

**sps 7-8, the literary magazine of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades  
of Somerville, Massachusetts**

**presents**

**Healey**

**After Dark**

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**Inner Demons**

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**The Billie Lightwood Case**

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**Emmy**

**Alaa Boutkhourst**

**Love and Legacy**

**Avery Cole**

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**Mature language and content: parents be advised**

# Healey After Dark

**A special edition of *sps 7-8*, the literary magazine  
of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades of Somerville, Massachusetts  
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## **Teachers and advisers:**

**Chris Mitchell**, English language arts, Arthur D. Healey Elementary School

**Roy Gardner**, English language arts, East Somerville Community School

**Emma Daniels**, English language arts, Arthur D. Healey Elementary School

**Julie Hughes**, English language arts, East Somerville Community School

**Emily Alcott**, art, East Somerville Community School

**Alan Ball**, publisher, Happening Publications

## **Mature language and content: parents be advised.**

**submissions:** current 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students and those entering 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades in September are encouraged to submit your fiction, poetry, essays, critique, and other writing to *sps 7.8*. Email your work to [happeningmagazine@yahoo.com](mailto:happeningmagazine@yahoo.com). Scanned original artwork to be considered for illustration or covers may also be submitted.

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# The Junkyard

Chris Hopkin

## The Debt Man bites the dust

Barney stood outside the door in what the break room residents and Bitch-Boys called The Velvet Hall.

*'Cause of all the blood and velvet thrown 'round here am I right?* Barney thought.

Barney chuckled to himself, but he was dealing with no laughing matter. Barney was a large Italian man who never really did his hair, just left his ruffled brown hair out to the public, but he always wore a suit.

Barney first looked at his watch.

*September 7 12:02 1974*

They were late. Good.

The velvet hall was falling apart, if Barney had to be honest.

*Actually, no. Whether a room's falling apart or not is not an opinion in this case, it's a fact.*

The room was covered in some kind of woefully unattractive felt. It was a darkish shade of velvet that was peeling off most of the walls, revealing a level of cool grey concrete bricks making up the walls behind. Barney honestly didn't think that a house was legally allowed to be built like this, but the laws didn't apply to The Mafia. To be honest, Barney thought it more like the law moved around The Mafia. There was dark wood coming out from the concrete walls to connect the walls to the scuffed redwood paneled floor. Most of the floor was covered by a long red carpet with golden tassels making the lining.

Barney could remember this room. It seemed to be cemented in his mind and in that way it felt like home. He liked to pretend a lot of things were like home, since he never really had one. He owned a smaller apartment now. He moved every couple of years, too fast for his taste. But he felt comfortable in his apartment. He didn't care that much about the largeness of his home, he just had to feel like he deserved it. Barney's small conversation was interrupted by the clinking of somebody's shoes down the hall.

Barney had been standing outside Harry ("The Chair")'s door when Al and Ivan entered into the hall. Al was Harry's consigliere as Harry was head, and had been the founder of the family oh so long ago. Al came dressed for business, and always carried around this atmosphere of someone who knew what they were doing, and to whom your presence was like a mere nuisance in their larger plan. It's why no one trusted Al.

Meanwhile Ivan was different. He carried anger on his back, like Santa and a bag of toys. Ivan dressed in what seemed like a bare minimum, made you think that he was busy and couldn't scrape up the time to dress up for dealing with you. Your presence was still pointless, just in a different more like, *I don't feel like it*, way.

Ivan's suit was jet black. Al's was grey.

Al's shirt was tucked. Ivan's was not.

Barney observed the differences as the two turned the corner. Al walked in front with confident strides, looking straight ahead. His mind seemed somewhere else.

Barney was a little sad he couldn't see Al's hair. It was hiding under a neatly placed fedora.

*Jesus, how many pounds of hair gel you think that bad boy eats up!* Barney thought once more.

Meanwhile Ivan had nothing to hide. He left his bald head on display, but it didn't take away from his rugged handsomeness.

**SEXY SERIOUS! HA!** Barney liked to make jokes, whether to others or himself. He thought it helped leave what you did and what you do behind. *Bleach the mind.*

Ivan was a few inches taller than Al, and seemed preoccupied with the cuffs of his suit when the two walked in. Barney's job was just to let them in, and close the door, and stand there. He was there as a sort of intimidating authority.

Harry's office was lit up by a dim light emanating from the corner, Harry's favorite (and only) lamp. The rest came from an overhead lamp, with one dead fly trapped inside. Barney thought, and Al knew that none of this light was being paid for by them. The room had the same peeling walls, and a large cabinet with a mirror against the wall with the door to the left of it. The wall next to it had a window, now closed to keep the light rain out. That would end soon, at least that's what the weather man had said in the morning forecast. Barney always watched the news. Harry sat at his desk. That was about all the decorations in the room, except, of course, for the stressed Luigi Fetta squirming in his chair in the center of the room.

Harry was a strange old man. He seemed more like a machine to Barney. Harry didn't show his emotions unless he needed to, and he expected others not to show any around. He thought fear, happiness, they held you back. Harry also demanded allegiance, commitment. That's why Harry needed sacrifice.

Luigi "The Debt Man" Fetta was hard to find, like any other Mafia member, but his family had done a particularly good job hiding him. Al had been the one to get him. Before this Al and Harry knew only three

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### **Barney always watched the news. Harry sat at his desk.**

---

things about Fetta. Fetta was good at killing, Fetta never disposed of the body, and Fetta had OCD.

Turns out he knew a guy who knew a guy, and was able to find Fetta from a pharmacy, getting his under the counter drugs to hide his disorder. In The Mafia you can't have things holding you back. You need to be sharp as a tack. That's why Fetta needed his meds. Al was able to figure out that the pharmacist knew one of Fetta's many addresses. From there Al had access to the New York Housing Database and found Fetta's fake name, then tracked it down to Fetta's current location. They waited for what, nine days for the ambush? But they had him now and though Al was proud he found Lar's (the fat fuck who ran the Attoney family) best man, that was in the past. You couldn't bring ghosts into an interrogation.

Ivan walked forward when he came in the door while Al went left past the cabinets, turning like a comet around a planet, and pulled the tape off of Fetta's mouth as he walked past. Fetta jerked his head forward with the pulling of the tape and gasped for air. Al looked smug, and with a certain parental disappointment.

"What are you, a fucking mouth-breather?"

Fetta looked back up from the ground with quite a lot of effort to exacerbate a short weezy "Ha freakin' ha." His face was worn out and tired. They normally screamed at this point. But Fetta knew what he was doing, because in a place like this it's about dominance and control. Where the most dominant seems like the one in control, and the one who expresses control whether they have it or not asserts dominance. If you lose it in an interrogation, you lose control. Harry had gotten where he was now because he never freaked. *Never*. Without missing a beat, Al walked up to hit Fetta. His jaw snapped back as well as his head, now facing the ceiling.

"No chandelier? I expected better from being in the big guy's office." Fetta smiled, revealing some blood on his teeth and a gold tooth on the right side of his mouth. Al was ready to hit him again, but Harry interjected and took back the reins he had before the two walked in.

"So you know how the game's played." Harry held a cigar that he must have been smoking before, and he pushed it deep into the ashtray while keeping his gaze on Fetta. Fetta might not have been able to see it, but

he must have had to have been able to feel it.

*A nice play*, Al thought

"Good. Then let's skip the chit chat and get to the meat, if you know what I mean.

"We want information. You don't want to die," Harry continued. Ivan was still behind the chair and slammed the back of Fetta's head.

"Pay attention," Ivan muttered. Fetta looked at the ground. It was smart, would make others feel like he was thinking, and it would hide his face. Even showing your face was a danger, might show a little anger, a little fear, and sharks can smell blood from miles away. Harry had tried experimenting with masks, but it never worked, shows fear to your rival of being discovered. Masks were viewed as complete child's play today.

"You've killed sixty three, by our count." Harry read from the now pulled out files now open on his desk. Showed he didn't care, makes interrogated afraid they're losing control, and then they lose more than they already thought they lost, Al thought before Harry elaborated. "Twenty three were ours."

Ivan put a hand on Fetta's shoulder making Fetta lift his face up to look at Harry. Things were going fast, since fast things were at hand. Al still smugly leaned against Harry's desk, looking.

"You're good at what you do, Fetta. Real good," Harry said, looking up from the file the same time as Fetta finally looked at him directly.

*Fetta 0, Us 1*, Al thought.

"But there's one thing this file doesn't say. One I had to figure out. You care. Care

'bout what you do. It's not just business to you," Harry continued. Al walked forward and pulled the switchblade out of his suit pocket.

Ivan then grabbed Fetta's hair pulling him back to look at the ceiling again. Now it was Al's turn to talk.

"That was your mistake Debt Man. Business is business. Not life." Al switched out the blade. Fetta was serious, but mostly emotionless. They had him in a vulnerable position, who knew what face to put on here. But Al knew Fetta was dedicated to his work. He would come back, it was just at the moment he was thinking. "So you lose your business..." Al paused.

*"You lose your life."*

Fetta stayed for a second, stuck in the past. Then he laughed. He knew Al was hinting at some sort of oncoming doom. That made him laugh harder.

"Oh, oh... You love to bluff. If you--" Who knows what Fetta was going to say next. Barney had the feeling not even Fetta knew. Fetta looked surprised and was only able to look at the blade sticking out of his chest when Ivan let go of his head.

"Jesus Christ what t--" Fetta tried to scream but Al had already left, briskly striding out. Barney also left closing the door behind him leaving only Ivan, Harry, and the soon to be deceased. Ivan had stuck the syringe with tranquilizer far into Fetta's neck, and Harry simply watched. He would bleed to death soon enough.

"We don't like to hear the dead talk..." Harry whispered as if only talking to the musty air in the room. This time, it was Harry who smiled.

Ivan dragged Fetta's body out of the hallways and outside. The building was on a random highway in some pretty deep wood. Getting a body to a car would look suspicious. Well, in the light. The street light in front of the house was long gone. Al had helped Ivan pull him down the halls and out to the garage but didn't go farther than that. Claimed it was too cold out. Ivan called him a pussy and proceeded to leave the building. Outside were four cars. Outside of Ivan's the young Boomer smoked his cigarette.

The Boomer had been Ivan's boy, assistant, and in a way son for many years now. If Ivan was doing something, it was likely he was bringing The Boomer along. Ivan began to speak in Italian:

"You know you're not supposed to smoke in front of me, right?" The Boomer continued to look at the ground for a moment and then looked back at Ivan.

"Yes." He took another puff almost immediately after.

"Show some respect and anyway," Ivan dropped Fetta directly behind the car, and looked back at The Boomer, finishing his sentence, "cigarettes are for women." The Boomer laughed at Ivan's joke. "Now you gonna help me or what?" Ivan asked, but in a more demanding tone. The Boomer stood and threw the cigarette across the ground. He went around the car.

### **Ivan and The Boomer drive down memory lane**

Ivan sat with his "son" in the seat next to him. He had seen The Boomer—who didn't yet have that name— on the street.

No one noticed him, so Ivan thought it best he did. He was poor, and had dimples. He was either lost or abandoned. He spoke Italian and English, at least according to the scrawls on the cardboard sign set next to him. He had a little blood on his coat.

Ivan looked and saw potential, and so he crossed the street to head right for the boy, even with the cars going past. They would stop for him. He knew they would. People did notice Ivan, standing out as the only person wearing some sort of informal business attire in weather like this, but the boy was the one who really noticed him. Ivan stood for a second, pulling a cigar out from the inside of his coat and lighting it, not looking down at the person at his feet sitting in his shadow. The boy spoke first whimpering a soft “Signo--”

Cutting him off Ivan pulled the cigar out of his mouth, and began to speak in fluent Italian. It was one thing to speak first, but it was another to interrupt the one who spoke first.

“You speak English?” Ivan still didn’t look at the kid, only staring down the alley. The kid noticed how the sun glinted off his glasses. The kid followed the lead.

“Yes. Sir, what would you like from me?” He was now speaking English, but he seemed to have some trouble. Ivan had a feeling the kid didn’t know much English, but he was trying his best anyway. Seeming smarter puts on a brave face, but Ivan knew at the moment he was afraid. If recruitment was to go right the boy needed to be afraid. Ivan finally looked down again at the boy.

“Riches or wishes, your choice.” Ivan

was proud of the play on words he’d come up with. It wasn’t a very *Ivan thing* to do. “Come.” And Ivan began to leave. The boy paused, and then did as he was told.

He looked back at the kid who would become The Boomer and how he was different. He wore a black suit with a tie, a dark fedora, and a Hawaiian shirt. He had apparently been sent to America with his father, as his mom died due to crime connection all the way back when. Dad apparently had cancer. Figured out and decided it best his son went to the land of promise before he died. He only lasted a couple months, and he had blown most of his money on the tickets. “The Boomer” still loved his dad, and he forgave and idolized him. He made a sacrifice. If he had died back in Italy, well “The Boomer” wouldn’t have boomed at all.

