

sps 7·8

vol 4 #4

The literary magazine of the 7th and 8th grades
Somerville, Massachusetts



Summer 2019

sps7·8

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The literary magazine of the 7th and 8th grades Somerville, Massachusetts

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Published independently on behalf of the students without expense to the community. Labor and materials donated. Green publishing standards observed.

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Cover art by Joli Luna, Madeline Destine and Zia Halawa, *East Somerville Community School*.

HOME PAGE

The New Role

Ellie Churchill

“Michaela! Guess what?” I was facetimeing Michaela, because I had just found out super exciting news, and I was bursting to tell someone.

That day had been the first day of rehearsals for *The Nutcracker*, a traditional ballet for the holiday season. A week and a half ago, I found out my role. I had been cast as a party girl, which was very disappointing. This was going to be my fifth year as a party girl, and I would definitely be one of the oldest. It’s kind of a boring role, because all you do is dance a little bit, and then just stand there and make gestures. It was fun for the first couple of years, but I knew that the fifth year would not be fun. And maybe it wouldn’t have been as bad if I hadn’t been expecting something better. I knew that in eighth grade, if you get to do a role that is *en pointe*, or at least understudy a *pointe* role, that means you’re really good. So, of course that was my goal. I had been *en pointe* for a couple of years and I was pretty strong, so I thought I had a pretty good shot. The audition went well too.

Some of my friends found out their roles earlier than I did. Most of them had been cast as a soldier/angel understudy. Soldier is not a *pointe* role, but angel is. I was hoping at least for the same thing. But when I opened that email and it said, “Congratulations, your child has been selected to participate in *The Nutcracker* in the role of party girl,” I basically broke down. It was like a slap in the face, because I had been expecting something better, and I didn’t get it, even though all of my friends did.

This decision didn’t really make sense to anyone, but it was what it was. After a lot of thinking, I decided to accept the role. It was a hard decision, but in the end I knew that both choices had disadvantages, but declining probably had more.

That Saturday, I woke up to the alarm on my Echo Dot. My first thoughts were happy thoughts, because I knew it was Saturday, so I finally didn’t have to go to school. But, I was also tired, because it was 7:45 A.M. I have to get up early every Saturday, because I have ballet class at 9:00 A.M. Thinking about ballet class made me think

about Nutcracker. That made me remember that I was a party girl *for the fifth time*, so my happy thoughts were gone.

I went downstairs, where my mom was in the kitchen. I let out a loud, dramatic sigh.

She chuckled. "What is it?"

"Today I woke up and I was happy, because it's Saturday. But then I remembered that I'm a party girl again, so I got sad. This happens every morning!"

She laughed out loud. "You're being too dramatic."

I had a pretty good ballet class. I had good balances and turns, and memorized all of the combinations perfectly. After class, I went to take off my *pointe* shoes with my friends Sage and Caroline who had both been cast as soldier/angel understudy.

"So we're going to have to go to three hours of rehearsal today?" Caroline said, sounding annoyed.

"Yup, we have two roles," Sage replied.

"That's six hours of rehearsal per weekend!"

"I know, right?" Sage said.

They both sounded tired and exasperated.

"I'll switch with you," I mumbled. How dare they complain when they were so lucky compared to me?

The class had ended at 11:00 and rehearsal wasn't until 4:30 P.M., so I went home. I distracted myself by doing homework, eating, and watching T.V.

When it was time to go back to ballet, I made a decision. If I was going to do this role, I was really going to do it. I was going to be the best party girl there and show them my dedication so I could get a better role next year.

I got to rehearsal a few minutes after 4:30, so I thought I was late, which wouldn't be a good start to my promise of dedication. Hurriedly, I looked at the sign in the office to see what studio it was in, and burst into the studio. But the angel rehearsal was still going on in there. They started to look at me, but I didn't give them enough time, because I ran away like the Flash. I felt like I wanted to introvert into myself.

When I went back into the hallway, sure enough, other party kids were still out there. The rehearsals must have been behind schedule. There were a lot of girls who were in 5th or 6th grade, and

they were all looking at me in confusion, probably confused about why I had the same role as them.

One of the party boys, Declan, gave me a sympathetic smile and said, "Wait Ellie, you're a party girl again?"

I flinched. "Yes," I said with great pain.

An obnoxious soldier named Derek jumped into the conversation. "She was almost crying when she found out!" He exclaimed, and started laughing.

I didn't find it funny. "We don't speak of that," I said, rolling my eyes. It was too soon to joke about it.

I looked around at the other party kids. The party girls were basically everyone I was expecting. They were mostly girls from the level III class, which is a level lower than my class. Thankfully, I knew that my friend Sophia, who is a year older than me, was also a party girl. But, she was also an angel understudy, so it was still frustrating.

I looked around the room. I didn't really know most of the party boys. Not many boys want to do Nutcracker, so they get very desperate, and sometimes recruit boys with no ballet training.

Just then, something hit my foot. When I looked down, I saw a little boy, literally slithering on the floor! I couldn't believe I had to deal with annoying little children like this. I sighed at my fate.

When angel rehearsal finally ended, all of the party kids walked into the studio in a line. I felt so tall. I noticed that all of the angels who were coming out of the studio were looking at me in confusion. This casting decision really didn't make sense to anyone.

I put my stuff down in the corner of the studio, and got back into the line of party girls. Then, I saw Irene. Irene is a girl who is my age. She is very nice, but when I noticed that she had been in the angel rehearsal, I got very frustrated. I was stronger than her. If she was an angel understudy, then *why wasn't I?*

However, it was still relieving to have another party girl my age. "Hi Irene, are you a party girl?"

"Yup," she said. "I swear, we're going to be party girls until we're like thirty!"

"Oh thank god," I replied without thinking. "I mean I'm sorry. But I'm glad I'm not the only one!"

"Yeah, me too."

In order to give us our party girl numbers, the administration needed to know our heights. So, we all went in a height line. I was at the very tallest end, of course. I wondered, have the party girls always been this tiny, or am I just too old? Probably the latter.

But then, I tensed up, because I saw Jose Mateo come into the studio. Jose Mateo, the founder of Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre, is the artistic director, and he basically decides all the casting. I was kind of salty, but he is very intimidating, and he must be respected. Being disrespectful would not help me in the long run, or the short run either. So when he came in the room, I put on a good face. I couldn't have a bad rep if I wanted to try to get a good role next year.

Mr. Mateo is a perfectionist, and so he was walking by everyone, shortest to tallest, getting everyone arranged just so. When he got to me, he leaned in a little bit. He was going to say something.

“We need to talk about having you understudy Clara.”

I had a flashback to the dreams that I had. First, I dreamed that I had been recast as an angel. Not even an angel understudy, but a real angel. Someone from the office had come into my ballet class to tell me. It was amazing. A few nights later, I dreamed that Mr. Mateo told me he wanted me to understudy Clara, the lead role in *The Nutcracker*. This would be an honor. The pointe work is very advanced, so the Clara's are usually in high school, and being an understudy in eighth grade would be super cool. It was extremely disappointing when I woke up from those dreams.

So when he said this, I didn't know what to say, because it was so out of nowhere. I just nodded my head like an idiot, as if I was totally unfazed, and Mr. Mateo moved on.

He then proceeded to give us one of his long, signature lectures about how this had to be the best *Nutcracker* ever, and we had to look well trained. I could barely pay attention, but I did. When he left, it was like the whole room let out a big sigh of relief, because now we could relax.

Our normal rehearsal teacher was going to get started, and I started to worry. He had said we should talk about it, but he never actually said it was for sure. But then, I saw Angie come in. Angie is someone who is kind of involved in the casting decisions, because she's pretty close to Mr. Mateo. She's also a principal dancer in the

company, the highest rank. She asked to speak to me, and we went to the side of the room.

“Hey Ellie, Mr. Mateo said that he already talked to you about this, but you’re going to be a Clara understudy. Did he tell you that already?”

“Yes, he did.” My voice quivered a little bit, and I started tapping my fingers. I was trying to stay calm and control my excitement. It was for real!

“Good, good. Oh, and can you come to angel rehearsal tomorrow?”

“What?” I knew that Clara was briefly in the angel scene, but I didn’t think I’d have to rehearse that part with the angels so soon. What did she mean?

“Oh yeah, sorry I guess he didn’t tell you. You’re also an angel understudy. You were cast as a party girl/angel understudy, but there was a typo in the casting email. We’re really sorry about that. I mean it wasn’t me, it was probably Julia or something, but I’m apologizing on her behalf. You’re one of the strongest in your level, you shouldn’t be just a party girl.”

Wow. I had two new roles! I couldn’t believe it - my dream had literally come true. “Thank you,” I said, and I went back to rehearsal. I could barely last through the rehearsal, because I had such exciting news. I was really jumpy the whole time, and it went by extremely slowly. When I finally got out at 6:00 P.M., I could barely wait to tell people. I was going to be very busy, but it would be very fun. It was a good thing I didn’t decline the role, because then I would never have gotten this exciting news. © 2019 Ellie Churchill

Trauma

Kayala Nayak

“Sometimes I just get so *angry*, I want to punch a wall! My boss has really been pushing my buttons lately, nothing is good enough for him! UGH! I really just want to quit and go live on a boat in the middle of nowhere, but I can’t leave behind all of my gerbils. I don’t think that the sea would be very good for them, ya know? Gerbils are not aquatic. I just don’t know what to do anymore...” Mr. Miller babbled on; he had been talking for almost an hour and a half.

