with hate.

“Did they used the curses in this book?” I picked the book up and sat down.

“Aurora what are you doing?” Will questioned.

“Finding a way to lifting the curse and thinking about a way to come to an agreement with shadows. You?”

“Let me help.” Clayton sat beside me and started to read over my shoulder.

“Rori, you know when I think about it, you being 600 years old makes sense. You know Old English right and you use weapons a different way than us. We shouldn’t forget the fact that you are awfully knowledgeable about history.” I didn’t even answered him.

“Clayton what does Shadow Hunters want from the shadows.” He thought for a minute and answered,

“They want them to stop possessing humans and they actually don’t want to see them anymore. You know seeing dark, scary things other people don’t is not pleasant.” I just nodded and kept on reading the book. We read the whole shadow curses part and there was nothing except ‘a great sacrifice should be made’. What does that even mean?

“I want to look at the immortal part.” I whispered, I knew Clayton heard me. He nodded softly and we started to read. Apparently I am the way I am because some shadow cursed me and my curse can be useful in some cases. I can sacrifice my curse to form a new one and remove one. After reading this a plan started to form in my head. I smiled softly,

“Let’s get out of here.”

## Chapter Eleven

“Why are we bringing the shadow with us?”

“Because shadows are here to save her.”

“This is stupid and how did you even remove her from the wall?”

“She was chained to the wall, I cut the chains and wrap them around my waist.”

“So how are we doing this?”

“We will just go and shout we will kill the shadow if everyone doesn’t stop.”

“What! That is the stupidest plan I’ve ever heard.”

“Jas if you have another plan please inform me.”

“Where is Will and Clay?”

“They want to capture Angelo.” Jas and I walked towards the screaming and running noises. The room was filled with shadows and other people I don’t know. They were throwing things at each other, slicing and kicking without knowing why.

“HEY, IF EVERYONE DOESN’T STOP THE GIRL AND THE BOY DIES!”

I pushed the shadow and Jas on their knees and held the knives beside their throats. The people who heard me stopped and stared.

“You shadows want the girl right? I have an offer to everyone here. Shadows want

to be free and the Shadow Hunters don’t want to see them anymore right? Well, I have a solution for that.” I stopped and breathed in and out. I just had to calm them down and make them believe me.

“I can make shadows stuck to the objects only in daylight and free them at night, this way Hunter’s won’t see them at daylight. Think about it and if you want me to meet me on the Kingston Bridge two days later at 2am.” I pulled Jas and the shadow girl on their feet and walked towards the door. I got out and found the vehicle Clayton and Will found us. We got on and pushed Jas and the shadow in. I muttered the words that will keep us unnoticed for awhile.

“AURORA, WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?” I rolled my eyes.

“Jas you’re overreacting, just shut up.” I stopped the car and got out. I was waiting for Clayton and Will to come with Angelo. Then I saw two figures with a black sack running towards our way, screaming ‘Start the car! Start the car!’. I quickly started the car and waited for them to get in.

“Go, go, GO, GO!”

They all squeezed into back seat and I started driving. I could see the nervous

look on Jas' face because he's pushed towards the shadow and Angelo's struggle inside the sack. I grinned.

"Well, that was a success." everyone looked at me with a are-you-kidding-me face and I just giggled.

"Let's find a hotel to stay."

## Chapter Twelve

It was the night of the meeting and I was super nervous. We had successfully reached the hotel and tied Angelo to a chair and the shadow to the wall. Angelo had thrown a tantrum and screamed as hard as he could before we taped her mouth. I had read the book twice and came to a conclusion that if a cut my arm and drop a bit of my blood onto the shadow and say something like 'the beat of my heart shall trap the dark with the light, and darkness shall rise when the light fades to the dark.' and then 'I sacrifice the eternal beat of my heart to help the mortal continue their life'. After that it should be enough to put shadows to objects.

"Hey Rori, be careful okay?" Clayton said. He had read the book with me and he knew something was going to happen.

I just gave him the brightest smile I can make when Jas said, "Let's live happily ever after, all together okay?"

"Yeah." I signed. Just thinking about how the things will end was enough to make my head hurt and heart to beat faster with pain.

"Happily ever after." I whispered.

We finally reached the bridge and waited for others to come. Angelo was with us and shadow girl was tied to Will's waist this time. The moon was shining and the water was reflecting the light. There were white clouds above us. I smiled as I thought

'I'm coming home, wait for me.'

The shadows started to come as the clock neared 2 am. We stand away from each other in silence. When the Hunter's came a shadow spoke.

"We have no intention to lose our friends to those Hunters."

And then a Hunter spoke, "We cannot trust such creatures to come out only at night-time and we cannot trust a worthless little girl like you to decide over important matters." What did he just said, just who does he think he is?



“Look buddy, I don’t know who you are but believe or not everyone is everyone. We’re all human or something similar to it. You’re just me with a different situation and a brain chemistry. So don’t act all high and mighty. Okay? I’m here to help you guys out. And if shadows want me to do it you have nothing to stop me, I’m just here to ask you stop hunting them and find yourselves normal lives.” After that I just stood behind the shadow girl and cut my waist open. I dropped some blood on her and said,

“The beat of my heart shall trap the dark with the light, and darkness shall rise when the light fades to the dark. I sacrifice the eternal beat of my heart to help the mortal continue their life” The wind blew and carried my voice to everyone. I felt like crying when the pain hit me hard. My heart was beating faster and faster but I wanted it to stop. I was seeing the memories of my life; the sad, happy, terrified, amazed, horrified, enthusiastic, smug, nostalgic, grieving times. My whole life was filled with memories of different centuries and people. I loved them all.

“AURORA!!!” The screams of the boys were ringing in my ears. I felt my heart slow down. I just smiled, probably the happiest smile I’ve ever had.

“I thought we were going to be happy forever. Don’t go Rori.” Jas was crying, even Will was crying. I just grinned at them.

“This is my happily ever after boys, dying is the best thing that will happen to me. Say goodbye to Justin for me okay. I will be the personal cloud of you guys.”

“What Aurora what are you talking about?” Clayton was looking at me, shaking a little. I was about to respond when the pain became too much to handle. The shadows started to scream as well. Our screams were ripping through the night. The difference was the shadows were getting clearer and recognisable while I was fading. The sounds were getting away every passing minute. The pain was still there but it didn’t affect me at all. The last thing I thought before I slipped into an eternal slumber was, ‘I guess you can say that humans are very similar to apple's, immortals are similar to apple trees and shadows, they are like the plastic apples you put in your kitchen for decoration. They don’t fade away just stay there. And apple trees, sometimes you have to cut them down to make other things from them.’

## Epilogue

The graveyard was empty, it was midnight and the shadows had finally come out. It

was their time to roam around the world and left their objects. They always try to have as much as fun they can have before sticking up to their objects again. But tonight it was different. If you looked close enough there were three men, surrounded by shadows. They were looking at a grave with nostalgic smiles in their faces. Their coats were protecting them from the chill air and the wind was talking to them. It was whispering them to look up and see the only cloud that's left in the sky. Things were going normal in their world, they had small problems left. They would have looked up if it was other wise. They always search for answers at sky when they don't know what to do. There were no more Hunters since there was nothing to hunt. The shadows had become the things everyone see but only some understand. That three men understood them. They wouldn't be here if they didn't. It was their day to mourn after a friend they lost. It was the time to remember an immortal friend, they didn't quite understand. So what did they do? They cried while looking at the cloud that was raining and washing away their tears. Even the shadows stopped dancing and listened to the heartbeat that kept them alive all these years.

# Janus the Conquerer

by Gokmen Utku Dinedurga



It has been almost a year since I woke up in an intensive care room in the NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center.

I remembered nothing. I didn't even know my name. The doctors said that my chance of living was under one percent, because of several shots to my body and one to my head. A human wouldn't be able to recover from wounds like that. At least that is what the doctors told me. But I didn't even care about me recovering in an inhuman speed.

I was at the hospital for three weeks before I fully recovered, and nobody came to claim me. I was just fourteen, a fourteen year old kid. And all the people that came for me were doctors and news reporters. I got out of the hospital, but I had nobody, absolutely nobody to stay with. And the doctor that was taking care of me took me in, Dr.Floyd.

He lived in a two-story house in Queens, NY. He had two daughters and a cool brother. He told me that he has lost his wife in a car accident a couple of years ago. It was hard enough for him to take care of two daughters by himself. But he took me in anyway. And treated me like I

was his own son. Her daughters; Natasha and Virginia were a little bit shy against me and doubtful that I should live with them. I mean, who wants a black kid that doesn't even know his name in their house. Natasha is a little bit older than me, she was seventeen at that time. Virginia and I are at the same age. And we have always been very close.

Virginia helped me find a name too. I wanted a name that is ordinary, which I'm not. An ordinary and original name that won't drag any attention. We decided on Jackson Ellis. I looked like an ordinary person too. 6'4 , muscular body, wide shoulders. Just like a high school basketball or football team star.

We went to get an ID card for me. They asked that how could I live without an ID card for this long. I told them I grew up on the streets. They had to register me to an orphanage for formality. Then immediately Dr.Floyd adopted me.

I started going to the same school as Virginia as soon as my ID card came out. I

was expected to be unsuccessful on every social and educational subject and fail every class. Because I was a kid who lived by himself on the streets until he was fourteen. At least they thought I was. I struggled at first, but after two or three months, I was the top student on every school subject I chose. I played exceptionally well in the school team although I have never played basketball before. I was a quick-learner I guess, or naturally talented. Most of the sophomore, junior and senior basketball players hated me though.

I avoided every fight and conflict I could, but one day, the team captain; Joffrey Jefferson had me pinned against the wall and had a couple of seniors behind him. I didn't even know why. he was jealous I guess. There was no chance of me getting away from them, I was cornered. There was two possible ways I could go; accepting the beatdown, or fighting them. So I made a huge mistake and chose the second way. I held his right wrist firmly, twisted it so his back was facing me, I got a hold of his shoulder and kned him in the gut. I punched the second guy and he collapsed into the ground. I got hit a couple of times by the remaining seniors but it didn't hurt at all. I deflected their punches

and kicks and I saw them collapse to the ground one by one as I hit them. I kicked the middle linebacker of the school football team and watched him as he flew over the students that were taking a video of the fight and crash into the row of lockers 20 feet away. The remaining seniors ran away and I stood still, confused. Confused about how did I pull something like that off. I pinched myself so I could wake up from this dream. When I realised I wasn't having a dream and saw dozens of people staring at my face with wonder and saw the principal walking towards me with an angry look, I panicked and ran off.

A letter came to our house that night. It was saying that I got suspended from school because of the fight I had with Joffrey. Three of the students sued me. Well, they would lose the case later on because they were the aggressors but I couldn't go back to that school. I didn't want to go to school when my suspension ended. I thought everybody would hate and fear me because what I have done. But Dr.Floyd forced me to go back to school. He valued education. And there was a part of me that wanted to go back to school, to spend more time with Virginia. I liked her. I liked Natasha too, but I saw her as a friend that

guided me and kept me away from trouble. I have always had different feelings for Virginia.

When I came back to school, the things I feared did not happen at all. Seniors and juniors did fear me though, they couldn't even look at my face. But freshman like me and sophomores were a lot friendlier to me than before. Girls seemed more interested in me and every cool guy wanted me in their group. I became popular.

The school began being enjoyable. It became my favourite thing.

The first term finished and we were on the winter break. One day while Dr. Floyd was in the hospital, and Natasha was away with her friends, a man knocked on our door. I started walking my way down but when I looked at the man waiting in front of the door from the windows between first and second floor. He was nearly 7'2, and probably weighed around 250 lbs.

"I didn't know that Dr. Floyd was friends with The Hulk" I said. Virginia said that she has never seen this guy before, so I didn't open the door. We waited doubtfully in the

anteroom. And then, the guy started talking to us. We were absolutely frightened. He said "Come on Virginia, open the door and let me talk to Janus here." , then he added "I can hear every single word you say, and I'm not likin' it".

"Who are you?" said Virginia. "We don't have any Janus here, leave us alone!". He started laughing sarcastically.

"Come on, Virginia. You are better than that. He can shove guys 30 feet away. You really think he is a super clever and muscular human foundling?".

Virginia picked the phone up, and before she could even dial 9, the door disappeared. I was shocked, and moments later I saw it fall down to the street. "I didn't want to do this, Janus. But you'll thank me later." I said that he was mixing me with someone else and that he was going to be sorry for it. Then I lunged forward to him. He didn't counter-attack me, he let me hit him. I obviously wasn't damaging him at all, he grinned. He took out a weird-looking object. It had 2 big holes and a panel between them. Before I could understand what it was, I was handcuffed with them. It was some sort of a handcuff and there was absolutely no way for me to open it. I

knew it somehow, I could feel it. It was a familiar feeling, like it was used against me before. And he shoved me to the backseat of a jeep which looked like it was stolen from the military. Or he was from the military forces. I didn't know which was more possible, or worse.

He pressed a button and my wrists started hurting, as the time passed by, the feeling of pain, left its place to numbness. Then my whole body got numb. And I closed my eyes. When I opened them again, I was in an empty room. Grey walls, one bed that I'm lying on, a little table with some pills on it, there wasn't even any windows. Just a light bulb on the ceiling in the middle of the room. As I was looking around me, recognizing my surroundings, the door opened, and the strange, huge man came in.

“Hey, how you feelin' Janus?”

I stared at him with hatred.

“You still not rememberin' Janus?”

“What am I supposed to remember, you criminal! Am I supposed to remember that you broke into our house, or that you kidnapped me!” I shouted.

“By the way, don't call me Janus again I swear to God I will make you pay for this! My name is Jackson!” I added. He laughed at me.

“I am God, you fool, you are too.”

“What do you mean?” I said, confusedly.

“Your name, Janus, the God of beginnings, endings, doorways and keys. That's the name they gave you in ancient Rome.”

“And I am Jupiter, the King of Gods, God of the sky, thunderstorms, lightning. Well they also called me Zeus in ancient greece but I prefer Jupiter.” He added.

“What the hell are you talking about? You lunatic.” I said.

“I am nearly fifteen, how can I have been living since ancient Rome?”

“You're so naive Janus, you weren't like this before. Just a couple of gun-shots transformed you into this? I'm disappointed.”

“Well, you ain’t believing me are you?  
Maybe this will help you”

He opened his right hand, and I saw a tiny flickering on his hand. That tiny flickering slowly started growing and growing until it became a mini lightning, and in an instant, he threw that lightning at me. It hit me in the chest, I felt it, I definitely felt it but I felt no pain.

“So now, do you believe me?”

“If that was a real lightning...”

“It was, I created it” He interrupted me.

“If that was real, how come it didn’t hurt at all?” I was thinking maybe that was just a kind of illusion.

“Because we can not hurt our own kind, Janus. That’s why your punches and kicks didn’t hurt me. I would be dead otherwise. That right hook was pretty powerful. I did not expect something like that from you.”

All of these were too much for me. I still couldn’t believe it.

He pressed a button on the panel that is between my handcuffs, and I was free.

“You with me?” He asked, holding his hand out to me.

I looked at him, than his hand, and I looked at him again. I wanted to believe him, I wanted to be a God, for sure. But that couldn’t be right. I did not shake his hand.

“Come on, I don’t like being left hanging.”

“Prove it to me, prove me that I have been living for thousands of years, then I’ll shake your hand” I said doubtfully.

He scratched his stubble, “Look, you are not going to believe me until you use your powers, until feel it yourself. But you can not do that unless you believe, and try to remember. But I’ll explain it to you anyway. Humans were our friends, our guardian angels, our protectors. They protected us against other alien civilizations with their excellent war tactics and superior technology. There were no other race that could keep up with them. Their only enemy were themselves. And when the Great War started, every nation started launching these bombs that are approximately 50 times more dangerous than the nuclear missiles you guys have now against other nations. So all of that advanced technology and civilization was completely destroyed in weeks and mankind went back



to where they started. Living in caves, using spears and such... But thanks to them, we are the superior race in all the universe and we are protecting them against other races, and of course, themselves. We have been doing this for thousands of years, without interfering with their timeline.”

I was shocked. I slowly started believing in him. But not completely, there was still doubt in me.

“That is just a conspiracy theory, I have heard of that before.” I said.

“Do I look like a conspiracy theory to you, Janus?”

“No, but you look and sound like a crazy person.”

“Plus, who are WE?” I added.

“We, my dear friend, are some of the most powerful people in our planet. And our mission is to protect and guide mankind through their journey until they reach a state with no war and conflict, so we can finally reveal ourselves to them and live in peace.”

He was telling all of these to me with such certainty, without no doubt in him, that I had to believe him.

“No, you got me wrong. Who are we as a race? What is our name? Where do we come from?”

“We call ourselves titans. It has nothing to do with the titans in human mythology. Our planet’s name is Gordian, it’s in the Gordian System that was named after us, it is a tropical planet known for its rainforests, beaches, and colorful wildlife. We have managed to protect the nature and develop our technology at the same time. That enough?”

“Uh huh.” My brain was about to explode.

“One more question.”

“Sure” he said.

“Why am I fourteen if we have been living since ancient times?”

“That is the most logical question you have asked so far, Janus. Finally you starting to believe me. Anyway, in Gordian, we have a completely different ageing time in Gor-

dian. If you are one year old in Gordian, then you are fifty in Earth. We call ourselves titans because of that, we are much bigger, stronger, faster and we can live longer than any other organism in the universe.

When we came here before, they were always temporary. This is permanent so they had to summon us in a certain age. And gave us some pills so we would age like humans. But I don't know why they summoned you as a fourteen year old. Our bodies needed some time to adapt to the conditions in Earth. We were vulnerable for a certain amount of time. And you were unfortunate enough to get attacked by some robbers at that small time. Is this explanation enough or do I have to write a book about it, Janus?"

"Ok, I think that's enough."

"So, what do we do now?" I asked.

"Just sit down, relax and try to remember who you are. That is the only way you are going to get your powers back."

"You didn't kidnap me to just lock me in a room and let me think, did you?" I asked. I could feel anger rising in me again.

"No, of course not. But to begin your training and our mission, we need your powers first. And I need to find the others too."

"Others?"

"Yeah, Pluto, Vulcan, Mars and Bellona."

"Are we all named after Roman Gods, Jupiter?"

"No, we are the Roman Gods. We had different names back then but humans gave us these names and declared us as their Gods. We liked our names and started using them as our real names."

"So, what is our real names?"

"I have forgotten your name over the years, but my name was Kreetak Strogonar." he said, proudly.

"This has been too much for you in just one day, get some rest. You'll need it." he said.

But I wasn't tired, so I got out of the room. I wanted to explore the place that I will be staying in. I walked along the hallway and got to the living room. The room was full of strange equipment and weapons.

As I was trying to take it all in, someone entered the house I wasn't sure what to do, so I ran up to him pushed him out of the house and closed the door back. I was afraid that we could be compromised. "Who are you, how did you get in?" the man yelled at me. And I was in the ground with the door on top of me in a split second, the man got in. He was slowly walking towards me, then suddenly, the chandelier fell on his head. He was surprised, he grinned and he tossed me to the wall with a flick of his hand. He lunged towards me and stopped a couple of inches before me. We were face to face. I was not sure what was going to happen.

"Finally, man. Welcome. You Janus right?"

"Yup" I said. "And, you are Mars I suppose?"

He laughed before answering me.

"If I was Mars, there probably wouldn't be any walls that you could lean on right now. I'm Pluto." he said.

"Yeah, I agree with that, but you didn't have to bring the chandelier down, guys. I'm the one who's gonna fix it now." Said Jupiter, coming from the hallway.

"Actually, we didn't touch it" I said.

"Maybe the screws were loose or something" "

"Well, we have the ability of telekinesis, Janus. I'm sure you will get it soon."

"But I did not use mine, man" Said Pluto.

Jupiter looked at me with amazement.

"Congrats, man. You just gained your first power."

"Wait a minute, I did that? And you told me I was Janus, God of beginnings, endings and such... How could I possibly do that? It has nothing to do with beginnings or endings" "

"Look, I don't think you are understanding what I'm saying, man. Humans named you Janus, they declared you as the God of those things. But we are a different race. We are not really Gods. Like Neptune, he could control liquids but that was not the only thing he could do. He had telekinesis as well. And he could be invisible for a certain amount of time."

"Oh, I get it now. But that's just stupid." I said.

“Well, there are a lot of stupid thing in the Earth, but trust me, we are not one of them.” said Pluto.

“Just get some rest we will talk about it tomorrow” said Jupiter.

And this time, I had to accept this offer. I really was tired.

As soon as I lied down on the bed, I was sleeping.

When I woke up, there was so many voices that I thought I woke up in the street. I walked through the hallway, and went to the kitchen. There was five people. Two faces were familiar. Jupiter and Pluto. But the other ones were complete strangers.

“Hey, good morning, Janus” a 6’6 , bulky woman said.

I nodded my head.

“So, when did you assemble The Expendables, Jupiter?” I said in a loud voice so everyone could hear me.

Jupiter introduced them with me one by one. So, the woman was Bellona. Mars

was the shortest male with a height of 6,8. He seemed like he wanted to start a fight with me. So I made a decision of being distant to Mars. And Vulcan was a funny and cheerful man who dyed his hair to red and yellow. His hair looked like flames.

So we had breakfast, everybody seemed nice and fun. I started liking this new group of people I’m in. After breakfast, Jupiter gathered us in a room and talked to us about our main goal in a room. After the meeting, just as we were about to start training, Jupiter and Pluto started shouting and panicking. All I could hear was: “It’s time, get in the jeep we’re going now” I got in the jeep and Jupiter started driving. “Where are we going?” I asked.

“Area 51” Jupiter said.

“And what are we going to do in there?” I said.

“Destroy the weapon that can cause human extinction” Jupiter said with a monotone voice. He pressed a button in the gear and we started travelling in the air.

“We are going faster than the speed of sound, hold tight!” Jupiter shouted.

We were in the military base and getting shot at in seconds.

“How did we get here this quick?”

“We were staying in Austin, NEVADA.” said Jupiter.

I was shocked, but there was no time for arguing. The others got out of the car and started fighting back.

Jupiter took me and we sprinted into a building. We busted doors and threw soldiers away like they were flies, finally we reached a massive room with an enormous ring-like object in the middle of it.

“This thing you are seeing, is an energy cannon that can erase countries of the map. You have to destroy this.”

“Me? How?” I asked

“We need your powers. You are the key to this all. Just get in the middle of the thing”

“You sure that this thing won’t harm me, right?”

“Yes, Janus. Don’t be a coward, we don’t have much time”

So I got into the middle of the thing. “What am I supposed to do now?”

“Close your eyes, feel the energy. And then when you open your eyes back, open your arms and let the energy leave you”

“How is that gonna help?”

“Just do it, Janus.”

I closed my eyes. Tried to feel the energy. Feel the titans waiting in Gordian for the good news. I did not want to disappoint them. And when I opened my eyes, the empty area in the ring turned dark blue. I felt all my energy leaving me. I fell to the ground.

And moments later, hundreds of titans and battle ships were coming out of the ring. Then, I realised that was a portal, not an energy cannon. Jupiter came running towards me. “You did it Janus, you opened up the portal. You are a war hero now. You will go down in history man, congratulations.”

I started realising what was happening, realising that they were using me to conquer Earth. I started crying. But not because of being upset. Because I was angry, because I was tricked.

“So... all of it, were they lies?”

“No Janus, most of it were true. But we are not friends with humans. They are our arch-enemy. We are the Gordanians, we are the Titans, we are the conqueror of the universe. And you are a hero!”

“No! I’m not. You are lying!”

“Ohh yes you are Janus, you are the key to everything. We can slay this illness to our universe and use Earth’s resources thanks to you!”

I couldn’t believe what I have just done. I would have killed him if I could, rip his whole body apart right there. But I knew that I wouldn’t be able to hurt him at all because we were from the same race. So I ran out of there. I ran as fast as I could. I reached the highest mountain I could see and watched those battle ships cover the skies.

And, the human race was extinct in three weeks, the Gordanians were spread all

over the world and became the inhabitants of the Earth. All of it because of me. This, is the story of the end of the mankind, if any human is reading this, I’m sorry. I did not want to do this. I am the key to everything. I am Janus, and I am the conqueror of the Earth.

# 2

## YA Fiction

“It's no wonder that truth is stranger than fiction. Fiction has to make sense.”

– Mark Twain



# The Statue People

by Mey Dalya Ocali





## **-PROLOGUE-**

### **Stanley**

A man sits next to me in the bar and orders a strawberry daiquiri. I scoff looking down at my own empty glass. That's an unusual order for a bar that only serves whiskey on rocks.

He turns to me grinning. The bar lighting is dim. I can barely see his face, his teeth have a prominent shine to them.

He speaks,

"What would you do if aliens ever visited Earth?" Is this man trying to mess with me? Well, two can play a game. I shoot back,

"But why would aliens choose Earth to visit out of all the infinite planets scattered around the universe?" The man's smile grows. If I concentrate hard enough I can see his gums. The man speaks again his voice is awfully clear for a man his age.

"Tell me Stanley, when you were a little didn't you ever see an ant mound? Put bread crumbs next to it? Poured water over it? Kicked the it to the ground? Just to see what would they do? Or just because your middle school teacher asked you to observe their behaviour?"

### **ADEN**

They came without warning. I mean NASA detected them when they entered our solar system but they were moving at an immeasurable speed and some reports even say they teleported (or maybe moved at light speed, you know like in Star Trek). People freaked out, nonetheless. Screeching on about how it was a message from the god(s?) and it was the second coming of Christ or whatever. At least some people had the decency to consider them to be aliens.

There were four of them, two landed on the north and south poles, another landed in between Africa and India, and the last one landed somewhere in the Pacific Ocean precisely on the equator, below Hawaii. Although I still don't know the exact coordinates. Satellites must have located them but I doubt the governments in charge would want people messing with them, let alone actually know where they are.

They are... I actually have no idea what they are. To be honest your guess is just as good as mine. All we know right now is that they came from outer space, they probably aren't from our galaxy. They are massive humanoid statues made out of rock-like material, they're pale grey, like marble or granite but I doubt they would be made out of anything earthly. The weird thing is that even though we call them "statues" today, people seem to forget they moved while landing. Shape shifted, to be clear. Before landing on Earth they were grey spheres. Just before entering the earth's atmosphere they unraveled like an armadillo does after being frightened. They have fingers but no fingerprints, heads but no faces, joints but no creases. They are perfectly smooth all over, like giant marble sculptures.

At least that's what all I got from the folders Adriel thinks he "expertly hid" in the not-so-secret drawer of his desk. I'm currently in his office writing down my latest findings about the statues in a moleskine notebook.

"Aden! Dinner's ready!" I hear my mom call out. If dinner's ready Adriel will arrive soon. If he catches me in his office...let's just say that I'm better off dead. One time when I was fourteen I was just wandering in

Adriel's office, not even snooping around. I was bored and got curious. What could possibly be in there of such importance that it was an "off-limits" area?

When he caught me I thought he was going to punch me straight in the face. He was livid. Screaming off and on about how I was grounded for ages. He avoided giving me an explanation but I found out what he was hiding later on anyway. That dirty evil man thinking he could keep me in the dark from—

“Aden! Your salmon’s getting cold!”

I snap out of my trance. I smile. Of course mom went out of her way to cook salmon, she knows it's my favorite. I make sure everything's back in place in the office and exit quickly.

Mom is working on the salad when I sit down at the table. She turns around holding the glass bowl filled with greens. "Oh, I didn't hear you come in." She smiles. I huff and pull out my phone. I wonder what Poppy is doing. I text her.

"I got new info pops"

"Good. We meet tomorrow ASAP"

"Lunch break?"

"Can't do, I'm busy sorry. 4th period?"

"Are you asking me to skip class?"

"No, I am inviting you to a meetup where you can brief me on the new info."

"You're turning me into a slacker pops."

"No you're just a softie who agrees on everything I say"

"touche"

"hold on I think my pizza arrived"

"is the delivery guy cute ;)"

"shut up"

"is that a yes or no?"

"maybe"

"by hobbit"

"i hate you"

Poppy is 5'2", I am 6'3". She is very sensitive of her height. But she loves me too much to be actually angry with me.

"Now Aden I think you know well enough that no phones are allowed on the dinner table."

I scoff. "Don't worry Adriel I was just putting it away." I can't hide my sarcasm.

"How was your day sweetheart?" mom asks. It makes me uncomfortable. I know she is happy with Adriel but it's not like I don't remember the times she used call my father that.

"Tiring, but there's nothing a nice oven-baked salmon can't fix." Mom's soft laughter fills the air.

"Well I do make a mean salmon don't I?" God, they are so cheesy. I think maybe if he didn't keep so many secrets I would have liked Adriel. He respects mom, and doesn't threaten to change the wifi password. You could say he's decent. Mom takes a seat to my right. She scrunches up her face when the chair screeches against the marble tiles.

"I hate when they do that." she mumbles. "Anyways, do you guys want sauce?"

"Don't worry Katherine I'll pass it around." Adriel picks up the gravy bowl and pours sauce to every plate liberally. Everybody must have been very hungry, no one speaks. We eat in silence.

Aden guessed it right. The pizza delivery guy was cute. If I wasn't starving by the time he brought the pizza I actually might have made an effort to talk to him.

I can't help but wonder what Aden's new discovery was. It could be satellite pinpointed locations or it could be exact dimensions. It could be any information about the Statue people for that matter.

I don't want to miss lunch tomorrow because I secretly made an appointment to the local dog pound. I want to adopt a beagle. She's four years old and has a heart shaped light brown patch of fur on her left eye. Mom and dad won't mind. Not like they were ever around to care anyway.

I'm bored. Thinking while sitting alone in the kitchen eating pineapple pizza is boring. I need to distract myself somehow. I order a second pizza. I want to get that cute boy's number.

POPPY

I think I am the only person in New York who genuinely enjoys pineapple as a pizza topping. Not because I try to be the fruity smoothy yoga doing health guru girl.

"Hello this is Lenox Pizza how may I help you?"

"Uhhh." I really didn't think this through did I? What can I get? I'll go with Aden's favorite.

"One medium triple cheese with extra spinach leaves on top please."

"Ok, and where will that be to?"

"3546 Madison Avenue"

"Got it. And are there any delivery specifications?"

"Send the guy with an undercut that has curly blonde hair."

The woman stops to laugh before speaking to me again.

"Of course. Your pizza will arrive in half an hour."

"Good bye"

Aden always says I'm too friendly with strangers. Or that it's unnecessary for me to put heart emojis next to the contacts of people I just met. He's just broody.

VAUGHN

I smile it's Poppy, the pretty girl who is always in pajamas, that ordered the triple cheese with extra spinach. (She's been a regular customer for three years. That's what my boss told me, I've only been working here for a year.)

I arrive at her house pretty quickly. Astonishingly there was very little traffic on the way. I mark this day down as the beginning of an apocalypse.

"October 18th 2015"

I lift my fist as if I'm about to knock on the wooden door, it swings open. Does she have surveillance cameras? Super pizza senses? The world may never know.

Poppy is grinning standing in batman print pajamas. (Superman is better in my opinion.)

"Tell me pizza boy do you have a name?"

Wow, this girl is forward.

"I'd rather you call me pizza boy." I try to give my best smile. I probably look like Jack Nicholson from "the Shining".

"Why? Do you have a weird name like Reuben or Quinten? or even better Vaughn?" She whispered the last word while squinting her eyes suspiciously.

Oh my god. Of course she would guess my name. She is probably a psychic or involved in witchcraft.

My expression must have given my shock away because she is laughing so hard she has to hold on to the door frame to stand up. She takes a deep breath.

"I'm so sorry I didn't know your name would be 'Vaughn'"

She breaks into a fit of giggles. I can't really blame her. Vaughn? Really? I asked the same things to my mother hundreds of times.

I shrug my shoulders. What can I say while she is borderline having an asthma attack because of my name? I'm not good with people.

"Oh god, that sounded so mean. I'm so so sorry. And-and Vaughn is actually a really nice name you know? Unique. Like, you'll never have to write your full name on things 'cause there's only one Vaughn in the whole town!"

Now it's my turn to laugh. I'm not offended in any way. Heck, the fact that she is worried that i will be, is kind of nice.

"Let me make it up to you. Ok? Come inside I'll reheat the pizza and we can share? If you're scared your boss will give you trouble, just call and tell her Poppy said hi."

I raise my brows in surprise, but I'm smiling. Poppy is a force not to be messed with. If she ever committed treason I have no doubt she would have CIA officials whom she is childhood friends with to cover her tracks.

POPPY

"...and that's how I learned the flying distance of a pepperoni slice" Vaughn barely finishes his sentence, he can't stop laughing. Neither can I. We've been talking about anything and everything as if we grew up together. I decide Aden would like him too.

Vaughn looks like a runway model, the kind that Aden decorates his blog with. (maybe it's because he has a good posture)

I decide I want him to join our little research group. I know it seems reckless but my guts keep telling me we can trust

Vaughn. (Maybe it's because I'm tired of holding all this information.) Besides a third brain would be helpful.

So I tell him. I tell him everything. The statue people came. They are foreigners to Earth. The government is playing with us pretending not to care about them. There are operations going on to determine their origin.

Vaughn seems a bit baffled at first but he catches up quickly. He already knows about the basic stuff but the information that only Aden can access through Adriel really intrigues him.

I decide to Skype Aden, I can introduce Vaughn to him that way.

When Aden accepts my call he is lying on his bed in his superman pajamas eating baby carrots dipped in ranch. When he notices Vaughn by my side he chokes on his carrot.

"What the hell Poppy?! You should warn me before you decide to make me face some total stranger!" He scrambles to get into a better position. Vaughn is clearly amused. Aden sighs, taking his laptop onto his lap.

"Hey, so I'm Aden," the crunching of his ranch dipped carrot echoes through my laptop's speakers.

"Yeah Poppy told me." Vaughn says although he seems tentative.

"And you are?"

"Vaughn, the pizza delivery guy."

"Oh." Aden keeps looking between Vaughn and I, trying piece things together. Then he grins smugly.

"Told you the delivery guy would be cute Pops."

Vaughn is too busy gaping at the screen to notice me say,

"Well you're right, but he is joining us, I already told him everything we know."

It takes a moment for Aden to process my words.

"Wha-Why would you do that?! You- We can't just go around telling people everything!" I didn't expect Aden to be so angry. Moreover he's being rude to Vaughn. I need to calm him down.

"Look Aden I--"

"No Poppy, what if he tells other people, even if it's unintentional?! Adriel would literally kill me and then the CIA would wipe him off the 'radar'!" I know but I want to stop being so paranoid of everyone. I want to trust Vaughn.

"Aden, it was about time we added a person to our group. Just-- please?"

Aden sighs, but before he opens his mouth Vaughn pipes up,

"Look I don't even have nothing to bring to the table and I swear I won't tell anyone. Hell, I'll forget everything."

We are completely silent except for the occasional ding coming from Aden's phone. He must be texting. He raises his eyebrows at his screen and scoffs. Before I can say something to question Aden about the text his voice comes from the speakers,

"I'm sorry Vaughn but you already know too much, we can't let you just walk away." I smile. Aden came around. I knew he would. Even if it's just because he finds Vaughn interesting. Vaughn is smiling too. Acceptance always feels nice. We keep talking. Aden decides we should meet up on our fourth period tomorrow. It's nice to see him warm up to Vaughn.



Aden grabs more carrots. (I swear that boy eats more carrots than his body mass every day.) He tenses. Looks to his left. His eyes are searching for something we don't know. He turns back to us and starts to speak though his words are purposefully loud, like he forces them to be heard.

"So ok, goodnight Poppy, see you at school!" then he immediately ends the call. Well, that was rude. Not to mention he didn't say bye to Vaughn. But if there's one thing I know about Aden is that he would never end a call like that unless he needs to. Moreover, he has to live in the same house as Adriel Hoenigsberg. He has to be sneaky.

Poor Vaughn doesn't know what's going on though. He looks at the bright computer screen, blond eyebrows pushed together and lips slightly parted.

I put a hand to his shoulder even though his height makes it seem like i am reaching up to tap his shoulder. (I think he's even taller than Aden. That's-- Woah) I show him the text Aden just sent me. It reads,

"Sorry for my disappearance, Adriel was coming.

PS Goodbye Vaughn (Adriel would lose his shit if he knew I had more than one friend.

He would do an extensive background search. Ask Poppy.)"

Vaughn looks at me, a silent question painted across his face.

I nod.

## Remote Model #1504 MWE

- These creatures are not capable of holding the vessel down.
- They try to take pieces from the vessel's limbs. They fail.
- They try exposing the vessel to different wavelengths of energy. The reason is currently unknown.
- #1502 MWE sends out a signal to investigate the core of the planet. Taking over.
- The planet's core seems to be stable. Returning to the previous position.
- #1503 MWE sends out a signal to investigate high population zones. Accepted.
- There seems to be frequent aircraft transportations to "40.7127° N, 74.0059° W".
- Advancing towards target zone.

Vaughn

I feel weird. Happy because "Wow, I have friends who are actually concerned about the statue people!" but also sad because "Damn, it feels so strange to develop friendships after all that happened with Raven." However that's not important right now. Poppy just invited me to go to the dogpound tomorrow to adopt a beagle. She has already filled out forms, bought a bed, food and other necessities. She just need to pick the dog up tomorrow. She says she always wanted a dog but she never could get one because she traveled a lot with her parents when she was little so the only pet she had time to care of was a tamagotchi. And it died in a month.

"You should see her Vaughn! Oh god, she has this heart shaped patch of fur on her left eye it's so adorable! She is extremely sweet too. They say she has never growled even once in her lifetime. It's like she is an angel or som--"

Poppy's words are cut short. The previously quiet news program on the television is replaced by an official government warning. My stomach drops.

An electronic man's voice speaks.

"One of the foreigners appears to be advancing towards New York. The president of the United States of America advises its citizens to remain calm. For the safety of citizens the following rules will be in order:

- i. Any major celebration, fair, parade will be postponed or cancelled,
- ii. Curfews will be set. They will change depending on the concerned area. Local governments will inform citizens accordingly,
- iii. Those who attempt to interfere with official operations will be charged with treason,
- iv. Anyone (excluding national forces) who attempts to reach the foreigners are considered national criminals and will be sent to trial in accordance with the National Extraterrestrial Response Act,
- v. The daily lives are to continue as they were, except for the rules stated above."

The words are displayed on top of the national eagle symbol in white letters. In my stunned state I barely register Poppy muttering a curse word. The electronic voice speaks again, there's a slight buzz, a quiet scrambling that comes with the pre-recorded message.

"This message will not be repeated."

And just like that it's gone. The news comes back on, but by looking at the weather woman's face I know she is shocked too. I try to distract myself. I wonder how it would feel working at a place that forces you to continue as if nothing happened.

Then the realization hits me. They probably displayed this on the Times Square, the subways too. Imagine the chaos.

I close my eyes and take a deep breath through my nose. The greasy smell of leftover pizza hits me but it doesn't distract me, I'm used to it. I can't let anxiety take over me. I can't have a panic attack in front of a person I just met! I'll look stupid, crying over something that advised people to stay calm! The thought that if I panic I'll look stupid and cowardly sends a new wave of panic over me. And I collapse. Why are they moving?! Aren't they Statue People?! If they can move why can't they

use their movement abilities to leave Earth? I clench my fists. My nails dig into my palms. It hurts but it's not enough to distract me.

What if the statue peo-- the foreigners decide that humans are useless and stupid and decide to destroy them? I can't leave my mom. She is all I have. What about Poppy? Aden? Will they be ok? And what will Raven do? My throat clenches. I struggle to breathe.

Humanity's end is coming and Hollywood predicted it a zillion times. The aliens do start from New York. Except we don't have the Avengers or Superman to save us. We're dead. Extraterrestrials (or whatever they are) will be responsible for our annihilation. Or even worse, our own kills us. What if somebody tries to mess with the statue people? Somebody definitely will and -oh god- the government will try to stop them. Even more chaos. No. No. No. I can't. I can't deal with this. I didn't want this. I bring my knees up. I hug them and squish my head against them. The harsh denim of my jeans hurt my face but I don't care. I squeeze my eyes shut. They sting. Oh god. I can't cry right now. I can't--

I'm sobbing.

Everything is overwhelming now that I've stopped trying to hold it all in. The leather couch is too fluffy. It's going to swallow me. I feel like I'm drowning. My jeans are too stiff. The denim feels like sandpaper against my skin. It's corroding me away. The weather woman's voice is too squeaky. Every syllable that escapes her mouth hits my head like baseball bat. If didn't know better I would think it would leave bruises. Shut up. Shut up. Shut up. The smell of cardboard boxes and pizza. I thought I was used to it. But no, the greasiness makes my insides churn. (Please let me be able to hold it in.) The taste of diet coke burns on my tongue. I don't think I'll ever be able to drink it again.

Everything is too much. I feel dizzy. Not in the drunk way. But in the way you'd imagine prisoners feel after being tortured. Overwhelmed by pain (anxiety in my case) to the point where it's almost numbing. I feel myself slipping. I don't want to pass out I--

"Vaughn?"

Mom? No, it's someone else. My body rattles with another sob.

"Hey, hey it's going to be ok I swear. I- Just- Vaughn look at me please, Vaughn."

It's Poppy. Her voice isn't squeaky like the weather woman's, it's soft and gentle. 'Cautious' my mind says. She's afraid that I'll take her with me and destroy her too isn't she? I can't find the strength in myself to look up at her.

"Ok, at least breathe in and out with me ok?"

I start heaving. I didn't notice I forgot to breathe until she asked me to.

Poppy

Vaughn is breathing too fast. I need to calm him down. I can't let him slip away. (What kind of friend would I be?)

He's curled up in a fetal position with his head against his knees. I've never seen someone so big look so small. I thought the saddest sight was hung-up laundry in the rain, Vaughn proved me wrong.

I gently pry his hands away from his legs. He jerks them back at first but doesn't protest when I take them again.

"Breathe in and out with my hands ok?" I say as comforting as I can while my voice is wavering. I can't help it. I'm scared too.

I lift our hands up. "a deep breath in--". I slowly lower them back down "--now let it go". It seems to be working. I repeat the process until he can breathe on his own again.

Aden

The moment the broadcast was on our TV screen. Adriel immediately got up and went to his office. Talk about suspicious.

Mom was trying to stay composed but her brown eyes looked worried.

Part of me thinks it is amazing. They do move! Although they didn't specify how, I still can't help but marvel at the thought of

their smooth limbs moving above the waves of the ocean. It's incredible, really, how they can literally walk on water.

The (supposedly) rational part of me is screaming, "We're dead! Can't you see they're coming for us. To kill us." As if to rub salt to the wound I think what Adriel will do to "protect" his family. Or what government forces will do to "protect" their nation. Both tend to be aggressive. A shiver passes through my body.

I can't afford to worry about myself while I need to protect Mom, Poppy, the journal, Vaughn... Wait, Vaughn? I am surprised how just in 15 minutes Vaughn was able to make it onto my list of important things. And I thought Poppy was naive. I erase him off. I just met him. I can't just start caring for him. (I feel slightly guilty but I doubt he would worry about me either.)

Vaughn

I lift my head to look up at Poppy. My cheeks feel cold now that my wet tears are exposed to air. My nose feels runny and my throat is sore from sobbing. I must look like some kind of shaved sewer rat that was dumped in radioactive waste then left to die. It's embarrassing, her seeing me

like this. I feel the urge to look away and cover my face but I'm too exhausted to think about my dignity right now. On top of that she has a good grip on my hands so I can't really pull them away (and I don't want to pull them away.)

"How do you feel?" she asks. Her lips twitch. A miniature smile.

"Like shit." I reply and it's true. I feel ugly inside out. But I'm grinning. Honestly it's amazing how she can make me forget how anxious I was a minute ago. What would I have done without Poppy?

Oh no, I held on to her for support without giving her time to worry about herself. She must hate me. Why do I have to mess everything up? The diamond encrusted, gold plated, knuckle duster clad punch of guilt hits my abdomen. I feel the urge to throw up again.

"Poppy I'm so so sorry. I- I- panicked and I just- I'm sorry-"

"It's ok, really it is. Don't worry, it happens to the best of us." she squeezes my hand as if to emphasize her point.

"Thank you." I smile. She smiles back.

She handled my panic attack so well. It's clear she has seen one before. I'm too

busy acknowledging my gratitude for her to be prepared for her pulling me to my feet and giving me a bone crushing hug. (She has strangely strong arms for her appearance.)

The ringing of my phone interrupts the hug. It's my mom, she must be awfully worried. I answer. She immediately starts speaking. Her anxious voice is scratchy and distant over the phone.

"Vaughn, sweetheart are you ok? Where are you? Will you be able to come home? I called your boss and she said you were over at a friend's house and I know how you tend to panic and I-"

"Mom. Don't worry, I'm ok" I'm not the only one in the family with anxiety.

She sighs in relief. Then speaks up again,

"Oh, and are you staying over at your friend's house?" Ironically Poppy was making signs that I should stay over with her hands while mom asked the question. As much as it sounds nice I can't. I try to make an expression of thankfulness but mixed with apologies to Poppy. She nods in understanding when I point to my phone and mouth the word "mom".

"No I'm not staying over, I'll be home in half an hour." I reassure my mom.

Poppy promises to text me before she goes to the dog pound.

There's only a couple of drunk people as I walk back home. And I only have to repeat Poppy's breathing exercise twice.

Aden

Everyone is quiet. Everyone pretends not to care. Everyone sees through each other. None of them speak up about it.

All of the rules broadcasted was taken seriously. But it didn't affect people's curiosity in the slightest bit.

By the time I reached my class the next morning, blurry pictures taken from plane windows were all over the internet. Although it's questionable if they are photoshopped or not, people are starving for them.

Class is pretty boring (as usual). But there's a certain tenseness that really threw me off. As if with the smallest movement, the glass that protected our sanity would crack and chaos would start leaking in, poisoning us to death. I always thought dystopian young adult novels exaggerated but no, they were right. What took away humanity is always going to be ignorance.

It's like there's a tsunami coming for us and we can see it clearly. And we are sunbathing on the beach. The wave is almost close enough to tower over us. But we are

fussing over putting on sunscreen so we don't get sunburnt!

I want to scream asking why isn't there one sensible person in New York that is actually concerned about what's going to happen?

But now that I think about it, it's better for people to not worry instead of them doing something stupid to be the "hero".

I sigh. Why is first period taking so long? And who thought it would be smart to make first period AP math? Ugh. I need to update my blog. An ootd (outfit of the day) isn't going to post itself in the middle of a national crisis. I pick out one of the outfits I tried on and took pictures with and posting the two pictures with the caption, "Impending Doom Aesthetics". It's one of my secret superpowers to be able use my phone during class. I am envied by many.

When (finally) the bell rings I remember that I'll be skipping fourth period. Which, sadly, is one of my favorite subjects: AP Art History. But it will be worth it. I'll show Poppy and Vaughn the new big revelation. Poppy will be shocked. Plus, I get to meet Vaughn in person. Apparently he goes to Beacon High. He must be smart, with all the scholarships and AP classes. (And no. I certainly did not abuse my extensive re-



search powers supplied by Adriel. What are you talking about?)

Second period is literature so it passes quickly. I mean how boring can reading a couple of verses and discussing them be?

Today it's the junior's turn to eat first and I feel lucky. (Suck it preps. Even the freshmen get to eat before them on Mondays.) They are serving chicken nuggets today and it's always nice to be able to get from the first batch.

When I sit down at my usual spot and start looking for the sophomores I remember Poppy was busy. (We're the same age but Poppy took one year off to travel the world with her photographer parents.) I bet she's trying to interrogate the local cops about the Statue People. (She would.)

Soon the bustling of the crowd fills my ears and I forget about Poppy and focus on my disappointment at the soggianness of my last chicken nugget.

Poppy

Aden will be so shocked when I introduce him to Judy. (Yes, Vaughn and I named the dog "Judy". And yes, it's from "Judge Judy") I swear this dog is smiling. She's currently sitting on my lap and her short light brown spotted fur is silky soft. I can feel her warm and steady heartbeat under my fingertips. I can't stop smiling. This beautiful pudgy creature is my new companion and I love her! (I refuse to use the term "owning a pet". I consider it to be more of a friendship based on mutual love for each other.)

"I think I like Judy better than you. No offense." Vaughn says while smirking. That cheeky rascal. I retort back.

"I can say the same for you Victoria." I made it my goal to come up with as many

names that start with the letter "V" to call Vaughn. He seems to go with it. It's not like I'll give him a choice anyway.

We skipped school together today and went out for pizza. When you're pizza delivery guy you can eat for free. Of course I abused Vaughn's privilege.

I try to keep things lighthearted and joking between us. It may seem like we're trying to avoid the current obvious topic but it's always in the back of our minds anyway. (I won't tell him that I do it because I don't want him to have a panic attack again.)

Besides we'll be talking about it more than enough when Aden's fourth period starts.

Vaughn

Poppy tries to avoid bringing up the Statue People. I don't think she knows that I noticed her (obvious) efforts, but I am grateful nonetheless.

We're walking towards Aden's school when I start to think. The autumn chill makes Poppy's hair puffy and she laughs without holding herself back at something she said herself. She almost trips because Judy randomly decided to smell a stop sign but she's still smiling. And one day, I hope to be as happy as her.

The soft pitter patter of paws on the sidewalk is enough to keep my mind away

from the bizarre reality the universe forces me to live through. And maybe Judy is the best kind of distraction I never knew I needed.

Aden

I wait in our designated spot for our little meeting. (I have no idea why we agreed on the art supply room, it smells like toxic waste in here).

I hate to admit it but I do feel a bit tingly (and a bit reckless) skipping fourth period. I swear, usually I'm not this much of a sissy.

I huff and slump against the wall. They're a bit late. I let my mind wander.

Vaughn. I'll get to see him in person. I wonder how he dresses. (It's hard to tell someone's sense of style when you have only seen them in a pizza shop polo.)

He doesn't look like the hipster type. I silently pray to the universe that he isn't the "bro" type. (You know, the guys that wear identical ugly khaki shorts with even uglier polos.)

But it doesn't really matter how he dresses. I mean, yeah I don't like certain styles but I'm not that much of a prick to judge someone by them.

While trying so hard not to think about the Statue People and what I found about them, I think about how excited Poppy will be when I tell her, mom finally let me buy a car. (I already have a licence it's just that no mother would waste money on a car for their child when they live in Manhattan of all places.)

Poppy will be ecstatic. You can't spell "Poppy Normand" without "freedom".

It was a surprise to me too. I never thought mom would actually say ok. But she caught me skyping with Vaughn and Poppy, she got so excited that I had another friend other than Poppy that she texted me saying she had changed her mind

about the car... while I was still skyping with them.

I expected her to change her mind after the warning on television (Because of the whole motherly instincts kicking in and telling her to “keep all family members close” thing.) But maybe she holds on to the idea that if something bad ever happens I have the chance to the kick the gas and drive away. That's kind of sad though. As if she was certain something bad will happen. I feel weights in my stomach. I don't want to think about this right now.

As if on queue, Poppy and Vaughn step in the art room, both giggling like their crush sent them a text back.

"Aden! Aden, you should've seen Vaughn's face. Oh god, he tried so so hard and- and then Ms. Bunce said-" Poppy manages to say between her cackles.

"No no Aden you should've seen Poppy! It was so hilarious when, when Poppy's backpack exploded because Judy decided to--" Vaughn can't finish his sentence. He doubles over laughing clinging to my shoulder for support. His smile is so wide that I suspect if he keeps it up, he'll get crow's feet on his face in his twenties. And who the hell is Judy anyway?

"Shhhhh Vandetta Judy was supposed to be a secret, remember?" Poppy puts a finger to her lips. Vandetta? I sigh. (She used to do that with me too. For months my name would range from Abigail to Alexander the III. Anything except for "Aden" really.) Her momentary seriousness crumbles with another fit of giggles. It's starting to get annoying.

If they don't fill me in right this moment I'll stab someone, I hate being left in the dark.

That being said, Vaughn isn't what I expected. He looked broody -tense even when we were skyping but right now it's a completely different story. He tries to regain composure but he can't even stop laughing, let alone stop smiling. Poppy has that effect on people.

Just when things seem to settle down a loud bark makes all three of us freeze in our spots. I look at Poppy's backpack on the floor and there's a small snout sticking out of it sniffing around.

I give Poppy a pointed look. I have no doubt that my expression is enough to silently say "Explain."

She explains that she had secretly applied for a dog and she got accepted for a beagle. Everything clicks into place. She was

suspiciously busy for the last couple of weeks. She must have been at the dog pound.

(It kind of bothers me that while she knows every single thing about me she is able to keep something like this a secret from me. It seems unfair but Poppy just knows everything.)

I like Judy. She's cute. And she has that kind of floppy ears that make you feel warm inside. I'm a huge dog person but thanks to Adriel's allergies I never got one.

I look over at Vaughn. He's wearing ankle-cuffed baggy light blue jeans with a pair of maroon converses and finishing it off with a colorblock sweater on top. Nice.

(I'm always a sucker for a good Kurt Cobain aesthetic.)

Poppy

Aden is staring at Vaughn. He doesn't even try to be discreet about it. Jesus. Get a grip.

I smile when I realize why. Vaughn is taller than Aden. Even Adriel isn't that tall. Aden face is precious. It's the look of a guy who is not used to feeling small.

It's all nice and all but I want to know what Aden found out in Adriel's office. So I nudge him in the shoulder.

"Come on, it's time we found out the reason you brought us here." I say and Aden stops and nods. He takes out our journal from his backpack and starts skimming through the pages. He starts speaking so fast I almost think he's speaking french or something.

"Ok so. Research agencies think the Statue People tapped into a radio station from Earth. Apparently they communicate with each other over the radio frequency. But the weird thing is the same kind of unidentified signals were being broadcast before the Statue People came to Earth."

"So you're saying..." Vaughn seems to connect the dots.

"Yes. They communicated with us before we even knew there was a possibility of

them coming." Aden's eyes sparkle (he always gets a thrill out of these kinds of stuff). But something still bugs me.

"But that means there are three possibilities: 1) the person who runs the radio station didn't notice the unusual signals, 2) the person noticed but didn't say anything and 3) that person called them here." My words seem to make them think.

"Who was the person that managed the radio station anyway?" asks Vaughn. His face is scrunched up, he is thinking hard.

Aden opens up a page in the journal and points to his color coded perfect handwriting.

"An old man named Stanley Harvellson, he lives in small house somewhere in Montgomery, Alabama." Wow. Aden did his research.

"But the NSA, CIA or FBI must have already gotten to the old man and taken him for questioning or straight up killed him." my voice sounds more hopeless than I thought it would.

Vaughn nods agreeing to my point but Aden smiles and points to the word "deceased" written in purple gel pen.

"Ah, he actually died before the Statue People came, he was 89 years old, he wasn't some intergalactic spy. Anyways, I couldn't find any of his podcasts online, the CIA drew them back for 'examinational research' purposes."

Vaughn opens his mouth to speak. Aden cuts in again.

"Wait, I'm not finished. His podcast was called 'Our Imperfect Views And How To Fix Them'. I don't know any further than that. But the weirdest thing is... Mom finally let me buy a car!" Aden beams with his last sentence, smiling with a toothy grin.

No freaking way. This could be a prank but Aden seems genuine. I'm about to kiss Aden on both cheeks and pop a champagne bottle open when Vaughn cuts in.

"A car, in New York? Why? And won't it be kind of pointless?"

Aden looks at him like he just plucked the feathers from a pigeon and swallowed it whole. Vaughn makes a face that rivals. Aden sighs.

"I'm going to buy a range rover. From Alabama. We'll fly there together and visit the

house of the Stanley Harvellson, look at his recordings and ask the local people about him. Mom already said ok. Poppy's parents would encourage a road trip in the middle of the semester. All we got to do is convince your folks Vaughn." Aden is smiling and looking up at him. (That must be new to Aden. Having to look up to someone.)

Vaughn looks unconvinced. Heck, even I just found about the plan. But I'll roll with it. (Aden's mom is a famous lawyer and she can make the school do all sorts of things.) I doubt we'll have any problems related to education.

Vaughn

What is Aden thinking? Did Poppy know about this? How on Earth will I be able to convince my mom? Technically I am 18 so I can do anything I want, but mom... And how am I supposed to afford an airplane ticket? Those things aren't cheap.

As if reading my mind Aden speaks up,

"Look, all the tickets and everything are already covered. We just need an 'ok' from your side." he smiles and I fight the urge to do so myself. But I can't, really. I've barely known them for 24 hours. Damn it tough, it sounds really fun. Very teen movie-ish.

Road trips with friends, something I didn't allow myself to consider for a while.

Both of them are looking at me with so much hope glimmering in their eyes, even Judy is staring at me, I can't help but grin and say,

"Ok."

Aden

We meet at the airport at 5 AM on the Sunday. All of us unintentionally decided to wear grey sweatpants and now we look like a boy band. Is it weird for me to like that we match as a group?

I hug mom and say goodbye. She smiles but it doesn't reach her brown eyes. She is the first to leave. It had been suspiciously easy convincing her. Maybe she liked the idea of me being away while an alien is closing in on New York? I hate to think like

that, as if she has accepted our doom. I know it's scary but giving up makes it worse. (Wow. Way to go on being not cheesy.)

Vaughn's mom is still hugging him like it's the end of the world. I learned that her name is "Finn" (short for "Fiona"). I also learned that Vaughn's dad had left them when he was five. It was an awkward experience. Finn and Vaughn brushed it off but it was obviously a touchy subject so we dropped it. All was better after that. My mom and Finn seemed to get along pretty well too.

I made my mom pull a few strings and now Vaughn has two weeks off from school so everything seems to be going ok.

(Except for the fact that I am scared of heights.)

Vaughn

Oh. My. God. Katherine Leuvano (Aden's absolutely lovely mother) bought us first class tickets. I repeat: First. Freaking. Class. I will be forever indebted to the Leuvanos.



But the glass of champagne the flight attendant offers me the moment we board the plane is enough to distract me. I politely decline the offer. The amount of luxury is already making me dizzy, I don't need alcohol to kick it up a notch.

Poppy doesn't seem fazed, although I do remember her having a full two story house all to herself. And her family does travel around the world for a living.

Aden and Poppy are the perfect example for the "American posh" type, except for the attitude.

I think I would feel a bit left out if Aden and Poppy weren't such good friends. (They let me have one of the window seats.)

There are two crib like seats against each side of the plane on every row. Aden and I sit behind Poppy and Judy. Yes, there is a seat for Judy.

Aden presses a button on his seat and it shifts into a twin size bed. He plugs in his earphones and starts listening to music even before the safety video is shown. He looks irritated and keeps clenching his fists. Is it something I did? Does he regret his choice? Did he want the window seat? Did he want to sit with Poppy? Should I switch next to Judy? My mind keeps pop-

ping up questions but I decide not to say anything. Mostly out of nervousness.

When he starts huffing occasionally I can't take it anymore I text Poppy.

"Is something wrong with Aden?"

She peeks through the gap between her and Judy's seat to look at me. She turns back and quickly types something out.

"Oh you have no idea."

"is he mad at me?"

"nope"

"then what is it?" I hear Poppy giggle before the clicking of nails against a phone screen.

"he's afraid of heights"

"oh" I stare dumbly at the screen fighting the urge to facepalm. Of course, it all makes sense but why would he book a flight when he's afraid of heights? Stupid Aden. Now he will have to endure two hours and twenty minutes of hell personally brought by fear.