For a while The Boomer didn’t have a name, but he soon got the name changed when he caused the boom. He found the man who killed his mother. He wouldn’t be where he was now if his mom hadn’t died. But she did. And the man who was responsible was coming to New York, and so the moment he stepped on American soil, he would remember. The Boomer would make him remember.

That man was going to hell and “The Boomer” was going to pay his debt to the devil. He watched them start up. He saw the individuals take residence in a nearly abandoned building. He saw them grow their roots secretly in the drug market, and it made the fire inside him burn brighter. Ivan advised him to stop, not to attack, told

him it was too dangerous for one man to take down a mob. Every time he got the same answer.

*Here we take justice in our hands, Ivan.*

Even Harry told him off. But “The Boomer” would not stop. They took the one he loved, so win or lose he knew he would come out dead or alive and proud. So Ivan thought it best he got help. Ivan was that help.

First he started picking people off, but he realized it was too dangerous, and it in short was what the then “Boomer” thought to be stupid. He needed to have presence. He would be heard and he would be feared. So he started blowing clubs and drug labs to shreds. He blew ’em up if he could and lit ’em on fire when he couldn’t. To watch someone’s life burn to shreds, The Boomer finally felt like he had power in this world. Then Jimmy “The Breaker” came. The long nights would come to an end. Harry’s Mafia told The Boomer to keep going. They were on the verge of, if not in, one of the inner Mafia’s biggest drug busts. When The Boomer blew one up, another two came along. Harry called it the hydra effect. But The Boomer was looking for something greater now. *True revenge.*

It took two and a half days to wire up the building. It took three point two seconds to blow up a collapse to the ground. It took nineteen minutes for the fire department to put out the flames. It took only seventeen for the tally of zero to be finally decided for the number of survivors.

Ivan and the Boomer were there for it *all.*

### **Ivan goes to the junkyard**

Ivan had always come here to dispose of the body. He hated doing it but there was a sort of accomplishment knowing there were still things in this world he could get rid of. Meanwhile, The Boomer was not a fan. Of course he never told Ivan “The Commie” that. He thought it always smelled like gas, and while that reminded Ivan of his first house in Little Italy, it reminded The Boomer that even dead bodies can smell better than this “Shit.” The Boomer grabbed the gun from the glove box as he left the car, but before he closed the door, Ivan told him in Italian to get the body. Ivan was trying to teach the kid Russian, but for now they would talk in Italian for serious things like this.

Fetta had been tied underneath the back seat with tape, and the knife had been removed from his chest. Blood dripped down to the floor beneath him. This was Ivan’s little thing. He loved going to the junkyard for the lack of police activity, and when it was unlikely the police were to search you, you went for convenience. Plus if your meat tries to make a move you’d see him.

The Boomer took the knife out of the glove box to take Fetta out. He moved to the back and began to cut. About a quarter of the way through the thick layers of tape, The Boomer was interrupted once more by three snapping sounds. The Boomer knew exactly what that meant. He dropped the knife and pulled himself out from under the back seat of the car.

“You must be kidding me I--” Ivan put his hand up to pause the Boomer who at

the moment was speaking English. Ivan responded in Italian. English was unprofessional.

“I’m not. Close the door.” Ivan was standing about a couple feet from the car and now turned around to look at the boy. “Check the door. I’ll look around the inner.” He was referring to the inside of these catacombs of various garbage. The Boomer looked to his left and saw a dead squirrel. He then turned around to go back the way they came from and murmured under his breath loud enough for Ivan to hear.

“Jesus.”

### *The Boomer*

The Boomer walked kicking a crushed empty Campbell's tomato soup can. *What kind of loser gets Campbell's and doesn't get chicken.* The Boomer didn't look up. He was bored and was sure that no one else was here that he didn't know about. He was also upset that he didn't bring a coat. *Too cold. Thought we'd be here for five minutes. Five minutes he said. Five! But look where we are now. It's Ivan's stupid "hunter senses." Tells him he's heard something. I didn't hear anything. But no, it's all Ivan, Ivan, IVAN. Jesu--.* The Boomer's thoughts were cut-off as the can he was kicking hit a stump. He looked up from the dirt path that he and Ivan had come in on. When they had come in, they didn't just close the gates, they locked them with a chain. It didn't look that suspicious. He looked up to see something he didn't expect to see. Trees. He had walked about a minute out of the junkyard without noticing.

*Which is impossible since the fence that divides the junkyard and here is locked. And closed.*

Then The Boomer looked back. He paused for a second. The gate was completely open like Heaven's golden gates, and the chain lay broken directly in front of his feet.

### *Fetta*

Fetta was meant to be dead. He was not. He was meant to bleed out. He woke up before that though. He was meant to be *sedated* until he bled out. Ivan had missed his blood stream.

Fetta was meant to be dead. He was not.

Fetta decided he should make some sort of decision, but he didn't know which one or what. He needed to think.

### *Ivan*

Ivan thought it was cold, but he didn't mind. He walked quickly cutting through the cold wind as he went around the paths he knew so well. The reason he didn't notice the cold was not fear, but stress. Things could only get worse from here and Ivan knew it.

He was careful around every corner, and looked backwards on occasion to make sure he wasn't being tailed. Ivan didn't walk with his gun out in the open. If it was the police and he was caught, he would be screwed. This was unlikely, as the highway was extremely long, and Ivan noticed no one behind them when they were driving. And he would have been able to notice if there was a car planted in the woods. Ivan

didn't feel like thinking about it for much longer, so he invested himself in walking faster and being more attentive than he already was. His hand was deep in his coat, and while it was sweating, it had a tight grip around the handle of the gun.

### *Fetta*

Fetta thought he should evaluate what was happening. Yeah, gain info. It made sense to him. He was meant to be dead and he was on drugs. That was what he already knew, but where was he now? He had never been abducted, but they were trained. But not for this. They were taught how to get out of minimal to no restraints and escape a trunk. I mean, normally you were meant to be dead, so why be restrained?

Well, he was meant to be dead. He was also restrained. Based on his view, Fetta figured he was somewhere in the back, but not in the trunk. He presumed under the seats. Fetta focused on his head. His head was tied to the bottom of the seat with a black piece of duct tape. He slammed his head down with all his might, unsticking his head from the seat, and almost knocked him out as he hit the ground that he thought should have been farther down. That's when Fetta saw opportunity. There was a good sized cut in the tape rolled across his lower body. It went from about ankle to knee, the cut. Then he saw a glint of something on the floor. It was familiar enough for him to see what it was in about a second. There was a beautiful knife right next to his feet. Fetta grinned.

### *The Boomer*

The Boomer knew the next move. He dug through his pockets looking for it. He knew Ivan had his. *Holy shit, what if they know he's in there! Shit!* The cuss words continued in his mind as he investigated his pockets. Then everything sort of stopped. All The Boomer could hear was the sound of crickets from the wood. He left the walkie talkie in the glovebox

### *You... FUCK!*

And so The Boomer began to run. Dirt flew behind him and he almost fell due to the fact control over his thoughts and emotions had flown out the window when the walkie talkie wasn't in his pocket.

*C'mon you're almost to the car. C'mon faster. FASTER!*

He finally turned the corner and ran to the passenger side door, pulling it with such vigor it reached the point in which it could no longer pull out. He slid in and began to tear apart the glove box and contents. Then he finally saw it far in back and pulling it out he knocked out nearly everything else left in the box. He was able to yell a short "Iv--" before he felt the back of the blade directly on his neck.

"Move over the emergency break and onto the driver side. You even make a move to take this thing out of park you can kiss your ass bye-bye." The Boomer could feel Fetta's breath surround his head, and felt as if he could feel the vibrations from his voice. The Boomer did as he was told.

### *Ivan*

Ivan was nearing the end of the trail and preparing for his comeback when his walkie

talkie blasted out the short lived *Iv*— from The Boomer. He stopped dead in his tracks. Boomer sounded stressed.

“Boomer!” Ivan let out a controlled yell. Then Ivan heard the first steps. He could have promised he saw a blur.

Whether it was the police or not, Ivan pulled the gun from his pocket. He was worried for his safety at the moment. Ivan kept his lips closed and walked with caution to follow the corner from where the blur had come. When he turned the corner, he saw footprints on the ground. He followed them before taking a left and catching the blur took another turn. Ivan walked faster now, and he sweated more. He was afraid, but he didn’t show it. He had lost track of where he was now.

“Boomer? Do you copy? Any info?” Whether it was the cold or the fear that Ivan hadn’t felt in a long time, Ivan’s voice shook and quivered as he spoke. The Boomer didn’t respond. Ivan continued and thought he was getting closer and closer. Then he took a wrong turn.

### *The Boomer and Fetta*

At the moment The Boomer had many things to think about. So did Fetta. The problem was that it was dark, and in the back he couldn’t see Fetta. It’s hard to see what someone’s thinking about when you can’t see their face. The Boomer was now in the front and running out of time. He first had to think about whether he could save Ivan. Then he needed to think about how much time he had. Then he needed to think of what to do with Fetta. Before he could answer any of the aforementioned

plans, he realized he had no time to answer any of them. Fetta commanded him to drive. He presumably meant in reverse. Instead The Boomer went full speed directly into the pile of garbage in front of them.

### *Ivan*

Ivan looked at his surroundings. Behind him, the path he was on seemed to go on forever. In front of him, a crossroads with a large mountainous pile of garbage between them. Ivan kicked a car tire. When he looked at the crossroads again that’s when he saw the first one. The man stood in formal attire in the crossroads split with arms outstretched. He wore a suit with a light shade of grey stretching across it, and had a black tie with a white undershirt. But one thing grabbed his attention.

It was the mask.

It was mostly taken up by that perfectly shaped open mouth smile. It looked like the ones the children made with the oranges. The small ovals of its eyes and its brimming smile were filled in blue, while the rest was a comforting yellow. Overall the mask made up a seemingly perfect circle, and from the angle he was looking at it, it blocked him from seeing any skin or hair. But there was one other thing.

On the top of his head the thing seemed to wear a comically-sized top hat that started thin and got thicker as it went up. It wasn’t that tall, it was just tall enough to be taken as odd.

Ivan pulled the trigger three times. Nothing happened. He could have promised he turned off the safety, but whether or not he did, the safety was on. And so pull-

ing back the hammer, preparing to shoot again, but right before that, he was hit on the head with a bone mallet.

### *The Boomer and Fetta*

Fetta went flying into the seat in front of him but not before trying to cut The Boomer, who jolted his head the opposite way and down, so the knife only cut part of the left side of his neck. The Boomer then hit the side window and was able to turn around and kick the incoming Fetta, still in midair. Fetta attempted to take another stab at the Boomer and being kicked went flying straight through the car's window, only leaving a bit more than half of him still lying in the car. The car was still stuck with the backend in the air and when it dropped Fetta was flung almost entirely inside the car. Taking another swing Fetta missed, still a little confused and overloaded with adrenaline. The Boomer pulled out his gun and shot at him, missing and hitting the window. But he didn't miss. Oh no, he didn't miss, he was just moving his plan forward. The Boomer then reached to lock the car doors with the gun still pointed at Fetta. Instinctively Fetta assumed he was wanted dead, like he was meant to be. He jumped through the now broken front window as he thought staying in that car would lead to a quick death. Then The Boomer pulled out and began to drive back toward the open gates, leaving Fetta lying on the trash pile. All The Boomer really needed was him out of the car. From there he could leave, and from there Fetta would bleed to death.

The Boomer finally attempted contact with Ivan after he was past the gate and en-

tering the deeper wooded area. All he got in turn was static.

### *Ivan*

Now losing his balance, Ivan looked enough to notice how the other figure was dressed. Same formal suit, different mask. The mask did have the same look, though, except it had triangles sprouting out the sides, giving off the essence of a sunflower. This time, the colors were inverted. In its hand it held a bone mallet. Ivan wasn't on the floor yet but he was falling, and the second hit was meant to make him fall, but when the mallet came back Ivan pulled it down causing the flower man to fall onto the floor. When Ivan looked back to the top hat man he was swinging down a long and large bone saw cutting down on Ivan's face and causing him to lose his new-found balance. On the ground the top hat man went in towards the heart with the saw, but Ivan proceeded to roll over, not in time to avoid the long cut across his stomach, but as he rolled over he swung his arms aiming for the top hat's face but instead got his caught as the top hat sent his foot directly into Ivan's shoulder blade, putting him in a locked position. The top hat then tried to swing the blade directly into Ivan's neck but Ivan brought up his hand and grabbed the saw and gestured it towards the top hat monster. When he was finally back on his wobbly feet he was sent directly into a trash pile by a bone mallet sending itself straight under his jaw.