Oh my God, does he even need to breathe? He hasn't stopped talking since he walked through the door. I don't get paid enough for this, Chloe thought to herself. Her eyes wandered to the clock, it was 3:20 P.M. *Ten more minutes Chloe, you can do this.*

Chloe Spencer was not very happy today. It seemed like everything was going wrong. Her alarm hadn't gone off that morning, making her fifteen minutes late for work. The disgusting office coffee had burned the roof of her mouth. She still felt the coppery aftertaste, and worst of all, today was a Monday. Everyone hates Mondays, but Chloe hated them with a passion; she had no young clients today, so she couldn't take a break from petty adult whining to color pictures to release stress or sing Disney songs with a kid to help get rid of her anxiety. Nope, not today, today was full of boring adults with boring stories and even more boring lives.

Mr. Miller was still talking, but Chloe no longer knew the topic of discussion. Something about gerbils or boats... nothing of any interest. *I have wanted to be a therapist since I was ten years old, and now that I am one, nothing seems right. I worked nights and studied all of the time during college. I got a doctorate from Harvard! Is any of this really worth it? All of the work that I put in landed me a job, I got some awards, got to be on some magazine covers. Yet I am listening to a forty-five year old man talk about gerbils? What is my life?* She thought to herself. For a therapist, Chloe had a lot more inner turmoil than expected.

"What should I do, Dr. Spencer?" Mr. Miller asked.

Shit, what was he saying? I should have paid attention, I should really just buy some better coffee for the office.

"Um.. Uh.. Just take your meds, distract yourself. I have not noticed any major problems, you just seem to have a lot of pent up stress. Maybe try painting? Or.. uh.. yoga?"

That was disastrous.

"Well, I'm sorry but our session is over for today. It's 3:30 now. Have a nice day and I look forward to seeing you next week, Mr. Miller," Chloe said. Her voice had risen an octave in an attempt to show some semblance of interest. Her acting was not very good.

With an awkward nod, Mr. Miller walked out of the door. Chloe let out a relieved sigh. Poor Mr. Miller, she thought absentmindedly. He was single, living in a cramped apartment with eight gerbils and no romantic action in years. He had no serious conditions aside

from anxiety, but he held on to a lot of stress. Chloe sipped some of the black sludge that was supposed to be coffee and slouched in her chair. She tucked a piece of her short curly hair behind her ear and started to doodle in her notebook, her work notebook. Sometimes, she just wanted to give her clients real advice, advice from Chloe instead of from the professional Dr. Spencer.

“Just get rid of the gerbils, you’re forty-five for Christ’s sake! You do not need eight gerbils, that is absolutely ridiculous, *no one* needs eight gerbils,” is what she would have said to Mr. Miller. But alas, she unfortunately could not do that. Do you think anyone got as many psychology medals as Chloe by saying stuff like that? No, you get awards by fitting the mold and being boring.

She flicked through her planner with her left hand, absent-mindedly twirling a pen with her right. She had a new client at four P. M. today, some woman named Jamie Adams. She let out a groan as she realized that Jamie had booked a two hour appointment. She glanced at the TV across the room, grabbed the remote and flicked on the news channel.

“Another death added to the string of murders occurring in Boston, Massachusetts,” the news anchor said in a very fake stage voice.

“A John Doe has turned up this morning and was found by some civilians who were going on a morning run. This marks the fifth murder in the same month, all victims have similar wounds and appearances. Is this the marking of a serial killer? Stay tuned for a police statement at six P.M. Eastern Standard Time.” After that brief statement, the news turned to sports updates. Uninterested, Chloe turned off the TV. She had heard about the previous two murders and was already intrigued. She would definitely be watching the update at six.

There was a knock on her door; she walked over to open it. On her way, she glanced at her watch. It read 4:00 P.M. *Four already? Damn it*, Chloe thought to herself. She opened the door and came face to face with her secretary, Joan.

“I have a Jamie Adams for your four o’clock appointment in the waiting room, Chloe,” Joan said in a polite tone. She had a pitying smile on her face, as she knew Chloe’s hatred of Mondays.

“Okay,” Chloe said with a sigh, “send her in.”

“Hey, do you want me to bring you an iced coffee, sweetheart? You look like you could use one,” Joan said, lowering her voice more to make sure that only Chloe could hear her.

Joan was about eight years older than Chloe, making her thirty-six. She started working for Chloe almost four years ago. Joan was basically Chloe’s office mom, who took care of her like one of her own.

Chloe’s actual mother had died in an accident when Chloe was nine, at least that was what Chloe told people when they asked. The reality was darker, much darker. Chloe’s mom had killed herself in her bathtub. Chloe was the one who found her, Chloe never told anybody. Her mother’s death had left Chloe with Thalassophobia, the fear of open water. Chloe told people that she had almost drowned when she was younger to explain her fear. People bought the lie easily.

“Yes, I’m desperate for caffeine,” Chloe said with a relieved smile.

Joan smiled, patting Chloe on the shoulder reassuringly and left to get her coffee. She waved Jamie towards Chloe’s office on her way out.

Jamie walked through the door and Chloe instantly started studying her. She first noticed her hands, tightly gripping her purse and fidgeting profusely. She was young, twenty-five, according to her documents. Despite her young age, she had wrinkles indicating a perpetual concerned frown. Her eyebrows pinched in a look of nervousness. Her weight was light on her feet, indicating a skittish nature. Chloe could already tell that this girl needed anxiety meds; she looked like she was preparing to run from the cops or something.

“H-H-Hi, I’m J-Jamie,” the girl said, reaching out a shaking hand.

“Hello Jamie, I’m Doctor Spencer. Don’t be nervous, this is a safe space,” Chloe said with a reassuring smile as she shook her hand. They both moved to their seats, Chloe behind her desk on her chair and Jamie on the opposite side in a comfy couch.

Jamie was a pale, skinny girl. Her nails were chewed, a clear nervous habit. Her blue eyes surveyed the room, focusing on the windows, the door, ways to escape. Chloe was intrigued. This young girl seemed very prepared for the worst.

“So, Jamie, is this your first time seeing a therapist?” Chloe offered as a way to start the conversation.

“Um... N-No, I’ve been going t-to therapy since I was a ch-child. I have IED an-and anxiety. I needed t-t-to find a n-new therapist since moving to the city around a month a-a-ago,” Jamie said. *Hmm, that’s interesting, Chloe thought to herself. Such a quiet girl, with an Intermittent Explosive Disorder. Very interesting indeed. Wait, Chloe, stop it, stop speculating suspiciously about your clients.*

Chloe and Jamie chatted for the rest of the session. Chloe tried to make her more comfortable around her, as therapy doesn’t work if the patient is scared and uncomfortable. Jamie slowly calmed down, still fidgeting with her bag and fingers, but her stuttering had almost disappeared. Chloe still couldn’t help notice how strange her new patient was. After Jamie had left, Chloe still thought about her peculiarity.

Jamie had something off about her, definitely something. Of course, most of her patients had something off about them, she was a therapist, after all. But, Jamie seemed different. She knew that she was hiding something. Chloe wrote some things down in her notebook. She had mastered notetaking without her clients noticing. Chloe assumed that it was unsettling to be telling your life story while someone took notes, potentially pointing out something bad. She had been able to learn to write notes under her desk and continue eye contact, like touch-typing.

She wrote about her fidgeting, a consistent twitch. Jamie often moved the fingers of her left hand over a strange scar that slashed through the three middle fingers of her right hand. She picked at the skin on her palms, scratched at her cuticles. She had a variety of twitches, but most were focused on her hands.

Suddenly, Chloe remembered the news update on the murder case that she was looking forward to. She clicked on the TV; the channel was already on screen. The news anchor appeared to be interviewing the chief of police. Chloe knew him a bit; she helped some of his officers with PTSD.

“This, uh, recent murder, uh, appears to be the work of a serial killer.” the chief said. Chloe let out a small gasp, although she had already suspected it.

“The victims are all, uh... tall, blond men with, uh... no family or relationships,” the Chief continued his statement, breaking up his sentences with pauses where he decided what to say next. This was definitely a serial killer, the entire force was working on it along with some specialists. Chloe was very intrigued, and she didn’t need to pay attention to the time since Jamie had been her last appointment of the day. She listened intently. The news anchor welcomed another man, who seemed much more comfortable with the idea of being on TV. He was one of the specialists.

“We are working on a description of the unknown suspect. We have no physical feature witnesses yet but we can tell the personality and potentially the appearance through the killing signature, the setting, and the victims,” the man said. He was younger than the chief but his eyes were heavy with the burden of some undoubtedly disturbing sights.

“The suspect appears to be a woman or someone with a feminine presence and style, indicated by the shoe prints at the scene. The suspect appears to be small, thin, but powerful. Due to the settings of the murders, the killer may be overly anxious. Perhaps they have something that they are embarrassed of, like a speech impediment, a stutter or a lisp. They are very cautious and skittish, maybe with anger management issues or a split personality disorder. Looking at the wounds on the victims, the suspect possesses a lot of unexpected power, disarming the victims and killing them quickly.”

With a shocked realization, Chloe noticed that the man was describing someone that she knew, someone that she had just seen less than an hour ago. He was describing *Jamie*. Although this thought caused a shiver down her spine, she brushed it off and went back to listening to the man.

“This suspect is very good at avoiding cameras. We have footage of a short and skinny person near all of the victims but no footage of the face or discernible features.”