Lucky for him I always pack flight sickness pills with me while travelling. I ask for a glass of water from the flight attendant. She immediately brings it. (I'm still not

used to this quality service.) I take one pill out of the bottle and nudge Aden. He opens his previously squeezed shut eyes and takes out his earphones, all while looking at me quizzically. I hold up the pill to his face and give him a knowing look. Blood rises to his tanned cheeks before he looks away and angrily murmurs something along the lines of "...damn you Poppy..." He mutters a thanks and takes the pill swallowing it dry. (I have no idea how he manages that.) I am baffled by his coldness but a small relieved smile he has on his face soothes my worries.

The plane wobbles slightly while I'm watching "Man of Steel" on the small built in TV in front of me. With a second and slightly more violent wobble Aden's hand goes to grip the armrest in his sleep. Unfortunately he catches my wrist instead. I don't dare to wake him up. But he is squeezing my hand so hard I'm starting to doubt if I actually had a left hand at all. I'm losing feeling.

If I wake him up he'll be so anxious and agitated... (Honestly, it's a miracle he was able to sleep.) I don't want him to suffer the flight while conscious.

I let my hand slowly slip into necrosis.

Poppy

Judy was surprisingly silent and compliant (and snuggly) through the whole flight.

The three of us wait patiently for a cab while Judy is busy sniffing around. It must be bizarre for her, trying to take in all the different scents of a whole new state.

"To the closest 'Land Rover' showroom, please." Aden says. The driver nods and doesn't question it. (I learn that Alabama cabs are much cheaper than New York ones.)

The showroom is massive and there are nearly 25 cars on one floor. The smell of car polish is heavy in the air. Every single car is shined to perfection.

Aden had already designed one, picked the colors and the materials out. He just needs to pick it up today. But that didn't stop him from going up to every single car "ooh-ing" and "ahh-ing" and commenting on their interior designs. Vaughn was silent. (I guess it's hard to speak while you

are too busy gaping at every car in a 10 foot radius.)

Aden said the design would be a surprise. (I trust Aden with aesthetical issues. He has a good eye.) I can't wait for it. If these employees don't pick up their speed I might just grab one by the collar and demand the car be brought up here this moment.

Oh. My. God.

It's covered in matte white paint all over. Even the grills are toothpaste white. It's interior on the other hand is completely black. The accents are black dyed cherry wood and the seats are genuine leather... (That's what the salesman talks about.) In simpler words, it's beautiful.

But the really amazing thing is, the car looks like a white chocolate covered oreo! (Although the white paint will stain quicker than Aden will be able to say "damn it", I love the car.)

Vaughn

I don't know where to begin. The car is custom designed. It is matte white of all colors. The interior is black leather...

When Aden meant "car", I thought, you know, a Toyota or something. But no, Aden just had to go get a range rover. I'm not even thinking about the car's own price itself. (Even the smell of it feels expensive.) How on Earth will he afford the gas for the car? Christ.

Ok, I'm taking back everything I just said. Sitting shotgun in this car is everything I never knew I wanted.

The driving is smooth and the engine gives a beautiful purr. (I never knew I could be this enthusiastic about cars.)

We're on our way to the hotel we booked. Poppy quickly fell asleep in the backseat next to Judy who's lying down on a towel we spread out for her. (When Judy tried sniffing the car I saw Aden's eye twitch. Poppy and I immediately took out a towel.)

The radio is on. Aden's fingers tap along with the rhythm of the song on the steering

wheel. It's calming. When the tune changes into a cheesy pop song, Aden scrunches up his face and changes the channel to a news podcast.

My mind stops when I hear the words a reporter says.

Aden

I change the channel. I will never voluntarily listen to "Let Me Take A Selfie". Ugh.

When the news reporter speaks I feel the urge to swerve and crash us into a tree.

"Breaking news! The other foreigners, or the Statue people as society refers to them, are moving. We all know the one closing in on New York but the other three?! All of them are moving now. Chinese and Indian officials have reported that the one in the Indian Ocean has started moving around and appears to be 'looking for something'. And we have live footage streaming from the Antarctic right

at this moment. Canadian research groups have confirmed that the foreigner located on the North Pole is also moving. Where does this leave humanity? Are they hostile? Are they friendly? We'll learn soon enough folks. We are currently waiting for an analysis report from the NSA. Ladies and gentlemen my name is Oliver Barnes and this has been breaking news on PBS"

The familiar news jingle plays. All of us stiffen, except for Poppy. I hear her gentle breathing, Judy's panting, the car's engine, the soft scramble of the radio. But I don't hear me or Vaughn breathing. I slightly avert my gaze from the road to look at Vaughn discreetly.

He is clutching the armrests so tight his knuckles are white.

I don't say anything.

Poppy

The boys wake me up when we arrive at the hotel. Both look equally tense. Oh boy, I have no doubt I missed something big.

They fill me in. I let the duffel bag slip out of my hands in shock. I look at Vaughn. I hope he handled it well. Aden gives me a silent acknowledgment. But Aden's determined.(I know because he keeps tensing his jaw muscles.)

Vaughns sits on one of the three king size beds in our hotel room and looks up at us. He cracks his knuckles and takes a deep breath.

"Guys, I think we should go to Stanley's. We could- we should sneak in and- and check out what this guy has been broadcasting."

I hum in agreement, I'm too busy thinking to give a verbal response. Aden is already putting on a black bomber jacket.

Aden

There is chicken wire around the house. The extra-large dish antenna makes the small cottage look even smaller.

We pretend not to see the danger warnings hanging on the wire fence as we climb over it. We have to awkwardly pass Judy over the fence while trying not to fall ourselves.

Dried leaves crunch under our feet as we cross the once green garden. Poppy picks the lock on the front door. (Don't ask me where she learned that from.)

We walk inside and take it all in. The sunbeams ascending from the windows reveal the extreme dustiness of the cottage. The wooden floor creaks as we shift our weight from left foot to right. Everything has a brown hue to it and everywhere smells like mold. In its current state, you'd think this house was left from the 18th century.

I pass out nylon gloves, hair bonnets and face masks. As ridiculous as we may look we can't risk leaving evidence behind.

Vaughn

We check rooms systematically. Aden checks the bedroom, Poppy the living room and bathroom and I take the small storage room. (I almost feel like a part of a SWAT team, who is a surgeon.)

The nylon gloves make my hands sweat but I don't really care. I lift containers, shove bags out of the way, rummage through drawers. Nothing. No journals, no CDs, no flash drives, nothing. I almost lose hope. Almost.

I push away a heavy dresser to reveal a hatch on the floor. I shout for Aden and Poppy. We lift the hidden door together. We find a ladder that leads down to a basement floor. I use my phone as a flashlight and climb down. Somehow this place is even dustier than the cottage.

There is an old recording set that sits on a small round table. Surrounding it there are boxes and boxes of CD's and flash drives.

We check the the boxes and pick one out labeled "queued" and set it on the table. Poppy picks up a CD with the date of the Statue People's arrival scribbled on it in black sharpie.

“June 28th 2013”

Poppy

The CD is heavy in my hands. The shiny holographic surface is thin and plastic but it feels like a bowling ball between my fingers.

The floors creak. Aden comes back with a dusty CD player and sets in on the small round table. Vaughn makes the mistake of blowing on the aged electronic to get rid of the dust. All of the dust flies into Aden's face and he struggles to breathe. Vaughn mutters a sheepish "sorry" while Aden is managing not to choke and still look unimpressed.

I plop the CD in and hold my breath. The machine starts whirring and buzzing as if it's an elderly man trying to run a marathon. I am tempted to cross my fingers or pray that it works, but I never believed in those sorts of things. If it's going to work, it will.

A small green light appears on the CD player. We all drag something that we can sit on next to the table. I take Judy into my lap and try to swallow the sour taste of anticipation.

The recording sputters to life.

“This is--” the old man clears his throat.

“This is meant to be posted on the 28th of June 2013. I’m afraid that I won’t be able to make it to that day. I would love to see it but, alas it is not my destiny. Ha! as if I believe in destiny. Anyways. Where was I?... Oh! Yes, the key introduction. I wrote the important stuff in my journal somewhere. Forget it. Ok I’m beginning.

Welcome y’all! This is ‘Our Imperfect Views and How to Correct Them’ this is my last session, ever. But I’ll save the goodbye for the end. Moving on. My name is Stanley Harvellson and let’s talk about global warming and how humanity is slowly killing the Earth. What? You thought I would end my life with a more passive topic? Hell no! I am stubborn old man living in the south I ain’t gonna be compliant to those who deny something so obvious as global warming! In my childhood you actually needed a winter coat to survive... ”

He kept talking about global warming and then bid his farewell. I don’t understand I can hear a high pitched scrambling in the background (it almost sounds like morse code) still Stanley doesn’t mention aliens once. However, before the intro he did say that he would love to see “it” happen. But what is “it”?

Aden keeps pacing around the room muttering words to himself. Vaughn is flexing his fingers, occasionally cracking his knuckles. (He wrote the whole session down in a notebook.) I realize that I’m violently chewing on my bottom lip. We all have our nervous habits. Aden’s pacing comes to a halt. He clears his throat.

“I don’t understand. There is clearly something going on but there is absolutely no acknowledgement of it.” Aden sighs and drags his latex gloved hands down his face. Vaughn shrugs saying,

“Yes, but I think Stanley knows, and he isn’t being forced to hide or ignore it, he is just completely chill with it. At least that’s what I think.” I hum in agreement. Vaughn is right. But we should check other recordings too. I voice my concerns.

While we search for another session to listen, Aden notes that several boxes have been taken away. He says that the CIA probably took them away for research.

Our suspicions are further confirmed when all the other sessions that we listen to don’t have that weird scrambling in the background. The CIA must have missed the “queued” box.



Aden abruptly sits up. "Wait." he says squinting and grabs the notebook from Vaughn's hands. His eyes frantically search for the right words. "A-ha!" He says in triumphant manner.

"Guys look. Stanley says that he wrote important 'stuff' in his journal. He keeps a journal! It must be around here somewhere. We should look for it. I bet he wrote everything about the Statue People in that journal." Aden is right.

"Let's just hope the CIA didn't find it before we came." I say and Vaughn nods.

We start our search from the basement and continue up to the first floor.

All the stereotypical secret stash/gun hiding spots have obviously been checked before. We find unscrewed air vent lids, slashed mattresses, disorganized bookshelves and lifted floor tiles all around the cottage. But no journal. I suggest we check the outside too. (I refuse to lose hope.)

I let Judy wander while we feel the underside of water pipes and lift loose bricks.

Vaughn

The autumn sun covers everything in a brownish gold hue. And although the strangely placed brick I just lifted was covered in grime and insects, I feel oddly happy. Judy runs around in dry leaves barking happily and occasionally comes for a little scratch on the belly. Poppy's eyes light up with her every suspicion and then dims again when she discovers that the wooden plank was loose because this cottage is probably older than time itself. Every few minutes Aden gets bored and not-so-gracefully throws himself into a pile of leaves. We all share a laugh. I don't have the heart to tell him there's probably more bugs in there than he can count. Because every time he laughs his smile crin-

kles the corners of his eyes and he tilts his head up to the sky with a hand on his chest trying to steady himself. And the sunlight makes his skin look golden.

My moment is interrupted by Judy's stubborn barking. Poppy makes a motion to quiet her down but Judy is persistent. And this dog isn't stupid. If Judy is barking, there's (usually) a reason behind it. So we check it out.

Judy is clawing at the small path of dirt. She digs so fast that by the time we come up next to her she is already heads deep in the ground. After awhile she stops digging and starts sniffing the small pit. When she barks proudly we look inside and, Lo and behold, a small hand-sized leather journal with yellowed pages sits somewhat sadly in the pit.

I pick it up and shake it to get rid of the dirt. The journal feels expensive. The bound leather is smooth and sans wrinkles in the way only top quality notebooks can provide.

I open it. Aden and Poppy are jittering in their spots out of curiosity and excitement. The handwriting is cursive and perfect. I pick a random page and start reading out loud.

"I think the aliens(or whatever they are) they have agreed to come. I think it's because they pity us. Anyone would, after seeing what we've do to our Earth. Some-days I am ashamed to be human. I hope that when they come people don't try to attack them. I don't want a rescue mission to turn into an apocalypse.

I also found a strange bath of mushrooms in my garden, I think they may be poisonous.

Note to self: Check if mushrooms are poisonous."

At the bottom of the page there are a few pretty realistic drawing of some mushrooms. I show the drawings to Aden and Poppy but they are too occupied with processing what I just read to actually care for the drawings.

Aden

I think Stanley did call the Statue People here. The page Vaughn read and the rest of the notebook all support this but the Statue People haven't really done much in terms of "rescuing" the Earth.

I sigh. It's getting late and I'm hungry. If we want to eat at the hotel we need to make

reservations. Ugh. I'm not in the mood for fancy food that takes 45 minutes to serve. I want cheap junk food that's heavy on the chemicals. Also some ranch and baby carrots.

And what's a better place to satisfy my junk food craving than Walmart? So I drive us to one. (The thing is huge. It's like a small mall just for groceries.)

We agree to split and then meet up at cash register number 16 when we find everything we want. Grabbing extra snacks are highly encouraged.

With that we all dash towards the pre-packaged food aisles. But we lose sight of each other pretty quickly thanks to the extreme size of the Walmart.

In the end I go to the cash register number 16 with a jumbo pack of baby carrots, a tube of ranch dressing, a box of powdered Hostess donuts, a pack of cheddar pretzels and a bag of coca-cola gummies.

Poppy comes with a bag of mini plain bagels, a small tub of Philadelphia cream cheese, cheddar cubes, three lunch bag packs of pre sliced apples with caramel sauce, two cans of dog food, a bag of marshmallows and three bottles of water.

Vaughn arrives with six fruit punch capri suns, a box of superman vs. batman fruit rolls, three pizza lunchables, diced pineapples, a pack of ready-for-salad spinach leaves, a mix of pre-grated cheese and a couple of dog treats.

Then it clicks into place. Vaughn thought about our favorite pizzas. Mine, triple cheese with spinach leaves. And Poppy's, plain with pineapples on top. And of course dog treats for Judy. While my respect level for Vaughn shoots sky high I grab his shoulder, look him in the eye and say,

"Vaughn Oberney, you are truly amazing."  
And he grins smugly as if he knows.

As the cashier rings everything she gives us a weird look (Probably because she struggles to picture three teenagers eating this much junk food.) but we laugh it off. Everything seems funny right now. Even the way my car looks like somebody accidentally washed the whole thing down with bleach is downright hilarious.

# Serendipity

by Deren Tasan

SERENDIPITY

"lost in the  
**BLUE**  
neighbourhood"

A Novel By:

*Deren Tasan*

## **PROLOGUE**

**ser·en·dip·i·ty**

**sĕr'ən-dĭp'ĩ-tĕ**

**noun**

**the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way**

This story is a story of a boy who has to face the cruelty of the world on a new level by; by defying societal norms when he falls in love. He hopelessly falls in love. But is it right? Is it okay? There is hope, there is the hope that things will get better. They always get better right? Well, we will have to wait and see.

## **CHAPTER 1**

Song for the chapter: The City-Ed Sheeran

**SAMUEL'S POV:**

I was finally settled down. I was finally starting to believe in the serendipity. I was feeling truly happy for once in a long time. Of course something had to change that. Of course there had to be something that messed everything all up again.

I'm Samuel, Samuel Pierce. I'm Australian, unlike my brother I did not even get the chance to start life as lucky as him. There was something wrong even from my birth. Oh well, let me talk about my family first. I live with my brother Matthew, my mother and my father. I used to call my brother Matt for short but now even hearing someone call him Matt sends chills all over my body, I would tell you the reason but that is a whole other story which I don't even want to talk about right now. My mother and my father met in NYC when mom was there for a gig in a bar and dad happened to be at the bar while mom was performing and they had the "love in first sight" thingy majiggy I guess. Well, we call that being in the right place in the right time. And that never happens to me.

So after mom and dad met, they spent loads of time together and dad told mom about his photography studio. Mom wanted to see it so they ended up in dad's studio and mom saw her pictures hanging up all around the room because dad always took pictures of mom. The pictures of her singing, laughing, blinking, breathing-- anything you could possibly think of. That's when mom realized she was in love with dad and so all the magic happened. They got married and had my brother about six months after the wedding. So he got to be born in NYC.

They lived in NYC, which I can't deny is one of the most beautiful cities in my opinion, until dad got a job offer to be a photography teacher in some art school located in somewhere called Australia, Perth? Have you even ever heard of that place? Because I surely wouldn't have if I wasn't born there. So yeah, you can probably understand that dad took the offer and the whole family moved to Perth. And when I say the whole family, I don't mean only dad, mom and Matthew; I mean dad, mom, Matthew and my grandparents! I can't even remember why they decided to move to Perth and how it all happened, but I wish it didn't.

So let's timeskip to me being born. The neighbourhood we (my grandparents, mom, dad and Matthew-- yes, we all lived in the same house) used to live in was really isolated from the rest of the city. So the gang (yeah my family) didn't have many neighbours before I was born, but to my luck, two years after I was born a family moved to the house across from ours. There were almost no kids in the neighbourhood so one moving in near my house was really exciting even though I was only two (almost three!). It was still a pretty big deal.

So the family, Davis (not too fast-- I will talk about him in a second), his father (I never really liked him) and absolutely amazing mother moved in. They were from America so Davis had a cute American accent, so did my parents and Matthew but I was stuck with my ugly, no offense to people with Australian accents, Australian accent. Mine and Davis' families met immediately and they became really good friends so Davis and I ended up spending almost every second of our childhood together. I feel like I've known him from birth. We were the inseparable duo, we would do everything together. I was a really quiet kid growing up so like I said I almost had no friends other than Davis. I was never the talkative type so having no friends didn't

really bother me, but not having Davis absolutely did. We really had been through alot together.

One day I was with Davis like I almost always was, we had gone to the beach together to build something from sand for some school project and took pictures of it, and when I came back home I immediately wish I hadn't. Here's the reason why; my Mr. Perfect older brother had to get "better education" to be able to go to the college he wanted so we had to move back to NYC-- where we are now. I was only ten but that was the absolute worst news I had gotten my entire life.

Mom and dad thought I would be really excited and start packing and not have any problems with moving; but they totally had the wrong idea. Grandma on the other hand knew everything, absolutely everything about me. So she knew how important Davis was for me and how I would insist on not leaving and staying in Perth with her and Grandpa-- but she couldn't do anything about it. I knew my parent always cared about Matthew more but this still came as quite a shock for me. And can you guess what else they did? They decided that telling me WE WERE FREAKING MOVING TO NYC TWO DAYS BEFORE WE WERE WAS A GOOD IDEA. I don't un-

derstand what they tried doing with this even to this day. They made me pack.

I was so devastated that all I did was either crying, just lying down and staring at the ceiling or just lying on my bed and staring at the ceiling while I was crying. I wanted to go and hug Davis and tell him that I did not want to leave him and ask him to hide me so that I wouldn't have to leave. This was something we regularly did. When we spent the day in each other's houses and when our parents came to pick us up we would hide each other thinking our parents would change their minds and leave without picking the one up. It worked almost all of the time, if there wasn't something urgent that had to be done. Even though I knew it wouldn't work this time, I was so desperate to think it would. I couldn't. I couldn't just go and say goodbye to him like nothing happened. I knew we would one way or another come back here someday but I just couldn't. So I didn't. I didn't go and hug him. Do I regret it? Not often, because I'm 100% sure I wouldn't be able to leave him. But I miss his hugs. So much.

When we first moved to NYC, it took me months to get used to being without him. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat-- everything reminded me of him. Yeah I know it

sounds like I was separated from my boyfriend, but it was even worse. I was separated from my best friend. It was like I'd been torn into two. I couldn't talk to my grandparents for months, especially to my grandmother because her voice reminded me of the Blue Neighbourhood. Yes, that is the name of- well, was the name of our neighbourhood. My parents and Matthew would go back to Perth every once in awhile to visit my grandparents, but I didn't. I insisted on not going back. So mom, dad and Matthew stopped going back to Perth; instead our grandparents started coming to NYC. When they did, I would just usually lock myself in my bedroom and blast the music so that I wouldn't hear my family's worried conversations about me, about how "weird" I was acting, and how I was turning the situations into more dramatic things.

Things have changed now. It's been six years since we moved to NYC. Grandma tried to talk to me about Davis but when she did I would just act like she wasn't there. We have grown a distance between us within the years since the move. Both literally and metaphorically. We barely talk about stuff other than school.

I'm sixteen. I could say that I'm a more outgoing person now. NYC changed me, it

changes everyone. I have plenty of friends. I'm one of the popular people in the school, I guess. It wasn't really my choice though. When I was about thirteen, I joined the theatre club and I-- well they, discovered I could sing. So the music teacher made me start playing the piano and stuff so it just happened. I'm the head of the theatre club now. I dated a boy last year but I was not (and am still not) out to anyone but myself yet so I was scared and we kind of just broke up. I didn't like him that much anyways.

Back to what happened earlier today. Um, I don't know how to put this but; THEY DECIDED TO FREAKING MOVE BACK TO PERTH. DO THEY EVEN THINK OR CARE ABOUT ME? DO I EVER CROSS THEIR MINDS WHEN THEY ARE DECIDING ON SOMETHING HUGE LIKE MOVING BACK? LIFE WAS JUST STARTING TO GET BETTER FOR ME FOR GOD'S SAKE. THEIR EXCUSE IS THAT GRANDMA AND GRANDPA CAN'T KEEP COMING HERE FOR US BECAUSE THEY'RE REALLY OLD NOW APPARENTLY, AND IT COSTS TOO MUCH. WHAT? THIS IS THE WORST EXCUSE THEY'VE EVER TOLD ME. IT'S EVEN WORSE THAN THE ONE THEY TOLD ME WHEN ONCE THEY FORGOT TO PICK ME UP FROM SCHOOL WHEN I WAS 11. WHAT THEY SAID WAS "You



didn't want to move here in the first place, so yeah!". ARE THEY DUMB? IT TOOK ME 4 FREAKING YEARS TO GET USED TO THIS PLACE; GET USED TO LIVING AS A HALF.

I don't want to think about anything. Don't want to think about the fact that I haven't talked to Davis for 6 years when he tried reaching me for months. And I avoided him. I will be seeing him every single day if he still lives in Perth. And there is a big chance he is. So I just let myself drift into sleep, where I hopefully can stop thinking about Davis-- but it didn't happen.

## CHAPTER 2

song for the chapter: Broods-  
Mother&Father

SAMUEL'S POV:

It has been two weeks since I got the brilliant, extremely awesome and surpriseful news. That means I only got more than a day before we have to leave to get to the airport. I've already said my goodbyes to all of my good friends. So I will just spend the day walking around outside and appreciating the beauty which I will probably not

be able to see for a long time since it costs a lot to travel here from Perth, which means we probably will not come back here for a long time. Am I ready to move again? Am I ready to go back to the Blue Neighbourhood? Am I ready to face Davis? Am I ready for seeing him every day? I have no idea. I want to be excited but at the same time I don't want to let myself be excited. I have no idea of what I will have to face when I see him, or even when I get to the Blue Neighbourhood.

So I just walk into the familiar coffee shop wishing there's no one I know inside. Well, this is new. There's almost no one inside except some baristas who look like they've been awake for, I don't know, seventy years? I better run out of the coffee shop before all of them turn into zombies and try to eat my brain, I can't let that happen when I am about to move again and mess my life up once more, can I?! With that, I just rush out of the coffee shop like I hadn't entered in the first place. Deciding going back home to make sure I had got everything I wanted to would be better, I just head home.

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I get to the front door, but before opening the door I just stand there, trying to memorise the beautiful view around our house, because this time I do not want to try to forget. This time I want to remember. I have nothing to make me want to forget this time though. It's not like I am leaving the other half of me like the last time, is it? After spending a good four minutes just looking around with my hand on the door knob, I head in.

Oh great. Mom and dad are sitting on the couch looking at me. Well, this means it's that time again when we argue about almost everything until we lose our voices from screaming. Great. Just great. I start making my way towards the couch across the one they are sitting on. We have assigned seats for these, guys. Dad usually sits on the armchair by the window because he reads all the time. He's one of those freaks who believe that natural light is the best while reading. And mom usually sits on the one with the coffee table next to it. It had been like that since the first day we moved here. I have no idea why; but they are now sitting together on the one by the plant. I don't have a seat I usually sit on a normal basis because since the move mom, dad and I haven't been on

good terms. I spent all of my time either outside or in my room. It was because I just thought I was better off without them asking me why I was so upset with the move-- constantly. I don't regret it. But I, too, have a seat for these arguments; the one near the TV. I don't know why I started sitting there in the first place, but it's near the corridor which leads to the staircase, which leads to my room, so when the argument ends it's quicker for me to get to my room and shut the door, so I guess that's why.

I head to my seat and sit down with a loud sigh (more like a groan) leaving my lips. I get comfortable in my seat and look up at my parents. "What?"

They just sigh back. Mom looks at dad with the "you talk" look and dad starts talking after taking a deep breath, "We need to talk.". Oh wow, really?

"Well I can clearly see that, so I would appreciate if you could just start talking. I don't want to waste my time just sitting here with you looking at me as if I'm a murderer."

They seem to get the message because dad starts talking again: "I-- We," he stops and takes a deeper breath, "are really concerned about you." then again he stops,

as if he's waiting me to reply with something. Too bad, I'm too tired to reply so I just wait for him to continue.

They know that I don't care if they care or not anymore, which is understandable because they usually don't. I'm just about to get up and make my way towards the kitchen to grab something to eat when a soft voice breaks the silence.

"Are you sure you want to move back?". I just freeze. My whole body just freezes in the place, unable to make the slightest move. They decided to care? This is new. When I earn back my ability to move, I stand up and take the time to look both of them dead in the eye.

"Oh, so you decided to ask me this time. Well, it's too late. Stop acting like you care. You don't. Just stop messing with my life, okay? I don't need your caring, I'm moving back." Then I rush up the stairs and slam the door with all of my strength, which is very little. Though surprisingly the doors shuts with a huge bang and I'm really grateful that it didn't fall down.

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After a long time, trying to just make myself believe they are acting like they care, I finally calm down. The one thing that has always helped me calm down is Troye Sivan's music. So I just blast the music like I used to. I hadn't done it in a while but mom and dad have started pushing me lately like they used to, so this is probably my only escape from them intentionally speaking the loudest they can and saying that they do really care. I can't just trust them like nothing happened. Everyone thinks that I'm making a bigger deal out of this than I should but I completely disagree.

I considered not leaving the room until both of them are asleep, but my poor little body probably will lose itself from not being fed for like, six hours maybe? Getting up to my feet, I slowly creep out of the room and start walking down the stairs. There seems to be no one around. I would like to thank not only god but also Jesus for this (I love you to death if you get the reference). I don't think I want to have another one of those awkward conversation sessions with my parents. After I have carried my body successfully down the stairs, I smile to myself, realizing how taller I got. That just came out of nowhere, but smiling is good right? Just as I'm about to start making my way towards the kitchen, my

body tenses when I see that the lights are on in my parent's office. They stopped using it a couple years ago. It had just become a place for them to talk about stuff they don't want Matthew and I to hear.

I don't know if I should go and take a look. Maybe it's something that I shouldn't really hear. Oh well, screw it. I have the right to know what's going on. After having a full-on internal debate on whether I should check it out or not, I just start slowly and quietly walking towards the office that is usually locked. When I reach the enormous wooden door of the not-frequently-used room, I lean on the wall, placing my ear near the door so I can hear what's going on.

“YOU KNOW HE WON'T BE ABLE TO GET HIMSELF TOGETHER WHEN WE GO BACK, MILES. WE HAVE BEEN KEEPING THE LETTERS DAVIS SENT HIM, HE HAS NO IDEA WHAT'S GOING ON!”

Wait a second, Davis sent me letters? Oh my god. He's going to be so mad at me, if he even bothers getting mad at me. I can't really get upset with my parents in this situation because I wouldn't reply back to him anyways, probably. But at least I could've read them. Whatever.

Dad started talking with a calm voice. “Why do you care about Davis so much? He was just a kid Samuel hung out with. There was nothing different about it, he hangs out with people here too, a lot more people in fact. He will just hang out with new people when we go back. And Davis isn't going to care about him anyways. Why would he?”

So that is the case. How-- what? Does he seriously think it is that simple? Is it that simple? Am I really making a bigger deal out of this than I should? I don't really want to hear anything else right now. I will know if Davis really cares about me or not when we go back. I just want to sleep.

I rush to my room once more, but this time careful on being as quiet as possible, and close my door really slowly. I jump on the bed, taking a deep breath, plug my earphones in and try to calm myself down. I can feel my heart pounding with its whole strength inside me. This is really happening. I really am going back to the “Blue Neighbourhood”. After staring at the ceiling for about half an hour, I drift to sleep, my heart still pounding like crazy inside me.

## CHAPTER 3

song for the chapter: Troye Sivan-Suburbia

SAMUEL'S POV:

We're almost in Perth, there's almost about half an hour left before we are officially home. Mom and Dad have been acting really strange the whole morning. I know it has something to do with the whisper-shout fight they had in the office last night. The flight was quiet. I listened to Oh Wonder and Broods the whole time. It calms me down, not as much as Troye's voice does, but it's okay. I don't think even Troye will be able to calm me down at this point. It's really strange, I don't remember being this nervous my entire life.

We are in a rented car right now, I don't know what kind it is and I honestly don't care. Am I going to puke? Well I hope not because our suitcases haven't arrived yet so I will not be able to change my clothes. We'll probably have to go and pick them up sometime today. I don't want to smell.

It's probably the best if I try to sleep off this ride. My body, brain and organs are literally going crazy. My body is sweating like I've run a hundred miles. My brain is working like it never has before. Oh my god. I am going to puke. What if I start

smelling and see Davis before I have the chance to shower or change? Wait, what am I expecting? It's not like he's going to be waiting in front of my door and come running to me when we pull of to the garage. Although that would be absolutely sweet. Maybe he really doesn't care.

I'm currently sitting in the car, with my eyes closed, scared of opening them. I don't think I'm ready to be back yet. Maybe I should've stayed in NYC when I had the chance to have a say in the decisions that are usually made without being bothered to ask me. Ugh, I hate regretting the decisions I've made. It's too late. We are doing this, and we are not going to back off (not me and my family; me, my body, my heart and my brain). Oh great. Suburbia from Troye Sivan just came on. I hesitate for a second, it's just really relatable for me right now, but I don't want to be reminded that I've seriously left Davis, and ignored him this whole time. But I can't find enough strength to just skip the song.

"The sunsets longer, where I am from,

Where dreams go to die

While having fun,

The boys fix their cars and

Girls eat it up,

Loving's so good when

Love is young

Yeah there's so much history in these  
streets

And mama's good eats,

Oh Wonder on repeat

So much history in my head,

The people I've left

The one's that I've kept"

And that is when I crack up. I can feel the tears filling my eyes furiously. As if they've been locked there for years and are ready to come out. I'm not sure if I should let them or not. I do, I just do. Tears come streaming down my eyes, like they've been set free. And they are. I didn't let myself cry for a long time after I was partially over the move. I thought it made me look weak, which I absolutely hate. The last time I remember fully crying was when I was trying

to deal with the fact that Davis wasn't there with my anymore.

I can feel Matthew looking at me with his rich hazel eyes. He must be surprised, I don't think he has seen me cry before. And I have not seen him cry before, obviously, since he is Mr. Perfect. We used to bond together really well until we moved. Like I did to my parents and grandmother (I was already not really close to my grandfather), I isolated myself from him too. I didn't really feel his absence at first, but lately I do.

Well, since I've started crying really loudly a couple of minutes ago, my mother has started watching me from the corner of her eye. She hasn't seen me cry in a long time either. Dad tries looking at me from the side mirror, but he ignores the whole situation overall.

It had been about five songs, and no one speaks a single word until I start calming down, then mom starts speaking; "Sam, are you okay?". Her voice sounds genuine for once. I think of just asking her if she really cares, but this time I feel like she does.

"I am, it's just that I-- nothings wrong, I'm okay." I say quickly, more like mumble. But mom doesn't buy it. Wow, she really is act-

ing like she cares. “Sam, I know something’s wrong. You never cry, well unless--” she doesn’t continue. Mom and dad know how sad I was, I’m just surprised that mom cares, that’s all.

“It’s okay mom, we can talk about it later.” I say and shoot her a weak smile. Did I just really say this? Well, she’ll probably forget about it so I won’t have to talk to her. At least I hope so.

She shoots me a smile back, which is surprisingly as genuine as the ones before I became really mad at her. I am impressed. Feeling surprisingly happy and warm inside, I stop crying and close my eyes. It is time for a nap.

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“SAM WAKE UP WE’RE HERE!”

Oh. Oh. I don’t really want to open my eyes. Can I just sit here for the rest of my life? Please let me sit here for the rest of my life. I don’t think I will be able to live because my heart started beating wildly once again. Oh my god. Someone starts shak-

ing me even more wildly, they really want to wake me up. I’m already awake idiots!

After a few more seconds, I slowly open my eyes and groan. Acting like you’ve just woken up is hard man. Opening my eyes fully, I see mom standing by the door, carrying some of the boxes we could pick up from the airport when we arrived. She sees that I’m awake and starts talking-- well, yelling to be exact, in such excitement and happiness that I seriously have to stand there and adore her. Maybe things really are starting to get better. I hope they are, I really do.

## CHAPTER 4

song for the chapter: Broods-Four Walls

SAMUEL’S POV:

Nothing has changed in the past six years when I was away. Well, of course a couple families moved out, a couple moved in, some plants were planted over there and here, there are more coffee shops, some houses have been painted; but it still feels like the same old home. It still feels warm and accepting. At least to some point.

Maybe I shouldn't say it is fully accepting-- but nowhere really is. Sometimes, not even the four walls you call home aren't.

Grandma and grandpa are seriously really thrilled that we are back here. Mom and grandma already started preparing a huge meal for the celebration of us moving back, right now; while dad, grandpa and Matthew are sitting in front of the TV, talking-- arguing mostly, about something related to sports. None of these really are in my interests so after I take a hot shower to get rid of the smell that was caused because of the stress I had-- and have because of the car ride, and decide to go around and explore the neighbourhood. I'm not doing this to see Davis, promise. I don't think I'm ready to see him yet. He's probably out with his friends anyways. We're almost nearing the summer break, these are the few last chances to go out and have some fun. Well, I'm going to be home, writing and singing. I have no one here except my family. And Davis, hopefully.

I grab my headphones and phone, quickly wave everyone goodbye and make my way outside the house. Dad offers to take me to wherever I was going because he was already leaving the house to pick up our stuff from the airport, but I just rush

out of the house. As soon as I'm out, I plug my headphones into my phone and put them on. Of course Troye Sivan starts playing. I happily turn up the volume and take a deep breath, inhaling the familiar smell of the neighbourhood. Looking around, I see a cute coffee shop by the blue houses and decide it could be a good start. I carelessly move my body with the rhythm and start walking to my destination, which in this case is the coffee shop; looking around and admiring both the tunes filling my ears and the beauty surrounding me. I've honestly missed being in the Blue Neighbourhood.

When I get to the coffee shop, I open the door slowly, surprised by how light it is. Have the doors gotten lighter magically or am I really strong now? Either way, I am welcomed with the overwhelming smell of fresh coffee. I'm such coffee trash. But you can't judge me because I HADN'T HAD COFFEE IN THREE DAYS? Time to calm down. I walk to the barista, taking time to inspect my surroundings. Reaching the barista, who is pretty good looking if I do say so myself, I order a cold caramel ice-macchiato and wait for my order to be made. Good thing I had money in my pockets from a week ago. Always keep money in your pockets, kids, you may never know when you might be in need.



After paying and grabbing my drink, wanting to discover the precious coffee shop more, I sit down on one of the cute arm-chairs. They are pink and have little polka dots on them. Really cute. Iconic. Getting halfway through my drink, I decide it's time to get out. Perhaps I'll come back to get another drink to sip on the way home.

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I walked around the neighbourhood for about half an hour before I decided to go back to the coffee shop since I craved more coffee the whole time. I kept ignoring and avoiding looking at people because I've decided that I seriously am not ready to face Davis yet. I'll probably have a heart attack right there if I see him anytime soon. But the neighbourhood is really small, and I am one unlucky kid.

Currently I am headed back to the cute coffee shop. This time when I get there I'm going to check the name of it on my way home because the last time I totally forgot. I told you I was such coffee trash, this is what happens when you get addicted to it. Try avoiding getting addicted to coffee at

all costs, because once you do, there's no going back. Don't say I didn't warn you.

This time I want try something different. I head to the menu that is pasted on a chalkboard by the window. What should I get? Chai Latte? I want something that could freshen me up. Coffee had always been one of the other things that could make me feel at ease. It's probably because dad's such a coffee trash as well, actually, he's trashier than me. If that's even possible. Since dad drank LOADS of coffee, I got used to being around the smell of it, so it always made me feel more secure.

Back to real life. I am not kidding, I probably spent 15 minutes looking at the menu, but at last, I can't help but go with the cold caramel ice-macchiato. Not addicted. Definitely did not spend 15 minutes staring at a menu filled with various coffee names. I pay for the coffee and I have absolutely no money left. The perks of living in a small neighbourhood-- I won't have to take a bus or anything, I'll just walk home. Plus, I enjoy walking. It is one of the few, let's be real, the only physical activity I enjoy doing.

I grab my coffee and put my headphones back on, I don't really have much time until my battery, which currently is on 7%, dies.

I hate being outside, or anywhere, with a dead phone. No. I'm not phone trash too. It's probably that I just can't stand being without music. Speaking of which, we need to buy some sort of a piano for me because I have no idea how much I'll last without one. Piano trash.

After checking the time on my phone, 5.30pm, I realize I will be just on time for the dinner and smile softly to myself. Why am I smiling? I have no idea. I walk to the door with my coffee, aka a blessing god sent for the poor little humans, in my hand. I start watching the ground, watching how my steps are synchronized with the music, keeping my head down. I grab the door-knob and just as I'm about t-- WHAT THE HECK? SOMEONE JUST BASHED ME WITH THE DOOR AND THE COFFEE SPILT ALL OVER ME. I tilt my head upwards to see who I'm about to drag to the pits of hell and-

Holy mother of Jesus.

## CHAPTER 5

song for the chapter: Troye Sivan-Lost Boy

SAMUEL'S POV:

Tilting my head up, I see the familiar pair of rich green eyes. The pair isn't new to me. They are as wide as mine, maybe even wider. I knew I would see him at some point but I bet he didn't even know I would be back here. Though I was not expecting to meet again like this. Of course I had to see him today, the world has no mercy for me. Of course I had to see him right after I said I wasn't ready. The second his eyes meet mine, I totally freak out and drop the coffee I held, my hands start shaking like a huge earthquake just hit them. I hate this feeling. I can tell by the way he started breathing that he knows who I am, he remembers. My heart starts beating even wilder than it did in the car, like the blood it was already pumping wasn't enough, and I start sweating like crazy again. Just taken a shower, why do you have to do this?! I had unconsciously started holding my breath. When I realize I had been doing that, I quickly gasp for air. And this breaks the eye contact. He murmurs something and starts rushing out of the coffee shop.

My body is not capable of moving again, you can't hate this enough unless you've experienced it, in the worst possible times. I probably have some disease where my body locks itself when I feel or experience something to its extreme, and usually that is what happens. My brain, or my emo-

tions don't have the ability to stop at some point which becomes really stressful because you end up overthinking every single thing. I have no idea what I'm feeling in this case, but I surely am overthinking. My body and my brain just stand there, I'm not sure if I am still there at this point, watching him walk in a hurried pace across the street, not looking up. I have to know if he cares. I have no idea why I'm obsessed with knowing if people care about me or not; it's probably because, thanks to my parents, I've rarely felt like someone's caring about me in the past few years. Overthinking once again, but I have to know if dad's right.

I place my coffee on one of the small table looking things, shakily, I don't know what they are and I don't give myself the chance to observe (I usually go blind when I'm nervous, I extremely am at this point, experiencing the feelings to their extreme once again), and leave the coffee shop, stumbling and almost falling. Everyone's probably looking at me with such interest. If this exact same thing happened to a stranger in front of my eyes while I was calmly sipping my coffee, just relaxing in a coffee shop; I would be looking at them too. You don't see a boy that just spent 15 minutes looking at a coffee menu to decide which coffee to buy, get bashed with a door be-

cause of another boy, and get soaked with coffee, then just leave the coffee, almost falling, and rush out of the shop. Not usual. Not at all.

I stand out of the coffee shop, still soaking in the remains of my precious cold caramel ice-macchiato, my heart still pounding to its full ability, my body still sweating like crazy. I can't believe I just left the coffee there. I spent fifteen freaking minutes trying to decide which coffee to buy! I close my eyes, taking a deep breath to clear my lungs and try to help my heart a little because I do not want to die right now. There is nothing I can possibly think is better to do in this second than to go and talk to him. I spot the brown haired boy a little further away from the small park, walking in a slower pace than he did before, and quickly force myself out of the lock my body had made for itself. I have to talk to him, it's too late for backing out now.

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Call 911. I'm seriously going to have a heart attack. I've said that I enjoyed walking earlier, now I totally take it back. I hate

walking. The closer I get to him, the faster he seems to be moving. It's like we're playing catch. I did not enjoy playing catch when I was little, not at all.

I make my move and partially run to him, holding my breath once more. I launch myself forward and grab his arm, being really careful on not squeezing it. All of a sudden, he stops moving and so do I. Should I back off and walk off like nothing happened? I stop and think for a second. I shouldn't. I have to know if he cares or not. He turns to me, as if the whole world is moving in slow motion, looking at me like I'm a total stranger. As if this is the first time he's ever seen

me. And I look at him, just like I used to. Just like I used to when he and we were still best friends. I can't stand him looking at me like I'm a some dumb kid he has never seen, so I speak up, hoping my voice doesn't crack or I don't start crying. Maybe he doesn't remember me or maybe he doesn't want to.

"Davis? I, I'm Samue--", I'm cut off by his sharp, almost shaky voice. Is he going to start crying? Oh god no. I won't be able to stand seeing him cry. I don't think he intended to be this sharp, but his words tear through the air just like knives.

"Samuel, yes I know. How could I not? You were my best friend, remember? The one you," he stops and inhales one of the deepest breaths I've seen someone inhale in my whole entire life, "the one you pretended like you cared? Then left someday without saying a single word, yeah I remember you. I also remember the nights I cried to sleep because I thought something bad happened to you. I remember the letters I sent to you, asking if you were okay. I remember the days I've sat in front of your front door waiting for you to come back. I remember going through my mother's death all by myself, at least hoping at some point you would write a letter back to me, showing that you cared at least a teeny tiny bit. Yeah I remember you. So now if you stop following me, I have important stuff to do."

He just spits it all out and pulls back his arm so hard that I almost fall down, then starts hurrying down the neighbourhood, full of rage. Great, my body has locked itself once more. I try to process the thing he had just said. He sat on my front door waiting for me? Maybe I should really have written him back. Oh wait, so that's the deal about the letters, the ones mom and dad were talking about. I know I just thought I shouldn't be blaming them for not giving me the letters, but now I'm start-

ing to. Maybe I would've known that Judy died and I could've helped hi-- wait. Judy freaking died? Oh my god. No. I really have messed up this time, really badly.

## CHAPTER 6

song for the chapter: Oh Wonder-Plans

SAMUEL'S POV:

Have you ever felt like you completely messed up everything? Feeling as if just as you were about to make things better, everything gets messed up once again? Well, I've felt that multiple times even just in the last week. And let me tell you, it's not great at all. I was not the person to mess things up when I was little, I was almost as perfect as my brother. At least around my parents I was careful to. I wanted them to think I was even more perfect than my brother. Even though knowing such thing would never happen, I just always thought it would. But of course I messed that up as well, several times. First being the day I learnt we were moving, second being the one when realized I might like boys too. I never told them this, but no matter what-

ever you do, they are your parents and they know you really well.

I just stood there for a while after Davis and I had interacted, making sure he doesn't feel like I'm following him or something. Our houses are just across each other's and he is probably heading home so if I tried going home at the same time he would probably freak out and think I'm following him or something. After standing there for about another five minutes I take out my phone from my pocket. I take a breath in relief when I find my phone completely dry. I hadn't had the chance to check my belongings, if they were soaked with coffee as well or not. So when I'm done with all the checkings, I look at the time from my phone. 6pm. I better hurry home before the dinner's ready. I don't really want to have to explain why I was late. But I do have to talk about this to my mother and grandmother at some point. Grandma probably already told mom that Judy passed away. I remember her going back to Perth when we were at NYC all of a sudden. She was really off on the following weeks. She definitely attended the funeral.

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On the way home, I try to sneak a peek at Davis' bedroom window-- what when I left was his bedroom window. Lights are not on. I really want to know if he's okay. He looked like he was about to cry when we were near the park. Maybe he really has "stuff" to do, I doubt it though. But considering I've not been with him in the last six years, I might have missed some things. Just lets hope he isn't doing anything to get himself in trouble and is okay.

When I get home, I just rush up to my room, ignoring the suspicious looks, get in the shower and take my second shower of the day. I actually enjoy taking showers because it helps me gather my thoughts together and I can spend some alone time without anyone interrupting me, but this time I hate it. I don't really want to think about the fact that to Davis it seems like I ignored Judy passing away. It looks like I didn't care. Just imagining it for a second if he had done the same thing to me, I would probably be even more upset with him than he is with me now. He always had this thing where he couldn't be mad to me or keep ignoring me for a long time.

But I think it'll be different this time. I freaking left him alone in one of the most upsetting things someone could go through. If mom came here for the funeral, then Judy passed away about two years ago. I have to show him I care, because right now he has every right to act like the way he does.

-----

Getting out of the shower, I put on some comfortable clothes and head downstairs. I'm going to talk to mom. I have to do something about this situation and complete the missing puzzle pieces as soon as I can. So I just plant a forced smile on my face and go to the kitchen, knowing they will be there because they really care about this family dinner thing.

"Hello baby." I'm greeted by mom's sincere voice once again. Grandma was already sitting down on one of the chairs so I just sit on the one next to her's. The forced smile turns to a sincere one.

"Hey." Grandma gives me a little squeeze on the hand like she knows I'm here to talk about something, that I usually wouldn't

talk about. She knows me too well. She was my other best friend, though I feel like I didn't lose her, unlike Davis.

I turn my head to grandma, taking a deep breath and turning back to mom, I start speaking.

"Um, I want to talk to you both about something. Something important." Mom stops washing the plate she was washing, leaves it on the side counter and turns to me knowingly. She leans on the counter. I would usually expect something like "let's talk about it later" or "let's leave it for now and I'll make some time about it later" but she totally surprises me.

"Then let's talk about it Sam. I don't want you bottling your feelings inside yourself anymore. You've done enough of that. I want to be like how we were before we moved back. I really wish we hadn't moved. I want my Samuel back."

Wow, just wow. So she really cares. This is... New. I totally didn't expect this. She has some points I totally don't agree with, like I don't bottle my emotions up inside myself. I write and sing to let them out. If I didn't, I would totally go nuts by now. But I haven't talked to her about singing and writing much, so I do not expect her to

know this. Maybe I'll sing her something someday.

I don't dare look at grandma because she is one emotional woman. She probably is about to cry right now and if there's something I totally can't stand without cracking up is seeing people cry. I just want to hug her. Maybe this isn't the right time to talk about Davis. So I just get up and hug them both, but promise myself that I will talk about the thing I really want to, after dinner.

## CHAPTER 7

song for the chapter: Zedd feat. Troye Sivan-PaperCut

### SAMUEL'S POV:

I, personally, had one of the best times in the past few years. During dinner everyone was really sincere and genuine that I literally couldn't help but smile half the time, though I always had Davis and the conversation I was about to have on the back of my head. I couldn't help but feel like this might mess up the things once again, but also there was a chance that it wouldn't and life is all about taking risks.

I grab the last few things that were left on the table on the backyard and walk inside. My hands are slightly shaking and I pray that my body doesn't get in the defence mode and locks itself because that wouldn't be great at all since I have breakable things in my hands. Plus, I don't want everyone to be worried. Wait, I just assumed they care. Well "life is all about taking risks", right?

I walk into the kitchen and carefully place the stuff in my hands next to the sink and smile at mom. She quickly rinses everything there is left and places them in the washer, eager to hear what I have to say because she probably saw my hands shaking.

"So, um, the thing earlier..." I stop, waiting as if she could read my mind and complete the sentence for me. But she doesn't have superpowers, so she just looks at me with a puzzled look, though her features still remain soft. I continue after making sure I breathed. "I really don't know how to put this--". I can see her tensing up, she starts taking deeper and quicker breaths. And I, myself, tense up as well. She now knows what I'm about to say.

"I... I saw- well ran into Davis today at the coffee shop. He just rushed off and I, um, I

caught up with him and tried to talk to him and he" I can feel my voice cracking and shaking slightly, "he just blew me off. And I can't do anything about it mom because I left him alone whe--". Looks like mom knows me after all. She immediately pulls me into a tight hug and the second she does, I can feel tears falling to my cheeks. I'm not crying but I am. She tells me she's sorry multiple times until the tears stop. It feels really good. Being hugged feels really good.

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I hope I don't regret this later on. When mom and I were done with our emotional little moment I got out of the house. When I went out I noticed that Davis' dad's (Andrew's) car wasn't in front of the house, he was probably out. That was great because I didn't really want to face him as well. So I went in front of their house and knocked the door. Nobody answered but I knew Davis was inside so I just sat in front of the door.

Here I am, still sitting in front of their door. It's 11pm. He's got to come and talk to me at some point.



Maybe I should go because apparently I'm not going to be greeted or invited inside. How rude is that?! But no. I'm sitting here until I have the chance to talk to Davis and make things right between us. The view is nice enough, I'll just continue painting it on my mind. It's pretty chilly though. I'm not going to lie, I am really cold. It's really weird to get cold during the summer in Perth, but Blue Neighbourhood has always been different. I said world had no mercy for me, here we see it again. I just hope I don't get sick. Fingers crosse-- Was that sound a sound of a door? I turn my head to see if it was, yeah, I'm right. Davis is standing there, looking at me as if I'm crazy. I just look, more like stare, back at him until I realize he had started talking.

"Ugh, are you freaking dumb? It's 11.37pm and it's outside. Not to mention my dad can be home any second. You are really dumb." I just stand there dumbstruck, because the next thing I know is him sitting next to me, taking his jacket off and placing it over my shoulders. He still leaves space between us though. I'm not sure what to say, so I just keep staring at him. We just sit there for a while, him looking around, me looking at him. I notice him shiver a little every once in awhile so I just take the jacket from my shoulders and scoot towards him a little so we can both

warm up. The second our arms touch, he jumps to his feet. "I, I think it would be better if we head inside, it's warmer there."

Okay, Sam, rule number one: Avoid physical contact for now.

I do what he says and get up to my feet and follow him inside. When I walk in, I hope to be welcomed with the smell of delicious freshly cooked food like before, but instead I'm welcomed with the smell of alcohol. I really hope it isn't Davis. I know he would never drink in a million years, but I still have this bad feeling inside. He seems to see that I felt a little uncomfortable but he doesn't comment on it and we start walking up the stairs. They've taken all of the family photos off, there's something wrong. Davis would never let anyone take off those pictures. He would even get mad at Judy when she took them off when she was cleaning the house. There totally is something wrong.

Davis leads me inside his room. We hadn't talked a word since we walked in the house. I look around the familiar room. It's not that different, though I notice that there aren't any family photos in his room either. He used to have one, actually with me in the picture too, but it seems like that one's gone as well. Just like the others. He sits on the bed, taking a deep breath, and I do

the same. The bed isn't too big, so we have no chance but sitting close to each other. After a couple of minutes, we both stop staring at the room because he asks the question I've been waiting for, and looks at me this time.

"Why are you here?" his voice sounds different. I look back at him.

"I wanted to talk." I continue immediately, not giving him the chance to talk. "I wanted to tell you that I'm really sorry for not being there for you. For leaving without telling you anything and ignoring you. I'm really sorry Davis. I regret ignoring you, you needed me. And I needed you just as much as you did, but I just couldn't get myself to talk to you. I thought ignoring you would help me forget about all the good times I wouldn't be able to have there, because of everything I left here. Because I left you here. I know this is really cheesy but I seriously can't stand us being like strangers. You are literally the person I've grown up with. I spent more time with you than I did with anyone else. I'm sorry." oh god, I'm about to cry.

He just looks at me for a few seconds, I can feel that he's about to cry too. Just as he's about to do something really unex-

pected, we hear the sound of a car pulling up.

## CHAPTER 8

song for the chapter: HONNE-Warm On a Cold Night

SAMUEL'S POV:

As soon as we hear the car, he literally jumps and I can see him shaking. "Oh s&%t. Oh no. You shouldn't have been here. Oh my god."

He stops and not so calmly turns to me. "Samuel, get in the closet." I don't move, I can't. What in the earth is happening? "ARE YOU DEAF? GET IN THE FREAKING CLOSET SAMUEL!" I have no idea on what's happening but I quickly get up and get in the closet. Seems like I'm just on time because as soon as I close the door of the closet, the door of the room opens. I feel like I'm about to throw up, the car ride all over again. Someone starts talking.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING AWAKE YOU PIECE OF ^=%&?" Oh my god. That is Andrew. He's totally wasted. Oh no. "Dad you're drunk, go sleep." Davis is really

calm? How can he stay calm? Does this happen frequently?

As I was drowning myself with more and more questions, I hear the loudest slap on the earth. "YOU CAN'T CALL ME DRUNK. YOU CAN'T TELL ME TO DO STUFF. WHO THE %&+& AM I? YOUR FRIEND? I'M YOUR FREAKING FATHER!"

No. Andrew just hit him. I fight the urge to get out and kick him in the balls because I know Davis would be really upset with me. A few seconds later I hear the slamming of the door and immediately come out of the closet (no pun intended). Davis is standing still, but he's covering his cheek with his hand so that I won't be able to see how bad it is. He's doing covering it intentionally.

I walk towards him, stopping right in front. I look at him, but he just stares at the floor. Like he did something really shameful. But he didn't. Andrew did. I grab his hand with mine, getting it out of the way so I can see his cheek. It looks really bad, it's almost the color of a tomato. I look at him, shocked.

"Why?", I ask, really confused. He just keeps staring at the floor. I place my hand under his chin, raising his head so he looks at me. "Why Davis? What's wrong with

him?" I repeat. He looks me in the eye. "No one can know."

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After making sure it was safe, I went down stairs and got a frozen meat piece to put on Davis' cheek. I made sure he put it on the right place and it stayed there for the right amount of time. It has been almost an hour and the meat is no longer frozen. I went back downstairs a couple of minutes ago, but there is nothing else he can put on his cheek. I'm sitting on the floor, my back resting on his bed. He's probably asleep. I need to go back home, but I can't get myself to leave him. The thought of Andrew hitting Davis again honestly scares the crap out of me.

After a bit more time I finally get myself to stand up. Standing up, I realize how tiring this day has been. More emotionally than physically. When I am fully up, I fix myself up and head to the door. I carefully open the door, trying not to make a sound. Just as I'm about to get out I hear Davis speaking.

"Please stay?"

And I do.

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I open my eyes slowly, finding myself tangled up with someone. I freak out for a second, not realizing that I'm back in Perth. But when I do, I feel so peaceful. I can't remember myself feeling more peaceful than right now. Fully opening my eyes, I immediately meet the warm green eyes. We just stare at each other for what felt like forever, then Davis speaks up.

"Morning." He smiles so warmly that I almost how to breathe for a second. Oh god. This boy.

"Morning," I try to smile as warm as he did, it probably didn't look cute. "how did you sleep?" I hadn't realized the arm I had around him until then.

"Really good, better than before." oh god, then he smiles like that again. I debate on whether I should pull away or stay like this. Let's see. Is this comfortable? Yes. Does he look better? Yes. Will I get another chance to have a moment like this? Proba-

bly not. Do I like this? Hell yes. It looks like I'm not pulling away yet. But we have to talk about what happened last night. Why was Andrew so freaking wasted and why was Davis so calm about it? It can wait. Everything can wait right now. I just want to be enjoying having my best friend back.

We just stay like that for a long time, we stare at each other for a long time. But then I blush, unintentionally, and he turns away with a smirk on his face. Question number 1: Why did I blush? Question number 2: Did he literally freaking smirk? Question number 3: Why do I care if he smirked or not? Question number 4: Why. Am. I. Still. Blushing? No. I'm not.

-----

Davis and I got up at about 11am. I texted mom last night so everything should be okay at home. We just ate some breakfast then cleaned up. I've noticed his cheek's better now. Even though talking about last night is the last thing I want to do right now, I still have to. It's for his own sake. We're in their living room. The walls are blue, almost every house's walls are blue in this neighbourhood. It's one of the rea-

sons why they named it a “Blue” neighbourhood. I’m glad they did, blue is my favorite colour. I love almost everything that is related to blue. It’s such a calming colour.

Back to real life, Davis is sitting on the couch across the TV. I’m sitting on the one near the stairs. I don’t know why I didn’t sit on the same one as him. I was nervous, I guess. We still stared at each other though. Then I obviously blushed again, and started playing with my phone. I could still feel his gaze on me.

But now, he’s on his phone as well. My hands are sweating. This is not good. I take a deep breath, one that fills my entire lung. Then I get into a more serious position and look at him.

“Davis, I-- we need to talk about last night. About what Andrew did.” Davis uncomfortably shifts, I could really see him tense up now. I hope talking about this won’t upset him.

“There’s nothing to talk about.” he says, not really looking at me at first, but then he does, directly into my eyes. That moment, I just lock myself again and look only at him. He’s sitting there. With his hair preciously down, his perfectly shaped green eyes looking directly at me.

His cheek swollen. I can’t let this just go.

“Davis, Andrew hit you.” I try to sound as calm as possible. He just sighs and curses under his breath. I remember what he said last night.

“You shouldn’t have been here.” I wasn’t supposed to see Davis getting hit. He doesn’t reply, and I don’t force the conversation anymore. I just get up and sit next to him, and wrap my arms around him. Trying to protect us from everything.

## CHAPTER 9

song for the chapter: Troye Sivan-Fun

### SAMUEL’S POV:

I went home at about 1pm, mom wanted me to be home for lunch, at least. My family wakes up really early, so they had breakfast at about 9am. Even during holidays and/or breaks. During school time, we woke up at 6am in NYC. It’s pretty early but what can you do sometimes? So lunch at 1pm isn’t early for them. When I was home, they bombarded me with questions. I just simply told them that I stayed there because I was too tired to walk back, even

though our houses are just across each other's. Of course I didn't tell them that he wanted me to stay, and that we cuddled. Nope.

We ate lunch about half an hour ago. Davis called me and told me to meet him at the park in about two hours. So I just took a shower and got ready. Of course it didn't take me 4893427 minutes to find the right outfit. I don't know why I care so much. Whatever. Right now I'm on my way to the park. I told my parents I'd be home for dinner. I probably won't be able to make it, but I'll try. I decided I like making mom happy. I also really like how things are going so far. We are better with mom, grandma and Davis. It feels really good, honestly.

I get to the park just about on time, and find Davis sitting on one of the benches. I can't help but smile just by looking at him, oh this boy. I make my way towards him, and see he's on his phone. I quietly sit next to him, trying to find out if he'll realize I'm there or not. He does, and turns to me with his perfect smile.

DAVIS' POV:

I arrive at the park a little earlier than I should. But I had to have some alone time, without my father. I don't even want to call him "my father" anymore, but I know that people will get suspicious if I don't. I'm sixteen. If they realize that my father is physically hurting me, they'll send me to some orphan home until I'm eighteen. I don't want to leave home. It might not be safe, but I have Samuel back. He's the only thing I have left and I can't lose him again. He can't lose me again. I could see how sorry he was by just looking at him last night. I've spent so much time with him, I can read him really easily. I could read the confusion and rage on his face last night, too. I know I should have sent him home before the person who's supposed to be my father came back home. But I just couldn't.