Ivan leaned to his right before being hit in the back of the head. He lurched to the

side, then came around slinging a punch. And then getting hit in his face and falling right back. His vision was blurry, and he was about to fall to his knees before he looked back at his tormentors. Everything was blurry, but it seemed as if they no longer looked like the masked faces. One looked like Ivan's old boss. Ivan used to be part of the Russian mob but when he was captured by Harry and his men in the Italian mob they put him into service in condition that he do them a favor. He had to kill the consigliere of the Russian mob. Ivan knew they were abusing him. They would

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*You're not a nice guy, Ivan—  
time you face it.*

---

kill him after, and so his only real choice was to go higher. The only person above the right hand man was the big man himself. Overall Ivan did as he was told. But there was one other person there. The other boy, There was the true son. Ivan's real son. The one he had to let go of so many years ago. Ivan let go of one tear, and guilt built inside his heart.

### **Ivan goes back through the years**

*March 13 1:53 pm 1965*

They wouldn't make him a made-man. He was tired of it. They called him an associate, when he did the job of a soldier. They were full o' shit that's what. Ivan had been sitting in his car for a long time now. He faced an important choice. A choice of family. Harry had offered Ivan a new venture. But it would take sacrifice. Harry needed dedication if he were to make a non-100%

Italian a made man. He needed the innocent dead.

He was ready with his gun outside when the kid came out. The kid was his son. His real son. It was three minutes before when the choice had to be made. In one hand he held the ammo. In the other a handgun.

*They hold you back Ivan. You have to destroy them.*

That was what the gun said. It needed ammo. Harry always called the gun a poison, a parasite really. It used you. It manipulated. Without it you could be something, but when you picked it up you fucked yourself. But parasites aren't always unusable.

*But you can't Ivan. You have to control. Life isn't a game, and you're no God, Ivan.*

That voice was quieter. He couldn't tell whether it was the ammo or his head.

*Ivan, this is your life now. You pussy out, you'll regret it every day. You're not a nice guy Ivan, time you face it. There are demons but they make you better as long as you're the one in control.*

*CONTROL? You shoot him then you've lost it. Ivan, he's trying to walk you backwards. Ivan, you shoot the gun, you kill the boy, then the demons are you. You're no longer Ivan. You'd be so—*

*You're gonna listen to that SHIT? Ivan believe. You need to jump. They all did it, every one of them. That's why they're here now, the ones who call you chicken-shit. You're not Ivan. Be the Russian. Throw up the red flag and FUCK 'EM*

*Ivan. Be you. You have to be you or you're stuck here.* The voice paused and let the statement ring out before continuing.  
*Ivan do you not realize what you're doing?*

*Barney has no control because he loves nobody, and the farther he goes into desperation the farther he is from human. Al was called Al the half-heart remember. He was pitiful because the gun controlled him.*

*Bribed by blood Ivan. But not you. Not y--*

*FUCK THAT. Your life is here and now. Fucking live it, Ivan. You have to or you'll be here. No one but your pathetic family you have to drag along, and all the people who don't know your name. Say your name Ivan, say it. SAY IT!*

*Ivan, you don't want to be the person he tells you you want to be. You can go back. You may have trouble but your family will remember you as noble. They'll remember your name.*

*WHAT like your PATHETIC ASS FATHER? He did nothing for you.*

*He cared for you Ivan he ca--  
Give in to what you want kid. You can be who you want. The big guy.*

*No Ivan. Be the bigger person. You shoot you quit life. You follow orders and you'll be filled with darkness and grief. Life isn't just material. Nothing's better than the feeling of right. You know this isn't right, Ivan. You know.*

Police said it was devastating. The kid didn't seem to have a dad, just his grandma. The shot seemed to come from nowhere. No traces, no evidence. Perp would never be found. But Ivan knew. Ivan knew where the bullet came from. And that was his demon, his ghost. It would haunt him for the rest of his days.

Ivan thought about this. Reminiscenced. Then the figure hit him again. Ivan would

be dead soon. He hated to admit it, but it was true. He would be burning in hell. He wished... Wished he could go back. He had regrets, yes. He made so many mistakes. He listened to the wrong person, to the wrong voices. He searched for happiness, and seemed to kill it on the way. The faces looked at him, seemed to observe him. He didn't know who they were or where they came from. That made them God's men. People with a message. So he gave them one of his own. One that would not fix his problems, and one that would not save his life. But it was one that might be able to fix him.

"I'm sorry," Ivan talked slow.

"I'm... So.. So so sorry..."

And then he was gone.

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## Suicide

Suzana Amatya

*"No!" I remember screaming.*

*A red mark across my cheek. My face began to flush.*

*"You're a fucking disgrace to this family. You should have never been born," my father shouted with a scowl on his face.*

*He quickly grabbed a bottle of whiskey and threw it towards me. It missed me by an inch.*

*"Dad STOP!" I screeched.*

*I remember he snatched my hair and yanked it so hard a couple of strands of hair came out.*

*“What sin did I commit to end up with a daughter like you!” he murmured through his teeth.*

*He grabbed a bottle of whiskey and stumbled drunkenly up the stairs. He slammed the door and I never saw him for the rest of the night.*

*I remember swiftly running into my room. I swung the door open and flopped onto my bed. There were puddles in my eyes, waterfalls began to pour down my face. I remember it like it was yesterday. It cooled the red burn on my cheek. I just cried with tears of sorrow, soaking my pillow until I fell asleep.*

I paused. I felt like I was reliving the terrible moment, like I couldn't escape it. I was speechless.

“Shelia, are you okay?” questioned Ms. Norbury. She was the guidance counselor.

“Yeah... Yeah I- I'm fine,” I stuttered.

“Now your teachers and fellow classmates have said you haven't been doing your work lately or eating at lunch, that you don't seem like yourself,” she said.

“I want to help you, but I can't if you won't let me,” she warned.

“I know this can be difficult, but you need to tell me everything that happened,” she said.

“Okay,” I replied softly.

I closed my eyes again and I took a deep breath.

*\*DING\**

*Mom: Hi Shelia! I can't wait to see u today!*

*Shelia: Mom, come pick me up! ASAP!*

*Mom: Why is everything alright?*

*Shelia: No... Dad's drinking again.*

*Mom: WHAT?!?!? Did he touch you?*

*Shelia: He slapped me.*

*Mom: I'm coming over rn. Pack ur things and be ready to leave.*

*Shelia: Okay.*

*I packed everything and I ran out the front door. I saw my mom and I rushed to her and embraced her tightly. A teardrop fell down my cheek. She squeezed me and caressed my cheek.*

*“Everything is going to be all right,” my mom reassured me.*

*Suddenly, I felt a warm peck on my forehead. My mother started the engine and the car began to move.*

“So, your parents are divorced?” asked Ms. Norbury.

“... Yes,” I replied with a heavy sigh.

She quickly jotted down something in her notes.

“You can continue,” she said.

“Okay,” I replied.

*We were in the car and I was listening to music. That's when I noticed my mother staring at me.*

*At the red light, I finally asked; “Why do you make me stay with him, mom?”*

*“You know I don't have full custody over you yet, right?” she replied.*

*I got quiet for a minute.*

*“Yeah,” I replied.*

*The rest of the drive, all I could hear were the crickets. The car screeched to a stop and I marched straight into my room and my eyes began to overflow.*

“How did you feel?” asked Ms. Norbury.

“I felt worthless,” I said.

“Continue...” she replied.

*My mom called me out to eat dinner.*

*As fast as I could I put a fake smile on my face, wiped my tears and headed over to the dining room.*

*“Hey hun,” my mom greeted me warmly.*

*“Hi, mom!” I replied.*

*“So, how was your day?” she asked me.*

*“It was fine...” I replied gravely.*

*“Listen, I was thinking about getting you someone to talk to” my mom finally admitted.*

*“What do you mean? Like a therapist?” I questioned.*

*“Yes. I was even thinking about your guidance counselor,” she answered.*

*“Why?” I asked, irritated.*

*“It’ll be good for you to find someone to talk to,” she responded.*

*“What makes you think that’s going to help at all?” I asked, my voice getting a bit louder.*

*“That’s enough! Either you take the help I’m offering or you keep suffering!” warned my mom.*

*“Fine,” I replied in defeat.*

Well, you’re very brave for doing that. It shows that you want to be helped,” said Ms. Norbury with a smile on her face.

“So how long has your dad been harming you?” she asked. “Do you know why?”

“About eight years ago, that’s when he began to beat me because he had just lost his job. Every time he tried to apply to other jobs they wouldn’t hire him and he became deeply frustrated that he couldn’t provide for his family anymore. So he be-

gan to drink. He really was a great dad until then and I miss him,” I replied grimly.

I could see a surprised expression appear on Ms. Norbury’s face. She took a deep breath and began to flick her pencil uncontrollably.

“Okay, I have to report this to the police,” she said in a serious voice.

Suddenly, I felt sick to my stomach. *What have I done* I thought. A huge feeling of guilt surrounded me.

“No! You can’t do that. He’s my dad. You can’t arrest him,” I pleaded.

“I’m sorry but I have to,” she said.

“No! Get him some help or something. But please don’t arrest him!” I begged.

“I have to according to the law. I’ll be right back,” she said as she left the room.

*What kind of a daughter am I? I’m horrible. I’m a disgrace just like dad said. I shouldn’t be here* I thought. I felt my throat clog up. Tears started streaming down my face. *A deep feeling of darkness began to eat my insides up. I can’t do this* I thought.

I jerked up from my seat and dashed out of Ms. Norbury’s office. My lungs felt like they had just collapsed into my stomach. As I tried leaving the room I ran into Ms. Norbury.

“Where are you going?” Ms. Norbury asked.

“I’m just going to quickly use the bathroom,” I lied.

“Meet me back in my office once you’re done,” she instructed.

*But I wasn’t coming back. I would never step into that school ever again.* I made

my way to the entrance of the school and dashed out.

As soon as I reached my front door, I raced inside and I went to the kitchen and grabbed a knife. I hurried to the bathroom and quickly locked the door.

As I glanced at the mirror so many thoughts ran through my head. *I'm a failure. I don't deserve to live here. My family deserves so much better. I'm a piece of trash.* A deep feeling of regret for ratting out my father haunted me.

I curled up by the bathtub and began to sob. My eyes burned. I didn't want to feel anything anymore. Not physically, mentally or emotionally. I was drained. *What's the point of living if you can't feel anything at all* I wondered, as I placed the knife directly at my chest.

A deep wincing pain filled my upper body. Then everything stopped. My wish had come true.

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## Marianne Tanika Caradine

*"You will be mine."*

*I instantly awakened from my sleep searching the darkness. I felt a dark shadowy figure in the corner staring at me. My breathing started to get heavy, my eyesight started to fade into more darkness.*

*"Boom!" I was awake again. I didn't know how but I ignored it.*

*"Another nightmare?" my husband said.*

*"Yeah," I muttered. I turned to face him and continued to say, "Sorry, did I wake you?"*

*"No," he replied. I noticed that his body had no sign of movement or that he was even alive. I quietly asked him to "turn around," but there was no answer, just slow movement in his body.*

*"Why?" he replied.*

*"I just want to see your face," I said.*

*As he slowly started to turn around, my heart dropped to my feet. I could tell something wasn't right; he seemed lifeless.*

*"Boom!" I heard a loud bang coming from the corner of our room. I instantly turned my head to see what it was. Nothing was there. I turned my head back around to my husband and an old creepy lady was right in my face. I couldn't move, scream for help or even speak.*

\*\*\*

I jumped out of my sleep frightened and scared to find no human in my room. I was still in complete shock. The presence kept whispering things underneath her breath to me like "Come home to me or you'll be mine." I was scared. I couldn't do anything—she was just staring at me, making a creepy face.

I got out of bed and began to get ready for work. It was time for me to go to a meet and greet that my coworkers had scheduled for me.

\*\*\*

Thirty minutes later I was signing books, taking pictures, talking, and smiling. A strange girl came up to me. It didn't look like she was here to get an autograph from

me, but looked like she was here for a different reason.

“You have to come with me now,” she demanded.

I looked up at her and said, “Why?”

She then slammed her hand on the table and said, “You’re the reason my mother is like this.”

“How am I the reason?” I asked.

“Ever since you came out with this book, my mother has been acting strange,” she replied.

I quickly signaled for security, but that didn’t stop her. She continued to say, “One day I caught her pulling out all of her teeth and wrapping them in something.”

She started to rummage through her coat pockets and tossed a bag that looked like it was made out of a piece of skin. The skin had weird markings on it like symbols or words. I couldn’t tell but there was something in it. I hesitated to open the bag at first, but I did anyways. I slowly unwrapped it to find teeth wrapped up in it. I instantly jumped, not knowing how else to react to it.

