

Hospitality

Cruising on an empty highway at 1:00 a.m., clocking 160 mph. Almost getting caught by a highway patrol, but since I got the head start, I was able to run away. When I reached home, I rushed my wife to the hospital, but this time I was running 203 mph. Luckily, no cops found me, so I got to my destination pretty fast.

Once we got there, I carried her in my arms and got lots of nurses' attention. They guided me in different directions, but one stood out to me. She looked caring, had a beautiful voice, and was very alluring. Of course, I picked her.

After my wife's labor was over, I then held the baby for the first time. Then, all of a sudden, the lights dimmed and I felt a breeze running down my whole body like someone had touched me. Then, back to normal.

I asked my wife, "Did you see that?"

"See what?"

I was stunned at this point because I saw and felt it, but I thought she was messing with me. I asked, "Did you feel that breeze then?"

"What breeze hub?"

I knew she was being serious as soon as she said "HUB". I wasn't sure if I was just tired, hallucinating, or gone nuts. Anyways, I just left it behind.

Two hours have passed, and my wife and son are sleeping. I had to leave the room to go to the restroom and the only way to get there was through a long, zigzagging trail. Then I went on with my walk, but all of a sudden a flicker of every

light along the hallway started going off. As soon as I stopped, the flickering light just got faster as it came towards my direction. I closed my eyes and then felt the same breeze like the one in the delivery room.

Then I knew I wasn't hallucinating, so I ran back to the delivery room and found the nurse but she was different than before. Her hair was all messed up, dark circles around her eyes. Her makeup was smeared, and her clothes were shredded and covered with blood. The scene was horrific, she was trying to kill my wife and son.

I snapped back to reality to see the nurse looking perfectly normal, walking up to me and saying "Congratulations sir, it's a girl".

Jeremiah H

Senior, seventeen

Why do Dreams Like These Exist?

I don't know what happened but all of them are dead. Every last one of them. None of them are breathing, no heartbeats, no blood flowing. I would know because I checked all four of them. All lying silently on the cool hard garage floor, never to move a muscle again. And now the realization is beginning to seep in. I looked down at my hands, and jumped as I realized that they are fully covered in hot and sticky blood. Not a sliver of smooth skin sticking through, all of it deep red and sticky to the touch. Oh and then there was the knife. The knife that I had let limply fall through my fingers as I arose from the seemingly memory resetting slumber that I had somehow been forced into, I had dropped it out of my left hand in shock as I went to feel my four friends for pulses. And none of them had pulses. And the knife, the blood matching the drip patterns on my left hand, blood flowing from the blade of the knife and down, but leaving five small gaps without blood, the five spots my fingers had been wrapped around. And then I sprinted. Opened the garage and sprinted. Further and further until I could not move an inch further, and darkness began to swallow me up, my vision fading, being invaded by dark circles that enclosed my eyesight.

It was a Saturday morning, eight nine-teen in the morning when I woke up. I groggily sat up from my bed, rested my head against the headboard, stretched out my arms and rubbed my eyes. And then I remembered, today was my birthday. I had just turned eighteen, and I got

excited as I thought about the party I was going to have that evening, that would entail a dinner, dessert, presents, and maybe a bit of drinking and partying in the night time. Then I looked around. This room was not my room. I couldn't recognize it. The pale yellow walls with the large ceiling fan, the deep rustic brown dresser in the right corner of the room, the bright white nightstands to the left and right of the bed, and the deep brown colored door in the front left corner of the room were not mine. This room belongs to someone else. I promise I had never stepped foot in this room before.

And then I woke up. My heart was racing, and I had almost begun to cry. But then I realized that it was all a bad dream, a nightmare even. All my friends are alive and perfectly well.

Trayvon W.

17 - 12th Grade

HANNIBAL

The air was brisk in the small town of Kilbrook, Massachusetts. Snowfall blanketed the entire area, and families were gearing up for their favorite time of year, the holidays. The town was a close community with only eight hundred residents. Everyone knew everyone. There was only one bank, one grocery store, one school, and one gas station. A new family was moving into Kilbrook, and they were moving into the largest home the city had to offer. A Tudor style estate with 21,903 sqft, 12 bedrooms, and 14 bathrooms. Built in the 1930s by Emmet Corwley for him, his wife, and their eight children on 283 acres. Emmett was a businessman worth more money than anyone could ever imagine. He picked Kilbrook to build his estate, because that's where he was born and raised. But, he wasn't necessarily a good man, he had multiple affairs, and beat his wife and children. His youngest child, Hannibal, passed away at just eight years old, when Mr. Corwley "accidentally" pushed him down their grand mahogany staircase. The family moved away after the death of Hannibal, and were never heard of ever again. The estate went on sale in 1969 for \$18 million and had been on the market until 2009 when the Mucker family bought the residence for less than \$3 million.

The Mucker's family of three, were elated to move to their new place. Lennon was the father, Mariam was the mother, and Adelaide was their son. Adelaide was 9 years old with fair skin, brunette hair, and the brightest green eyes ever. When they moved in, Adelaide rushed to claim his bedroom up the stairs and down the hall to the left. Coincidentally the room Hannibal

had previously occupied. The home was extensively large for just three, but the Mucker's didn't mind a lot of space. Adelaide admired his bedroom, it was large, had floor-to-ceiling windows, vaulted ceilings, and a nice sized closet. However, a little boy like him would soon be terrified to ever close his eyes in a room this magnitude, especially at night. The first night in the home, Lennon and Mariam tucked Adelaide into his king sized bed. They read him some stories and reassured him that he was safe and sound in the new home. When Adelaide felt comfortable enough to fall asleep, he did. But, he was awoken in the night by a faint whisper. He would get out of his bed and circle his bedroom to find the source of the whispering, but it would always go away once he got up. He never told his parents after the first night, but as it continued to happen, he would let them know. "You're just trying to adjust," they would say to him. After three consistent months of whispers, Adelaide had an episode, and screamed bloody murder until his parents entered his room. "There's someone in here", he'd sob. They stared at their son in disbelief, and decided to do something about it.

The next morning, the couple brought in a counselor to talk to their son about what he's been hearing. Adelaide explained what he's been hearing, and the counselor told him about the tale of the Corwley family. The counselor also mentioned that Adelaide had picked the same bedroom as the little boy. It was believed that Hannibal's spirit had lived in the walls of his bedroom and would attempt to communicate with whoever entered the room. The meeting was over with Adelaide and the counselor explained to the parents what was happening. They shook their heads in disbelief.

"So the boy's name is Hannibal," Lennon asked.

"Yes and he lived here in the 40s. Hannibal is trying to communicate with Adelaide, so you guys need to be more understanding about what's happening," the counselor added.

Lennon and Mariam were in disbelief. Once the counselor left, the house was awfully quiet. A loud noise echoed from upstairs, it sounded like someone had dropped an a thousand pound weight on the floor. Without second thought they ran to check on Adelaide.

“Adelade, Adelade. Are you okay?” They yelled.

When they got to his room, he was rocking on a chair in the middle of his bedroom and was shaking freakishly back and forth. When they approached him, his eyes were white and had rolled to the back of his head.

“Get out, get out, get out” Hannibal whispered in the room.

The parents looked around frantically and realized that their son had been telling the truth.

“He’s mine now, he’s mine now, he’s mine now”, the voice repeated.

They knew it was Hannibal, the boy the counselor had just told them about.

“What do you want with our son,” Mariam asked?

“I just want someone to play with me, but not how my father did, he was too rough,” Hannibal responded.

“Adelade, get up and walk towards the stairs,” Hannibal said afterwards.

Adelade listened to the command and started walking down the hall towards the stairs.

Lennon and Mariam did everything in their power to stop Adelade from walking, but the presence in his body was far too strong. Adelade got to the top of the stairs.

“Now jump. Come and be with me Adelade,” Hannibal said. “Jump Adelade, I said jump,” Hannibal screamed.

Adelade’s eyes opened wide and he leaped as far as he could onto the staircase, jumping headfirst. He hit the edge of the first landing, and the rest of his body tumbled down the residual

steps. Lennon and Mariam screamed as they ran after their son. But little did they know they were chasing a corpse. The last hit was deadly as Adelaide's neck struck the edge of the mahogany stair and bounced onto the white marble floor. The boy had been decapitated. The parents sobbed and stared at their little boy's head in disbelief.

“He believed me because you guy's didn't believe him”, Hannibal said at last.

Elise CI
12th grade

Thinking About You

The house was empty, but it did not lack the feeling of being watched. The house was cold and still. She sat like a statue waiting to hear if there would be a peep or crack from somewhere in the house. Silence filled the room until there began a scratching at the window. She thrust her head toward the sound. She sighed in relief seeing that it was tree branches hitting the window. Even Though there is nothing insight or any noises to be suspicious of she still sits there in statue position.

This is the most boringest job ever. All I do is sit here and watch this stupid video recording of a girl who sits there and does nothing. What's the point of this, she never does anything. I thought when I took this job it would at least be a little interesting. I guess I can't really complain that the pay is good, but I feel like I'm rotting away at this job. Thankfully I won't have to do this much longer. I just need the money. Not gonna lie I do think this kinda a weird job. I don't even know how I heard of this job or how I got it, but it's an opportunity to get easy money so I took it. But I wish I could at; least do something while sitting but there are so many stupid rules, I can't do anything but sit here and watch this girl. All she does is just sit there or sleep. She doesn't even talk to herself. I'm guessing she's crazy, or maybe just really tramaized, I wonder if she knows she's being watched or at least knows there is a camera. And this stupid office is so small and creepy, but i'm just glad i don't have to walk around this creepy place, i just have to watch this girl sit and do nothing. It is kinda weird there aren't any other patients, or maybe there are and I just have to watch her cause she's the craziest or the least stable. But not gonna lie she doesn't seem crazy, she always looks sad. I feel bad for her. I usually don't see her face but , the little

glances I do when she does move she looks pretty. She has long brown hair, I bet it would look pretty if she could brush it. I wish some patient confidence didn't matter. Like I'm the one watching over her and I don't even know her name. I wish I knew her name.

I hear what seems to be a mumble. It caught me off guard, did she try to say anything? And I'm hearing things now? Or maybe I am just talking to myself too much and need to focus more. But god damn this job is boring my adhd mind can't handle this, my mind keeps getting sidetracked. I wish I could at least listen to music while working. This job is so boring. What was the song that I heard on the radio earlier? It was really good, and it reminded me of something but I don't remember, I just remember the tune sort of, I was too focused on driving. How does it go?