With that sentence, the screen changed to the anchor who said that the press conference had ended. Chloe switched to her favorite show, a little frazzled from her overly curious thoughts. *Could it be possible? Could it be Jamie?*

Chloe was suddenly hit with an extreme wave of fear. Her brother fit the description of the victims. Tall, blonde, and

hopelessly single, that was Tom. Her baby brother, who was no longer a baby but a man of 22, meant everything to her. He didn't know their mother very well, and didn't share her phobia. He didn't shudder when he saw a sink or bathtub full of water, nor did he hyperventilate at the thought of crossing the bridge over a stream or flying in an airplane over the ocean. He was amazing. He was the perfect little brother.

What if I put him in harm's way? What if she finds him on one of my Instagram posts? No, no Chloe, you just met this girl. She could be perfectly normal and you are blowing this way out of proportion.

The door opened with a squeal, causing Chloe to let out a scream. She quickly took her high heel off of her foot and held it in a defensive stance.

“WOAH, CHLOE! It's just me! Jesus, have you been watching horror movies or something? Wait, are you *wielding* your *heel* at me? *Are you serious?*”

Chloe sunk back into her chair when she realized the person in the doorway was just Joan. She hadn't realized how on edge she had been, sitting in her office alone. She let out a small laugh, the kind that meant “I'm pathetic and I just got scared shitless by my harmless, lovely secretary.” Joan entered the office fully, closing the door behind her using her elbow. Both of her hands were full. In one hand, she was holding a grey cardboard cup holder with two large cups of iced coffee; in the other, she held a brown paper bag which looked like it held food.

“Before you went all crazy on me, I was going to tell you that I got us coffee and food,” Joan said, looking concerned, but there was an amused twinkle in her eye.

“Sorry, I got caught up in a stupid train of thought,” Chloe murmured, shaking her head with a small smile on her face. She moved a chair next to her desk for Joan to sit and took the cup holder from her hands.

“Ah, a classic Dumbass Chloe Theory. I'm going to get you a trademark for that,” Joan chuckled, sitting down and placing the bag on the desk in front of her.

“Anyways, I got us sandwiches from that place by the corner. I knew that there is some murder thing going on and you usually get distracted and forget to eat or go home after work.”

“My office has a flat screen TV, why would I want to go home to watch the case on my tiny computer if I have this as an option?” Chloe questioned. She rummaged in the bag for a sandwich.

“So, what’s the current theory?” Joan said, now thoughtfully sipping her coffee through the clear straw.

“I think that Jamie is a serial killer,” Chloe declared bluntly.

“What?” Joan almost choked on her drink when she heard what Chloe was saying. Although she teased her relentlessly about her theories, those theories were usually correct.

“Okay, you know about the murders going on, right?”

Joan nodded.

“Well, there was a press conference with the chief of police today, and he said it was a serial killer. Then, this specialist guy came on screen and gave a description of the suspect’s potential mannerisms, appearance, and such,” Chloe paused, giving Joan a moment to register.

“All of the descriptions fit Jamie, I don’t know the cause of those mannerisms but they match. It all matches,” Chloe said, chewing the corner of her sandwich thoughtfully. This theory was building in her head as she continued informing Joan, the evidence becoming more concrete.

“What do you mean? You barely know her,” Joan questioned. She already kind of believed Chloe, although she was still skeptical.

“Well, due to doctor-patient confidentiality, I can’t tell you her diagnosis or anything. But, you’ve seen her, you’ve seen her mannerisms and appearance. It matches kind of perfectly,” Chloe said, her own thoughts scaring her, but she couldn’t bring herself to care at the moment. Realizing that Joan hadn’t seen the press conference, Chloe played a recording for her. She watched as the frightened realization spread across Joan’s face.

“Oh my god, Chloe, there is something you should know,” Joan said, her voice now lower as though she was sharing top secret information. Her face flushed as she started to pick at her nails, a nervous habit.

“The security cameras, she maneuvered through every single one of them. There is not a single glimpse of her face on any of the cameras.”

“Oh my god, my patient is a serial killer,” Chloe gasped. There was now a firmer yet terrified tone in her voice. She was certain now.

After knowing this woman for less than a day, she had learned a lot. Jamie Adams, the serial killer, the targetter of Tom-type men, Chloe’s *client*. *Uh oh*.

“Well, what the hell are we gonna do?” Joan asked. Her voice becoming higher, as if her vocal chords were being pulled tight. Chloe shared Joan’s fear, but her constant curiosity always got the best of her.

“I have to find out for sure. I have another session with her on Wednesday, right?” Joan nodded. “Well, I am going to ask more personal questions now. The first session is always a meeting with no breakthrough, I think I can start really digging for information in the next session,” Chloe said, an authoritative tone overtaking her voice.

Chloe and Joan waited with bated breath for Jamie’s Wednesday session to arrive. Chloe talked with her brother Tom over dinner on Tuesday, telling him about her theory. Tom was a lot like Chloe. He always participated willingly in her conspiracy discussions. She told him to not go near her office until the killer was caught. She turned both of their social media accounts on private.

Finally, after what felt like years, Wednesday arrived. Chloe had stopped by the nearby Starbucks with Joan during her lunch break, ordering large iced coffees. She sipped the drink, filled with apprehension. *Are my theories correct? What is her motive? Was my brother’s appearance the cause of choosing me as her therapist?* Chloe’s thoughts shot through her brain like a storm. With each passing second, a new thought or add-on to her theory would occupy her mind. She exchanged worried glances with Joan, who sat next to her with an equally worried expression. They watched the clock, the arms ticking rhythmically with each passing second.

Jamie was her only client who came after lunch on Wednesdays. Her session was at 3:30 P.M.

“Okay, it’s a two hour appointment,” Chloe told Joan. “I think that’s enough time to figure out a potential motive.”

“I went to Best Buy yesterday. I bought something that I think you might be interested in,” Joan said. “I bought a spy camera.”

“What? Really? Do you know how to set it up?” Chloe asked.

Joan took a small package out of her pocket, placing it on the table. Inside the package was a small camera, less than the size of a gumball. Chloe picked it up, careful not to get fingerprints on the lens.

“I already had it set up at the store. We just need to find a place to hide it where she won’t see it. I was thinking maybe in between the books behind you?”

“Yeah, that sounds like a good idea. How do we turn it on?”

“It’s activated by an app on my phone, I’ll turn it on when I send her into your office,” Joan said.

Chloe took the camera and placed it in the bookshelf behind her desk. She hid it amongst a therapy series that was written by one of her professors. The camera was almost completely hidden, the lens hidden in the shadows of the books.

“Okay, how are we supposed to record what she’s saying?” Chloe asked.

“The camera has a built in mic, everything is taken care of,” Joan responded.

“How would I survive without you?” Chloe felt a wave of respect for Joan. She was happy that she had someone by her side through this terrifying process. Joan put a hand on Chloe’s shoulder, the look on her face one of a worried mother.

Chloe glanced at the clock, 3:25 P. M.

“It’s showtime, Joan. Are you ready?” she smiled slightly, a façade covering how she was really feeling.

Joan walked out of Chloe’s office, carrying her coffee. On her way out, she turned her head towards Chloe, a glint of fear in her eyes.

“She’s here.”

Chloe quickly looked at the camera, hoping that it would work. She threw her finished iced coffee into the trash and took out her notebook. She began to doodle a small flower in the corner of a fresh page.

Jamie walked in.

Chloe instantly straightened her back and greeted her with a smile. Jamie looked calmer than the last time, her face solemn as if carved in stone. She sat down, her eyes making contact with Chloe’s. She smiled, and although it was meant to show happiness and greeting, it sent a chill down Chloe’s back. Chloe’s skin erupted in

goosebumps. She was thankful that her arms were covered by the sleeves of her dress.

Jamie continued the eye contact. The smile still plastered on her face looked twisted, it looked wrong. Her eyes held anger, resentment, but they also seemed to have a thin veil of sadness. Chloe felt as though those eyes were burning into her soul, leaving only charred remains of her heart.

With much effort Chloe still held onto her graceful expression and started the session.

“So, Jamie, why don’t you tell me some more about yourself,” Chloe commented, “Where did you grow up? How was your life at home when you were younger? Is there any specific information that you think would be important to making a breakthrough?”

“I grew up in B-Boston but m-moved t-to Nevada when I was ei-eight. Uh, I w-was diagnosed with IED when I was n-nine. M-my old th-therapist th-thinks that it was ca-caused by a t-t-trauma. I’ve t-taken anger management c-classes ever since, b-but I-I don’t think th-that they really work,” Jamie finished her sentence.

Chloe tried to pay attention, she really did, but her hands were shaking and beginning to sweat. *God Chloe, get it together. Act as normal as possible, she can’t know.*

Jamie went on with her life story, but she never talked about the time before she moved to Nevada. *Interesting.*

“Uh, Jamie, could you tell me something about before you moved to Nevada?” Chloe asked, trying to be subtle in her curiosity.

Jamie paused, an emotion flashed through her eyes but disappeared before Chloe could read it. It looked a bit like anger. Then, she turned and stared off into space for awhile. Chloe knew that whatever she was going to say was going to be a lie. The thought process was obvious.