There's more to think about last night. Why did I ask him to stay? Why was he staring at me while I was sleeping? Was he really watching me sleep? Did he blush when I looked at him? I have no answers for these, I don't know if I ever will. But I can't help but smirk at the thought of him blushing. He blushed a lot when we were little too. I don't know, I just always liked it when I made him blush. He looks cute when he blushes. I just want to hug him.

I don't know how long I was just sitting there, thinking for; but I feel someone sitting next to me. Here he is. I turn to him with a smile, AND HE FREAKING BLUSHES AGAIN? Oh. I smirk, but don't try to hide it this time. I keep smirking and looking at him

"Hey." the smirk turns to a smile.

"Hey." he says, smiling back at me. Should I hug him? I'll just hug him some other time.

"I called you because I thought we-- well if you'd like to, could go to the beach. I heard someone from my year's throwing a party. Everybody's invited. I thought it would be a fun way to end the summer. I mean I know you don't really like being in crowded places, oh no maybe we should just stay he--" He cuts me off.

"Davis, breathe. It's okay. We can go to the party." and he smiles again. I can't smile, I have no idea why, but just breathe like he told me. I ramble too much. Note to self: stop rambling.

We end up walking to the beach. It's windy. I can't help but watch him as the wind swings the loose curls hanging down on his face. He looks like a five year old who's going to buy new toys. I can tell he's

excited. He's blushing again. This boy's going to be the death of me.

#### SAMUEL'S POV:

We're walking to the beach. I know that we're probably going to end up on our own but I agreed on going to the party anyways. I just couldn't say no. He looked so excited and it could actually be fun. Now I'm excited too. I texted mom and told her I won't be able to make it to dinner. She responded with "it's okay dear, have fun, we love you, be safe xx" but I think she's upset. I'll have to make it up to her. Maybe I'll stay home and cook for the family tomorrow. She'll be thrilled.

It's really windy. Me being the clever boy I am, I didn't bring any sort of jacket with me. I hope I don't freeze to death on a da-- Wait? Is this date? He never said it was. Although I would really like it to be. Oh my god. No. I'm absolutely not going to like my best friend. I don't want to screw this up for the both of us. But maybe he likes me too. I mean, he asked me to stay the other night and now he's taking me to a party. Do I like him?

As we're walking to the beach, we rarely speak. I think he has as much in his head

as I do. His father hit him. He should. Does he think about me too? I can feel his gaze. I feel it multiple times. I try my hardest to not blush, but here it goes. Oh god.

-----

We get to the beach, only to be greeted by a huge crowd. A huge, sweaty, loud crowd. People come running to greet Davis. Davis laughs and they literally have a group hug. Nobody from the group is from the same kindergarten me and Davis are from. So I don't know any of them, naturally. I'm about to excuse myself to go and get some water when Davis starts introducing me to them.

"This is Samuel." he turns to me and smiles. It's going to be a long night.

## CHAPTER 10

song for the chapter: Troye Sivan-WILD

DAVIS' POV:

It's been about an hour since we got to the beach. I can see that Samuel's having a good time. He usually wouldn't be able to hit it off with new groups as easily as he is now. I'm glad everyone likes Sam. It's going to make things much more easier at school. He never has been the type to have friend or talk much. He would ignore other people and avoid socializing. Unlike me. I had a lot of friends back then, and I still do, but the one person I always valued the most was definitely Samuel. Then, mom. Losing both of them in such a small amount of time was probably the worst thing that could ever happen to me. And it did. I'm so glad I have him back, he makes me feel better. I've missed him.

Samuel was too busy thinking the whole way here. I don't know what he was thinking about, but whatever it was, it was pretty intense. I wonder if he thinks about me. I know this is going to sound stupid but I liked Samuel when we were little. I know, I know! It's too "lame", falling in love with your best friend. It's a cliché. But I couldn't help it. He's so cute and funny and adorable and handsome and-- I don't even know. He's now really hitting it off with my friends, dancing with a boy named Castiel. I shouldn't really have a problem with this, but Castiel's freaking gay. Nope. I should let Samuel have fun. Yes. Deep



breaths Davis, deep breaths. I'll just go over there to the corner and keep an eye on him.

I walk to the drink stand. There isn't any alcohol, there's some fruit punch and orange juice and stuff though. Looks like the person throwing the party isn't really rebellious after all. I just get some water, not feeling the mood to have any sort of flavor in my mouth. I should try to have some fun too. Or I could just stand here and watch Sam dance. Oh, let me correct myself, or I could just stand here and watch Sam dance with Castiel. No way. No freaking way. Castiel is definitely hitting on Samuel. Calm down Davis. You can't go around deciding who hits on Samuel, and who he hits on back. Though I am his best friend and I will stop them if they try hurting him. I guess I'll just stay here, making sure Samuel's okay.

#### SAMUEL'S POV:

I'm REALLY having fun for once. This boy named Castiel is dancing with me, he looks cute. We've been dancing together for a while now. I really am having fun. "So, Samuel, what brought you here?" he asks, still dancing. We both probably look really silly from the outside but I don't even care

at this point. "Davis brought me here." I say, more like shout. The music's so loud I can't even hear what I'm saying. Though I hear what he says for some strange reason. Oh, I understand why now. He's leaning into my ear. "I'm glad he did." I shoot him a shaky smile, and he just smirks. Speaking of Davis, where is he? I swear he was here a second ago. He probably had to get out of this crowd for a little, he has really sensitive ears.

I slow down a bit, trying to see if he's still near the crowd. But I can't spot him. So I decide it would be good to go and try to check on him. I try getting Castiel's attention.

"Hey, I'm going to quickly check on Davis, I'll be back shortly." He nods and FREAKING KISSES MY CHEEK. WHAT? I try taking deep breaths and make my way out of the dark. I'm not going to think about Castiel right now, first I'll make sure Davis' okay.

I get out of the crowd. After looking around for a little, I notice Davis by the drink stand. I make my way towards him.

"Oh good. You're here. I thought your ears hurt." I say, looking at him concerned. Though he doesn't look at me.

“Yeah, you seemed to be having fun with the boys, Castiel especially, and decided it would be better if I didn’t interrupt you.” Is he jealous? I swear his eyes were full of jealousy, more than ever before.

“He’s a great boy. We can leave whenever you want Davis.” I say, smiling softly but not looking away from him. I have to know if he’s jealous or not.

“No, no. Go have fun with Castiel. I’m okay here. You guys seem to like each other.” I hear the jealousy in his voice this time.

“NO. I mean he’s great but I don’t like him.” Davis just shoots me a “yeah, sure” look. He’s jealous. And he’s not having a good time. Let’s get out of here.

-----

I try making Davis agree on leaving the party and going to a further part of the beach for about ten minutes, he’s so convinced that I like Castiel that he doesn’t even listen to what I am saying. But he ends up agreeing anyways. We say goodbye to his friends and Castiel kisses me on the cheek once more, earning a death

glare from Davis. I mean Castiel’s pretty good looking, but not as good looking as Davis. It’s pretty chilly but we don’t mind. After walking for fifteen minutes, we find the perfect spot and sit down.

“I don’t like Castiel, Davis.” I like you, I want to say. But I don’t.

“It doesn’t look like it.” are you serious Davis? Ugh, well, here we go.

“Look, I don’t like Castiel. We just freaking met? And why would you care so much anyways?” he doesn’t respond. Maybe I shouldn’t have included the caring part. He’s my best friend. That’s why he cares.

“I-- it’s nothing important Sam. Sorry.” he sighs and lies on the sand. He’s going to get sand everywhere. Dumb kid.

I lie next to him, yeah, dumb kid me. We just lay there for a while. None of us saying a word. Like usual. Is he mad? Oh. OH WAIT. HE HAS NOT HEARD ME SING YET. THIS MIGHT BE THE PERFECT CHANCE. But what should I sing? ILYSB? No. Hm. WILD. WILD is the perfect song. Oh lord, let’s go.

“Trying hard not to fall,

On the way home

You were trying to wear me down, down”

I took him by surprise. His eyes are as wide as the time when he first ran into me, he sits up and he starts watching me.

“Kissing up on fences

And up on walls

On the way home

I guess it’s all working out, now

‘Cause there’s still too long to the week-end

Too long ‘till I drown in your hands

Too long since I’ve been a fool,

Oh yeah”

I don’t look at him, I close my eyes and just sing. Here comes the best part.

“Leave this Blue Neighbourhood

Never knew loving could hurt this good, oh

And it drives me wild

‘Cause when you look like that

I've never ever wanted to be so bad, oh

It drives me wild

You're driving me wild, wild, wild

You're driving me wild, wild, wild

You're driving me wild”

I take a deep breath and continue, still not looking at him.

“White noise in my mind

Won't calm down

You're all I think about

Running on the music

And night highs

But when the light's out

It's me and you now, now”

“'Cause there's still too long to the week-  
end

Too long till I drown in your hands

Too long since I've been a fool, oh, yeah,  
yeah, yeah

Leave this blue neighbourhood

Never knew loving could hurt this good, oh

And it drives me wild

'Cause when you look like that

I've never ever wanted to be so bad, oh

It drives me wild

You're driving me wild, wild, wild

You're driving me wild, wild, wild

You're driving me wild”

I slowly open my eyes and see that his jaw has dropped. I wasn't that good. I mean there were times I was better. Plus, I haven't sang the whole day. Just a little bit in the shower. That's all.

“You are freaking amazing.” he says, looking directly at me once again. His jaw still agape.

“I'm not that good, but thank you.” I shoot him a shy smile.

“No, seriously Sam. You're,” he stops, as if he's trying to find the right words for it, “absolutely amazing.” he smiles back. I think I won't be able to resist the urge to kiss him. But I do. He doesn't even like you Samuel, calm down. He just continues.

“Did you choose the song on purpose, is it about someone?” Oh, dog poop. I'm screwed. I could've just easily lied if it was someone else, but I can't with him. He just sees right through me.

“It, um, it is.” don't ask who it is. Don't Davis.

“Oh, who?” I TOLD YOU NOT TO FREAK-  
ING ASK. HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO RE-  
PLY TO THIS? OH IT’S YOU DAVIS. I  
KINDA LIKE YOU. UM, I ACTUALLY  
KINDA NEVER STOPPED LIKING YOU.  
FROM SINCE WHEN WE WERE FREAK-  
ING SEVEN YEAR OLDS. I lose control of  
both my mind and my mouth, the words  
come out.

“You.”

I feel like burying myself into the sand. I  
haven’t just said that. Have I?

“Oh.” is what he just replies with. And that  
is when I get up and start running home.

## CHAPTER 11

song for the chapter: Troye Sivan-Make  
You Love Me

SAMUEL’S POV:

I screwed up again haven’t I? I hate doing  
this. I hate screwing everything up. What  
was I even thinking? It was obvious that he  
didn’t like me. I’m a total fool.

I keep running and don’t look back even  
once. I can hear him calling my name but I

don’t dare look at him. Maybe I shouldn’t  
have come to the party at the first place. I  
could have been having fun with my family  
right now. Or sleeping. Probably sleeping  
but even that is better than running in the  
middle of the night. I feel myself slowing  
down, but I haven’t given my brain the  
command to. Oh no. Lock mode.

I stop all of a sudden. Davis must be sur-  
prised because I hear him stopping too.  
He starts walking towards me slowly but  
surely, I don’t notice it at first. I was too  
busy taking the deepest breaths I could  
and trying to get myself out of the lock. I  
was basically panting. Davis approaches  
me, and slowly places his hand on my  
shoulder.

“Are you okay?” he’s definitely concerned.  
Of course I’m great. Amazing.

“Yeah.” is all I can manage to get out.

“I think we should stop for a bit and calm  
down because it’s the middle of the night  
and if something happens right now, it’ll be  
really hard to get help.” I like how con-  
cerned he is. I just nod and he helps me sit  
down. We’re in the middle of a random  
sidewalk. Let’s hope no one decides to  
take a walk at 12am.

I still don't look at him. I don't think I will be able to, for years. I can feel myself blush once again. Oh my god. Why do I have blush this easily? I-- my thoughts are cut by his angelic voice,

"I, um, I want to tell you something." I swear this boy is going to kill me. My heart starts pacing, I feel like I've just started running again. But I haven't. I'm sitting just next to the boy that I just confessed my feelings to, and that just told me he wants to tell me something. I'm not going to die right now.

"I," he stops, takes a deep breath. I can feel he's nervous. I can feel that whatever he's trying to say is really hard to get out. He's going to tell me he doesn't like me. This is great. I feel tears forming in my eyes. A lot of tears.

"I like you."

Silence. Absolute silence. I don't know what to say. I lift my head up, only to meet his gaze. I let the tears fall down once again. I don't know what to do. I just look at him. Look right into him like he always does to me. He's the one who blushes this time. He freaking blushes. The moonlight is on him, lighting him up as if he's the most beautiful thing. He is.

## CHAPTER 12

song for the chapter: Troye Sivan feat. Allday-for him.

DAVIS' POV:

I told him. I told him I liked him. Nothing happened for the rest of the night. We just cuddled, yes, on the sidewalk, and then went home. I made sure he got inside safely because he wasn't really great for the rest of the night. I mean he was really happy but something was just off. I don't want to pressure him or anything. We don't have to date, or we don't have to act like we're something more than friends. I was just worried that I wouldn't be able to tell him if I didn't last night. Everything went great. I did something right for once. High five!

I'm in the shower right now, thinking about how the last few days made my life better. How they helped me think less about the man that's supposed to be my father. Well, I still think about him occasionally. Especially in the shower. But it doesn't matter. I want to ignore him, but the more you do the more violent he gets. I don't want to

screw anything up. Not between me and him, not between me and Samuel. I have nothing planned with him today. Maybe I'll stop by their house on my way to the coffee shop. I can't live without coffee to be honest. But I can't buy any for home because every time dad sees that I've bought something, he starts asking for money. I'm absolutely not going to give him any. I would if I knew for sure that he wouldn't go and buy some alcohol. He comes home drunk every night. The earliest I've seen him come home in the last few years was 11pm and that was because some dude was trying to beat him up or something. He usually comes home at about 1am. But of course the night Samuel was at our house, he had to come early. It wasn't that early, but it was still earlier than usual.

I am actually worried. Not because he hit me or anything, but because Samuel knows that he hit me. He's a great person and is reliable but when it comes to protecting people he loves, he literally goes crazy. I'm really surprised how he hasn't gone overly protective about me in this situation yet. Maybe he's scared. He might be. But he has to keep his mouth shut. For his own safety. I'm used to being hit by dad now, but I can't let him hurt Samuel. And if he somehow learns that Samuel knows that he hit me, he will beat Sam up

until he dies. I'm not kidding. But I don't want to bring the topic up. I have no idea what to do. Maybe I can stay in the shower for the rest of my life. No one would realize my absence anyways.

Eventually I have to get out of the shower because I'm scared we'll run out of water. Seriously. Dad never pays the bills and I'm the one who ends up paying them. I haven't been working over the summer, I have to start working again. We need money. Since mom's death, the only thing dad has been doing is drinking. He only drinks, sleeps and sometimes eats. I've barely seen him take a shower. I wash his clothes though. After all he's my father and I don't want him to go around with really freaking dirty clothes. He's already a total wreck, at least I want his clothes to look decent. Oh and sometimes I cook mac and cheese and leave some on the counter for him. He just eats the meal and puts the plate back on the counter. He doesn't even wash it. But it's okay. He wouldn't be able to wash it properly anyways.

I quickly dress up, throwing on a black pair of jeans and a loose grey shirt. I like wearing grey and black together. I think it looks cute. I wonder how Sam would look in this outfit. Oh god, we have to try it sometime.

Stop thinking about him you dork, you've got work to do.

I start with making sure my room is clean. I grab the stuff I've worn yesterday and go to dad's room. When I get in the room, I just look around it for a little. After a content sigh I go to the window and open it to get some fresh air in the room, it smells in here. In the meantime, I start playing music from my phone. I searched up the song Samuel sang to me last night. It's from a boy named Troye Sivan and he looks amazingly alike to Samuel. They look like almost the same person. Their voices are so similar too. I am amazed. I play WILD while I continue cleaning up dad's room, singing along to the song under my breath. I grab the clothes on the floor and get out of the room.

It took me a good hour to clean up all the house. I feel sorry for mom at times like this. I can understand how it must have like felt cleaning after us every single day. Even I am having trouble keeping up.

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I called Samuel and asked him if I could come over or not. He said I could. I spent a really good time trying to figure out if I had to bring them something or not but Samuel called me about fifteen minutes after the first call and told me not to bring anything. And that's what I'm doing right now. I'm just crossing the road empty handed, going to his house. It has been a really long time since I've been to the house. Since I've talked to his family. His grandmother, Anne, tried talking to me for a long time but I simply ignored her. Anne and Lauren, his mother, came to mom's funeral. I just thanked them for coming and tried avoiding any contact. This is going to be hard.

I knock on the door, breathing in such a quick pace from the excitement. I almost choke on my own spit when Lauren unexpectedly opens the door. She looks at me smiling, though I can see the pity in her eyes.

"Welcome, Davis." she says and moves out of the way so I can get in. I get in and take off my shoes, I remember Lauren's strictness in shoe-taking-off. Her smile grows bigger when she realizes that I remember. I smile back at her, it's a shy smile.



“Sam’s upstairs. I think he’s working on something. He probably just lost track of time. Why don’t you go check on him?” I nod and start making my way up the stairs, sighing in relief because I didn’t have to talk to Anne just yet.

As I get closer to Samuel’s room, I hear a soft piano playing in the background (from his phone, probably) with the angelic voice of the angelic boy. I smile to myself before knocking on the door of his room. He immediately stops playing and clears his throat. I hear him getting up and seconds later he opens the door.

“Hey.” I say, as my eyes land on the familiar blue eyed boy. God, why is he so perfect? His curls have fallen onto his face, his huge blue eyes even bluer than the usual.

“Hey.” he says back, causing the smile on my face widen. He grabs me by the arm and pulls me into the room, closing the door after me. We, then, sit on his bed.

“Wanna watch a movie?”

“Sure.” is the last thing I say in a while.

songs for the chapter: Jamie Lawson-  
Wasn’t Expecting That

Troye Sivan-Touch

SAMUEL’S POV:

We’re watching Peter Pan. I have no idea why. I actually wanted to watch a scary movie, but it turned out that our internet isn’t fast enough to download a movie for us to watch. We ended up moving to the living room, there’s no one else in the house except us so that’s great. They went shopping. Grandpa and dad didn’t want to go but mom dragged them out of the house, winking at me on her way out. Of course I blushed. What does she think we’ll be doing?

We sat on the same couch, but not that close to each other. After a while, probably half way through the movie, I found myself getting more and more sleepy with every word spoken in the movie. Davis had noticed it probably because he scoot over to me, offering his shoulder. I quickly accepted it and rested my head on his shoulder. As soon as our bodies touched, I was wide awake once again. We’re more in a position where we are cuddling right now. His arm is wrapped around me, my head

resting on his chest, his hands moving slowly and steadily in my hair. I can stay like this forever. I don't know, it's just really peaceful and I really like how I can feel his chest move up and down with every short, snuff breath he takes; the way his hands move in my hair, playing with my loose curls every once in awhile.

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We finished the movie about five minutes ago, but neither of us have dared to move yet. We just basically sit in the silence, not moving a muscle. I guess he is afraid of letting me go as much as I'm afraid of letting him go. That is good.

"Sam?" I turn my head to him, his soft voice filling my ears.

"Yes bab--" Oh my god. I did not. I did not almost call him babe. He's going to freak out. He's your best friend Samuel, best friend. Nothing more. I hope he didn't notice it, I really don't want to make things awkward between us. I avoid looking at him for a while. Eventually, I have to. I look at him, taking a deep breath. He's smiling. He's smiling really big. Oh god. The mo-

ment our gazes meet, I know I'm screwed up.

Liking him isn't something new. I liked him equally as much when we were little too. I never told him though. The reason I was depressed that bad when we moved back to NYC wasn't only because I left my best friend there. I literally had left my other half. I left the boy I liked. Maybe more. People say you can't really like anyone or fall in love with someone when you're that little, but I did. I like to think we did. I'm pretty sure people could tell we were always something more than best friends, except dad. I wonder what would happen if we hadn't left for NYC. Would we start dating? Would he start liking someone else? Would we fall apart from each other? Well, even the move couldn't tear us apart at the end, but horrible things can happen to people. Besides, even though Davis is a really open person, I know for sure that he wouldn't be open with his sexuality.

I must have dazed off for too long this time, I know that because Davis is looking at me with a puzzled look, though there are still remains of the smile still on his face. When he's sure I'm back, he looks at me with a nervous look. I know this one. He's about to ask something.

“I, um, I was asking about what you were singing before I interrupted you.” he heard it. He heard me singing when he came here. Maybe he heard the whole song. Oh god. I start stuttering. And rambling, of course.

“I-- it was nothing. I was um, just singing, you know. Nothing special. I want some water. D-do you want some water?” I quickly get up, fixing up my clothes. I try calming down by taking deeper and longer breaths. Davis sits up and looks at me, his eyes filled with even more nervousness than before.

“Are you okay?” of course I’m okay, look at me!

“Yeah, yeah I’m fine. It’s really hot inside maybe we should open some windows. No that won’t help. Should I turn on the AC? I should. Let me turn on the AC.”

I try making my way to the remote of the AC, which is sitting on the small coffee table, almost tripping in the process. I grab the AC remote, nervously pressing all the buttons that seem relevant to turning on the AC. I can see in the corner of my eye that Davis is getting up. I hope he doesn’t come too near. My body will not be able to handle it. He moves towards my hand, taking the remote from mine to his, gently. He

chuckles a bit under his breath, pressing the right button to turn the AC on, sighing a bit. I lift my head up to look at him. He’s just a little bit taller than me. Maybe an inch or two. Our eyes meet once again, this time it makes me blush even harder. I haven’t realized how close we were standing until now.

“You okay?” he asks again.

I’m freaking not because we are standing really freaking close and I can feel your freaking breath on my face and I’m trying to fight the urge to kiss you, I want to say. But I don’t. Instead I just nod. He doesn’t turn away, his eyes still looking directly into mine. I try breathing, but I had fully lost the ability to.

He lifts his hand up, I think it is to probably fix his hair up or something but surprisingly, he places it on my cheek. I blush so hard this time, that I can feel that I could probably melt the whole Antarctica in a minute. Or even in seconds. He probably feels the warmth on his hand because he smiles once again, his perfect teeth shining like crazy. He starts leaning in. IS HE FREAKING LEANING IN? WHAT? As I’m freaking out, I feel his lips crashing into mine.

## CHAPTER 14

song for the chapter: Ruth B.-Lost Boy

DAVIS' POV:

It's about 5 PM and I have to head home to eat and stuff. Samuel suggested me to stay for dinner, but I rather not. It's not that I don't want to spend time with him or his family, I just get upset seeing what a good family is. I'm not jealous, I just get upset. So Sam leads the way outside. I think he tries to hold my hand maybe once or twice, but he doesn't. So I slowly move my hand next to his. Our hands eagerly and cravingly brush against each other, sending shivers down my spine. He is the one to intertwine our fingers. I look at him with the biggest smile on my face and as he sees me smile, his lips form into a smile as big as mine. When we get on the porch, I give his hand a little squeeze, he squeezes mine back.

"So," I pause, taking my time to admire his soft features, especially those enormous blue eyes. I continue after taking a deep breath.

"I'll see you later." he nods, leaning in for a hug. He slowly, but surely this time, wraps

his arms around my neck and I wrap mine around his waist. We stand there just like that and I feel the world slowing down. I feel it slowing down for us. I slowly pull back.

I am a person that does not like goodbyes. At all. So I decide that I want try something different. Mom and I used to do this. Even the day of her death, it was the last thing we said to each other. I look at Sam, smiling just a little bit so he smiles back and I can see his precious smile. And just like how I wished he would.

"Hello, Samuel." I say, he smiles even wider. I'm sure he has no idea where the random idea of saying hello instead of goodbye came from, but he just goes with it. He remains smiling.

"Hello, Davis."

-----

As soon as I near my house, I get this bad feeling and my body immediately tenses. Maybe I really should've stayed at Sam's for dinner. I slowly creep into the house, and am immediately greeted with the presence of dad. I don't even get to say a word

because he slaps me even harder than before.

“WHAT THE F&%+? ARE YOU A F=?&%-/+& FAGGOT NOW? WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOIN’? I’M NOT GONNA LET YOU END UP AS A FAGGOT, YOU UNDERSTAND ME? I KNEW YOU WERE SICK. I’M DISGUSTED. IF I SEE YOU WITH HIM ONE FOR TIME I’LL KILL BOTH OF YOU!” He grabs me by the collar of my shirt and starts beating me up. He must’ve seen us outside the house.

## CHAPTER 15

song for the chapter: Troye Sivan ft. Betty Who-HEAVEN

DAVIS’ POV:

“You are a piece of /&%+, you freak. You’re sick. A /&^+%)= freak. I’m disgusted and dishonored to be your father.”, “I would rather see you die than have people thinking a son of mine is a faggot.”, “After everything your mother and I have done for you, is this how you thank us?”. I hear the things he said over and over in my head. The more I try to make them go away, the more they pressure me. The

more I cry. The more I feel my whole body tremble under the touch of his words.

And oh, how much I wish Samuel was here to comfort me. He knows how to. Only he knows how to.

## CHAPTER 16

song for the chapter: Troye Sivan-TALK ME DOWN

DAVIS’ POV:

It has been four days since I had last gotten out of the house. Dad doesn’t let me. He sits on the front porch, drinking. He drinks even more than he did before. I try to not to think that I am the reason he started drinking even more. I know I shouldn’t be thinking about these but I just can’t stop.

Is dad really disgusted to be my father? There’s nothing to be disgusted about me. He shouldn’t be disgusted. I just happen to like boys. What’s wrong with that? Is that disgusting? Am I really sick?

No.

I'm not.

I'm perfectly fine.

And yes, this is how I thank dad. I look over the house, pay the bills, cook, clean, look over him.

This is exactly how I thank dad.

I'm not sick.

I watch Samuel out of my window every-day. I see him desperately walk to our door, I watch dad get up and yell at him and tell him I'm not home, and to go back to his house. I haven't seen him get out of the house, unless it's to ask for me.

Dad has taken my phone. I think he probably threw it away by now, there's nothing I can do at this point. He really wants to make sure that I do not get in contact with Sam.

Every time Sam tries peeking at my window, I immediately close the curtains and act as if I am not there. It hurts, it hurts so freaking much. But I know that ignoring him and not giving him the hope of me being home is for the best. I know he will try to do anything to get to me. I don't want dad hurting him. I won't be able to stand it. He will kill us both. He wouldn't even re-

gret it a second if I tried to get back with Samuel.

All I've been doing for the last couple of days is crying, not eating, just staring at the ceiling and trying to sleep. I try to sleep, but it doesn't really work. To be honest, I'm scared of sleeping. I'm scared of dad hurting me while I'm asleep. I'm scared of Sam trying to get inside the house and getting hurt while I'm asleep. I'm scared of seeing dad kill us both in my sleep. I'm scared of seeing anything in my sleep.

There's nothing more I want to do than to hug Samuel. If only I had a chance to hug him. If only I could tell him to stay away for a while, then everything would go back to being okay.

"But the less time that I spend with you,

The less you need to heal

I wanna sleep next to you

But that's all I wanna do right now

So come over now and talk me down"

Or would they?

## CHAPTER 17

songs for the chapter: Seafret-Oceans

DAVIS'S POV:

It has been a week and a half. Sam tried forcing himself in the house, and dad beat the life out of him. I went downstairs, but the door was freaking locked from the outside. I know Samuel saw me while he was getting beaten up, but he probably thought it was his mind playing games at him. He most probably thought that I would come out and try to save him. I would if I could.

I resisted so hard on screaming, because he would know I was inside if he heard me scream. He would never forgive me. That's why I just stayed by the window and watched him get beaten up as tears kept violently pouring down my eyes. What I did might seem selfish, and I don't deny it, but I had to make sure he didn't come back.

After the occurrence, I do not feel the need to mention again that dad beat me right after Samuel was gone back home (which took about 2 hours because even after he

was beaten up, he still stayed on the front porch because he didn't want to look weak), he told me that he would be taking me to a strip club. A freaking strip club. I tried sticking up for myself for once but of course he beat me again. I was just tired of everything so I'm letting him do it. I'm letting him try "fixing" me.

I'm dressed up. Dad made me do a quiff on my hair because he thought it looked more "boyish". I hate my hair like that. I like just letting it down. I guess it's not "boyish" enough for him. Though there's nothing as "boyish" or "girly". Gender roles are the second most stupid thing ever, right after homophobia.

While I was dressing up, I kept checking if Samuel was outside or not. He is not. But I'm sure he will be, in a second. It's Sunday and every Sunday his family goes out for dinner, most probably. They have, the week before. I hope we both don't go out at the same time. He'll probably run up to me, that will get him beat up again for sure. But maybe he'll be scared, or even angry, possibly. I hope he's scared. It will be the best for him.

Dad calls for me to get downstairs, so I do. He has almost stopped drinking. I do not know why. Is that a good thing? I guess it

is a good thing. The first time he beat me up for kissing Samuel, I thought it was a drunkish thing like he always did and that he would forget about it in the morning like he always would. But he didn't. He kept replying the same exact words he had said the day before and kept beating me up.

When I get downstairs, I see that he has dressed up in nicer clothes than usual. Why? I don't get to think because as soon as he sees me, he opens the door and starts walking outside, to his car. I hesitate on going outside for a second, but I know he will get mad if I don't soon so I head outside, too scared to lift my head up and see if Samuel was there. I make my way towards dad's car, successfully getting to the car without having to look around.

I sigh in relief as I'm about to get in the car, and make the worst mistake by looking up. Because as soon as I do, our gazes meet with Samuel. He is as shocked as me, in fact he drops the phone in his hand. I feel that I'm about to cry, but he still keeps looking at me. I can't cry while he does. But I can't lift his gaze either. It's too heavy for me to carry. It's full of so many emotions. Pain, love, relief, anger...

I turn my head away slowly, looking at dad. I can see he's about to do something.

I have to calm him down. "Dad. Dad it's okay. I will tell him to go away. Please just get in the car." I say, my voice unbelievably quiet and soft. He looks at me for a few seconds, without doing anything. I take that as a confirmation because I partially start running across the road. Dad still doesn't move a muscle.

Samuel starts moving towards me slowly, I feel my knees getting weaker. I meet him more than halfway there, he tries pulling me in for a hug but I immediately pull away. I feel tears forming in my eyes, but blink back all of them, knowing he wouldn't believe the words I was about to say if I cried. He looks at me, apparently really confused. He looks like he's been crying; his eyes are puffy and red, as well as his nose and he looks really tired. I've done this to him. It's all my fault.

"Sam," I pause, should I sound more formal? "--muel." I add quickly. He seems even more confused now. He doesn't know where this is going. I feel so bad for doing this to him. Doing this to us.

"I-- We, I-- You" I'm not really sure what to say. I take a deep breath, trying to earn myself some more time. My hands are shaking, but I act as if they are not. I act as if I'm strong.



I'm not.

“You can't keep coming to my house and asking about me Samuel. I can't spend time with you anymore. You have to stop. You have stop peeking at my window. You have to stop trying to call me or message me. You have to stop liking me.”

I don't tell him anything about dad. He'll freak out if I tell him what really is going on. Besides, I really have to keep him away from this.

The less time that I spend with you, the less you need to heal I remind to myself. He really has to stop liking me.

I see tears streaming down his eyes, each time one drops to the ground I feel as if someone's stabbing my heart.

So this is how it feels when your heart-breaks. This is how you feel when you're trying to make someone not love you. I want to hug the crap out of him, but I don't. I stand there for a few seconds, until what I had just said gets to me.

But it's said and done.

I have to go.

I have to do this for him.

I have to let him go.

“I want you

And I always will

I wish I was worth

But I know what you deserve

You know I'd rather drown

Than to go on without you

But you're pulling me down

It feels like there's oceans

Between you and me once again

We hide our emotions

Under the surface and try to pretend

But it feels like there's oceans

Between you and me”

But I love him.

## CHAPTER 18

song for the chapter: Troye Sivan-THE QUIET

DAVIS' POV:

It has been weeks.

Everyday, it gets harder to breathe. It gets harder to sleep, to eat. It gets harder to watch Samuel suffer day by day, when I know exactly how the pain of the heart-break feels. I caused this pain. I am the reason he's suffering.

I didn't lie about anything though. That's what I like to try to think about when I want to feel better, but miserably fail every single time.

Everyday, Sam wakes up at about 1 PM, or at least he starts moving at 1pm because that's when I see the shadows move on his curtain. I hope he actually wakes up at 1pm because the more time he spends sleeping means the less time he spends thinking about this situation. The less time he spends hurting.

My curtains would usually be closed, but now his are closed and mine are open. He has been avoiding me. But I told him to do so. Has he moved on? Maybe he'll get with Castiel. They would make a cute cou-

ple together. Castiel is a great person, I'm sure he'll make Sam happier. Or at least happier than I ever made him. Happier than this.

Maybe I should have let Samuel be with Castiel that day at the beach.

None of this would have happened if I did.

I have started leaving the house more. And dad has almost completely stopped drinking. Maybe things will get better. Maybe we, dad and I, needed this. Maybe this is our way towards happiness.

But I broke Samuel's heart on the way. I broke his heart to get to my own happiness, causing him more pain than he probably has ever felt. But maybe things will get better for him too. Maybe he'll write great songs about this and get out of the "Blue Neighbourhood" for good. Maybe he needed this too.

Just as I was thinking about things getting better, I hear dad's voice. The breakfast is ready probably. Can you believe this? He has started to cook. He even goes grocery shopping and does laundry sometimes. I go downstairs, curious about what he's going to tell me when I find him sitting on the couch with a serious look on his face. I

stop on the last step and look at him questioningly.

“Yes, dad?” he gestures the seat across him. This is weird.

“Sit down.” he says. He doesn’t sound violent. I quickly make my way to the seat across from his and sit down, eagerly looking at him. “Well, I see you and Samuel haven’t been talking. And I appreciate that. It really will help you in this process of fixing yourself. I want to think of it as a phase though. You both are hopefully over it now. Those things are just disgusting. Back to the point, I want you to have a girlfriend.” he makes it sound so simple that he almost made me believe I could do it.

But I can’t.

I’m gay.

I like boys.

Just boys.

How am I supposed to act like I love someone I don’t?

“Dad you-- I can’t?” I almost stutter. Dad hates it to death when I stutter. I hate having to act like something I am not.

I am proud of what I am and what I am isn’t disgusting or what I feel about a certain gender isn’t a phase.

I like reminding myself that.

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU CAN’T?” maybe he has started drinking again. He definitely has started drinking.

“I--I, I’m sorry” I stutter this time. That is when he comes and slaps me for the first time in a while.

Things will get better.

-----

Dad found someone from this support group that has a daughter around my age. That’s who I’ll be dating.

I hate this. I hate the thought of this. I hate feeling like I’m something wrong while there’s nothing wrong with me liking boys.

It should be perfectly fine.

I hate that some people think of this as a disease and that it could be fixed. I hate that I have to act like I like a girl while I could just be together with the person I

really love. I hate that people think I am wrong, that we are wrong. I hate it.

I just have to hold her hand and stuff in the public. Just to show people that I'm not gay. Just to make sure that people around the neighbourhood don't think that Andrew's son is a "faggot". Which is totally stupid.

But I have to do this. Things will get better. This is what I have to do to make them better. I have to do this. I will do this. I will do this no matter how hard it is for me, or no matter how much it hurts me.

-----

The next few days went terribly bad, I think the girl likes me. That is the last thing I need right now. I can't tell her I can not like her though. Dad would first kill me, then kill the girl and then kill Samuel. I hate that I give him the power to make me this scared.

All these years after mom's death, I had never been scared of dad for myself. I was always scared of dad because I was scared that he would hurt people I loved. And now, all I'm scared of is him hurting

Samuel or I. Oh, and also, I visited Mom's grave yesterday. With the girl. I got a little emotional and the girl tried to hug me but for some reason I thought she was doing something sexual and immediately walked away. Let me stand corrected, ran away. She had to chase me for a long time. I'm sorry for her.

This is absolutely dumb.

Today, dad wants me to hold hands with the girl. Outside. Down the street. Near the cafeteria. Near the cafeteria Samuel always goes to. Near the cafeteria which is probably the only place he has been to other than his house in the past few weeks. I hope we don't see each other, but at the same time I do.

I picked up the girl from her house. She lives really far away from our's. I had to really break a sweat to get to her. I don't think she knows the plan. I think that she really does think that I like her and that we're dating. She has no idea that I'm gay.

Of course they wouldn't tell her.

Wait, did dad even tell his father? I hope he did because I don't think I can act like I love her when no one's around too.

I'm just doing this for dad's reputation.  
Just for us to be happy.

For Samuel to be happy.

-----

We start walking down the street. We had to stop by our house because dad wanted to make sure I was with the girl. I told her that the reason why we stopped by is because I had to pick something up. She has no idea what's going on.

I keep my head straight forward when we're walking down the street. I don't look at people in the eye. Everything seems so unreal right now.

I have no idea what to do.

I guess I have to do the same thing I did to Samuel.

I hesitantly move my hand next to her's, her name is Rosie by the way, and she immediately grabs my hand. She smiles.

I remember the times I've made Samuel smile.

I remember the time I held his hand in mine, just before everything changed. I remember what it felt like to be next to Samuel.

Oh how I wish I was next to him.

We keep walking down the street, holding hands the whole way.

#### SAMUEL'S POV:

Today, I decided to get out of the house. I would usually check Davis from the ripped part in my curtain. I keep the curtains closed because I don't want to see Davis' house everytime I look out. Or Davis' father. Or even him.

I have started getting better. My family has seen the scene that happened two weeks ago. It has exactly been two weeks.

Rumors move around quickly in this town, Castiel has called me multiple times to ask if I'm okay. I always answered with a polite "yes" but almost none of the times it was true.

I felt okay. He has come to visit me, too. We watched "Toy Story" and he took me out for a dinner. I think he might like me, but I have absolute none feelings for him. I

really like him as a friend though, but everything he does reminds me of Davis.

I don't think I can do this to myself again.

I don't think I can be with someone who is this alike to Davis.

I have just started to heal. I only have a couple more years left in this neighbourhood, might just make the best of it. 10 years from now, I won't even remember the things happened here. Hopefully. I just want to forget about the last moth and move on.

I quickly take a shower and dress up in comfortable clothes, just tight black jeans and a white shirt. Yes, tight black jeans are comfortable. I leave my phone and headphones on my bed, simply because I just want to isolate myself from everything and take a walk. Everyone in the household is minding their own businesses right now, so I smoothly make my outside the house. They'll probably be surprised that I left, but they'll understand. I know they will.

I avoid looking at Davis' house on my way out, and just start walking towards the usual coffee shop to grab some coffee for myself. Ice caramel macchiato to be exact. You have to treat yourself every once in awhile.

DAVIS' POV:

We end up passing the coffee shop because Rosie told me that she hates coffee. How could a person possibly hate coffee? I just told her that it's okay, and we continued walking down the street. This is going to be a long day. A really long one.

SAMUEL'S POV:

I get in the coffee shop, it seems like forever since I've been here. I feel the shivers through my body as I look around the familiar place. The thoughts I had back then, when I first stepped in here, hit me like a wave. I remember how excited, how nervous I was. Was it all for nothing? Tears unexpectedly start falling down my eyes, I don't even notice I had started crying until people start looking at me. I quickly get out of the shop and start walking down the street, I don't know if the tears are still falling.

Suddenly all of the lyrics I've listened to in the last few weeks start filling my brain up. I start feeling dizzy.

“Growing distance free of explanation

We're getting deeper in this mess

Take careful contemplation”

“I am tired of this place, I hope people  
change

I need time to replace what I gave away”

“This separation,

time and space between us

For some revelation

You didn't care to discuss

I'd rather be black and blue

Than accept that you withdrew”

“Only fools fall for you, only fools

Only fools do what I do, only fools fall”

“And I don't wanna walk away

But you left me no choice

Only talking to myself here

Now you've muffled your voice”

“I can't say no

Though the lights are on

There's nobody home

Swore I'd never lose control”

DAVIS' POV:

I finally convince Rosie to let me go buy  
some coffee. It took a while but now we're  
going up the street. She clenches on my  
hand and never lets go. I try pulling away

every once in awhile, but when I do she tightens her grip.

“Rosie, um, my hand’s sweating. Could we, like, stop holding hands for a second?” I say, biting my lip from nervousness in process.

She looks at me for what seems like forever, then lets go of my hand. I quickly wipe the sweat away on my jeans and continue walking. She doesn’t try holding my hand again for a bit, and I sigh in relief. This is good. This feels better.

As we keep walking up the street, I start looking around. It seems like there’s no one else here except us. Oh wait. I see a figure walking down the street.

I try figuring out who the person might be, because they look familiar. They look oddly familiar. The thought of the figure being Samuel comes to my mind but I quickly wipe it away. He wouldn’t be here right now, would he?

Rosie totally ignores the situation and turns to me, she usually smiles but isn’t really smiling right now.

“Can we hold hands again now?” oh god, I was scared of this question. I hold her hand, unwillingly, and she immediately

starts smiling again. I look at our hands for a while, and when I look up, I now know who the figure is.

It’s him.

It’s Samuel.

## CHAPTER 19

song for the chapter: -----

SAMUEL’S POV:

Is that Davis? Is he freaking holding hands with a girl? How on earth? I slow down a bit, trying to figure out what’s going on. The girl’s smiling. I don’t look at Davis, I don’t care if he’s looking at me or not. When they walk past me, I stop walking and look at them. And I feel my heart break once again. I feel the excruciating pain again. I feel it in my whole body. I feel it in my throat, my heart, my knees, my eyes... My ears start ringing. All the lyrics, all the good things Davis had said to me, all the moments of Andrew beating me come back.

All of them.



Maybe I should sit down right now, to calm myself down. I'm pretty sure my body's going to lock itself at some point. But I keep on walking.

How could he do this to me?

Why?

He liked me right?

Even if that was just a lie, how could he hurt his best friend like?

Is it all this easy?

My eyes are blurred from the tears within them. I don't realize I was standing in the middle of the road until I hear the sound of a car horn.

A few seconds later, my body is numb from the pain. I can't move a muscle. I can't hear a thing. I can't open my eyes. I can't even feel the pain Davis has just caused.

I just feel this black hole trying to suck me inside it.

I let it.

I let myself in the black hole.

If only I knew it was this easy.

Hello.

## CHAPTER 20

song for the chapter: Broods-Sleep Baby Sleep

DAVIS' POV:

We just keep on walking.

I try to act like nothing happened.

A lot happened.

Not after almost a minute later I had seen Samuel, I hear this loud horn. I just think it's a mad driver honking the horn for people crossing the road to hurry up.

I decide to ignore it, but a few seconds later the sound of the car hitting something really hard and the sound of the brake fill the neighbourhood.

No.

It is not what I think it is.

I escape from Rosie's grip and start running towards the one single car that is stopped in the middle of the road.

I know, I just know.

I look around, my eyes try to find Samuel. I don't see him. I see blood. It's everywhere. As scared as I am to get near the car, I force myself to.

No.

This time the neighbourhood is filled with my screams.

## CHAPTER 21

songs for the chapter:

DAVIS' POV:

Things haven't started getting any better. They just keep getting worse and worse with every hour. We lost Samuel. Two weeks ago.

School has started.

I haven't started yet. I don't know if I will.

I don't even know if I will stay in Perth anymore.

We lost Samuel at the place I saw him covered in blood, he died a few seconds after he was hit. He died right after he saw me with Rosie.

He died hating me. He died thinking I lied when I told him I liked him. He died thinking I was just trying to make him feel better when I told him I liked him.

I know he did.

It's all my fault.

I can't help help but wonder how worse things can get.

Dad has absolutely started drinking. I think he felt guilty. After all, he is guilty. So am I. The guilt is getting to me. Slowly.

Samuel's family is devastated. They are almost in the same pain I am. But they can't feel it as much as I do. They just can't. None of them were in love with Samuel.

None of them were the last person Samuel saw, none of them were the last person to hurt Samuel.

Castiel's having a hard time too. He really liked Samuel.

I loved Samuel.

I can't get any proper sentences together. The pain is just too much. Probably none of this makes sense.

I have been crying, really crying.

I don't think I will ever be able to cry again after today.

Today's Samuel's funeral.

They've asked me to make a speech.

I will.

I haven't written anything yet though.

I won't.

I have to make up to him.

I have to make up to what I've caused for him.

I miss him, more than anything. I want him back, I need him back. But there's no way for it, except one.

-----

“.....

Samuel, he-- He has been my best friend ever since I was two. We did everything together. He taught me how to play the piano, I taught him how to ride a bicycle. He taught me how friends work. He taught me the true meaning of being friends with someone. He taught me how love works.

He is my best friend. He will always be. I miss him, more than anyone possibly could. I miss him like crazy. I miss him.

I remember this one particular day, when he took me to this place with the greatest view. We watched the sunset together, it was pink. And beautiful. But not as beautiful as him. His nine year old self was sitting there, his hair was salty because we had just gotten out of the sea. We were sitting on top of huge rocks. I remember his smile, his lips blending with the pink of the sunset. And that is when I knew I loved Samuel. He is a person that could possibly make you smile at anytime, and he never lacked making me smile.

His beauty never lacked on satisfying me.

I know I was not the only person who could see the beauty, but believe me, I have seen how beautiful he was countless times. And I remember every single time.

I remember the first day we called each other “best friend's”.

We were just playing in this tent we made by the beach. He looked at me without saying anything for minutes. I did the same. And we said the words, “You're my best friend.” at the same time. That is when I knew he had something more than just a

friendship. We had this weird connection. We still do. Whenever he's not by my side, I feel the literal definition of "missing the other half of myself".

I am missing the other half of myself.

And Sam, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for every little time I broke your heart or hurt you. You are just so beautiful and I'm sorry that I was the one to cause you pain. But it has been you, it has always been you. It has been you from the start. And at the end, it's not about going to heaven or not. If I'm losing a piece of me, then maybe I don't want heaven.

It's still you.

Hello, Samuel."

I never remember crying this much in my whole entire life. I look up. Everyone else is crying too.

## CHAPTER 22

songs for the chapter:-----

DAVIS' POV:

The funeral ended about half an hour ago.

I'm sitting on the top of the rocks Samuel took me to. I look around, the sky is as pink as it was that day.

I remember how happy he looked.

I remember his smile.

I remember his laugh.

I remember his warm skin next to mine.

I remember how he put his arm around me that day.

I can feel his presence next to me.

I turn my head to where he sat that day.  
And--

And I swear I see him.

He's smiling at me.

I close my eyes, not believing that he's back.

He's too good to be back.

This world is too cruel for him to be back.

I open my eyes.

He's gone.

But I want him.

I want him back.

I miss him.

Maybe I am left with the only way.

I have to do this.

I slowly get up, take just a moment to look around for the last time. Take just a moment to look at the pink sunset. Take just a moment to remember him watching the sunset, in case I can't have him wherever I go.

Then I let myself fall.

And I swear nothing has ever felt so right.

I do not believe in the serendipity.

# 3

## Romance

**“Men always want to be a woman's first love - women like to be a man's last romance.”**

*– Oscar Wilde*



# The Right and Wrongs

by Bahar Yoleri

# THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS

Bahar Yoleri



*Write  
Behind*

## Chapter 1:

Charlotte was about to sleep. Her eyes were bleary and she didn't have much left to save herself from sleeping. She actually loved poetry, but she hadn't slept for quite a while, and her teacher had an incredibly soothing voice, so she figured that it wouldn't be a bad idea to sleep in Miss Brooke's lesson. Besides that, she had always been exceptionally kind towards Charlotte, so Charlotte could just say that she had a terrible headache -which was actually true, she felt like elephants were playing football in her head- and she would leave her alone.

As Charlotte placidly put her jacket on her desk, Miss Brooke kept talking. She turned her head ever so slightly that no one but Charlotte could understand that she was staring at her. Charlotte didn't even bother to lift her head up a little and stare back at Miss Brooke. She hoped that Miss Brooke would be understanding and kind as always.

Charlotte closed her eyes. She finally got to have some sleep, didn't matter to her that she only had fifteen minutes left to sleep. Miss Brooke was still telling her students about some random stuff about poetry that Charlotte would normally be inter-

ested. Every few minutes, Miss Brooke stared at her professionally. Charlotte felt her stares even though her eyes were tightly closed. "She's like dust" thought Charlotte, "no matter how tight I close my eyes, she gets on my eyelashes." She liked poetry, and she loved the thought of being "poetic".

When Charlotte finally managed to sleep, the bell rang. Before she could even open her eyes, she felt a soft hand on her arm, a warm hand tenderly touching her cold skin. Charlotte opened her eyes.

"Are you sure you understood our subject, Charlotte? Next week you'll have an exam, you know that, right?" Miss Brooke was almost whispering.

"I'm terribly sorry Miss Brooke. I wanted to go to the infirmary, but I didn't want to interrupt your lesson. Yesterday was a rough day and I couldn't really concentrate today. Tomorrow, I promise I'll be better." Charlotte was embarrassed. She felt like she took advantage of her kindness, and she knew that Miss Brooke's last concern was Charlotte's grades.

"Look, Charlotte, I know you. I've known you since you were a little girl. Now you're grown. Your problems might have changed. Never, never hesitate to share



the things that make you sad with me, alright?”

Charlotte didn't want to say anything. She nodded. Her eyes watered.

“We live pretty close too. Maybe you'll talk to me when we get in the bus? If you don't share, it won't go away. I'll be there whenever you need me, do you understand?”

Charlotte nodded again. This time, she had the courage to open her mouth and mumble a bit.

“Thank you Miss Brooke.” Charlotte knew that Miss Brooke was like this to every single one of her students. She felt lucky that she had her as her teacher. Although she was slightly happier than she was in the morning, she was exhausted. She survived school -at least for that week- but she had to take the bus and that was the biggest challenge for someone with a terrible headache.

The second she got out of the school, the cold air slapped her in the face mercilessly. She hated wearing scarves or beanies, she felt like she was being choked when she wore a scarf. But otherwise, she could freeze. Her nose was red and she was pretty sure that her blood had the same viscosity as slurpee. She quickly

jumped into the bus and she felt the ice in her bones melting. She took the scarf that her mother jammed into her bag in the morning saying “Trust me, you will need it”.

When she finally got out of the bus, it was snowing. Charlotte loved snow. Every single one of her friends wanted to be in summer -the break plays a huge role in that-, but she always wanted to be in winter. Winter and snow was like a person she wanted to become, cold, but welcoming. Cheerful. Beautiful.

Charlotte rang the bell. Her mother gave her a look that was even colder than the weather outside. Charlotte smiled. Her mother didn't. They stared into each other's eyes for thirty seconds. Her mother's expression was frozen. Charlotte's smile gradually faded away.

“Mom, what happened?” Charlotte almost shouted.

Her mother didn't respond. Charlotte was pretty sure that she was angry at her, but she didn't know why. Her mother looked at her in the exact same way when she told her that her grandpa passed away. This increased the possibilities and unfortunately, none of them were good news.

“Mom, I’m freezing.” Said Charlotte. She had to destroy this ominous tranquility and silence. There was something weird going on, that was for sure.

“I’m sorry honey, I’m a little tired. Come on in.” Mrs. Young finally spoke. Charlotte still felt like something unusual was going on. Her mother was acting a bit strange.

“Mom, are you sure everything is fine? Did someone do something bad to you?”

“No, no, nothing happened. I’m a little tired, that’s all. Did you call your father, when will he come?”

“I don’t know, wasn’t he on a business trip?”

“He was supposed to come back today, I told him to come back today. I missed him, and I’m sure you did too.” Mrs. Young’s hazel eyes suddenly turned into a bright green color. And the whites of her eyes were no longer white.

“Mom, come here,” Charlotte hugged her mother tightly. Mrs. Young was no longer trying to hide her tears. She was almost hysterically crying.

“Now, will you tell me what happened? Anything you bottle up will make you sad-

der, we both know that. Is it about grandma, is it about dad?”

“NO, NO, IT’S NOT ABOUT THEM. I was watching a movie and you came in. Now, will you please stop asking questions and let me cook the dinner?”

“OK mom don’t sh-”

“I’M NOT SHOUTING!” shouted, Mrs. Young. The silence took over again.

“Mom, you need to rest. Let’s order pizza, okay? Now, go and take a shower and you’ll feel a billion times better, alright?” Charlotte gave her mother a kiss on her cheek. Mrs. Young smiled. She nodded.

“It fascinates me how mature you’ve grown up to become. I’m proud of you Charlotte.”

Charlotte thought to herself, “Adults are weirder than teenagers sometimes.” But she was proud. She felt like a good person, which didn’t happen so often. She always felt like she wasn’t nice enough because she was always in a grumpy mood at school. Charlotte had a lot of things to concentrate on, and being nice certainly wasn’t the top of the list.

A little later, she ordered a large pizza and finished her homework. She hated home-

work, well, at least the math homework. It felt unnecessary and dull to her. Mathematics fascinates a lot of people who doesn't even like it, but for Charlotte, math wasn't a source of fascination. It was rather a burden.

At the exact moment where the last brain cell remaining in Charlotte's head started to disappear, she heard her mother's footsteps mixed with the sharp sounds of the waterdrops falling on the floor from her mother's hair. She opened her room's door. Mrs. Young had already gotten in her room but -this was unusual- she didn't close the door. Charlotte took a deep breath. The warm air smelled like jasmine.

"Hurry up mum! Cold pizza is good too but the warmer the better!" shouted Charlotte to upstairs.

"I'm coming sweetheart!" shouted back Mrs. Young as she wiped her tears. She forgot to take her makeup off before shower, she was trying to take it all off with a small piece of cotton. She was a stunning fifty-five year old. She was intelligent too. Before Charlotte, she had two miscarriages. She moved on pretty quickly since she got the good news just a few months later, her precious little daughter, Charlotte was on her way. Mrs. Young was a lucky lady.

Once she finally got that stubborn mascara off of her already long and thick lashes, she dried her hair with a towel and went downstairs.

"Finally mum!"

"Sorry for the delay, I didn't wanna show up looking like a panda."

"You know it wouldn't be a problem, mum. Now, eat. I gave you the slice with more mushrooms. I didn't put ice cubes in your drink. You weren't gonna drink wine right? Yes, you were, I'm sorry, I totally missed that. But at least I remembered your habit of not putting ice in any kind of beverage. You want some ketchup?"

"Cola is fine Charlotte, don't worry too much." Mrs. Young had never been the "affectionate mum". She was always the busy type. Charlotte's dad was always on road trips and she had to do everything. She was usually mad at Mr. Young, but she loved him so much. She valued him more than she valued herself, which was probably her biggest mistake.

"I love you, you know that, right? You can share everything, and I won't share it with anyone, even dad, okay?" Charlotte hesitated telling that to her mother, but she wanted her to be aware of her support.

“Enough! How many times do I have to repeat that I’m perfectly fine, now can we just eat?” Mrs. Young almost spat her words. As she shut her mouth, Charlotte took a deep breath, just like she did right after when her mother got out of shower. But this time, the smell of jasmine stung her nose. Charlotte was showing her utmost effort to be calm.

“OK.”, she mumbled.

“Thank you.”

They ate their pizzas in silence. Charlotte knew there was something wrong. Regardless, she was now afraid to ask her mother anything. “People don’t like kindness”, she thought, “And you should treat people the way you want to be treated.”

After eating they cleaned the table and put the leftovers in the fridge.

“Goodnight mum.”

“Goodnight Charlotte.”

They went to bed.

Next morning, Mrs. Young was the sweet and loving mother she had always been.

“Good morning sweetheart! Did you sleep well?” Charlotte was a little shocked by her mother’s attitude. She smiled.

“Yes, you?”

“I slept very well! I needed that eight hours so bad.” Charlotte sat on the nearest chair. Mrs. Young sat next to her.

“Honey, I’m really sorry about yesterday. I acted so strange. I was so tired and I know I shouldn’t have shouted or said the things I said. I know you only wanted to be kind, but I promise, the next time you show kindness to me, I will not act strangely. Let’s forget yesterday, OK?”

“It’s not your fault mum, I should have left you alone for a while. But you’re good now, right?”

“I’m awesome!”

Charlotte was completely, genuinely happy for the first time in a long while. She missed her father a lot, but she also missed her mother. She missed having a mother whom she could share everything with. She was gone for a long time too. But now that she was sure that her mother was back, her day would be better. It was going to be one of the best Saturdays ever.

“Mom, Sarah invited me to a sleepover. I would ditch her but I really want to meet people today. Can I go there today?”

Charlotte was trying to benefit from the good mood her mother was in. She didn't feel guilty this time, because her mother made her cry a little bit yesterday, she felt like she was giving her mother the opportunity that she needed to make the situation better.

“Of course you can go! I will tidy the house before your father comes so I will be bust tonight anyway. Go and have fun!” That was the answer that Charlotte predicted to get. She had already prepared her bag even though she wasn't sure Mrs. Young give her permission to go Sarah's. But she couldn't sleep last night so she needed something to do. Therefore she prepared her bag.

“I'll get my bag from upstairs then.”

“You've already prepared your bag? You cheeky little kid-”

Mrs. Young tickled her daughter's belly. They both laughed. Charlotte ran upstairs, got her bag.

“Bye mum. I love you.”

“I love you too honey.”

Charlotte started to walk. It was raining cats and dogs; she started to get cold. With the music and everything, she felt like she was in a movie. She was happy. There was no negativity in her life and everything was perfectly fine.

After a short walk in the rain, she knocked Sarah's door. Just three seconds later, Sarah's mom opened the door. She looked at Charlotte for just a second and in the fakest way possible, she almost screamed:

Then they both entered to Sarah's capacious room. There were a lot of people. Charlotte wasn't intimidated by that though, she was quite bored of her own friends anyway, so she just went inside.

“I wanna introduce you to one of my closest friends, guys, this is Charlotte.”

“Hello!”

“Hi!”

“Hi?”

Charlotte could read people. That was her God given talent. She could just stare into someone's eyes and she could say a lot about them. It was like a super power to her. Of course, there were some cases where she was wrong, but most of the time, she was right.

In this case, she was bored. Sometimes, she did have the chance to catch a light in people's eyes or something, but this time, it was very different. Everyone was exactly the same. No one had anything special about them. They all had the same energy, and Charlotte really didn't know what to do in that small place, plus, she wondered why she ever agreed on staying at Sarah's place. She was the queen of dumb decisions.

She had a few choices ahead of her:

1. She could just pretend to be ill and go home.
2. She could stay and "enjoy" the rest of her night.

Of course, she chose the first one. As she already went a little overboard with the treats -but my God were they delicious-, pushing her finger a little far away from where anything except food is supposed to be made her gag instantly and she threw up, right in the middle of the room. She initially didn't intend to make a scene, but just like her mother, she appreciated a little bit of attention.

After everybody wishing her to get well soon -well, not everybody, after witnessing that horrible scene some of the girls were still in shock-, and some of the girls even trying to wipe her mouth and help her to the bathroom, she felt like she succeeded in deceiving people into believing that she was actually ill.

She went to the bathroom since she was actually nauseous after throwing up a pizza slice that was probably twice her weight, she washed her face and she picked her bag up once again. She called her mother and let her know that she would be coming pretty soon. Her mother sounded tired, which was totally acceptable considering it was pretty close to midnight. Not that her mother slept really early each night; Charlotte even thought that she didn't sleep at all, but, as a soon-to-be-single mother, Mrs. Young knew her responsibilities and worked accordingly. Although she never let her daughter know, she was sure that her marriage wasn't going to last for a long time. She made many sacrifices, but letting go of the things she felt for his husband was arguably the hardest thing she ever had to do. They got married at a pretty young age and they made many promises that none of them could ever keep. They held on to one thing, Charlotte.