"Mhmhm... hmm.."

I think I went something like..

"Do you think I have forgotten about it?... Do you think I have forgotten about you?"

Finally I figured it out but I can't remember the rest of the song.

It's almost three A.M. I only have a couple more hours left, she hasn't moved. I still can't get that song out of my head. What's the name or the rest of that song? I'm gonna continue to hum. In hope I get the rest of the song. hmhm hmhm have you thought that I have forgotten, did you think that I have forgotten about you.

"Hmhm..."

What was that? Did I accidentally hum out loud? No, I don't think so. I'm too tired for this.

"and I think about you" I heard it come from my monitor, did she just say that? Is that my song?

I think that's a part of the song. How did she know that?

"there was something about you now I can't remember " that's the song. She has a pretty voice.

But all of a sudden I get the chills. This is kinda creepy. How did she know that song?

BANG

What was that? There shouldn't be anyone else here. Okay now i'm very creeped out, maybe something just fell. Should I go check it out?

“Do you think that I have forgotten, do you think i have forgotten, do you think that i have forgotten about.. you”

I looked back down at the monitor. She's staring right at me, she's never looked at the camera before. I've never seen her face. She's pale, and looks so tired, but she's so pretty. Her face looks familiar. Have I seen her somewhere before? Maybe she looks familiar because I watch her everyday. Am I stupid. But honestly I don't know. I dont think ive ever seen her face so clear before. She looks concerned. Her eyes look like she's seen so many terrible things. Her skin looks porcelain.

“I know a place, It's somewhere I go when I need to remember your face” It's the song again. Another part of the song. How does she know that song?

“It's not fair.” She said, still staring at me “It's not fair you get to watch me, and I don't get to watch you.” Her facial expression changed to fear. Her eyes changed, her stare hardened. I'm frozen, what do I do?

“ I liked hearing you sing”

She heard me singing? How? She can't. Can she? Maybe she's somehow messing with me.

“I'm so lonely, you never talk, your humming soothes me, i can finally get some sleep, goodnight.” She gave me a soft smile, and turned away and layed in her bed.

What just happened? Did that really just happen? Am I going crazy?

“Maybe you are,” the voice from the monotier said.

Hailey L...

Eclipse

If only I had known.... What lurked in the shadows of the book. What hid behind its demise. It was too late though. I should've been more careful, I should've put it back, but how could I? I was compelled by its lingering, odd figure. Its uncanny voice draws me closer and closer and closer to its freedom of being open. Until I finally gave in, I became the voice trapped in the book, I became the lingering finger, drawing the next victim in line to fall prey to my demise. If only I wasn't the one to fall weak. If only I didn't pick it up....

....The summer of 2014, that was the day, I was going out with Ali Skov. I planned the whole thing. Pick her up at seven sharp, take her to a nice dinner, watch a movie after, and end the night while looking at the stars. Well, that was the plan. The whole day, I was ironing my clothes, checking my phone, checking the time, changing my outfit, putting gas in the car, brushing my teeth, fixing my hair, and putting deodorant on. I ended up with the white collared button up shirt, khaki's, my black shoes, my brown golden hair combed and my gold chain. With time left to spare, I walked the two blocks down from my house to the marketplace. Thinking to start the date off right, is to buy her some flowers.

Walking down to the store and shedding some time off, I walk through the street alley to cut through the buildings and exit out to the street right across the store, instead of going around the usual path. Walking towards the light at the end of the alley, I stumbled upon this unusual textured brick, but when I looked down, I saw the intricate details of the cover of the book. Practically living inside the walls of buildings being filled with books, this one caught my eye,

not only of its intricate detail, but its absence of being within the shelves of a library. Drawn to its compelling cover, a voice inside of me, warning me to leave it be, but the whispers within the book are too strong. I picked it up. Studying its texture, its spine, its overall structure, I get lost in the track of time, and turn back to my house. Forgetting the flowers. Focusing on the book.

I reach my house, and lay the book flat on the table. I pry it open to reveal the encryptions written within the book. Inspecting the sketches, the inscriptions, the whole thing, until the words are floating in front of me, the sentences become voices, and they grow louder, and louder. Engraved in my mind, taking over my thoughts and body. I try to close it, but my soul, my body is captivated by its essence. Slowly, but surely, I looked down at my hands and they started to fade. Like sand dropping into the beach and snow evaporating into the day sky. I try to scream, but my body is not my own. I'm muffled. I'm screaming through a sheet of fabric pushing my way out, until I hit the bottom. I look down and see the pages on the lines, and look more closely to reveal that those weren't lines on pages but also uniformed bodies creating lines on papers. My body is not my own, I look up and I look down, paralyzed. Paralyzed from fear, regret, and guilt. I tried to move, but the weight of the body above me was so heavy. I kick, I grunt and groan, but nothing. My body was not my own. The weight becomes heavier and heavier, until I cease to exist. I'm molded into the words, in the book, I am pages sewn. My voice becomes the words written, my body becomes the spine, and my hands become the pages turnt. I became the book.

I sit there, waiting. While dust collects on my spine, on my cover, on my pages. Waiting. Days go by, maybe weeks, even months, or a year. I sit and wait. Wait for my freedom, waiting to be open again, waiting to be free. I think back to that day, the day I was going on a date with

Ali Skov. The day that everything should've gone well. The day that was supposed to be my day. Oh how I hate that day now. A reminder of my weakness, a reminder of loss of hope.

I sit and wait, until I can't anymore. I push, I shove, I kick, I yell, until I hear a voice, a voice of hope, a voice of freedom perhaps. I keep fighting and the voice becomes louder and *louder*.

"Wake up Jake! Wake Up!". I open my eyes.

My body is my own. There's no pushing, no kicking, no fighting, just me. I look to find my mom standing over me, looking at me with anger.

"You'll be late". Late, I thought but for what.

"It's six, you need to get ready for your date with Ali".

"My date?" I asked.

"Yes your date, you fell asleep".

I fell asleep. My body is my own. I'm free. No more fighting. No more screaming. Only a dream, a dream that felt like an eternity. A dream that was all. An eclipse in time, my clean slate, my new beginning to an end. Only a dream... it was all a dream.

Best Friends, until the End

The best of friends can become the worst of enemies in times of panic and strife, and the events happening now certainly classify as times of panic. With each creak of the stairs, and rumble of the old house, betrayal seemed more and more likely. The shared space between us seemed to shrink every second we spent hiding, and trap us even further than we already were. How had we gotten here?

We had been planning this sleepover for about a week now, excited to have a fun night. My family had just moved into a new home a month ago, a much larger one than before, due to my dad getting a promotion. The only downside of said house was its age, with each step being followed by a creak, and the stairs looked about ready to break, at least that's what my parents said. But it was spacious and it had room for everyone, and probably enough for that twice over. With such a large space to live in, a sleepover was needed to use all this space. I mean, large spooky old home, classic horror trope, lets add a few more in. The plan was a night of watching classic slashers, and horrible sequels, and maybe redeeming third installations. Nothing complex, just some scares for the mood of the house. God how wrong that would go.

It was around 5pm when he arrived, pouding at the door, yelling to me.

"Let me in, Eric!", he shouted over his constant pounding. He really was persistent, never once taking a break from knocking, despite yelling and waiting for a few minutes. As he continued his knocking, I stood in front of the door, watching through the peephole, throwing the door open as his arm came down again, making him stumble inside.

"I let you in, Lucas." I said, watching as he hurried to right himself. As soon as he did, he glared at me as I shut the door, locking it and turning back to him. We looked at each other in silence, until he turned, and bolted straight towards the stairs and towards my room. I

immediately followed, but when it came to speed, Eric far outdid me. He was much lankier, slightly taller compared to me, and much more athletic. Dusty blonde compared to my black hair, though we had the same eye color, simply brown. He was tanned due to his athletics, a runner, compared to my pastier complexion, due to days of sitting inside watching movies. The house we ran through was the house of my dreams, a horror movie house personified, every downside my parents pointed out something that I loved. Within the month my family had lived in this house, me and Lucas had explored every inch of it, Lucas fitting himself in any nook and cranny he could, any dark spot possible, while I watched and cheered him on. Every place in this house had been explored by us, and the house was large so that's saying a lot. But even with how much we explored it, the house still had the same aura, making it feel like the house was watching us. Truly a horror house. This is all besides the point of the race, which Lucas had long since won, both of us sitting on my bed catching our breaths.

"Well what movie do you want to watch first?" I asked after a moment of silence.

A few hours later, it was reaching midnight, the moon high overhead, casting blue light through the few open windows in the house, the darkness making shadows seem deeper, more alive, writhing across the floor as curtains flailed. The large house, mostly empty, filled with silence broken by the occasional yelling from one room.

"Come on Eric, you can't actually believe Halloween is scarier than Nightmare on Elm Street, like come on man." Lucas had been arguing with me over this for over 30 minutes by now.

"I stand by my beliefs, accept them or leave my house." was my final response to him.

"Fine, I will!" and with that Lucas stood, opened my door and walked into the shadows beyond, disappearing completely. I sat there laughing at his actions for a minute, before I realized he hadn't come back. I sat a moment longer before I got up and walked to the door.

“Lucas?” I got no response, and dread filled me, the horror cliches we had just been watching unnerving me. I stood in the door frame looking out into the hallway. The completely dark hallway. The completely silent one. Lucas would’ve made some sort of noise by now, and with how the halls creaked, his footsteps would’ve made some noise, just any noise. But there was nothing. It was deathly silent. Until it wasn’t. Pounding came from down the hall, and I saw the familiar figure of Lucas running down the hall. His steps thudded, the house booming with noise now, like it wasn’t pulling it all out of existence a moment before. I sighed with relief and stepped out into the hall, until I noticed something. Lucas’s right arm was hanging down to his side, seeming to flop around uselessly, and there was something running down it, that glinted as moonlight hit it. Terror was etched into every line of his face, and as he locked eyes with me, it only seemed to grow more.