“I, uh, I d-didn’t do m-much. I w-was a pretty s-s-secluded ch-child, I th-think. I only wanted t-to hang out w-with th-the girl who lived next d-door b-but, uh, she pu-pushed me a-away. I-I was unhappy i-in B-Boston, so m-my m-mom took the opportunity o-of a j-job in N-N-Nevada,” Jamie finished. She had a cold look on her face. She was staring out into space again, just above Chloe.

“Okay, do you think the move to Nevada caused any issues in development? Leaving a friend behind at such a young age must

have been hard for you,” Chloe was beginning to see a potential trigger. Trauma at a young age can cause a lot of problems, but that doesn’t explain the victim’s appearance.

“How about past relationships. Any violent break ups, abuse, traumas?” *Subtle, Chloe, real subtle.*

“N-No, not re-really. I’m n-not th-that into re-relationships.”

“Ah, okay just continue with your story. Share anything that you feel is important,” Chloe wrote down a little note about potential connection issues. She desperately wanted to know more about Jamie’s childhood but it was clear that it was an unwelcome conversation.

The session continued awkwardly. Chloe listened intently for anything that seemed suspicious, finding only strange looks from her patient when she asked a question.

When it had ended and Jamie had left, Joan rushed into the room. She locked the door behind her and sat next to Chloe. Taking out her phone, she set up the spy camera app and clicked on the recording of Jamie’s session.

Watching the video, Chloe realized with horror that Jamie wasn’t just staring off into space for long periods.

She was looking directly at the camera.

Chloe clutched Joan’s hand, fear painted her cheeks red. Joan’s hand squeezed Chloe’s as she turned to look at her.

“Holy shit, Chloe,” Joan said, a strain clear in her voice as she tried to maintain her composure.

“How did she know? We hid it well,” Chloe was confused.

She glanced at the book shelf from her desk. She couldn’t see the camera, how had Jamie spotted it so easily? She moved to where Jamie had been sitting. *Shit.* There was a red light blinking in the dark crevice of the book shelf. Chloe hadn’t noticed it when she put the camera up there. It was a dead giveaway. Joan moved to where Chloe was and found the red light too. She sighed disappointedly, as if this was just a minor inconvenience. This was not just a minor inconvenience. A potential murderer knew that they had been recording her. She knew.

Joan had to leave for an appointment that day, and she suggested that Chloe leave early as well. She didn’t want her traveling alone at night. Chloe agreed, and she shared her location with Joan on her

phone just in case something were to happen. *Nothing would happen, she would be fine, right?*

Chloe and Joan walked together to the parking lot, but parted ways when Joan reached her car and started the drive to her house. Chloe walked to her car alone, in the dark and musty parking lot. She put her keys in between her fingers, preparing for a situation in which she would need to protect herself.

Of course, keys didn't end up helping Chloe very much.

Suddenly, Chloe felt a blinding pain on her right temple. She swayed, and fell on the ground. Her eyesight was fuzzy but she could make out someone standing above her, holding a bat. She felt the warm sting spread from her temple to the rest of her head. A throbbing pain pierced through her cloudy vision, bringing a little bit of understanding up to the surface.

"What the hell?" Chloe asked, her voice quiet and hoarse.

Then, everything went black as she felt a fabric bag cover her head. She began to struggle, kicking at her attacker, attempting to scream. Her yells of terror were muffled by a gag being forced into her mouth.

She was abruptly thrown onto the cold concrete of the parking lot floor. With that movement, Chloe passed out.

Chloe awoke later, no longer in the parking lot. Instead, she was laying on her side on a cold tile floor. She looked around, black blotches interfered with her vision. She definitely had a concussion. Faint blue light shined on the ceiling. With startling recognition, Chloe realized that it was the reflection of a pool. She was on her side beside a pool, a big, open water pool. *Oh my god.*

She heard the sound of shoes clicking on the floor as someone walked towards her. She turned her head and gasped.

The person who stood before her was Jamie Adams.

"How's that Thalassophobia, Chloe?" Jamie said in a hysterical yet cheery voice.

Chloe began to cry.

"Oh quit it, it's just a pool," Jamie said. "What's so bad about pools?" She moved closer to Chloe. "It's not a bathtub, Chloe. I know how you feel about bathtubs," Jamie giggled. She dipped her hand into the pool, cupping a bit of water in her palm. She suddenly poured the water on Chloe's face. The seemingly harmless act brought a chill to Chloe's bones.

She tried to stand up, to run away. She couldn't move her hands or legs. Thick ropes wrapped around them and held her in place. Fresh tears ran down her face, mixing with the pool water. A bit of blood ran down her face, probably from where she had been hit.

Chloe stared at the pool, shaking violently with fear. *I'm going to die, oh my god, I'm going to die.* She struggled against the ropes that wrapped tightly around her wrists. Tears stained her cheeks as blood trickled from a laceration on her right eyebrow.

"Jamie, what the hell are you doing!" she shouted, fear mixing with anger as she continued to struggle. *Open water, open water, open water.* A rhythmic chant filled her ears. *Open water, open water, open water.*

The overwhelming anxiety and tension was making her dizzy, her vision was going in and out of focus.

"You honestly don't remember me? I knew you for five years yet you don't remember me?" Jamie asked. Anger was clear in her voice.

Chloe didn't understand. *What is she talking about? I don't know anyone named Jamie.* Chloe searched her mind for answers, coming up with nothing.

"Jamie, I don't know what you're talking about. Please, just calm down and let m--"

"*My name isn't Jamie!* How can you not remember? How can you not remember me?" Jamie, well apparently not Jamie, screamed.

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry! I don't know who you are, I don't remember! Just please don't kill me!" Chloe sobbed. Jamie was unravelling; Chloe was sure that her own death was approaching.

"*I was there for you!* I was by your side when your stupid mother killed herself. I was there!"

Oh my god, oh my god, I remember who she is. Chloe felt as if a dam in her mind had finally burst, a wave of memories flooding in to her brain. *Eve.*

"Eve?" Chloe asked as the walls that she had built to protect herself crumbled and fell to dust.

Eve, her strange young neighbor who moved away a year after Chloe's mother died. Eve, the one who was always obsessed with Chloe. She spent every moment that she had hanging off Chloe like

a vine. Chloe always shook her off and went to play with the older girls. When Eve visited the funeral, Chloe told her to go away. She shook her off, pushing her away as she always did. Rejection was a common trauma that could result in IED, in control issues.

Five people dead, and it's all my fault.

“Oh, so now you remember. After eighteen years, you are still as stuck up as you always were,” Eve let out a shrill, disturbing laugh. She moved closer to Chloe, a psychotic look in her eyes.

“Why? Why did you kill so many innocent people? Why not just kill me and get it over with?” Chloe said. She was angry now. So many people had suffered, just for some petty revenge over a childhood rejection. She now understood why the victims looked like Tom. It was all a psychotic attempt to get her attention.

“I wanted you to suffer. I want you to live with your guilt for the rest of your useless and insignificant life!” Eve shouted.

She pulled out a knife, twirling it merrily on her fingers. Her face twisted into sadistic enjoyment as she watched Chloe struggle against her confinement. Chloe saw the knife and closed her eyes, breathing deeply, preparing for the end. She was just going to be another name on the list of victims. Just another obituary in the news. Eve walked forward with a strange aura of grace as she brought her hand to Chloe's neck. The cold metal of the blade pressed on Chloe's skin. Chloe held her breath, hoping not to move and accidentally cut herself on the knife. Tears streamed down her flushed face. She smelled the chlorine of the pool and the lavender scent of Eve's perfume.

BANG!

The sound rang in Chloe's ears. She wasn't expecting it. She was expecting to hear the sliding of the knife as it sliced through her skin. She was expecting to feel the warm blood as it left her body, flowing from her veins. She was not expecting the sound that greeted her.

Suddenly, the pressure of the knife disappeared as it fell to the ground with a metallic clang. She exhaled, relief flooding through her. She wasn't dead, well, she wasn't dead *yet*.

Eve's arm dropped, and to Chloe's horror, the rest of her body dropped too. Eve fell into the pool with a splash. Chloe screamed, she sobbed, she struggled against the ropes wrapped around her and shook with fear. Eve's body floated in the pool, the water turning a sickly crimson color. Her abdomen was already soaked with blood, dark and viscous. Her limbs drifted and waved with each ripple that was created when she fell into the pool.

Her face was blank, pale and emotionless. Her eyes were open, staring vacantly at the ceiling. Chloe felt as if time had frozen. She felt trapped in an alternate dimension with Eve, with Eve's dead eyes staring for all of eternity.

"Oh my god, Chloe! *Chloe!*" someone shouted her name, she heard the footsteps running towards her.

She felt someone grab her shoulders, careful and delicate hands that steadied her trembling body. It was Joan. Joan had just saved her life, but a price was paid. One life continued while another ended abruptly. She must have known that something was off when Chloe's location was at a pool.

She looked at Joan, she felt numb. Joan was crying, holding her close and working to untie the ropes. Chloe blinked, and suddenly felt very cold. Eve was dead. This short chapter of her life was over.

She knew that she would never forget Eve.

"There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds." —Laurell K. Hamilton

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Anderson by Lissy Saravia

Camila

"Camila! Can you get up for a quick second?" I heard my father holler from the other side of my bedroom door.

"Ugh! Dad, leave me alone! I'm tired an—" He barged into my room before I could finish my sentence.

"You can go back to sleep, but first..." he raised his pointer finger. "How do I look for my first day?"

I sat up against my headboard as he took a 360 spin, showing off his gelled dark brown hair, a dark grey suit complemented by a matching tie and white dress shirt under it. He wore an expensive gold watch that fit nicely on his left wrist.