She then said, “Yeah, that’s what she was doing to herself and not just her to me. When I’m sleeping I can feel a sharp pain in my back and when I open my eyes I find her standing above me with a knife in her hand. I don’t know what to do so I just close my eyes and wait for her to leave.”

I was in such complete shock that nothing came out of my mouth. I didn’t know to believe her or just have security drag her out. She turned around and started to lift up her shirt and said, “Look what she did to me while I was sleeping. It’s your fault, you

did this to me!” Everyone around me was instantly shocked like me. I couldn’t speak, I just stood there and stared. There were weird markings on her back like the ones I saw on the piece of skin.

Security came running soon and escorted her out of the premises. I decided to call it a night and not sign any more books or do anything else even though the fans were mad. But it wasn’t just a coincidence that I had a nightmare about it and then this girl showed up talking about how her mom had gone insane because of it. I just got a weird feeling from this girl and I was not looking forward to seeing her again.

I decided to just take some time for myself and write down things in my notebook. That’s what I usually do if something is bothering me. It’s how I clear my mind.

\* \* \*

The next day I was on my way to work when my assistant ran out of the building calling for help. I quickly ran towards her and asked, “What’s going on? What’s wrong?” She couldn’t speak; she looked terrified. I ran inside looking around in terror. I saw everyone gathered around looking up. I ran towards them confused about what was going on.

I saw the same girl from yesterday standing on the edge of the balcony with a rope tied around her neck. I tried to talk to her and get her to calm down, but she wouldn’t listen. She kept on saying, “She won’t leave empty handed, she never leaves empty handed, if you don’t go she’ll take everyone you love away from you. You hear me.”

Then she jumped. I flinched, then just stared at her as she hung there. I felt sick to my stomach. I just kept repeating what she said to me over and over again. I couldn't get it out of my head. "She never leaves empty handed." I didn't know what to do. I just stood there and stared at her.

Then I saw something in her hand, like a piece of paper, so I ran up the stairs and tried to grab the piece of paper out of her hand. But it was too far, so I leaned over the balcony stretching out for her hand. I grabbed the note out of her hand and opened it up to see what it was. My parents' home address and the city that they live in. "She never leaves empty handed" kept repeating in my head and every time it got louder and louder.

I started to worry about my parents and if they are safe or not. So that night I packed my bag. I asked my assistant if she wanted to come. She said yes and we headed to where my parents lived to go and check to see if they were okay.

We arrived at my parents' house. I ran to the front door and found it unlocked. My heart started to beat faster and faster. I ran up the stairs looking for my parents. I started to call out to them, "Mom, Dad!" There was no answer. I worried that something had happened to them. It's no coincidence that my nightmares came back, then this girl came to my work saying that my book had caused her mother to go crazy and now my parents are missing.

\*\*\*

*When I was a little kid I would like to play around in the woods. But one day I*

*stumbled into a dug up grave in the woods with some skin wrapped up and it looked like something was inside of it. I picked it up and took it home with me. Ever since then everything in my life has gone bad. I can take the most beautiful thing and turn it ugly or destroy it.*

\*\*\*

"Mom, Dad!" I yelled.

"Born on a Tuesday, happy on a Wednesday, married on a Thursday, witch on Friday, caught on Saturday, judged on Sunday, executed on Monday, buried on Tuesday."

My heart instantly dropped to my feet. "Who's there?"

There was no answer, just quiet. I ran up the stairs to find a trail of blood on the floor. I dashed to my parents' room to find my mom lying on the floor with blood on her hands and around her neck.

"No, no, no, no!" I shouted. "Please, Mom, wake up, wake up!" I cried. "This can't be for real," I muttered. "Why me, why me?" I yelled. "What did I do to deserve this?" I screamed.

Silence filled the air as I cried softly. I held my mom close to my chest, crying as all the memories I've had of her came flushing through my mind. I stood up and searched the rest of the house to see if anyone else was there. I walked into my room to find an old lady with blood all over her hands sitting on my bed just staring at my mirror. She started to sing the rhyme again. "No, stop, shut up; why are you doing this to me?"

My assistant finally made it to the house. She heard me screaming and started

to tell out my name. “Jade, Jade, where are you?” I didn’t reply. She finally got to my room and she stood there looking at me as if I am crazy. She ran over to me trying to get my attention but I wasn’t moving or even making eye contact with her.

\* \* \*

I was so fixated on the old lady that I didn’t even realize that my assistant was calling my name. I was too busy trying to get answers to why this witch was haunting me again. “Why are you doing this to me? Answer me now.” No answer but I could feel the tension growing between us. I was so angry that I was willing to just kill her. My heart is broken— is she that cruel to take my mother's life? All this for what, for me to write another book? I don't know what came over me; I jumped up and reached for her neck. I kept on squeezing and squeezing. I felt her gasp for her life but that didn't stop me. I had so much anger built up in me that I didn't let go. My assistant tried to get me to let go but I continued to let out all of my anger and frustration. She started to gasp and grab my hand trying to get me to let her go but that wasn't working. I stared right into her eyes and watched as she took her final breath. I slowly started to let go of her neck to find my assistant in complete shock. She quickly ran over to the dead body trying to do CPR on her but it wasn't working. She leaned in to do mouth to mouth and that's when the dead body started to shake uncontrollably and it scared her so that she leaned back and fell down the stairs and was knocked unconscious. The dead body was still shaking uncontrollably and it started to float in the air. I was

too shocked to move or even speak, seeing the body and vomited out black stuff. I was terrified for my life I didn't know what to do so I just sat there. Her eyes started to roll to the back of her head. Then all I heard was chanting. I couldn't quite understand it because it was muffled underneath her... *breath?* Then a black dust started to pour out of her mouth, surrounding the entire room. A black hole opened on the roof and sucked up the dark black dust. While sucking out everything else left in the dead body, before closing, I heard a whisper say "I never leave empty handed."

\* \* \*

After that I never heard back from her or anything else related to that. I don't know if she is planning something or what.

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## Sam

Sylvana Gruesz

I sigh and toss the coat I'm wearing to the side. It's almost 1 A.M., and I'm exhausted. I have to be up in three hours. I should sleep, but I'm starving, and I know it's going to be another sleepless night. The dreams about Ash have gotten more persistent, and I never want to see my sister again.

\* \* \*

*It's September 17. I hear distant noises, and roll over to look at the clock. 7:43. Ugh. Ash, for some reason, likes to wake up early in the summer and play video games. This isn't the first time I've woken up to find her replaying Undertale or something. It's too early to hear Megalovania. I*

*groan and push off the covers. I stumble out of bed, grabbing my phone off my bedside table, when it starts ringing. I stare at the number. It isn't one I recognize. I press the green answer button. "Hello?" I ask, my voice groggy. "Hello, Noelle. I'm here to speak to you on behalf of Ashley," a smooth, unfamiliar voice answers. "Do-"* My voice is barely a whisper. I clear my throat. *"Do I know you?"* The person on the other end of the line drawls, *"Unfortunately, we haven't had the pleasure of meeting yet. Before you ask, I'm a friend of your sister's. She's asked me to tell you not to worry yourself with what's happening. "Um, what?"* I put my head in my hands. *It's early, and I'm so confused.*

*"Hi, can you please clarify a few things for me? First of all, who are you? And second, what the actual fuck are you talking about?"*

*The voice chuckles. "Oh, my dear Noelle, don't worry. Everything will be cleared up soon enough. My condolences." The line goes dead. I take my phone away from my ear and stare at the screen.*

\*\*\*

It's been months, and I still don't understand why Ash did it. Our dads were good people. They often worked late, but they always made time for us. They were told by the adoption center that they could only adopt one of us, but they refused to leave without both of us the day they took us home. Ever since the police arrived at my house, I've hated Ash.

I guess I'm kind of a hypocrite. Saying that someone can't kill another person even

though I'm an assassin is a little unfair. But Ash didn't just kill our parents, she killed the people who saved our lives. No one else wanted to adopt the gay kid.

I'm startled out of my thoughts when my phone starts ringing. I pull it out of my back pocket and check the caller I.D. Sam? *Why the fuck would she be calling me at 1 A.M. when I haven't seen her in months.*

I stare at the screen as it rings twice more before I decide to answer it. I lift the phone to my ear.

"Hello?" I say, before she starts screaming. "Where the fuck have you been? You can't leave, ghost me, then *kill someone!* Not without me, at least!" Oh shit. After my dads died, I dropped out of school. Which sucked, by the way. I got a few letters of acceptance, one of them from my top college.

I had to leave the city for a few months, which also sucked, but I needed to wait until I was eighteen to get the money in my dads' wills. I got the entire house. It's weird though, they didn't mention Ash at all.

After I came back to the house, I realized that I needed something to do for money. After all, I still needed to do things like paying bills and buying food. I was lucky to get the job I did.

☐☐★ ★ ★☐☐

*I'm sitting on the couch, watching cartoons. They're made for kids, but hey, they're good. Like, a non-binary shapeshifting lizard is pretty progressive.*

*A ding sounds from my phone, and I pause the episode. It's a text from an unknown number.*

***Hey Noelle.***

*You know me, but I'm keeping my identity secret for security reasons. looking for a job, and I have the perfect one for you.*

*How would you like to become an assassin?*

☆☆☆☆

Like, if someone asked you that and you needed some money, would you really say no?

"Noelle!" A voice shrieked. Right. I'm still on the phone with Sam. "Did you or did you not kill someone?"

"No, of course not. I don't know where you heard that, but why would I?" I lie quickly.

"Um, because you're ON THE FUCKING NEWS BECAUSE YOU KILLED SOMEONE!" *Oh no.*

"Dude, what? Why would I kill someone? Who would I even kill?" Oh god, I'm fucked. How did anyone find out?

"I don't know who it was, like some random person in Brooklyn." What? All of my targets live close enough to drive, or they're visiting here or something. Unless...

"Sam, what? I haven't been to New York since, like, 10th grade. And why would that be on the news here?"

"Your dads were famous, you and your sister are famous, it's not that far away, the murder was *so cool*..."

I definitely didn't do that. But nobody's really seen me since I dyed my hair, so maybe... "Sam, are you sure it was me? Cause I think you forgot that I have an identical twin who killed our dads and maybe left the country."

"Oh. I was really hoping you killed someone. But I guess if it was just Ash, then I gotta call her. Later!"

"No, Sam, don't--" the line went dead. "Call her."

**I have a new target for you.**  
My job. Right.

who is it?

**Samantha Holt. 18 years old. Lives in D.C.**

**[3 Images attached]**

It can't be the same Sam, right? Like, the Sam I was on the phone with a couple hours ago? I click on the first image. Fuck. It is her.

no

**What?**

i won't do it

**It's your job. You do it or someone else will.**

but i know her  
she's my friend

**Is your friendship with one person really more important than your job, Noelle?**

yes

because i'm in love with her

**Fine. Do what you want. I'll kill her if I have to.**

I have to find Sam.

I lift the mug to my face and inhale deeply. I'm about to take a sip of the freshly made coffee when I hear the door open. I look outside; it's pouring rain. Maybe I left the door ajar and the wind blew it open. I put down my coffee and go to the front hall. Sure enough, the wind is blowing like crazy.

I start to close the door when something pushes it back. I stare, frozen, as Ash stands on the other side of the open door.

“Hey sister,” she says as she walks in. “Wow, you’re still living here. I guess I’m not surprised, they always liked you better. Heard they left me out of their wills. Also unsurprising, why would they want a murderer to get their money? They did give you stuff, though. Hey, get in here.” She directs the last sentence to the open door. I gasp as Sam walks in, her eyes wide with fear. She’s wearing a light green sweater with a yellow stripe in the middle, black ripped jeans, and black Converse with rainbow laces. She looks amazing.

I turn back to Ash, confused. “Oh, what? You didn’t realize I was behind this whole thing? No, I did almost everything. A friend called you, but I did basically everything else. Yeah, those targets were just random people I knew would be easy to kill. I had to give Sam a reason to call you, so you’d remember her, so I took a little trip to New York. And now, since you’ve refused to do things the easy way, I’m going to follow through with my promise and kill your girlfriend here,” she gestured to Sam.

“Why did you kill our parents? Why did you do such a horrible thing?” My eyes are burning, and I know I’m going to start crying soon.

“Oh god, don’t tell me you actually *miss them*,” she groans. “They were fucking horrible to me and you were too blinded by the idea of a happy family to notice. They liked you, but not me, and we’re a package deal,” or we were, “and so they were stuck with me. You were the smart, happy kid. They

didn’t care you were gay. But me? No, I wasn’t good enough for them. I’m so fucking glad I’ll never have to see them again.”