“RUN, YOU HAVE TO RUN!” he shouted at me as he grew closer. The liquid on his arm was blood. Blood was dripping and being flung across the floor with every desperate step he took. I wasted no time in turning around and running as well. As we ran, I could hear heavy footsteps behind us, walking, like they had all the time in the world to catch us. Yet another cliché come true in this nightmare. The stairs were just in front of us and we ran down them, down into the house’s entrance. The footsteps seemed to have stopped, but we kept running, fumbling with the doors lock, until we had stepped outside.

“What happened, you were only gone for a few minutes, what happened!?” I frantically asked him.

“I-I’m not sure, one moment I was walking out the door, and the next I just felt something thud into my arm. I don’t know where that guy came from, or how he got in, but he seemed to know the place well.” Lucas explained, catching his breath as he did so, desperately averting his eyes from his injury.

“What about my parents then, what happened to them?” I was desperate for an answer.

"I don't know, I didn't see them while running, and they would've heard the pounding from us running." Lucas said, finally catching his breath and standing up straight, wincing as the adrenaline wore off and the reality of his wound set in.

"Well we have to go back in, we have to go find them. Come on." I was pulling Lucas along, avoiding the injured arm, opening the door and walking in before he could even say anything. In that moment I wanted nothing more than to see my parents, to see them alive and ok, not in the condition Lucas was in. My parents shared a room on the bottom floor, the master bedroom, a strange spot for one, but convenient in this situation. I hurried along to it, still dragging Lucas. As we reached the door, I let go.

"You stay out here and grab me if you see that psycho coming, ok? Try to stop your bleeding if you can." I asked. He simply nodded, positioning himself next to the door, scanning the area for any medical supplies and the man who rendered him in need of them. I took a moment in front of the door. Deep breath in. Deep breath out. I reached for the handle and swung the door open, holding the knob to stop it from slamming into the wall. The silence was deafening, the darkness all consuming. I hesitated as I reached for the light, dreading what I could find with the silence. When I finally did turn it on, it was a decision that I regretted more than anything else. There they were. My parents. Happy just a few hours ago. Dead now. Dead by the same ax that had mutilated Lucas's arm. Dead in their own home. Yet another cliché. The parents always die first. Horror movies are usually for a teen audience after all. Lucas and I were one hell of an audience, enamored with the horror movie situations we now lived through. I didn't even get time to process it, as Lucas bolted into the room, silently shutting the door and turning off the light.

"I saw him on the stairs, he was coming down but I don't think he saw me." Lucas explained.

"We need to hide or get out of here then" I said, letting the survival instincts take over, ignoring the emotions rising in my chest. We both looked at the closet before nodding at each other and heading over to it. What a moronic choice, another cliché. It was the master bedroom, so the closet was bigger than an average one, but still not big enough to fit two teenage boys comfortably. We sat in silence, Lucas with labored breathing as he held his injury.

"They're both dead." I whispered. Lucas stayed silent, understanding what I meant. There was no time for comfort, no time for emotions. We had to survive. That mindset was shared between us. And maybe that's why when that psycho came into the room, we both tensed. When he approached the closet, we both were prepared to run. When I felt the hands on my back, heard the door open, felt myself fall, maybe it was all caused by that mindset. I saw the blow before I felt it, the ax came down straight into my shoulder. The pain didn't process immediately, but when it did, it was agony. Is this what my parents felt, is this what Lucas felt when he got hit? I didn't have time to think more before the ax was ripped out of my shoulder, and brought up again. As it was raised I saw the bedroom door wide open, and heard footsteps fading. Lucas had run, shoved me into the murderer's path, and then ran for his own safety. I had thought that friendship would go over survival. What an idiot I was. One final cliché. There's only ever one survivor. The final girl, seen in every Friday the Thirteenth, every Halloween, every Nightmare on Elm Street. We had fallen for every trope possible, after just watching them all. The ax swung downwards.

Found

By Landon M. _____

Phone # _____

Address: _____

Grade: 10th

The rain had only just begun five minutes ago, Jacob thought. The roads were already becoming flooded and they were still three hours away from the resort. The storm was unlike any other they had ever seen before, and strangely no news stations had mentioned it on the forecast that day. Jacob looked in the backseat and saw that both Emma and Julie were still asleep.

Julie was dating Jacob's brother, Ethan. She had piercing blue eyes and long wavy blonde hair that glowed in the sunlight. She was twenty-six and was best friends with their younger sister Emma. Emma had dark brown eyes with long black curly hair. Emma and Julie met while in high school and have been friends ever since. Jacob turned back around and watched as Ethan concentrated on trying to get through the flooded roads. Ethan had dark black curly hair and was twenty-seven. His dark brown eyes kept switching from the road to the GPS. Jacob was confident in his brother's ability to drive in dangerous conditions but he wasn't sure if he could manage this storm without taking a break at least.

"You think we need to stop and wait for the storm to pass?" Jacob asked.

"Maybe, but I don't want to risk getting the engine flooded," Ethan responded.

"We might come across a rest stop. We can stop there if we have to." Ethan added.

"Ok. What if we don't make it to the resort till tomorrow?" Jacob asked.

"Hopefully, it doesn't come to that. If it does, we'll have to find somewhere to stop the car."

Ethan said reassuringly.

"You okay if I rest my eyes for a bit?" Jacob asked.

"Go ahead, I'll wake you up if anything happens," Ethan said.

Ethan watched from the corner of his eye as Jacob slowly dozed off. When he saw that Jacob was finally deep asleep he tried the radio, but all the stations were static. He decided to just sit in silence for the rest of the drive. Barely fifteen minutes later Jacob awakened, seeming startled.

“Bad dream?” Ethan asked.

“Yes.”, Jacob responded, “It felt so real,” he added.

“Why don’t you tell me about it? Then I won’t have to drive in silence.”

Just as Jacob was about to describe his nightmare to Ethan, a tree came falling.

“Watch out!” Jacob yelled.

Ethan slammed on the brakes and tried to steer out of the way but it was too late and the tree fell, the car crashing into it.

“What’s going on?” Julie asked as she was startled from her sleep.

“Did we crash?” Emma added, she too was startled awake.

“A tree fell,” Jacob responded.

“Is everyone alright?” Ethan asked.

“Yes,” Emma said, even though her head was throbbing.

“I’m okay,” Julie said, though there was a nasty bruise forming on her arm.

“I’m alright,” Jacob said.

“No you’re not,” Ethan said, “you’re bleeding.”.

As soon as Ethan finished his sentence Jacob felt a hot trickle of blood run down his forehead. Ethan quickly grabbed Jacob and pulled him over to check his head. He located the bleeding point and found that it was quite small so it wouldn’t be fatal.

“Stay still,” Ethan said as John winced.

“Sorry, it stings,” Jacob replied.

Ethan reached into the backseat and grabbed a rag from the back of the seat. He pressed it against Jacob’s head and told him to keep the rag there and apply pressure.

“Everyone stay here,” Ethan said, “I’ll go and see if there’s anything I can do about the tree or if there is a house nearby.”.

Ethan got out of the car and surveyed the fallen tree. He tried to see if the tree could be pushed or rolled but no such luck. He walked over to see how the tree had fallen as it came down without any warning. Ethan saw the trunk and rubbed his hand across it, it was smooth. It is too smooth to have fallen due to natural causes. No. Not him, Ethan thought. He couldn’t have found them, it had been five years since the incident. He was dead, he had to be dead. Suddenly Ethan heard rustling in the bushes behind him and turned around almost instantly. The rustling stopped. Ethan cautiously walked over to the bushes, trying not to create too much sound. He grabbed a nearby branch and held it above his head, ready to hit whatever was hiding. *BAM*. Ethan hit the forest floor, but nothing was there. Suddenly the car alarm went off. No, not them. Ethan entirely forgot about the others, he raced back to the car but he was too late. All the doors were open, the alarm still blaring against the sound of the rain, the car lights reflecting off the puddles. Jason lay there, his throat cut, with multiple stab wounds in his chest. Julie was sprawled across the backseat. Her golden hair was suddenly dirty, stained with blood, her blue eyes frozen in the shock of fear. She had been repeatedly stabbed in the chest and torso, with a final stab wound in her head. Emma was the last one, she had made it out onto the road. The trail of blood most likely meant she had to crawl out. Her back was littered with stab wounds, the water around her quickly becoming red. He got them, all of them. Ethan was last, he always knew he’d be the last one to go. Then he heard it, he was walking towards him. The footsteps stopped, he was right behind Ethan. Five seconds later Ethan lay there with a knife sticking out of his head.

“CUT!”, the director shouted.

“What are you doing John, this is completely off the script, and you four get up,” he said angrily.

No one got up. Everyone started to murmur as no one had ever ignored the director. The director, feeling the uneasiness, decided to get them up himself.

“You stay right there, I’ll deal with you later,” he said to the man.

As he approached Ethan's dead body he noticed that the body seemed too real. He grabbed Ethan and tried to pick him up but he was just dead weight.

"What have you done?" the director asked.

No reply.

"What have you done John!"

No reply.

"Answer me." the director shouted as he approached the man.

"Your-you're not John." the director said.

With that, he suddenly realized that Ethan, Jacob, Julie, and Emma were really dead, and he was standing right in front of the killer.

"I...found...them," the man said, and then he snapped the director's neck.

Underground
Mckenna R.

12m grade

(80925)

The train screeched to a halt. I kept my chin tucked into my hand as I dug my heels into the old, dirty carpet. Unlike my younger brother David, who flung across the seats. He yelped capturing the attention of the other passengers.

“David!” I hissed, “You don’t have to be so dramatic.”

He stuck out his tongue in response, with his hands on either side of his head. “You don’t have to be so mean, Dylan” He crossed his arms and puffed out his chest, trying to appear older than his seven years.

That was enough to garner an eye roll from me.

“You know one day your eyes will get stuck in the back of your head if you keep doing that,” David said.

“No, they won’t. Now stop talking, we need to get off the train to find Cassie.” I said. David tilted his head, “Who’s Cassie?” I clenched my teeth, “I’ve told you a million times already, Cassie is Mom’s friend, Jane’s cousin. She’ll be bringing us to Jane’s house.”

He nodded his head slowly; I hope he gets it through his head this time. Gathering our luggage and getting off the train was treacherously slow. It was hard enough keeping control over a hyper little boy, but also waiting for the other passengers to disembark the train.