Charlotte knocked the door to let her mother know that she was home. Her mother essentially ran down the stairs and opened the door. She was out of breath.

“What happened, mum, you seem tired.”  
Charlotte stated the obvious.

“I was just... I was just tidying upstairs, your room was pretty messed up.”

Charlotte’s room was always like that and apparently, Mrs. Young was just realizing that her daughter had a problem about keeping her room tidy. Charlotte had many other problems that her mother didn’t know of, but Mrs. Young also had many problems that her daughter didn’t know -or care- about.

She went straight to her room and started listening to music. Her mother, however, was pretty stressed out as she had done something she wasn’t necessarily supposed to do, and didn’t really know how to fix. She wasn’t nervous anymore, but something was definitely rotten in her house, and the smell would eventually transpire through her bedroom’s door.

The following week was tough for both of the women living in the house. Mr. Young was still not home, and there was palpable tension between the mother and daughter.

In addition, menopause and adolescence are never meant to be together peacefully, so a few fights here and there started to cheer them up even. But at nights, they would turn back to normal life and eat their food in front of the TV like they haven’t been viciously screaming each other to the utmost level of effort their vocal chords could make.

One night though, they became two very different people. It was as if one of them was ice and one of them was fire, they spoke words that they would regret saying one day. After the huge fight, they both went to their rooms separately, and Mrs. Young who locked the door of her bedroom every night forgot to do that as she was more concentrated on the harsh sentences that she just said and also the ones that she had to hear. She was devastated and exhausted, which led her to keep the door of her bedroom open. Getting angry at your teenage daughter and not locking your room’s door after the fight is one of the most ordinary sentences a mother with a teenage daughter can hear or experience, but neither Charlotte, nor Mrs. Young knew how this little act of forgetfulness would make a tremendous impact on the remainder of their years.

Charlotte decided to get out of bed to redeem herself after saying things that should never be said to anyone, she first went to the kitchen and took out a few flowers from inside the vase and went straight ahead to her mother's room. She was careful at first, she didn't want to wake her up, but her clumsiness gave her away. She dropped one of the lilies she had picked up, and when she tried to take it up, she saw something peculiar.

Her mother had never told her that she stuffed her clothes under her bed, well, maybe she was worried that would lead Charlotte to continue doing the same thing. The room was completely dark other than the street lights feebly illuminating the bed and the nightstand. Also, the room smelled terrible; though it was obvious that her mother used cans of Febreze to hide the stench, she had failed miserably. The air in the room was lingering in her nostrils, but she decided that it was simply the dampness that caused the room to stink like a corpse mixed with lilacs.

She kept walking to her mother's bed, she tentatively approached her and didn't make any noise. She was walking on the balls of her feet, and as she got close to her mother's bed, her foot touched something that was firmer than a cloth. She first

wanted to ignore it, but as humans are incapable of thinking straight when in panic, she wondered what the thing that just sent shivers down her spine was. She slowly bent down and looked at it, it was the sleeve of a shirt. She was familiar with that shirt, it was one of her father's favourite shirts. However, for the shirt to stay as firm as it was when it touched to her foot, there had to be many more clothes hiding under the bed. She didn't want to embarrass her mother, -OK, maybe a little bit- but she had to see the mess under there to make herself feel better.

She pulled the shirt, but she couldn't get it out of under the bed. This was the very moment where her heartbeat started to be hearable. Her mother had sunk into deep sleep, and was breathing slowly and rhythmically. Charlotte pulled the sleeve, but there was a little twist to what she thought was unusual, the sleeve had an actual arm in it.

Charlotte could feel every single cell in her body, filled with adrenaline, and as I said it before, her mind didn't work like a sane person's mind would because of all the chemical reactions that were going on in her mind. She decided to further pull the arm. She blinked once and her brain recognized what it had seen before once more.



She gasped. Her father's cold, grey face would never quit her memory for the rest of her life.

# 4

## Thriller

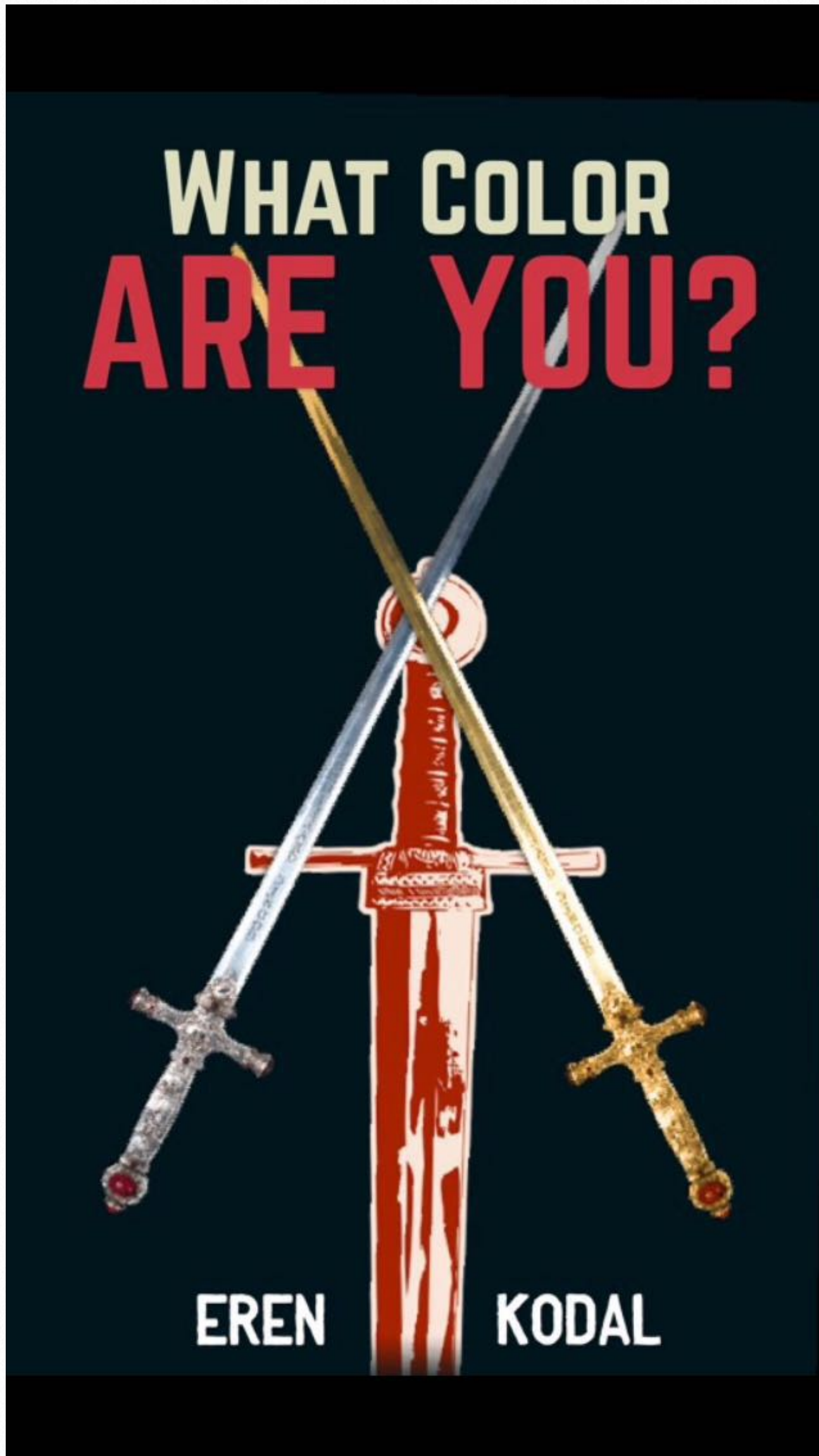
“The way to write a thriller is to ask a question at the beginning, and answer it at the end.”

– *Lee Child*



# What Color are You

by Eren Kodal



It was 2145, Ronan and his guild were attacking Earth. Ronan; a greedy, middle aged Ork, someone that does nothing but destroy. He had a single goal: to rule the seven dimensions to make everyone respect his powers and make them hail against him.

As he conquered Earth, he destroyed everything in sight. There was a little village called Hyakou. A little boy named John was living there. He had a happy life for 15 years. But when Ronan came to the village to destroy, he cracked into John's house. Ronan took his axe out of its shield. He pointed his sword against the little kid. John saw Ronan's eyes. It was as red as flames. Please combine these sentences, they are fragments as is .

John's mom, Matilda, couldn't resist seeing his son die. He got a knife from the kitchen and dashed towards Ronan. Ronan got mad at her.

Ronan said, " Do you dare to attack me, you silly human."

As Matilda distracted Ronan, John's father took John and fled from the village. As they were fleeing John saw his mother die. The memory was buried down his head. He promised himself that one day he

would get strong and kill Ronan and will bring peace to the 7 dimensions.

John and his father Albert fled to the nearest village, which was Crypto. Actually there was a myth about the place Crypto. It is said that Crypto is a place where bandits organize manhunts. You don't understand that they are bandits because they wear cloths normal peasants wear. They feed you, you think they are helping you out but actually they feed you so you are stronger so killing you will bring more amusement to the bandits. At The night that they feed you becomes your last happy day. They handcuff you and throw you to the forest of the Crypto. Bandits get their knives, guns and bombs. They even make traps for their preys so they can have a cruel dying.

Well, John's father didn't believe it. He thought it was nothing but a lie, something that someone made up. They went into Crypto. In the entrance there was a sign that said danger but they didn't care and just went in. John did believe in the myth, but he said to himself "I shouldn't be scared of something like this because I promised myself to face Ronan one day for revenge."

We started going deep in the woods. There were wolves, snakes and wild animals like that. We weren't scared too much because we had lots of wild animals in our home village too. John liked hunting wild animals in the forest. It was one of his hobbies. The others were playing with the animals in the farm and watering the plants in the botany garden. Because he liked hunting he always had a knife with him. We might think of him being a veteran using knives. He had his knife in his hand, he was ready for an upcoming animal attack. He actually should be more cautious about ogres because in Crypto lots of ogres exist. No one has been to Crypto so none knew their were species like ogres living their. It was almost night time, it was very dark. It was almost impossible to see so they tried to find something that they can be safe at night. They walked for an hour and found a cave. John was very happy about it and ran into the cave. His dad was shouting behind from him "Don't go in too fast. Their might be animals inside. John couldn't hear him so he continued running inside the cave. He went pale when he saw the things inside. It was far worse than wild animals. There was a group of ogres. While he was running he made lots of sound so the ogres were awake and they were looking into John's eyes. Ogres were a specie made of rocks. They were very brutal ene-

mies and could kill humans within one punch but they were very slow because they were made of rocks. He started running outside to the cave and said to his dad that there were lots of ogres. They both started running.

They ran and ran until they were too exhausted that they couldn't continue running.

John said to his dad "I guess we made it, it is impossible for them to catch up to us now and I'm sure they are getting back to their cave. John was thinking about something. His dad got curious and asked what he was thinking about.

John answered, " I was just curious about something that I saw inside the cave which the ogres were living. I guess I saw something gold. I would like to go back and look for it. It looked like something important.

Albert responded, " If something is gold it is always important, don't think too much on it. Let's just get a good night sleep." Albert slept heavily and he was even snoring. The situation was different for John, he couldn't sleep. He couldn't stop thinking about Ronan killing his mom and destroying his village. While he was thinking he heard footsteps. Something was running towards them. John poked Albert to

wake him up. Albert woke up and said let's run, it might be bad. They started running away. They could still hear the footsteps, the thing was still chasing them. John started getting nervous, it seemed like the thing chasing them was faster than them. A few seconds later the thing caught up with them. It was a man with a bow in his hand. He seemed like a hunter of some kind.

The Hunter:” Who are you and what are you doing in my hunting territory!”

John:” We aren't here to do anything bad against you, we were just running away from Ronan and his guild. They destroyed our village and we fled from there.”

The Hunter:” Oh my brother huh, as well as usual.”

John:” What, is that guy your brother”  
John gets his dagger from his pocket and walks towards the hunter.

The Hunter” Wait, don't think that I'm like him. When he asked me if I wanted to join his guild and conquering the world and killing for amusement. I declined him. He doesn't think of me as a brother know because I'm not on his side. I chose to live a life as a hunter, hunting wild animals. Get-

ting their peltry and selling those for money to live.”

John calms down, puts his dagger back to his pocket and asks for his name.

The hunter:” I'm Martian, what's your name young boy?

John:” It's John, pleased to meet you.”

Well john, if you really want to defeat my brother, sorry but you can't do it with your body right now. You don't have enough power to defeat him. No one has enough power to win against him, even I don't.

John says:” But I will become powerful, the strongest in the universe.”

Martian:“For that you need to get trained I will help you if you want.

John:“I would appreciate it.” It is noon so Martian says that they should get a good night sleep before the training day. Martian told them that he has a small hut near the river. They go to Martians hut and sleep. The day starts. John can't even stand still. He really wants to start as fast as possible.

John:”Can't we just start?”

Martian:”No, you should eat breakfast first.” They captured fish from the river

near Martian's hut." They grilled it and ate it with bread. It was a good meal for them. Albert even liked the fish. He doesn't actually like fish but this was so fresh and natural he couldn't resist eating it. After their breakfast, Martian told them his plan for the training. He was planning to go to a cave near the hut. He told them there were a few ogres and today Martian was going to teach him to hunt ogres. John and Albert were thinking if it was the cave they saw, but they didn't tell it to Martian. They started walking and soon came to the entrance of the cave. They could see the ogres. They were all sleeping. Martian started telling John how to hunt Ogres. He was whispering so the Ogres wouldn't wake up. He told that the Ogres were slow and heavy creatures. A single attack would be fatal but because they were slow they could be easily killed with a long ranged weapon or with a trap. Martian said we will now set the traps, the ones that get caught by the traps will be dead, the ones that didn't stepped to one will be killed by arrow and bow. Normally arrow and bow, traps wouldn't be effective against these creatures but they will be putting poison to it that is fatal for ogres. They started setting the traps. John already knew how to use a bow and an arrow. They woke up the ogres and they started walking towards John and Martian. Some stepped to the

traps and died. There were two left, John got the bow and started shooting the arrows. Most of them missed but he managed to kill them. John:"That was a close one.

"Martian:"Yes, indeed."

John:" May I go into the cave."

Martian:"Yes, but why." John:"Just wanted to look if there were more."

Martian and John goes in. John sees the gold thing again, then he starts running towards it. Martian follows him.

Martian:"Wow!"

It was a golden sword. There was actually a town legend about it. There was once a man that had a golden sword and ruled the world. He was the strongest, and it was said when he died he hid it for someone to find it and use it for good. It was said that evil people couldn't hold it because it had a magic seal on it for that. John putted his hand on the sword. Grabbed it. He could hold it! Martian was shocked to find a sword like this at a place like this. Martian told John, if the town legend was true he could win against Ronan with this sword. John said to himself "I will surely win against him!"

Martian was a wise man too, he was thinking to himself. He knew something, it was that “Everything happens equally in this world. When you gain something. You lose something in the same amount. It was the only rule of the world. He was very terrified about what would happen after gaining something this big. He wanted to stop him to make sure nothing terrible happens after him gaining this much power, but he couldn't. He didn't want the boys hope of killing Ronan fade away. The sword was John's only hope.

The sword gave the user an unbelievable amount of strength. The second thing which was very useful for him was. If the user didn't even know how to use a sword he will become a master at using sword when you hold it, but these powers fade away when you drop the sword. There was something that he noticed that wasn't told in the legend, the sword was changing its color, it was changing from gold to orange. He didn't think about it much, he thought it was only an illusion.

They had no time. He had to face Ronan as quick as possible to minimize the destruction that Ronan and his guild is doing. They needed to find Ronan as fast as possible. Ronan was last seen at a village called “Sanctuary”. Sanctuary was really

near to where they were. It was only a kilometer away. They rushed there and saw Ronan destroying everything.

Ronan:” You filthy humans, how can you dare to run away from me! You are going to die anyway!”

John rushed to Ronan, he said:” I challenge you for a duel Ronan!”

Ronan:” I accept your invitation, try to entertain me!” Ronan's brother Martian walks toward John.

Ronan:” Hmm, who do we see here, my idiot brother huh.”

Martian:” Yes, if being a good person is being idiot, yes I am. Now we will kill and free the poor souls that you have killed in while seeking for being mighty. John got his sword from its sheath.

Ronan:” What, a nice sword. Once I kill you I will get care of it.”

John wanted to take his revenge by himself so Martian walked away and started watching the things that were happening. Ronan didn't even move. His body was saying, you attack first, like you can even hurt me. This made John angry. As he got angry the color of the sword started to change to red from gold. As the sword was



getting redder, he got more powerful. John was swinging his sword very fast so Ronan didn't have time to dodge or counter them. Ronan was getting angry and he started to get a lot of wounds. He started being aggressive as well. They were both focusing on attacking but John was much stronger. Martian was getting scared of John, even though he was the one that was trying to kill the evil. His eyes were now looking like Ronan's. It was the eyes of a killer. John in the end killed him with a finishing blow. The place was covered with red.

Martian shouted to John: "Are you okay there, you done well."

John didn't answer. He turned towards Martian. He wasn't looking friendly. He was looking at him like he was an enemy. The sword was still red, even more red than before. Martian was sure in the end. He now understood that the sword was making him stronger by giving him sins like lust for vengeance and this was making him evil. He now wasn't any different from Ronan, Ronan was controlled by his lust for destruction. Martian now understood that he should stop him because he was a big threat to the human race. Martian got his sword out from of its sheath and killed him in one shot. As he was killing him his sword started changing from its normal

metal color to white. On his sword it was written "I kill in the name of God, I kill to bring peace". He got his sword, cleaned the blood on it with his cloth and started walking back to his hut...

To be continued...

# Dark Case

by Yusuf Gurkan



It was a usual boring day. Birds were singing, trees were growing, Ms. Maner -my mother- was preparing the breakfast, I was just lying on my bed. What a boring day! On that usual spring day I got out of my blue capacious bed and started walking to the window. I slowly stepped my feet on the ground and I started moving my big body. I am long, fit and healthy although I never do sports. With slow and small steps I came near the window -my room is so small that I don't need to walk much- and I started thinking. I looked at the joyful birds and wondered how they can be joyful in this awful world. Not a day passes when I don't think about my brother. That is why I always complain. I was very cheerful when my brother was with me but nothing is the same since he accidentally got lost. My brother was looking just like me. Whatever, while I looked out of the window I continued complaining. I looked at the trees and said "Poor old trees people kill you although they know you are our livers," when I was complaining my mother interrupted me by shouting "Come on Drake breakfast is ready".

I turned back, walked and started going down the stairs. When I step my foot to the ground I saw something magnificent on the dining table. There were bacon and

eggs on the table waiting for me. I got surprised because my mother had not prepared this breakfast for seven years since my brother disappeared. As an explanation she was always saying: "This is our way of respect to your brother." I looked blankly at my mother. I was trying to overcome my shock but I wasn't very successful. After two or three meaningless minutes I lifted up my head and asked "What are these?" My mother answered my question like it was a usual thing: "Bacon and eggs. Your favorite breakfast." "Also my brother's favorite breakfast. Where is our respect to him?" I replied. I saw a teardrop in her eyes. She sat down to an old chair and wanted me to sit down too. When my mother wants me to sit down there is two options. One: she wants me to relax because I work hard, two: she is going to give me a long speech. This time the second choice was correct. I sat down and started to wait for her to talk. She wasn't able to start because she was crying and she wasn't able to prevent it. After two minutes I was still waiting so I shouted: "Ms. Maner you owe me an explanation." She waited, got her strength and started talking. I was feeling her hand shaking upon my body. She wanted me to feel relaxed but she was the one who was stressed. Her first words were: "Drake, he is gone. He is not going to be with us any more. We

don't know where he is, maybe he is far far away in a bedroom belonging to a different family. Maybe he is working in a great office. And maybe... Maybe... You know we don't know where he is. Maybe we also don't know where he lies, on a bed or in a coffin.. I am not saying that we should forget him but we should start getting over his loss. As you know-" "This is not getting over, this is trying to forget him!" I shouted and interrupted her. She didn't mind and continued: "As you know I loved him. He was my son. I lost him too. We should get back to our jobs," she ended her speech with tears. I knew I shouldn't sadden my mother but at that time I wasn't able to think logically. I was only shouting, I said so many illogical things and the most important thing I said was: "Where is our respect to him?" My mother also knew that I was right but something was going wrong. My mother wouldn't want me to forget him.

My mother's words impressed me. No, not the ones which were about my brother. She said that I wasn't doing my job because I was thinking about him. So her words confused me. She was right, I quit my job because I wasn't able to work when I was thinking about my brother. For a minute I thought that maybe the one who died was me, not my brother. I wasn't living. I was

just breathing. Does breathing means living? Before my brother got lost I was so busy with my job that I wasn't able to find time for sleeping. My job was to solve cases and catch criminals. No, I wasn't a police officer. I was a genius. I was Sherlock Holmes. Of course the real one. I know it sounds a bit weird but I used to be Sherlock Holmes. My brother and I were waiting in our house to receive a message. If something was going wrong, people in Alabama would call us and ask for help. Out of hundreds of cases there is only one case I wasn't able to solve. A loss. My brother's loss. "Yes!" I shouted. I am going to continue my job.

I went to my working room, stared at the books, examined the photographs, took my pen (my name is on it so it looks fancy) and clean the dust from the books. It was the sign of a new beginning.

When I told my mother that I again started my job I thought she was going to be happy and from her gestures and facial expressions I was able to understand that she was sad and she was keeping a secret. I also knew that if I asked her what was wrong with her she would say she is fine and that nothing is wrong with her. I was sure, she was keeping a secret and she wasn't allowed to tell me. I thought

what it could be about and only thing seemed logical was my brother's loss. Yes, she knows something about it and she is not telling it to me. But why?

I was solving crimes, getting awards, my photographs were taking place in newspapers like the old days. I became very successful again but there was no sign from my brother and also there was no sign about the secret which I didn't know. I am about to go mad! It is the only case I care about but it is the only case which isn't solved. I do not care about money or fame, I want my brother, I want to hug him again, I want to feel his big, soft hands on my hair, I want my mother to be happy. I want us to be a family again. Is it much? Do I want so many things? No I don't. I only want to be happy.

I looked at the clues of my brother's loss again and the only valuable clue is that my mother keeps secret about it and I don't know what it is. In this situation only thing I can do is to force my mother to tell the secret. It is going to be hard because my mother is really good at keeping secrets but she is really sensible about my brother. If she doesn't tell me the secret I have a plan to take the words from her mouth with a tweezers. It won't be easy

but I'm sure that it is going to lead me to success.

Again and again I woke up but it was different. I was curious and I was filled with passion. I was obsessed with my job and yesterday I only slept for one and a half hour. My eyes were flickering but I didn't mind. Normally I would mind it and I would work for healing it all day long. It wasn't important. The only thing in my mind was my brother. I was going to find him.

After I researched about my brother I went downside to my mother. She was lying in the big, black, leather sofa so cutely that I didn't want to disturb her but I had to. I sat down near her feet and asked if she wanted to have breakfast with me. She got happy, stood up and she started preparing the breakfast. Bacon and eggs again... Alright, I love bacon and eggs but I was bored of it, it is the seventh day in a row. Whatever I didn't say anything, I waited for her to sit down. She sat down and we started to eat. While we were eating -according to my plan- she was going to tell the secret. I started the chat with simple things.

"Thank you for the breakfast mom, it was awesome as always."

“Oh darling, I am happy to hear that. How is your job going? I hope it is fine?”

“It is going to be fine.” (She opened the issue too early that I was surprised. Did she understand something?)

“Can I do something to make it fine?” she asked deridingly.

“Sure you can,” I mumbled.

“You know I really miss your brother,” she said sadly but her facial expressions showed me that she was puzzled. She wanted to say something and it seemed like it was going to be easier. After analyzing her face I got angry to her and I couldn’t control my anger.

“THEN WHY ARE YOU KEEPING A SECRET? IT CAN HELP ME SOLVE MY BROTHER’S CASE BUT YOU ARE NOT HELPING. YOU ARE ACTING SELFISH. I DON’T UNDERSTAND YOU. YOU ARE A MOTHER. I DON’T UNDERSTAND YOU. I THINK YOU DON’T WANT ME TO SOLVE MY BROTHER’S CASE. I DON’T UNDER-” she interrupted me. I was shouting and I had lost my control.

“Enough,” she cried.

“I’m sorry. I can not understand why you are so mad at me.” She wasn’t able to talk.

I shouted so angrily that now she was crying.

“Come on mom, we both know that you are as clever as me and again we are both sure about you know why I am mad at you,” I said in a weak voice. I was pretending like everything was alright and I wasn’t angry to her.

“Drake...” she sighed.

“Drake, Drake, Drake just keep on. I know my name but I don’t know what are you hiding.” After my words she stood up, walked to her bedroom, got a letter, came back and slowly she handed me the letter. No one was talking at that moment. It was death silence. I read the letter so many times that it was resounding in my ears. The letter was simple. “Do you miss me!” exclamation mark I was sure that it was from my brother. He never uses question marks because he knows all the answers he is so smart and I am sure that if I get lost he would find me. But how? Where is this letter from? I was puzzled.

I looked at the letters for minutes. I didn’t want to lose time by asking my mother why she had hid this from me because I knew there wasn’t a logical explanation. It was written on a notebook page

which was our common notebook when we were younger. So what?

Months passed and I couldn't find any more information about my brother. Last week I gave up. I thought if he wants to be found, he would be..

Now I am working on another case. It looks similar to my brother's case but absolutely there is more clues. Mr. Walton came to me and asked if I can find his lost brother. He offered me lots of money, of course he is going to offer me lots of money he is the owner of Walmart! I knew he was the owner of Walmart and I didn't think he could have a problem. But believe me he had and it was a big problem. He said that he lost his brother and also he gave me his address, his indefinite address. He said that he hasn't have enough courage to visit him and asked me if I could go and look if he lived there.(I know it doesn't sound like a loss.) "It is a pleasure to me." I replied because I knew his pain.

The day after I talked to Mr. Walton I went to look if his brother was in the address which he gave. I knocked the door and a filthy man answered. He can't be the brother of the man who found Walmart I

thought but with a hope I asked:" Are you Mr. Hutch Walmart"

"Yes, what do you want?" he asked with a rude tone. I was shocked and I replied:

"Your brother worries about you, he send me here to look where you liv-" he interrupted me.

"So you are one of the dogs which he rented uh? Go tell your boss that I don't need his fame or money."

"I am, I am..." I stuttered

"You are not his man. Am I right?! Everyone who came here said that. Do you think I am stupid?"

"Sorry," I said with a sad voice.

"I don't know what happened between you and your brother. My job is to solve mysterious cases and I got this case because it was looking just like my brother's case except one difference, I wasn't able to find him," I finished my short speech by crying. I think the man understood me.

"Man, now I understand you," he said in a lovely voice which surprised me because five seconds ago he was angry to me.

“I am living here with a friend which I met when I ran away from my house. I would like to help you but he said that he doesn’t have a brother. He is probably going to come in ten minutes. If it helps his name is John. John Maner.”

No way I thought. He can’t be my brother. After I had a little heart attack I asked if he had his photo. He opened his phone and showed me a picture. Yes he was my brother. He was John Maner.

I looked at Hutch and I tried to choose my words carefully because I didn’t want him to think that I am crazy. After I thought for a few seconds I said:” Yes he is not my brother but he is an old friend of mine and I really missed him, can you tell him that I want to see him at seven o’clock in the Crudge.”

“Crudge?” he asked me. It was normal because it was a secret place where me and my brother used to play football.

“Just say that. “ I wanted to end the conversation because there were tears in my eyes but I was smiling because I was trying to look like I was happy. Who would feel sad when they find an old friend? I thanked him and turned back, while I was taking my first step he asked:

“Sorry, what was your name?”

“Drake, sure he is going to remember me,” I said and I continued walking.

At seven o’clock I was at the Crudge waiting for my brother to come. The sun was in his way to sleep. Darkness was about to begin. Birds stopped singing. The road was cracked. Plants were growing in the cracks and I was waiting for my brother when I heard a sudden hush. Someone was coming. I was feeling and hearing but I wasn’t sure about which direction he was coming from. When I was looking for him I saw old shoes on the ground. Those shoes were the shoes which he was wearing when he got lost seven years ago. I lifted up my head and yes, he was standing in front of me. I had a step to hug him but he took out a gun from his pocket and pointed at me. I didn’t say anything, I just asked a simple question:

“Why?”

“Remember the times we started solving crimes. We were together right? Yes we were but you were always the clever one. You got the awards, you got the fame, you got the love of our mother. Just you, you, you,” he said and his eyes were full of tears.



“But we are brothers John, we were and we are going to be, I missed yo-” He interrupted me not and didn’t let me finish my sentence.

“Keep missing Drake, keep missing.” He changed the direction of the gun which was pointing me to himself.

He fired it, I was motionless. I saw the blood coming from his head. He was lying on the ground without breathing. I collapsed to my knees and looked at him. I saw our old notebook falling from his pocket. On the cover ‘BF’ initials were written. When our mother bought this notebook to us we wanted to name it. He wanted us to name it ‘Best Friends’ and I wanted to name it ‘Brothers Forever’. So we named it BF. Memories come to life. I said nothing, tears were talking for me.

# The Collector

by Sumru Nur Elden

# THE LECTOR



by Sumru Nur Elden

- "You are killing them dad. Stop!"

I turned at a slow pace. My face was turning red from anger. I could literally feel the fire inside me. In that second my anger reached to a state that I couldn't even think properly. How could he ask me this? He is my son. He wouldn't betray me. Would he? Besides that, I am not killing them, I am releasing the pain. No, no I AM NOT KILLING!

"You stupid kid! How could you say that? Go away now or you will face the consequences."

I yelled at him like it was the end of the world. The glass in my hand was smashed into million diamond pieces. They were piercing into my hand. The blood was spilling like a red lake into the brawny wood floor but it was not hurting at all. My anger was turning my eyes to blind. I looked at my hands, I saw the blood and looked without deviation back at him. I was sure that he could see the fire inside of me just by looking at my eyes. He started to cry and straight ran to his room. The sound of the slamming door was the same sound that my broken heart made. But, but... He deserved it didn't he? I picked the diamonds from the ground and the blood was all over

them too. With blood all over the glasses they looked like rubies.

I started heading to the kitchen to throw the glasses. As I passed his room, I could still hear the sound of his crying. If he was loyal, he wouldn't even have the courage to ask me this question. I threw the glasses to the trash and looked at my hand. It was hurting. I thought that I should probably pick the glasses out of my hand. My second stop was the bathroom. The bathroom was dark as night like all of our rooms. My house demonstrated my soul. I felt happy in black. I felt safe like, black was the only colour that suits me perfectly. I picked the tweezers and started to pick the glasses out of my hand slowly. The moment, the tweezers touched my hand screamed with this excruciating pain. The pain from hand started to wave around my body. It was just like the waves that crashed into the sea but not pretty at all. When I was done, I covered my hand with a bandage. I walked into my work room, cleaned the blood out of the wooden floors. He was still crying. But his sounds of crying made a melody for me to work in. I picked up the work that I have left because of him. That night he never came out of his room. I didn't have the need to

check him out. I made myself some dinner and ate alone. It wasn't a surprise. I was used to eating alone. I was always alone. He must be scared but he did this to himself. But he left me with this unbearable thoughts. I couldn't get my mind straight. It was all over the place. My head hanging down from my body, I walked to my room. The dark floors and doors... My art in the walls. I sat on the chair that was looking through the window. The moon was shining on the lake that was looking as black as my soul. I wandered, if my heart had anything that moon's shine can recover. I was unaware of everything this night. Time, thoughts, souls... But the main question that I should answer was the hardest one. Am I killing them?

“NO!”

I screamed to the night even though I knew that anyone wouldn't hear me. I repeated to myself.

“I am not killing, I am releasing the pain.”

Releasing the pain... I fell asleep as I was repeating. The morning breeze came to my injured hand firstly. The sun hit my black soul but it wasn't even a slight bit brighter. My anger was somewhat gone. I walked to the kitchen to make breakfast. Still, I wasn't going to check him. I made myself

some bacon and eggs. Eating wasn't for me. It wasted my time greatly. To prepare and eat... Anything that stole my time from doing art was my enemy. The first thing that I did after breakfast was going to my work room. When I arrived to my room, the sight drove me crazy. I was shocked. My eyes turned black just for a moment. I opened my mouth but the words were useless. At first, I couldn't realize what was going on. My art was in the floor, smashed. I yelled with pain. He was definitely going to pay for this.

“Elliot, come out now!”

Along with my great art, my eyes got caught on a piece of paper on the floor. I opened it and read.

Dear Dad,

I am really sorry but I had to do this. I had to run away from you. You are hurting them. The butterflies. Why would you do that? They have done nothing to you. NOTHING! They are everywhere. And, and, the blood... All over them. Why would kill them like that? And hang them all around our house. I couldn't withstand that sight anymore. Seeing that innocent and delightful butterflies around me all the time... Yesterday, I saw the psychopath in you. I don't want to be around you. You should know

that I am still going to be your son. But this is the sake of both of us.

The letter slipped from my hands. It slipped from my hands just like my son. And then it happened... I cried. I cried for the first time after fifteen years. I made a promise to myself that I would never cry. It was in my sister's funeral. The most painful day in my life. The pain ripped my heart from my ribcage. That is how I became a person made out of wood. I cried and cried for hours. Maybe it was the poison that was coming out of my soul. Because my son was the only thing that made my day a little less cloudy.

“Okay Jonathan, get it together.”

I said it to myself in a strong voice. Just like, if I spoke stronger, I would be stronger. I walked out of my room. The sight was still in my mind. All my work on the floor, the effort that I gave to this projects were unbelievable. I was trying to hold it together. But it was just... Unbearable. I ran to my bedroom and quickly grabbed the phone book. From start to finish, I called every person who was in the book. None of them knew where my child was. As the pages on the book went on, I was coming closer and closer to losing myself. My heart was beating like crazy. Even

that, wanted to get out of my body, my system. The part that was hurting the most was the knowing that I made him run away. I was responsible. As I was thinking of this the dark clouds of desperation started to block my view. I was not able to think. I started limping to my son's room. My little Elliot's... I sat down to his bed. Crawled to his bed... I smelled the pillow like it had the last oxygen pieces that I need in despair. Like it was the only way that I could live. You could clearly smell my son. I laid there like a dead man for almost half an hour. I forced my brain to think where he was. Then the clouds separated. The glimpse of the sun came to me. He must me in his mother's grave.

“Yeah! I found him. I did it.”

I ran through the front door and didn't even grab my jacket. The car started with a sound of sadness. And I drove my way through the desperateness. When I arrived at her grave, Elliot was beside it. Just like I thought. The tear drops started from his eyes to her grave. With the sun shining all over them, the drops looked like pearls. I steadily walked to him, I didn't want to scare him. I didn't want him to run away from me again.

“Elliot, my son...”

“Don’t come near me, don’t even think about it.”

The fear in his eyes was clear like a crystal. I sat down onto the wet ground. It smelled like freshness after the heavy rain. I looked to him. There were almost a meter between me and him.

“Why dad?”

He asked with strong voice. He was trying to stay strong as hard as I was. I could see that all over his body. His jaw was sharp like a Butcher’s knife. Ready to cut me with the words that he was going to say. He made his hands into a punch. His body was tense with the fear. The sun was on top of us. But the great plane tree hide us. Now it was just two of us. No human, no dead, no sun and no feelings... I felt intensely that there was going to be a trial here. I must be honest.

“I asked you! WHY DAD? Why did you killed all of the butterflies in such a wild way?”

“I, I...”

“If you don’t answer then forget that you have a son.”

“The time has come huh?”

“I WANT TO KNOW.”

“Okay then.”

I hold my breath. My heart was beating faster and faster every time I breathed. It was a story that I didn’t want to remember. It was a story that even I didn’t want to hear myself talking about it.

“It was long ago. My mother, my sweet mother...”

My voice cracked along with my emotions. The pearls that I was holding for fifteen years started to leave me. I looked at Elliot, he was still just like a stone, but instead of fear, his face had gained a new emotion. Understanding...

“She died when I was just six. Sheila, my sister was just around two. I remember that cold night like it was yesterday. Sometime in the night, when I was asleep. The phone ringed. I immediately knew something was wrong because the house felt darker than the night itself. I heard my mother answer the phone and say “Hello?”. I couldn’t hold myself in the bed. I sneaked around the kitchen, into my mom’s bedroom. I stood around the corner and eavesdropped. As the conversation went on, her voice got louder too. I heard that she was yelling “WHERE IS HE? TELL

ME NOW.” Then she closed the phone and I saw a teardrop hanging on her cheek. But she looked at me and smiled. She was a strong woman and I always admired her for that. I was standing in a corner, crawled up. She came to my side and said in a lovely voice that was nothing compared to the voice that she spoke with earlier: ”Mama has to do something baby, look after your sister. I will be back soon.” I knew that it was something about my dad. After that day, we learned that one of her friends was in the bar and she saw my dad kissing another woman and walking out of the bar with her. So she immediately called my mom to report this event. She was furious, I could see in her eyes. So, I agreed slowly and went to my sister’s room. She was sleeping so quietly. Just like an angel. I kissed her forehead and crawled besides her in the bed and we slept like that until the morning. The morning that everything changed, forever in my life. I remember myself woking to a cry of pains. I ran to my dad with curious eyes. He leaned towards me and said the three words that made my universe to fell apart. “She is dead.” “How?” I screamed until I can’t. He hugged me just for a second. She was raging when she got out of the house. She took the car and started to drive to the bar that my dad was in. But something hideous happened. When she was driving,

from the anger she turned blind. A car hit her and she jumped out of the window. It was my dad’s fault and I was never going to forgive him. With all that fuzz, Sheila eventually woke up. I looked at her sad little face. A skin just like cotton, eyes green just like a deep, dark forest. I didn’t have the heart to tell her that our mom was dead. So I just hugged her said: “Everything is okay. We are together and I am never going to leave you. You are my number one priority from now on.” Even though I said that everything was okay, she understood that instead of okay, everything was falling apart. So we just hugged and cried for the whole evening. That was the day that my world crashed down.”

“That is terrible dad! He shouted. Yeah it was and this was just the beginning. The tear drops became unstoppable. As I continued the story, the pain got bigger and bigger. I almost could feel the emotions that I felt at that time were coming back. Just like I was living at that moment again. It was overwhelming. I thought to myself. “God! Take my soul.”

“Then my dad started to drink again. It was just me and Sheila left. I cared for her. I made all the meals, I even worked for the family. And that pig... He did nothing! Nothing but drinking like a pig. He smelled like

carrion. Just like his soul was puking to his outside and that caused this smell. But I was doing all of this for Sheila. My little beautiful sister. She needed love, care and me too. We gave that to each other. But no matter what I did she cried every night. She cried herself to sleep. That tore my heart apart but I was not able to stop her. When he returned to home, he would call me and say “You little son of... Shut that girl up, or else you will pay the consequences.” I already would have tried everything. I would go to him and he would beat me up till I fainted. Once she came to my side and kissed me in the cheek. “I am sorry brother. I am really but I can’t...” I shook my head with understanding. While she was talking to me, I saw my bruises. That animal made bruises everywhere. They hurt like I was burning in the hell. I cried with pain. I was screaming, kicking but nothing made the pain easier. Sheila came to my side. She had a pen in her hands. “What are you doing with that?” I asked her. Even, from my voice, she could perceive my curiosity. She started to look to my bruises. She opened the pen and started to draw butterflies all over my bruises. I was intrigued to see what she was doing so I didn’t interrupted her with my questioning. When she finished her butterflies, she came closer to my face and said: “When they fly away, when they will

go brother. They will take your pain, they will release your pain.” My world seemed different with that words. All I know or knew changed. I hugged her and cried my heart out.”

“This went on for almost a year. Whenever my dad hit me, she would draw butterflies on my bruises. It helped. It magically helped. She made me feel better, the butterflies released the pain. I loved her so much because she was the little light of my dark galaxy. One night, when the night was darker than any. Dad came home. He stood up, in front of our room, like always drunk. He was looking different though. Sheila was crying again. I thought to myself that she was afraid of dad. He yelled with a strong voice. I tried to warn her under the blanket with my feet and I immediately made a shush sound. “I am sick of you. Don’t even start to cry.” But she kept crying. Like I knew my faith, I walked up and went to his side. It was time for our father son nights. But instead of me he walked straight to Sheila and grabbed her by arm. I screamed and hit him once. “Let go of her.” She was crying like it was the end of the world. He started to drag her by hair to the living room. He started to beat her. I came between them but he pushed me. “That’s enough, I am sick of your crying. I told you enough, I think.” he



screamed. He was hitting her harder than he hit me. "YOU ARE A MONSTER!" I screamed with all of my power. He looked at me and laughed. His laugh was the sound of the devil burning my ears. I tried to stop him again and again. I was trying to step between them. But he hit me so hard and I fell down and hit my head. My eyes started to get darker and last sound that I heard was the sound of despondence. "Please dad, please don't..." . The sound of my pain releaser. The sound of my little sister, and her more little sound. That was the last memory that I remember from that night. When the bright sun light hit me, my brain was hurting like it was going to explode. I dragged my body to kitchen and drunk a whole glass of water in a one sip. With that glass, my strength to stand up came to me. I walked to the crime scene and my soul got darker than an empty room. My sister, my little Sheila was on the floor, lying. She looked like a painting with a red background. But instead of paint, it was blood. She had blood all over her and bruises. My whole world was crashing down, I was not able to breathe. My lungs were burning, my eyes were flowing. The last thing that made me happy was gone. I was empty in this life. I had nothing. I promptly checked her heartbeat. HE KILLED HER! THAT, THAT, THAT... ANIMAL. My one thing, my loved

one, my everything was gone. I ran to her room and grabbed a pen, came back to her. Her face was as cold as my dad's soul. I drew butterflies to every bruise. "My baby, this will release your pain. I swear that they will." Like you did to me, like you released all of my pain. But there was nothing that can be done to heal me now. I knew that so I let my soul to leave. To leave its place to nothing. To darkness, emptiness... When I stood up, I was the side painting to hers. Covered with her blood. That animal had left and if he was here I was sure that he would be in the floor beaten up to death, just like my innocent sister. I changed my clothes and kissed her cold, empty body one more time. I called 911. At first, I mumbled. I didn't want to admit the horrible truth to myself. Let alone the others. I ran from the house. I waited till I saw the workers carrying her with a black bag all over her. I ran and ran away. To run from my memories."

"Oh my god dad! I would never know, I don't know how I can apologize to you."

He ran to my and hugged me very tightly. We cried together, hugging like almost half an hour.

"Will you come home now?"

“Dad, I know it was not your fault but from the other night. I am still damaged. You lost your mind. I can’t come back. I think we should be separate for more days.”

I told him the most agonizing memories I had and he doesn't appreciate it? But as I thought about it, I really scared him. He has to think about it. But I know that he will understand me. So I decided to leave and let him with his thoughts. I stood up and walked back to home. Dark thoughts were on my head. I perceived that when I recalled the memories back, they were too heavy on me. My brain was blunt. My thoughts were sheeps without a shepherd. They got darker as the day went on. I was suffering from the pain from the past and the present. I was suffering from the pain that I had caused. I was suffering from the pain that my sister suffered the day when she died. I was suffering from the pain that anybody has ever suffered. I was dying from inside. The poison that I had was eating me alive. I couldn't bare that anymore. I wanted to die, I wanted to get rid of the pain. I walked to my work room with all the butterflies hanged wildly on the wall. I fell down from the excruciating pain that I was suffering from. It was the end, I could feel. It was the time to get rid of all the reality and the pain. I opened the drawer and there it was. My black gun... I held and

greeted him like he was an old friend. With my pen in one hand and the gun on the other hand. I was going to release my pain. I was going to get rid of this poison that was sickening me. My pain was going to be released. I apologized for everything that I made. From my mother, from Sheila and my son... I pulled the trigger and BAM. It was the last sound that my ears ever heard.

I was curious of my dad. He left in such a hurry after our conversation. I can't believe what he went through but in the end last night was... Terrifying. But I still had to check the house to see if he was okay. I walked to home with all the things he said in my head. I thought that I would come back to him. But I was torn apart, what if he would kill me last night. But he wouldn't do it, would he? His anger... I was not able to think comprehensibly. I opened the door to the house, hoping that he would be home.

“Dad, I'm home.”

It was dead silence in here. I was afraid. My heart had a monstrous feeling about this silence.

“Dad, where are you?”

I walked through the house. When I entered the work room, my chin dropped to the floor. My dad, my dad... He was lying on the floor. With blood coming from his torso. HE COMMITTED SUICIDE. My dad is gone. I cried besides him. I never had the chance to tell him how I felt truly. I loved him... Even with his flaws. I saw a piece of paper besides him.

Dear Son,

You know that I love you but the pain is killing me. I had to do this or else it would kill me eventually.

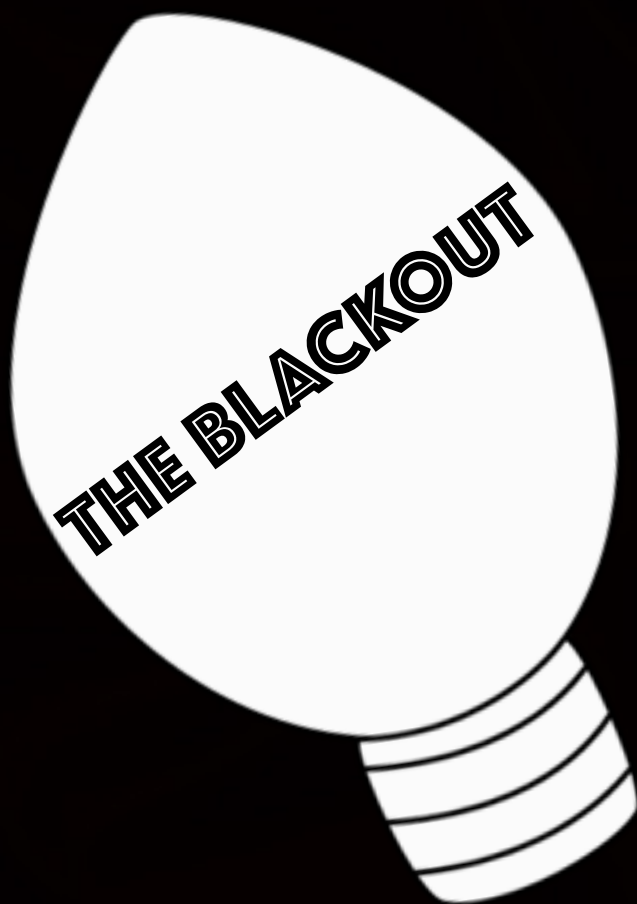
Bye for forever

It had blood stains all over it. My dad's... It was the end of the world for me, I thought. But when I saw a butterfly standing just on the spot where he shoot himself. It was a pink butterfly with white dots on it. It perfectly fit on the spot. I knew at that moment that was Aunt Sheila. I knew that he was not in pain anymore. The butterfly flew away with blood all over her. I knew that she got all of the pain. I knew that she released the pain...

# The Blackout

by Defne Ondersev

*"NOTHING. I REMEMBERED NOTHING."*



*A thrilling short story by*

**DEFNE ÖNDERSEV**

I opened my eyes slowly and let the light in. My head was hurting torturously. I looked around. I didn't know this place. It was a small apartment. The blinds were half open and the stream of light was making the tiny little pieces of dust visible. I was lying on the bed, which was centered in the room. There was a blood-red sofa that looked really old, almost antique. Right in front of me was a nightstand, with a TV on it that probably didn't work. Everything looked so outworn and rusty, I wonder how many years it had been since someone beside me came here. Well, it looks like decades. I've never been here before, or at least I don't remember being here. Where was I? I looked out of the window and when I saw the buildings I knew I was somewhere in Queens. What the heck was I doing in Queens? I wanted to get out of here. I had a bad feeling about this place, my instincts were telling me to get out immediately. I tried to remember last night, what happened, how and why did I end up here? Nothing. I remembered nothing. It was all a blackout. I got up and started wandering around the room, trying to find something that I recognize, something that may be a clue of last night. I found my phone and my coat, both thrown onto the floor in different sides of the room. I unlocked my phone to see if I sent or received any messages or calls last

night. No messages. No calls. But then I see something, a red notification on the Mail icon. There's an incoming mail. But why would someone mail me instead of texting me? I go to my inbox to see who the mail was from. I didn't recognize that mail address. It must be someone from work, I thought at first. So I clicked on it calmly, expecting to see something related to work, but the second I saw what it really was I dropped the phone. No no no no no no this couldn't be true. It was a picture of my brother, Ben, tied to a chair, his head bleeding and his mouth wrapped with a piece of cloth. I was freaking out. What was going on? Why were they keeping my brother hostage? Was he okay? What did they want from him? What happened last night? That last question kept repeating in my head. I wanted answers and I wanted my brother back. So I sent a reply to that same email address that said, "Who are you and why do you have my brother! What's going on? What do you want from us?" When I sent the mail, I realized I was still in that little old room so I grabbed my coat, viewed the room one last time and got out. I knew I was in Queens, but I walked down the streets and looked around to be sure. I've been walking for almost 10 minutes when I realized, I didn't know where I was going. I've been walking down the streets and trying to convince

myself that Ben was okay. He was fine. There should've been a misunderstanding, when they realize that they will let him go. They will, right? I checked my phone again for the millionth time and there was still no answer. I decided that I should go home, take a nice, warm shower and then sit down and think with a clear head, try to remember what happened last night. I should keep myself together, I shouldn't freak out in order to make rational choices and get out of this situation as fast as I could, with no harm. As I was waiting for a taxi, my phone started to ring. I looked at the name that popped up on the screen. Oh, Great. Just what I needed, a haunting conversation with my mother. But I knew her. If I didn't take this call right now she will keep calling and calling until I get pissed off and pick it up, so it's better to just get it over with right now. I answered and listened to her irritatingly calm voice saying;

“Nora, Hello dear. I see you started picking up my phones on my first cal. I should say I'm very pleased though a little bit surprised.”

“Well, yeah, you made it pretty clear that there was no way out, and I figured why not just get it over with.”

“I always knew I've raised a smart girl. How's everything going darling?”

“Same as always.” I say, trying to sound convincing. I can't tell my mother about Alex. Not now.

“I'm glad to hear that. I actually called to inform you that your old friend Georgina is back in town. She called me yesterday morning and said that she really missed you and that she wants to catch up but she lost your number. I gave it to her, she should call some time soon.”

I didn't hear what she said after Georgina. I mumbled some things and finished the call. How can Georgina be back? Why was she back? She must've come to finish some unfinished business, or maybe start a new one. Either way, there must be something she wants here in the city. Whatever it is, I'm not eager to find out.

I rushed home and took a long, hot shower. I dried my hair and put my comfy pajamas on. I couldn't stop thinking about last night, I mean how could I? If Ben was safe and I woke up in my own apartment, it would've been just another night that I've spent drunk. But something happened and I need to figure it out before it's too late. Before I lose my brother. Thinking about that gave me the chills. I wasn't go-

ing to lose him, I couldn't. I was thinking about these horrible things when another thing popped into my head. Was it a coincidence that this thing happened in the same night Georgina came back to town? I could feel the blood flowing in my veins. It's never a coincidence with Georgina. I feel terrified. What am I going to do? If she's involved, what happened must've been horrible. I just need to figure out what, but without her noticing. She's dangerous and if she understands what I'm up to she's probably going to try and stop me or harm me and Ben and both are not valid. She would probably call soon, with her ridiculously thin voice. She'll want to go that same coffee shop we've been going to for years. She'll say she wants to hear all about me, what I've done while she was away but when we meet she'll never stop talking. I start to think about the things I'll say to her, ask her. Maybe I'll start by asking her how her first night in the city was like. I can ask her what do we owe the pleasure of having her back. She will not understand what I'm up to. She can't. Now would be the perfect time for all those spies moves I've watched in years to pay off.

When my phone started ringing I was lying under my favorite fluffy blanket, watching F.R.I.E.N.D.S for the 100th time. I picked it

up, Georgina. Let's do this, I said to myself, and took the call.

The first thing I heard was her penetrating voice, echoing in my head. "NOORRAAA BABY I MISSED YOU SO MUCH!!"

"Hi Georgina."

"We HAVE to meet up, meet me in our usual coffee shop in 15? I have so much to tell you, we can talk about it over coffee."

"Okay, yeah, that sounds good. I'll be there" I said, feeling the excitement and fear flowing all over my body.

"See you in 15 babygirl."

And I hung up.

I got there a little early, because it's really close to my apartment and I couldn't wait. I sat at a table and ordered a latte and chocolate chip cookies while I was waiting, all this obscurity made me hungry. I was taking my first bite from my cookie when I saw her. Her hair was dark red, and it gave her a devilish look, her eyes an oppositely light, pure green. She scared me, I didn't want to do this. I wanted to disappear right now. But I couldn't. I needed to do this, for me, for Ben. She literally ran from the entrance to the table I was sitting at jumped on me. Wow. I wasn't expecting

this much love, what was that all about?  
“Oh My God! You seriously get more beautiful every day. Ahh, I missed you Nora. Come on, sit down. I have a lot of talking to do.” she said as she started laughing, and I tried to fake a smile.

Two hours past, there was no time for me to ask my questions. No time at all. She just wouldn't stop jumping from one subject to another. She told me all about her summer camp, her 4 ex boyfriends, how good the ice-cream in LA was, how much she hated bugs and how she starts questioning life when her battery dies. Then her mouth stopped moving -finally- and I saw that as the perfect opportunity to start asking questions. I was just about to when she got up and said, “Ugh, gotta use the lady's room. I'll be right back babygirl, don't go anywhere.” I was so frustrated with myself. How could I fail at asking a simple question? But then, I saw something on the table. Her phone. She left it here when she went to the bathroom. I grabbed it quickly and meanwhile started thinking of password combinations, but it was my lucky day, no password. I went through her calls and her texts first. Nothing suspicious, from what I saw. I knew all of the people I saw names of. But then I remembered, that freak didn't call or text me to inform me about my brother, he mailed

me. So I went through her mails, and there it was. The same e-mail address who mailed me. I was 100% sure, I memorized it this morning just in case. I was right all along. She was involved. My mind got so busy thinking about these that I forgot to read the mail and as soon as I realized this I read it. She mailed him first, saying “Is everything ready for tonight? Nothing can wrong.”

“Yes ma'am, everything is how you wanted them to be. Everyone is ready.”

“Great. I'll be in the city at late-afternoon. Inform me when it's completed.”

\* 6 hours later, 2 am \*

“We have him.”

“Marvelous. I'll see you tomorrow.”

My heart was racing so fast, I could hear the flow. I didn't know what to do. Should I face her and and want my brother back, or should I just go with the lie and try to find more clues so she doesn't get in my way. When I saw her walking towards the table, I haven't decided yet. But the moment I saw her face, the way her eyes look at me, I knew I made up my mind. “Ah, sorry I've kept you waiting for so long. But you



wouldn't believe how many people are in line there!"

"Oh, it's okay. It's fine." I said with a smile. I tried to fight the urge to tell her I know, I know about her kidnapping my brother, but it was just too hard to resist.

"Have you, um, spoke to Ben recently? I don't know, yesterday?" I could see her face blushing with fear. Now this was going to be fun.

"No, no, I haven't spoken to him since the last time I was in the city. Why? Isn't he answering his phones?" I could see her smirk no matter how hard she tried to hide it.

"Well, I don't know about that, I haven't tried calling him. After seeing that photo of him tied to a chair, his head bleeding, I figured it wasn't the perfect time for a chat."

Her face turned cold. "I-I don't know what you're talking about. What the hell happened?" she said, trying to hide her fear. I knew her too well to know that even though she may act like it, she wasn't sorry at all. She didn't regret possibly drugging me and hurting my brother. I need revenge. I need her to pay, to suffer. "Oh, you do. Very well." and I left the cafe.

Okay, so far so good. But what will be my next move? I need to find where they're keeping Ben. I could find the man's phone and track it down, but I'm not Felicity Smoak (a super smart IT girl from the TV series Arrow) so even though I would love that, I don't think it would work out very well. So I started thinking of places that has a moral meaning for Georgina. A place suitable to keep a man hostage, a place where people wouldn't suspect or walk by randomly and see him inside. A few places crossed my mind, her family's old house downtown, an old cigarette factory that she enjoyed going to and just wander around and also her old apartment in Queens. Wait a minute. In Queens? I woke up in Queens. Was this another coincidence, I didn't think so. So I decided that I would start looking from there and keep going until I find him, do what it takes. I couldn't lose my brother.

I took a cab to her old place. I don't know if I was ready yet, but I didn't have to be. I was just going to want my brother back and offer money instead, meanwhile record all this and give it to the police at the end. When I got there, nothing looked suspicious, but some house furniture were blocking the entrance. It didn't look like it was made on purpose, someone just may be moving out. But I knew it was her. I got

on the elevator and slowly went to the 10th floor. Here I was. My instincts were telling me to turn around and run away now. But I needed to face this. I've had enough of her. I wasn't going to knock of course, so I went back a few steps and kick-opened the door. It was that moment when I saw her red hair that I felt hatred flowing all over my body. Ben was there, sitting, looking miserable but still not given up hope. He was so surprised to see me, I could almost see his jaw dropping if it wasn't for the piece of cloth covering her mouth. There were two men standing next to him, like bodyguards. They looked really scary though. "What. Are. You. Doing HERE!?!?" yelled Georgina. "I came to take what's mine, and then I'll be out of your way. But you need to tell me everything that happened night."

"Oh, I'd be honoured to tell you" she said. "All these years, I always got left out in your shadow. You were good at everything, I looked like a failure next to you. I just couldn't stand it anymore. So I wanted to hurt you. Hurt you by taking away what meant the most to you" She started crying. I went by her side. "I didn't know you felt like that, next time, just try talking to me before kidnapping my brother. Were you really going to harm him?"

"Wait, wait. Just because I opened up to you doesn't mean I forgive you."

"Whatever, keep telling me about that night,"

"So I was in the city and I saw you and your brother, walking down the street, laughing. That was when I came up with this plan, I was going to kill him actually, but I just couldn't. So, um, I followed you guys into the bar. Drugged both of you without you noticing so you passed out. I took him with me and left you in an apartment."

I couldn't believe this. It was all nonsense. I told her to give me my brother back. She said that she loved him and wanted to keep him a little bit more. That's when I lost my temper and attacked her. I jumped on her, pulling her hair, punching her. The bodyguards came to separate us, but I just wouldn't let go of her, I was too furious.

And that is when I heard a bang. I looked at Ben, he was looking at me in horror, he started to cry. I could feel the hot blood pouring out of my chest. Ben's face was the last thing I saw before everything went black.