She unzips her jacket, wet from the rain, and pulls out a long, sharp knife. “You. Come here.” She looks at Sam, then points to a spot beside her. “We can do this the easy way or the hard way, but with my dear sister here already *devastated*, I’ll spare her by going with the easy way.”

She turns to Sam, who walks toward the spot she indicated. Oh god. I should do something, but I’m frozen in place. Sam turns to me, eyes pleading for me to stop her. She opens her mouth, and that’s when Ash drives the blade through her heart.

☆☆☆☆

*I remember the first time I ever saw her. It’s freshman year of high school. She’s sitting across the room in the cafeteria with her friends. Her long black hair flows down her back. The ends are dyed a deep purple that match her nails. “Stop staring, stalker,” Ash says, shaking me out of my thoughts. “Her name is Sam, but like, you could go ask her that yourself.” Sam.*

☆☆☆☆

“N-Noelle...” Her voice sends me crashing back to reality. I rush over to her, catching her right before she falls onto the floor. I know she won’t make it. The knife is too deep in her chest.

“Sam!” I cry. There’s blood staining her sweater, and I can feel tears streaming down my face. “Noelle...” she says again before she sits up and kisses me.

The kiss is over as soon as it started, and she falls back onto my lap. “I had to do that before I died. You had me worried,

you know, when you dropped out. I thought I might never see you again.” Her breathing is slowing and she’s crying now too.

“I’ve loved you since freshman year. I love you every single second. I love you so fucking much, Noelle.”

I take both her hands and hold them tightly. “Sam. Sam. Sam. I...I love you more than even I can comprehend. The moment I first saw you, I knew I would be falling for you. And I was right. You’re so amazing. You’re the only person I’ve ever been in love with. I love you so much.”

She’s still breathing, but barely. I hold her, talking, whispering to her until she takes her last breath, clutching onto my hands. Her grip loosens, and I lower her to the floor.

I shakily stand, sobbing. I whisper one last thing to her, “I love you,” before I turn away. I only know one thing. I’m going to kill Ash if it’s the last thing I do.

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## The Creature Inside

Ortello Hamilton

*I wake up I wonder who he had found the night before who his eyes had set upon and not let go of, the one he captured like a bald eagle who was so unfortunate to be found in the wrong place at the wrong time.*

I am a semi-normal person so to speak. There is not much adventure and excitement in my life. I have a basic life. I have a job, house, and all that, but if you think that’s my life story, then you got it all wrong. At night, that’s when the fun begins. That is

when the second me emerges. Stronger than any man or creature, who stalks his prey in the night and then pounces after stalking for a while. When he sets his eyes on his prey, they cannot be released, just like the boa constrictor.

You may ask, who do we identify with? Well, look at it this way, we’re like the Hulk. Two souls in one body except we were born this way. Some may say that we are split personalities. Some may say we are just crazy, but no. We think clearly and unlike most people it didn’t take long to accept ourself for who we are. He prefers to capture his prey at night and lock them in an underground bunker and eat them slowly over a few nights. Once they are finished, he goes on to the next one, but it wasn’t that way with his last piece of prey.

I am now telling you this tale from the land of the dead. When I caught this woman she seemed different like this had happened before. She didn’t fight nor scream. She seemed almost like she had accepted her fate to be put into the belly of the beast. He calls himself “The Creature Inside.” He called it that because of the irony. He is called the creature inside yet he comes out. It is important I tell you this tale for I have committed some unforgivable crimes. It all started on a cold lonesome October night. He was stalking as usual. He saw this nice innocent perfect girl, a little too perfect. She was walking down the streets of South Central L.A. by herself, dressed tightly and revealing while still keeping that innocence.

As he was stalking her, she looked like she wanted to be captured by someone or something. He knew this because she

looked like a lone bunny hopping in an open plain of wolves, meaning she was walking very slowly. I thought, *what was a dainty and innocent looking person as herself walking the streets of South Central L.A. at night?* When he went to capture her she saw him and he saw none other than a smirk on her face. She almost laughed, he took her to my bunker and on the way there, she didn't scream or make a single sound. When we finally arrived at the bunker I whispered, "Aren't you afraid of The Creature Inside?"

She jokingly whispered back, "Why be afraid of what I look for?"

Then he walked away with a feeling in his gut that he never had before. He knows now that it was the feeling of uncertainty and he thought to himself. *I am the stalker. How can I be found when I don't want to be? I lurk in the deepest shadows. As a matter of fact I make the shadows. I am astonished.*

I went home with the feeling that the next night would entail some great findings and the night before gave me a feeling of uncertainty and a rush of adrenaline filled my veins. So I went to bed and woke up the next morning ready to tackle the day with more thrill than ever. When I came home from work I sat down and I ate the pizza that I brought home because some customer didn't want it, because we put too many pepperonis on it.

He went to the bunker to check on the girl and maybe eat her leg so he went to clean his knife and got a plate ready to eat when she blurted, "I have to eat too you know."

He explained, "You are food and if I was an uncivilized animal, I would have eaten your skull already."

He thought to himself. *This girl may be more trouble than she is actually worth. It may be time for me to eat her and just get this over with. No finesse just plain old fashion down in one sitting eating. No play no foul.* He then approached the girl with the knife with intent of chopping her into bite size pieces just big enough to stuff into his mouth.

She then boldly murmured, "Don't you want to know why I am here? How I found you and what I am looking for?"

He frustratingly shouted, "Well, tell me!"

She replied, "Well, a long time ago, a woman named Margaret Marmalade was walking down the street. The same street you found me on. She was abducted and no one could find her for days, weeks, months, and years. They still haven't found her till this day. Everything I found led me back to you and I found you and drew you out. That woman "The creature inside" was my lovely, beloved mother."

His jaw dropped and he was speechless. Karma had come full circle and kicked us in the butt. The reach of god could not be avoided and his soul was worthy of damnation and so it was condemned. She pounced like a cat. She suddenly freed herself from her chains and ran a piece of glass across our throat and he dropped to the ground on our knees and he fell backwards. There he was lying on the floor with his cold pulse barely hanging on. She was feeding the open flames with slabs of wood.

Once the fire was complete, she chopped us up into little pieces and roasted us. She laughed as she ate me with much joy. She smiled from her cheeks to her bangs and she laughed and rejoiced. The mighty “Creature From Inside” was conquered.

She chuckled, “The hunter killed the wrong fawn.”

She was the crazy one. She plotted so well, not even we could tell what she was up to. We are much alike, but she is much smarter. When I think about it, the way she carries out her plan is only with precise execution. Had she done this before? Had she killed other predators and kidnappers or cut the hand off a man who dared put his fingers in the wrong place? Now that I think back on it, she was a kind of anti-hero of sorts, to defend the people and kill the predators.

I tell this story like it was yesterday. In fact, I have been dead for over 20 years and every time someone dies at the hands of “Her,” I tell them this story. Before you ask, yes indeed you are dead if the eerie and pitch black tone didn’t give it away already. As well as the way the demons beat and lash the lost souls who unfortunately end up here. That is not even the worst of the punishments. We are forever bound to a replica of the bunker he used to kill people in. We are forced to be eaten slowly by a demon dressed as ourself for all of eternity. It has been driving me mad not because of the pain. In fact, the pain is what clings on to the little sanity we still have. It is the fact that “HER” is just as crazy as him and she has not yet been condemned to Hell. Why me when she is just as wicked? If I am

to be honest. I admire her. She is like a false worm. She lures the fish leading them right to their sudden death to be beaten and ate. Now you as the reader of this grim tale, you will take our place **FOREVER**. Waiting for someone else to die and take your place and mark my words for “HER.” This is not the end.

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## Inner Demons

### Ruth Leib

I examine my artwork in the pale moonlight. The painting seems to glow a bright orange, radiant and bright. It depicts the scene in front of me, from just a few hours ago. It’s so strange how in such little time, things can change so drastically. My painting shows a bright yellow ball of light, sinking below the shining blue ocean, which reflects the orange sky. Now the sun has completely set, and I’m alone with the moon and the stars. Well, maybe not all alone. I hug the back wall of the cliff, terrified of falling. I’ve been up on this mountain so many times. It’s usually quiet up here, and has beautiful views on either side. One side faces my village, which now probably has faint orange candles making it glow among the trees. The side I’m on faces the seemingly endless expanse of water. I watch the waves crash into the sharp rocks on the shore. I swallow. Despite how often I come up here, I will always be afraid of slipping. Especially with Scarlet here. I can’t see her, but I know she’s following me. She always is. I should probably explain her.



It all started the day after my mother died. She was a hunter, and a good one, too. And I loved her so much. After she died, I was completely devastated. I would do anything to bring her back. So, I asked around, and decided I was desperate. I would try necromancy. That night was a full moon. I put on the darkest clothes I could find, and in my attic, I drew a large circle in chalk. Carefully, I drew a star and placed black candles on each point. I sat beside it and quietly uttered, "Uhm.... I'm not sure how to do this. Mom, are you listening? I miss you. I'm too young to take care of the house. You didn't finish teaching me how to hunt, I--" Tears fell down from my eyes, making my vision go blurry. "I need you, Mom. I miss you." Now I couldn't see. Tears completely blocked my vision, and I shut my eyes tight.

"God, can you stop complaining?" My eyes flew open. This was definitely *not* my mother. This was what looked like a young girl, around my age. But, she was very clearly not human. Her skin was a pinkish red, and she had crimson horns sticking up from her long black hair. Her eyes were all black, except for bright red pupils, and her lips were black so that she always appeared to be wearing lipstick. She hovered off the ground on leathery wings, which were gradient, starting black and fading to red. She was wearing a black leather jacket and a short maroon dress. She wore black thigh high socks, with tall heeled combat boots. She looked very emo, and this is coming from someone who just summoned a demon. "Who has summoned the almighty one?" she asked. When she opened her

mouth, I noticed that her teeth were pinkish and her canines were long fangs. Her tongue was bright red and forked like a snake's.

"Uhh, m-my name is A-angelica," I stammered.

"Scarlet. I'd say it's a pleasure to meet you, but that would be a lie. Why did you summon me?" she asked flatly.

"A-actually, I was t-trying to summon my m-mom," I told her.

"Well too fuckin' bad you got me instead," she said. She landed and folded her wings in. They blended in with her jacket. She paced around me, examining me. I pulled off the hood on my mother's black sweatshirt. The sweatshirt was all black except a small white design in the center. The design showed a winged circle above three triangles. My mother told me the triangles represented us, and the circle represented an angel. The sweatshirt was too big and the sleeves flopped down past my hands. I smoothed down my long dark brown hair and stared at the demon. She stared back. Uncomfortable, I looked away.

"So, you're a demon? Like, from hell? Why did I get you instead of my mom?"

Scarlet rolled her eyes. "That isn't how it works, hun. Once she's dead, she's dead. Making a pentagram just summons a random demon. Seriously, did you not look into this before doing a ritual?"

"I--" She was right, I had no idea what I was doing. I just tried something demonic and hoped it worked.

"Well, too bad. You're stuck with me, bitch."



And I am. I've been stuck with her for a year now. She follows me everywhere I go. It's kind of creepy. Right on cue, she shows herself.

"Hey Angel. Whatcha painting?" Scarlet flies down from the sky and takes the painting from me.

"Hey!" I try to snatch it back, but she holds it just above my reach. Even without flying, she's taller than me.

"Ooh! Fancy!" she says, examining the painting.

"Hey! Give it back! And don't call me Angel," I whine. She giggles.

"It's fun watching you struggle," she tells me. "Angel," she adds, just to make me angry. It works. I pull the painting back and inch around to a safer part of the mountain. I do *not* trust her not to push me off. Or throw the painting off. Now in a bad mood, I make my way down the mountain, back to the village. People stare at me sympathetically as I walk through the town. I can almost hear their hushed conversations.

*Poor girl. Only 16 and all alone.*

*She needs a man to live with her.*

*My grandson is around her age. Maybe he can help her.*

That's what they always say when they think I can't hear. That I need help. Trying to ignore everything, I take a deep breath. I just need a positive mental attitude. I enter my house, leaving the nosy villagers and negativity behind. I can feel Scarlet watching me as I eat dinner.

"I know you're there," I say, tired. She shows herself.

"Guess there's no point in hiding then," she says, sitting down across from me at the table.

"What do you want? Food? Water? Do you just want to watch me suffer?" I ask her.

"You drink water, I drink anarchy. No," she pauses. "Okay yes, I enjoy watching you suffer." She puts elbow on the table and leans her head on her hand. "I feed off suffering"

"Really?"

"No. I just like it."

I groan and she laughs. "I'm going to sleep," I tell her, walking away to my room.

"Night, Angelica!" she waves after me. "I hope you have horrible nightmares!" she calls enthusiastically.