When David and I finally got to the platform, it had mostly cleared out. That meant there was only us and a teen boy in sunglasses on a splintered bench. He was holding a cardboard sign in odd handwriting. He was expecting a hand-out of some sort. I grimaced, if I thought the train was dingy, this place was worse. Everything looked incredibly gross, it was as if everything was coated in a layer of dirt. And there was no Cassie in sight.

“Keep an eye out for Cassie, ok?” I said to David.

He was staring straight at the boy holding the sign.

“David, it’s not polite to stare,” I said in a hushed tone.

“But...” he began to say.

I interrupted him, “David. Listen to me. Look for Cassie and don’t stare at that kid.”

He made a big pouty face.

I exhaled sharply, where is Cassie?

“But... Dylan. That boy is holding a sign with our names on it.” he said weakly, scared to upset me.

I looked to see that he was correct, the sign did have our names on it. The boy wasn’t a hobo. I grabbed hold of David’s hand and walked up to the boy with caution. “Excuse me, I’m sorry to bother you. But did you come instead of Cassie?” The boy gave a bewildered look, even behind his dark sunglasses. “I am Cassie,” he said in a voice that was much deeper than I expected from him.

“Isn’t Cassie a girl’s name? Are you trying to mess with us? Why are you wearing sunglasses? None of us have even seen the sun for...” I counted the years on my fingers, I never really kept track. “Ten years?” I said, not knowing if I was correct.

‘Cassie’ shook his head no, “Eleven years, four months, and nine days.” he sternly corrected.

“I’M SORRY I was only FIVE YEARS OLD when we were forced underground.” I said defensively, “I DIDN’T EVEN KNOW HOW TO COUNT THEN. I didn’t even know what a “nuclear fallout” MEANT.”

“Woah there, sugar pie, no need to get defensive,” Cassie said.

I tilted my head toward the “sky” in frustration to see only rusted metal, I only faintly remember the real sky which held a blue tint. David had never seen the outside world or the real sky. And probably never will. David hid behind me, acting extra shy around this new person.

“Why are you holding a sign with our names?” He meekly asked.

“Your names?” Cassie said while scratching his head.

David and I both nodded our heads.

“So, you’re David,” Cassie said while pointing to my brother, and then he shifted towards me “and you’re...”

“Dylan.” I finished the sentence for him.

“Huh. I thought you were a boy when my cuz talked about you two.”

I glared at him. “And I thought you were a girl,” I replied.

“Cassie is short for Caspian. My father’s name is Caspian, and my grandfather’s name too. And then his father’s name, and then his father’s name... you get the idea.”

I nodded my head. I studied the boy closer now, he was covered in dirt. His dark hair was unruly and just as dirty as the rest of him. From a distance, he seemed to be younger than me, but up close I could see he was probably closer to 17 or 18.

“Why is everything here so dirty? And old?” David said.

I was thinking the same, but I wouldn’t have said anything aloud.

Cassie chuckled a bit, “Welcome to Sector 1312. Or one of the first come, first serve sectors.”

David looked confused but I knew what Cassie meant.

“Most of the sectors built had specific people in mind, a certain amount of doctors, farmers, politicians, etc. were picked for each sector. A few of the unfinished sectors though were based on who could get there first, like this one.” I tried explaining to David, reciting my history textbook.

“What about the people who didn’t get here first?” he asked.

I tried to speak but didn’t know what to say.

“They died. If they didn’t get shot and killed trying to get down here, they died of radiation poisoning.” Cassie said. David’s eyes went wide, but I wasn’t sure if he understood the full extent of it.

I was furious that Cassie would do that to my brother. I glared at him, and he must’ve seen my rage because he held his hands up in surrender. David and I were fortunate. Our dad is a politician, leading us to be able to live in one of the nicer sectors. Mom’s friend, Jane, wasn’t as lucky, but at least she wasn’t left to die. Trying to change the subject I said, “You never answered why you are wearing sunglasses.”

Cassie looked mischievous as he said “You’ll see soon enough. You guys came in the nick of time.” He shot up quickly from the bench and walked away, motioning for us to follow. It didn’t take long to find out what he was talking about, as lights from every direction began to shine. It was pretty but looked odd against the hodgepodge buildings and the grime.

David was amazed at the light show, his mouth gaping in excitement. It seemed he’d already forgotten what Cassie said.

Cassie glanced back toward us, “It’s not easy to impress you, is it sugar pie?”

“Yup,” David answered for me.

I couldn’t disagree.

“Follow me,” Cassie said as if we weren’t following him already, before ducking into an alleyway. It was cramped and dark, with no particular use to it. Nothing was planned out here, unlike our Sector where buildings were neat and uniform. Pristine and a shiny white, with not a speck of dirt to be seen.

At the end of the alleyway, Cassie stopped in his tracks. “Behold...” Stepping to the side while pulling a rough curtain along with him. The moment I saw what he was talking about... it

was like I stopped breathing. Shards of colorful glass hung from walls and poles, along with whatever else was deemed pretty. Millions of colorful specks shined everywhere, enveloping everything around in its warm light. It was chaotic at best. But also, the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

"Are you impressed now?" Cassie said, with a smug look on his face and his hands stuck in his pockets.

I resolved to only give him a slight smile.

David, on the other hand, was the happiest I'd ever seen him. The magical light was strewn upon his face, his eyes sparkling not only with the light but with pure joy.

"So, what brings you guys out here?" Cassie asked.

I gave him an inquisitive look, "Your cousin didn't tell you?"

"Jane doesn't tell me anything," he said with a grand shrug of the shoulders.

"We're here because Mom said it was time for us to take a trip out of our Sector." David chimed in, though he was still enthralled with the display of lights.

"What Sector are you guys from?" Cassie asked. I was hesitant to respond.

"Sector 183" David replied once more.

Cassie let out a long whistle, "That explains a lot." I knew we shouldn't have told anybody about our Sector.

"What does that explain exactly? That we're stuck-up goody two shoes?" I said before he had a chance to.

"That's not what I meant to say..." Cassie said before turning away.

"Jane really doesn't tell you anything. She's visited us before you know." I said, not knowing if Cassie knew that fact or not.

“Jane visited you?” Cassie asked, I could see some hurt in his expression. I nodded my head. I didn’t mean to hurt him.

“Wait. Why are you wearing sunglasses? The lights were bright, but not bright enough to warrant sunglasses.” I said.

“Observant one, aren’t you,” Cassie said in a flat voice.

“That doesn’t answer my question,” I said while crossing my arms.

Cassie leaned in close and flipped his sunglasses up to reveal two different colored eyes. One was green with amber flecks and the other a blueish grey.

“Oh. Do you wear sunglasses to hide your eyes? Why? They’re pretty.” I said.

“Aww, you think my eyes are pretty. I knew there had to be a heart inside of you somewhere. Pretty eyes around these parts get stolen, I kind of like having my eyes.” Cassie replied.

David covered his eyes, which were a brilliant blue.

“Are you going to make it a habit of scaring my brother?” I said while eye-rolling. “And wouldn’t somebody notice you wearing sunglasses? Isn’t that suspicious?” I asked, thinking how silly it seemed.

“No. A lot of people here wear sunglasses. You’ll find that everybody you meet here has something or another that they’re hiding.” Cassie said casually. Now that was a loaded statement. Cassie continued to travel through the alleyways, slipping into a particularly small and dark one. With each step, I could feel him becoming more and more abrasive. The dim light framed his figure, his shoulders tense. This Cassie and the Cassie I had met earlier were a far cry from each other.

Deathly silence ensued, except for a few sounds that I would rather not know the source of. “Dylan,” David whispered, “I have to say something to you.” I pulled him close and took his

hand in mine. Cassie was out of earshot, weaving expertly around debris and rubble. A light shone from an apartment window far above allowing me to see David's face. His eyes glistened in the light, they were red and puffy. He had been crying. No wonder why he's been so silent. This may be more serious than I initially thought.

"What?" I said, hissing when I meant to whisper. Cassie must've heard me as he took a long stare at us over his shoulder. David's hand went limp, I allowed my hand to drop his. Between my sharp tongue and Cassie's glares David retreated into his shell, clasping his hands over his face. No matter how hard I try I always end up hurting somebody.

Cassie rounded a boarded-up building's corner and came to a slow stagger.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"We're here."

A glower came across his face and he headed up some stairs before flinging a door open. The door belonged to a large brick building that was by far nicer than any of the buildings we'd seen so far. It still couldn't stack up to even the worst buildings at home. I followed Cassie inside and David followed timidly. A worn spiral staircase awaited us, and we took our time going up.

"The owners originally planned this place as a hotel. Once they found out this Sector was going to be unfinished, they abandoned it. Now it's apartments." Cassie informed us, I nodded. At the end of the staircase, we came upon a door. Cassie fumbled with a key to unlock it, which revealed a whole row of doors behind it. "This is the penthouse. This is where Jane lives. And anybody who she feels like pitying at the moment." Cassie said, pasting on a smile. A fair amount of people were around. A petite woman with choppy short brown hair came into view. Jane.

“I thought I heard your voice! Now what took you so long? I knew I should’ve never trusted you to pick them up, the apple doesn’t fall too far from the tree huh? Just like your deadbeat dad.” Jane said melodically, her tone sweet as honey though her words stung.

Cassie’s eyes drifted to the floor, a scratched-up vinyl with varying shades of dirt brown. His smile fell along with his gaze. I wasn’t the only one with a sharp tongue, a fact I appreciated times when Jane visited. Maybe not so much anymore.

Jane was quick to give us hugs and catch up but made no effort to introduce the grimy strangers that shuffled around. “I have a few errands to run. Show them to their room for me, won’t you Cassie?” Jane said before prancing out the door.

Cassie did not reply.

“She scares me,” David said, shuddering.

“Me too kid. Me too.” Cassie said.

Cassie took David by the hand and led him to a door at the far end of the hall. I followed.

“This is where you guys will be staying,” Cassie said.

I looked inside the room he was talking about, to see two old dirty cots.

“I’m leaving,” Cassie said, giving a salute. David and I set our backpacks down and tried to get as comfortable in the cots as possible. It was easier than I thought, but that was because it was past midnight, and I was beat after traveling all day.

I was on the brink of sleep when David whispered, “Dylan. I have something to tell you about Dad.” He was standing over my cot, his eyes bloodshot. “In the morning.” I groggily said as I flipped to the other side and put the pillow over my head. I woke in the morning to find David gone. “David?” I called walking into the hallway.