“Like a million bucks,” I said groggily, lying back down onto my bed and covering myself with the cover.

“Why thank you,” he said with a smile, wrinkles forming around his hazel eyes.

“Well, I have to go before I’m late,” he said walking out of my room and shutting the door.

“Have a good first day at work!” I yelled, loudly enough for him to hear.

I removed my blanket and jumped out of bed. I walked to the bathroom and turned on the warm water. The water hit the sink and minute droplets covered little bits of my tank top. I rinsed my face with water to wake myself up, realizing how disgusting my mouth tasted. I grabbed my toothbrush, I grabbed the toothpaste and squirt some on my toothbrush and brushed away.

I changed into the outfit I had picked out the night before. I put my hair up into a messy bun, then taking one look in the mirror before I proceeded downstairs and plopped onto the maroon leather couch.

I looked around the living room. Boxes piled and scattered all over the hard wooden floor. I decided to play some music, and started taking things out. Box by box I organized everything, pretending that the duster was a microphone. I sang, danced and dusted every inch of the living room until it was clean.

After a few hours of cleaning, I turned off the music and I headed to the kitchen to make myself something to eat. I decided on a simple turkey and cheese sandwich. I sat down in the living room and thought. A year ago I wouldn’t have thought that my life would end up in New Jersey. My father and I decided to move. I couldn’t walk the halls of my own home without tears streaming down my face. My mother was murdered. The murderer would be in prison for time that was unknown to me because I was not willing to count down the time of when he would be freed from prison. I felt very lonely without her. I long for the days that we could talk to

each other and be with each other like we used to. That's something that I know will never happen. It was a difficult thought that I've accepted. I don't know where I'd be if my father weren't there to support me each step of the way.

The next day was the first day of my junior year. I woke up with an overwhelming head to toe feeling of anxiety that lingered in my body. It traveled with me to the first few steps of the high school. It was an average-size high school fitting almost 5,000 students from grades 9-12 according to the research that I'd done the night before. The front school yard was filled with herds of students. The all brick building was covered with green vines coming from the sides and going upward, leading up to the broad letters that said, *Williamson High School*.

A loud ring echoed throughout the whole entire school. Students strolled toward the entrance with murmurs of "I don't want to be here" and "summer vacation was too short." I walked behind everyone else regretting the decision of actually getting out of bed that morning.

* * *

I'm already a few periods in and I'm mentally exhausted, the teachers have only done introductions for each class, they've already introduced thousands of homework assignments and projects just in the last three hours that I've been here.

I turned to look behind me, the voice of Mr. Kurk, the Social Studies teacher, slowly faded away as I focused on the other students surrounding me. One girl was looking down into the desk, obviously hinting that her phone was concealed in her desk. A brown-headed guy was passing on a crumbled up blue lined paper on to the person beside them, still keeping their full attention to Mr. Kurk.

"Does anyone have any more questions?" I turned my head back to see Mr. Kurk slouched on his office chair, his hands intertwined resting on his crossed legs waiting for someone to raise their hand.

“Go ahead, Xavier.” He stood up and walked to the front of his desk and leaned against it.

“Are there going to be any partner-based assignments?” I turned my head to where the voice came from. In the very corner of the room I saw the boy whose name was Xavier, who had light brown hair that traveled down to his forehead, reaching to the tip of his black shiny outlined glasses that went over his chocolate brown eyes.

I couldn't help but admire his looks. I'd never seen someone who had such qualities. He wasn't like the rest of the students in this class. He focused and listened in on every detail. Just from that observation I knew that he had an ambitious quality that I found attractive.

I heard a loud noise coming from the speakers, which meant 6th period, the last one of the day. Even hearing the bell and everyone standing with their bags in hand or over their shoulders, I continued to stare at him. My heart almost jumped out of my chest from fear when he looked back at me. I could see the slight wrinkles in his eyes form as he smiled at me.

I turned immediately, feeling heat sneakily creeping onto my cheeks. I grabbed my floral bag quickly and rushed out of the door, getting lost in the swarm of students.

The next day was just as interesting at the day before. I got to learn more than I wanted about this Xavier person when I bumped into this girl during lunch.

I was walking away from the cash register after paying for my hot dog, with my tray in hand, when I accidentally bumped into someone. Forced forward, I almost dropped my tray when someone said,

“OMG! I'm so sorry.” I looked up and noticed a strawberry blonde girl wearing a knee-high red dress covered with lilies. She bent down to grab her mini Chanel purse that she had dropped. Coming back up from the ground she put a strand of hair behind her ear.

“I’m sorry about that. I get really clumsy. I can’t believe I was stupid enough to wear these shoes today.”

“No, it’s fine,” I said to her. “My name is Camila. Camila Williams.” I held my hand out to her.

“My name is Cassidy,” she said, shaking my hand.

We sat together for that whole lunch period talking and we stumbled upon the topic of Xavier.

“You like him, don’t you?” Cassidy asked.

“No, I don’t like him,” I said, failing to sound convincing.

“Stop lying, I can’t blame you. He’s cute,” she said, smiling and pointing inconspicuously toward his direction.

I saw him smiling with his group of friends.

“I like the guy sitting next to him. His name is Jackson. Xavier and him have been friends since like, the 3rd grade,” she said, placing her chin on the palm of her hand with her arm leaning on the table.

I looked back at them; he and the guy next to him have very similar features, the big difference being their eyes. Xavier had brown eyes while Jackson had very bright hazel-greenish eyes. He had very dark curly brown hair.

“I remember hearing about the death of some middle-aged woman; turns out she was killed by this guy who could possibly be Xavier’s cousin,” she said.

“I doubt it.” I looked at her with an unconvinced look. “He doesn’t look like he could commit a murder. I mean, it was his so-called cousin who killed, not him.”

“He is coming over here!” she whisper-yelled at me.

I started freaking out. My heart rate started to increase. I looked down to hands that were intertwined together, getting sweaty.

“Hey uh, so my friends over there...,” I looked up to see Xavier, his thumb pointing to his group of friends behind him. He was staring directly at me, glancing quickly to Cassidy and back to me. “They wanted to invite you guys to the game that’s happening tomorrow.”

“So you guys are welcome to come if you’d like.” He quickly gave an awkward smile and scratched his neck slightly. He looked at me with his chocolate eyes.

It was dead silent for a few seconds. I didn’t know what to say, I suddenly forgot how to form words.

“Yeah, that sounds fun. Thanks for asking,” Cassidy said with a slight smile.

Xavier got up and walked back to his table.

“Camila, Camila! He was basically eyeing you the whole entire time!” I couldn’t help but blush.

“You guys would make the cutest!” Cassidy squealed quietly, giving a very wide smile. I rolled my eyes.

I was wiped away from my thoughts when somebody screamed, “Touchdown! Whoooooo!” Jackson, who was at the end of the field, started running around with his arms in the air. The enthusiasm from the crowd made it seem that the school had won the game.

“The Eagles can suck it,” I heard Cassidy say beside me. “Were you even paying attention?” Cassidy gave me a raised eyebrow.

“Sorry, I was lost in my thoughts again,” I replied honestly.

“You do that a lot, you were probably thinking about *XAVIER!*” she said, exaggerating the sound of his name.

“I was not,” I said, clearly lying.

“Keep telling yourself that.”

I rolled my eyes and pulled out my phone out as I checked the time. 8:32 P.M. appeared on the screen as I turned it on.

“Cassidy, I have about 30 minutes before I have to get home.”

“We could go now if you want to—” Someone interrupted her before she could finish her sentence.

I looked down to see Xavier and Jackson walking up the bleachers. Cassidy nudged my shoulders.

“Jackson and I were both wondering if you guys wanted to go eat. Since we won the game, we just wanted to go celebrate at Pop’s.”

“That’s sounds like a lot of fun, doesn’t it, Camila?” Cassidy gave a questioned look.

“Yeah, a lot of fun, Cassidy,” I said shyly and looked down at my fiddling hands.

Cassidy turned back to them and asked, “We’ll meet you there?”

“See you there.” Jackson and Xavier walked away.

* * *

“I can’t believe you said yes,” I mumbled under my breath.

“Someone had to do it, besides it’s a great opportunity. You like him and he likes you,” she said reassuringly.

“I have to get home in less than twenty 20 minutes, Cassidy, my dad’s gonna freak.”

“Your dad can wait. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity, and plus we’re already here.” A sign with big neon letters on the front of the building read, “Pop’s Dinner and Breakfast.”

“Fine, but we gotta make this quick,” I said, quickly turning my phone off and getting out of the parked car.

Going in, the bell above the door rang. In the red leather booth near the cash register, Jackson and Xavier looked over to see who it was.

“Hey you guys made it,” Jackson said, smiling. He walked out of the booth allowing us to sit between him and Xavier.

“You can go first Camila, you know, since you’re the oldest.” She gave a smile. I glared at her knowing what she was doing. I slid in the leather seat in the booth and slid more to the spot next to Xavier. I looked at him and gave him a quick smile and looked away as Cassidy slid next to me and Jackson followed her in.

* * *

The dinner took up only an hour and a half of my time. But, Cassidy was right, it was worth the time. I never thought that I would ever be comfortable with Xavier. We spent a lot of our time laughing and making jokes. When we finished, we paid and went back outside to leave.

Jackson was off the side of the building on his phone with a face of frustration. He placed his phone in his left back pocket and walked back to us.