I slam my door shut and crawl into bed. I had been so tired, but as soon as I lie down, I suddenly am wide awake. I turn in my bed. Through the window, I see the moon reflecting against the mountains. I whisper to myself, "It's going to be all right. Everything's gonna be fine." I close my eyes and fall asleep.

I wake up to Scarlet grinning at me, sitting on my bed.

"Ahh!" I scream and push her.

"Morning."

"Get off my bed!" I scream.

"I like scaring you," she said.

"Yes, I know that!" I scream, shoving past her. I put on my hoodie and grab a loaf of bread. It's dawn, I'm never awake this early. Everything's quiet as I make my way up the mountain. The only sounds are the wind in the trees and my quiet breathing as

I climb further up. I reach a small platform in the face of the mountain, facing towards the ocean and away from my problems. I bite my cheek as I swing my legs over the side, watching the waves crash against the shore. The ledge is small enough that I can press my back against the cliff face and dangle my legs over the side at the same time. I sit listening to the waves, eating the bread without cutting it. Sleepily, my eyes close slightly.

“Hey Angel,” her voice startles me. I drop the bread off the cliff and instinctively lean forward to catch it. I lose my balance and slide off the ledge. “Oh Shit!” I hear Scarlet say distantly.

*This isn't happening* I think, feeling my stomach drop. I squeeze my eyes tight. And suddenly I'm not falling. *Did I wake up?* I think. But when I open my eyes, I'm suspended in the air. The only thing I can see is Scarlet's face, and her wings block out the sun.

“You.... caught me?” I ask.

She looks down at me. “Wow. Have some faith in me,” she says, offended.

“I thought you wanted me dead,” I tell her, still confused.

“I don't want you dead, idiot. I love you.”

“You've been tormenting me for a year!”

“Yeah, because I like you, duh,” she says like it's obvious.

“I-- I don't think that's how love works,”

“Well fine. I'll drop you then,” she says and loosens her grip around me.

“Hey!” I squeak, grabbing her waist. She laughs and lands me on a wide ledge.

Now safe, I look at her. “Do you seriously like me? Oh my god, that's so embarrassing! You're supposed to be all cool and tough and you like me!” Finally, I have something on her. She's been annoyingly perfect for all the time I've known her. She glares at me and I grin back. I look her in the eyes.

“Do you want to... go kill some homophobes... together?” I ask.

She smiles down at me. “It's a date.”

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## The Billie Lightwood Case

Jenny Rodriguez

*Beep! Beep Beep!*

“Come on Billie, wake up! We got work to do,” Leo said.

“Ugh alright,” I responded.

I headed to the bathroom and got into the tub. I rinsed my arms and noticed that there was blood dripping. I didn't realize that last night got messy. A wide smile formed on my face. Mr. and Mrs. Lauren-der deserved it. After I was done showering, I got dressed and headed downstairs.

“Who's our target today?” I asked Leo.

“The Harkenders, they have a little boy and a teenage girl. Mrs. Harkender leaves for work at 9:30 in the morning and Mr. Harkender leaves at 6:30 A.M. Mr. Harkender comes home around 5 P.M. The mother doesn't come home until 7. Their nanny picks the kids up from school at around 2:30. They have a dog, so bring some treats,” Leo said.

“But what if Mr. Harkender tries to fight?” I asked.

“He won’t. Not if he doesn’t want to see his kids die. He wouldn’t dare try to do anything” Leo said in a sinister way.

Leo taught me to always take control of the dominant one in a household. Once you do that, nothing else presents a threat to you. That way you have more control. Leo and I got our tools, a knife, a gun and a muzzle. The muzzle makes the gun silent, so when I shoot, you won’t hear anything at all. I opened the trunk of my car and threw my bag in. I turned on the engine and drove away from the parking lot. Once we arrived, we parked three houses down from the Harkenders.

Ring! Ring!

“Hello?” I said.

“Billie, why aren’t you at school?” Sarah asked.

“I’ve got some things to do,” I responded.

“The school called your house, but you didn’t pick up. They’re sending someone to your building to check on you,” Sarah said.

“There’s no need, I’m not even home.”

“Billie you haven’t been in school for three weeks. What is going on?”

“I have to go, I’ll call you later,” I said as I hung up.

We waited for what seemed forever until the Nanny left to go pick up the little ones from school. We walked around the house to the back door. I taped the window and smashed it lightly. It was a trick that Leo taught me. Tape the window so when you smash it you barely hear any noise.

“Take care of the dog, then set the chairs up,” Leo demanded.

Everywhere I turned there were several family photos. Each face filled with joy. None of them looked unhappy. My stomach clenched, and I got this sick feeling.

“Don’t let those pictures trick you, trust me, they are miserable inside,” Leo proclaimed.

I walked around the house some more. Their wallpaper looked fancy. Wealthy family, they obviously could afford expensive things. I spotted the dog and grabbed it.

“You know you have to kill the dog, right?” Leo asked.

“I know,” I sighed.

I unzipped my bag and reached for my knife. It was as big as a butcher’s knife. I made sure that I sharpened the knife so it would go through things easily.

“It has to be a fast kill, and a quiet one,” Leo asserted.

I made sure the dog was lying down. I needed a precise kill. *Slash!* Blood splattered around my clothes and on my face. *Slash!* I could see the insides of the dog, it smelled horrible.

“Set the chairs up. The Nanny is going to arrive with the kids anytime now,” Leo demanded.

“Ok,” I replied.

I set the chairs in front of the couch. Their curtains looked new, they definitely weren’t the same ones from last week. I closed them. I noticed a drawing at the bottom. That’s probably the same reason they got rid of the other one.

“They’re here” Leo said.

I reached into my backpack and grabbed my gun. I connected the muzzle to

the gun. *Click!* Kill the Nanny, then shove her in the closet.

“Don’t forget to do your homework,” the Nanny said.

She walked into the living room and turned the T.V. on. I waited until she wasn’t facing my direction. I sprang up, three shots and she was down. I quickly dragged her to a closet.

I pointed the gun at the children and made them all sit down on the chairs I had set up. I first tied their legs, then hands, then I tied them up to the chair. I felt triumphant, the last kill wasn’t as smooth.

“Why are you doing this?” the girl said crying.

I could feel the fear radiating from her body.

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“Dad! Stop! Please,” I yelled. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it!” I said crying.

“Shut up! Now listen to me boy, don’t ever disrespect me. You piece of shit!” he yelled while he punched me.

“Mom! Please help me,” I cried out.

I looked over and saw that she had been standing there this whole time. Her face was emotionless. She lit a cigarette and walked away.

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“Because they deserve this,” I said. “Call your father and tell him he needs to come home right now,” I demanded.

The girl nodded her head slowly. There were tears forming in her eyes. I couldn’t afford to have a crying child.

“When you’re talking to him you better not try anything because if you do, I will kill

you and I will make sure your brother watches every second of it,” I stressed.

I held the phone near her and she started talking.

“He’s coming home in ten minutes,” the girl said.

“Great, now we wait,” Leo said.

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“Daddy please, no! I’m sorry” I cried.

“Go to your room, Billie!” Dad shouted.

I quickly ran to my room, I slammed the door and pushed against it.

I wasn’t strong enough, the door broke open. “Don’t you dare! Look at me!” he demanded.

“What did I do?” I asked.

I could tell by the smell of his breath that he had been drinking, and when Dad drinks, he gets very angry and violent.

“Shut up!” he shouted.

“You’re a fucking disgrace,” my mother said from the corner.

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I grabbed my gun and re-loaded it. “Don’t worry, it’s not you I want to hurt” I whispered.

**10 minutes later**

“Lucy, are you ok?” a man yelled.

“Remember, take control of him, tell him you will kill his children if he doesn’t cooperate,” Leo reminded me.

“Ok,” I replied.

I held my gun tightly and I took a deep breath.

“Lucy?” a man said as he walked into the living room.

“Put your hands up!” I shouted, pointing the gun at him.

“Ok! Ok! Don't shoot, please!” he cried out. “Are my children ok?” he asked.

“They will be, but not if you don't cooperate. Sit on the couch! Don't you dare try anything, I'll kill them if you do,” I demanded.

“All right,” he responded.

I tied him up and made him sit down on the couch in front of the children. I told him to call his wife and tell her to come home. And I did the same thing to her. I threatened to kill her children if she didn't cooperate. I tied her up and made her sit down next to her husband.

“I'm proud of you, Billie. Kill them, they deserve this. They ruined your childhood. They are the reason you're like this... kill them,” Leo said.

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“I hate you!” I yelled at him.

“You think I care?” he said, laughing at me.

“What did I do?” I said crying.

“You deserve this.”

\* \* \*

I grabbed the log grabber by the fireplace and started to beat the parents with it. I felt rage all over.

“Shoot them!” Leo said.

“I hate you guys!” I shouted at them. “You put me through hell, and you... you just stood there,” I yelled.

I turned around and faced the kids.

“You're going to want to watch this,” I said. “Trust me, I'm doing you guys a favor,” I said, reassuring them.

“Shoot them,” I heard Leo say again.

I grabbed my gun and shot them five times. I ran over to my bag and grabbed the

knife. Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash! They were both bleeding out fast. I smiled as I stood there and waited till their heartbeat stopped. I watched as their life was slowly draining from their eyes. I watched as they took their last breath.

“Thanks for putting me through hell,” I whispered.

“Do you feel better?” Leo asked.

“Yeah, much better,” I responded.

I walked away hearing the kids cry for their parents. They owe me, their lives are better off without their parents.

### The next day

Beep! Beep! Beep!

“Wake up sleepy head” Leo said.

“I'm up,” I replied.

I got up and turned my T.V. on.

“We are looking for this person as a possible suspect in the murders of the Harkenders. Mrs. and Mr. Harkender were murdered at approximately 3:20 in the afternoon. His name is Billie Lightwood. He was abused as a child and developed a mental issue. Billie is in high school, he is sixteen years old. He has brown hair and green eyes. He has a scar on his right eye. It is possible that Billie's parents gave him that scar. If you know this person please contact us at 180-267-8902.” I shut off the T.V.

“We are screwed!” I yelled.

“No we are not!” Leo shouted back.

“We just need to get out of here,” he said.

“What will Sarah think of me,” I replied.

“We need to go, who cares what she thinks of you,” Leo said.

“I do! She's my only friend,” I shouted.

**30 minutes later**

"I've got everything packed up," I said.

"Great, let's go," Leo responded.

"F.B.I., open up! We know you're in there, Billie," a man yelled.

Bang!

"Out the window now! They are trying to get in," Leo shouted.

Bang!

"Billie, hurry up!"

Bang! The door gave up. I couldn't move, even if I wanted to. I just froze.

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"Billie, bring me some beer," Dad demanded.

"No, I'm not your slave," I responded.

"Boy! I swear you never learn your lesson," Dad yelled.

"I waited too long," I said.

"Get your mother right now," he proclaimed.

"She's not available right now," I responded.

"Billie-"

"Shut up! Sit down," I yelled while pointing a knife at him.

"Billie, let's talk this out," Dad said.

"Really, Dad? Now you want to talk," I said.

"Billie come on-

*Slash! Slash! Slash!*

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"Billie, you are being arrested for the murder of the Harkenders. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be

appointed to you by the state," the bald man said.

"I'm sorry, Sarah," I whispered.

**2 days later**

"Breaking news, two days ago 16 year old Billie was charged with murder in the third degree. He is now being held in a mental institute until his trial begins. F.B.I. claims that he killed the Harkenders and many other people. It is thought that he killed many people because he thought he was killing his own parents in the process. Billie was abused as a child which caused his mental state that he is in now. Billie was diagnosed as a schizophrenic. He kept following orders from someone named Leo, the person he made up in his head. It is still unknown where his parents are but it is suspected that they abandoned Billie a while ago. F.B.I. suspects that Billie has killed five other people in a span of three weeks. We reached out to the Boston police for comment but still haven't heard back. This has been CCB, I'm Lauren Lang and I'll see you tomorrow."

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**Emmy**

**Alaa Boutkhourst**

We moved our stuff into the new house and right away, I felt the cold breeze swiftly pass through my sun dress. I got goose-bumps all over my legs. I looked up at the house and took a deep breath. I threw the door open and I quickly ran upstairs looking for the best room.

"I call dibs on this room!" I yelled

It was the room at the end of the hallway. I liked it because it seemed different. My sister Brianna quickly ran up the stairs to choose her room as well, switching from room to room to see which one was best.

“I call this one!” yelled my sister.

My parents went into their room and called us to bring our belongings into our rooms. I ran downstairs in excitement and carried two boxes full of clothes to my room. I went down to get my other boxes and placed them down on the floor of my room. The room was already painted the color I loved. Purple! I guess the people who lived here before us painted it.