Instead of David, I found a group of people glued to a tv screen. I peered over their shoulders to read a headline on the news, "Corruption, political conspiracies, and dirty money: David Wyandotte."

Dad? I turned to see David's face appear, ghostly white. He knew.

"Kids. Your mom is on the phone. You're going to have to stay here a bit longer." Jane said with a telephone cord trailing behind her.

Antoinette J

Mr. Acker

Creative Writing

17 October 2023

Help

For as long as I can remember, life has been lonely. It is either quiet or loud. The screaming or the sound as if something shattered. When it was quiet, you would hear my heart. My head was always loud. The thoughts never left. The whispers wouldn't go away. I hated the quiet. I loved the screaming. I used to be scared. I would hide in my closet. The dark corner. The rough carpet touched my legs. Surrounded by the walls and beautiful that weren't mine. I was never allowed to touch them. I wrapped myself into a ball, crying like a baby. Sometimes even falling asleep into a ball. At least I knew I wasn't alone. It quieted my thoughts. The screaming meant they were around.

Mom never seemed to be around. She never touched me. She never hugged or kissed me. She never braided my hair. She never even smiled. But she was beautiful. She had black beautiful hair, as if it was the night sky. Her eyes sparkled in the sun, it was like the ocean. She was tall and had long legs. Her beautiful face became blocked with smudged black eyeliner. The same day the screaming started, she never showed her face again, her hair was always blocking it. She stopped wearing makeup. She always cried, yelled, or just had complete silence. Her clothes changed from short, to long sleeves. Even in the summer, when it was 100 degrees. I would find her in bed, or just on the floor.

Dad was never nice to Mom, he was mean. Dad gave me toys, as long as I never told Mom about the friends he brought over. I never understood why. One day, Mom came home early, to find Dad and his friend. Dad's friend ran out the door. Mom played music, it was loud. I hid in my closet, the music was too loud. Mom and Dad were yelling, not even the music could cover it. The door slammed once, and then again. She never came back.

All the other girls were beautiful and had gold hair. My hair was the color of a raven. Sometimes they even looked like bunnies. Why couldn't I have bunnies in my hair? They even have beautiful deep blue eyes. It reminded me of the ocean. Their eyes even sparked in the sun. I loved the ocean. Their skin is the color of snow. I loved snow. They never looked like raccoons. The girls had teeth that blinded me. Everyone loved them. Always the one everyone picked.

I looked into the mirror, and looking back was nothing like those girls. They had beautiful snow skin, my skin was caramel and hairy like a cat. They were smooth and mine were harsh and dry. My eyes were harsher. Different colors surrounded my eyes. The colors of purple, green, and yellow. I looked like a raccoon. It was Dad. My eyes are as dark as the cat. When he was drunk, he would scream. He never stopped screaming at me. All his might pushed into me with his words and fist. All he was ever was cruel or nothing at all.

I turned on my phone. It blinded me. As I squinted my eyes I turned to the music app. I played "We Belong Together." My stomach growled. I walked to the kitchen. The walls were bare. Not a single picture was up. It was getting darker. It was orange throughout the house. As I turned on the light his hands pushed into me. The force pulled me down. Landing on my wrist first. I tried getting up. I couldn't get back up. An instinctive shock of pain shot through me.

"DID YOU NOT HEAR ME YOU LITTLE BRAT?!?" Dad said.

I stayed quiet, he reeked of alcohol. Of course, he was drinking. I sighed. I knew that was a mistake. He looked back at me. He looked like a demon, with eyes and it reminded me of fire. Smoke was escaping his ears. I was as if he was going to explode.

“OH, SO YOU’RE ANNOYED, HUH? GET UP RIGHT NOW,” Dad said.

I knew this was going to hurt. I didn’t even move. My wrist ached. The pain was shooting up, pulsing. I knew if I said something, it was going to be worse, than saying nothing. Dad's hand was tough and large. That's what made it worse. He started unbuckling his belt from his pants.

“THIS IS WHY YOUR MOM LEFT YOU. YOU UNGRATEFUL BRAT,” said Dad.

“PLEASE, NO. I’m sorry” I said.

Now I started to move. Oh please. Please. It hit me once, then twice, then a third, and then kept going. I didn’t scream. I knew screaming would make him even madder. I kept quiet. It was cold and hard. The leather left imprints on my skin. It was as if the belt never left my skin. It was red and started to swell. It left how it hit as if it was still there. I started to slowly move to the side. He noticed. Of course, he would notice.

I got tired of getting back up, so I tried to run. But his eyes were angrier than ever. They were red, his eyes bulging out of his head. Air pushing through his ears. His skin was almost as if it was a tomato. His face is meaner than it has ever been. He grabbed the vase. In one quick motion, it shattered, causing me to collapse to the floor. He hit my thighs, my back, my head, and then me again. It was as if red paint splattered all over his face, clothes, and the walls. I screamed in agony. Screaming through the top of my lungs. It hurt more than it has ever felt before. My body was throbbing with pain. It was warm on top of my head. A flow of steadily

warm blood ran down my forehead, to my eyebrow, and near my eye. It slid down my face. I could only see red. Then, I could no longer open my eyes. I wiped it off with my arm. The screaming didn't stop and I continued to cry and scream.

The hitting and the screaming just kept continuing, until he was done, tired. My eyelids were now heavy. No matter how hard, I couldn't open them. I listened as his breath was now heavy. The floor creaks, and he is sanding. I heard clack, with each step he made. The clack got quieter and quieter the further away he was. As his foot hit the floor, I felt my heart synchronized. Clack, clack, then silence. I listened, waiting, wondering. Where is he? Then, I heard jingles, it was scraping the glass. He then went quiet again. No noise. He throws something against the wall and then shatters what would be glass. Then, again I heard a clack, and then a slam, causing the house to shake. It was quiet, nothing but me. It was dead. I laid back on the floor. It sank throughout my body. The pain overtook me. My headache, I felt as though I was spinning. But wasn't I? I was moving in circles and I couldn't stop it. It got harder to breathe, to even move. I couldn't sit up. This was the farthest he even went. I couldn't keep my eyes open.

I opened my eyes, staring at the ceiling, it looked like little icicles the more I stared. It was warm. Wasn't it supposed to be cold? I was blinded by how bright my room was. Did I forget to close the blinds last night? I sat up, my room was beautiful. Nothing was destroyed, it looked as if everything was new. As if everything was perfect, the mirror wasn't broken, it was together, clean. It was my room, but it didn't look like my room. My heart was throbbing. I was paralyzed. I didn't move. It smelled of eggs and bacon. Bacon? Eggs? Where am I?

There was a knock at the door. I jumped up. My body didn't ache, no, instead, I felt light, like I was a cloud, like a feather. I slowly removed the blanket from me. I was holding my

breath. The floor creaked under me. I couldn't stop. I had to open the door. I was compelled, as if a spell was cast over me.

"Honey, it's me, Mommy."

Case no. 1000

I'm Not the Bad Guy After All

By: Alana F

As I looked through the tiny hole in the trunk, I saw what he was about to do to me. I tried to scream as loud as I could, but I couldn't find my voice as if it fled in my moment of need. As he kept getting closer and closer, I saw my whole life flash before my eyes. Literally. But before we get into more of that, let me tell you how I got myself into this situation:

It was a normal Tuesday morning. Normal in a sense. It was Tuesday the 17th, if I might add. I woke up and got ready for work like I did every morning. As I slipped my socks on, I saw something unusual on my bedroom floor. It was a piece of very sharp metal, the kind that should belong in a tool box, not on my bedroom floor. I did not think much of it because my husband works with tools all the time, so I naturally assumed that he accidentally brought a part of it into the bedroom. As I went over to carefully pick up the sharp blade, something shocked me. I hadn't even touched the dang thing yet. I stepped ever so slightly towards it again to try to pick it up, but there was the shock again. Something was trying to keep me away from that piece of metal. I decided to go talk to my husband about it, maybe he was pranking me. It was in fact almost Halloween and he always put up little pranks around the house during this time. As I walked down the stairs, I heard something out of the ordinary.

"Honey?" I called out. Maybe it was my husband working on something. As I turned the corner, I did not find my husband, but something very strange. It was the same piece of metal that was just on my bedroom floor except this time, it was huge. It was like a big metal fence post sitting on my kitchen table.

"Where are you?" I yelled again, hoping for him to answer me this time. This had to be a joke. As I walked toward the table with the scary looking metal, I heard a screeching sound and then blacked out.

When I woke, I wasn't in my house anymore. At least I didn't think I was. As I opened my eyes and got a feel for my surroundings, I saw something. My vision, still blurred from the blackout, focused on this one thing. I couldn't take my eyes off of it. My eyes were glued to the thing with a face. It's like it was calling my name.

"Clarice! Clarice!" I am not entirely sure if it actually was saying my name or if it was just in my head. Then there was the high pitched screeching sound and I blacked out again. Waking up this time was much harder as my head felt like a ton of bricks were being dropped on them. I carefully opened my eyes to find my husband hovering over me calling out my name.

"Clarice! What happened? Are you ok?" My husband isn't known for the comforting type and he kept yelling questions at me. At least I thought he was yelling. As I found my voice, I began telling him everything weird that had happened that morning.

"Ha! You must have hit your head pretty hard, there is no metal, except my sewing needles," he explained. I became even more confused because since when did he pick up sewing?

"You don't sew," I said calmly, still in a lot of pain.

"Don't be silly, I have always sewed. We better check out your head, you are becoming delusional," he explained. I knew I hit my head on something, but I also knew that I wasn't becoming delusional. He had never looked a sewing needle in the eye before, let alone sew with it.

"I know for a fact that you don't sew. What is going on?" I said to him, resisting his hand to help me up. There was something else that was strange about his appearance. Before I could comment on that and ask more questions, the blaring screeching sound came again and I blacked out, once again.

I woke up in the same place I did before except this time, my vision wasn't blurry and I could see more of my surroundings. I was in a dark basement, no light except the old, dingy light bulb that hung from the ceiling. Across the room, there were rocks surrounding something, in a circle. My head wasn't pounding anymore, so I thought I would go and investigate. I slowly made my way over there, but I wasn't expecting to see what I did. The rocks weren't surrounding anything, they were acting as a wall. Beyond the rocks, there was a deep hole in the floor. About 30 feet down. The hole contained something that made me every inch of my body shake with fear. There were at least 3 bodies in the hole. I assumed they all were dead as none of them moved or acknowledged my presence. That's when I heard footprints behind me.