# 5

## Mystery

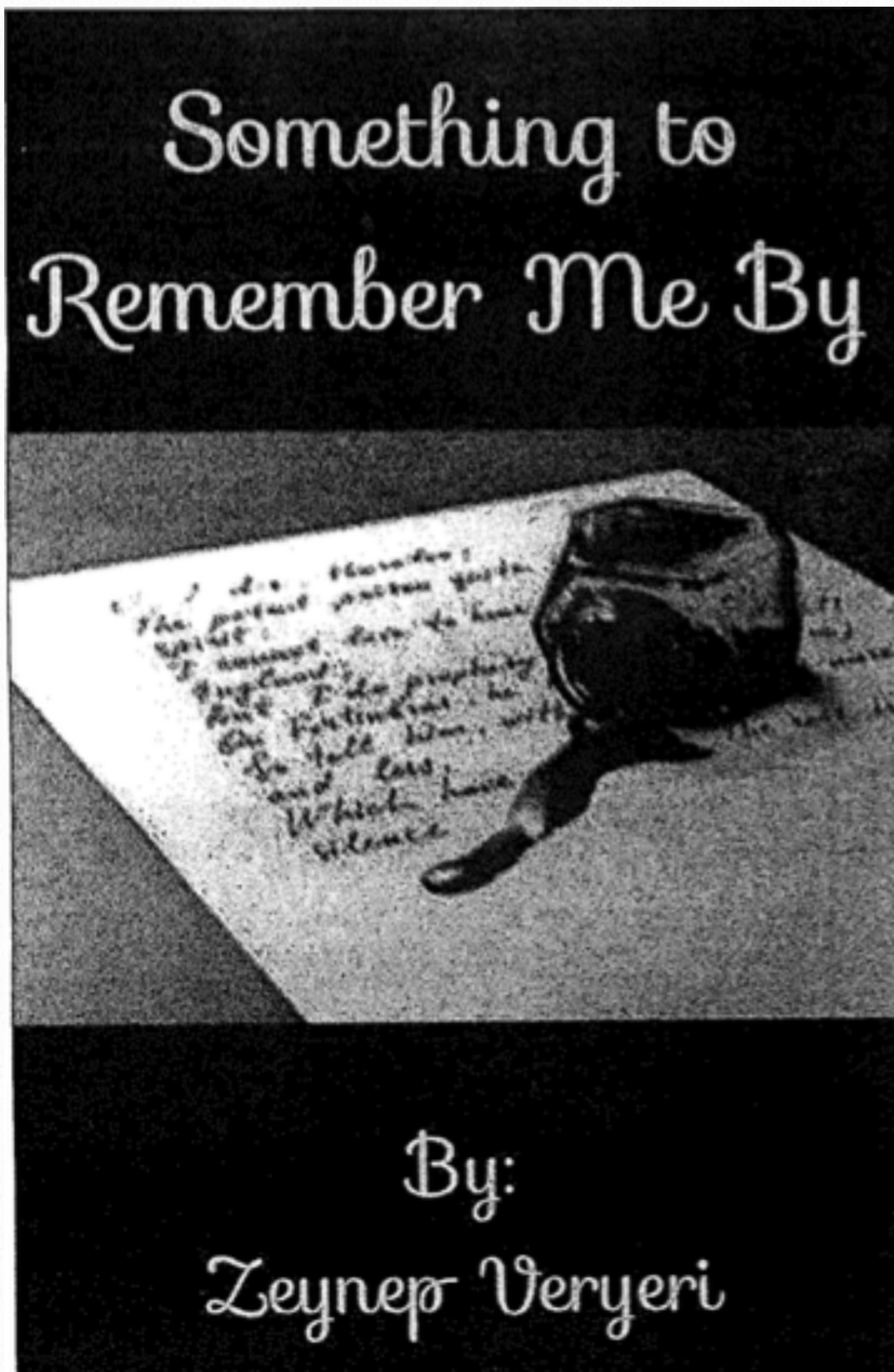
“Mystery creates wonder  
and wonder is the basis of  
man's desire to under-  
stand.”

– Neil Armstrong



# Something to Remember

by Zeynep Veryeri



## Chapter 1

She finally opened her eyes after sleeping for almost a day. Her head was aching as if she was hit on the head a thousand times. When she finally looked around, she realized that this wasn't her apartment, or was it? She couldn't remember anything. She decided to look around a little more to see if she could find something that can help her remember where she is, more accurately who she was. She looked down to see if there was something familiar with what she was wearing. She was wearing a black short sleeved shirt, instead of pants or tights she was wearing (God knows why) volleyball shorts, loose beige knee-high socks and a long beige cotton sweater. This was a pretty usual outfit for pajamas the unusual thing was the paper pinned on her chest, she took it off and read it. It had a name and a number next to it, the name was Alex and the number was twenty. She thought on the name Alex, was it someone she knew? Then again the reality hit her and she remembered once again she didn't have any memory of her past life. It felt funny to her remembering again and again not remembering anything. What about twenty, could it be the age of this Alex person? Well that was all she could think actually. She dropped the paper over the coffee table

and watched it slowly float. She needed to know something about herself.

If there were to be another person in her place he/she would've freaked out or panicked, but she didn't. She sat on the gray couch calmly and watched the birds flying right outside the apartment. The worst part was that she realized this, she knew that she should panic or try hard to remember something, even if that something is a very simple thing like her name. But she knew the truth, she was trying to escape from, that she didn't actually want to remember her past, no one's past has been a fairy tale; of course there was pain, remorse, agony these were in everyone's lives even if they couldn't accept it or even if no one experiences them in that same way. There they were, waiting around the corner to slap you in the face harder every time you walk through the streets of your life. No opportunity to run away.

Even though she didn't want to remember anything, she could do better with her name. So she focused on her name and tried to pull it away from the mess inside her head. She dealt with this for a few more minutes until she finally figured that the name Alex and the number twenty was pinned on her chest. So her name was Alex and she was twenty years old. After

she unraveled this mystery she couldn't believe it took her this long to understand the pinned paper. After some self-anger sessions she calmed down. This was all she knew about herself, she didn't even know what she looked like; so she wandered around the house looking for a mirror.

During her search she observed the apartment; the apartment was mostly gray and it had a soothing effect, just like the feeling you get when it's raining outside and you're inside reading a book with a hot cocoa in your hands to warm you up, there was a big bed which was white with gray sheets, across the bed, there was a huge window, covering the whole wall, with a view of Central Park; there were leaves covering the green grass, the trees were almost naked & the ones that had leaves weren't green. It looked as if a reddish, orange veil was covering everything. She figured it was fall, maybe that was the reason she had been feeling a breeze behind her neck. She stared down from the window for a few more minutes. All those people rushing to get someplace, none of them looking at the warming beauty in this frigid morning. She felt sorry for every single person who ran through the park, suddenly she saw the ones who weren't running, the ones whom are sitting surrounded by the sea of yellowish brown leaves, the ones

whom are playing fetch with their dogs, the ones whom are walking peacefully with their loved ones. For them she only felt jealousy because she didn't have any loved ones or even if she did something took it away from her, something had taken everything away from her. Something had made her forget who she was, took herself away from her.

Lastly she found the bathroom therefore the mirror. She looked very carefully to herself, the first thing that came into her mind was that she fitted the name Alex. She had short, wavy, black hair, big, ice blue eyes, a tiny nose, freckles over her cheeks and nose, and medium sized lips. There were black circles under her eyes and her eyes were reddish, swollen as if she had cried the whole night.

Suddenly she felt very tired although she had slept for almost a day. She went to the kitchen and made a tea to relax. The last thing she remembered was walking towards the couch.

Next morning she wake up on the couch and noticed a piece of paper on the coffee table. The paper had instructions but she didn't understand what the instructions were about. She read it aloud: "1- Open the mirror in the bathroom you'll find a key

inside, this is the key of your apartment. 2- The phone on the coffee table is yours and it has all the numbers you'll need during your mission. 3- Open your wardrobe, every clothing you need is in it. 4- Under the bed there is a gun but you don't need it yet, I will let you know when you are going to need it. 5- In one of the drawers there is enough money to help you while you're saving your brother. I will be right behind you watching your back so don't worry. -Angel.”

There was a picture under the note. Alex immediately recognized herself and next to her there was a boy he looked older than her. On the left bottom corner of the picture the date was written. The picture was taken three years ago, however she didn't remember it, the boy wasn't familiar also. She flipped it and read aloud; “Alex and Nic, on a lovely day outside”. Who the hell was Nic? Could it be the “brother” she had to rescue? How had they gotten into this huge mess? And what the heck was going on?

## Chapter 2

In the next few weeks she got some similar instructions from Angel. She was curious on how did this Angel knew everything about her past life. She had some theories

on it such as this Angel could be her mother or father but she doubted that these were true. It had become a usual thing for her to receive instructions but today's were different. The instructions needed her to go outside. She had never been outside of the apartment, she knew every hidden spot inside the apartment and she knew every kind of self-defense but she was afraid to go out. She tried to calm down by looking outside of the window. It was ironic that the thing that calmed her down was the thing that terrified her. She watched carefully, people were always running; they had been running since her first day at this apartment. The thing that convinced her to go outside was, that she was really curious why were they always running. She finally got up, went towards the capacious wardrobe, opened it carefully, picked the first things that came into her hand as her outfit and went to the bathroom to get the apartment keys. She still wondered why were the god-damned keys were hidden in the bathroom cupboard but it came to her mind that this wasn't the most mysterious thing about this apartment. There was a gun under her bed! She thought about taking the gun with her but the instructions were clear that she didn't need a gun. Though all of her resistance, she reached the door. She kept reminding herself that it was going to

be okay and that her only mission was to call some Taylor. This Taylor girl, she couldn't be bad, right?

She went down the stairs because for some reason she felt something was wrong with the elevator. After. Fourteen. Goddamned. Floors. She reached the main entrance, people inside the building looked at her like she was retarded, well she had just ran down not four, not ten but fourteen floors for god's sake. In her defense she was inside an unfamiliar apartment for a week and she had rights to suspect literally everything around her since some maniac kidnapped her and erased all her frickin' memories. When these thoughts came to her she realized that the panicking stage had started. It was a week late but you know it would be dumb to panic in your apartment while there is no one around you to see or make fun of you when you can simply panic in a public area. Instead of thinking ways to calm down all she could think was "Wow, thanks brain!" She tried to stabilize her breaths and walk outside maybe fresh air would be better.

She stepped outside and started walking inside the park to find a quiet place to call this Taylor girl. After walking for half an hour, she was freezing, tired and had an ex-

planation to why the hell everyone was running. Well because it was so cold that you could feel your eyelashes freeze. Again she thought to herself "Of Course it was because of the cold genius, why would someone go for a peaceful walk in the middle of FALL, in FRICKIN' NEW YORK CITY. When she finally found a quiet place, it had started to snow and stuff because why not. She was never the luckiest.

She called Taylor for a couple of times until Taylor had the decency to finally pick up the phone. She had even practiced the things that she were going to say but her mouth surprised her by using the following words; "Hey, what the hell? If you think that you are cool or something by not answering your phone, let me enlighten you. YOU'RE NOT! So when someone calls you while freezing in the middle of God knows where, try to get your precious bottom up and answer the phone, okay??". She felt the weight of anxiety leaving her chest at that exact moment.

The answer was immediate but there was something wrong, a boy was talking. What? She didn't even understand what the voice said. She was stuck on the voice. She felt the embarrassment rising within her. She knew she had to interrupt also because the voice started saying



“Hello, are you there? Are you sure you can hear me?” She answered the voice with the question of “You are a boy??”. The voice was also surprised and answered with a chuckle “The last time I checked, I was a boy. If it’ll make you more comfortable I can check it n-”. She immediately, in a quite loud voice, responded with “NO, nope. It’s fine, I believe you.”.

“So you’re Taylor. Do you know what are we supposed to do ‘cause I have no idea, like literally I only know my name and that we have to rescue my brother Nic, whom I don’t even remember, you need to help me. There is someone called Angel who told me these and guided me about what we’re going to do but it is all too complicated. I’m not even sure if I can trust this Angel but it looks like you guys are my last chance. So if you could go ahead and enlighten me I’m not holding you back.” she finished her sentence and started gasping for air. She had talked so fast that Taylor could only understand half of it.

He had a smirk on his face and he responded calmly. “Hey, hey, hey! Calm down princess are you always this annoyed and panicked? I know Angel and she is a really great person who helps people that had to go through what you are living right now but she is a bit shy, she

doesn’t like showing herself because she is in danger. You and I are in grave danger too and it is mostly because we’re talking about Angel, oh and also it may have something to do with the fact that you are one of them.”. Alex still had questions why was Angel helping them? Who were they? What was she a part of? She tried to ask these but Taylor interrupted her thoughts, “We need to be quick princess. Would you mind picking your precious bottom up so we can finally meet and plan our rescue mission.”.

Alex felt intimidated and felt the rage rising within her. She learned that she had an easily intimidated temper. “Of course I had to get angry to everything around me. That’s what happens when you get kidnapped and stuff!” she thought to herself. She was getting angry again. She tried to answer calmly but her voice was too rebellious to listen to her and again the words came out of her mouth rather loud. “I’m not a princess and I’m definitely not your princess either. In time you’ll learn the difference between me and a princess, by the way I am waiting for you smart-ass to show up, freezing my ass-off. If you are not here in ten minutes I am going to be even more pissed off and I don’t think you would like the snowman I will make from your ripped off face and arrogant attitude.” before she

hung up the phone she heard the chuckle again.

### Chapter 3

Taylor turned around after he heard the dial tone. He was still chuckling, in a calm voice he asked Angel; “How do you always manage to find the crazy ones while there are lots of sane people in the City That Never Sleeps?” Angel responded with a laughter, her nervous attitude was slowly turning into who she really was and that made Taylor happy. Angel wrote in a paper; “You better get ready we heard our little princess’ threats.” Taylor laughed and started to get ready.

Taylor had light brown hair that wasn't long but also wasn't that short. His forest green eyes always shone. He was tall but he was ordinary. Nothing about him screamed he was different than the others except the mark on the back of his neck. It was a scar a long time had passed since it happened but he could still feel the stinging on his neck when he forget something. The scar hadn't healed completely, it had white flesh on the outside parts but this flesh piece turned into pink then red closer to the heart of the scar. His headaches were caused by it, it hurt as if he had been hit in the head for a thousand times. He wasn't

ashamed of it but he covered the scar with bandages or scarves when going out. This scar was something else it continued being there and continued to fight against healing it was as if the scar was alive.

Angel knew this and she was worried about this but there was nothing she could do. Every doctor in NYC worked for that, that hideous thing. She couldn't even say it's name. If the doctors saw the scar they would know, they would know that the person with this exact scar had fought against their master. Angel had tried that before, there were casualties, huge ones... She couldn't hand Taylor in knowing that she's sending him to die. She couldn't explain Taylor why she didn't help him about the scar also. She wouldn't explain it to Alex. Alex was still lucky they found her early, her scar was just a little red dot and Alex wasn't aware of it, yet.

When Angel found Taylor, Taylor had been living with this memory loss for almost three years. This explained the size of the scar. Whenever she thought of this memory she always felt the remorse getting in control of her. Why couldn't she save him earlier, she would've stopped the stinging on his neck and the horrifying memory of that hideous thing. This memory was the only thing recovered when you live with

this memory loss for a while. It still haunted Taylor in his dreams but there was still time for Alex.

She stopped thinking about these when Taylor called her by the door and said he was leaving. She was all alone now in the quiet, almost entirely dark room. She had some few memories to herself too. She remembered the day she stopped talking, it was the first time she saw that thing she was running away from it or was she supposed save a kid from it. She couldn't remember and there it was the stinging on the back of her neck. She slowly and carefully reached for her scar. Taylor didn't know but her scar expanded on her back to her waist. It got slightly bigger everyday. Slowly and slowly it was going to cover her entire body and turn her into that hideous thing, that hideous hideous thing...

Taylor was getting ready upstairs. He wore a black shirt, light colored jeans, converse shoes and a leather jacket. He carefully bandaged his scar and made sure to not touch the skin in the middle because it hurt like hell when he touched the open wound. He wasn't going to talk about the wound with Alex, she had to stay calm because her brother was in danger and needed their help to rescue him. Taylor knew that soon her scar will start itching

and stinging when she thought about the lost memories of her family and herself but there was time. Taylor looked at himself in the mirror. He could see the pity on his own face. He wasn't sure if it was for himself or for Angel or for Alex.

Taylor was ready, he went downstairs called Angel and let her know that he was going. Taylor knew that Angel was almost always sad. He knew that she felt remorse for everyone she couldn't save but there was only one Angel taking care of everyone in NYC.

Taylor started walking in Central Park, it was a cold morning and every breath he took made him feel more alive. He knew where Alex was because he had a tracker planted on her phone. He saw a girl standing near some bushes and almost jumping to get warm. He wasn't sure if the girl was Alex but from where he was standing she was beautiful. She had coal black hair, every time she hopped her short hair bounced on her shoulders. Her ice blue eyes looked as cold as the weather, she looked at everyone as a suspect and she examined everyone, it looked like she was waiting for someone. She was medium heighted and skinny. When he got closer to the girl he could see the scared look on her eyes and her eyes were so strong that

even he felt a little shiver climbing up his spine.

Taylor finally reached the girl. The girl looked suspicious almost as if she was planning on how to run away from him. He calmly asked if she was Alex. Her response was timid. "Are you Taylor?" He responded in a relaxed way. "Yes princess I guess that makes you Alex." He could see the frown forming on her face. Her cheeks turned red and she almost yelled, "I thought I was very clear on the princess issue Mr. Smartypants." "Okay, okay whatever you want Princess."

After a few more fights Alex realized that she was the loser of the arguments and that she had to accept the nickname "Princess". Who even calls someone he just met princess? What kind of a nickname is princess? Taylor looked at her with a smirk on his face and said "You know for someone this small you have a lot of temper." and of course she blessed him with her death stare.

## Chapter 4

Taylor took Alex to a cafe near Central Park. It was warm and cozy. There was a fireplace in the middle of the room. Around

the open fireplace there were cozy looking bean-bags, different length sofas and some chairs. They sat on two bean-bags to be across each other. The waiter came and asked what they wanted to have. Alex wanted some hot chocolate with marshmallows but she didn't have any money with her so she just looked at the ground. Taylor ordered some hot chocolate with marshmallows but Alex kept looking at the ground because she didn't want him to see the jealousy in her eyes. Her eyes exposed every single feelings of hers'. They didn't talk until the order came. When the waiter brought the hot chocolate Taylor took it and gave it to Alex. She looked confused and shocked and she politely rejected it but Taylor refused to get the hot cocoa back. Alex couldn't continue being stubborn again.

She warmed her hands with the hot cocoa. She could see the steam coming out of the hot beverage. She brought the cocoa near to her nose and breathed in the relaxing smell of chocolate, it reminded Alex her childhood. It literally did. Taylor could see the childish smile forming on her face as she remembered.

The memory was on a cold, snowy day. She and some other people (probably her family) was inside a warm room. There was

a fireplace in the middle of the room that lit everywhere and it protected her from the darkness of outside. She was holding a hot cup of cocoa and there was a boy, slightly younger than her, he was holding tight onto his cup of cocoa. There were two older looking man and woman staring at them peacefully. She could feel the warmness of love in that room even though all the faces were blurry.

Taylor was waving his hand in front of Alex's face. She felt a shiver on her spine and finally replied to Taylor, "What?". Taylor answered with palpable worry, he was never good at hiding his feelings, "What happened, why were you staring at the wall with blank eyes?". She answered almost bursting a laugh "Relax, I just remembered something about my childhood.". Taylor stopped with a shocked expression on his face. He replied even more worried than the first time, "That is impossible! People like you and me never remember anything. What did you do? How did it feel like? Is the back of your neck stinging? Turn around I have to check it." She was very confused and looked at him with puzzled looks but since he was the one who bought the hot cocoa and helped her remember, she listened the him anyway.

While Alex turned slowly and still looking suspicious, Taylor was not sure if he should feel graceful because she may be their cure or if he should feel scared because this never, ever, ever happened before. Angel had to know about this. If there was a cure why hasn't Angel said anything? This was the main reason he felt scared because he was afraid that Angel was lying to him after all what they had went through again and again.

Taylor slowly reached out to check the back of Alex's neck. There was a scar but not like any other he had seen before, it looked like a tattoo more than a scar. It was purple-ish on the middle and the color lightened as it expanded on her neck and on top of this purple area, there was a mark, shaped like a lightning which also expanded on the scar but the mark was a lot bigger than the scar. The lightning augmented towards her waist. He couldn't see the whole mark because she couldn't take her shirt of in the middle of a coffee shop but he could guess what it looked like and this couldn't be a sign of something good.

Alex sat silently while Taylor examined her back. She was a little bored but if it weren't important why would he examine the back of her neck in the middle of a coffee shop. Alex thought about all the things

she had been through these last weeks, she woke up in an apartment with no memory, she received weird instructions from someone named Angel, she had a gun under her bed, she had called and yelled at a man she had never met before, she met that man and now he was examining her back. All this was explained in one sentence in her head, it was more like a question, "What is with you people that you think it is easier to hide than to tell so we could come up with an answer to all of this?".

Taylor was finished with his little check-up. Alex turned and realized that she had never looked carefully at Taylor and of course she noticed the corner of the bandage on his neck, well the back of his neck. She was aware that he had just examined the back of her neck. She got curious about it and since they didn't have any time for acting suspicious she asked, "Hey, what happened to your neck? Why is it covered, is it that bad?". Taylor smiled because he knew that he was not going to get away with her not noticing the bandage covering the entire back of his neck. He was not escaping from her insisting eyes so he gave up and started telling the thing she had just got into.

He told her about the plague that left scars on the back of people's necks, the plague made them forget their pasts and not everyone could take this. In time the plague evolved and the scars started to get worse. They expanded from the back of necks to waists, they were open wounds, the middle part always bled and the flesh got lighter in the outer parts of wounds. The thing was that the wounds were not the only things about this plague that had evolved; some people had started claiming that there was a voice behind their head whispering to them, some of them said that they felt a warm breath on the back of their neck even though they were alone. No one could sleep because the scars were so bad that even if you touched it very very slightly or tried to heal it, it got worse it was as if the scars had a mind of their own. The plague didn't kill but there were lots of suicides because there was always this voice or the breath or the stinging of the scars drove people crazy.

The ones that were free of plague never left their house some of them were sent to islands so they could be protected of the sickening disease. The professor that found this plague was working on a cure for Spanish Flu but something went wrong and the cure and the virus was mixed with amnesia drugs. The whole lab was in-

fectured immediately. The professor knew this because he had added some chemicals to the cure so that it would be more effective faster than any other cure. So they were against a super virus that was more effective, dangerous and faster than any other virus they had stumbled upon.

The professor reached out to the microphone to inform his colleagues that they had to start the carantina mode of the lab. Unfortunately they were too late, two of the doctors had went out just after the virus was leaked. The virus was out but the ones that hadn't left, stayed in the lab for five years looking for cures. They were unsuccessful. The virus was weak at first, in time it evolved and the workers started forgetting their past very very slowly. The scars started forming and they got bigger as people continued forgetting. The workers started telling each other about the stinging in their neck, the stinging only occurred when they forgot something. Slowly and slowly they forgot everything including the cures they were working on. The forgetting continued until they forgot how to breath and died, slowly suffocating and gasping for air.

The professor however was a survivor. His scar had gotten so bad that no one could recognize him anymore. The scar and he

had emerged and the side-effects of the virus were a part of his brain. The voice that people complained about was his voice, the breath behind the sick's necks was his warm breath and he was the one that evolved with the plague and changed it in a way that it would not kill people but drive them crazy.

After he told her everything he knew about the plague he continued in a disturbed voice "In time the most of the sick people died and the disease wasn't common anymore. I mean, no one was healed but since they were not capable of remembering, the plague was forgotten. Since the plague couldn't find any victims it lost it's effectiveness. You and I are not hearing voices whispering to us or feeling a warm breath, gently brushing the back of our necks, causing a slight chill in your spine and a rising panic within you.". He stopped and shivered. Alex looked at him very carefully and she noticed that he looked behind him to see if anyone was there. There wasn't anyone.

He looked around the café and checked if anyone was listening to them. He looked panicked. After a couple of hesitations he continued to explain his job, "Me and Angel work together to find the sick ones and help them even though we can't cure them

we know how to slow it down. For example Angel found me after I've lived with the scar for almost three years so this is the smallest it will ever get and it covers the entire back of my neck. Now we've got you and you've only lived with the scar for three weeks, don't worry yours' will never even be seen."

He was lying. Her's was different, it wasn't ugly or disgusting like the others. It was more like an art and she was the canvas. The most important thing was that she could remember. The hot cocoa helped her remember a childhood memory. He had been trying to remember for four years now and the answer to it was sitting in front of him, playing with her hair. He once again looked into her ice blue eyes and saw the worry in them.

Even though he had realized that this speech made Alex uncomfortable he needed to finish that. He knew that since the moment they talked on the phone Alex wanted to know the truth. Now that she knew what really happened, he wasn't sure if she wanted to continue. He asked her in a soft voice, "If you don't want to hear anymore I can stop telling this messed-up story."

Alex was disturbed, not by the story but because of the fear she saw in Taylor's eyes when he slowly turned to see if someone was behind him. She wasn't dumb. She realized that he had felt the breath thing. If he hadn't felt it how could he talk about it in such a realistic way? She had a bad feeling inside. It was the silence before the storm. Whatever the professor was, he was back and she could feel his substance in every single cell inside her. She shivered too.

Alex knew they had to find this professor and they had to find him quick. Alex asked Taylor to continue. Taylor started talking again but his voice was full of hesitation "He is still in the lab that everything started. Since none of the previous symptoms happened in three years we thought he had died but if he was dead the disease would've died with him. He is alive, in that lab and I'm sorry to tell you this but he is getting stronger. We have find him and end this."

Alex opened her mouth as if she was going to talk but she didn't, she closed her mouth and leaned back after she saw the man behind Taylor. He was wearing a long, brown jacket that almost covered his every part, he had a plaid scarf and a brown fedora. He looked like a detective from an



old movie. When she was just about to continue talking, the plaid scarf almost fell and she saw a scar, a huge scar that covered his entire neck. She shut up and continued her silence until the man left. Alex thought that she had found him, she had found the professor that Taylor was talking about. She leaned towards Taylor to tell him about the man in brown but she choked up. Because before he had left, he had turned around and his face was the reason Alex almost screamed. His face was so disfigured and covered with scars that she almost couldn't recognize him but he felt familiar. When she thought of the photograph that Angel gave her in her second day of amnesia, she recognized the man. He had the same face features as the boy in the photograph.

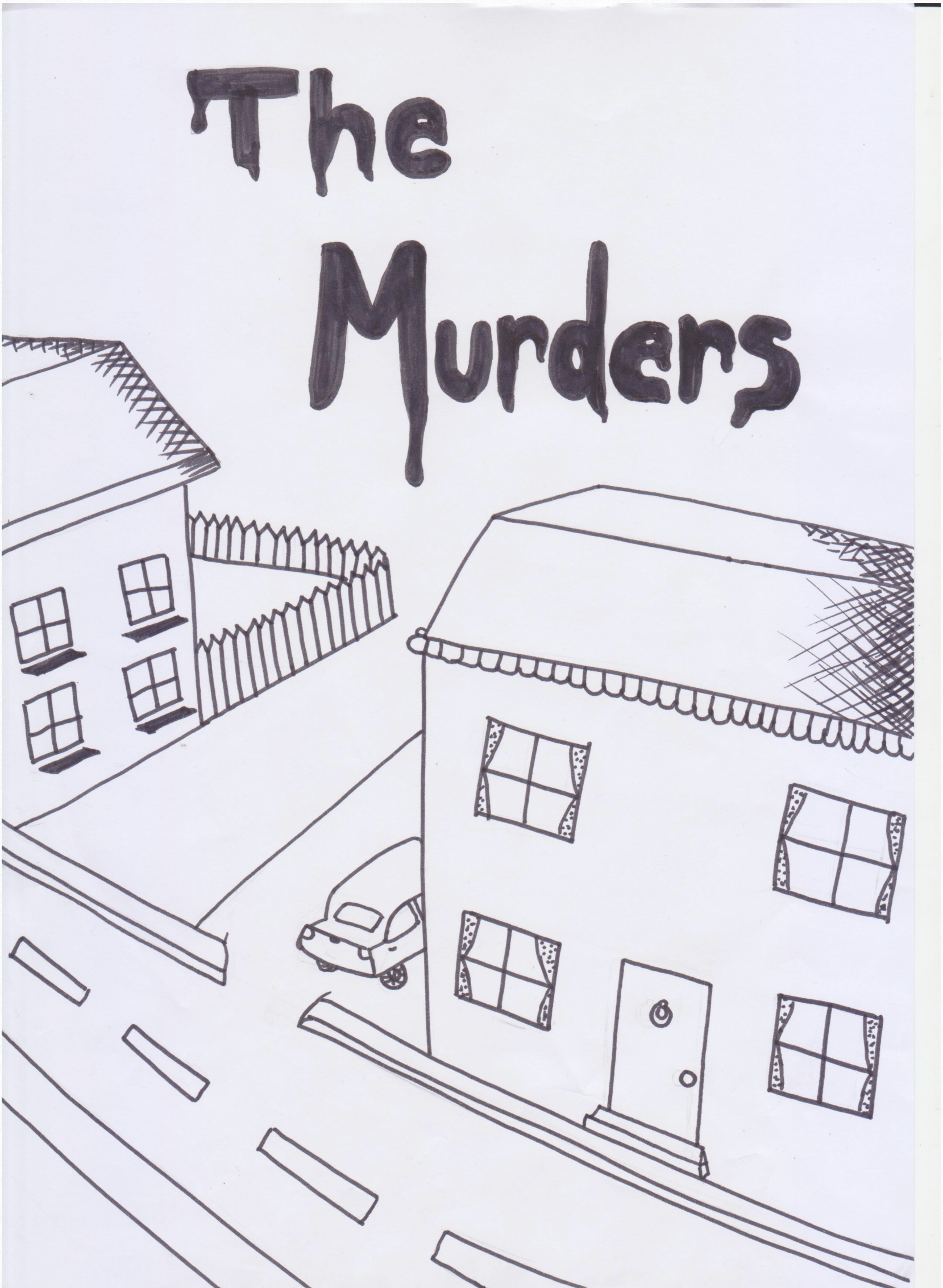
The stinging on her neck had begun, maybe because she couldn't figure out who the man was, but she was sure that he looked like the guy from the photograph; her brother, Nic or something. She leaned towards Taylor to tell what she had seen. She kept her voice down, now that she know everyone could be working for the professor and they could be listening to them. She carefully whispered the words; "The guy that just went out looked an awful like the guy who you say my brother is. He was wearing a long brown

jacket, a brown fedora and a plaid scarf that covered his neck but it couldn't cover it entirely, I saw the scar Taylor. It-it was horrible, that thing disfigured his whole face. What if he really is my brother? From what I saw there was nothing left to rescue." She looked at Taylor to tell her to be calm, that it was just a look alike and that there was nothing to worry about; but he didn't he looked back to Alex with sad eyes. He didn't want her to find out the biggest secret he avoided when he was telling the story. He looked at Alex and the only thing he could see was desperation. Taylor knew that he was about to shatter that last piece of hope inside Alex. He looked at her again but this time he only saw how beautiful she was and how hard that it was going to be to hurt her. Hesitation, yes, it was back. He kept opening his mouth without breaking the eye-contact. It took him about ten minutes to finally say it. He was full of regret after saying it, it was too late though. A part of Alex had crumbled as she heard the most upsetting thing she had ever heard. That the professor' name was Nic Kelly, also that her last name was Kelly too.



# The Murders

by Ekin Karaoguz



“So you still can’t remember what happened?” Mr. Barker asked, like he did on every Sunday. He was wearing his normal white uniform, like every other doctor in the building. I shook my head as a no, once again lying to him. Well, I couldn’t tell him the truth, not yet anyways. I didn’t know what had happened myself. All I knew was that I was starting to remember and I didn’t want to share anything until I completely understood what had happened myself. “I know this is hard for you. To know that you were there when she died but can’t remember.” He had a sympathetic expression on his face. He was right... It wasn’t easy. I had tried to remember the details a couple thousand times since that day, the day I woke up in the hospital.

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It was about three weeks ago. I had opened my eyes slowly, and had no idea where I was. I was still trying to figure out what had happened when a lady came into my room. She was dressed in white and had a name tag on her shirt, which made me guess that I was in a hospital.

“Oh, hi! You are in the town hospital honey. We have been waiting for you to wake up, how are you feeling?”.

Her cheerful voice irritated me and I was confused about why I was in a hospital. I opened my mouth to talk and tried to sit up on the bed. I frowned with the sudden pain, I must have hit my head. The nurse was still watching me, probably trying to figure out if I was ready to talk.

“Why am I here?” I asked, shaking my head a bit as if it was going to help me remember.

“Oh dear, don’t you remember?” she asked with that same tone of voice. I would have rolled my eyes at her but I was too confused and in pain at that moment to do that.

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“Don’t worry, I am sure that you will remember. You are sharing everything you remember aren’t you?” Mr. Barker interrupted my thoughts. “I told you I can’t remember.” I said once again, and I wasn’t technically lying. I had no idea what had happened. All I knew was that there had been someone in my house that day, and the image of the person was becoming

clearer every day. If you ask me why I didn't tell anyone about this... Well, I didn't exactly know. I was a bit scared I guess. As much as I wanted to find out who had killed my mother, I was scared that the murderer would come after me if he knew I remembered. Maybe it was this thought that was keeping me from remembering much.

The first time I started remembering was when I talked to my father. It must have been his sadness which triggered the memory because before that my mother's death hadn't even felt real. I saw him waiting outside my room in the hospital, his grief was obvious. He walked in slowly, and he looked nothing like the man I remembered. Beneath his eyes were purple with the lack of sleep and possibly of all the crying. I remember how shocked I was. I guess it felt weird for someone to grieve about something I couldn't remember. I knew that my mother was dead before I talked to my father but I hadn't accepted it. I hadn't understood the reality of the event because I couldn't remember any detail. I had this memory as he made his way to the side of my bed. It was the body of my mum lying on the floor... I could remember her colour-drained face, and all the blood. There was blood everywhere, lots and lots of blood. I must have seemed so terrified that my father looked very worried. No, I

don't think worried is the word for it... I don't know what to call it but he looked scared at the same time. He called the doctors and that's when I became aware of the beeping sounds. It was the sound of my racing heartbeat that the beeps represented.

It was a blur after that but I didn't think much happened for me to remember anyways. I was laying on the hospital bed and could hear the doctor and my father having a conversation right outside the door.

"She needs more time to recover. She's physically okay but all of this is too much for her. I think you should consult a psychologist." That was when my father decided I should start seeing Mr. Barker. And since then I have been visiting his office at the hospital. Since then, he has been asking that same question every Saturday: "So you still can't remember?"

Mr. Barker was a new doctor at the hospital, he had just moved to our town, but he was a very popular doctor at where he came from. I remembered my dad telling me he was one of the best at his job. That was why my dad really wanted me to see him I guess, he wanted what was best

for me, and he thought I couldn't have handled the pain on my own.

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Our session finally finished and I walked out of the room to find my father sitting in the waiting lounge. The waiting lounge wasn't that big but there were a couple of chairs and a table which was covered with magazines. The walls were a light tone of purple and the chairs were bright which made it look like it was a playing area for children. My dad would wait for me in this room for a little over an hour and then drive me home. He would have to go to work then. I was a bit scared to be alone in the house but my father and the police were sure that my mum's murder wasn't planned but probably a robbery gone wrong. They told me that the possibility of the murderer to show up at the crime scene was almost none. It was "almost" none though, there was still a chance. That is why Mrs.Morgan , our neighbour was always around to look out for me. Unlike the police and my father, she thought that I was right to worry and always checked on me. She even stayed with me if it was getting dark and my father was late from work. She was great company, Mrs.Morgan , I was always glad that she

was our neighbour. When she came to our house we watched her favourite tv shows, and commented on the character's and their behaviours. "No, you didn't! Oh my, can you believe what she did?" she would say whenever the main character did something she didn't like.

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It was one of those days, when my father was late and Mrs.Morgan was staying with me when we heard the news. Mr.Anderson was found dead at his house. At least that's what the police officer at our door said. I freaked out then, so did Mrs.Morgan who was keeping me company that night. She cursed at my father for not being at home and that if she weren't here it could have been me that got killed. She was probably right. Mr. Anderson had owned the red bricked house next to the post office. That was about 200 meters away from our house. The policemen had a lot of questions to ask, so we invited them in. We all sat in the kitchen because to be honest no one even used the living room anymore, not after what happened to my mum. Our kitchen wasn't small but it was also definitely not comfortable for four people to sit in it. The walls of the kitchen were yellow, giving the false im-

pression of happiness. No one was happy that night, we were filled with grief and fright. You could see it in the policemen's eyes as well. This had been the second murder to happen in the last two and a half months which was unbelievable for a town like ours.

I lived in a big town, but everyone in our neighbourhood knew each other. There were two main parts to our town: the central area where all of the hospitals and workplaces were, and the more peaceful area of our town where there were a lot of villas and everyone knew each other.

I lived in the second part. Our neighbourhood was very friendly and we looked out for each other. Our street consisted of double-storeyed villas that all looked like each other, with their red-bricked roofs and white walls. The only difference was the conditions of the gardens. Some people, like Mrs.Morgan, paid much more attention to their plants.

“So did you hear or see anything?” the policeman asked, distracting me from my thoughts. Mrs.Morgan immediately started answering, stating that we hadn't seen anything while I said nothing. I felt weird, as if nothing was real. I got up from my seat, and everyone turned to look at me. I apolo-

gised and went to the second floor to wash my face. I went in my room and threw myself at my bed. I sighed and closed my eyes.

“Why is all of this happening?” I asked myself. I slowly got up and looked out of my window, only to see all of the police cars at the end of the street which made me feel even worse. I wished my cat was here. In fact, where was she? I panicked for a moment, but then realised how stupid I was being. She was probably in the garden. I went back downstairs to find my dad, he had finally come home, but he was too busy with talking to Mrs.Morgan to realise I was there. I walked towards the glass door that lead to our garden, hoping to find my cat, but I didn't see her. I was walking around the garden when I heard a voice behind me.

“It's cold, you shouldn't be outside,” it was my dad. I sighed, “Tracie is missing.” I said. I knew I was overreacting because I hadn't really searched the house. “I am sure she'll come back, she is probably just wandering around.” he said. I gave up and went inside.

It was in the middle of the night, I woke up. I walked up to the window and checked to see if the police cars were still

there but they were gone. The street was empty and almost no lights were on in the nearby houses. Suddenly a figure caught my eye in the garden. It was Tracie! I could see her digging something in the garden. I felt a great relief and went back to my bed. I was too tired to go downstairs and Tracie was used to staying outside. I could just let her in the next morning.

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The next morning I woke up feeling happy, but it didn't last long. I frowned when I remembered the murder of the old man. It seemed unreal for something like that to happen in our town. I decided not to think about it because it made me feel sick. I slowly went downstairs, my dad was already there.

“Good morning sunshine.” he said with a smile but it was obvious that he was faking it. His mouth was in the shape of a smile but his eyes were red and tired. He returned to his serious expression and looked outside the window. I went out to the garden and looked around but Tracie was nowhere to be seen.

“Dad, have you seen Tracie?” I asked, I was confused. “I think I saw her in the kitchen.” he answered. “Oh so you let her

in?” I replied. “Good because I was feeling bad for leaving her outside the whole night.” He looked at me, obviously confused.

“I didn't let her in, she was already inside.” Wait, what? I was sure that I had seen her in the garden last night. “What do you mean? I saw her in the garden last night.” I told my dad. “I am telling you honey, she was already in the house. Maybe you were just dreaming.” he replied. I was annoyed that he didn't believe me. I did see Tracie outside last night. I let it go though, because I could sense that he was getting bored of the conversation.

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My dad stayed with me that day, mostly because Mrs.Morgan was giving him death stares as she came to check out how I was doing. My dad was also right, he had to work a lot to cover my hospital bills. Speaking to Mr.Barker was boring for me but it was not cheap either. I had told my dad before, that I didn't want to go to the phycologist. The sessions didn't help me remember anything, despite all of the drugs he prescribed, and I didn't like Mr.Barker that much. He always made me feel like I was stupid for not being able to



remember. Plus, I could see that he was getting irritated that I still couldn't recall a detail about that night. I didn't like that my dad was working so hard to just be able to pay that man. He immediately refused my suggestion, when I brought it up though.

Mrs. Morgan agreed with me. "Oh are you taking those stupid medicines again? I'm telling you, that is way too many pills." She said one night, as I swallowed another pill. "The doctor prescribed it, it should mean something right?" I told her, not trying to be mean. I sighed.

"I guess so." she answered, sighing as well. "Oh come on! The show's about to start." I sat next to her on the couch but all I could think about was what would happen if I stopped taking the medicine. I was too busy thinking about that, to even hear Mrs. Morgan's question. "Hello? Earth to Katherine. Are you hungry? Should we eat dinner?" Her question made me realise that I was hungry. "Yes, that would be perfect." I answered her but I was still thinking about the same question...

The next morning, when I went to the kitchen to take my pills, I stopped. I wasn't going to take them. If I could show my dad that the pills didn't work, he would stop paying Mr. Barker and wouldn't work as

much. As I was getting out of the kitchen I remembered: My dad would understand I didn't take the pills if he looked and would get mad at me because unlike me, he thought they worked. I took 2 pills out of the jars and went to my room. I opened my drawer and placed them in there, but first I wrapped them in a piece of tissue. I didn't know why but I was already feeling better.

My dad wasn't home, he had left early in the morning. Mrs. Morgan had called to let me know that she couldn't make it but she would visit at night. I told her it was fine. I was feeling happy to finally be alone for once. Ever since the accident had happened, nobody would leave me alone. Don't get it wrong, I loved Mrs. Morgan but it was okay if she didn't stay with me 24/7. I wasn't comfortable staying home alone at nights but there was no problem during day time. I grabbed some cereal from one of the cabinets and went back to my room. I wouldn't go in the living room and it was too cold to be staying out in the garden. I ate while I watched TV. I didn't use to have a TV in my room but after the accident, since I refused to go in there, my dad brought up the TV to my room.

My room had light blue walls, and white curtains to match it. Me and mum were the ones to decorate my room. She

had a smile on her face as she brought the paintbrushes and paint. We had painted my room for the whole day and when it was done we went down to watch TV while eating. We were both so tired but the result made us happy. Though the paint hadn't dried yet, I had to sleep in the living room. My dad wasn't at home because he had gone to meet with his friends. So I took some blankets and put them on both couches. My mom slept in one and I slept in the other. We could have slept in my parent's bed but there was no TV there and spending the night in the living room made me feel like we were having a sleepover party.

I felt the tears running down my face, I hadn't thought about my mother for a long time. I was told not to, by my dad and mostly Mr. Barker. They didn't understand, it was my thoughts that made her live even after she was dead. I washed my face, and from the mirror I could see my eyes were red. I couldn't take it anymore. The police was clearly incapable of solving the mystery of my mum's murder. Maybe I could... They didn't know her as well as me, maybe I could figure something out. So, with these thoughts, I went in the living room.

It's not like the living room looked like a crime scene. There was no blood or anything, everything had been cleaned and now it just looked like any other room in our house. I was annoyed. How could the room look like nothing had happened even though something huge happened? Even though my mum got killed? Even though this was the place where she gave her last breath?

I stopped thinking when I saw it. Tracie was in the room. But how was that possible I had closed the door behind me as soon as I had gotten in? There was no way for her to get in when I had. So, that meant she was here before? What? That didn't make any sense. I had seen Tracie in the kitchen yesterday. "So how did she get in?" I asked myself. The door of the living room was always closed. "Someone must have opened the door yesterday. That's the only way she could've gotten in." I whispered to myself, as if there was anyone around to hear me. If someone had gotten in the room, it must have been at night time since I didn't hear them.

DING DONG. DING DONG. I panicked and quickly got out of the room, I let Tracie out in a hurry. I ran towards the entrance and opened the door, but before that, I took a second to calm down and acted

like I hadn't run at all. Mrs. Morgan was waiting at the door, she was wearing a pink dress which had white dots all over it. It was a very pretty dress and by the way she had put makeup on, I guessed that she had come from a formal event.

"Hi Kath, sorry I'm kinda late." she said as she got inside, I smiled even though I didn't like it when she shortened my name to Kath. "My friend Sarah invited me over for breakfast, I had to go because I hadn't seen her for years! Can you believe it? Turns out they have moved back to town." She explained cheerfully, as she hung her coat.

"Moved back? So they used to live here?" I asked her. It wasn't normal for people to move back to our town once they had moved out, so I was interested.

"Oh she used to live just a few blocks away with her family, but then her grandfather got sick and they had to move to take care of him. I heard later on that she met a handsome man there, got married and that's why she didn't move back to town. I was happy for her but missed her as well. She was a great woman. You can ask your dad, they were friends in college." I didn't know that my dad knew her.

"Oh, I haven't heard of her. So when did she move out of town exactly?" I asked with curiosity because I had met almost all of my dad's friends.

"It's been many years, before you were born. I don't really remember, maybe about 17 years ago?" That explained why I hadn't met her, I wasn't even born then. My parents were probably newly wed at that time. "She was my neighbour, that's how I know her. I visited her a couple of times, she seemed very happy. Actually, maybe you should tell your dad that she is back. I am sure that he would want to see her, they used to be pretty close."

"I will." I told her, and I did so when my dad came home.

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We were in our tiny kitchen eating dinner, my dad had come home earlier than usual. We had pasta with tomato sauce and cheese, a classic because it was easy to make and I loved it. My dad usually didn't have time to cook because he came home too late, and I didn't know many recipes. I also loved pasta so that was one of the reasons why I always cooked it. My dad made no comment on it though he was probably getting bored of it.

“Hey dad, Mrs.Morgan came over today from a friend’s house. She told me you know her friend, that you were friends from college. Her name is Sarah?”

“Oh yeah, I remember Sarah. Hadn’t she moved out of the town? Maybe she was here to visit?” He asked without making eye contact.

“Mrs.Morgan said they moved back. She said you were pretty close, and left the address in case you wanted to visit her.” I pointed at the tiny paper on the kitchen table.

“Oh great, I should actually visit her sometime.” He answered. You could tell that he was thinking about something by the way he played with the leftover pasta in his plate.

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I was walking around the neighbourhood, because it was a nice day. I had a blue jacket on, despite the warm weather. I had thought about biking but I didn’t have the key to the storage to get the lonely bike out. So instead I decided to walk around. I walked past Mrs.Morgan’s house, and admired the white roses planted in her garden.

I had always wanted to plant flowers in our garden as well, but I lacked the patience for taking care of them and after a few tries my parents thought I were better off without flowers. They didn’t last long, died in a couple of weeks. Maybe I was very bad at it, or Mrs.Morgan was just too good at it since none of her flowers ever died.

I was still occupied with the thought of flowers when I saw the red-bricked house. I held my breath, and stopped. No, I wasn’t going that way. I didn’t know what to do so I immediately turned right, to one of the streets that I hadn’t been to before. I could’ve turned the other way and went back to my house but I really didn’t want to see the red-bricked house again. So instead, I decided to use the back streets.

I hadn’t been walking for long when I ended up in front of a white house. And you might be thinking: Ok why is that important? But it is. My dad’s navy blue car was parked in front of the large house. The car that he took this morning when he was going to work. Or coming to this place, I suppose. I didn’t need to check the street sign to understand whose house this was, I knew it. You can call me the worst child one can have for being suspicious about my own dad but it explained his behaviour

last night. He knew where Sarah lived. He had been here before.

I didn't have to look to guess that Sarah's address, which was on a piece of paper, laid untouched on the table. Yes, the paper hadn't even moved a centimeter. Ok, this was getting weird. Why was my dad lying to me?

Later that day, at night, when I was about to sleep, I got another memory. It was two people shouting, my mum and dad. "I KNOW YOU DID IT! STOP LYING!" I didn't see anything, just heard the fight.

"I AM TELLING YOU I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING! I DIDN'T EVEN SEE HER." I had already guessed who they were talking about, Sarah. Now that I knew my dad knew the address to Sarah's house though, I got mad at my dad for lying to my mum.

"I KNOW YOU DID. IT'S HAPPENING ALL OVER AGAIN. I KNEW YOU DIDN'T FORGET HER." Wait. WHAT? There was something between my dad and Sarah?

And that was it. All I could remember.

The next day when my dad left the house to go to work, or possibly to Sarah's house, I went into the living room once again. My parents' yearbooks were on the shelf there. I opened up one of my dad's from highschool but I couldn't find Sarah. I opened up a new one, and there she was. She was actually pretty, with straight blonde hair and dark brown eyes, but who cared? I hated her. I wanted to tear up the page and burn it in the fireplace but I had to concentrate. I turned the pages hoping that I could possibly find something.

On the next page I found my dad's picture with a bunch of messages underneath from various people. I was only looking for one name when I read through the messages. There it was: Sarah. There was nothing wrong with what she had written. "Hope to see you", and other classic things. So I turned to the very last page of the yearbook where everyone had signed it. This page was full of friendly messages and some were probably inside jokes because they were filled with smiley faces. I found Sarah's name once again, this time her writing wasn't formal. From the content of her message it was obvious that they were dating. I felt like I was going to throw

up. I mean, who wants to know about their dad's high school girlfriend, right? I definitely didn't want to.

I told myself that I learnt what was important and that I didn't need to look for more clues in the yearbook, so that I could get out of the living room. I spent some more time there to fix the yearbook shelf, I didn't want anyone to know I had been in this room. I closed the door carefully behind me and went to my room. I needed to find more clues.

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I took a scrap piece of paper to write down what I knew so far:

-My mum is dead. She was murdered.

-I can't remember anything but the fight between my mum and dad and someone kneeling beside me.

WAIT. If my mum and dad were fighting... My dad was in the house that night! But he had told the police that he was at work, and of course I couldn't testify against him since I couldn't remember anything according to others. They didn't know I had stopped taking the medicines...

-Someone killed Mr.Anderson . My dad claimed he was at work.

-Tracie was in the living room before I had entered. Someone had been there. My dad lied about seeing Tracie in the kitchen.

All of the evidence pointed at my dad, but I thought he would never have done something like this. Even though he might had been cheating on my mum, he would never kill her.

-The cause of my mum's death was a hit to the head. That is why the police thought it was a robbery.

-Mr.Anderson was shot with a gun. So maybe he knew something and the killer had to shut him up.

I had to investigate more... Oh, this was going to be hard.

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The next day, Mrs.Morgan came with an idea, which was what I had been wishing for. A trip to Sarah's house to investi-

gate. Well, actually for dinner but I guess I could still look around the house a bit. Mrs.Morgan was going to go there anyways and she asked me if I was okay staying in the house alone at night. When I asked her why, she told me about the dinner and asked me if I wanted to come.

So yeah, I wore my pretty lime green dress which my aunt had bought me for my birthday last year. I put my camera in my little bag, in case I found something suspicious and wanted to take a picture. I felt like a real detective. I had one goal in my mind: to find out what had happened.

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“Oh hi! The dinner's almost ready, come on in.” Sarah said, I tried hard not to show my hate towards her. I probably looked like a psychopath while I smiled at everything she said.

“Hi dear, this is Katherine. Michael's daughter.” She probably already knew who I was, keeping in mind that she ruined my life.

“Hello Katherine, nice to meet you.” She smiled. I can't describe how I felt. I was somewhere between kicking her and

strangling her to death. Breathe Katherine. Breathe.

“Nice to meet you too, I heard a lot about you.” I faked a smile. And there it was. It passed in a second but I saw it. That look of panic which supported my suspicions.

It was a nice dinner. Even though I hated her I couldn't deny that she was a good cook. A very good cook in fact. I didn't let it get to me.

“Excuse me where is the bathroom?” I asked as innocently as I could. This was the perfect time to investigate because Sarah and Mrs.Morgan were busy talking and there was no one else home. Sarah's husband was working late. I felt sorry for him. I wondered if he knew his wife was cheating on him.

“It's on the second floor, first door on the right.” She answered and then quickly went back to talking about how hard moving was for her.

I made my way upstairs and stood in front of the bathroom door. But instead of going in I just opened and closed the door to make them think I was in there. I didn't want Sarah to get suspicious. I went into her bedroom, and some other rooms but

there was nothing there. Finally I gave up and went into the bathroom. I checked some of the drawers and then realised the telephone that was hidden at the very back of one of them. Why would anyone store a phone in a drawer in the bathroom. I guess it was kind of smart because no one would search for it there.

I turned on the phone to see that there were only calls to one number. Guess whose: Yes, my dad's.

Being extremely mad I went downstairs but I didn't say anything. I must have been looking like a mess that Mrs.Morgan and Sarah stopped their conversation and asked me if I was feeling okay.

"Yeah, I just have a headache. Is it possible for you to give me some painkillers?" I half lied. I did have a headache after all of the things I had found out but it wasn't the reason I looked so bad.

"Of course, let me just search for it." She went upstairs and came back with a box of painkillers. Nothing happened during the rest of the night, until I went home.

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I was laying on my bed, staring at the list of what I knew in my hand. I had added another line on the list:

-There is a phone hidden in Sarah's drawer. My dad is the only one she calls from that phone.

As I was about to fall asleep I remembered something else about that night. It was the vision of my dad, knelt next to me.

"Hey! KATH! HEY! WHAT HAPPENED?!" ,he definitely sounded scared and confused. I remembered that I felt pain, I felt that I wanted to move but I couldn't. I felt all of the emotions at the same time. I felt pain, I felt scared, I felt grief, I felt anger, I felt the need of revenge; but most of all I felt hate.

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I finally became aware that the medicines, which I hadn't taken for days, were no help to me and actually kept me from remembering. With the information that I had gathered from last night, I wanted to look in the living room again for more clues. I was more comfortable going in there now, probably because I had been



there for a couple of times and it had really helped me remember. I decided that this time, I wanted to see if anything had been moved, but it had been a long time since “the day” so I couldn’t find anything. I couldn’t remember many details about how the room looked that night, and the room was cleaned after... you know, her death.

I was about to leave the room when I accidentally knocked down one of my dad’s yearbooks. Actually the same one I had looked at the other day. What’s interesting was that the book fell open in front of me, and the first thing I saw was his name: Jeffrey Barker, also known as Mr.Barker, my psychologist. I couldn’t even move... There was obviously something wrong. The truth struck me then. Sarah had just moved to town, Mr.Barker had just moved to town. They had moved to the town approximately on the same time... This was too much to be a coincidence. Mr.Barker was Sarah’s husband.

It made sense, that was probably why I didn’t see pictures of him and Sarah at their house. She knew I was coming over and my dad must had gone there to warn her just in case. But why would my dad, Sarah and Mr.Barker work together?? I’m saying worked together because Mr.Barker

was the one to give me meds that made me forget, Sarah was the one who acted as if nothing had happened and as she didn’t know me, and it was my dad who always looked serious and insisted I took my meds. I was filled with rage. That’s when I heard the door open behind me... I froze in shock, it wasn’t possible, no one was at home! NO ONE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE AT HOME!

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I woke up, and realised I was trapped in a chair in the basement. I wasn’t taped from head to toe or anything, but I had tape on my wrists to hold me to the chair. I knew it was our basement because I could see my old bike in the corner. The blue colour was no longer visible because it was covered in mud. I saw three other shapes in front of me, three people. A woman with long blonde hair, Sarah, stood on the far corner near the exit. Mr.Barker and my dad were closer to me, checking if I was waking up.

“Honey? Are you okay? I found you lying on the floor of the living room.” He said. My father, my own father lied to me. I knew this was more than that.

“Wh-why am I tied to this chair?” I asked, even though I knew I would get another lie as an answer.

“You were acting like a crazy person, throwing everything you saw. I had to tie you to make sure you wouldn’t do that when you woke up. Mr.Barker is here to inject you so this doesn’t happen ever again, and umm Sarah is, it turns out she was married to Jeffrey here and..”

“Save it. I know what you did. What all of you did.” I sigh, and a tear slowly drops from my cheeks to the tape tied tightly around my wrists.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, what have we-” my dad starts, only to be cut by Sarah: “Oh stop it, don’t you see she’s aware? It won’t matter anyways, she won’t remember anything after that drug that you’ll inject her with, right Jeff?” Oh so this was their plan? To make me forget once again...

“You know I’ll still continue to look for clues, even if you make me forget I’ll find out you did it once again.” I tried to get out of the chair but failed.

“I guess we’ll see that then, am I right?” I had the urge to break free of the tape and

stab her with any sharp object that I could get my hands onto.

“Hey, stop it. It’s gonna be okay Kath. You won’t remember anything about this, it’s for the best.” I wasn’t sure if it was my father talking or a demon had taken his place.

Sarah made a sign to my dad and climbed up the stairs, my dad followed. She appeared to be very mad as she left the room. Mr.Barker sighed which made me wonder why on earth he would be helping these two.

“So why are you helping them, you’re aware that they went behind your back right?” I asked him, and he turned towards me.

“I know that, but I won’t let my wife rot in prison.” He said, clearly annoyed that I was talking to him.

“So she killed my mother, I’m go-” I almost shouted.

“Hey, hey! Stop it. It was all a mistake!” he interrupted me, but I could see in his eyes that he didn’t believe what he said. He took a syringe out of his bag.

“Yeah? It was all an accident that she cheated on you? It was all an accident that

my mum found out? It was all an accident THAT MY MUM IS DEAD NOW?!" I was screaming now.

"I'll tell you what happened if you stop screaming! You won't remember any of it anyways." he finally decided it was okay for me to know because I wouldn't stop screaming otherwise.

"Your mum wasn't supposed to be at home that night, and you were supposed to be at one of your friend's house because she was going to be working late. Sarah told me she was going to visit one of her friends, and I didn't question it. I had trusted her you know?" I almost felt sorry for him, because he had been lied to, just like I had. "They met at your apartment but they didn't know you and your mum would be at home. Your mum found out that night that he was cheating on her. I don't know more about it. All I know is that Sarah came home crying and told me everything, even though I can't ever forgive her for what she did I can't let her go to jail."

He didn't need to remember more. With his explanations I now remembered everything myself. The truth that I had been trying too hard to find:

Me and my mum were on the couch, eating dinner and watching TV as usual. The

door opened, and we both paused because my dad was supposed to be at work. We expected him to come to the living room because that was what he did when he came home from work. Instead, we heard a laugh. A laugh of a woman, who I knew now was Sarah. My mum, obviously angry, walked to the entrance. I didn't follow her, I was too confused to do that. I heard the door shut and then my parents came to the living room. Seeing how angry and upset they were, I understood that they would rather be alone so I left the room. I went up the stairs but then decided I wanted to know what had happened between them. I went back down and sat on the stairs. I couldn't see much, just the coffee table in the middle of the room.

I heard the fight: "I KNOW YOU DID IT! STOP LYING!" My mum shouted.

"I AM TELLING YOU I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING! I DIDN'T EVEN SEE HER." My dad was obviously lying, because Sarah was at our house!

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU DIDN'T SEE HER, SHE WAS IN OUR HOUSE FOR GOD'S SAKE! I KNOW YOU DID. IT'S HAPPENING ALL OVER AGAIN. I KNEW YOU DIDN'T FORGET HER. I SHOULD HAD

KNOWN FROM THE MOMENT I HEARD HER MOVE BACK THAT THIS WOULD HAPPEN.” That’s when I heard my mum telling my dad to let her go. And in a few seconds I saw my mum fall down and hit her head on the coffee table.

“MUM!” I screamed, not caring if anyone heard it. I ran to the living room; my dad was already by her side, crying. He turned towards me after some time, “Kath, this was all a mistake.” He tried apologizing, as if that was going to fix anything.

“STAY AWAY FROM ME!” I shouted and backed away as he came closer to me. I started backing up faster, almost running, but I slipped on something and fell down. “Hey! KATH! HEY! WHAT HAPPENED?! HOW DID YOU FALL?” ,he definitely sounded scared and confused. It was black after that.