The truck came with our old house stuff. The workers had helped us put our belongings in. My dad and I carried my mattress to my room and placed it on top of the bed frame. My sister was already on her bed using her phone. Everyone seemed to be busy, so I decided to look around the house.

I noticed something as I walked down the hall. An attic? I grabbed the pull down cord and stepped up into the attic. I coughed from the dust that surrounded me. It was so dark, I could barely see anything.

“Emmy! What are you doing up there?” screamed Brianna.

“Uh...N-Nothing”, I yelled back

I walked down from the attic and let go of the pull down cord. It was night time so my family decided to eat take out. I went to my room and felt a little homesick. I was not used to this new house. I placed my head on the pillow and felt the stress in me release.

The room all of a sudden felt really cold. My eyes were closed, but I could still feel and hear everything. There were sounds, voices everywhere. I threw my blanket over my head in fear. *What was that sound? Was it my sister, playing with me to scare me? Or was it a ghost?*

I felt something touch me and I quickly got up from my bed. Nothing was there. I turned my light on immediately trying to investigate what that was that I felt. I checked the time, it was 3:27 A.M. I felt so anxious and paranoid. I felt like I was being watched. I turned the light off and sat up in my bed and quickly watched my room from every corner. I heard whispers. Was that Mom and Dad or Brianna? I felt it get closer to me.

“Hello, is anyone there?” I whispered.

I started to hear footsteps get louder as they got closer to my room. My mom burst into the room and turned the light on, very confused.

“Who are you talking to at this time?” my mom asked in worry.

“Uh..N-no one I-I nothing,” I mumbled.

My mom went back to her room and I just lay back in relief. I was still questioning what it was that I heard. It sounded like talking, but I could not quite catch what it was saying.

I woke up the next morning feeling extremely tired. I took a shower and I put on my uniform for school. My sister and I were getting ready for our new school. I went downstairs to eat breakfast and went back upstairs to brush my teeth. Our parents decided to take us separately since we

go to different schools. I grabbed my lunch box and school bag and walked to my mom's car.

"Would you like to talk about what happened last night, Emmy?" my mom asked as we were driving to the school.

"I wasn't talking to anyone. I heard some weird noises so I thought it was Briana playing with me. I'm just not used to the new house just yet," I said.

As we rolled up to the school, I was shocked. It was such a better junior high school than the one before. But then it hit me. *What if the kids there are mean? What if they don't like me? What will I do then? What if I don't have any friends?* I was so anxious and scared I didn't know what to do. I stepped out of the car and walked to the building.

"Have a nice first day at your new school," my mom yelled from the car window."

I opened the door and my heart dropped. There were so many kids. I began to become even more anxious than before. I didn't take my anxiety pills! What was I gonna do? My mom left.

"Hello there! You must be the new student. I am principal of this school! Please follow me to my office," the principal said.

I followed her to the office and I gazed at all the posters on the wall and all the different locker colors. I watched kids talking to their friends. It all looked too good to be true. She gave me my schedule and all of a sudden from the corner of my eye a girl around my age came in.

"This is Bailey. She will be in all of your classes. She's here to give you a tour of the

school. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know," the principal said.

I followed her out of the principal's office. We both stared at each other, waiting for one of us to talk.

"H-hi! Uh, welcome to this school. It's pretty nice. I think you'll like it here," Bailey said with a smile.

I followed her around and saw so many things that were amazing. This school has its very own pool! We had to go to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor for our classes since the older kids were on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.

We went to our first period class and immediately as I walked in everyone looked at me. I could hear them whispering about me. I was extremely anxious. My heart was racing as if it were about to explode. I was getting hot and my hands were sweating.

"Hey everyone, this is our new student Emmy. She moved here from New York," Bailey said.

I sat down quickly in a seat where no one would talk to me. Bailey sat next to me and I could still see people watching me. As time flew by it was already time for lunch and I ate alone. Bailey went to sit with some of her friends, so I ate alone. This one girl came to my table and sat next to me... I felt her cold bitter presence next to mine.

"Hey, new girl. What'cha got there, huh?" she said.

She threw my lunch on the floor and walked away to her friends laughing. My heart dropped. I grabbed my lunch box and ran to the bathroom. I can't believe that just happened to me *on my first day!* I skipped my other classes and just stayed in the bath-

room stall. I didn't want to see her again. Then the bathroom door opened. I immediately stood up from sitting on the stall ground. It was her and she wasn't alone.

"Aww, is the new girl crying here?" she laughed.

She opened my bathroom stall door and grabbed me.

"You're a loser and you're not worth anything and you'll never have friends and you'll always be that one girl that no one likes!" she said.

She and her friends ran away laughing and talking behind my back, loud enough that I could hear. The bell rang and I ran out of the bathroom to my locker and got my stuff. I started tearing up and I ran outside. My mom was in the car and I opened the car door and sat down.

"Hey, honey how was your first--" my mom said right before I cut her off.

"Can we just go home please? I'm really tired," I said.

We drove home and I ran to my room, slammed my door, threw my stuff on the floor, and lay on my bed. I stayed in my room all day and didn't go to eat dinner. I took a shower and changed into my P.J's and went straight to sleep. Again I heard those voices. They became more clear now. It was like two people whispering in your ear.

"Kill herrrrrrr," the voice said.

"You will dieeeeeee," another voice said.

*What did they mean by that? Kill who? Why? The rest of the voices were unclear. Was this house haunted?* I stood up from

my bed and turned on my light and out of nowhere my sister stormed into my room.

"All right, Emmy I wanna know now why you're all grumpy and sad. Did you even take your anxiety meds today?" my older sister Brianna asked.

"This one girl was just being really mean. She's the popular girl and no, I forgot to take my meds," I said quietly.

"Well that explains a lot. Tell me her name I'll talk to her," my sister said.

I shook my head. I didn't want things to get any worse. My sister gave me a warm hug and left my room. Since she reminded me, I decided to take my pills now. I went downstairs to get a glass of water and my parents looked at me, worried. I could tell my mom wanted to say something but I left before she could. I walked up the stairs and I went in my room. I took a sip of water and placed a pill in my mouth and swallowed it. I didn't want to go to school tomorrow and I wanted to know what these voices were. I went on my laptop and I decided to look up "hearing voices at night" to see what would pop up. I clicked the first link and began to read the article. Paranormal activity. Haunted houses. Hallucinations. I was confused by all of this I shut my laptop and went to sleep.

I woke up the next morning and I didn't wanna go to school. I remembered to take my anxiety meds. I showered and put on my uniform. I ate breakfast really fast so my parents wouldn't question what's wrong. I went upstairs and brushed my teeth and got my bag. I didn't take my lunch because I didn't want the mean girl to do it again. So, I just took Dorito chips.

My dad drove me to school and he was just staring at me reflected off the inside of the car window. He dropped me off and hugged me goodbye. I took a deep breath and entered the school. I saw Bailey, who came up to me quickly and asked me if I was okay because she hadn't seen me during the last 2-3 periods.

"That girl over there. She was being really mean and threw my lunch and like was being mean to me in the bathroom," I whispered to her.

"Yeah. She's like the school bully. No one has ever stood up to her or even talked back to her. She'll seriously hurt you. I'm sorry that happened. You should have sat with us for lunch. You're always welcome to," she said with a grin on her face.

"What's her name, anyways?" I asked.

"Taylor Rykers," she sighed.

I felt at ease knowing that I wasn't the only one and I could sit with Bailey. But still I worried what she might do to me. She was walking behind me and was laughing with her friends. She pushed me into the locker and laughed at me. Bailey helped me up and picked up my books.

\* \* \*

Days and weeks have passed and the same things keep happening over and over again. Taylor being an absolute jerk to me and me hearing these voices. They just keep repeating like a never ending story or I guess nightmare.

\* \* \*

It was nearly the end of the first semester and one morning my mother told me I was not going to go to school and that I was going to the therapist. I was confused at

first. *A therapist? I wasn't much of a person that was open towards my feelings.* She drove me to the place and she signed papers before we got called in.

"Emmy Carter," the receptionist yelled.

I stood up and I went in the room by myself. I saw a lady sitting at a desk and couch for me to sit at. I was scared. I never have done any of this before. She started asking me some simple questions. Minutes in we had deeper conversations about bullying and hallucinations. I told her that they were no hallucinations and that everything I felt and heard was real but she wouldn't believe me. Days and days I spent with this therapist, yet she couldn't help me. She said I was "mentally insane."

On the last day of school before the semester break we had a school dance. Me and Bailey became best friends by then so we danced together. I went into the bathroom and I saw Taylor there fixing her makeup. My heart stopped.

"Look at what we have here. Well if it isn't our little crazy loser? Are you gonna go home and tell mom and dad and cry to them? You already got me in enough trouble," she said in anger.

She pulled from her purse something I couldn't see quite well but I knew it was something bad. Her friends backed up. She had a knife and she started pointing it in every direction possible, threatening me.

When the dance ended I went home and I lay down. The voices became louder and more demanding.

"Kill herrrrrrrrr," one said.

“You will die if you don’tttttt...” another whispered.

The voices repeated over and over in rhythm and got louder and closer. They repeated it fast enough that I had to scream. I knew what I had to do now. I didn’t take my hallucination pills; instead, I threw them on the floor. I knew exactly how to do it and where. I laughed to myself. She thinks she can threaten me?

I brought my knife and stuffed it in my dress. I snuck out of the house and I walked to her house. It was late. Her whole family would be asleep. I snuck in through the back and walked upstairs. Quietly. One step at a time. And one breath at a time. One by one I reached the top. I turned to her room and she was asleep. **PERFECT.** I looked at her sleeping so soundly. I let out a quiet giggle. And I stabbed her right in the neck. Her breath was gasping for air and I kept stabbing repeatedly. Her parents ran into the room and let out tears. As I stabbed blood poured all over my face. I was arrested and brought to a mental hospital and I spent time talking to the doctor.

“Tell me why you stabbed her to death!?” The Doctor asked, getting impatient.

“It was the voices, they told me to!!!!” I screamed.

I was later admitted to a Mental Hospital and put into an Asylum where I spent the rest of my life. They never really understood that it wasn’t me, it was the voices. The demons that lived among me and will later live with me till death.

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## Love and Legacy

Avery Cole

I jumped behind the ancient stone pillar and heard the gunshot penetrate the spot where I stood only a second before. Debris slowly floated onto my shoulders. I ran behind the next one as the machine gun fired and followed me. I looked around the pillar and saw two muscular men in all black dropping their empty guns and pulling out the knives they had stashed behind their backs. I looked up and surveyed my surroundings. Ancient rock pillars stretched up fifteen stories, and small nooks holding golden braziers were all along the walls. I started to get worried that maybe it wasn’t here anymore. Then, I saw the telltale glint of polished bronze and I knew exactly what to do. I grinned and ran out into the center of the colosseum, which was marked with a bright red X. They advanced around me, sure that I was cornered, but I knew something they didn’t. My two attackers steadied their arms and hurled the glinting knives at me. Right as the two knives were about to hit me, I executed a perfect roundoff back handspring back tuck right onto the flagpole, springboarded up and swung onto the golden cup using the old rope connected to a ladder. I pulled the rope, and the ladder fell onto one of the men, and he crashed to the floor, unconscious. I pushed my hand into the wall and pulled out a chunk of rock, which I hurled at the second. The man collapsed. I quickly pulled my dart gun out of my pocket and shot them both in the stomach. That would make them forget the

last year, and being Señor Diablo's henchmen. I panted and doubled over in pain. A chunk of rock had hit my stomach and it was bleeding. I started to feel dizzy. I looked up at the night sky, gripped my hand onto the smooth surface and pulled the lever. Everything went black, and I faded into memories.

Two years ago, I knew nothing. I mean, I knew the basics, math, reading, and writing. I had already graduated from high school, and I was only fifteen. I was very smart in an academic setting, a genius. Still am. But I was happily oblivious to the life that my parents were living around me. I didn't find out until they were killed in a bomb accident in Peru on a mission. A woman wearing a pantsuit and a large diamond necklace had come into my living room.

"Come with us," she said. "We are your only family." I followed her into a black limo with tinted windows and guns in the cupholders. She held my hand and brought me into a giant castle, which she informed me was my new school, Frauenetikette Internat. I walked right up into my new dorm room and passed out on my bed.

The sun blurred my tears, and I barely felt it when a girl dragged me out of my bed and yelled at me in German.

She was tall and so pale you could almost see her veins. Her blonde hair was so light she almost looked like a snow-capped mountain.

"Come on, you lazy little girl! We're going to be late!" She pulled my arms up. I stood, grabbed the uniform she gave me and rushed into the bathroom. I started

changing, but then I noticed what the uniform was. Black athletic leggings, a black tank top, a black athletic jacket, and black sneakers. I walked out with it on and looked at my roommate.