I turned and I realized that this person was who I couldn't stop staring at last time. I knew him from somewhere, but couldn't remember from where. I was getting older so my memories weren't as vivid as they were before.

"Clarice! Don't be frightened. I am not going to hurt you. We used to be great friends. After all, I am not the bad guy," he said, walking closer to me.

"Stay away from me! Leave me alone!" I shouted.

"Listen to me. There's been an escape at the prison and a serial killer is on the loose. You need to hide before he gets you because, after all, you are his number one target," he said in a low, calm voice, smiling. Then the loud screeching came again and I was back in my kitchen.

My head, blaring with pain again, was in my husband's lap. When I saw him this close, I realized what was different about him. He wasn't my husband at all, he was the serial killer that escaped. I shot up real fast before he could start to kill me.

"Stay back, I know who you are!" I yelled, grabbing my gun from the side of my pants. I am a detective after all.

“Clarice, don’t be so juvenile,” he said, coming closer and closer. The closer he got, the more blurry he became. I couldn’t find the trigger on my gun and I knew I was going to lose this battle. I then blacked out.

That’s how I ended up in my own car’s trunk. As I peeped through that hole, I saw that he held the piece of metal that I saw this morning on my bedroom floor and kitchen table. Except there was something on the end of it. He was sewing with it except there was no fabric around. He was sewing something that looked tough like denim. It was tan, like the color of my skin. That’s when the pain became evident. I went to touch my legs, expecting to feel the smoothness of my skin. With the little bit of light that showed through the hole in the trunk, I saw blood all over my hand from where I touched my leg. I was in excruciating pain and realized that the skin on my legs was out there with the serial killer. I couldn’t scream, my voice gone. My stomach did multiple backflips as I watched him sew my skin together. My legs burned, like someone had lit them on fire. No, I wish someone did light them on fire, that would be better. He must have heard my quiet, sad whimpers because his head turned ever so slightly to the car.

“I hear you’ve been talking to your little friend. Trying to make me the bad guy when he is the one that consumes people. I only wear their skin,” as he was speaking, I knew exactly who this was. I had arrested him years ago after he had kidnapped and skinned young girls after keeping them in a hole in his basement, like the one I kept seeing in my “visions.” His name was Buffalo Bill. How could have I not seen it before? It was such a long time ago, it must have passed through my mind. That’s when I realized I wasn’t in the trunk alone. The guy I kept seeing in my “visions” was right next to me, bleeding out of his mouth. Being this close to him, I recognized his face and realized who it was, my husband, Hannibal Lecter.

7.11.11

Aprielle W
October 25, 2023

Then She Disappeared

So I have this crazy story but it might not be what you think, and it all started just like any other day where I went to school on a subway. The smell on that train was always unpleasant, yellow stains on the floor from leftover trash people leave. Everytime I got on I see someone smoking. The one good thing about going to school is that I get to see my best friend, his name is Jacob. I used to have a crush on him but now I think we are like brother and sister, locked in. Him and I met on the playground in the 4th grade. Standing there he looked at me and I punched him in the face. Looking back on it now we laugh at it now that he is taller than me. I was taller than him then. At first I didn't like him but later on I got used to him. Always wanting to hangout with me. The one bad thing he has done is get into a gang. I know it runs in the family but I can't help but have this feeling something will happen to him. Will he get hurt, or die? I wonder about that sometimes. If I will get to see him again. Walking through the school I see him, "hey Jacob" I say. "Hey Mal," he says. "Are we going to skip today...or no?" "Nah we better not..." I say. You know sometimes you feel like life is getting too much so you just don't care about little things. Yeah, school is one of those things for me. Sometimes you just need to take a break and run away from it all. I'm not saying I'd run away but I'll skip classes to enjoy life.

I have to tell you something, my life is a little crazy. I live in an old apartment with some strange people. My one neighbor wears a suit almost everyday, I guess it is for his job. I have no idea. And don't get me wrong about the noisy people too, they are hearing people fight and oh I think I need to dry my clothes outside. I mean sometimes I am like that too but I don't know the people, why would I be in their business? Maybe that's just people nowadays. I live in an enormous city named Chicago. Full of noisy and somewhat kind people. Anyone could be

anything in my option. Now that we are on that topic I want to talk about my mom. My mom oh...I love my mom. She raised me when we had nothing up till now. When my father died we all were devastated, not as much as my mom though. He had tried his best on the loans but couldn't keep up, so the rest was up to her. She fought those loan sharks like a bitch but in the end we lost everything. For a very long time we were on the streets or at friends houses. But I'm glad we are where we are right now. Let me tell you a little something about my mom, she is an ex-military soldier but if you were to look at her you wouldn't believe it. You know why? By how she looks. She has long black hair that always shines. Her eyes are like you are looking into the ocean, so baby blue. People might think she is Mexican but she is actually hispanic. Maybe it's because of her height, she's 5'4".

I will tell you my mom would have to be my very first role model. She set the bar for me with everything she had been through. Like being myself and sticking to it I got it from her. The other thing I got from her is her height. I'm 5'4" only because my dad was taller than my mom. The main thing that I was going to say is this city has very strange people. Some people are nice while others can be stretchy. It seems I always see people talking to the grass or random people looking at each other and getting triggered to fight. I will say that doesn't happen all the time but the very few rare moments it can be entertaining. But lately my mom has been acting weird. How so? Well it all started when I asked her how her day was. She responded with "oh it's ok but make sure to always call me when you are not ok, ALWAYS." I didn't ask her to check up on me, although I appreciate how it is related to today. Today is nothing special. Not a holiday or birthday or an anniversary. Why did she tell me that? Huh...I want to know why.

A couple of days later she asks me to always keep my phone on me and to text her whenever. I mean is it normal for parents to check on their kids constantly. Suspiciously she was always checking the windows before she went outside. Rather it be before going to work or at night. I want to know why she did that? Is someone looking for her or staking her...no that can't be it. I need to stop thinking about this matter and get lunch. While eating lunch I notice a

guy in a suit looking at me yet again. Trying to focus my eyes on him again, he disappears. He...disappears. Maybe it was in my head. Oh...there's Jacob. As I'm finishing my lunch I wonder why that guy was there. What was he doing? Why was he in high school during the day? Is he stalking me, why is this happening to me?! Holding onto my bag tightly I hold on. Huh...it's getting a little burry. THINK, calmly think...ok. He wasn't a teacher...huh I wonder if he was a teacher. "MAL,MAL...mal, MAL..." Jacob says. "Huh...were you talking to me?" I said. "Yeah, you spaced out on me...you good?" "Yeah I'm good" I say.

I have to call my mom. Waiting patiently for her to pick up...RING GGGGG...RINNNN GGGGG...beep. What she didn't answer. She always answers my calls!? Maybe she is still working, I say to myself. I'll call her coworkers, that's it. NNNN GGGG...hello? "Yes this is mal, Mary's daughter. I was just wondering if my mom is working late." Lady on the phone, "uh yeah she signed out a little while ago but she said she will come back. You want me to call her?" "Yes, could you do that? I just want to know when she will be home," I said. "Yeah definitely I can do that sweetie, I'll get back to you whenever I can..." she hangs up. "While it looks like my mom is working late today, can I come to your house Jacob?" I said. "Yeah you can come over" he says. I think nothing of this because she has always worked late or came home a little late.

I still had that strange feeling something is going to happen? Huh...walking with Jacob I see that same strange man again. Whispering, I say "...hey look."

"What..." as he sees the man. "That's the man I was talking about at school..." I say.

"OHHHHHHHH..." lets keep walking he says. Why have I seen that man two times today! I'm getting more anxious by the minute. The coworker hasn't gotten back to me and a man is stalking me. "Hey Jacob, can I stay at your house for a couple of days...please" I say. "Yeah you can do...you good, you look scared" he says. He must have noticed I was holding his hand and shaking repeatedly. "Ohhh...yeah I'm ok, I'm just on edge" I say. It had been a whole week of me staying at his house, so I tried to call my mom and the coworker a couple of times. I got no answer though...I wonder where she is? Ok before I move on I have to tell you about my

best friend, Jacob. As you already know he is in a gang. There are stereotypes about how people associated with gangs just have to tell you he isn't a bad person. The one of many things I love about him is he is always there for me. Rather than being with his gang a lot he is always by my side. I love him as my closest friend. He is a tall, handsome man. He has tattoos all on his left shoulder and arm. He is way taller than me but only a few inches, I like to say. But it's false, he's 6'5". Lucky bastard. Oh I'm not just going to talk about him, imma talk about myself too.

I like to think I'm lucky to have parents by how other people don't. I came from a hispanic household that wasn't how people think it was. I had loving parents that weren't controlling, they were the opposite. My dad was strict on how I hung out with, but never made me think badly about him. My mom was a supporter of anything I wanted to do. Both really want the best for me, which I'm grateful for. I will say we did have hardships before. My dad once borrowed money from the wrong people and they almost killed him. I was 5 when it happened so I don't remember much from it. All I can say is the look my dad gave my mom and me was petrified. I can never truly get that look off my dreams. My height is now 5'5". I'm 18 years old just like my best friend. I don't like to talk about myself a lot only to people I feel comfortable with. My eyes are a brownish-blackish color like a pond of chocolate. My hair is long and longish and the same color as my eyes. I speak Spanish and a little bit of thai.

Scrolling through my phone I see a post about missing adults. "I hope they are ok" I say. CRICCCCCKKKK...mom are you home. Maybe she is at work now? Why is my body shaking? I'm not cold, it must be because I'm scared. She isn't picking up...mom. My hands won't stop shaking...what is wrong with me. I should call...how. My mom didn't answer. Call how...JACOB. I'll call jacob. RIN gggggggggg... "hello." "Hey, what's up?" He says. "I can't contact my mom, I've called her so many times today and I know something is up." "She has never done this, where could she be? I'm freaking out." "I want to know where she is, so I called her work place and waited for hours." "IT'S BEEN TWO WEEKS, where could she be?!" "I want to see her, I

miss her, where could she be!!” With tears in my eyes I’m trying to calm down. “MAL MAL MAL mal” he says calmly “you are going to be ok, calm down first.” Trying to catch my breath I drop a glass of water. BEE PPPP.... “What was that? MAL ARE YOU OK?!” “NO I’m not ok I can’t find my MOM and I dropped GLASS.” “I’m coming over to stay still...ok?” “Ok...” I say.