“I have an issue,” he said with a hard fist over his mouth. “My car stopped working and the nearest car towing company is closed right now.”

“Cassidy, you have a car, don’t you?” I looked over to Cassidy who looked at me with a hidden glare. She got closer to me and said,

“I know what you’re doing! You are not leaving me alone in a car with Jackson!” she whisper-hissed.

“I can go with Xavier and Cassidy, you can go with Jackson,” I replied reassuringly, giving Cassidy a smile.

“I guess that can be arranged,” Jackson said.

“This is a once in a lifetime opportunity,” I whispered to Cassidy.

Cassidy glared at me, then walked back to her car with Jackson. “Ok, follow me.” Xavier started walking away and I followed behind him.

Getting into the passenger seat in the car, I closed the door beside me and put on my seatbelt. I told him my address and we left. While he drove, I suddenly felt a bit queasy. Something unsettling came over me. The feeling kept coming and going. I tried to ignore it while Xavier talked to me.

“So, who do you live with?” he questioned, taking a right turn.

“I live with my father,” I said with my lips forming into a straight line.

“What happened to your mother? If you don’t mind me asking, of course.”

“No, it’s okay, it happened a long time ago.”

This weird feeling began to happen. I started feeling worse, the world around began to spin. I tried to speak out but couldn’t. I didn’t have control of myself. I began to freak out. I struggled to keep awake, my eyes began to close, my body relaxed against the car seat. The last thing I heard was, “Shh, relax, it will be over soon.” Xavier’s words slowly faded away and I finally went to sleep.

“Yes, Jamie, uh huh, she’s here safe and sound. Yes, I did slip it into her drink.”

“Good, you know what to do.”

A voice is what I heard, a familiar deep voice. I pried my eyes open, immediately a silhouette started to form in front of me. I groaned out loud when I tried to get up, I was tied down to a wooden chair. Harsh friction heated up my wrists as I tried to move them, as they’d been tied up behind my back with rope.

“I see you’re finally awake.”

“Xavier, what’s happening?” I’m starting to lose my breath, anxiety grows from inside of me.

“No need to worry, after today, there will be no suffering,” he said walking up closer to me.

I suddenly became more angry. Something in me changed.

“Xavier you better tell what the fuck is happening!” I yelled at him angrily.

“You bastard let me go!” I started trying to loosen the rope.

“No can do sweetheart,” he said with a slight smirk. A smirk that I would gladly wipe off his face.

“I don’t think Jamie would like that.”

My heart dropped down to my stomach. I hadn’t heard the name Jamie since a year ago. A few days after my mother’s death, investigators concluded that my mother’s murderer was named Jamie Anderson. His name lingered and haunted me since I was given that information.

“Jamie? What does Jamie have to do with this?”

“You see, Camila, Jamie wasn’t just only trying to kill your mother, he was also after you and your Father!” Xavier placed his hands into his pockets.

“But, obviously it didn’t go as planned. So he decided if he couldn’t finish you guys off, then I should do the honors.” He pulled out something from his left pocket. A brown object, with curvature designs that filled the whole of its casing. He pressed a little button and out with a flash snapped a sharp, glistening blade. A pocket knife.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” he said, looking at it with admiration. “My great-grandfather carved it, been in the family for years.”

“I-is that what you’re going to kill me with?” I asked, fearing the idea.

“No, but if I could, I would, but Jamie insisted that I use something else,” he said with a slight frown.

“Well, I’ll be upstairs, if you need anything, anything at all, don’t bother to call me,” he said, placing the knife onto a small ledge near the tip of the stair railings. I heard his footsteps as he went up the stairs, then a door slammed shut and the noise of locks being engaged was the last thing I heard before it was all silent. The room was dim, only a low light illuminated the surroundings.

“How in God’s name am I going to get out of here?” In desperation, I tried to think of an idea. There at least had to be something that I was able to do. Looking around the room, I saw a small table at the left corner, above that, spider webs. Nothing else but the stairs, a small nightstand, and myself sitting tightly on a wooden chair.

Cassidy

It's been quite a long time, just two days since I had last seen Camila. She was nowhere to be found. The first day after the football game, I thought she was just absent, but today I knew something was up. I knew Camila well enough to know that she cared too much about her attendance record to even be out of school for this long.

So, I decided to go to her house, thinking I could get a few answers. I knocked at her front, and Mr. Williams opened it.

"Hey, I'm Camila's friend. I was wondering where she is," I asked him.

"Yeah, I'm afraid I don't know either. I was just about to file a missing person report." I noticed dark circles under his eyes, indicating that he hadn't slept.

"I've checked in with every neighbor, and every place for any witnesses of where she is. Do you have any idea?" he asked in hope.

"No, I'm afraid not," I didn't want him to feel hopeless. "But, the last time I saw her she was getting in a car with a guy named Xavier Anderson." I said hoping that it would help.

"Anderson? Also as in Jamie Anderson?" I wasn't necessarily familiar with his name, I've only heard it once or twice from gossipers that it was Xavier's cousin, but shrugged it off when he said that they weren't related.

"I'm not really sure, Xavier said he didn't have any relation to him."

"Well, thank you anyway, uh, Cassidy." He gave me a fake smile. He shut the door and I walked down from the porch.

A feeling of suspicion filled me as I walked toward my car. *Maybe I should talk to Jackson.* Yeah, maybe I could get an answer from him.

* * *

Parking on Jackson's street, I removed my seatbelt and exited the car. Shutting the door, I walked toward the steps and rang the bell. The door opened slightly and Jackson appeared.

“Hey, Cassidy, what are you doing here?” Jackson asked in surprise.

“I came here to talk to you,” I said as he directed me into his house. He led me to his kitchen which is right beside his living room. He motioned to me to sit down on the chair beside him.

“So what did you come here to talk about?” he asked.

“Do you know what happened with Camila?” His head immediately rises and his eyes meet mine. The topic obviously caught his attention.

“No, I know nothing of what happened with her,” he said, biting his bottom lip.

I immediately became concerned, for the few years that I’ve observed and learned anything there is to know about Jackson, one thing that I definitely know about him is what he does when he lies. He does two things. He fiddles with his fingers, and he bites his lip. It’s usually always his bottom lip.

“Well, the last time I saw her, she was getting in the car with Xavier,” I said.

“Same for me as well, I haven’t seen her since.” He lets go of his bottom lip.

“Ok, so you don’t know where Camila is, do you happen to know where Xavier is then?” I questioned.

“Haven’t seen him either.” He’s not biting his lip, but I looked down and he’s fiddling with his thumbs.

“Quit the act Jackson, I know that you’re lying,” I said to him.

“What are you talking about, Cassidy?”

“You know exactly what’s happening. I’m not leaving without an honest response.”

“I’m not telling you anything because I know nothing! Nothing at all.” His voice raised higher with every word he let out.

“Really, then why are you being so fidgety and biting your lips so much then?” I raised my eyebrow.

“Are you accusing me of lying?”

“Pretty much, so cut the lying and tell me the truth,” I threatened him.

“Let’s make a deal then.”

“There’s nothing that you can do to make be confess anything,” he said confidently.

“Really, what about that little sister of yours? I could maybe make some kind of exchange,” I said, slipping my hand into my pocket and pulling out my thick brown leather wallet.

His facial expressions changed, I knew that his younger sister was on the edge, she was going to die, I knew that he would do anything in this world to save her life. My father was a doctor and I knew some things about some of his patients. His mother struggled with money and I knew that any possibility for money would definitely catch his attention.

He went silent for a second, his expressions showed me that he was a bit hesitant about his decision. He looked down and sighed, he lifted his head back up; nodding, he raised his hand toward me.

“I’ll do it, but only for the sake of my sister. You heard nothing from me.”

“It’s a deal then.” I reached my hand out and shook his hand.

Jackson explained everything to me. Jackson hid this secret from everyone, even his own parents. The fear of getting killed by Xavier was the only thing in his mind. He would keep quiet till the day of my death in the sake of his life. Jackson’s sister, Elizabeth, was his #1 priority, and I had siblings so I understood the feeling. I offered him \$1,550, from my father being a doctor and the money I’ve raised from working in the neighborhood. I thought it was worth it.

Not wasting any time I got in my car and was ready to drive off.

“Wait! Cassidy!” I heard Jackson yell from his porch.

I rolled down my window to see what he wanted.

“Bring me with you, I know the way to his basement, plus, you don’t know what he’s capable of,” he said, opening the door, then sat in the passenger seat. I quickly drove off.

Camila

For the last few hours, I waited and then formed a plan in my head. Knowing that Xavier was going to come back I needed to do this quickly.

“This is going to hurt so bad, but it’s going to be worth it.” I started trying to move up and down, trying to loosen up the chair, trying to slide my legs down the rope tied at my legs, I kept moving until my feet touch the ground. Standing up, I braced myself ready

for what was going to happen next. I took a quick breath before I slammed my body onto the ground, shutting my eyes forcefully while the chair under me broke. Pain started to increase around my waist down to my legs.

Finally free, I carefully moved toward the wall behind me. I used the wall to support my back while I used my hands with pressure on the wall to push myself up. When I was finally standing I hopped to the stairs where the pocket knife lay. Turning so that my back was facing the stair railing, I used my hands to grab the knife. Using my right hand I started to cut through the rope, harshly and fast I cut through the last piece of rope until I heard it fall to the ground.