"What is this school? Why do we have to wear this ridiculous stuff?" I asked her in German, panicking. She looked at me like I was the dumbest person in the whole world.

"It's spy school, idiot!" she finally responded, and grabbed my arm. Her fingers pinched at my skin, and she dragged me down the stairs, and into a gigantic classroom that looked like a karate dojo. On the back of the wall, about twenty girls my age stood stick straight, looking at an old man in the center of the room. He looked at my roommate and smiled.

"Ariana, Annika, kind of you to join us. Please come to stand at the back of the room with your classmates as I begin the demonstration." Annika dragged me to the wall and we both stood up as straight as we could. The man asked his assistant, a muscular man, to fight him, and I knew it was going to be an unfair fight. The assistant was at least thirty years younger, one foot taller, and one hundred pounds heavier. I was astonished when the teacher flipped the assistant over his shoulder and pinned him onto the floor.

"This is a demonstration of what to do when someone attacks you from behind." He walked to the front of the class. "You must make sure you jab your knee right into the center of the stomach, so the wind is knocked out of your attacker." Before class was over, the teacher, Mr. Manchuso, gave us five more demonstrations using lots of

karate and jujitsu techniques. We headed down two flights of stairs, through seven different hallways, and around a large theater before we got to another classroom. Stepping foot inside was like being transported to another century. The walls were covered in shelves, filled with ancient books and sculptures. There were red velvet cushions, and the whole room was painted a pleasing sort of gold. The most amazing part though, was the ceiling. It was like an old Michelangelo portrait, but instead of angels, there were women beating up enemies, reading books, and jumping out of helicopters. There were also pictures of women all around the room. An old woman wearing an ugly flower print dress walked in.

“Hello, new students. I am Professor Hughes,” she quipped in a posh British accent. She paced around us and picked up a stack of thin books. She quickly passed out one to each student and took a seat.

“I am in charge of teaching the cryptography and math class.” She stood up again. “Please open up your booklet. I expect you to have decoded five problems by tomorrow.” I opened up the booklet and found a sentence made up of random letters. I looked around in confusion. Why did they keep giving me classes on things I already know? I quickly decoded the sentence and sped through the next few. It looked like all of the other girls were asking each other questions, and didn’t know what to do.

“How did you do that?” Annika looked at me with her eyes wide open. “Only fifth years know how to do this. We’re the first years!”

“My parents taught me how to do these when I was younger,” I replied. They weren’t hard at all. I heard footsteps behind me and saw Professor Hughes standing above me.

“You already know how to do this?” she asked, squinting through her rhinestone-encrusted cat eyeglasses. She walked back to her desk and picked up an ancient book from the cluttered pieces of paper. She came to me and placed it on my desk. She patted it.

“This is your assignment for the rest of the year. It took many years for even the greatest of cryptographers to crack it.” She smiled, looking at my hopeless expression. Then, her face hardened. “Do not lose this. It is a very special book.” I heard her words through my mind as the rest of the day continued, through gym, shooting class, the Obstacle, all the way until after the school day was over. I finally fell asleep and dreamed of my parents. I thought of their rushed “business trips” they went on a few times every month. I remembered that one time I walked into their room while they were packing, and saw my mother place a gun in her suitcase.

“Don’t worry sweetie,” she said, leading me out of their room. “We need to protect ourselves sometimes, that’s all.” I also thought about all the cryptography classes, karate lessons, and all the different languages I learned! I know French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and English, of course. I thought of the men in black suits that came to my house one day.

“Your parents are dead. They were killed in a terrorist attack at the airport. It

was an accident.” They assured me in unison. They didn’t bother to tell me why my parents were the only people killed in that “terrorist attack.” Now I knew that it wasn’t an accident. Someone killed them on purpose. I decided to bide my time, until the opportunity to learn more came. Every day, I went to my classes, learning more, until I was the best in my class. I was the girl the teachers always used as an example. Straight A student, cryptography master, and the girl who always won the Obstacle course we had every month. I only excelled at the physical activity because of all the gymnastics and parkour training I had gone to all my life. But I hid my real self, who laughed at everything and loved *The Simpsons*. I missed my old friends from school and my cat. I missed my boyfriend. I was proud of myself for my hard work and keeping myself together this long. Some nights I felt like I would burst out bawling, but I knew that would just make my stay longer. I became a cold mask, devoid of all emotion and feeling. I knew my only purpose was clear. To find who killed my parents and kill them. I would sneak out at night and scope out the surroundings, and learn more for the day when my plan was put into action. After eight months, what I was waiting for finally happened. I was walking past the Dean’s office and heard talking. Talking about me.

“Poor girl,” I heard a feminine voice say. “Her parents were both murdered by him,” I heard a sigh.

“We can’t tell her,” another voice responded.

“Why not?” the first voice said. I had had enough. I barged in the door and looked at the two women sitting in chairs across from each other.

“Yeah, why not?” I said, glaring at the Dean. She looked around nervously.

“We weren’t going to tell you until you were ready,” she sighed, “but I suppose we can tell you the basics.” She pulled out a chair and I sat on it. She began.

“Your mother and father were both the last descendants of four very influential and successful families. Your mother, Alessia Sousa, was born from a master spy from Britain’s M16, and the head of the SNI. Your father was Erik Anderson. His parents were the head officer of Sweden’s intelligence agency and the top spy for the CIA. Both your parents became the co-heads of the CIA, after thirty years of continuous service. Then, they were sent on a mission and assassinated. Their mission was to capture and bring in Señor Diablo, an evil mastermind criminal plotting to destroy the world with a bomb. He needs a special book that has the instructions to build a bomb that could destroy a whole country. This happened many centuries ago to a place called Atlantis. Señor Diablo decided that killing your parents, two very influential people, would show everyone how evil he was. He also thought that they had this book. We are working now to find him, and to arrest him for all the crimes he has committed.” She stood up and came over to me, and led me out the door. I walked up to my dorm in silence, but a plan was forming in my mind. I was going to find Señor Diablo. And kill him.

That night, I packed my bag, adding all the necessities and weapons I would need. I also snuck tons of snacks and money to keep me safe along my journey. I picked up the book Mrs. Hughes had given to me and shoved it in my backpack. Who said I couldn't finish a little homework on the way? Unless they expelled me, of course. I went to classes as normal and snuck into the Dean's office while she was gone. I quickly disabled the cameras and opened her cabinet. There! A red folder marked "Señor Diablo" was in the center. I grabbed it, and dashed into the hallway and back upstairs. Time for the big escape. Right at 10:00, I hid my bag behind me and walked into the hall.

"Bye, Annika," I called. "I'm going to the nurse to get some medicine."

"See you soon," she answered, and waved at me as I walked through the door. I walked quickly out of the castle, carefully avoiding the cameras swiping around the hall. I jumped when I passed the statue of two people sitting together, making sure I didn't trip on the electrical wire. I looked at the helipad and saw the helicopter with its back door about to close. I dashed to the back and got through just in time. I was glad for my all-black outfit, which hid me in the shadows. The helicopter jerked and we were off. I almost nodded off, but the helicopter slowed. I looked down and saw the colosseum. I snuck to the wall grabbed a parachute, and jumped out of the door-frame. I pulled the tab, and I slowly floated down. I looked down and saw two men wearing all black standing at the bottom of the arena. The sun shone on my legs, and I

smiled for the first time in months. That day, I would avenge my parents.

\* \* \*

My eyes blurred as I took in the surroundings. I tried to move my body, but I was tied to a chair with thick rope.

"I am Señor Diablo," a rough voice chuckled. "I killed your parents, and I will kill you."

I blinked, and everything came into focus. I gasped aloud.

"Mr. Martinez?" I whispered, shocked.

"Yes, that was my alias," he purred, pacing around me and my rope prison. "I must admit, I was surprised that you were so reckless to come here alone. You fell right into my lair! Bad for you, good for me," he cackled. "It is very convenient, that I didn't have to go find you. You also brought me the book!" He drew back and shook his head.

"I don't have time for this," he looked at one of his henchmen. "Bring in the syringe." A tall boy my age walked in.

He took one look at my face and rushed over.

"Ariana! What happened to you? Why did you leave me?" His voice sounded angry and accusing.

"Your dad killed my parents. My only choice was to go to boarding school. No one else cared enough about me." Tears started to trickle down my cheeks. "I trained to keep myself safe." I looked at him straight in the eyes. "I loved you. I can't believe you did this to me." Tears dripped down my face and onto my chin. We had dated for three golden years, which all end-

ed the day my parents died and I was off to school.

“What?” Marcos turned around and glared at his father. “Is this true?” Señor Diablo sighed.

“Yes, I swore I would destroy their pedigreed bloodline. First I killed her grandparents, her parents, and now I will kill her.” I struggled against my bonds.

“How many other innocent people have you killed?” Marcos yelled at his father.

I slowly breathed in and out. If I didn’t act now, who knows what would happen to Marcos. Or to me. I carefully maneuvered the slim knife tucked into my shirt and passed it to my right hand. I placed it to the rope and slowly began sawing it back and forth. The rope quietly unlatched, just in time. Señor Diablo pulled a gun from his pocket and pointed it out to me. His finger pulled and I dove for the table. The bullet screeched as it hit the metal floor. I grabbed my cold metal dart gun from my sleeve, stood up, and aimed it right at Señor Diablo’s heart.

“Your crimes stop now. I have the strength of my parents and every other person you have killed!” I screamed at him. I narrowed my eyes and tightened my index finger on the trigger. The dart flew right towards its mark. It hit his neck, and a loud thud sounded as he hit the floor. Marcos looked at me in horror.

“It’s a stunning dart,” I reassured Marcos as I handed him a gun. “He’ll be fine.” We jumped around the room, carefully dodging bullets. I used my dart gun and knocked out as many people as I could. I rolled on the floor, stood up, and did a

back handspring right into one of the henchmen's faces. He was out cold. I knew Marcos didn’t have as much training as me, so I made sure he was protected. I couldn’t bear to lose him too. Then, I saw movement in the corner, and I heard the chink of a trigger being pulled. The bullet shot right to my heart. I gasped and couldn’t move. I closed my eyes, braced myself for certain death, and thought of my parents. I missed them. Even though they had been gone for a year, I still felt it like it was yesterday. I hoped they would be proud of me when I met them in the sky. The impact didn’t come. I opened my eyes and looked down. Marcos was on the floor, covered in blood. He saved me. I shot my stun dart at the man and pulled out my phone. I dialed 112.

“Please help! My friend has been shot!” I cried in Italian.

“Please calm down, miss. We will arrive soon.” Ten minutes later, the ambulance came and found me cradling Marcos’s weak body in my arms, collapsed on the floor.

“Please save him!” I yelled. We were both loaded onto stretchers and I closed my eyes. I was haunted by dreams of a red giant man with horns about to stab Marcos with his long sword. As it was about to cut into his heart, I opened my eyes and sat up with a start. The starchy white hospital sheets bunched around my legs. I remembered what had happened last night.

“Where is he?” I urgently asked the nurse next to me.

“Your friend is safe,” she replied, smiling. I sighed in relief. I looked at the TV. “Terrorist found unconscious in lair under

the Colosseum,” flashed across the screen on the news channel, with a video of Señor Diablo being led away in handcuffs, yelling curses at the camera. I sighed again. Everything was all right. I slowly stood up and the nurse brought me to his room. The hallway was full of IV machines connected to elderly people being pushed around in wheelchairs. He was awake, sitting on his cot and eating some very dry eggs. I walked up and sat next to him.

“Thank you for saving me,” I said feebly. He smiled, and his dimples came into view. I didn’t realize how much I had missed him.

“Of course, Ari!” he replied. “You would have done it for me.” He’s right. I would have. He grasped my hand and I looked into his brown eyes. *I finally have someone to care about*, I thought as I lay next to him.

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*sps 7.8* is the literary magazine of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades of the Somerville Public Schools. Current and past issues may be read free on line at [www.happeningnoweverywhere.com](http://www.happeningnoweverywhere.com).

All 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade level students residing or attending school in the city of Somerville, Massachusetts, may submit original, previously unpublished writing to [happeningmagazine@yahoo.com](mailto:happeningmagazine@yahoo.com). Students entering 7<sup>th</sup> grade in September, 2020, are among those eligible to submit now. All submissions must be accompanied by full name, email contact address (either student's or parent's), school and grade.

Due to the pandemic emergency, Volume 5 of *sps 7.8* to date consists of work from one school whose prolific writers submitted early. Their publications include the following.

Healey Memoirs  
Healey After Dark  
More Healey Fiction  
Healey Poetry

We will return to a periodical schedule as submissions are received. Volume 5 will be open through the summer of 2020 and Volume 6 will begin in September.

**Mature language and content: parents be advised**

You and younger readers will also enjoy *Kid!* magazine, online at [12zine.com](http://12zine.com).

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