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Mr.Barker slowly stuck the syringe in a small medicine container. The white liquid, that was supposed to make me forget everything, slowly filled the syringe. I’m not going to lie, I was scared. Very scared in fact. After all of these weeks, that I couldn’t remember, I finally understood what had happened and I didn’t want to forget again. A

tear dropped from my face, leaving a soft trace on my cheeks.

BAM! I heard the front door open. Was someone here to save me? Mr.Barker was shocked. He must had been wondering what was happening upstairs that he left the syringe on the table and quickly walked up the stairs. I took advantage of my chance and reached up to the syringe. It was hard but once I got the syringe in my hands, I immediately cut the tapes around my wrists with it. I was trying very hard not to spill the liquid in it because I didn’t know it’s effects.

I finally freed myself of the tapes and got up. I was making my way to the stairs when a few people came down. At first I thought they were my dad and Sarah but they weren’t. These were cops! They saw me, and ran next to me to help me out. Together we walked out of the house.

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Police cars were parked in front of our house and my dad was in one of them, Sarah and Mr.Barker were in another one. Mrs.Morgan was standing right at the garden gate and she ran towards me when she saw me. “KATH! Are you okay?! I’m so sorry you had to go through all of that!”

She hugged me tightly and I started crying. I couldn't stop it, I hugged her and cried for a good time.

Later on, I found out that Mrs.Morgan was the one to contact the police because she heard my scream and saw my dad and Sarah in our garden. She was also deeply horrified by what my dad and her friend Sarah had done. She told me she had always seen Sarah as a great friend and she would have never thought she could do something like this. Also, the police found evidence that Mr.Anderson, the second victim was shot by my dad, because he knew what had happened that night. They found the voicemail of him threatening my dad to go to the police. The mystery was finally figured out and my dad was most likely not leaving prison for a very long time.

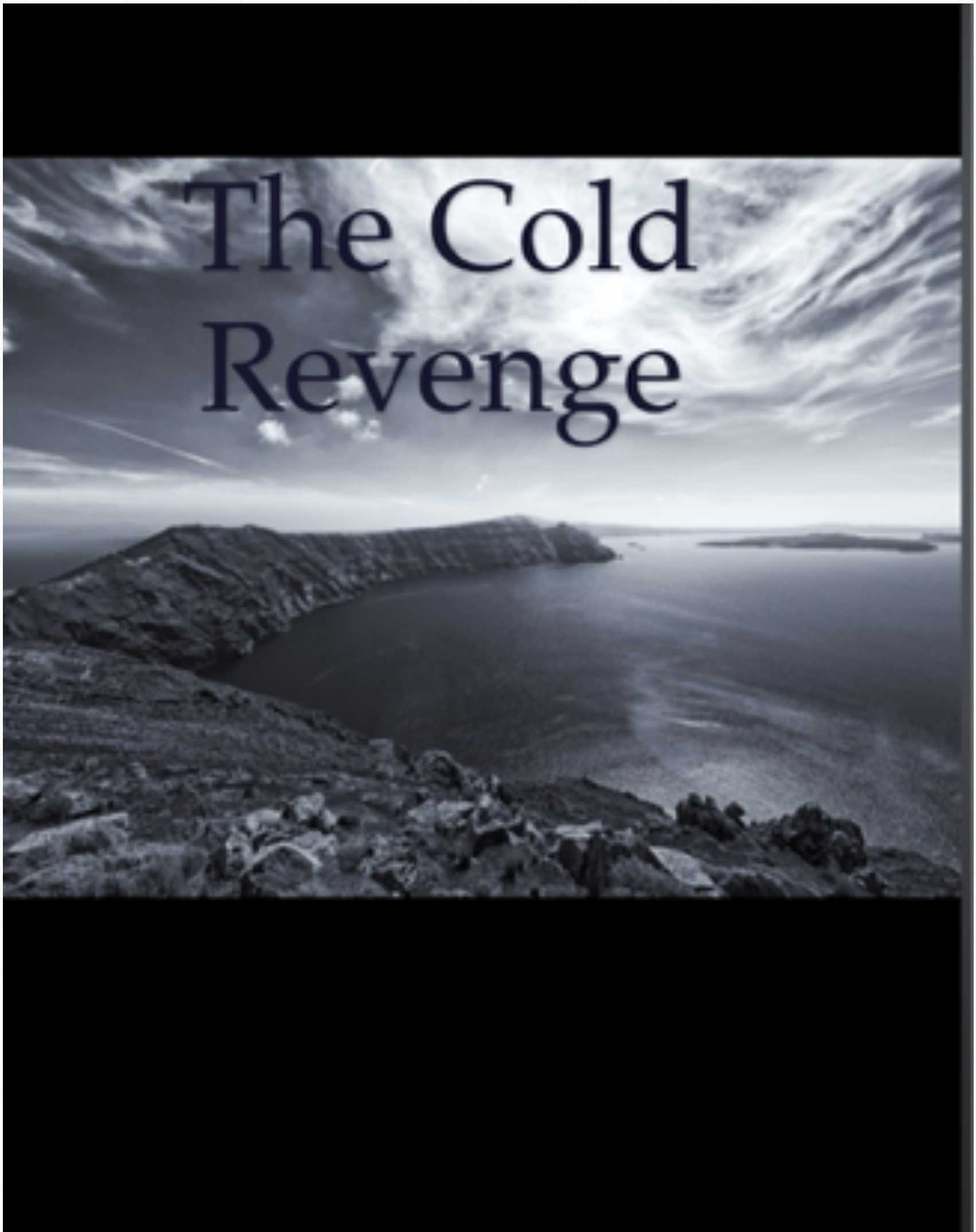
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Now? Now I'm sitting in my room and typing out what has happened. I am told to do this, because it's supposed to decrease my stress if I share it with someone. And since almost everyone in town knows the details now, I am typing it out. Mrs.Morgan can arrive at any moment, and with her I'm going to pack my bags and then she'll take me to the train station. I'm leaving this

town. I don't want to stay in this innocent town where not so innocent things happened. My grandparents will be waiting for me when I step out of the train and I'll start a new life. DING DONG DING DONG. Oh, that should be Mrs.Morgan . I should get going... Because... Well, I'm finally leaving this town.

# The Cold Revenge

by Rana Okan



## Chapter 1 Learning

Now Victoria was curious about what the truth is. She understood that the truth wasn't like the way her grandpa told her. There is much more than that. The only thing that she keeps thinking is how this happened. She can't focus on anything, only this.. But she determined to find out how her parents died three years ago, on a very cold winter day.

One freezing winter day in Chicago, in the evening there was a dead silence.

Grandpa Adam was trying to light up the fireplace and Victoria was looking for a book to read in the vast bookshelf. Normally, she likes to read fantasy books but this time, because his grandpa is forcing her to read a classic, she got her classic book from the middle shelf. She opened the book gently. The book is heavier than the other books she has read so far. The back cover was rough. She felt something was inside the book. There was an envelope. She glanced at her grandfather, he was still trying to light the fireplace and mumbling, "At the end I will light myself." While he was dealing with the fireplace, Victoria opened the envelope. There were bunch of letters written on different colours of papers. She got the first one that comes to her hand. The letter was folded and on

top of it, it was written in bold, " from Fiona Denver",

"It is hard to say it, just read. They didn't die in a car accident. I saw everything. I can't give the other details from here so please come to the park." December 19, 2009. On October 7, 2009 Victoria's parents died in a car accident.

Two teardrops fell from her cheek. For a long time she hasn't thought about them, actually she learned to forget them. This information made her feel like she is in dark room with no light. She can't find any way out of this dark room. What she should do now? Act like nothing happened or force her grandpa to learn the truth. For a second she didn't realised she was turning into red and her eyes were twitching, but her grandpa did noticed. He knows her grandchildren very well. Since their parents died, they live together. Her grandpa witness all Victoria's emotional changes. When she gets angry, her hands starts to shake, when she become happy, she leans on her hand and when she feels pain, she concentrates her eyes on the floor. Besides, he still couldn't solve this puzzle girl. She is a strong girl, but all strong people has a lonely part in their hearth. She usually doesn't cry so much, only in cold freezing days.

For a long time, grandpa Adam tried to understand what is happening with her. This time it was different, He never saw this kind of emotion in her face. He starts to recall the memories. He starts to put the pieces together and find out when she does these kind of reactions and he found. Nervous. She was nervous. He glanced to the paper in Victoria's hands. It was a familiar paper. It was old and the paper was wrinkled. He realised that she was holding a book in her right hand. It was Pride and Prejudice. Then he solve the circumstance. He stormed out from his chair and got the paper. Now Victoria's hands were shaking terrifying. Her hands shaked her whole body. For the first time she was excessively angry to her grandpa. She put her hands to her grandpa's shirt's collar. She definitely lost her control. She shouted at him

"Tell me everything"

"Look Victoria"

"If you don't tell me I will definitely go and never come back. Did you hear me I will never come back!"

"First leave me please."

She realised that she was still holding his grandpa's collar. For a moment she under-

stand that she was loosed her control, and when she loosed her control something bad always happens, her asthma starts. She started to cough. Then she started to cough worse and she just laid to the floor. Grandpa Adam run to the kitchen and get her inhaler and give it to her quickly. Victorias face turn into white. Now she was quaking. This is the first time it happened this badly but a few seconds later the quaking finished and Victoria's cheeks turn into red again. She was looking at her grandpa sadly so he said,

"Since that day I was looking for who did this to them and when If I found I know that I will definitely kill him but I can't find, and I never want you to know until he is dead. I was thinking about to tell you all the time but I always-"

"Always what? You should told me this before."

"But-"

"Enough. Tell me how they die! Do they kill themselves, drugs or-

"They were killed by someone"

This possibility never came to Victoria's mind. Her parents were so successful and everybody around them loves them. She



looked astonished. She felt that something inside her was growing. Something that for years she kept it inside and never bring it to light for many years. She felt hate. Not to her grandpa, to the person who killed them.

With anger, she rushed out from the house. Their house was not in the city centre, it was near to Ancient museum. There was a inside the museum were Victoria loves to stroll around in a safe place at night. She has a classic bank where she sits and thinks about her life. Also on that bank she wroted her dreams to her dream book.

## Chapter 2 (What does this means)

Victoria took her dog for a walk in a hot sunny afternoon. The dog was cheering and jumping happily. They were going to the way Victoria choosing to go because she was in front of the dog but suddenly the dog pass Victoria and now she was going to the way the dog chooses. She wants get in front of him but the dog didn't let her. The dog started to walk faster. While Victoria was trying to keep up with the dog they came to a graveyard. When she tries to understand what was happening, the dog get his collar out and disappeared. She looked around to find him.

She heard some growling at back and when she turns , she saw the dog with other four dogs looking at her venomously. She thought that they won't do anything that hurts her because she knows that her dog was there but something unexpected happened and all the dogs attacked her. She started to run and all the dogs were chasing her. They chased her until she fell down. When she falls, they immediately vanish. Victoria was still laying prone on the floor. She gets up and realised that she was on the middle of her parents grave.

She woke up confused. She never saw this kind of dream before. She just thought that because of yesterday she saw this dream. She got out of the bed and went to the living room. Grandpa Adam was already woke up, reading his newspaper. She looked at him. She couldn't decide wether she told her about her dream or no telling because if she tells, her grandpa will definitely tries to get meanings from them and this will take Victorias time a lot. Actually she loves to listen his grandpa, trying to solve her dreams but because of yesterday and the things she learned about her mother and father made her feel like collapsing to a wall. Then suddenly her grandpa asked "Did you saw any interesting dream today?" Then she told

him about her dream. His grandpa was shocked. He said,

“Be careful”

“What happened”

“There are bad persons around you and you thought they are not bad but they did something very bad to you. I can't really get the meaning but I think one day this dream will come somehow.”

### Chapter 3

For one week Vic can't get out her room. She can't get the shock out of her. Everywhere she looks everything she smells something always makes connotation with her parents and she realised that she can't stop it. That day at afternoon she went to her grandpa's room and ask him to help him finding the murder. Grandpa grinned.

“I was waiting for this moment... And when we find we will kill-

”No no no”

“What happened”

“We won't kill him”

“Then what is the point”

“We will make him kill himself”

### Chapter 4 (another one)

Victoria was lost in a dessert looking for her way. Suddenly their parents appeared. When she saw them she become so happy because they know the way out of the desert. They started to walk cheering and having fun. While they were walking the sun disappeared but its still warm. Then suddenly a big snake started to run to them. They started to run. First the snake swallow his mother and then her father. But the snake did not

swallow Victoria and disappeared. Now she was lonely again in this enormous desert. She shouted but no one was hearing her.

“When did you saw this dream?”

“I saw it after you learned they were killed. One second, didn't you go to that park to learn who did that and for the love of the god who is this Fiona Denver”

“I don't know and I think I will never learn. The only thing I know about her is she died in the hospital in the Beakers Street. She was a very old lady and I will never know how she learned.

“then how can you be so sure about this”

“ There is no corpse in the grave Victoria. They told me that the car accident happened near to sea and they can't find the body but I know something sure that that day they were not near the sea. They were coming to home, because of the camera recording they were able to told me about the accident.”

Victoria didn't listen what his grandpa told her when she heard that there were no body in the grave. This means every time she went to their grave, every flower she brought, every teardrop that fall to their grave, were not their grave. It was just a symbol. It made her feel terrible and she ran to the bathroom to vomit. It was hard times for her and it goes even worse every day. Normally after she talked with her grandpa she was planning to go to the grave. But now she will went to somewhere else.

“Do you the exactly place that the accident happened?”

“Yes. Do you know the Seaside Beach?”

“Yeah I do. Once we been to there too. The mountains are very near to the sea.” Victoria paused.”Then they fall from a cliff but my father scared of heights so they

never got up to the mountains. At winter it was a very quite place, mostly these days of the year because of the weather. The place is famous for the natural condition. It's a very dangerous place because if you fall from a cliff, you will definitely die. Around the sea, there are many summer-houses and hotels too.

“I will go to the cliff”

“Victoria I will go first and check that place. Please don't insist-

“Okey I get it, you will go first.

Chapter4 (to kill two bird with one stone)

Before Victoria's parents died his grandpa was working as a cop. At the morning after many years he went to his old police station. All the faces were familiar to him. He went to saw one of his oldest friend. His name is Barney. He was now the new commissar of the town. He went to his room

“Oh my god is that you, you become very old”

“You are a jerk. You never changed”

“Come here oldie. It's been 3 years since we haven't talked.

“When Rose died, I died too. I dedicate my whole life to her. My life means my Rose and now she is gone. Now, my only life hope is Victoria, my only and goldie grandchild. She is just like her mother. All her facial expressions, her big brown eyes, her red cheeks.”

“She was exclusive Adam, she was like my daughter too. She was too young and if she lived, she will become the president of the company. Many people love her but also many people are jealous of her.”

Grandpa Adam looks exhausted when he talks about her daughter. But when Barney talks about jealousy, he realised something. What if someone makes jealousy and killed them.

“Barney I want something from you.”

“Just tell and I will do it”

“Can you give me the file of their death. I know it's forbidden but-”

“Wait a second.”

He opened a commode and got a big red file. On the top of it it's written “2009 death circumstances”. He turned some pages and got a pink folder and gave it to Grandpa Adam,

“October 7, 2009 at 8.35 Rose Carter and Ed CARTER DIED IN A CAR ACCIDENT IN SEASIDE mountains. From the camera record we understood that the victims drove the car so fastly and fall from the Turner slope. Their body couldn't find.”

After having conversation with Barney and getting the folder Grandpa Adam WENT TO THE seaside beach. He climbed up to the most dangerous cliff where there was a sign written “Do not move any closer to the edge”.

He got the sign and throw it down to the mountain. Then he realised that there was somebody at the edge of the mountain sitting and doing nothing, she was just staring at the sea. Grandpa Adam move closer to the edge and said

“Hello.” He was shocked. It was Melanie, one of her daughter's closest friend. They worked at the same company together after studying at the same college for years. She has a son who is 18 years old. She has a summer house at seaside. She looked at Grandpa Adam terrifying and she looks like she was about to cry

“What are you doing here Mr Adam”

“I'm standing on the place where my daughter last breathed, her last moments.”

“Somebody killed my daughter Melanie”

Suddenly she was astonished and started to cry very hardly. Grandpa Adam doesn't know what she should do. Then suddenly she got up and said

“I have to go Mr.Adam”

## Chapter 5

Victoria and his grandpa came to home at the same time. They were both looking dreadful and tired.

“Something weird happened”

“What happened “

and then Grandpa Adam talked about everything that happened. He told that how Melanie struck in horror when she saw Victoria and all the other things.

“What she was doing there?”

“I thought that she went to her summer house and just climb to a cliff-”

“You catch her”

“Catch her. Wow stop.She was one of your mothers best friends and at the funeral she

was there and cry so hard that day don't you remember”

“ I have to learn something”

“Learn what”

“Who is the the new president of company”

“Melanie I think”

They both stop and looked to each other. They are both thinking the same thing and probably they were right.

“ I'm going to the police or no I will kill her or-

“Grandpa we are not sure about it, first we have to learn the background between the car accident”

“ I don't care the background I will kill her-

“No we won't. If there is something like that she have to tell it herself. We have to get açığıni yakalamak.

“You're right Vic. But how we are going to do that”

“ I have a plan.”

“ Vic people are bad. If Melanie has no conscience than we will never find out the truth.”

“ Grandpa I believe that when people born, they born as a good person. Than when the time goes they can be either bad or good. If we get the bad side and make her feel remorse than she will have no choice to tell the truth”

## Chapter 5

Vic and Grandpa sit down and started to make a plan to make Melanie feel remorse.

“We have to find aunt Robin immediately”

“Aunt Robin?”

“You know she is a film projector”

“Yeah I do but what is related to our occasion”

“We will take a short film about my feelings”

“You know Melanie’s son is an actor and he will play me but he will never know the truth and we will pay for him so we have to find him immediately and start taking this short film”

“Vic, don’t mess up things. We will find her and killed her or something like that.

Where did you found such a stupid idea like this-

“Stupid? You are stupid that if you go and kill her you will be the murder and how can I tell all of the thing. We don’t have any evidence”

## Chapter 6 (Finding)

Today grandpa Adam went to the hospital at the Baker’S Street for learning something that he should learn.

“Good morning sir, can I help you?”

“Oh yes I have to get an information about Fiona Denver. 3 years ago, we lost her in this hospital and I have to learn where she lives because I’m a cop and there is mystery behind the death. (He shows her old police cart)

“I’m sorry but I can’t give the deta-

For the first time Grandpa aDAM DID SOMETHING ILLEGAL.He glanced at the camera than to the people. Thre is nobody in the hall.So he gets out his gun out. The secretary was shocked.

“Tell me the adress and we both get what we want. You will live and I will get the adress. Am I clear?”

“Okay I’m sorry I’M giving”

“Good girl”

Then the secretary, in a horror, gave the adress.

While her grandpa doing some illegal things, Victoria went to Melanie’s son’s acting school. He was getting some lessons in this summer schools. They are both at the same age and they are friends.

“Hello, do you know where can I find Culver Denner?”

“At the second floor. In five minutes its break time.

“Okey thank you.

“Culver!”

“Oh my god Victoria, every time I see you, you become more beautiful”

“Thanks Culver”

“So what are you upto”

“Actually, I have great news for you?”

“Oh yeah, I’m excited, what is it?”

“You know my aunt is a film director and she want to take a short film and need some actors. SO I recommend you.

“Victoria, thank you thank you thank you, I really need something like this” So he hugged Victoria and Victoria grinned.

## Chapter7

“Hello Aunt Robin”

“Aww sweetie how great to hear your lovely voice. I know it's been a while we haven’t talked yet but-

“No problem Aunt Lily. Umm are you available tomorrow at 2 o'clock”

“Yes I am.”

“Great so can we meet at the Clock's Cafe near to our house “

“Of course darling”

“Okay, see you then”

“Bay bay darling”

## Chapter 7

“Hi Aunt Robin”

“Come here and gave me a hug darling

“I learned something about my parents”

“Ohh Rose and your father. I missed them so much. They died so young and-

“They were killed”

She was shocked.

“Victoria are you okey”

“I will be okey if she feel the pain that I felt and for this, I made a plan

“What is it”

“If you say okay, I want to take a short film that shows my pain. I found the main actor and we need to find someone similar to my parents and Melanie.

“Melanie? Why we found someone like- oh my god is she-

“I think she is the killer and we will understand if we take it than are you in?”

“Yes, I am”

## Chapter 8

On Sunday morning Victoria Aunt Robin and meet at the museums park, where Victoria sits every time when she been there. They open a big cartoon and wrote the plan. and they wrote the skeç

“What do you think Aunt Robin?”

“You feel grief.

“I do and I just want her to feel the same way too

“You can2T CHANGE THE people victoria. If people are bad, they don't feel dolour-

“First, I think about the same thing as you, but then I realised that she has a tender spot, her son.

After writing the play, aunt robin immediately get all the actors together and start filming Victoria doesn't watch the filming process but when they finish filming and when she watched after a long time she cried.

## Chapter 9

The big day come. Today two things can happen. one victoria will learn how her parents die and make her feel how she felt or second Melanie wasn't the murderer.

“When we will go to the office”,

“When they caught her they will immediately call me and we will go to the office. There are going to be cameras and tape recorders around the room. You are going to talk first. They started to wait the call in their car



“Should I call Carney?”

“Call him when we went to the office. He can listen too.

Five minutes later Mr Barney called grandpa “We catch her”

Grandpa Adam Victoria and Aunt Robin directly went to the office. Police meet them and they went to a room. In the room there are five tv and many computers and headphones in there. The police said” come inside Victoria we will listen to you she can’t move or do anything to you. If you don't feel well you can come out when you want us to play the video we will play it.

Victoria listen him carefully. she was possessed. She opened the door and come inside. And there was her parents murder. She is the one who get their parents from her she is the one who changed victoria's lives and she is the one that make victoria feel the pain. She opened the door. Melanie was inside the room sitting on a desk looking apprehensive.

“Do you know why you are here”

“No I don’t know and I am white handed please get me out of hear

“Shut up.

Victoria started her eyes to her. If she wasn’t living than her parents will be live to, if she wasn't exist everything can be good but there she is staring at her.

“There is two kinds of pain. One physical and two emotional. If I want you to feel the physical pain- she gets her gun out of her pocket and yüzüne doğru tutmak i will kill you. While she was doing this police wants to stop her but her grandpa said”she won’t kill her, she is scaring her”

Melanie was astonished shouting “Help me help me victoria please

“This is nothing Melanie” You killed my parents, you killed the most important persons in this life that I had why did you do that she was screaming and about to cry then she shouted play the video than it started

If you watch an emotional the film you will probably cry but if you watch a film that related to your life more if you watch something that you done so bad you will cry. IN THE FILM THE the actors that play her parents died falling from the cliff the actor that plays melanie was so looking so much like her than Carney comes and shouts at her how you can do something like this mom i hate you you are the baddest person in the whole world.I will never ever forgive you

BUT TELL ME HOW DID YOU KILLED  
THEÖ

then melanie started to shout forgive me  
my son I am sorry please

“”

“They were so successful and I want to be  
the president to pay my son's school  
bills, her father and I were divorced and I  
thought he hates me but If I pay his  
school bills then he would love me but  
when they become the president I loosed  
my control and some friends seduced me  
and I call them to come to my house then I  
killed them by hitting their back and throw  
from the cliff but Victoria I went to the  
same cliff and apologise-

Victoria was staring at her she was feeling  
terrible and go out of the room.”

“ I’m not feeling well I’m going” and she  
went home.

Grandpa Adam come to the home. He was  
exhausted. Victoria was sitting in the sofa  
thinking about what is going to happen.

“50 years jail Victoria”

Chapter 10

10 years past now victoria is the the presi-  
dent of the company and married with the  
owner of the company. and they have 2  
children. Grandpa Adam return back to the  
police office and yesterday he called her

“how are you my darling”

“fine working you”

“i learned something”

“What happened “

“Melanie killed herself at the jail”

# When It Comes

by Lara Ozturkeri

# WHEN IT COMES

A Novel By  
LARA ÖZTÜRKERİ

The sky was light grey, the rain clouds were covering the sun. A light breeze rustled the yellowish leaves on the trees. This was a common sight in the town of Mallory. Nobody remembered a day when the sun shone down on this godforsaken town. There were, of course, old people who claimed they had seen the sun; some even went as far as describing the warmth they felt on their then-young skin. However, since their memories were not very reliable, they might as well have been telling fairytales. The residents of Mallory led plain, uneventful lives. They never questioned or protested the unfortunate incidents that happened to them, they just claimed it to be the work of “fate” and moved on with their lives. Even the mayor, Mr. Thomas Collins never protested the misfortunes, and he was supposed to be the person in charge of the town.

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Alysa walked down the street, between the rows of houses and trees the trees in front of them.

The gentle wind blew her black hair out of her face and made the leaves rustle. The sound of it always brought her peace. As she was walking, she heard a familiar voice calling her name. She came to a

stop; and looking back, she saw her best friend, Carla, running towards her. She was out of breath when she reached Alysa.

“Hey.” she greeted.

“Hello,” Alysa replied calmly. Carla, being the talkative girl she was, started chatting away as soon as she recovered her breath.

“Hey, did you hear about Mrs. Summers’ death?” she asked excitedly. Alysa gave her a sidelong glance.

“I did, but there’s no reason to get excited about it, is there? She was old anyways.” Carla sighed.

“You’re as boring as ever.” Alysa liked Carla very much, since she was her best friend, but Carla had a tendency to get excited over every little thing, including morbid subjects like death. Well, at least she was a breath of fresh air from all the other townsfolk, who might as well had been walking corpses. They walked to the town high school in silence. As they were going through the entrance, they saw a group of teenagers chatting among themselves. One of the boys spotted Alysa and shouted, “Hey, look! Two-colors is coming!”. At his remark, the group burst into laughter. Alysa felt her face turn red with anger and embarrassment.

The “Two-colors” nickname came from her different eye colors, which were grey and blue. Alysa had been self-conscious of her eye colors ever since she found out that no one else had the same feature. Since it was so rare, she was always teased by the children her age who thought that the appropriate reaction to differences was making fun of them and pushing the “different” person into self-hatred. Her teachers had always told her that differences were what made them who they were, and that she should embrace her differences rather than loathe them. Easier said than done, when you don’t get bullied for having a really rare attribute.

“Hey!” the shout pulled her out of her thoughts. The voice belonged to Carla.

“Leave her alone, will you? Being jealous of her pretty eye colors isn’t going to make you any more of a guy!”

Everyone except for the boy made hooting sounds and laughed. This time, Alysa blushed with only embarrassment. She was not very good with compliments, either. Carla grabbed her hand and pulled her away from the group.

“Thanks.” Alysa muttered. One of the reasons Carla was her best friend was that she accepted Alysa’s differences; not judg-

ing her for how she looked like, but for how she was on the inside.

“No problem!” Carla replied cheerfully.

The school day went by pretty fast, and soon Alysa found herself walking towards her home with Carla.

“So how are your parents?” Carla asked. Alysa felt her mood drop. She didn’t like talking about her parents, since she didn’t like them very much. She showed the basic respect that needed to be shown to one’s parents, but the same thing couldn’t really be said about her parents. They ignored her for the most part, and they would starve her for a few days as punishment for something that completely wasn’t her fault. During one of those days, when she was still in elementary school, she overheard her father saying that it was her fault that they couldn’t have anymore children. Carla must have sensed her discomfort, because she immediately changed the subject.

“Why do they always give us so much homework? Don’t they know that we have lives too? I mean, we’re 18 years old, we should be living our lives!”

Alysa, feeling relieved to have the subject changed, replied, “Well, homework is given

so that we can review what we learned in class and not forget it. But yes, the amount is needlessly large.”

Their conversation ended when they reached Alysa’s house. Exchanging farewells, they parted ways.

Alysa called out “I’m home!” When she entered her house. As always, she was ignored. She went up to her room to do her homework.

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When she finished her homework, she went downstairs to the kitchen to make dinner for herself, since her parents were already eating and there wasn’t a third plate on the table. While she was making dinner, she listened to her parents.

“I heard Mr. Evans died from a sudden heart attack,” her mother said. “I talked with his wife. The poor woman could barely speak, she was crying so much.”

“We’ll attend his funeral,” her father replied.

Of course, Alysa thought, the word “we” must have consisted of her father and her mother. She couldn’t imagine her parents wanting to take her anywhere. Inwardly shaking her head, she thought about how

strange it was for two people to die in a short span of time. She shook it off, silently reminding herself that Mrs. Summers and Mr. Evans were old people, and that old people dying was nothing to be worried about.

The next day, as she was eating breakfast, Alysa listened to the news on the old-fashioned radio. Mallory was not a very modern town; they had out-dated electronic gadgets, and they had occasional power cuts. The town clinic was not very modern either, the doctors could only cure simple illnesses like flu, stomach bugs, and the like. That’s why people were more often than not sent to a hospital in the city. The news was about the death of a man in his early 30’s. Apparently, after his wife had reported his death, his body was taken to the clinic to see if they could find out what had happened to him. Of course, they could not figure out the problem, so he was sent to a hospital in the city an hour from the town. According to the autopsy results, the cause of death was sepsis, more commonly known as blood poisoning. Alysa was starting to get slightly worried. She could no longer brush these incidents off as simply old-age deaths. She wondered what these deaths could be. She finished her breakfast and headed to school.

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“Oooh, how mysterious!”

Suppressing her annoyance at Carla’s childish remark, Alysa nodded. “Isn’t it? I wonder what causes these deaths. I mean, three people dying in a day? And they die in different ways.”

They were currently sitting on a bench in the park, discussing the recent “events”. Carla made a thinking gesture.

“Hmmm, I’m pretty sure old folks think these are all just a coincidence.”

“Right, then why don’t they think their own existence is a coincidence as well?” Alysa snapped.

“That’s harsh.” A comfortable silence followed that. Until Carla spoke hesitantly.

“Hey, do you think we’re being punished?”

“We?”

“We, as a town. Maybe we did something, and we’re being punished for it by a deity or something.”

Alysa glared at her.

“Don’t be ridiculous. There is no proof of that. Also, I don’t think we did anything.”

“What if something happened in the past?”

“Then they would be ‘punished’ in the past; assuming, of course, that your ‘deity’ theory is true.”

“Well, what do you think is the case?”

Carla huffed.

Alysa could not reply to that immediately. Three deaths in only two days, and all different cases? What could possibly be the reason? Was there some sort of disease? That was the most logical explanation.

“There must be some sort of disease.”

“Boring” Carla sing-songed.

“It’s the most logical conclusion, since I highly doubt a ‘deity’ is punishing us, or the town is cursed or something!” Alysa yelled, receiving stares from passersby.

“But wait. All the deaths are different. If it were some kind of disease, wouldn’t all the deaths be the same?” Carla asked.

“Maybe the disease has a varied way of killing people,” Alysa said.

Carla sighed. "Can we talk about this tomorrow? It's getting late and I have to get all the schoolwork done. I'm tired too."

"Fine. Goodbye." They got up and walked toward their houses.

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Alysa was in her room, thinking about the news she just heard. An entire family, consisting of a mother, a father and 3 children had died. Again, they all had died from different diseases. Her parents were starting to get worried as well, even though they had not expressed it around her. Rather, she overheard them talking. It seemed that the whole town was starting to get worried. About time, she thought. What sort of disease could this be? Carla's 'punishment' theory had not crossed her mind in the slightest, since it was so silly. She had never been interested in religion, anyway. She decided to go to sleep. It had been a long day of worrying over the incidents and school.

The town looked even grimmer, and more isolated. The few people Alysa saw outside wore anxious or mournful expressions. What made her more uncomfortable was that Carla, out of all people, had the same expression.

"Hey," Carla greeted solemnly.

"Uh, hi." Alysa's reply was awkward.

Carla started walking towards the school. Alysa followed her. They walked in silence for ten minutes. Alysa could not help but feel very anxious. How could such a cheerful girl become so quiet and grim overnight? Alysa's patience wore out.

"What's gotten into you? You've been acting really strange since this morning. I understand that all these people dying is scaring you, but you weren't like this at all yesterday or the day before. Usually these things don't bother you very much..." she trailed off. Carla looked back at her through her curly blond hair. It was then that Alysa noticed Carla had bags under her eyes and her eyes were bloodshot. What kind of a terrible friend was she, not noticing these before?

"My parents are dead."

"What?!" Alysa could not believe her ears.

"I didn't hear them making breakfast or anything. I didn't hear them at all. They weren't on a day off or anything, so I thought it was strange. I went to their bedroom to check on them, and when I got close enough to see them, they weren't



breathing and..." at that point, Carla started crying. "I... called... the... ambulance... and they... took.. their bodies..." she sobbed. Alysa hugged her, but did not say anything. How could she? She could not muster up any comforting words, since she had no idea what it was like to see her parents dead one morning. Well, she thought, they might as well be dead, ignoring me and all. She quickly shook away her thoughts. No matter how they acted, she still respected them, had to respect them.

They were her parents, after all.

Carla pulled away.

"Thanks. Let's continue walking, or we'll be late."

"I don't think you should go to school today."

"It's okay. I'll manage."

Alysa hesitantly walked behind her.

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"All these condolences really tired me out."

They were walking to their houses. Every single person in the school building had come up to Carla and expressed their con-

dolences. Carla had accepted them all without shedding a tear. Alysa admired her strength.

"Why don't you stay at my house?" Alysa offered. She highly doubted that Carla wanted to spend the night in her house, where that sight would haunt her the entire night. "You don't need to pack anything. You can just use my stuff."

"Sure, thank you so much," Carla replied. Then she added, "But will your parents really let me stay?"

Alysa nodded. "Of course they will. They like almost everyone in this town, except for me."

When they reached the front of Alysa's house, Alysa unlocked the door. Carla called out.

"Hello!"

Alysa's mother came running.

"Oh, hello Carla! Come in, come in." She was ignoring Alysa as usual.

"Um, if you don't mind, may I sleepover here tonight?"

"Of course, of course. We were just starting to eat, come to the table."

She hurried to the kitchen and came out with two plates. Alysa scoffed. Of course, her parents would not completely ignore her presence if they had company. Alysa's father greeted Carla as well, and they all sat down at the table. After a while, Alysa's mother said:

"We're so sorry for your loss, Carla."

Carla smiled, but it did not reach her eyes.

"Thank you, Mrs. Peters."

They continued eating until everyone was finished. Alysa and Carla went up to Alysa's room, sat on the bed and chatted for a while. They were chatting about school, and gossiping, as much as Alysa hated it. They did their homework together. Carla's mood was getting better ever so slightly. As they were about to go to bed, Carla suddenly hugged Alysa, murmuring, "You're the greatest friend anyone could ever have." Alysa was surprised.

"What's this, all of a sudden?"

Carla chuckled. "Nothing. I just felt like saying it." She walked out of Alysa's room and went to the guest bedroom. Alysa had a bad feeling as she went to sleep that night.

She was feeling peaceful when she woke up, there wasn't even a trace of the

unease she felt last night. She got up and got dressed. She then headed to the room where Carla was staying. She knocked on the door. When there was no answer, she called out Carla's name. When there was no answer again, she decided to finally go inside. Carla was sleeping. She shook Carla.

"Carla, get up! We're going to be late for school!"

There was no response. She tried again.

"Carla!"

There was no response. She stared at Carla for a few seconds before she realised something that made her blood run cold.

Carla was not breathing.

In her panic, she started frantically shaking Carla, all the while yelling her name. Soon her parents came bursting through the door.

"What happened?!" her father yelled.

“She’s not breathing!” she was too scared to be happy about her father finally talking to her.

Her mother ran to call the ambulance while her father performed a cardiac massage. It was not working. Her mother ran up the stairs.

“The ambulance will be here in a short while.”

Alysa could not believe this. She refused to accept that her best friend, her only friend, was dead. It all seemed like a big, cruel joke to her. She just stood there, frozen, until she heard the sirens of the ambulance. Her father went downstairs to open the door for them. At that moment, she just dropped to her knees and cried in her hands. She cried for a good minute before, surprisingly, she felt a hand on her shoulder. When she turned her head, she saw her mother looking at her.

“Come on, now. Stop crying. We called the ambulance, and they will try to do something.”

Alysa wiped at her face. Soon the ambulance crew came in with a stretcher. She followed the stretcher all the way out of her house into the front lawn. She tried to

get in the ambulance, but one of the crew members stopped her.

“You can’t come in here, miss. Only family members are allowed.”

Alysa got furious at that comment.

“She’s my best friend! You have to let me in! I have to know that she’s going to be okay!”

Her parents held her back as the doors to the ambulance closed in her face. She started to cry more violently than before. She screamed, tried to break free of her restraints, and yelled after the ambulance as it drove away from her house, the sirens piercing the deathly silence of the town. Alysa eventually stopped struggling, but went limp and continued crying just as violently. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see a silhouette standing behind her house, partially hidden by the trees. She turned her head towards it to get a better look, but it had already disappeared.

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She listened to the radio with a blank expression. As expected, the news was about Carla’s death. She still could not believe that the girl whom she had spent her entire childhood with had died. Was this a

punishment? Was she being punished for taking her best friend for granted? She had never stopped to think about the possibility of Carla dying, or what would happen if she did die. She decided to stop thinking about it. She had much more important things to do.

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The town library looked like any other building in Mallory. The outside walls were mostly white, but patches of paint had fallen off, revealing the bricks underneath. The roof consisted of dark red tiles. It had a dark brown, oak door with a little window on it. There were two windows on the left and right side of the building. There were no curtains on them. The owner probably had not bothered to hang curtains since the town almost never saw the sun. Alysa entered the building.

“Welcome, welcome.” greeted an elderly lady. She was of medium height, not short and not tall. Her hair was the color of the rain clouds that covered the sky in Mallory. Her skin was wrinkled. She had icy green eyes. She was wearing a light grey, long-sleeved dress. The woman peered at her eyes closely.

“My, what interesting eyes you have.”

Alysa became uncomfortable, but she did not want to be rude. She smiled.

“Thank you.”

She left the front of the desk to walk around the shelves of books. The scent of dust and old books filled the air. The books looked like they had not left their shelves for a while. That would make sense. A lot of people had been hiding in their houses for a couple of days. She was walking around in the ‘non-fiction’ section of the library. The library was not very big, so she could arrive at her destination without difficulty. She reached the shelf that contained the book she was looking for; ‘Sudden and Unexplainable Deaths in History’. She carried the book to a table and sat down to read it. It was an old book with pages that had a brownish tint at its sides. It had an odd but comforting smell that reached out to her nose and made her nostrils itch. The book was thick with small-sized print covering its pages. Some illustrations of ancient times decorated various corners. Since she didn’t have much time, she was skimming through the book... ‘Deaths caused by Witchcraft’, ‘Mysterious Plagues’, ‘Devil’s Hand in Mass Deaths’ were names of some chapters that caught her eye and made a shiver run through her spine. She was wondering if someone had

actually turned up the cooling in the building as she caught herself trembling. She put it down to nerves.

She was skimming through the last pages when she heard a voice so faint that it could have been coming from the depths of her mind...

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“You won’t find what you’re looking for in there.” a tall man with dark hair graying at its temples whispered behind her. He was leaning on a walking cane and looked like he was in physical pain. The way his face twitched when talking made her wonder if he was, in fact, in need of medical help.

“I’m sorry, did you say that to me?” said Alysa trying not to sound annoyed at being sneaked up upon.

“ Yes, and I’m sorry if I startled you. I didn’t mean to.” said the strange man almost reading her mind.

“ I just wanted to point to the fact that you won’t find any answers in that old book.” he added.

“And how would you know what answers I was looking for, assuming I was looking for answers in the first place.” replied Alysa

desperately trying to suppress the anger building up inside her.

“I should first introduce myself. I am Dr. Ben Randall. I am a forensic scientist. I know that you are trying to make sense of what’s going on in this town just like all the others. You are smarter than them in the sense that you chose to do a research on the occurrence of sudden deaths in history. You have a science - oriented mind. Being a scientist myself, I appreciate that. However; the book you have chosen will not cast any light on to what’s actually happening at Mallory.”

She let his words sink in before she responded. The rising anger left itself to intrigue. She was curious to know more about this stranger.

“Sir, are you...”

“Call me Ben.”

“Ben, are you here to investigate the deaths that are occurring here?” She wasn’t comfortable addressing a stranger with his first name.

“Actually yes, I am...but let’s say I am not part of a team. I work alone.”

“Are you a private investigator? Why would you be looking into these deaths if you

aren't working for the government or someone?"

"Well, as I mentioned, I am a forensic scientist and we forensic scientists look into unexplainable phenomena. The sudden mysterious deaths that have been occurring in this town have drawn me here. I feel the need to find the cause."

Alysa suddenly felt hopeful. She felt like together they could uncover the mystery surrounding the deaths of the town folks and most importantly, her best friend. She owed it to her.

"Ben, I would like to help you while you are investigating this mystery. I grew up here and know this town very well. I could help you interview the families of the deceased. Assuming that's what you would like to do, right?"

"Collecting facts is the first thing a scientist must do when solving problems. You see, I told you that you had the mind of a scientist. I can see how you could help me. Let's go, we don't have any time to waste!"

"You sound ominous..."

"Unless we solve this mystery, there will be other deaths. So unless you want that hap-

pening, I would advise you to hurry up and take me to the house of the first deceased."

and with that, they set off...

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After minutes of walking, they finally reached Mrs. Summers', the first deceased person's house. It was like any other house in Mallory, with greying white walls, brown oak door, dark red tiles and only a few windows. Alysa knocked on the door. A man that looked like he was in his late 20's opened the door.

"Yes?"

"We're here to investigate the cause of death of Mrs. Summers. We would like to ask you some questions," Ben replied.

The man cautiously stepped aside to let Ben and Alysa inside. He closed the door after they entered. They walked into the living room, which consisted of a wooden table, three wooden chairs, two couches and no decorations at all. The man gestured to couch to get them to sit down.

"Did Mrs. Summers display any unusual behaviors before her death?"

The man shook his head.

“No. She didn’t show any signs of discomfort either. In fact, she seemed quite healthy that evening. But when I went to her room to wake her up in the morning, she was already dead.”

Alysa unintentionally remembered seeing Carla’s dead body the first time, and the grief she felt at watching Carla being taken away from her. She pinched the bridge of her nose to stop the tears before they could leap to freedom. The man continued.

“However, I remember her drinking more water than she used to, although, I don’t know if that indicates anything.”

Ben thought for a moment before answering.

“I understand. In that case, I will have to collect samples from the food and water in this house. I also need to swab the furniture, clothes, and personal belongings.”

“All right, but what for?”

“I need to see if there is some kind of pollution, or poison that is causing these deaths. Of course, after I’m done collecting samples from this house, I need to move on to the other victims’ houses.”

Ben opened the briefcase he had been carrying all this time and put on plastic gloves and a mask. He also took out the swabs and pipettes. He took a few drops from the well in the back garden, cut up pieces from the food and swabbed the furniture. He also swabbed the clothes and personal belongings of Mrs. Summers. When he was done, he placed the samples in zip-lock bags.

“I will now return to my lab and examine these samples.”

Alysa and Ben bid farewell to the man and left the house.

“Could you tell me where your house is? I would like to be able to communicate with you once I have the results.”

Alysa was a bit reluctant at first, but she figured she had to trust Ben if she wanted to find out what had caused the death of all these people, especially Carla’s. She lead Ben to her house.

“This is it.”

“Thank you. I will see you soon, then?”

Alysa nodded, before they went their separate ways.

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Two days had past since their meeting. Alysa had been reading a book on an arm-chair when she heard a knock on the door. She gazed out the peephole on the door and saw Ben. She opened it.

“Hello,” Alysa greeted him.

“Hello. I came to report the results.”

Her hesitation of letting someone she barely knew in her house was wiped away with curiosity. Luckily, her parents were working. She stepped aside.

“Come in.”

She closed the door once Ben was inside. They sat down across from each other at the table.

“Well?” Alysa looked at Ben expectantly.

Ben took out the paper with the results on it.

Alysa examined the papers as Ben was talking.

“I did not find any abnormalities from the clothing, furniture, personal belongings, and food samples. From the water however...”

Alysa spotted the results of the test that was run on the water.

“A high level of mercury?”

“Yes. As you might know there is a factory about an hour from this town. The mercury released from the factory came in contact with the water this town uses, which killed anyone who drank the water. This is known as mercury poisoning. Mercury is a very toxic metal.”

Alysa thought for a moment.

“There must be people who have noticed the mercury in the water. What about the people in charge of the water in town? There’s no way this could’ve gone unnoticed by them. Do you know who is in charge of the water?”

“You’re right, there is a person who has noticed the mercury; the very person who is in charge of the water, no less. To think that he, of all people, would turn a blind eye to such a disaster...”

Alysa was getting impatient.

“Who is ‘he’? Who is the one who turned a blind eye to this?”

Ben’s expression turned very serious.

“Thomas Collins, the mayor himself.”





# 6

## Science-Fiction

“Science fiction is trying to find alternative ways of looking at realities.”

– Iain Banks



# The Unusual

by Ayda Posacı



The kid is staring out the window of the metro bus, we are going fast and it's making him feel uncomfortable. I am able to see that but his mother isn't, she is just waiting in a hurry for this trip to end so that she'll be home. No one else is seeing it, maybe this is a gift, or maybe people are not aware of anything else because they are all looking at my eyes, or my skin which I try to hide but can't. I have different coloured eyes and have a skin condition which looks really disgusting with white spots mostly on my arms and my neck.

When we arrive the kid takes a deep breath and runs straight out, letting go of his mother's hand. I walk out of the subway and this time I take a breath and thank my parents for choosing to live on the countryside. I hate the city, the air is always gray, even on summer days because of pollution, and you can barely breathe. I love my house. I love taking walks around my house right before the sun rises, and seeing the dark

blue air and the way that blue affects everything around it. At that times of the day everything is better, it is like another world, with other livings, with other colours.

My house is not so far from the subway, it lasts only 10-15 minutes, walking. When I arrive home my dog is always the first one to greet me, he is a huge Great Dane and we call him Clifford because he's really big and has reddish fur just like my hair. I really love him because he's been with me since I was three, he is now thirteen years old which is really old for a dog but he's doing good so far.

My mom is the second one to greet me, I mean, she can't reach Clifford's speed anyway. My dad is not home on weekdays he works outside the city so he comes home only on weekends. My parents are very curious, they are so interested in my "not so interesting" life which is really depressing.

I enter in our house, Clifford senses me and comes to the door barking. Home smells like new baked bread and I start feeling hungry all of sudden. My mom is baking something again, she always finds new recipes and bakes different kinds of food almost everyday. "Come here Ori!" I hear my mom yell from the kitchen. My name is actually Oriana which is not a very

common name, my parents are the only ones calling me Ori. I go to the kitchen and see my mom baking, as usual. She got her golden hair up in a ponytail, she's trying to read something from her phone, probably the recipe of whatever she's baking. I sit on the floor, right next to where my mom's foot stands. Clifford comes next to me and lays down and puts his head on my lap. I lean forward and get closer to his face and make that baby voice to make him get excited, as usual. My mom asks me to move so that she can get a spoon from the drawer, as usual. I stand up and go to the living room and Clifford follows me, as usual. I turn on the TV and watch Spongebob Squarepants, as usual. Yes, I do watch cartoons although I am sixteen. My mom brings me the thing she finished baking which tastes delicious. I eat it all while watching my cartoon and go upstairs to my room, as usual. My room smells like vanilla ever since my mom bought me that vanilla scented candle from Ikea.

Everything is, so usual.

I sit on my desk to do my homework but end up daydreaming about what it would be like if nothing was this usual. I have so

many different scenarios in my head. The time is late now and I have done no homework but I really don't care and go to bed.

I connect my phone to the speakers on the both sides of my bed and turn on my all time favorite playlist. I play it on low volume like I always do. I go and brush my teeth while Clifford waits for me then I go to bed with Clifford.

## Dream

I wake up, it is still dark outside although my clock tells me it's 9:12a.m. Clifford wakes up with me and gets under the blankets, it is so cold and I'm freezing even under the blankets. I'm scared to get out of bed because of the light coming from the door which I had left slightly open. The light is getting brighter every time I breath. I have dreamt of a stranger coming into our house and to my room for a moment but this wasn't like this at all. My throat is sour from breathing the cold air so fast. Clifford is not aware of what is going on he is just laying next to me trying to keep himself warm. The light is now so bright I almost can't look at it, I squint my eyes and stare. The door opens slowly I keep look-

ing until its wide open and when its fully open I can't keep my eyes open anymore everything is white. I get under the blankets and try to sleep back. I hug Clifford and try to concentrate on his heart beat.

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I wake up my eyes hurting, still in shock of how real that dream was. It felt so real that I am still cold and still scared but intrigued too. It is 6.30am, I get out of bed to brush my teeth and finish my morning routine. I think of what that bright light was all day long, even in my English class, which is my favorite lesson. I want to go back to sleep and continue the dream. I arrive home earlier than I think I would be. My mom is cooking again but today I am going to finish everything early and go to bed. I eat my food in the kitchen and couldn't do my homeworks again, but its too early to go to sleep so I surf the internet a little bit about dreams but I couldn't find anything similar to mine. I think about sharing it with my parents but a strange feeling stopped me from doing it. I go to sleep with Clifford. I wake up at the exact same time 9:12a.m and everything is exactly the same. I know

it is a dream so I am not scared this time but still curious. I wait until it comes to the place where it ended yesterday and watch still. The light is so bright and I cannot see. The door wide opens and the light goes away and now it is completely dark. I hear some noises I never heard before and I feel something getting closer and closer to me. I see figures moving across the room and nothing else. Everything feels so real and I start getting scared because I don't remember falling asleep. I suddenly start feeling tired, I am not trying to move but I know if I try I can't. I start falling asleep, so slowly it feels like two hours.

When I wake up I'm still unable to move. I do try this time but it feels like there is something so heavy covering every part of my body except my head. I look around see a human-like figure moving in front of me. It is not a human, I can tell because it has these thorn looking things on her back. It is a female, she has very womanly body figures. I don't make a noise but she senses me. She comes straight to me and I see her face. She has huge eyes with unusual colours. I can't tell what colour, it's a colour I have never seen before. Under her eyes she has the same thorns she has on her back but tinier. She has a very tiny

mouth but very sharp teeth. "Hello there, are you feeling well?" she asks me with a really beautiful voice. I am still amazed by what I'm seeing. I answer late, but she looks like she was expecting this. I can tell she has done the same thing to other people. "Not really, I feel so heavy. I will be very happy if you can fix that.", "I almost forgot!" she make a weird movement with her head and her eyes, and that pressure is gone. "Thank you." I say confused and not at all thankful. I slowly move my body and sit up. "Now listen to me carefully, I am an Azhuwa, we are a kind of animal just like your kind is." "Where do y-"she stopped me. "Listen to me Oriana." "How does she know my name?" I say to myself. "We are more advanced than the human-kind and since we have discovered your planet now, your kind is no more useful so we have destroyed the rest of you but kept you and some other people we have been investigating and found a little bit more advanced than the rest of the humans.". "My parents too?" I am not crying, but I am angry, she was telling me these like it is not important. "Yes, like I told you." I am crying now, and I am getting ready to attack her. I swing my fist against her head. I was about to hit her when I feel that heaviness on me again. My arm fall down on my lap and she hold me from my shoulders and lay me back down on the bed. I am still cry-

ing and I am screaming. "Okay, you shouldn't attack any of us like that, cause you will die.", "Why did you kill my parents?" I ask trying to keep myself calm. "I really don't know, these are the things I was told to tell you, and all I know is this. Listen I didn't kill your parents, you shouldn't attack me."she explain. "What about Clifford?" I ask still crying a little. "You mean the dog? He's fine, we like dogs, we keep most of them.", "Where is he?" I ask. She says "He'll be here when you stop crying.". "How do you expect me to stop crying, your kind killed my parents!.", "Listen Ori, I cannot relate to this because we don't have such a thing called family bond or whatever you call it."she say. "What was your name again?" I ask, "I haven't told you yet."she say, "Yes you did.". "Azhuwas, that's not my name, that's the name of my kind just like you call your kind Humans."she explain. "What is your name then?" , "My name is Suas, the easiest one you'll be hearing around here." , "And where are we Suas?" , "We're in our planet, Xorth."she say. The things that are happening right now are so unusual. I don't know why I am chosen, what makes me advanced? "So, what am I supposed to do?" I ask. "You are here because you are more intelligent like I told you before. You are going to have a test or a game you'll call it. You are supposed to make it

out alive so that you'll prove us you are actually more intelligent."she say. I am extremely scared, I start feeling sick. "What kind of a game?"I ask with my eyes closed. "It's so simple you just have to do what you are told to do. If you don't, you will die. What's important is you have to control your feelings very well Ori."she explained. It sounds easy but I am still scared of dying. "Can you bring Clifford here now?". She doesn't say a word but brings him to me from outside the room. Clifford jumps on the bed, Suas takes away the heaviness again and I am able to move. "This is your room, you'll stay here until the game starts. The game starts in two days, press this button if you need me."she says pointing the red button next to the door and leaves us alone with Clifford. I stand up and walk around, everything is similar to the things humans have, except the colours. The colours are so beautiful and unique, and I cannot name them.I sit on the bed with Clifford and start thinking about the game, if controlling my feelings was the most important thing I could make it alive. I controlled my feelings easily, at school when I felt like crying I smiled instead, at home when I felt like dying I laughed. It shouldn't be that hard.

I press the red button Suas come slowly open the door and wait for my question. "May I get out of the room?"I ask. "Of course!"she say, "With Clifford?" I add , she say "Why not Oriana?", "Just asking." I say to make sure. She leaves and I leave two minutes later, I want to see what outside looks like. We walk outside with Clifford. It is a round area with six doors, mine says three on it. I go down the stairs and this floor is round too, but there are no rooms, just tables and chairs and a place like a cafeteria . I go one more floor down and there is the door. I walk outside, it is a lovely place, the air smells so fresh and sweet. There are many Azhuwas's walking around, they all look like Suas with different colours but the male has a different body shape and has those thorns over their ears too. The environment is exactly the same with earth but has different colours. I look up to see the sun but realize the thing like a sun in the air. It is not a sun but something else with a sun light more reddish than ours. That is the only way I can explain that colour. For the rest of the day I try enjoying the day, keeping in mind that these days might be my last days. I spend the day outside with Clifford trying not to think about my parents. I go back when it turns dark. I go to my room and see Suas waiting for me. "What is your sun called?" I ask knowing it sounds weird.



“Yurx is what we call it Oriana.” she answers me laughing. “Oriana, I take care of every human that will take place in this game, there are six humans but you are my favorite so far. I can feel you are going to be a winner in this game.” She say with a very friendly smile on her face.

I couldn't sleep at night, I cry myself to sleep, sleep for two hours and wake up the other day with my eyes all red. I nap all day and I go outside at night time then go back inside. This could be my last day and I waste it all away. I sleep for the rest of the night and wake up very early. The game is going to be at night so I go outside with Clifford to take a walk. We walk all day, we lay on the grass and stare at the Yurx. It has been a nice day. When it start getting dark I start getting excited and afraid. I can win this game I know it but I am still afraid.

I am laying in the bed, Suas come and tell me to get ready. I don't know what she mean by that but I say ok. She brings me to the upper floor. There are six rooms and the other chosen kids are standing in front of the doors. I am in front of number three.

“There are three levels of this game, you have to do what you are told and that is it” the male instructor say. The kids look confused but I think it is pretty simple. The game begins, we all go in our rooms.

The room is dark but I see where the light is. I walk towards there and see a mirror under the weak light. I hear the speakers “You cannot break the mirror, and you cannot cry but you have to look in the mirror.”. After the speakers stop my reflection in the mirror starts moving itself. It starts burning. My reflection in the mirror starts burning and screaming, “Help me Ori, you can save me!”. Her hair burns and eyes melts. She screams so loud. Her skin melts just like a candle and it drips on the floor. I just stare in the mirror. This level is not so hard, It ends and I stay alive. “Move to the second level please” the speakers are saying. I open the next door, I move to the light again. There are two people under the light. They turn around and I can't understand what's happening, I was told that they are dead but my parents are facing me, I go and hug them and kiss them. “Do not touch anyone or anything, you can cry this time but you are not allowed to touch anything” the speakers say and I move away from my parents. I stand there right

in front of them smiling and that's when I realise a man coming from right behind the darkness. He's got an axe in his hand and I freak out, I shout at him to stop. He tie mom and dad to a chair. "Please stop, no I can't handle this" I keep screaming. He swings the axe in the air, giving me an evil look. "Help us Oriana, please" , "Oriana come here, Oriana please!" my parents are screaming but I don't understand my parents never call me Oriana, and they should've been dead. The man raises his axe and hits my dad. My dad cries for my help. I start crying. His head is bleeding. He hit my mom this time she scream out my name, they both scream out my name until they pass out. That's the end they are both covered in blood I am on my feet. I don't understand I should've saved them and risk my life but some feeling stopped me they didn't feel like my real parents, the way they say my name they never call me Oriana, they call me Ori all the time. They were not my real parents I know that.

"Move to the third level please" the speakers say. I move to the last door open the door slowly and see Clifford he is standing there, when he sees me, he comes running. I gulp, I know something bad is going to happen to him. "You can't do this, he is

just a dog, don't hurt him" I start crying and shouting. "We are not going to hurt him, you are. You are supposed to kill him with that knife next to you, good luck" I look at the knife, I hug Clifford and I throw the knife away. I can't kill Clifford. He is the only one left. I just can't. "You have thirty minutes" the speakers say again.

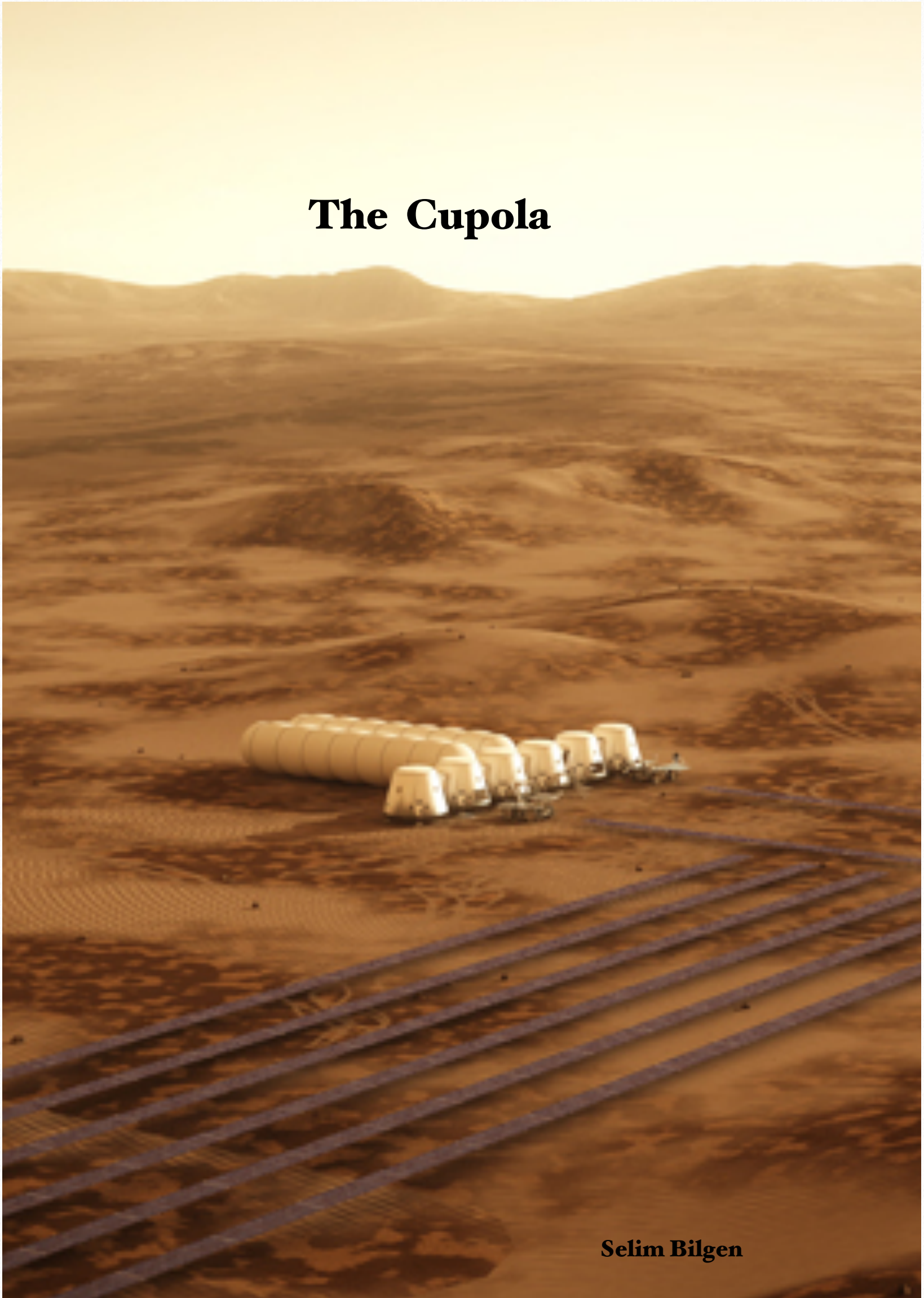
I am not going to do this. I hug Clifford and just count down inside my mind. The last thing I see is an arrow coming right towards my head and that's it...