Relief waded through me from head to toe when I realized that I had come this far. Quickly, ignoring the pain of my slightly bleeding wrists, I tried cutting the rope that was tied to my legs. I suddenly heard a noise from the door upstairs. The locks upstairs were being unlocked.

“Oh fuck, he’s coming.” I started feeling anxious and I began going back and forth much more quickly. Cutting through the entire thickness of the rope until I felt pressure on my back, I felt myself fly forcefully into the wall, the pocket knife knocked to the ground.

“So you thought you could escape, huh? Well, lucky enough for me I came just in time.” I saw him holding a small gun pointed in my direction. Cocking the gun he started walking toward me. He grabbed the knife from the ground. He got closer to me and bent down to my eye level. I whimpered in pain as I touched the back of my head. He forcefully grabbed my arm. I felt something cold pressed against my temple.

“So this is it, huh? I finally get to finish the job, well almost. Next, I have to go visit that father of yours,” he said, staring directly into my eyes. I looked in the other direction.

“Don’t you dare go anywhere near my father!” I said, weakly staring back directly in his eyes.

“And what are you going to do about it? There’s nothing you can—”

I screamed loudly when I heard a loud bang echo through the room. I started to cry when I heard Cassidy’s voice.

“Camila! Oh my God!” She immediately ran to me and hugged me tightly.

“I was so worried sick about you,” she said as she placed her hands on each side on my face. I hugged her tightly, hot tears falling from my face. I got up from the ground as she held my hand tightly.

“I don’t want to be here any longer,” I said, staring at Xavier’s dead body, blood pouring out of his mouth. I thought I was going to be sick.

As I was walking up the stairs with Cassidy, Jackson followed behind us.

“I wish I had never liked him.”

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Mischievous Snow & White Fox by Ryann Mack

Day 3,649,977. Twenty-three more days until *she* is released from punishment.

10,000 years prior, Yuki, the one who oversees the winter season, decided to decimate a whole race of humanity due to her selfish desires. As no overseer was allowed to harm animal or human, they imprisoned Yuki for a 10,000 year sentence due to the severity of her crimes and temporary resignation from her title as the overseer of Winter.

As Yuki lay atop a mountain, she scratched off another tally mark out of millions, and glowered at the Earth below.

Yuki was a beautiful young woman who wore an elegant white kimono with a black sash decorated with white sakura trees. She had piercing blue eyes like the ocean, and pale skin like snow. Her hair was long and silky. Yuki had her hair in a ponytail as she preferred it to be out of her way. She had a small face and small features, but a mischievous grin hidden behind red lips, and a fake smile.

“Twenty three... t-w-e-n-t-y t-h-r-e-e... twent-ee thra-ee”

Yuki unctuously thrashed all of her supplies to her side and sighed. She had been imprisoned in Yama no yamas; The jail of the overseer council, for almost 10,000 years with only 23 days until she was released.

To those who were immortal, 23 days felt like no time at all, but the council made all time unbearable for Yuki. Though Yuki was temporarily released from the authority of overseer, she had mounds of work to complete before she was released. Yuki was one who liked to avoid responsibility at all costs. She loved mischief and most hated everything about her job during the other seasons. She was different, the only overseer who loved most humans and Earth, and for that she was despised by all. Yuki was imprisoned for wanting to be human. But killed the Khajit. Animals who had a human form, dead, because Yuki was too selfish. She had decided long ago to attempt to take a mortal form but struggled with the thought of losing the power she had over the Winter, and even more so after the failed ritual, resulting in the death of the Khajit that had worked so hard to prepare the ritual. It was supposed to release Yuki from the bond that the gods had given her that made her immortal. But something went wrong, and instead it took the lives of all of the mortal Khajit. Yuki had always wondered if it went wrong because the overseers interfered, but she never got that answer.

Day 3,649,997. Three more days until Yuki is released back to her duties

Whenever Winter came, Yuki was sent down to help and to watch the humans. It was the most important, and her favorite task. Yuki loved messing with the bandits on the little island she visited. It was the only place she had visited for the few years before her imprisonment. Before, Yuki was attached to a little fox she called Kitsune. He had beautiful blue-yellow eyes, and the whitest fur she had ever seen. That fox was the only living thing that she truly had been attached to. Yuki did love most humans but had never tried to bond with them. Kitsune was the only living thing Yuki had made a bond with, and now... he was gone. 10,000 years outlive the lifespan of a fox over and over. It broke Yuki every time to think about it, yet she still retained excitement for the Winter to come. Yuki knew that humans were quite fickle. The snow was beautiful, but human bodies were too weak to withstand it without wearing very thick clothes, and even then... Yuki sighed. She wanted to leave the council and see that fox again, but she knew that neither of those things would come to be.

Day 3,650,001. First day on Earth, end of year count.

When Yuki awoke she paused, and suddenly she took a deep breath and screamed, which was followed by a yawn and a lazy look in Yuki's eyes. She was approached by Tsuki, overseer of the moon. Tsuki was a beautiful young-looking woman wearing a detailed red and black kimono and a sky blue silk scarf wrapped around her shoulders. She had a face that fit her figure perfectly. Her eyes were cold but soulful. Yuki liked Tsuki. Though she was cold, Tsuki wasn't arrogant, she had a sharp tongue, and was extremely straightforward.

"You are free to go... gather your things and leave. Don't come back until Winter is over. And don't kill anybody else."

Yuki laughed awkwardly and nodded, "Will you watch at night? I'm sure that around this time of year the moon will light the snow quite beautifully."

Tsuki gave Yuki a thoughtful look and sighed, "Of course I'll watch, I only wish I could visit the Earth when I was on my job, but I can only watch. And you must listen to the council this time."

Yuki smiled a mischievous smile, and gave Tsuki a look, "Of course I'll listen, but that doesn't mean I will help like I used to. It was always problem after problem, I never had time to myself. And the Khajit..."

Tsuki waved her hand dismissively, and muttered to herself, "She hasn't changed one bit."

Tsuki walked away, and as the air around her began to tremor, Tsuki was gone. Yuki muttered under her breath, "Human time has always been so strange. It's been too long since I've last visited." With that, It only took a few seconds for Yuki to vanish into thin air.

As Yuki appeared on a mountain top near a remote lake in the forest, there was a fox watching Yuki from a nearby mountain-top. He was a small fox with snow-white fur and yellow blue eyes. His eyes were soulful and kind. When the fox watched Yuki, his eyes were filled with an apprehensive excitement. When the Yuki's eyes met the fox's, he ran down the mountain, away from her line of sight. She couldn't see his face. Not yet.

Yuki sat in the middle of a secluded lake, floating above the chilled water. She closed her eyes and began to conjure her power. The water she was floating on overturned to ice, and the trees'

leaves began falling slowly in sequence. As their leaves began to change color, the sky became white, and the ground littered with snow. The leaves and the trees' oak became darker, and the animals were watching from their burrows and nests in safe comfort. When Yuki's eyes opened, they seemed to be a darker shade of blue. The forest around her looked beautiful. Yuki walked towards some faraway chimney smoke and began to hum *Seikilos Epitaph*.

Day Six of Winter in the town of Astoras.

Children rushed by with runny red noses and thick brown clothing. The atmosphere was warm, and the village people were happy. The market was bustling even though the moon was high in the sky, which was painted with millions of white dots that were too far to reach. As Yuki looked to the moon she could feel Tsuki's cold eyes watching her, and she smiled. Yuki followed her stomach to what looked like a bread shop. Yuki hadn't been to one in a long time yet somehow, the long lineage of the breadmaking family had survived. Yuki took two fistfuls of snow from the ground, and concentrated her power into it. She was rusty in her skill, but Yuki used her magic to create coins from the powdery substance. Yuki walked into the bread shop, stomach rumbling, to see a young girl standing at the counter talking to another employee. She was plump and cheerful, and her cheeks were red from laughing, her nose was red from the cold. The girl's presence made Yuki a bit jealous. She had everything that Yuki didn't, but Yuki was happy to see a baker like that nonetheless. Even so, there was only bread on Yuki's mind. As her stomach growled, Yuki grabbed one of every bread. One after another, and another, and another, until Yuki had filled her traveling pouch full of soft, warm, delicious bread.

Yuki approached the counter and laid out the bread in an assortment of colors and flavors. Yuki smiled a blinding smile to attempt to distract the counter girl from the amount of bread she had and the fake money she was to use to buy the bread. Yuki wasn't allowed much to eat while imprisoned, let alone bread, and she had daydreamed about it every day, and dreamt of it every night. "How much does this cost?" Yuki kept on smiling but her mind was racing, maybe humans could tell now what was real, and what

wasn't. Though it wasn't likely. Either way, the illusion would last only a few weeks, a bit cruel but necessary.

“Umm... that'd be 1,000,000 Yuan” (\$149,394 USD).

Yuki almost cried, but she grabbed the snow money in a sack larger than a normal sized chair and placed it on the table, walked out, stomach grumbling, and impatient with the bread sack in hand.

Day forty-five of Winter in the mountains.

Yuki began to hum *Seikilos Epitaph* once again as she ate her bread. Over the past month, she had been eating the loaves of bread and fruits she had bought at the markets. Yuki had also built a house atop a mountain so that she could work in peace. There hadn't been any problems so far. But she had spent every day thinking. Thinking about the townspeople, and how wonderful it would be to work in that bread shop. How happy she would be to just be able to enjoy something for what it truly was.