I hear footsteps near the door. Maybe that is Jacob? RIKK...as the door is opening I see him. Just by the looks of it I could see he rushed over here. He still had a toothbrush in his mouth. “I feel a little weird...” THUMP PP. “Mal...MALLLLL she isn’t answering...” This hard surface feels nice, oh look its a red stain. Is that my blood? All I feel is Jacob lifting me up and getting the glass shards off my arm. Mal didn’t know if her arm was nothing of her problems for now. Opening my eyes I see Jacob looking at me. Why is he here? Oww my arm hurts glancing. I see a bandage on. I must’ve hurt myself. Sitting up Jacob looks at me. “Hey what happened? I’m worried about you..you know that right” he says. Trying to remember what happened. “My mom is MISSING!” Oh here come my watery eyes again...we need to find her I say.

Talking to myself repeatedly isn’t going to help me, now it is time to go to her work place. Ok let’s rewind a bit, I’ve told you her mom has gone missing but what I didn’t tell you is if her father is alive, he is not. To answer your question, who might be the man in the suit? I don’t know if you will have to read on to find out. I can feel the stress leiger as my thoughts keep wondering where she is. Clicking on the car keys I drove with Jacob to her work place. I have never been to her office before but have seen the building getting advertised a lot. The new tiles you see and a smell you can’t really get rid of. It had a good smell like a new laundry pile was getting cleaned. The strange thing about it was there were only two main windows. You would have thought more of it by the tall structure it held, but no. My mom always had her hair up. Struggling to get inside, jamming the door I see one of my moms coworkers. She had come over to our apartment multiple times, for holidays and just in general. She and my mom are so similar if you looked at them from afar you would think they are sisters but they aren’t. She has

long black hair like my mom but brown eyes. My mom doesn't really have many friends but the ones she has has seen her worst. When my dad died.

Me and her are close. Wiping into her arms I ask "have you seen my mom?" She replies with "no, I haven't sweetie what is something wrong?" I reply with "YES, she is gone I can't find her anywhere, she is MISSING, and I have come to print papers for her." "Oh sweetie, are you sure you have looked everywhere...did you check the car wash?" "YES, I HAVE AND SHE ISN'T THERE!?" Trying to hold my tears gasping on air I say "she isn't anywhere." "How about this? I can look for her and I'll get back to you. That sounds good?" She says. "OK, but please call me whenever you hear anything about her" I reply. Later that day I looked for her in random places. I know this wasn't going to help my sanity but it did help me to calm down. I had been so started that I fainted thinking too much. Oh I feel drained but I must keep looking. Over the course of weeks I've been losing sleep, asking people about her, fainting from constantly thinking of bad scenarios.

Another strange thing about my mom missing is I'm more focused on people like if they are the kidnapper that took my mom. Or if the man in the suit is the perpetrator. All this is making me lose sleep repetitively. I want my mom, it aches me to know she is out there by herself. That accident I was talking about earlier my mom got some of the blow to. She had bruises on her neck and face afterwards. The loan people really tried to get to us, even me. But they didn't touch a finger on me. I want to know what the strange suit man wanted with me, he had never been following me until now. Even now I feel like somebody's watching me. Terrified to sleep as my thoughts linger with bad dreams. I want to find her so much it hurts. I have never been so scared to step outside with the thought someone will get me too like they took my mom. Wait a minute, my mom is ex-military she wouldn't get hurt so easily. Right? Yeah, she wouldn't. Running to the guest room I hear from across the hall a claw on the front door. Was it a cat or someone's nails? Peeping through the door slip I see a man. I opened the door and to my surprise it was a man in a suit. "I'm with the landlord, can I come in?" Yeah..." I replied. He

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How I Survived: The Apocalypse of Malicious Zombie Dogs

It's nine at night and Maria is out camping alone in her tent. The smell of campfire coarses through the foggy air. The night is silent, except for the crickets chirping in the background. Maria had just had a big seafood dinner that included, crab, fish and snails. She caught the snails and crab by hand and caught the fish using the fishing rod she had brought with her. She boiled the seafood in a pot and muched down her food in a span of only ten minutes. Before going to sleep Maria adds a small coat of her favorite scent of perfume; Santas Cookies. All is quiet and Maria starts to drift off to sleep when all of a sudden she can hear the noise of growling and can smell the stench of wet, soggy dog.

"What is that horrific smell and weird growling noises?" Maria said.

To her surprise it was a pack of hungry wild zombie dogs foaming at their mouths.

"Oh my gosh! What am I going to do? Im to young to die" Maria screamed out in fear. Maria grabs the bottle of perfume and lights a torch. She hops on the ATV and starts to speed away causing the dogs to chase after. She sprays the perfume into the flame which sets some of the dogs on fire. Maria realizes that the perfume causes the zombie dogs to burn in the places the perfume touches. To the best of her ability, she sprays as much as she can until the can runs out. Shes left in the middle of the woods with nothing but a half of tank of gas in the ATV, a pot, and a chainsaw she had brought on her adventure. She couldn't figure out why these malicious dogs were after her. Then all of a sudden an idea sprang into her head.

"Maybe they are hungry." Maria quietly mumbled.

"I did hear low grumbling coming from their stomachs."

Although Maria knew what she had to do next she couldn't stomach the thought.

Holding back the vomit she said

"I must chop some of the zombie dogs up with the chainsaw, then boil the pieces and feed them to the rest of the pack.

The blood sprayed across my face. While holding back the vomit in my mouth, I continued chopping the dogs up. Once I was done chopping them up, I threw them in the pot, boiled the pieces, and fed them to the rest of the dogs. Once the dogs ate, they immediately turned around and never once came back to bother us again. In conclusion, all the dogs, just like us humans, need to eat food in order to remain sane.

Brian~~na~~ Pellerin

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3,2,1...

I was conscious, being awoken from the disturbing noise of metal clashing. My eyes wearily adjusted to the dark. As I continued to become more and more awake, I noticed the smoke hazing on the floor. I squint my eyes in order to take a closer look around. Half-dazed, I didn't notice what made up my surroundings. The room, seemingly an abandoned warehouse, had a singular green light pointing towards the left wall. I turned to notice there was a clock that showcased "4:00". *Is that the time?* I ask myself. I can't remember what led me to this place and why I was still here. It has not yet occurred to me to move around. My brain is drowsy and my body feels exhausted. I look down to face my lap. My face hardens. I'm sitting on an unknown wooden chair. My neck feels a strain when I look down, so I lift my right arm to investigate. I touch metal. Confused, I attempt to touch around my neck, only for it to be wrapped by what seems to be a metal collar. I grasped at the collar, attempting to get it off. My strength could not remove the collar from my throat. I stand up from the chair in a desperate attempt to search for an answer to what is going on. I was facing towards the chair when I took a few steps back and mistakenly stepped on a paper. "What's this?" I mumbled. The paper had hand-written writing, and was covered in dust. I must've been here for a while. I bent over to pick up the paper.

"Hello Victor", it read. How do they know my name? I continue reading, "I've been eyeing you, Victor. You're a thief, a no-good pretentious vagrant, who carelessly put others into a set back. I, unfortunately, happen to be one of your victims. You evicted me from my house and stripped me from my pride, Victor. I hung my head down in shame, while you flaunt your abominating riches. Now, it is time to reflect. The metal collar around your neck will become tighter as soon as the clock on the wall begins the countdown. There is a tray located behind the chair you've awoken from, and there is a cigar cutter - the same one you use on your daybreaks

from incriminating the disadvantaged. You must rid of your evil. Remove each ten of your fingers in the given time before the suffocation, and you'll be like the rest of us."

Utterly confused, I read the last line, "Good Luck."

I couldn't believe what I just read. Is this some kind of sick joke? Surely evicting those in poverty didn't seem like a big deal, I mean, rules are rules. C'mon, how else would the world run? I was enraged. Then, I heard a large beep. I look up to find that the timer has been started. I run to the front wall and begin to bang the metal door, I realize the metal clashing from earlier was this steel storage door closing. I scream for help in a voice that I thought would never reach that type of loudness. I was given no response. My adrenaline surged rapidly, and I felt faint once again. My heart became the pounding of drums, while my ears rang. My adrenaline increased as the clock furiously ticked. I needed to start now.

I quickly ran to the cigar cutter. It was on a silver tray on the ground, where the letter said it would be. I go down on my knees to get a closer look. I pulled the lever a couple of times to get familiar with it. Suddenly, my collar tightened. I can already sense the lack of airflow. *I have to do this.* I stick my left index finger into the top hole of the machine, where the cigar would usually go. *This is crazy. This is crazy. This is crazy.* I place my right hand on the lever. *This is crazy. This is crazy. This is crazy.* I attempt to go slow. I feel the blade coming in from the side of my finger while it slowly pierces the outer layer of my skin. I let go of the lever and remove my finger from the machine. I pull my hair in shame.

The collar becomes tighter. My breathing goes out of rhythm and I struggle for air. I try to fight the collar again. No luck. *I have to do this.* I place my left index finger, now bleeding, into the hole once again. I grabbed the lever, and in one solid go, I felt an unbearable pain, like my finger was on fire. I cry out in agony. I stumble and fall on my side. I take a hold of my hand

to try to seek any comfort. I'm still screaming. After a few seconds of trying to process the pain of what just occurred, I get back on my knees, and go for a second finger. I place my left middle finger into the hole. I looked up at the clock. The bright red color flashed at 2:19. I cursed under my breath and squeezed my eyes shut. I hear the noise of the blade against the metal, followed by the intense amount of heat radiating from my finger after the deed was done. I yell out in agony once again.