I wish everything stayed usual.

# The Cupola

by Selim Bilgen

## The Cupola



Selim Bilgen

It was rainy outside, the voice of the raindrops which are hitting the gigantic glass cupola were making Miles's ears hurting "Why they don't activate the rain stoppers?" it was Axel. "I don't know Axe the Glass is dying slowly, four days ago one of the oxygen makers stopped making oxygen, they tried to call home but they couldn't get any answer from earth" When Miles finished his words the announcement of rain stoppers start: "Rain stoppers in process... Rain stoppers in process... Enjoy your day MARSCOM" "Thanks MARSCOM" Miles murmured. MARSCOM was the name of their community in Mars, when their elders on the earth decided to create a new community in space they have created MARSCOM. In their community there are 96 different nations. And some of the nations are not existing currently because of the H67 which killed 3 billion people. But the life in Mars is better than earth except they still can not make the atmosphere liveable so they still living in glass cupolas which are big as manhattan island. "Dinner time is now on process please go to your homes and eat food" it was the announcement again. "See you tomorrow Axe" said Miles while making a call to a taxi. "See you Miles" Road was too busy that he went to home in 20 minutes. He knocked the door. Morana opened the

door she was their maid."Hello Mr Miles" she said politely while smiling. "Hello Morana, what we have for dinner" "We have clean water, potatoes and some earth cow meat" when Miles heard meat he run upstairs and he opened the dinner rooms door. "Why were you late Miles" " Sorry dad it won't be again" after the conversation Miles start to eat his delicious food with his mom and dad. To buy fresh water potatoes and meat for only one dinner was really expensive but Miles's father was one of richest man in the Earth and Mars so it was normal for them.

After the food Miles go upstairs to his room. He played guitar for an hour, later he make his homeworks which due to tomorrow. At 12 o'clock he put his head to his pillow and sleep.

Dark, time, sea, oceans, purple, hot it was It again. The thing he can't name the "It". It was part of his life since he started to understand dreams. It was his nightmare but sometimes It was protecting him from bad things. "Go away" Miles screamed. "What, why you are here" Miles was powerless to It. "Protect yourself Miles something really bad will happen Miles really really bad" Miles opened his eyes the tears on his eyes were still wet he felt tired and he tried to remember the dream but he couldn't remember he fell asleep again. He wake up with the voice of the

alarmclock, he put on his clothes and look to himself from mirror. Miles was a handsome boy he has nice looking blonde brown hairs and green eyes. His body was perfect too he was 1.90 and really fit. He go downstairs and go out from his house. Axel was awaiting him in front of the house with his car. They were in school in 5 minutes.

School was normal they had Marshistory exam which was easy and they had 6 other lessons. But something unusual happened, Karl tried to crack the cupola and when the teachers saw him they sent him to the principal's office. When teacher ask him the reason why he hit the cupola Karl said that he is tired of being inside.

When school finished Miles decided to go to the shopping mall where is near to the entrance of the cupola. Miles asked Axel to come and he said yes. While they were walking Miles asked to Axel "Why do you think Karl tried to destroy the cupola" in that moment Miles remembered his dream but he did not share his dream with Axel. "I don't know Miles maybe he was bored" he laughed and keep talking "but I think Karl will not stop until he achieve his goal. Do you know that he hates us especially YOU" "I know that Ax it is not hard to understand"

When they arrived to Mall Miles asked to Axel about going to the entrance gate.

Axel said okey but he couldn't find any reason to go there. There was not any guardian in the entrance since they understand that outside is not liveable but there were some guardian towers around the cupola because of the outsider attacks. Outsiders were not humans or alive things they were intelligent robots. Entrance was old there were some rusty parts but someone who has a overall intelligence could say that it is high technology. When they decided to go back Axel saw some footprints which are going to upstairs where the control room and escape capsule is. "Axel look there are footprints" Miles started to run to upstairs and Axel followed him.

When they opened the control room they see 5 man who are wearing black they only noticed one of them, Karl. 5 man start to run through Miles and Axel they beat them until they become sure they both are dead. Then they put them to the rubbish container because containers were going to a place in outside.

Miles opened his eyes it was all black he was thirsty his lips were hurting. He started to remember what happened. "Axel" he tried to shout but he was too weak. He gathered his power and shout again "Axeell" then he waited. He heard a voice it was too weak "Axel is that you" he waited for six minutes. "Yes, where are we" it was a hard question to answer. "I

don't know we are in a rubbish container I think. We have to find a way to go out”

“There is a button next to I will press to it Miles”

“Okay, press” When Axell pressed the button they closed their eyes because of the sunlight. There was a door in the container and it was open, most important they were in the outside and they were alive.

Axel was out first, he let the sun to burn his body, he smelled the fresh air it was all great. Then Miles get out, he was shocked with the beauty of the Mars. They walked for a hour. They saw a water fountain, they went there and drink from the freshwater later they lie down under a tree it was a great feeling because and fall asleep. Miles wake up in the middle of the night it was dark outside, he watched the stars and drink water. He was hungry he decided to find something to eat tomorrow. He was missing his family, but luckily there was Miles with him. He fall asleep again.

Miles wake up when Axel pour water over him. They both start to laugh.

“Good morning Miley”

“Good morning Emily”

“Enough fun for morning we have to find something to eat or we will die Axel. Lets search for some fruit”

“Okay Miles but first I want to sit for a while”

They sit under a tree and chat. The place

where they were camping was a great place. There were trees and animals, from the cupola no one ever saw a tree or an animal. After they chat they stand up and start to search for something to eat. 10 minutes later they find a tree which has fruits. They were big and yellow. Miles eat one without thinking. It was the greatest thing he ever had. They collect all of them and start to walk back to the camp. While they were walking they made a plan. It was: going back to cupola, punishing karl and telling people that outside is livable. While they were walking back to their camp they saw some animals which are looking like humans. When they arrived to camp and sit, Miles said "What if the things we saw were really humans"

"What, are you crazy"

"No, really think about it we can't be the first, I am sure that they are people who escaped from the cupola"

"You are crazy"

"shut up" They laughed and fell asleep.

That night Miles saw the "It" again. "It" said that he is going good and said that he has to protect Axel and himself”

When they wake up it was early in morning they eat their BigYellow Fruits and start to think about what to do.

“I think we have to explore the forest and later find a hill so we can understand where we are and where the cupola is”

“It is a really good idea Miles, I think we have to climb to that cliff and maybe we can make some fire to take attention of the cupola” he pointed the hill with his forefinger.

“But Ax if we make fire, the outsiders will see that too and they will kill us”

“They are not alive, they are robots”

“I am not sure about it, I think there are humans in the outside too and maybe the reason we didn't see any of these animals and trees is because they put a huge fake wall between the forest and the cupola. And maybe they are the ones who are playing with the atmosphere's oxygen results because they don't want us to go out and take their place.”

“I don't want to say that but maybe you are right and if there are people in this forest we have to be more watchful”

“Of course, we will Axel. Lets explore”

First they went through the forest. Forest was dark, trees were huge and there were many animals, after they have walked for half an hour and got tired they sit under a

huge tree. That moment Miles heard a rustle coming from the bushes behind him. He first thought it was an animal but when the rustle kept coming he decided to check the bushes.

“I will go and check the bushes Axel I heard a rustle and I am not comfortable with it”

“Okay Miles I am coming too”

They walked like a wild animal who is following his target, slowly and carefully. Miles take a rock from the ground he was scared. When they came front of the bush rustles stopped. That moment 3 things jumped out from the bush through the Miles and Axel, they were yelling screaming and fighting, in the end of the fight Miles's and Axel's hands were tied to each other and one of the thing was carrying them. All of the things were man, they were tall, strong, fast and fit. They were nearly hairless and they were speaking in a different language but they were like humans.

“Who are you” Miles screamed. They looked to the Miles but they don't answer.

It was nearly night and they were still walking. Axel was passed out when the biggest thing hit him but Miles was stronger, he did

not passed out or sleep because he wanted to remember the way to their home. At midnight Miles saw some lights coming from the canyon. He promise to himself that he will go back home and tell to people that Mars is livable. When they come to the entry of the canyon a huge gate opened.

Inside of the gate there were thousands of people, there were people who were selling fruits, meats and other stuff.

There were towers around the bazaar area, in the towers there were people who had guns.

They kept walking. Miles understand that they come to the residential area when he saw the houses. Houses were big and good looking, they were white and mostly made of wood and glass. There were gardens around the houses. Miles thought they will stop in the residential area but they don't. They stop when they came to the entrance of a big building. It was made of marble and a shiny thing. When the doors of the building opened other people cut the rope of the Miles and Axel and force them to go in.

“Where are we” Axel whispered to Miles while they walk

“I am not sure but we are in a place like a town”

“Who are they”

“Some kind of human”

Other people opened a door and tell them to go in.

When they go in they saw a beautiful woman she pointed the chairs to them.

“Hello human, sorry if we hurt you”

“Who are you” Miles asked.

“I will explain everything be patient” she continued “where are you coming from”

“We are coming from a cupola, we thought that outside was unlivable. We have to tell them”

“I know your nation, we are trying to keep them inside” the woman said in a peaceful way.

“What, are you crazy if we can't find a way to go out we will die inside, you have to help us” Miles was angry but the woman didn't cared him she kept talking.

“We are humans like you, we are coming from the cupola X”



“I thought that it was destroyed by an asteroid thousand years ago”

“Yes, we are the children of the survivors. We decide to create new community in Mars which is better than which are in Earth. My name is Jasmin. What are your names”

“My name is Miles and..” he looked to the Axel “his name is Axel he is really tired is there any place that he and I can sleep”

Jasmin said something in another language and two guardians take Axel and Miles.

“I will think about your people in cupola” she said while they were walking to their room.

When Miles wake up he couldn't find Axel. He went out but he stopped when he saw Jasmin coming towards him.

“I want to talk with you about your people Miles”

“You can, but where is Axel?”

“He is safe. I thought about your people I have an offer. I care my people more than everything and I want them to be safe and

I don't trust your people they can try to fight with us. I will only trust you if you let me to kill Axel”

“What you can't ask me to do that” Miles was shouting.

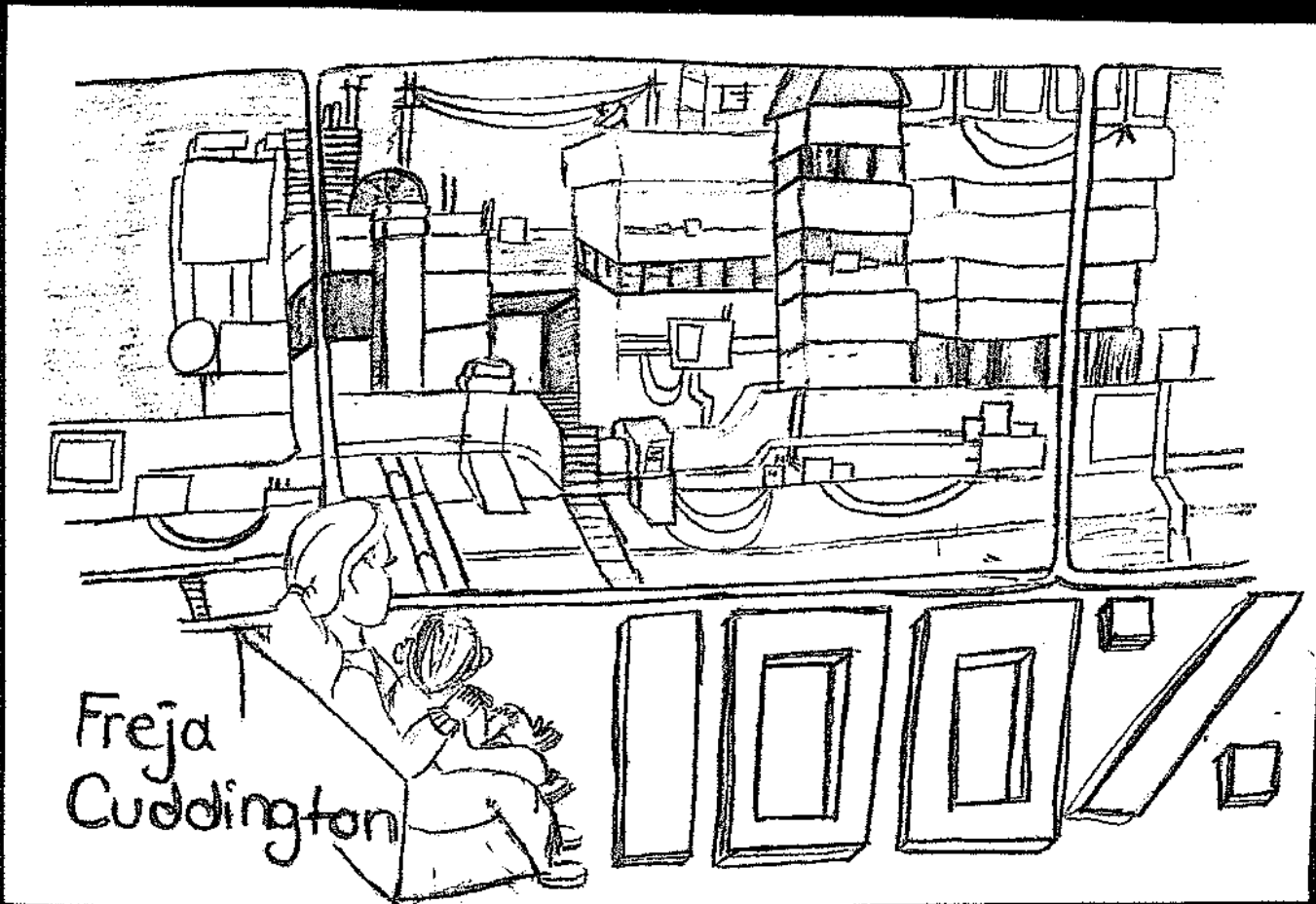
“Think about it if you say yes I will change the oxygen results to liveable from unliveable and I will destroy the fake reality wall. If you say no I will make you a member of our colony, I will send Axel back to the cupola and when the people in the cupola starts to die I will show that to you.” she went out and said that she will come back at midnight. Miles was angry to Jasmin but grateful too because he knows that Jasmin had power to kill them but she choose to give him a choice. He tried to think about what would Axel do but he couldn't. In the end of the night Jasmin came and asked about his answer Miles was feeling powerless but he gathered his power said “kill”.

2 days later Jasmin and his army destroyed the wall and changed the results. They sent Miles as a delegate. Miles explained the situation and took peace promise from minister. 6 months later both colonies were living in peace.

Miles heart was bleeding because he was feeling himself guilty but whenever he saw the children who are laughing he became happy. Years later Jasmin and Miles married and the colony lived in peace forever.

# %100

by Freja Cuddington



Year 2076

Selections

Day 2

The squeaky floorboard beneath grandfather's workshop was my first guess that something lay beneath. I pry the old wooden floorboard open with one of the his rusty wrenches, it comes up with a budge, the smell of damp soil and wet wood fill the air. Under the floor is a foot deep space where the bottom of the workshop and ground meet. At first, all I can see is a few old screws but then I see the silhouette of a small brown leather book. I grab the damp thing and dust off the mud, opening the first page, I'm surprised to see handwriting- it's a journal, and they're illegal.

July 4, 2016

Humanity is lost. I knew it was going to happen sooner or later. Normally every week there would be one big headline that would take over every news channel and let it be exaggerated, then it would die down, slowly getting mixed into the background of history. For the past months it

had been different. It was getting a little weird because nothing much had been on the news for a while. It was like all the hate in people just took a holiday. No breaking news headlines that announce a recent school shooting or a powerful country bombing another country, nothing mentioned about the outbreak of a civil war. Most of it was about miracle patients recovering from illness or the change in weather. Everybody was aware of this, but nobody really pointed it out because nobody wanted to jinx it. The air had a different feel to it and I knew something was up. For a long time everything was so nice and peaceful but they had to come and wreck it all.

The Sirens were the worst part. It was like they were going off in every building across the world, it was mind numbingly loud. Nobody knew where the sound was coming from and what they were for. People started to panic and ran outside into the already crowded streets of Sacramento, in a frantic matter, including myself, trying to figure out what was going on, which is exactly what they wanted. I could see people trying to scream to each other but it was no use. All that they would accomplish was moving their mouths. When the hundreds of fighter jets started to fly across the sky I had a feeling that my time

on this once beautiful earth would soon come to an end. Slowly everything around me came to life in balls of fire and destruction. People from the crowd in front of me start to drop to the ground, lifeless.

Footsteps startle me and I quickly place the journal in my bag and leave the forbidden workshop.

My father's angry voice cries out

"Hope, is that you? I've told you not not come back here. It's off limits." he says grumbling.

"I should have torn down this old workshop years ago when he was taken, now go back inside and prepare for the Selections and stop chasing that old ghost."

Year 2076

Selections

Day 4

I saw it again. The dream. It was the same as always. Same setting, same people. The only difference was the information my Father and Grandfather talked about.

"You know that it's not fair and yet you keep on supporting them" my grandfather warned.

"You're an old fool, this will bring our family security - can't you see that. They are offering me a position within the Community. Things are different now, they are never going to change back and you just have to accept it."

"We have already lost our most basic freedoms, last week they took away Judge Washington for voicing his opposition to the selections - doesn't that mean anything to you?"

"Things have changed and you're going to have to get used to it, don't say anything or you will be next to disappear."

The conversation gets clearer and makes even more sense every time, even though I would never have the courage to talk about it with my father. We were always fearful that someone was listening, watching our family and reporting every detail. Suspicion was everywhere and my father being a member of the Selections commit-

tee only made it worse. Somehow they would hear me. I don't know how, but they just do. And that would be the end of our family. Little bits of that dream come to my mind everyday.

Our community had just completed the three days of Selections, this is when the dream comes to my mind most vividly. The five days of Selection fall between the ninety days of Autumn and Winter. These are the five days where the Community government decides very important matters that will affect the 360 days of the year. It's a public event that takes place in front of the community. The first day is the selection of job categorization for the new babies. Everybody is assigned a job in the first year of their birth and continues their education accordingly until they are fifteen. The second day is when all the percentages of each community member are counted. After the age of fifteen, every year a person starts at 100%. Through the year the individual tries to maintain their points. It's supposedly how the government keeps everything peaceful because any kind of bad behavior would end in the consequence of the decrease of points. This could be because of behaving rudely to other community members, going against the Community or any of its rules. All the points are varied according to the

situation. All points from age 1 to 15 will be added together and then categorized from lowest to highest. For individuals that are older than the age of fifteen, they will only be accounted for the points of one year and then they are also categorized from lowest to highest. Day three is the Day of Fifteens, where they are given their official work status, and once you are given your status, it is impossible to change. For example, if an individual is put into the Education category at the age of one and has a high percentage at the age of fifteen then that individual will be put into the status of one of the heads or assistant in the school division where they will have more of a luxurious life style. Suppose though, that they have a low number then they will be put into the job of a janitor at a school which is one of the less honored jobs.

Today is the worst out of all the five days, it is when the the percentages are announced. There are strict rules about joining the ceremony. I can't be late. Being late for any official ceremony means the decrease of five points and that is the last thing I need. My feet hit the cold marble floor as I roll out of bed. I change out of my plain white pajamas into my newly washed official ceremony dress that is made out of the same white material, just like all of my

and all of the other girls in their Community clothes. I hear my brother shuffle around in his room next door.

I walk into our shared bathroom and stare at myself in the mirror. My bright green eyes stare back at me. I wash, then dry my face followed by untangling the scruffy parts of my hair with my brush, then tie it back out of my face into a ponytail.

My cold feet carry me to the stairs to the kitchen and get a ready-made breakfast ration from the fridge, add water to it then pop it into the microwave. I watch as the dry mixture and water rise and form my breakfast. I finish the tasteless food as my tall brother Mason walks into the kitchen. He is already dressed in his all white selection uniform. Normally he has a glowing, smiling face with plum cheeks and nicely done brown hair but today he looks extremely pale, like all the color has been washed out of him.

Yesterday was the Selections of Fifteens so we had the day off. I thought it was a good idea to tell him about the journal I found. Mason is not one to keep quiet. He has very strong opinions about things that are not supposed to be talked about. Our whole family knew about my grandfather's political opposition but my

brother and I have never actually heard my parents talk about it openly. Everything that my brother and I know comes from whispers between my parents or old community member friends who have mentioned things in whispers. My parents do not want to jeopardize their status in the Community that is why they always try to change the subject when the topic has come up.

As we read through the dusty old journal our hearts sank as we learned of all the things that we have lost. All of the countries, cultures, diversity and freedoms that have disappeared since my grandfather's time. An anger rose in my brother, it was like something snapped inside him as he read the secret words from the page. That night at family dinner, Mason persisted in talking about grandfather. He talked about how it isn't fair and he openly discussed his plans to rebel against the system and Selections. My parents listened in horror trying desperately to hush him. I just listened in amazement at how courageous he was and saw the resemblance to my grandfather. It was like I was reliving my recurring dream except it was between my father and brother. The last words of the night were of Mason yelling that the ways of the Community and the system mustn't continue and my mother's desperate sobs.

The bright morning sunshine fills the kitchen with light which contrasts the dark angst that Mason wore on his face. There is a foreboding feeling in the house this morning. I can see the fear on Mason's face as he makes his breakfast, not even acknowledging my presence. I know he is stressing about his Selection Day points, even though he has always been the top of his class and a well-respected youth in the community. I would ask but we both know that speaking about percentages with one another is forbidden. He is only seventeen so he is just getting used to the new point system. I on the other hand have yet to pass the age of fifteen. I will be fifteen at the end of Autumn next year, so I still have one year left, but that means I have to keep my points up for my job selection.

Mason sits next to me and starts to slowly eat his food. He is normally very talkative and bubbly, but not today. My parents have probably already left like usual. My Father is part of the Selection Committee and my mother is the assistant sound technician so today is a very important day for both of them. They usually go early for preparation. I go upstairs and get my little brother Cyrus from his crib to get him ready for the selections.

Together we walk toward the already crowded bus stop. This is a walk that I take with my brothers almost everyday but this time it feels different. Mason keeps fiddling with his hands and has still not said a word. It is obvious that he is stressed out. There is a tense feeling in the air. The crowd waiting for the bus is silent. The weather doesn't help the situation, it has now become overcast and the gray cloud-filled sky make the entire situation even more depressing.

All of the white and gray community homes blur together as the bus speeds by. Cyrus sits in my lap playing with the button on his white uniform. The bus is more crowded than usual. Everybody is headed to the ceremony. The bus is silent other than quiet whispers from time to time. This day is probably the most dreaded one of the year. Most of the time people have an idea who the bottom 100 will be but sometimes the most random people are picked and don't have a say. One big mistake could cancel out another person with a bunch of little mistakes. That is why nothing is ever certain in the Community. Sometimes it's because of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

As I look at all the worry filled faces of the people on the bus, my eyes fall on Ma-



son who is sitting a few seats down with his face in the palms of his hands.

I look back to the people on the bus trying to think of how things would be different if they all knew the past. How all of them once had a grandparent that had a totally different lifestyle that was taken away from them with a memory loss serum. It's kind of crazy how the world had once had more than 7 billion people living on it and today the Community had less than 60 thousand. This was one of the more shocking things that Mason and I read from the journal. We are now just coming to the first Amphi C where all of the children under the age of fifteen get off. The next stop is where all of the middle class adults get off, this is where Mason will be. Then the last stop is where everything happens. All of the high class doctors, engineers and government officials are there. Amphi B and C will watch A live on big screens. A is where they announce the points and where the bottom 100 will disappear.

The bus slows down and lurches to a stop, the doors swing open and there is a moment of hesitation in the children, then they slowly start to step out of the bus. I

walk over to Mason with Cyrus at my side and give him a hug with a terrible feeling that it will be our last.

I step out of the bus with Cyrus in my arms. I follow the pathway that is nicely decorated with trees and pink flower bushes that are equally aligned on each side of the stone pathway. However, the sight is ruined by the community guards that are standing alongside the path every few meters, their bodies still but their eyes searching from person to person for anything suspicious. Nobody ever tries anything because they are all wearing full protection, guarded with loaded guns that would kill a man in seconds. The children normally act all rambunctious and annoying but they know that today is not a day for that. They all walk silently holding an older sibling by the hand or with their head down terrified to come eye to eye with one of the guards. After a few minutes of walking we come to the familiar amphi theater that we visit once a year. It always surprises me how big it is. It is built to hold twenty thousand people. I take a seat with Cyrus about ten rows from the main floor.

Cyrus is very different from most children. He has come to the age of three and I have barely heard him speak a word unlike Mason who was a blabber mouth

since birth. Cyrus has always been much more mature than other kids. He barely cried, always sits up straight like an adult and just sits and watches his surroundings, just taking it all in with his bright green eyes. He especially likes crowded places like the amphitheater. Watching all the children find their place somehow amuses him. The big screen that will soon broadcast live from amphitheater A has a timer on it counting down from twenty minutes till the ceremony starts. With every minute my hands start to get sweatier. I watch as the last children take their seats.

The director of Amphitheater C enters from the bottom and walks across the stage into the middle and all he has to do to quiet the crowd of children is raise his hand and the silence sweeps across the amphitheater. The timer on the screen fades away and the Devil as I like to call her appears on the screen.

“Ladies and Gentlemen” Quinn Russett, the director of amphitheater A announces,

“Welcome to the 2076 Selections day four!” It sounds like she is not even a real person, like a box of joyfulness exploded in her and it's the happiest day of her life. The crowd in A give a giant applause that

lasts for more than a minute. C however stays silent.

“To keep our community stable and peaceful The Community has come up with a fair way of making sure that everybody stays harmonious” she points out.

I laugh to myself about how she uses the word fair. Obviously it isn't fair and everybody knows it.

“Today is the day that we punish the rule breakers and show everyone who is in power” she announces with an even jollier voice than before.

She makes me sick. She has never felt the fear of this day.

“Now the time has come to announce the bottom lot” she says with a smirk on her face.

A well protected community guard carries a silver briefcase toward the podium where Mrs Russett stands. She takes a key that is on a string around her neck and unlocks it. She takes out a white folder that contains all of the names. Opening the front page slowly she takes a deep breath. I look around and everybody's eyes are wide open watching the screen. She starts. With every name there is a sob or a gasp. Most

of these people from the list are usually from amphi B. Once their name is called they are escorted by guards to the buses that are waiting at the entrance that will take them to amphi A. Usually very few people from amphi A are in the bottom list. Being an A and on the bottom list is shamed upon. They awkwardly walk down to the main stage when their names are called.

My heart stops as I hear a familiar name.

“Mason from family 484” Quinn says without a care in the world.

My body goes cold as I see the camera focuses on Mason being escorted away to amphi A. I knew it was going to happen. His bold statements were heard and now he is going to pay the price. By now the overcast skies have opened up and a fine mist of rain has begun to fall. The bottom 100 are now gather on the main floor of the Amphi A. There is no time for families to say good bye. The executioners ready their weapons. The sound of gunfire and falling bodies end the ceremony. Mason is dead.

The following day I am awoken by the clatter of my father rummaging through the old workshop. He is frantically searching for something. From my window I see in the

backyard my parents whispering. I look under my mattress to check if my grandfather's journal is still safe. With a sigh of relief I see it sitting there. Just as I put the matters back down my father's voice calls to me to come down to the living room.

I walk into the living room to see that a strange figure is sitting next to my father.

My father starts up and starts to introduce me,

“Hope, I would like to introduce you to inspector Danforth. He has come to help us. First he’s going to take a look around the house and in Mason’s room.”

Danforth was a towering figure. He wears a black uniform unlike most Community members. With an emotionless face he stared deeply into my eyes and fear gripped me.

I nodded in response in loss of word. As Danforth walks away jotting down things in his notepad my father pulls me aside.

“What they did to Mason was horrible and I know you were very close with him. I agree now with Mason’s mindset, that our Community is an unfair place and must be changed.” he says

“I also believe that things should change but I never said anything because I thought you were against it” I say shocked that my father has finally turned to the good side.

For a moment it is like my father is stunned at what I just said.

“Do you know what Mason has learned about the past?” he asks curiously.

Not even thinking the words spill out of my mouth. I explain how we have learned things from neighbors and people in the community. Then I explain how I found grandfather's old journal. That is when he stopped me.

“What journal? Where is it? Do you have it with you?” he asks eagerly,

“Why do you need it?” I ask,

“It is important to keep these secrets safe especially with inspector Danforth so close, so bring it to me quickly.” he says with persistence.

As I sprint up to my bedroom I think to myself that our family will finally be able to avenge my Grandfather's and Brother's deaths. It feels like the beginning of a new revolution. I rip the matters up and grab the journal. A feeling of pure happiness

goes through my body. With the help of my father we will finally have fairness in our community and everyone will know the truth of the past.

I hand the journal to my father before inspector Danforth enters the room. He smiles reassuringly and as he clutches the journal to his chest as the inspector enters. Without hesitating my father hands the journal over to Danforth. My head begins to spin in disbelief and shock as I realize that I have been betrayed by my own father.

“I guess there is another traitor in the family” my father says with a smirk on his face.

“Your loyalty and contribution to the community will be rewarded” says a very pleased inspector Danforth as he slips the journal into his trench coat. He takes me by the shoulder as I curse my father.

Hope is dead.

# 7

## Drama

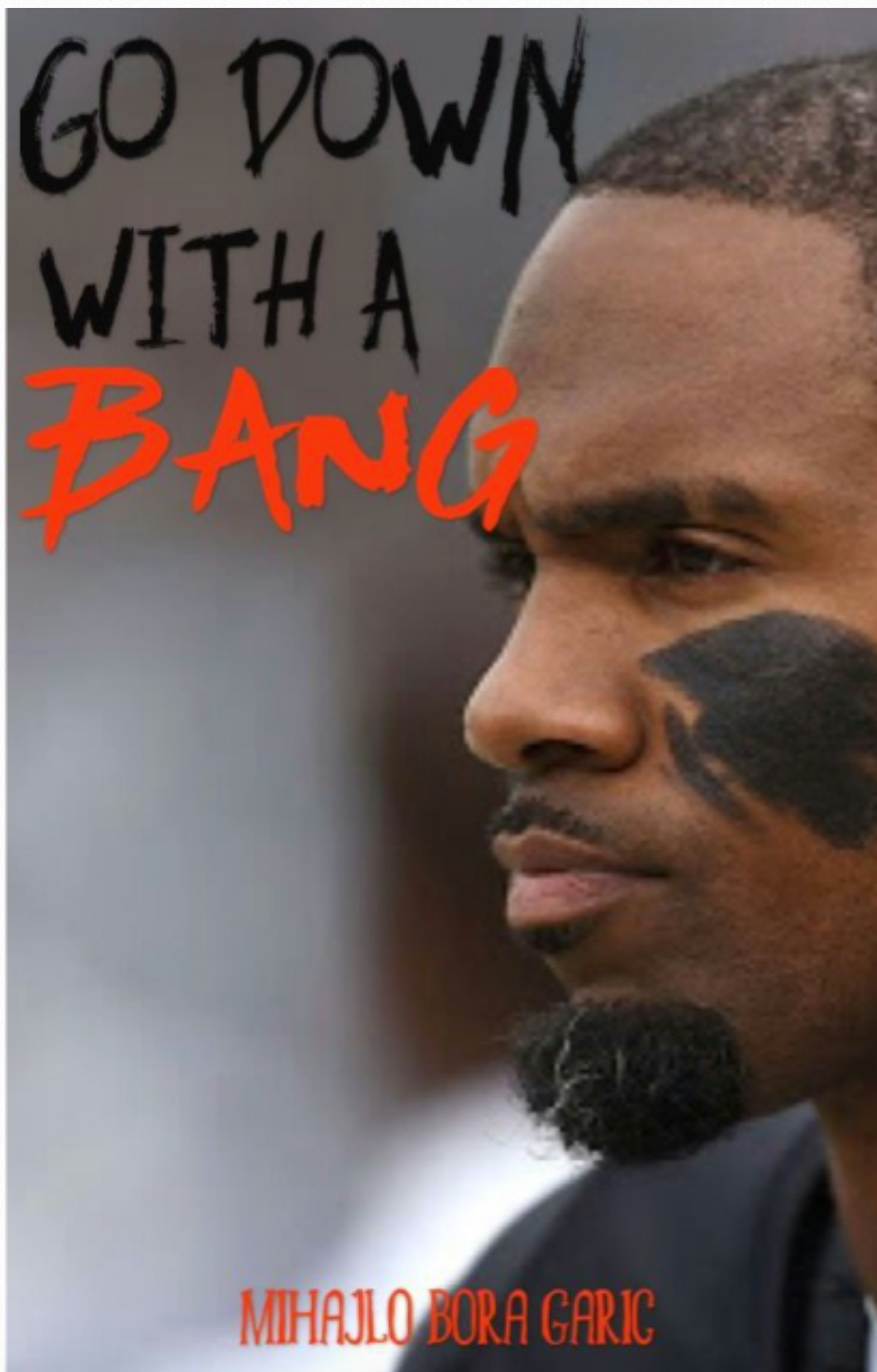
**“If there's not drama and negativity in my life, all my songs will be really wack and boring or something.”**

*– Eminem*



# Go Down With a Bang

by Mihajlo Bora Garic



## GO DOWN WITH A BANG

I wake up to the sound of garbage trucks picking the trash on my street. I want to go back to sleep, but I deny myself the satisfaction of having good sleep because I want to do something today. I go to the bathroom and wash my face. I notice my mom calling me from downstairs, breakfast is ready.

My dad died when I was five years old. He had drug problems. One night someone came to our house. He had a gun in his hand and he was calling my dad's name and swinging his gun around. he was probably drunk and my father probably pissed him off in some way. All I remember was my dad opening the door with a baseball bat and swinging it at the man. I heard a gunshot and then I saw my father fall to the ground. All I heard was my mom screaming. After that it's all blank. I was too little to remember the details.

I hear her calling my name and I say, "I'm coming mom." I enter to the kitchen and say, "Mornin'" and she smiles and says "Good morning Chris".

My mom is a pretty young woman. She is 33 and I am 17. She had me when she was still young. Sometimes I am bothered by it, but sometimes it helps us understand each other better. A lot of my friends have young moms too, so it's not something people in our community are really bothered by. My mother is a happy woman. She always has a smile on her face. She really helped me through life. She works at a Walmart as a cashier so she is not home a lot of the time. She has been through a lot, my dad was gone and she had to raise me alone when she was still pretty young. She is very tough and she never gives up in life.

We live in a small area in East Oakland. It's not the best place to live, it's actually one of the worst places to live. I try not to think about it a lot. What I do think about most of the time, is football. Football has been a part of my life since day one. My uncle started training me when I was about five. By the time I was eight, my uncle started getting more intense with the training. I was running a 5.30 40 when I was only 11. My uncle always said I would get in the league one day. I want to get in the league

more than anything I ever wanted. I want to get drafted and help my mom and uncle out. So by the time I was 15 I was already way ahead of all the other kids on any high school team.

I go to Oakland High. It is a good high school that has a good football program. The only problem in school for me was my grades. They were not necessarily good, and when you don't have good grades you don't get good offers from colleges.

My mom is talking with her friend from work while I eat some delicious bacon and eggs. It's Sunday so we don't have practice today. I decide to go see my friend Andre.

Andre lives just a couple of minutes west of where we live in a small ghetto area. I finish up my breakfast and I kiss my mom on the cheek and I go upstairs to change. I put my jacket on and rush back downstairs. I open the door and leave.

When I get to Andre's house I see a couple of big guys in front of their door. I walk slowly towards a car and I hide behind it to see what will happen.

One of the guys knock on the door and yell out Andre's mom's name. I hear the other guy say that they have to hurry. I get more and more tense as I hear their hands bang on the door. After one minute one of the guys say, "Let's break it down". I am shocked and I decide I can't just sit there and watch. Whatever Mrs. Jackson did, it pissed the guys off.

I get out from behind the car and move towards them. I have confidence in my speed. I'm a pretty fast kid. I figure even the fastest kids on opposing teams can't catch me so they sure as hell weren't going to. When I get to the gate I hear one of the guys say "Zoey gon' get killed if she don't answer the damn door".

I am stone cold after I hear the man say that. I feel a fire burning inside me. I can't let that happen. Not after what happened to my dad. I can't let the same thing hap-



pen to Andre and his mom. I find a rock and pick it up. I aim and throw it right at the man's back. He turns around and looks at me with eyes full of rage. I wait for him to start coming after me before I run. He looks at his friend and then starts running. He jumps over the gate and yells "You wait here Sean". I start running.

The guy has been running after me for five minutes now, and I can see he's getting tired. He runs surprisingly fast. At one point I even thought he was going to catch me and I was going to get the best beating I've ever had. But I kept moving my legs and now we are here. I jump over fences and slide over the hoods of the cars. I really think I will outrun him. I hear the sound of a motorcycle suddenly stopping. The screeching of the tires rubbing against the pavement is a sound that not only bothers me, but scares me too, because I know what's going to happen next, and it isn't anything good.

The big guy is moving pretty fast now considering he is on a motorcycle that he just stole to get to me. I cut into a long alleyway which was not really where I wanted to go but when you have a big maniac

coming after you on a motorcycle, you don't really have many options. I am running as fast as I possibly can, my lungs are bursting for air and my legs are burning in pain. Every second that passed in that alleyway meant that the guy was one second closer to catching me. At last I try doing something that was so stupid, I never would do it again. I jump on to the fire escape ladder and start climbing up. The is was right behind me climbing up the ladder and still finding different combinations of swear words to use.

Just as I am about to get to the top my jacket gets stuck onto the railing. I pull on it more and more as I see the man climbing up. I pull one last time and the jacket rips off the railing, and with the sudden power of the pull I stumble toward the wall and hit my head on it.

I black out for a second as the man comes closer. I try to get up but my body won't let me. I didn't even run this fast, for this long in my football games. The man holds me up and says, "I ran after ya for a long time young blood, you better start explaining". I try to get out of his grasp which just makes him even angrier. He pushes me

higher on the wall, holding me from my shirt.

The thing that didn't really make sense is why anyone run after someone for that long after getting hit in the back with a small rock. Why did I even throw the rock? They weren't going to kill her. I just thought they were going to. Now I'm stuck here half-conscious, stuck in the tight grasp of a man that is very, very angry. He has long dreads that are loose behind his back, he has a muscular body just like a bodyguard. I can't really see his face because I'm not fully conscious. He keeps shaking me so I wake up. I remember him giving up at one point and just leaving me there.

I wake up on that same fire escape. I try getting up but fail at first. I sit there for a minute. It's dark. I can see the stars. They seem so close yet they are so far away. Finally after like one minute of sitting on my butt, I get up and stretch. There is a sharp pain in the back of my head. I put my hand on the back of my head and there it is, a ginormous lump. It hurts when I feel it so I stop touching it. I get down from the fire escape and start walking towards the main street.

I walk for almost half an hour before finally getting to my house. The lights are still on. If my mom is still awake, it isn't that late. At least that's what I thought. I was horribly, horribly wrong. I knock on the door. My mom opens the door and I am stone cold. She is crying and when she sees she hugs me very tight and then she looks at me and slaps me, very hard. I just stand there and she goes back inside.

I walk in too after standing there for about a minute thinking about what I have done. That slap is pretty damn effective. I walk towards my mom.

"Where have you been Chris?"

"I was outside I'm sor-"

"No! Where were you Chris?"

"Ok mom, calm down please..."

I talk about the whole thing. I know I can trust her and I know she will understand somehow. I tell her I went to Andre's house and saw two guys knocking on the door. I tell her that I heard them say they were going to kill Mrs. Jackson. How I threw the rock and then the chase. In the end I am

breathless. It was almost as exhausting as the chase. "Ok, ok Chris" she says "I understand but please tell me about this stuff, I need to know." I say "Ok." and I kiss her on the cheek and she hugs me for a while. She puts her hand on the back of my head and I groan in pain. She looks at me confused. I say I hit my head on the wall during the chase. She walks toward the refrigerator and takes an ice pack from the freezer and hands it to me. I say thank you and go upstairs

I wake up the next day in a foul mood. It's Monday. I check my head and the lump is nearly gone. It doesn't hurt anymore. I keep thinking about the season start. It will kick off on Friday. I am very excited. I get ready and rush downstairs. I eat some bacon and eggs which made me even happier. I kiss my mom and say goodbye as I walk towards the front door.

I walk out of the door and see my friends in a car. Andre is in the car too. I enter the car. Tony who is our quarterback is driving. Riding shotgun is Desmond one of our finest cornerbacks. In the back row sitting is me, Andre who is our running back and

Russell who is our middle linebacker and our team captain.

I say "Mornin'" and they all say "Mornin'" at the same time. 2Pac is playing in the car. I shake hands with Andre and Russell. Desmond reaches out towards me and I shake his hand too. I pat Tony's shoulder and he looks at me through the mirror and nods his head. I keep thinking about what happened yesterday and I wonder if Andre knows anything about it. He doesn't seem worried at all. I assume that he wasn't there when it all happened. I look at the mirror again to see Tony focused on the road.

Tony is a tall kid with shortly cut hair. You could get lost in his blue stormy eyes. He has a sharp facial expression and he doesn't talk much. Most of the talking he does is on the field, calling plays. He is a good quarterback and he is a confident leader on the field.

As we drive Desmond starts the conversation, as usual, about the regular season. We are all excited about it. We are more

ready than ever. “So who’s ready to get that state championship?” he says laughing. We all laugh and cheer. “Coach Smith is gonna be happy with the team this year, we’re all ready to grind.” says Andre and we all nod. “You gon’ get them with that mean stiff arm.” says Desmond while he put his hand back so they could do their handshake. Andre is laughing too and they do their signature handshake. I look at Russell who is focused on the road. I say “Hey Russ, you ready man?”. He nods back at me and smiles. One of the rare moments in his life.

Tony parks in front of the school, turns the keys and pulls it. We all get out and start walking towards the door. Desmond slides over the hood and Tony hits him with his “look”. Desmond laughs and says “Chill man, chill.” We all shake our heads smiling.

Our school is just another high school in America. Nothing is different. The same classrooms full of kids who don’t want to learn anything. The same factions in the school: the jocks, the cheerleaders, the nerds and the outcasts. The only thing in

the school that stands out is it’s football team.

Oakland High is known for its football team. Years of state championships. The team that every team in high school football knows: The Oakland Lions. “The lion is the most dominant animal in the animal kingdom. No other animal can stand in it’s way.” This is true for our team too. The trophy room is filled with golden football’s.

I say goodbye to the guys and walk into the classroom. We have History with Ms. Roberts. I say good morning and walk to the back of the room towards my seat. I sit next to Jennifer, who is a cheerleader for our team and Kyle, who is one of our safeties. I nod to Kyle and he nods back as he turns his focus back to Ms. Roberts. Jennifer is wearing her cheer suit. She looks at me and smiles. She has a smile that just lights you up. I look to the far end of the classroom. I see Juan who is looking out the window. Juan is from Mexico. He had to move to America because of his father’s job. He is tall and strong kid. He plays tight end. He isn’t a big talker either. I look back at Ms. Roberts and start listening.

After 30 more minutes of Ms. Roberts talking slowly I finally rush out when the bell rings. I am excited to see the Coach. I walk through the long and crowded hallway bumping into a lot of people. I see my teammates standing in front of the P.E department's door. I walk towards them and stand next to Jimmy one of our offensive line center, also the snapper. He is a huge kid who is the strongest one on our team. I've seen him block three guys rushing the quarterback. We wait until the bell rings and then Tony knocks on the door and we all go in.

Coach Smith is sitting at his desk. We all line up in front of him. "Good morning guys." he says while carefully examining every one of us with his eyes. "Good morning Coach Smith!" we all yell at the same time. He stands up from his chair and walks towards the door that leads to the field. He opens the door and we all follow him. He takes us to the 50 yard line and says "Sit, I want to talk about something." "For years I have been a coach of this team and I've seen all of it's glory days." he said and we all nodded in appreciation. " My best years though, have been with

you." "Never have I ever seen in my career as a coach a team that is more talented."

"Look up into those stands. They are going to be full of people who want us to win that state championship." "Are you going to give up halfway?"

"NO COACH!"

"Are you going to leave the field when you see that you are losing by 24 points in the fourth quarter?"

"NO COACH!"

"Are you going to go back home when you throw up after three-a-day practices?"

"NO COACH!"

"You will find the strength in yourself and the community who believe in you, to get back in the game when you are losing, to throw up relentlessly and then come right back and keep running!"

"Because there is no other team that can stand in your way if you do this." "Now huddle up!" We all gather around him and put our hands up in the air.

"Now you boys have to promise me that you will win that championship because I sure as hell believe you can."

“WE PROMISE COACH!”

“Lion’s on three, one, two, three!”

“LIONS!”.

“Now get back to class.” says Coach Smith with a big smile on his face.

I wake up on my desk. I fell asleep in Math Class. Mr. Weller is still talking. I want to get out of there but there is still five minutes on the clock. I stretch very slowly trying not to draw too much attention. I rub my eyes and focus on the board where there is a lot of numbers. They are all so close to each other you can’t tell which numbers are for which question. In front of me sits Caitlyn who is on the cheer squad also. Caitlyn has the most beautiful blue eyes that you can just look into all day long. She has auburn hair that are past her shoulders. She keeps pulling them back behind her ear. She isn’t wearing her cheer suit. I wonder why.

The bell rings. She packs up really quick and starts heading to the door. I throw all my stuff into my bag and walk towards the door. I want to catch up to her but there are too many people in the hallway. I start

walking faster. I can see her head in the crowd. She turns right and I go after her. It isn’t that crowded here so I yell her name “Caitlyn!”. She turns back and looks at me and smiles.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, why is something wrong?”

“No. Just... It’s just that you aren’t wearing your cheer suit.”

“Oh... I quit the cheer team yesterday.”

“Why, what happened?”

“Nothing happened. It’s nothing, really.”

“Caitlyn I ain’t going anywhere until you tell me what’s going on.”

She sighs then rips a paper from her notebook and writes something on it. “Meet me at this address at six o’clock.” she gives the paper to me, smiles, then walks away. I watch her exit through the door. I look at the paper in my hand. It looks familiar. I put it in my pocket and walk out.

School's over and our first practice is about to begin. I walk towards the field. I walk into the locker room. Russell and Tony are already here. I start putting on my gear. Then I put my practice jersey and helmet on. I tie my shoes and I walk onto the field.

Coach Smith and Defensive Coordinator Coach Gordon are already on the field getting ready for the practice. I say hello to them and start warming up. Desmond walks towards me and starts warming up beside me. I see Russell and Tony on the far end of the field. After we are done we sit around Coach Smith and wait for our instructions. Training is hard. Every one of us are putting in a lot of effort.

After an hour or so we scrimmage offense against defence. We huddle up around Tony and he gives us a play. It is a play action pass play in which i run a corner route. We line up in the pistol formation. I jog to the far end of the pitch and put one foot on the line of scrimmage and plant my other foot behind me. I let my hands rest at my sides and wait for the snap. Des-

mond is lined up on defence in front of me. We are face to face. He looks at me and grins and then he is totally focused. I look at Tony and he gives me the "look". The ball is coming my way. The ball is snapped and I launch off the line of scrimmage. Desmond immediately backs up because he knows I would run right by him. Desmond is very agile and he can change directions and movement really quick. I run about seven yards and then I plant my foot to the right to make Desmond think I am changing directions. Desmond dips his shoulder outside and as soon as I see that I cut to the inside using my planted foot. Now Desmond and I have enough space between us for the ball to come my way. Tony throws a bullet right at my stomach and I catch it and then I run upfield. I see Kyle closing in on me from the left and Desmond is right behind me. I run to the right side of the field to get away from Kyle. I run down the sidelines for a 64 yard touchdown. I am breathless and so is Desmond. He walks towards me and slaps my helmet. "Nice route man." I nod and say "Can't say the same for your coverage." He sends a sharp look my way and I laugh and say "Chill man, I'm just kidding."

Practice is over and it's almost six o'clock. I shower thoroughly to get all the sweat off my body. I put all my stuff in my bag and walk towards the exit. I see Andre sitting on the bench in front of the entrance. I sit beside him. I want to talk to him about the incident at his house. I am still very confused about the whole situation.

"You okay?"

"Yeah man. Just thinking."

"Hey, did you happen to have any visitors on Sunday?"

"Nah man, we was at Tony's house."

"I was going to pay you a visit and when I got to your house there were two big guys in front of your house. They were bangin' on the door and yellin' your mom's name."

"What? Man you could have told me this earlier. I haven't heard from my mom yet."

"I had to find the right time man. This is kind of private."

"Yeah man I guess but we family man. All of us."

"Yeah I know sorry bro."

"It's a'ight but I gotta reach my mom though."

"Yeah you should probably do that. Look man I gotta go now tell me if anything comes up."

"Yeah of course thanks for everything bro see you."

The sun is going down painting the sky pink and orange as I walk down the street. I walk for another two minutes and then I am home. I open the door and walk inside. My mom is cooking in the kitchen. "Hey mom." I say while making my way upstairs. "Hi Chris!" she yells from downstairs. I open my drawer as I take my shirt off. I get dressed up. I wear a black t-shirt and a white hoodie on top of it. I look for my jeans and I find it in the back of my drawer. I put on my jeans and then I take my leather jacket off the hook on the back of my door. I put it on as I walk out the door.

I walk down the street when a thought passes my mind. I don't like it but I feel that I need to go to Andre's house and check on him. I change my direction and turn into another street that leads to Andre's house. I take out my phone and text Caitlyn that I will run a little late and that I



was going to Andre's house because there was an emergency. As I walk down the street I can start to see a couple of cars in front of the house. I crouch and I head to the sidewalk. I stealthily walk behind the cars that are lined up on the side. I get close enough to see the people at the door. There are two guys at the front door and six guys behind them and in the car. I stand behind the wall and I try to hear. I can barely hear them but I still can. I slowly, very slowly peek out from behind the wall and I see the men talking. I see guns in some of their hands. I hold my breath and I can hear my heart beating through my chest. I get back to my old position where I am safe. I take out my phone and I start texting Caitlyn. I call her and I talk very silently.

"Caitlyn, call the police and tell them to come to 345 Park Avenue."

"Why what's wrong?"

I don't answer because I am scared they will hear me. "Ok. I'm calling right now don't worry." I close the phone. I slide down the wall and sit. I peek out again and I see a man looking right at me. I get back immediately. I don't know if he saw me but he looked right at me. I get up and I get behind the car in the driveway. I wait for

someone to come and check if I was here. No one comes. My heart is beating like crazy. It feels like it's going to burst out of my chest. I get out from behind the car and I go into the garden and from there I have a perfect view of what is happening. I crouch and watch what happens. I see the men taking something out of the car. Two guys stick those things on to the door and four other guys stick them onto the right and left side of the house. I see a red light on the little square shaped things on the wall. I see the men going back into their cars. I hear the sirens and so do they. The tires screech as the man in the car is trying to get away. I see them turn the corner. I get out from the garden and I go onto the street. I see the police car coming right at me. I wave for them to stop as I yell. "Stop! Stop!". The car stops and two cops come out of it. "Officer there were men here trying to do something. They were knocking on the door and they put something on the walls and on the door." The cop looks at the door and he sees it. He looks at me terrified and then he looks back at the other cop cars coming. "Run son ru-". I see a light from my right side. I don't even have the time to look at it. I hear a huge boom that hurts my ears and I am in the air.

I wake up and I'm on the floor. I see flames rising from Andre's house. I feel a lot of pain on the right side of my body. I look down and I see a stick of wood that is in my belly. I see the blood gushing out. I look at my leg and it's disfigured. So is my arm and fingers. I feel so much pain that I don't even feel my body anymore. I go numb. I can't keep my eyes open. I can barely see a cop running towards me. I see an ambulance in the distance. The cop looks at me in horror. I shut my eyes.

I wake up in a hospital. I feel horrendous. The door opens. A doctor walks in. He smiles at me. I don't smile because I can't move my face muscles. "You have been in a big accident Chris." I look out the window. He comes to the far end of my bed. Where my feet are. I can't feel any part of my body. "Chris there is something important you should see." He pulls the blanket off me. I look at my feet and I see metal. All I see is metal until it reaches my knee. I start crying. I can't stop crying. The doctor looks at me and says "You can't play football anymore son." He turns around and walks out. The only thing I ever dreamed of doing, the only thing I wanted as bad as I wanted to breathe. It's gone. It's all gone.

# Runaway

by Melissa van Mannekes



# RUNAWAY

MELISSA VAN MANNEKES

“Well that was easy.” he said looking me in the eye. My brother Brandon was trying to get me to run away from home with him. Why, you may ask? Me and Brandon have been living in my step-father Xavier’s house for 12 years. I was 4 and Brandon was 7 when my mother got married again. I don’t remember much but I do remember that our father had died and that’s why my mother married that monster. Our step-father Xavier. At first he was really helpful. He took us in, fed us and helped me and Brandon with our education. When I was in 2nd grade he started to abuse my mother. He got drunk easily and he gambled a lot. My mother was working at a local bakery at the time so she was the one that brought money home. He started to abuse us more often when I was 7. His abuse started to get worse. One day he beat up my mother so badly that she needed to go to the hospital. Xavier said that she was beaten up by other man while she was coming home from work. Of course the officers believed him but Brandon and I knew that it wasn’t true. We stayed quiet because of the fear of getting beaten up. While my mom was still in the hospital we would visit her but after a month she died. Xavier didn’t care. He kept on gambling and he forced Brandon to drop out of school and get a job to bring money. He didn’t do anything to help Brandon, he just

spent all the money and left us just a little bit of it. We managed for a few years but it was tough. Now I’m 16 and my brother is 19. Brandon has been saving some money and now we have enough money to buy a new house and start a new life. We were talking about how we could get more money when he suggested that we run away. Normally I would’ve disagreed but since I’m fed up with the things Xavier did to us I agreed quickly. I still had scars on my from the last time he beat me up. He came home drunk the other night and he started shouting at me because I was still up. He unbuckled his belt and whipped me. Yeah, it’s not a pleasant memory. “Well then what are you waiting for go grab your bag we’re leaving.” Brandon looked at me with suspicion. “What’s going on in your head Madison?” I shrugged “I may or may not have been planning about this run-away.” I gave in “Okay I found a cheap house on the other side of the town and I thought since you’re old enough you can have custody of me. I already packed my stuff so if you are ready than we can go now because Xavier is passed out in his room.” It was true. He came home earlier drunk out of his mind and crashed on his bed. He has been sleeping for a few hours now and he probably won’t be waking up soon. I may or may not have gave him a sleeping pill instead of a painkiller. “OK.”

he drawled “Hang on a second did you give him a sleeping pill again?” he looked at me accusingly. “Maybe” I answered but it sounded more like a question. Brandon chuckled “Go get your stuff we’re leaving in ten minutes.” I smiled and ran to my room to get my stuff. What I call my room is actually the attic. You think that you would’ve gotten a better room in a house with 5 bedrooms, but no I get to have the attic. The reason? I don’t know. Probably every time Xavier comes home he sleeps in a different bedroom. Brandon has the room closest to the attic. That’s because Xavier doesn’t even come near the attic. He probably doesn’t want to see Brandon unless he has money. I grab my “Escape Bag” and run downstairs to Brandon’s room. I enter his room and see him packing some clothes. By packing I mean just stuffing them in a bag. I look around his room and see that his walls are pretty much empty. Except the writings on his walls. Brandon used to play the guitar and write songs when he was bored. He usually wrote them on paper but then he would lose most of those papers. So he decided to write his songs on his wallpaper. One day when Brandon was playing his guitar, Xavier came home half drunk. He probably had a headache because he started yelling at Brandon to stop playing. “Stop the music or I’ll smash the guitar on

your head again” he had said. It had happened before so Brandon stopped playing. He was too scared to play the guitar since then because if he even dared to strum his guitar Xavier started yelling at him saying he’d smash his beloved guitar on his head. The guitar was still in the corner of his room waiting to be used. Brandon looked up at me. “You ready?” I nod. He got up from his kneeling position and pulled a pocket knife out of his drawer. He walked towards the wall and started cutting around the song lyrics. When he was done he folded them and put them in his bag he turned around and started to leave when stopped him. “Aren’t you going to take your guitar with you?” He stopped and turned around. “What?” he looked at me, obviously confused. “Your guitar. Aren’t you gonna take it with you?” I asked him pointing at/to his guitar. His eyes focused on the guitar case that was standing there in the corner. “You should take it with you. It’s basically a part of you, right?” Brandon used to say that his guitar was a part of him and no one can separate them. Well at least that’s what he said before Xavier decided it was a good idea to smash the guitar on his head and then threaten him to do it again. Brandon sighed. “Madison...” he trailed off “I’m not so sure if I want to take it. Since it can slow us down.” I shook my head pulling out a pair of keys out of

my pocket. "You have money right?" He nodded, confused "What does this have to do with my guitar, and what are those keys for?" I chuckled motioning him to take the guitar. "Well I already kind of bought the house. We only need to pay for it. We can first go to the house and then head off to the police department." Brandon smiled at me then gave me a bear hug. "You are full of surprises Maddie. I knew you had something up your sleeve." I chuckled slightly pushing him away "Come on we have a long walk to the house." I thought it would be a better idea if we walked the first bit. The reason was simple. Xavier instantly wakes up when he hears a car engine. That's also why we are in a secluded part of the town. Xavier doesn't even stir when a plate breaks in the kitchen. It's crazy. "Well hitch a ride once we are in the town" I told Brandon once we stepped out the house. We started walking down the road in a comfortable silence before Brandon spoke up. "So tell me Madison, when did you plan all these things without making Xavier notice?" He looked at me expectantly. I chuckled "Well, I realized that we weren't doing that good when I overheard Xavier talking to someone over the phone. He was talking about paying the money he owed or something like that. Eventually he would've gotten your money. So I called a few places and asked if they had a cheap

two person house. I found one and asked if I could pay them later. He said it was no problem if I give the money this month. That's it." Brandon looked stunned. "Wow. Maddie I can't believe you've grown up so quick." he looked at me "Mom would've been proud of you" I couldn't help it anymore, so I hugged him. "He would've been proud of us Brandon, not just me, us."