Yuki was looking out at the rising sun and the sky full of beautiful colors. Yuki sighed. It was time for another snow. Yuki sat and began to focus her energy on the sky and released her power. The clouds began to gather, and snow fell. Yuki felt the cool air on her face, and the soft wind blew at her hair. Yuki was sad that she couldn't live with the townspeople and truly enjoy the snow like she hoped they did, and as she wanted to.

Yuki spotted a crouched fox in the distance while drinking her afternoon herbal tea. It must've been the same one she saw on the first week of Winter, and it hurt how much that fox resembled Kitsune. She waited for the fox to approach her and after a little while he was curled up in her lap.

It was night, and Yuki tossed and turned in her sleep. The clouds began to gather and snow fell furiously around Yuki's mountain. The fox opened one eye sleepily and saw what the girl was causing outside. The fox nudged Yuki vigorously, and after a short while she had awoken. Yuki looked outside to see what she had done. She was shaking from the shock and fear she felt while sleeping, and at what she had caused. “This has *never* happened before... am I really that unstable?” Yuki's voice was shaking. The fox rubbed against Yuki like a cat.

Yuki walked over to the fireplace in her home, and it lit with a beautiful warm brilliance. Yuki put tea over the fire and spoke.

“Maybe I should call you Kitsune, what would you think?”

The fox gave her a curious look and sneezed before curling up into a ball. Yuki snickered and pet the fox on his head.

“I..hmm..how should I...how should I say this...”

“Kitsune, what if I died. To become mortal... I’d probably be happier, I’d get to stay with you, I’d get to live without be scrutinized for having feelings toward things that shouldn’t be cared about. Is it really okay?”

The fox whined and looked at Yuki as if saying *no*

“No, not dead, but if I died *would* I become mortal? Would I be able to join the humans? Could I escape the hell of the people in the clouds? Is that too selfish of me?”

The fox howled at Yuki, and she gave a groan before she fell to the ground

“No?” Yuki smiled at Kitsune. “Hmm, I guess I shouldn’t then”

Yuki had a bored look in her eye. She wanted something more interesting than sitting in her mountain hut. She looked over at Kitsune and smirked, while patting him on the head.

“What if we found some bandits to scare?”

The fox yawned and nodded.

Later that day Yuki created fog perfect for an eerie Winter evening. Yuki spotted the bandits and their fire in the distance and took the fox into her arms. They vanished into thin air, appearing once again above the fire. The bandits had not yet spotted the two, so Yuki took time to create an illusion of herself so that the bandits would try to run in spite of fear.

“They’re saying there’s a town nearby with lots of riches and women, it’d be a huge haul.”

The bandits laughed.

Yuki coughed to get their attention.

The men looked up in horror to see a strange fox and a woman that looked like a ghost.

One of the men screamed,

“RUN!”

As the men stumbled to grab their stolen goods, and run from her, Yuki snickered, but held herself back from making too much

noise. Yuki sneered at the bandits, and used the wind to create a blizzard of some sort, so the bandits couldn't run away.

“You must pay... you can only pay... pay... pay...”

Sequentially the men fainted in the circle. After Yuki had put everything back in its place she laughed so hard she almost ripped through her stomach. The fox looked delighted, and Yuki brought the men to a boat and put them in the middle of a large ice pond. Unwillingly, Yuki remembered where she had started, and knew that she had to do it tomorrow, otherwise it would never happen. But still, the same question was weighing on her mind. What if she was mortal, could she use her knowledge and ability to do the same harm done to the bandits?

Eighty-ninth day of winter, one day until Winter is over.

After many sleepless nights, Yuki had finally finished her plans. She was positive that if she died in the pond she infused with magic, the gods would trap her in a mortal body as a punishment. Yuki wanted to be with the humans, with Kitsune. She wanted to die, no matter how scared she was, or how fast her heart was beating. Yuki believed it was the only way for the torment, loneliness and cruelty from the other overseers to end. She would quietly escape as to not wake Kitsune and trap herself in the pond in which winter began. Yuki would try to drown and freeze herself to death in the only body of water with strong magic that she knew of. And the gods would put her in a mortal body, seemingly a punishment worse than death for trying to escape one's duty. It seemed foolish to her then, but she was desperate; grasping at straws, she had no other choice, and time was running out. Yuki wanted, *needed* to become mortal.

“Dying shouldn't be so hard... should it?” Yuki sighed. She went to put out the fire, and went to her cot where Kitsune was sleeping. Yuki didn't get much sleep that night.

Last Day of Winter.

Yuki had awoken just before dawn when the sun was not yet up, when the air was cool, and Yuki was in comfortable silence. Except for the sound of her beating heart, which pounded in Yuki's ears. After a short while, Yuki had arrived in the secluded forest. Yuki

made her way to her pond. She walked slowly to the middle of the pond and closed her eyes. She felt elated, but couldn't keep thoughts from bubbling to the surface of her mind. She sat, and meditated. Slowly but surely, Yuki's pale body had been immersed in the cool water; there was no turning back. Yuki's heart was beating slowly at first, but it began to quicken, faster and faster. Then her breath started to escape her. Yuki began to cry and scream in the cold water. All she could do was scream. Yuki did not cease to try to escape the water, but she had no help. Her voice was only turning into bubbles that were taking away the breath from her lungs. In the moment before she felt her soul begin to escape the husk of her body, Yuki screamed once more. She didn't want a mortal life if it was to be this painful. Yuki's throat was hoarse. No time was left.

Why? Why must I always be followed by constant, pressuring, misfortune...

Yuki felt a rough hand wrap around her slim, pale arms. She coughed up so much water, her stomach felt like it would burst from all of the pressure. Yuki was mortified. She felt like she was a child again, except she was scolding herself. She felt the worst feeling of a sinking heart. Fear, shame, and sadness hit her all at once. Tears stained her face, and she couldn't have stopped them from falling.

The guards who saved her spoke in a monotone voice, in a cruel, cold tone to Yuki: "Thaw the snow, end this winter. Then, you may return." The guards both bowed to Yuki and walked up the steps back to the land of the overseers. The gate to the stair, though, was still closed.

Yuki shakily got up from the position in which she was sitting. Yuki's knees buckled, but she locked them, to keep them sturdy enough so she had the ability to stand. Yuki wiped away her tears, and with a quick hand wave, the clouds, the snow, it all began to regress. Yuki moved the sun so that it would let the days last longer. How she *hated* it when she couldn't wake to see the sun rise. Yuki had known since the first day of Winter when she saw the fox run away from her. Yuki paused, and looked to the fox while chuckling in a depressing manner, "You're really Kitsune... aren't you?"

The fox paused, and nodded. Yuki took in a long shaky breath and let it out. She would never become mortal. And she... didn't want to anymore.

“Want to come with me, Kitsune?”

Kitsune was silent for a moment, and began to walk toward the long trail of steps leading to the overseers’ “second heaven.” The two of them walked up the steps. Yuki stopped and looked longingly behind her, taking in the sight of the last sunrise of Winter, *her* Winter. Kitsune nudged Yuki and the pair disappeared up the steps. She knew she could come back, and they would once again be welcomed by the fleeting Autumn sun.

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The following poem is a continuation of “*Caged bird*” by Maya Angelou that was first inspired by the Paul Laurence Dunbar poem written in the late 18th century named “*Sympathy*.” The poem is an allusion to their work, with my own modern twist. -E.F.

I too am a caged bird

Evelyn Flores

I soar through the sky
Flying freely, elegantly
The sun warming my face
With a start I wake up
Still caged, but fooled
I feel the heavy weight of my shackles
I believe I can fly, I believe I can soar with them
But it’s all a cruel lie

A lie, a beautiful and elegant lie, creative even
But alas, I dream of the world of tomorrow
A world where I will be able to soar without limits
Not restricted by my heavy shackles

Here I am still crying out for help
Still in pain
Still being held back
Still stopped by my own mind
Still trying to break free like the birds of yesterday
I try to break free for the birds of marrow
I thank them for their bravery,
Thank them even though I know,
That there still is a long unpaved road ahead
But I thank them nonetheless for beating their wings and crying out

Sometimes in the night
When the moon is full,
And my only witnesses are the stars
Like a professional sleuth,
I slowly and quietly in a single move slip out of my shackles
I spread my wings and begin to soar,
like I was meant to
I expertly fly through the sky
The stars looking at me with warning looks,
telling me I should be more careful
But when they see my face,
They see that hope,
that happiness that they only see at night

As the sun begins to shine in the horizon
And the clouds part
I quickly make it back to Tartarus
The place that they tell me is my home
I sing my haunting tune
Slowly stowing away all of my dreams, aspirations,
and hopes, savoring them
Knowing they are weapons that they can use against me
And lie in my cage that is my mind again

Waiting, patiently
Like time itself I sit and wait,
Biding my time,
Thinking
But most of all waiting

Until the day when I will be able to escape my shackles
Not only in the night
When my only witnesses are stars
And the moon's haunting and mystical aura

I beat my wings fighting but knowing it's futile,
Because I am forced to be patient and wait for the days in which
I am able to fly next to the birds that were always free,
fly next to them in the day
And get to feel the sun's warmth envelope me,
Like a mother's hug,
telling me it will all be all right
Making me feel safe to dream

Because even though I will never feel the pain that the caged birds
before me felt
I am still shackled and measured
I believe there will come a day when birds of every color
Will be able to dream, to have aspirations and hopes
And won't have to hide them
And know that their dreams are dreams no more

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