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We walked side by side for half an hour before we decide we should rest a little bit. We were currently sitting on a bench that was placed randomly on the sidewalk. Our neighborhood wasn't that modern so there was a gravel road that lead to the houses and benches randomly placed along the road. No one in this neighborhood actually had a car so we couldn't ask someone to bring us to the town. Suddenly my phone started to buzz in my pocket. I took my phone out and looked at the caller ID. "Shit!" Brandon looks at me confused. "Who is it?" I show him my phone and his eyes fill with panic. "What should I do?" I ask Brandon who is looking more panicked than me. "I don't know! Just do something. I answer the phone. "Hello?" I ask as if I'm not expecting Xavier to be calling me. "Where are you? I hope you're not

up to something because if you are I will ground you for the rest of your life!” He sounds like he was drinking again, but that’s his normal voice. I’m used to it. “I’m at school Xavier. Don’t you remember I asked you if I could go to the free extra lesson on Saturday? You said I could so you shouldn’t be worried.” First there is no response, but a few seconds later he speaks again. “Where’s your brother?” I look over at Brandon.

“He’s waiting for my lesson to finish. We’ll probably be back soon.” I lie, earning a thumbs up from Brandon. “OK don’t be late or you know what happens.” I mumble a ‘bye’ before hanging up. Brandon looks at me. “All set?” I nod. “Let’s go before he realizes that we’re not coming.”

We finally found a cab and I gave him the address to the house. When we arrived Brandon gave the money to the driver and he took off. I look at the building in front of me. I pull the keys out of my bag and walk up to the front door. I open the door and step in. “Well this is it” I say looking around the apartment. It’s a small place but it will be good for a few months until we have enough money to buy a bigger house. Brandon walked in behind me and glances around. “Hmm, we can decorate it a little but this will do.” he said.

# April Fools

by Duygu Cakmur



April Fools

Duygu Çakmur



## April Fools

He laughed. After she brilliantly performed her “why I have to quit medicine school and start a career as a writer” speech - which she had practiced a hundred times before- in front of him, her father’s reply was a short, dry laugh.

“Wasn’t that a little bit early? April Fools is two weeks away.” he stated and smirked at the lousy pun he made before he reached for his newspaper, carelessly.

“Not exactly the reaction I expected.” April thought and waited for a minute to choose the perfect words to say “Dad, this is not a joke. I want to be a writer.”

A moment later, her words echoed in the huge living room before the only thing left was an ominous silence. She realized that no word that explained this situation could be perfect for his father. She watched tentatively as his mocking expression from the moment before contorted into Bruce Banner’s last expression before he turned into The Incredible Hulk.

Her father decided that she wasn’t allowed to leave after an hour long monologue.

“How are you doing April?” Bethany asked carefully while she was watching April’s fingers dance on the keyboard. Her own fingers always seemed so useless and weak whenever she watched April’s moving on the keyboard or writing.

Bethany’s question may have seemed insignificant to most people but it made April stop writing which was a really rare occasion.

Bethany tried to hide her surprise as April replied, “I don’t know anymore Beth.”

Her expression reflected her pain so well, Bethany couldn’t continue looking her in the eyes.

“I don’t even think about myself anymore, I think about my book, I think ‘What will happen once I finish it?’ After that, I think about my decision, maybe I was so determined to leave and write this book, I could not see the obviously right thing to do. What if my parents were right, Beth? What if I be just as miserable as I was before instead of being happy?” she said and took a deep breath in. Her vision was blurry because of the tears waiting to fall. She didn’t let them.

It was true that Bethany always had had her doubts and worries about April

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leaving and the best thing she was able to do was try to hide them behind the curtain that was her mind although she knew that curtain had become transparent to April after two decades spent together. But in that very moment, as she hugged her best friend in the whole world, she saw how unfair she was being, how she had backed off when April needed her the most. She felt tears rolling down her face and eventually, it was hard to tell who was crying harder.

“What?” Bethany yelled. “What do you mean you are dropping out?” she continued then she stood up and started walking back and forth around the room, she felt like she couldn’t breathe.

“Beth, calm down please. You know I don’t enjoy living this life, you know I can’t live like this forever. Don’t act so shocked!” April tried to defend herself and calm Bethany down. For a brief moment, she thought she succeeded.

Her slight hope got torn into pieces when Bethany shouted even louder at her, saying how reckless, how careless, how irresponsible of a person she was. Didn’t she ever think of her parents, Bethany and all of the other people she would be leav-

ing? Couldn’t she see she was acting incredibly childish? How dare she upset everyone that loved her for a stupid whim of hers?

April listened to her solemnly without saying a thing, she just stood there, tried to ignore all the cruel things Bethany spat at her face and waited for her to calm down.

Bethany was crying when she finished talking, she murmured “April are you leaving me too?” as April pulled her into a hug. April shook her head, “Never.”

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It was late at night, sleep wouldn’t join April as she rolled on her bed as usual. Nightmares kept haunting her, her dad’s voice constantly echoed in her head saying “You’ll never be successful, you’ll come crawling back.” April promised herself again and again until she fell asleep: “Never. I’ll never go back to that hell hole.”

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A normal day had been waking up, washing her face, getting dressed and combing her hair before she had breakfast for April since she was very little. Now, it was just writing. She didn’t bother to do any of the things she did before except

waking up. Her sense of hygiene had been dead for about a month, she had short showers once in three or four days now instead of her daily showering routine, she couldn't remember the last time she bothered to eat breakfast but it was probably the day before she left home and her body was craving the caring it used to get but she ignored it every time.

Today was no exception, she opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling for a minute or two before jumping out of the bed to get to work. She remembered all the days she woke up with huge reluctance towards the idea of getting out of bed, now she knew that it was not because of her "laziness" as many suggested but in fact her deep loath for everything she had to do that day. These moments of remembrance were the only ones she was completely grateful for her decision to leave her old life.

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"Are you ready honey?" April's mother Eleanor shouted from the living room, she was wearing an elegant black dress and a pearl necklace with high heels. She had always had a classy-without-even-trying look. Now she had an expression of pride and excitement on her slightly wrin-

kled face, although she could never be as proud and excited as her husband.

"Give girls a break El." said her husband, he put his right arm on her shoulders in a comforting way. He had known her for over thirty years and definitely well enough to understand and even feel her sincere excitement for their little girl. He reached for her hand with his other hand and squeezed it tightly. They gave each other a look of understanding and started to think about the times April was just a little girl with doe eyes, wanting to be held in their arms.

Soon, they heard a noise coming from the stairs. They knew they had heard April's voice but neither of them quite understood what she was saying. When they saw April and Bethany in their dresses they had picked out three months earlier, girls were both dead quiet with frustrated expressions.

They couldn't understand why, how could they? As far as they were concerned, Bethany and April never got in big fights but just "arguments". Eleanor gave her husband a curious look and received one right back.

"Are you okay, sweetheart?" said David carefully, he knew how easy it was

to get April mad again after a previous moment of anger. Her forest green eyes had darkened with annoyance but she nodded.

“Let’s go.” she commanded after a moment of awkward, uncomfortable silence between the four people. Everyone nodded but all of them were lost in their thoughts.

If people were meant to speak every single word they think, three of them would hear Eleanor say “She probably had trouble getting in that dress of hers. I knew she shouldn’t have bought it three months beforehand.” and her smirk would make sense while her husband would be heard saying “I should talk with April, her behaviour has been very odd lately. I hope she’s not in her rebellious mood again.” and seen furrowing his eyebrows.

Bethany would say “I can’t believe she said all those things, doesn’t she know what my family is like? Doesn’t she know what her family is like? Has she gone mad to think we could actually do such thing?” while trying to hold back her tears.

April’s voice would echo as she’d state “She won’t. We could but she is too much of a coward to do so. I should do it by myself. I should, shouldn’t I?” and her

eyebrows would be furrowed just like her father’s.

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“You should stop coming here once every two days Beth, you will either get caught and killed or fail every single class you have and get killed. I will be fine, believe me.” April complained before she took another bite of her chicken.

Bethany rolled her eyes, “Do I look like I care?”

April gave her a worried look, she felt guilty now. She didn’t regret trying to get Bethany to run away too because she knew she would be much happier but she certainly should have thought twice before telling her where she would live and saying “she could come visit whenever she wanted”

“I really should have known better.” April thought while biting her chicken again. They ate the meals Bethany had brought in complete silence, they were both too busy thinking to talk.

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“I don’t want to study medicine Beth, I want to write. I don’t want to be gloomy, wealthy doctor. I want to enjoy my life and do whatever will make me genuinely happy.” April said, her beautiful graduation dress was about to be stained with tears.

Bethany shook her head side to side in disagreement nervously. “We can’t do that April. How are you planning on living without your parents supporting you?” she yelled.

“You don’t think I did not consider that, do you?” April yelled back at her, being underestimated was her biggest pet peeve. “I have saved some money and we have a whole summer we can spend saving money ahead of us before we have to take any action.”

“No, no, no, no.” answered Bethany and sat on April’s bed. “No, no, no, no.” She was feeling like she couldn’t say anything else.

April panicked, seeing her friend like that was frightening. “Beth, please hear me out. Please. We can do this, do you hear me? We can do this if we are together.” she said and tried to hold her hand.

Bethany stood up and started yelling once again, “No, no, no, no!”

A moment later, she was basically just screaming. April shut her mouth with her hand and tried to relax her. She now understood Beth’s panic attacks had come back from dead, she could feel regret boiling in her blood. She would rather go through a zombie apocalypse than witnessing and even worse, causing another one of Bethany’s panic attacks.

“It’s over, it’s over, you are okay, we will go and study medicine, okay? You don’t have to be scared, your parents will be very proud of you.” April comforted her, she couldn’t help but to think “Neither of us will ever be sincerely happy though.”

Beth nodded, she was still shaking. “Are you ready to go downstairs?” April asked after a moment. Beth nodded again, her shaking was gone now but her face was full of frustration, disappointment and disbelief.

April remembered Bethany confessing how much she hated panic attacks when they were nine and she experienced attacks regularly, she had said that it was because they made her feel weak.

She made a move towards Beth, maybe she was going to hold her hand maybe she was going to hug her. Whatever she was going to do, Beth didn't let her. She backed a little bit and said "Leave me alone, give me some time April." before leaving the room.

April ran after and caught up with her. "I get that you're angry and shocked and you have all the rights to be all of those right now but you can not act like this in front of them. If they learn, there is no going back, okay?" she said quickly.

Beth ignored her. "Does she really think I'm that stupid?" She got even angrier.

"Okay?" April yelled again, she was being completely selfish. Bethany nodded aggressively before quickly going downstairs.

April sighed and shook her head side by side, "God help me."

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"She will come crawling back, you'll see." David said but he was not as sure anymore. Eleanor's tiny hand was between his two large ones, he squeezed it in a passionate but soft way.

"I will get her back to you." he promised before leaning in kissing her forehead.

He couldn't believe how much his life had changed in two short months. His daughter had left them for some stupid dream of hers, didn't she have any manners? How could she do such a selfish thing to them, who never wanted anything but her well-being?

And as if it was not enough, his dear wife's constant exhaustion and loss of appetite had been diagnosed as pancreatic cancer symptoms. She was not even conscious anymore, there was very little hope for her now.

He was not aware of crying before he felt tears on his cheeks. He quickly got himself together, he wasn't the type of boss that would cry in front of his workers.

April leaving was one thing --he was sure she would come back once she understood the difficulty of living without her parents providing her. But Eleanor could be gone forever.

"Sir?" he heard one of his employees say. What was his name again? Tom? Tim? Jim?

"Yes..?" he asked, pausing on purpose for him to introduce himself once again. He had become very forgetful lately.

“Aiden, sir. You wanted me to track down your daughter?” he reminded him, his tone was nothing but patient.

“Oh, yeah, yeah I remember.” David said, he was full of hope now. “Did you find her?”

Aiden nodded, it was clear that he was very proud of himself. “We have her exact address now.”

David smiled and looked at his lovely wife, “Everything will be alright honey, don’t you worry.”

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April packed steadily, she knew she didn’t have even the littlest time to waste. Her hands were moving almost automatically, putting whatever comes to her hands to her suitcase.

Five minutes later, she had a suitcase full of random pieces of clothing and three letters which all had tear stains on. Her only source of light was the moon, she could not risk being seen.

She was walking barefoot, trying to make as little noise as possible. She went towards her father’s big, locked safe. She knew this was the only day she could possibly take anything from there.

Her plan actually was staying here until the summer was over to save enough money before running away but a life changing incident had happened earlier that day.

While April and her father were playing chess in the living room, Paul had come in with a worried look on his face. “My brother had an accident,” he had said. “His life's in danger. I have to go see him, sir. Maybe for the last time...”

Mr. Moore hadn’t hesitated for a second before saying “I’m so sorry Paul. What are you waiting for? Go and bring us some good news with you when you come back!” after seeing the tears falling down his cheeks.

Paul had run out of the room after nodding and agreeing, “Yes, sir.”

There had been moment of silence between the father and daughter after he left, they were both staring thoughtfully at the chessboard.

“I hope he’ll be okay.” April had finally said, everyone loved Paul. He was the cheerful guard of Mr. Moore’s safe.

“I really do hope so, too.” Mr. Moore had agreed. Neither of them made an effort to

continue the game. Mr. Moore was now worrying about the safe and who would guard it while his own daughter was feeling guilty and disappointed at herself because she had known that if it meant leaving that house where her dreams and hopes suffocated a good four months earlier, she wouldn't be able to control herself.

She had known, she would be opening that safe and taking all the money she could with her while she was leaving without hesitation.

And on that April night, that was exactly what she did. The only witness was the moon.

---

"How is the book going?" Bethany asked and watched as April's anxious looking face brightened up a little bit.

"It's going really well. I think I'll be done by a week or so." April said proudly. Both of them were glad to see that all this misery was paying off.

Bethany smiled, "I'm incredibly happy for you April. But..." She couldn't complete her sentence.

April frowned, "But what?"

Bethany avoided answering.

"What's the matter Beth, do you have something to tell me?"

Bethany thought about all of the crazy things happening back at home before sighing with guilt, she knew she was not the one to tell her.

"I'm okay. The matter is... What will you do after finishing this book April? I know you are caught up in the moment or something right now and I know that you only want to complete this novel but then what?" She finally answered.

April was startled by all the questions she had no answers for. The truth was scary, she had never planned what would happen after writing.

All she truly cared about was the writing part and now she realized for the first time that it was not enough.

She felt dizzy, what would she do? Was she going to try to get it published? She knew, if she were to dare going to a publisher, her father would find her in a heartbeat.

Now she could hear Beth's regretful voice by her side, "It's okay, I was just being silly



April, I do that sometimes!” she was saying. It was not believable.

April closed her eyes.

---

“How did you say she bought that house?” Mr. Moore asked Aiden, he had one hand on his forehead and with the other one, he was holding on to the chair.

“She used the money she stole from your safe, sir.” Aiden said, he was worried about the middle-aged man. He had been too late to notice that this was too much for Mr. Moore to take. “Maybe we should continue tomorrow, sir.”

David looked at him with burning eyes, couldn't he see? The sooner this ended, the sooner his daughter would be home.

“Continue please, Aiden. You said our men had discovered something while watching her, right?” His words were kind but his voice was not. Aiden nodded and continued.

---

Bethany woke up to the sound of her phone ringing. She was still sleepy when she answered the phone, “Hello?” she said.

The voice, however, was everything but sleepy. “Beth?” it said. “It's me April.”

“April!?” Bethany yelled, then lowered her voice in panic. “What-- How-- Why are you calling me from an unknown number?”

“Calm down. There is a letter by your front door. Read it and just be at the address I wrote, tomorrow at 12 PM sharp. Thank you, love you.” and she hung up.

Bethany stared at her phone briefly before running to the front door, finding the letter and running back to her bedroom. She read the letter faster than anything she had ever read.

“Oh boy, April, what have you done?” she sighed before tearing the letter into pieces until every letter was illegible.

She woke up feeling more anxious than ever, her heart was beating so loudly that it made her even more anxious about being caught.

After making a basic excuse to go out - “I have to go shopping.” - she hurried out and started driving. She soon realised that the addressed place was literally in the middle of nowhere.

After two hours of driving, she found the little cottage-like place she was supposed

to meet April with. She got out of the car quickly and rushed to cottage's door. Her knocking was more like punching and she could feel her hands hurt.

"Calm down Beth, I'm coming!" April yelled, she had just got out of bed. She opened the door with sleepy moves.

"Calm down?! CALM DOWN?!" Beth shouted, April had never seen her this angry before. Her anger was so palpable that April did not dare to speak.

"You spontaneously decide to run away in the middle of the night without any warning whatsoever and I HAVE TO CALM DOWN!?" April could sense one of the infamous panic attacks coming.

"You are right, I should have warned you but I was not able to. You know my dad's big safe and its guard, right?" April asked.

Beth nodded, "Paul?"

"Exactly, him. Apparently his brother had an accident so he had to visit him and it was already evening and we were all at home so dad didn't bother to find another guard. It was the perfect opportunity Beth, I couldn't have risked it. Think of how much time I saved by doing this!" she

cried excitedly, waiting for her friend to share her enthusiasm.

Beth shook her head in disappointment. "April, do you need me for anything right now?" she asked in a nervous but solemn way.

"No, I thought I would while unpacking but I couldn't sleep so I had a lot of time to take care of that by myself. I had just fallen asleep when you came." April explained.

"Then if you don't mind, I will take off. I need time to think, I was not ready for this. I'll see you within a week. Okay?"

April nodded quietly, what could she say?

---

"So you've known where she was all along and didn't tell us? You just watched and laughed internally at us while we were all worrying for her and searching the tiniest clue that could lead us to her?!" Mr. Moore yelled, poor Beth was shaking.

"It's not like that, sir. She didn't want me to tell you, I couldn't betray her like that. You have to understand!" Bethany cried, she looked at each one of their faces and looked for a little sympathy or mercy. They were all wearing poker faces.

“You should have told us Bethany, there’s no excuse for that.” her father stated. He had mastered the art of not showing emotions so well.

“I’m so, so sorry. I--” She was interrupted by her cellphone ringing. She looked puzzled for a minute, who would call her at this time of the night?

“Answer it.” Mr. Moore commanded. “It may be April.”

Bethany nodded. April had never called her since the day she moved out, she hoped she didn’t pick this day to be her first.

It was an unknown caller, she answered the call hesitantly. “Yes?”

“Beth? It’s me April. I’ve finished the novel! Beth I have a book!” she cried excitedly, her voice was so loud that Beth knew Mr. Moore had understood it was April without even looking at him.

“That’s great, April!” she said, she was careful about sounding as enthusiastic as April. She didn’t want April to panic before she could understand their plan.

“I know, right?!” April exclaimed. “All I need is a title now.”

“I’m sure you’ll find one.” Beth said before realising the paper in front of her face. The sentence ‘Why don’t we go out and celebrate it tomorrow, we’ll be extra careful.’ was written on the paper.

While April was talking, Bethany gave Mr. Moore a “Are you serious?” look. He nodded and something about his nod was threatening.

She sighed before reading it, she knew disagreeing would not help her right now.

“Hey, I’ll tell you what. Let’s celebrate this over lunch tomorrow. I’ll take you out, how long have you been in?”

Naturally, April, being the smart person she is, was not convinced. “We’ll get caught, Beth. Don’t you understand how serious this is?”

“Too late to worry about that.” Beth thought but she said “We’ll be extra careful April, you need to relax a little.” instead.

Finally, April agreed. Now everyone was smiling except for Bethany. She was filled with guilt and frustration towards both herself and the three people whom she had respected so much until now. She

soon stormed out of the room, weeping like a little baby.

---

“She’ll come around.” said David after the crying girl. The other two, despite being her mother and father, nodded in a reckless way.

“How’s Eleanor doing David?” Mrs. Campbell asked carefully after a moment, she knew how sensitive David was about the subject.

“She’ll be alright. Everything will be alright.” David said, it sounded more like a threat than a wish. His tone was shouting “Disagree and you’re dead.” so the Campbells stayed quiet.

---

It had been three hours and although her crying had stopped minutes ago, Bethany’s eyes still were the red and watery proof of her tears.

She heard a knocking on the door, she had run to the closest empty room after she left her parents and Mr. Moore so she had no clue which room she was in. She hoped it wasn’t a maid’s bedroom, she really wasn’t in the mood for being kind. Yet, she wiped her eyes with her shirt just in case.

“Bethany?” It was Mr. Moore.

Bethany sighed. “I’m not in the mood for talking right now, come later.” she said coldly, her extra polite attitude April had always mocked was nowhere to be seen.

“You don’t have to talk, I’ll do the talking. You just listen.” Mr. Moore said in an even colder way. Bethany was feeling like she had ice rushing through her veins instead of blood.

She didn’t say anything, Mr. Moore nodded slowly and began talking: “We have a plan Bethany. It’ll bring April back home, don’t you want her back? By your side? Living a better life, eating better, dressing better, sleeping better?”

Bethany did not look at his face because she knew if she did, he could see the hope she was so ashamed of on her face but she asked, “What do you want from me?”

Mr. Moore smiled.

---

“Oh my God, Bethany! You scared me to death!” April yelled when she saw her friend standing at the edge of her bedroom door, looking like she had just discovered

that her father was actually a hundred year old ghost.

“Yeah, sorry about that. I didn’t want to distract you.” she said but she was the one looking distracted.

“No problem, are you okay?” April asked, she was a little worried now. Bethany looked extremely pale and sad. She soon noticed the bags under her eyes.

“I’m okay, what are you doing?” Bethany asked as she sat down on the couch next to April.

April hesitated briefly before answering, she wanted to ask what was wrong but she certainly didn’t look like she wanted to talk about it. “I’m still trying to come up with a title but I’ve got nothing.” she confessed a moment later.

“Oh, that’s bad.” Bethany said and April couldn’t help and thought she sounded an awful lot more like a robot than her actual self.

“Yeah, anyway, do you still want to go out?” April asked, Bethany froze. Did she really want to go out? Knowing what it meant, did she want her friend to go through all that?

---

“WHAT?!” Bethany yelled as soon as Mr. Moore stopped talking. “ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR FREAKING MIND?”

“You are overreacting, Bethany.” Mr. Moore stated calmly which made Bethany even angrier.

“You are crazy, mister. Definitely crazy!” She couldn’t stop yelling, how could he even think about doing something like that to her daughter?

“I am not crazy, I’m very reasonable unlike you.” Mr. Moore tried again, she needed this stubborn little girl to agree and help if he wanted the plan to work. “Think, Bethany. She’ll be miserable for a few days but after that, she’ll go back to being wealthier and happier than most people can even imagine. She doesn’t know what she’s doing right now, do you think she does? Being a writer? Do you really believe in that stupid dream of hers?”

He had made the word “writer” sound like the worst insult in the whole English language without even trying and Bethany felt offended for a reason. “What’s wrong with being a writer?” she asked and her voice sounded harsher than she expected.

“Nothing. Except the fact that she will be starving after she spends all the money she stole!” Mr. Moore hissed, he had reached his limit of patience. He was now feeling like he was just wasting time, talking with this stupid little girl who couldn’t reason.

“Look, Bethany.” he said, trying to sound much calmer than he is. “You don’t have to do anything extra. You’ll just make sure she leaves the house and we’ll take care of the rest.

Bethany let her guard down and nodded.

---

Aiden had been waiting behind the huge tree for two hours now. The tree was just outside the little cottage-like place April was living, he could even see the inside if he wanted but it would be risking being seen.

“Will they ever come out? This is getting more and more exhausting every second.” Paul whispered, he was sitting on one of the highest branches.

“Hush, I think they are coming out.” Aiden responded and he was right.

Soon two girls headed out, “April seems awfully worried but it is normal considering how much she is risking by going outside.” Aiden thought before calling his boss to let him know.

“When will we go in?” Paul asked, impatiently.

“In a couple minutes, just shut up.” Aiden commanded, he liked Paul but he was such a crybaby.

---

“I can’t believe my father would do that.” April said, shaking her head. “I can’t believe. When did he become so crazy?”

Bethany knew why he had become the crazy obsessive person he was but she didn’t have the guts to be the one that tells April about Eleanor’s condition. So she let April continue thinking out loud.

“Where is the turn you told me about?” Bethany asked, two minutes later. Their plan was as risky as Mr. Moore’s but they had no chance.

“There,” April said, pointing at the narrow path that was to their left. “We’ll be back in five minutes or so. Do you think they broke in already?”

“Probably but I’ll go a little slower just in case.” Bethany said and she sounded actually relaxed but she could feel her hands shaking.

“Okay.” April said and they went completely silent.

---

“Come on, come on, boss will be here in five minutes!” Aiden yelled to Paul.

“My feet is asleep from all that branch sitting you made me do.” Paul whined, he was a strong guy but he was not an ambitious go-getter like Aiden.

“Sounds like a personal problem!” Aiden shouted while pouring gasoline all over the place. “Just find a way to wake it up.”

Paul rolled his eyes at him before grabbing his own bottle of gasoline and start pouring.

---

David Moore was ready to go out, this was the day his daughter would finally get back home and he was amazingly pleased with just the idea of yelling at her all day long.

He heard Eleanor’s doctor calling for him just as he was about to leave. “Mr. Moore, sir?”

David didn’t really have the time to chat but he was too cheerful to be rude so he answered, “What’s the matter, Dr. Green? I’m about to leave, is there any chance we can talk later?”

Dr. Green gave him a painful smile. “I don’t think so, sir.”

David had started to panic, “What seems to be the problem, Doctor? Is it something serious?”

Dr. Green hesitated briefly before shaking her head, “I think you should sit down.”

“I don’t agree, just tell me what’s wrong.” David opposed stubbornly.

“Okay,” Doctor murmured. “As I had told you before, patients with pancreas cancer are supposed to have at least a year more before...”

David wasn't very pleased about where he was going with these. "Cut to the chase, please."

"But your wife's symptoms were noticed and diagnosed really late, as you already know." David nodded.

Dr. Green looked as if he was afraid of what would happen next and he announced it quickly like pulling off a band-aid: "We expect her to live at most another month and nothing more."

David sat down, devastated.

---

"Boss is going to be here in five minutes!" Paul mocked, impersonating Aiden as he was frowning at him.

A moment later, they heard a car's arrival that put an instant "I told you." grin at Aiden's face while he headed to the door.

But there was no need, because two girls were already standing right in front of them.

"Looking for someone, gentlemen?" April mocked, she had always used sarcasm as a defense mechanism.

"April? Bethany?" Paul stuttered, "But..."

"Surprise!" Bethany yelled and threw the vase next to her at Paul's head.

At the same time, April kicked Aiden in a very sensitive area and punched his head.

Their only advantage was the surprise effect since both men were as twice as big as they were combined but somehow, only five minutes later, they had both of them laying on the floor unconsciously.

Girls tied them up with a rope they had found before they left the house --a rope April didn't even know she had at the first place.

After half an hour of discussing what they should do next, they heard another car arriving. They both froze and looked at each other with confused expressions.

"Aiden?" Mr. Moore called outside of the house. "Why the hell aren't you two idiots done yet?!"

Mr. Moore got even angrier when he didn't receive a response to his yelling and he quickly walked towards the small cottage-like place.



“Aiden? Paul? Anyone?!” he shouted, questioning his memory. Was it Tim and Park whom he sent?

“Hello dad, it’s me.” April said as the girls stepped out of the closet they had hidden in.

Neither of the three talked, April felt exactly the same horror inside of her which she had felt the day she announced she would be leaving and got completely ignored.

“April...” Her father mumbled and walked up to her to either give her a hug or to slap her in the face.

April backed off a few steps as an instant reaction. David stopped, surprised and disappointed. He stood there, not knowing what to do next.

“Dad, are you alright?” April asked, squeezing Bethany’s hand as if it would give both of them strength.

“I will be, after you start thinking logically and come back home.” David said harshly, gaining his control once again.

April shivered but she was just as stubborn as her father so her response was “Then you’ll never be alright, dad.”

Both father and the daughter had clenched jaws and looks on their face that could kill anybody if looks could kill one.

“Yes I will be, young lady, because you’re coming with me this instance!” he shouted after a moment and grabbed her by her arm.

“No!” she yelled and saved her arm from him. “I don’t care how stupid you think my dreams are, I’m going to make them come true and you can’t stop me.”

“Try me.” Mr. Moore hissed and pulled out a gun. A gun, he had once convinced April that he carried around only to protect her and her mother. She had never thought that he would be pointing it at her one day.

Bethany panicked and screamed the moment she faced the gun and hid behind April. April, however, was still standing still and looking directly at her father’s eyes.

“So you’ll kill me? Because that would get me back home?” she asked sarcastically.

“Alive or dead, sweetheart.” David stated, his eyes were sparkling with a frightening anger.

“What happened to you in two months, that you’ve become the kind of

man-- no, a monster that would consider burning her daughter's house down to make her come back "home" and if it doesn't work that would try killing his own daughter?!" April cried in anger and surprise.

David hesitated for a moment and then grinned, "Didn't your little helper tell you?" He pointed the gun at Bethany's horrified body.

"Tell me what?" April said bravely but she had started to feel like pushing Beth away. She had sensed that Bethany was hiding something long ago.

"Your poor mother got sick because of you, you little ungrateful girl! That's what made me go mad!" he shouted at her, bending the truth.

April could feel her blood freeze, "Is that true Beth?" she said, her voice shaking just like Beth's body.

"Yes." Beth said quietly, "I'm so sorry April. I wanted to tell you but it wasn't my place to tell--"

"It's okay, Beth." she lied, her voice was still shaky. "What's wrong with her?"

"Cancer." Her father said so recklessly that April wanted to punch him really hard on his face.

"So little April, are you coming home or should your little friend here taste one of my bullets?" Her father grinned.

"YOU HEARTLESS, CRUEL MONSTER!" April cried, she couldn't believe. In two short months, her mother had become a patient of a fatal disease and her father had gone completely crazy.

"This can't be real, this can't be real." she started to repeat, she was in some kind of hysteria.

"Believe it darling, or maybe you'd prefer blood stains as evidence?" Her father asked and before April ever got a chance to respond, he shot Bethany.

He shot her at the middle of her forehead.

No chance to live, no chance to survive, she slowly fell to the ground as April's scream echoed.

Her father's evil laughter filled the room as well as Bethany's blood.

All April could do was scream, scream, scream and scream.

---

April woke up screaming. She had sweat all over her body and her breath was heavy.

“April, what’s the matter?” Beth who was laying next to her said. “Are you okay?”

April looked at her with disbelief. “Beth? Beth! You are alive!” She shouted and hugged her tightly.

“Hey, slow there champion.” Bethany laughed. “Was it a bad dream?”

“It was a NIGHTMARE, Beth.” April cried, still hugging Bethany. “You were dead, mom was sick and dad was a complete maniac.”

“Maybe it’s because your mind is so stuck on that whole ‘I’m going to be a writer.’ thing, you’re not thinking straight.” Beth mocked. She wasn’t very supportive about that subject, so close to graduation, what was the matter with April?

“Maybe you’re right.” April said reluctantly. “Maybe I just need a getaway weekend?”

“THAT’s what I’m talking about!” Bethany yelled excitedly. “I’m going back to

sleep now because I need at least 8 hours of sleep to maintain my beauty.”

“You never sleep 8 hours.” April objected.

“I said ‘to maintain my beauty’.” Beth said and she turned her back to April after she got out of the hug. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.” April said but she knew she wouldn’t be able to sleep.

She started writing a ‘why I have to quit medicine school and start a career as a writer’ speech in her head, maybe that would make her lose interest.

# Smooth Storm

by Doga Aras



## Chapter 1

Blue's feet were starting to get numb. He struggled to keep his head on the surface of the water. His hands searched for Kyle but he was nowhere to be found.

"Kyle!, Kyle where are you?" Blue coughed out. The storm was getting worse, waves crashed on him, his lungs filled with salty water. His throat burned with every breath. Blue's arms no longer functioned. He felt himself getting pulled to the bottom of this big mystery. He closed his eyes as he floated to his death. Suddenly he felt something on his arm, pulling him back to life. He didn't want to be alive. The only thing he wanted was to see Kyle, he wanted to hug him and stare in his eyes.

"Let me go, please!" his words came out as bubbles as he swallowed more water. He couldn't feel anymore, he didn't want to feel without Kyle. He heard people shout above him. He was being dragged to a surface, he spat some of the water trying to breathe. His vision was blurry and his breathing was shallow. He slowly drifted to sleep shivering.

When he finally opened his eyes he had no clue about where he was. The only thing his eyes saw were clear blue skies with no one besides him.

"He's awake, better call the capt'n" an unfamiliar voice shouted besides him. He drifted off to sleep again as he heard loud footsteps walking on what sounded like a boat deck.

## Chapter 2

Blue was raised by a very strict family that restricted him from a lots of things. His family was highly religious and forced him to be so. Well, he never listened to them so they gave the sixteen year old boy a hard time. They were rarely home, attending all these religious ceremonies. He never felt like they loved him but Blue did not care, and if he did he was good at hiding it. Although his two different colored eyes, one blue and one green, were like a mirror to his emotions he had a wall built around him. His face was unique, just like a painting, his face could be called art. He had this messy but somehow attractive ginger hair. He was pretty tall, about 5'8. His skinny but strong body combined with tallness gave people the impression of a really tough boy that you shouldn't mess with. Only Kyle knew that he was actually a really sensitive and a caring boy inside this barrier. They have been friends with Kyle since they were kids. Blue could call

him the only person he felt comfortable with.

Blue usually hung out with Kyle in a breath-taking cave besides the beach. This cave was one that no one dared to enter but Kyle and him because most people thought it was filled with water. They discovered it when they were little and have been addicted to the chill air mixed with the sound of waves crashing on the stone walls since then. There was a little hole in the wall of the cave, just a little above the range of the waves that crashed on the wall. Sometimes water splashed inside from the hole, but it was never a big problem.

They recently discovered that early in the morning the sun shone on the waves, scattering the inside of the cave with an astonishing variety of colors. Blue liked to come here with Kyle the most when this illusion of colors appeared.

“The light that shines on you.. It makes all your perfections vi..visible” Blue would mumble to Kyle whenever they came here. Kyle just grinned every time and repeated the same line

“The sun makes my imperfections show, and that’s all I have anyways” Blue never argued with him but it irritated him how

Kyle had low self-esteem. Whenever he looked at Kyle, he saw a boy with perfect brown styled hair, unlike his. He had perfect hazel eyes that drilled through him. He was a bit shorter than him, about 5’7. When they stood together Kyle always stood on his toes and ended up falling. Kyle was mysterious like a murder case that was never solved. The victim was Blue, and the murderer was Kyle.

### Chapter 3

Blue is holding his breath, he is underwater grabbing on to some rocks to stay at the bottom. He can’t help diving in his biggest fear, drowning. He gets up every morning exactly at five, walks on the dark and lonely streets. He makes his way to the beach, takes his shirt off letting the frigid air hit him. The waves crash on to the shore hitting his feet and making adrenaline take over his body.

“This time is gonna be the one” he mumbles to himself trying to overcome his fear. He runs, he runs like it’s his last chance to fix everything.

He thinks about what will happen if Kyle knew what he was doing to himself. How he is torturing his mind every morning with the fear of leaving everyone behind. He takes a deep breath and sinks down the smooth and clear sea. As he holds his breath, his mind wanders off to Kyle again. He wonders what his biggest fear is. He has always been strong showing no weaknesses. Even if he was, Blue could never understand the mysterious gesture he had.

As his lungs start to struggle he kicks his feet on the sand, pushing himself to the surface. He has this feeling every time, this feeling that makes him think he'll never make it to the surface in time. That he'll lose Kyle without even saying goodbye. He fears a silent and unremarkable death yet he never gives up.

His strong arms splash through the water, carrying him to the surface. His breath is now steady as he sprints of the water. He gets goosebumps from the cold air touching his skin. The towel he brought is hanging on the entrance of the cave. He walks up to his towel wrapping it around his body. He enters the warm cave that's blocking off the wind until his shorts dry.

It was an ordinary day, Blue woke up at five again. He got up, stretching his body. He took a quick shower, brushed his teeth and wore his swim-shorts. He was extra careful today incase his parents were home. He opened the door quietly, walking down the street. Even if the day was pretty ordinary, Blue felt like something was different. It was a feeling he couldn't explain. Like he was being followed, like his life was about to change. He pushed away his thoughts quickly not wanting to think about it. He walked past Kyle's house like he always did. Kyle's parents were in a good condition economically so their house was always dainty and neat. His eye caught something he never saw the previous mornings. Kyle's light was on.

"Maybe he just forgot to turn it off" Blue said under his breath as he walked past the house. He heard a door open and turned back instantly, not finding anyone in sight.

"My mind must be playing games with me" he mumbled. He kept on walking calmly trying not to look back.

Blue walked on the old dock, aged wood cracking under him. He wanted to enjoy his beautiful surroundings before div-

ing in. He stared at the clear sky laying down on the dock. His feet touched the water, hanging from the side of the dock. He knew he had to get up and face the pure salty water soon but for a moment, he felt like nothing could make him give up, like nothing will hurt him. He rose to his feet, he ran fast on the dock diving into the cold water.

He spent no time swimming today, instead he just dove under the water holding his breath.

“Splash!” a rock hit the water near him falling on the sand. He pushed himself up without even thinking. He couldn’t believe what he saw. There he was, standing on the dock with his tidy hair and surprised face.

“K.. Kyle?” Blue stuttered.

## Chapter 5

Blue threw his arms up, climbing to the old dock from the water. He struggled to pull himself up, he thought Kyle would give him a hand but he just stared at him. Blue grabbed his towel that had been laying on the wood dock. He wrapped it around him to block the cold that was making him shiver.

They stared at each other for what felt like hours, an awkward silence took over. Finally Kyle spoke.

“I.. I thought you were afraid of water, What are you doing? I don’t wanna lose you.” he raised his voice halfway into the sentence. Blue just froze, not able to say anything. How was he going to explain this to him? He himself didn’t even know what he was doing early in the morning bringing himself closer to his death.

“Answer me Blue, stop staring at me.” Kyle now shouted getting closer to Blue. He was angry, how could Blue do this without his support. Kyle would have helped Blue through this but Blue choose to dig his grave for himself all alone in the cold water.



Blue still couldn't talk. He felt like someone glued his lips together making him unable to even open his mouth. Blue could see how angry Kyle was and he was getting worried. Kyle was never like this, this was the only time he was actually showing anger. This was the only time Blue felt like the murderer, and Kyle his victim. He was killing him with his wrong decisions and burying him under this horrible rage with his fears. Blue knew he had some explaining to do because Kyle was getting angrier walking towards him. Blue finally opened his mouth

"Sorry-" he mumbled unable to finish his sentence.

Blue was suddenly out of breath. The last thing he remembered was Kyle's hands pushing on him forcefully. Was he in the water? He quickly tried to swim but all of his muscles were stuck. This is it he thought, the only thing I actually cared about is going to be my death. His thoughts and struggles to stay in the surface got interrupted with Kyle's arms carrying him out of the water. Kyle was apologizing like crazy but Blue couldn't care less. Kyle saved him and he knew it was a mistake. Blue knew he put Kyle in a hard situation, he knew that Kyle lost control of his body that was full of rage and disappoint-

ment. He let Kyle drag him off in the cave. He couldn't feel the towel around him anymore. It probably fell in the water but he couldn't remember clearly. All he knew was how his body shook with fear.

## Chapter 6

"Are you feeling better?" Kyle asked sitting besides Blue. His anger was gone and it was replaced with worry. Blue scanned the room he was in. He recognized this room, he was in Kyle's bedroom. Kyle must have carried him here not wanting to leave him in the cold. He decided to answer Kyle letting him know that he was feeling well.

"I'm okay,... thanks for saving me back there, I know I have a lot to explain and I-" Blue talked fast. Kyle put his hand on Blue's mouth keeping him from talking.

"We both messed up man, but from now on we wake up together and swim. Understood?" Kyle said in a calm voice. Blue nodded, he didn't want to get him inside the mess he created but Kyle looked serious about it.

When Blue got out of the bed, Kyle gave him some of his clothes and they went out to eat. They spent the day together just talking about stuff like they always did. They acted like nothing happened. Blue felt they were even more comfortable with each other hiding no secrets. After they ate they went to their cave as always sitting together. Blue was drawing on an old sketchbook and Kyle was mumbling some song Blue has never heard before. They were closer than they have ever been and they realized how much they meant to each other after this little fight. You know what they say, you don't know how much someone means to you until you let them go.

It was almost midnight when Blue and Kyle parted ways only to meet at five in the morning. They set their alarms for the morning. Both of them couldn't sleep and they texted until one of them fell asleep.

## Chapter 7

“BEEP BEEEEEP BEEP BEEEEEP” Blue's alarm went off. It was almost five. He was really nervous today because he didn't know what to expect. Kyle was feeling just like Blue did. Nervous and worried. They both knew this was going to be hard but they had each other.

Blue got dressed nicer than he usually did and made his way to the beach. When he walked past Kyle's house he thought of ringing the bell but he remembered it was early in the morning and a doorbell could wake everyone up in the house.

“He’s probably there already” blue mumbled and kept walking. Kyle was always in time and Blue was late to everything.

As Blue made his way to the beach Kyle sat on the cold wood. The weather was kind of cloudy and windy. Kyle yawned and layed down on the dock. How did Blue get up so early every day and where was he anyways. He was late, like always. Kyle didn’t really mind him being late because he didn’t want to go in the water. He knew Blue would try everything to get out of this. Kyle knew Blue was sensitive inside, he knew that Blue could never hurt him. Blue was probably going to come here to pick him up without even going in the water.

## Chapter 8

“Kyle! Hey, ready to swim?” Blue shouted as he climbed on the dock. Kyle got up to hug Blue and they caught up in each others life for some time before removing their shirts to dive in the water. Blue wasn’t sure how he would do this with Kyle around. Will they both hold their breaths, or will they just swim? He decided to leave it to the flow and do whatever Kyle is doing.

Blue watched Kyle from the top of the dock. As Kyle slowly dropped himself on the water from the edge Blue saw some clouds in the distance. He wasn’t really paying attention so he decided to ignore the big clouds coming their way and jumped in the water. The water was really cold, it was cold all the time, but not this cold. This time something was strange.

They shivered as they swam trying to get used to the water. After some time of swimming close to the shore they decided to go some further. As they swam across the smooth, deep and mysterious ocean they could never know what was coming their way.

## Chapter 9

Blue and Kyle swam until their feet couldn’t touch the ground. They were very far away from the shore now. They just let themselves go and laid on to the smooth surface of the ocean for what felt like hours. They would have stayed more if it didn’t start raining heavily.

“I.. I think we should turn back” Blue mumbled kind of freaking out to the sight of big waves coming their way. He turned to Kyle who nodded and started swimming to the shore quickly. Blue was having a hard time following him because of the continuous waves that crashed on him. The waves were so big and strong, they were stuck between them. The rain was now heavier and the wind blew on their exposed faces. They knew they were in a bad situation. Blue was really scared, would his fear become real? Would they drown in this smooth but scary storm? He couldn't even think anymore so he just ignored all these questions in his head. He realized he wasn't paying enough attention to Kyle. He wanted to shout his name but he just couldn't get himself to do it. He was nowhere to be seen, why wasn't Blue shouting his name? He wanted to, he really did. Blue needed to find Kyle. He didn't want to be alone in the storm. What if something happened to Kyle? What if...

## Chapter 10(BLUE'S POV)

This is how I ended up here. In this wood ship deck, laying on it reminded me of the old rotten dock back at the shore.

My clothes felt wet, and my stomach dropped every time the ship got hit by the big waves. Some people were around me, oxygen tubes and bandages in their hands. It didn't even matter, I felt cold, my body felt empty. Kyle wasn't rescued, he would have been here with me on the deck. I want to shout to the top of my lungs, It's my fault he died. It's my fault that he no longer has that crooked smile and neat hair. I never got to say goodbye to him, I didn't even have anything to bury, nor anything to leave flowers to. The only thing I had of him was our memories. They felt fake as they messed with my mind. I tried to remember, remember all of our moments from our childhood to the time he was taken away from me. It was painful remembering it all while everyone shouted at me with worry. I just ignored them and closed my eyes. I closed my eyes and wished for him to come back. What were his parents going to say, what about his other friends. What about me... What was I going to say. I knew it was my fault, my fear took my best friend from me.

No... it wasn't my fear after all. It was the storm that took him. The smooth ocean turned into a mess. My head hurt from thinking. I couldn't ignore all of the voices inside of my head nor the shouts of sailors around me.

I know what took him, now I know. It was “The Smooth Storm”. The innocent smoothness and the gray storm clouds. That what took the only thing I cared about away. This was what I was going to say. This was what happened. “The Smooth Storm” took the mysterious murder case away and dissolved it in the water. Piece by piece, mystery by mystery, perfection by perfection...

# 8

## Crime

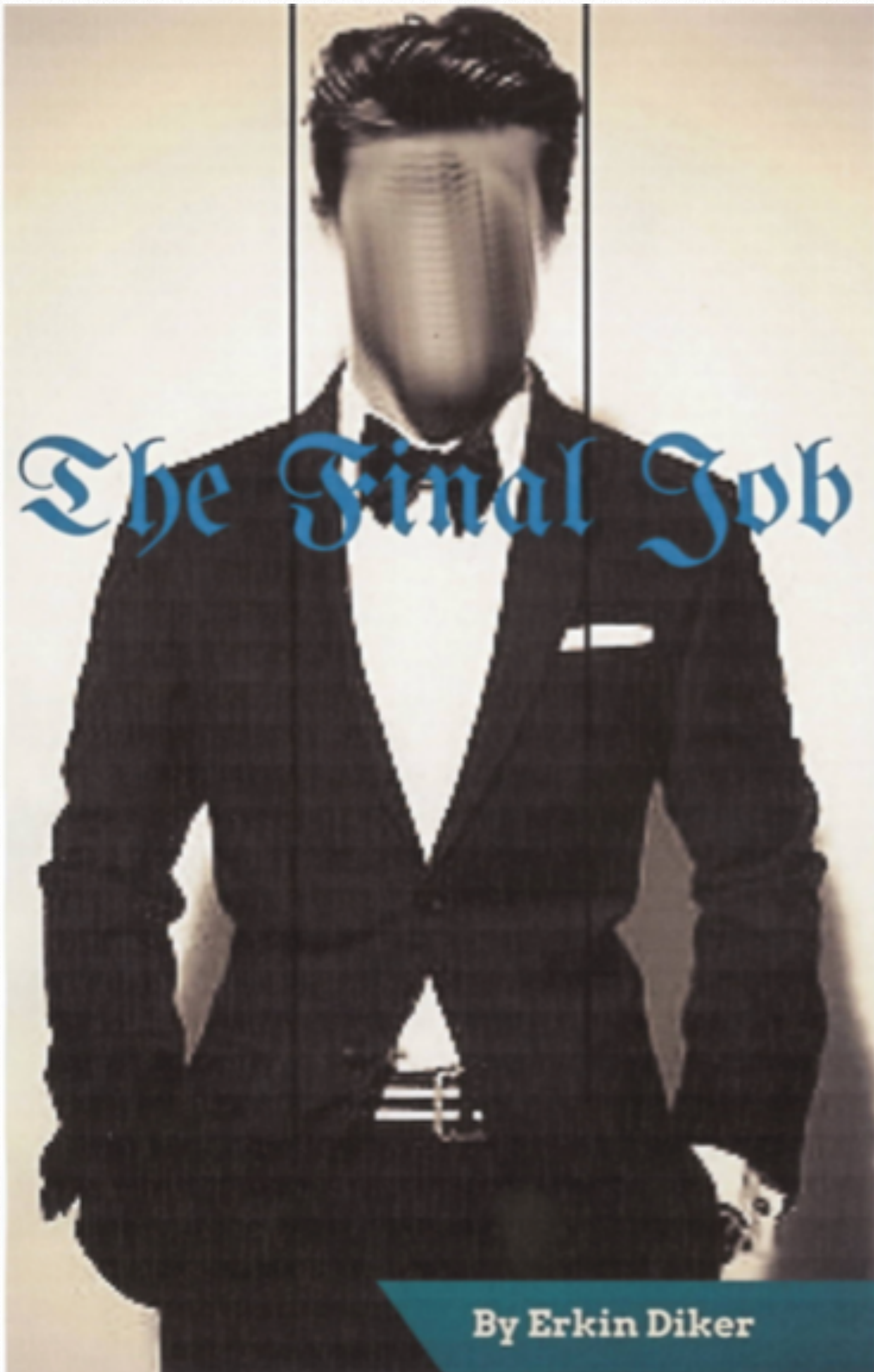
**“But from each crime are  
born bullets that will one  
day seek out in you where  
the heart lies.”**

*– Pablo Neruda*



# The Final Job

by Erkin Diker



It had been a rather warm day. A long time had passed since Wycombe had seen such a day where the weather would be so calm, neither hot or cold, dry or humid. Wycombe was just in the north of Manchester, England. This was exactly why the weather was, just as expected, rainy and cold very often. However this had been an usual day for the public as the meteorology had finally proven themselves right and brought back the warmth to the town. It was just in the perfect condition that all of the people had hoped it to be for a long time. Just the one to go outside when the sun was setting and have a walk along the steady flow of the river. That was exactly what Jim had done, he was enjoying the sweet breeze of the air going through him.

Jim was a 37 year old man living in one of the old countryside houses of Wycombe, far away from the city center. However, he was quite glad that he was living there, this way he could have more time to himself to stop doing something and relax for a while. He was a little bit slim, tall, with brown clean spiky hair and sapphire blue eyes which drew women's attention. He had become fairly attractive because of his appearance and after some time he seemed to actually like the feeling of the wonderful speciality given to him. He had

been living in Wycombe for some time now and had participated in lots of town events and contests. So people kept on thanking him for the interest he had been showing lately, while they could also get a chance to know him better. But did they know him well? All of the town thought he was an ordinary business man doing his job finely, making online meetings at home. However, this was not exactly the person he was, it was far beyond from it. He hadn't been doing any online meetings or something like that and even if he was it was certainly not the business type a normal person would think of. Jim had an extremely rough past doing some dirty jobs that could never be forgotten. Nonetheless, he had come here with a significant hope in him. Finally the time he struggled for had come. It was the time to run away from everything, he had done or was about to do, and try to live a peaceful life. This was the exact reason why he was in Wycombe. The countryside, the calm people, the sweet breeze of the air, these were some of the indicators of the most wanted peaceful life.

While walking along the river Jim fell into deep thoughts about what he was going to do today. In the evening there was a party at the town centre where there would be lots of people. This was the sort of



event that Jim liked. He was really outgoing and it seemed like an advantage to him, to meet new people. And of course there was a habit of him try new things out, so he thought “Why not?” However, he wanted to be super sure if there wasn't any events that was really important and didn't want to miss. Because of this he had now fallen very deep inside his brain searching one by one for his memories and as time passed by, he figured out that there was nothing that had extreme importance. At least as he could ever recall of. Now that he had finalized what he was going to do, all that was left was to either walk around for a little bit more or to sit on a bench in order to gain back the quickly flowing precious energy.

The door opened with a large clatter and let footsteps in. After a long but relaxing walk Jim had come home. All he had to do now was to wait until it was time to go out to the party. However, unlike some other people Jim didn't like waiting without doing anything so anxiously he looked around his room if there was anything unfinished that he could do. Despite searching for a while Jim unwillingly had to put up with doing nothing. He sighed in horror as if a nightmare had become true. Anyway he had to get over this. It was just a free time that could be spent with playing

games, sitting, sleeping and so on. He hadn't been asked to do an impossible mission after all. He finally decided to take some time to sleep and as he lied he slowly faded away.

It was 6 o'clock now. Time had passed so quickly that he, of all people, could not even understand. It had passed so quickly that he even realised that it was getting a little bit late on his actual program that had been carefully planned. He wanted to leave everything aside and question himself for the serious mistakes he had done to ruin his almighty plan. Anyway he quickly remembered that there was extremely limited time if he didn't act as quick. In a huge grasp he took all his clothes and put them on. After that he rushed out of the door in a hurry and went for his car. Jim was now driving his car however, he did not want to rush in traffic since it caused problems for him that he did not want to state. Also it was easier for him to review his plan for the day this way. The plan for the day went on like this:

08:00-09:00 - Wake up and have breakfast

09:00-11:00 - Do some housework

11:00-14:00 - A trip outside, maybe a walk if the weather is good.

14:00-17:00 - Free time.

17:00-18:00 - Preparation for the evening.

18:00-19:00 - Have a quick meal outside.

19:00-20:00 - Finish the meal, get some fresh to relax, go to the party place.

20:00-23:00 - Let the party begin!

23:00-24:00 - Get back home after the tiring party.

This was the perfect, in his point of view, plan he had made. Well at least it was what was leftover from his brain. He had certainly got that preparation part wrong as he had slept for most of it. He tried to convince himself that it was not a major fault by saying "Never mind". He had never got the preparation times right anyway. Eventually he arrived to the town centre. Now the only thing he had to do before the party was have a meal in case he would get hungry throughout the long three hour program.

After a long wait, the party began. He entered the door to realize that some peo-

ple had been waiting for him to come. They were the same age group of him. Still he could not figure out who they were at first look. However, he recognized the faces when he was steadily walking to them. They were his friends from Wycombe. It was a surprise as he did not expect to see them here, in this party. There was three of them and their names were Jack, John, James.

They had similar appearances to Jim, all of them had clean spiky hair, slim body and quite tall. On the other hand none could match the magnificent glow on Jim's eyes. "Surprise!" Jack exclaimed in full of joy. "I bet you didn't expect us here." He went on with a calm but exciting voice. "Then my friend, you have won the bet!" Jim chuckled. After a long laugh James couldn't wait more and asked, "So, what do you plan to do in the party? Surely you are going to have some fun, not just stand like you didn't even want to come." Jim answered him in a polite, "Of course I'm going to have some fun, you just wait and see. But it's too early right now so let us talk a little bit before we are included in the action." It was a really satisfying reply as Jim had, once again, convinced his friends to listen to him. The friends wanting to chat altogether had played an important role in this but after all, he had convinced

them. They sat at a table and started talking about random things, mainly daily life. Jim asked all of them, "How is life going?" and received similar replies every time: "So far so good, how about you?" It wasn't really a surprise for him to receive the same answers as most of the people talked this way. The other line that came up very often was: "How is business going?" Especially John talked about jobs and seemed to be curious in how his friends jobs were going so far.

The quartet of friends had now talked for a quite long time. And this time Jim was surprised as he looked at the clock, just to realise that 1 hour had passed since they had started talking. So Jim decided it was the time that they joined the flock of people dancing together and maybe meet a few. Jim said "Guys I think it is time. Let's make the show begin for real." Jim's choice of words had a really great effect and instantly persuaded John, Jack, James to go and join the group. This was another thing Jim was particularly good at, he used the words in such a nice way that people thought they were about to go to war, not just join a group full of crazy dancing people. Unlike ten minutes ago everyone had now stepped onto the podium and began to go crazy. Jim was not quite good at dancing but it did not matter for

him as he had a different plan in mind. He hadn't come here just to dance until he would get so tired that he would want to go, he

come here to meet new people, make new friends. And this specific party would be the perfect event to do the job. Jim began to roam around freely, while trying to dance. To quite a surprise Jim seemed to find no one that he could chat a little bit with, but he still thought that time wasn't totally up to find someone.

People had now slowly begun to show how tired they had got over time, besides the party bit by bit was now separating as some were leaving. Jim was one of the people that was disappointed. He hadn't found anyone to meet or chat around with, he had just wandered about not doing much. Without wanting to stay there anymore, Jim acted anxiously to the exit door . But he remembered his friends, so he first checked them out. Unluckily they weren't there with the rest of the flock. They had left. "It is late anyway so it is rather normal for them to go." he said to himself as he tried to comfort his mind. Nonetheless, he still had a little suspicion about why they had left. He knew his friends well, they wouldn't leave until it was over. Anyway, what could have possi-

bly happened? It was just a different way his friends had behaved. He tried to throw the nervous suspicion out of his head. He quickly grabbed a bottle of water and drunk it without even stopping for breath. After that Jim headed towards his car, got in, started it and sped out of range.

Jim drove along the highway, while still being able to see some countryside views in the dark. He drove like a flash until he came to the junction. He turned to a different road and drove for a little bit more until he came to his cosy home. As he got out of the car, the effects of the weather had started to show itself once again. The bone-dry cold had once again risen to the occasion. Even though it had been quite calm and hot in the day it was a way more different consequence in the night. It didn't have to rain or even have clouds, the weather just needed to be cold to unleash its pain. Yes, you heard right! It was so cold that it actually was painful to the human skin.

Jim realised that he had become more tired than he had thought. His legs didn't want to walk anymore as they suffered in pain. He just wanted to turn the keys, go to the bed and sleep. Though as soon as he arrived to the front door he noticed a weirdness about the door. There was a

strange mark on the door handle as if someone had forced it strongly, to open the door. Jim now knew someone had broken into his house because the door wasn't locked. It looked as if the door had been opened professionally so Jim tried to open the door more carefully than usual. He tried to be very careful because if he was not the door would cause a huge creek noise. This would put Jim into danger if there actually was someone inside. As the door opened a lot of tension began to build into Jim. His adrenaline was rising but this couldn't be a major problem to him. He was well trained though, which made him not burst under pressure. At this time of the day, which was night, the house was so dark that none could be seen. Jim had other ideas though, he didn't want to be under the utter darkness, he wanted to see what was going on.

There was a cupboard right next to the door where he kept equipment that could be useful like special night vision goggles. There were other things he kept as well such as: a precious knife, a taser, a helmet... He took these with him and went to observe the place. It could be said that Jim's house was vast so it wasn't an easy job for someone to differentiate the areas of it. But Jim knew well and was heading towards his bedroom when he couldn't

find anything in the other rooms. The door of the bedroom was ninety degrees open and this was a sign to if there was a person inside. Jim decided to try something sudden to sneak inside. Otherwise in probably all ways he would fail and if the person inside had a weapon... No, he did not want to think of this right now.

Jim took out his taser and readied it in his hand. After this he crawled on the floor. With a sudden launch from the ground Jim reached the other side of the door. There was a gunshot and a taser noise echoing in the calm room. It couldn't be said that it was a shocking view because there wasn't a view that could be seen with a bare eye anyway. Suddenly a body collapsed onto the floor leaving the room to silence. Luckily this body wasn't Jim's. Jim patiently stood up and went to the man. The man had a gun and a mask. He looked around to see if there were anything that needed to be examined. At that moment one specific thing caught Jim's eye. It was the weird logo on the man's gun. It was a curly object that specified something. He tried to think of what it signified but it just didn't come to him. Jim said to himself: "Whatever that logo is I am going to find out. Now let me reveal the secret behind the mask." Cautiously, Jim opened the mask. As if he was shocked at what he saw, he

instantly leaped back. It was John, his dear friend.

It all began to make sense now. Jim was a man who wanted to forget his past and it seemed that he managed to do so. But now, his memory was back. One of the groups in the past had tracked him down to eliminate him and the logo meant that group. Now he noticed that all of the time he was with John, James and Jack was for them to provide information about him. It was a trap right from the start. However, his past life had saved him. Jim knew exactly what to do in these situations. He was a professional, a professional killer. If he wasn't he would definitely have drop dead by now anyway.

But he still wanted to forget and this was exactly why. He wanted to forget all of the crimes he had committed, all those things he had done... Nevertheless, his past had haunted him again and he had nothing to do but to go with it. Now he was going to get ready for his final dirty job, ever. To eliminate the rest of the group.

To be continued...