The collar gets tighter. I try to breathe carefully now. I attempt to do the remaining fingers on my left hand. It was my right hand's turn. I had to push the lever down with the palm of my left hand. There was blood everywhere, but time was running out. I looked up right before it was my thumb's turn. The clock showed 00:24. I had two fingers left. I tried to push down the lever with my palm, but it kept slipping away. The blood made the lever impossible to push down. My palm wouldn't stop slipping to the sides instead of going in a downwards motion. *No No NO NO!* I wipe my hand on the side of my shirt. That did nothing to help. I remove my shirt as a desperate way to wipe away the blood. I threw it onto the ground and attempted to push the lever again. No luck. I look at the time. 00:12. I grab my shirt and wipe the lever down again for a better attempt. I placed everything where it needed to be and slammed roughly on the lever. It worked. I needed one more finger, but the collar tightened. Asphyxiation was going to be my killer. I couldn't breathe anymore. I continuously took gasps of air. I look up. 00:04. I hurried to put my last finger in the blade, but my eyes couldn't tear away from the clock. 00:03. My palms slipped from the lever. 00:02. I tried again, but the spilling blood from the open blood vessels was squirting everywhere. 00:01. I rotate the small machine and I use my elbow to slam the lever. I looked up to see the clock only had one digit repeating. 00:00.

Then,

the clock goes black,

the light went dark,

and the only thing I could hear

were my dying breaths.

Daniela
Cis

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Grace L.

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Family Affairs

Dan moved through his kitchen to the living room, settling down into his armchair with a mug of tea and switching on the TV. He sighed as he sat, glancing over to the couch still made up for his brother Gary. He loved his little brother dearly but it was going on 6 months of “getting back on his feet” and he was starting to get annoyed at him lazing around and eating all his food. It didn’t help that Angela got mad at him for “being rude and inconsiderate” every time he asked after Gary’s job search, acting like he was threatening to kick him out over simple inquiries.

He perked up as he heard a door slam, slightly confused. Angela was having a girls night and Gary said he was gonna be out really late because of some possible construction job he was trying to land. He called out, “Welcome home! Which one of yall is it?” After a moment of silence he frowned at the lack of response and went to stand but he was only half out of his chair when pain exploded on his head and the world went black.



Detective Joseph Allen stood outside a nondescript looking house singing to himself as he waited for his partner, Kevin Moore was perpetually late whenever a case came up late at night, not that he could blame him, midnight wasn’t his favorite time to look at gore either. Lights flashed blue and red and neighbors crowded the police line all wondering what could have happened to the Wilson-Davis family. They were popular in the community due to their kindness

and generosity so news had spread quickly when the police pulled up to their house. Finally Moore slid up beside him and asked, "So what happened, sir? What are we dealing with?"

"There was a break-in, it looks like someone was trying to rob the place, unfortunately Mr. Wilson-Davis was home and the guy got spooked and killed him. Wife came home from an outing with friends to find him dead and called the police, understandably pretty shaken up."

Moore grimaced and he couldn't help but agree, the idea of such a kind person being killed simply because they were home at the wrong time truly was horrible. But he continued, "Officers are searching nearby areas for anyone suspicious or to see if anyone saw anything, what we need to do is look at the scene to see if we can find anything that could identify the culprit." He had headed up the lawn to the house as he was doing his recap with Moore trailing him. Entering the house it looked oddly put together, as if nothing was wrong, but as they past the entrance hall they could see through the kitchen and into the destroyed living room, there were books, broken glass, and blood splattered everywhere.

He paused looking around when something caught his eye, in his back pocket, clearly visible was the victim's wallet. And the longer he looked the more he saw that was inconsistent with a robbery gone wrong, valuable and light objects left untouched, shattered glass that had no point being there with the windows and coffee table unbroken. It looked like a poorly staged set more than an actual break-in. Not to mention the body, the attacker had stabbed him at least 5 times from what he could see, it didn't look like an accidental hit from a spooked man, but planned and angry. Detective Moore walked over to him, also looking confused, "I checked every door and window. None of them were unlocked other than the front door and there is no sign of being forced open. I asked the wife and she said she unlocked the front door when she came home. How did they get into the house in the first place? And why would a spooked robber lock the door behind themselves? It's not adding up."

Detective Allen nodded, absorbing what he had said and pointed out the inconsistencies of the room he had noticed to his partner, then they both stood in silence realizing what this all meant. Finally, Moore broke the silence, "This wasn't some random robbery gone wrong, it was a murder! And it had to be someone that they knew well enough to either have a key or that they would let inside the house based on the lack of forced entry."

"Unfortunately, that doesn't narrow it down a lot, boss. They know pretty much everyone in town and are near famous for their hospitality. Dan would have let anyone who came to their door in, hell I used to have dinners here every weekend when I was still new to town and they barely knew me!"

He nodded, knowing it was true, unfortunately that made the entire town suspects until they could narrow it down. "We need to get back to the station, let the others know what we learned and give the forensics people time to work their magic." Moore hummed his agreement and the two of them left the house passing the police line to return to their patrol cars when they were stopped by a crowd of people yelling questions asking about the couple and if they were okay, demanding to know what was happening.

Allen stepped ahead of his partner, they both hated dealing with crowds but it was his turn, and addressed them, "We cannot disclose what has happened at this time, please return to your homes and the police will issue a statement once the situation has been dealt with." Ignoring further questions they got into their cars and headed back to the station.

They were greeted at the station doors by Charlie, a rookie cop who had been on the canvassing team, who burst into chatter the second they were close, "We think we found the guy! He was hanging around a few streets away holding a lot of stuff. We picked him up for questioning because he was being suspicious and he hasn't said a word yet, just laughed when we asked if he wanted an attorney. He's sitting in the conference room if you wanna talk with

him.” They glanced at each other before thanking Charlie and moving through the station to the conference room. He doubted it was the right guy but they needed to talk to him anyway to see if he had seen anything suspicious and clear him so he could leave. Upon walking into the room they both grimaced, it was Dave.

Dave was a druggie, constantly being brought in for loitering or “acting suspicious” by the more biased cops, in reality he was just homeless and struggling to get back on his feet while trying to kick an opioid addiction that started when he had a major surgery and got hooked on the meds. They both knew there was no way in hell Dave would have killed Dan, especially since it was a murder instead of a robbery gone wrong. The guy was a coward, the thought of blood and fighting terrified him, and the Wilson-Davis’s were always helping him out with food and trying to find jobs. He had no reason to rob them, and even less reason to kill Dan, not when they would give him what he needed if he just asked.

But protocol dictated they question him and Allen even held hope that he would have seen something that could be helpful to finding the murderer. “Hey Dave, we got a few questions about tonight that we wanna ask then you should be free to go. You were near the Wilson-Davis household earlier and we need to know if you saw anything out of the ordinary around 2 hours ago.”

Dave shot up in his seat looking panicked, “Are they okay? Dan, Angela, are they okay?”

Detective Allen glanced to the side before sighing and looking Dave in the eye, “Dan was caught in what looks like a robbery gone wrong and got killed, Angela found him earlier. We need to know if you saw anything so we can find the guy who did this.”

Dave’s hand had come up to cover his mouth as he collapsed back into the chair and he began to cry, ignoring any further prompting from the Detectives as he cried for the people who

had always been so kind to him. Suddenly he startled and looked at them, "What about Gary? He's staying with them right now and I saw his car at their house when I passed by earlier." Detective Allen was confused for a moment about who Dave was talking about before he remembered, he was Dan's little brother, he remembered hearing about him staying with them for a bit but hadn't even thought about him, too focused on what happened to Dan.

"Gary should be fine, Dan was the only one in the house at the time." But he did keep the fact about the car in mind, he felt bad about his suspicion but knowing Dan's brother was there earlier could be helpful in finding the culprit.

"That's all we need from you right now Dave so we're gonna send in someone to get a full statement about anything you saw, please cooperate. Please. Once you do that you are free to go."

Dave gave them a two fingered salute chirping out a, "Your the boss hoss" as they left the room, Moore flagged over an officer to get Dave's statement while Allen headed to his desk to look over the statements taken by the responding officers.

As he read over Angela's statement he noticed something odd, she mentioned that she was out with friends who had gladly corroborated her story but she also mentioned that Gary was meant to be away all night attempting to land a construction job and would not have been at the house, having left before her, directly contradicting Dave's mention of seeing Gary's car at the house that evening. He noted down the inconsistency and the way the break-in appeared staged into his notes fighting back a yawn. He will have to talk to the brother tomorrow. For now it was well past 1 am, he was exhausted and needed to rest to make sure he didn't make any mistakes, the family deserved that much after all they had done for the community.

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At a bright and early 7 in the morning, Detective Allen stumbled into the station with a large coffee, ready to look into the things he had noticed last night. He was stopped when Charlie bounded over to his side looking way too awake after the long night, damn morning people. He forgot all his grumbling in an instant when Charlie opened his mouth, "The murder weapon was found. It was sitting in the back of a dead end alleyway a few streets away from the Wilson-Davis house. Forensics is working with it now to see what they can get off it." He was shocked, he hadn't expected them to find it so easily, usually if it wasn't left behind at the scene weapons wouldn't be found until the perpetrator themselves was found. He nodded Charlie away, he still had work to do, there was no guarantee that the weapon would have anything useful so he needed to follow his own leads in the meantime.

He headed to his desk, reading through his notes as well as any accounts from officers on the scene that had not been turned in when he had left. As he read he noticed a common theme that every officer had noticed, Gary had rushed to the house but seemed oddly calm about the situation, as well as many officers noting how touchy he was with Angela in a way that seemed much closer than a typical brother-in-law. It made the seed of suspicion in his mind grow a little more, feeling the need to look even closer at Gary and Angela. At the same time the thought made him vaguely sick, they had just lost a brother and husband and he was suspecting them of a terrible crime, but he couldn't ignore his training and things weren't adding up.

He resolved himself. This was more important than his own discomfort at the idea, he needed to find the truth not the easy answer. He sent out a request for the Wilson-Davis family's finances, citing a possible connection or stolen card as his reasoning for the information, while also looking for any suspicious transactions on Angela and Gary's ends. It took a while to get the records but eventually he did and as he looked through them he saw the pattern emerge, odd

purchases or withdrawals that didn't make sense starting around when Gary moved in with them. The evidence all pointed to one thing, an affair.

He lumped in his seat, dragging his hands down his face, to think that sweet ol' Angela was cheating on her loving husband with his brother would have been laughable before but was irrefutable with the evidence in front of him. He hated the conclusions that brought him to when paired with the death of Dan, how likely that made the two of them to have conspired to kill the kind man. He needed to speak to the two of them, find out what happened, and hope to god that they weren't responsible. Reaching for his phone, he dialed the number that Angela had given on the report to contact her with, speaking the second the phone was answered, "Mrs. Wilson-Davis, this is Detective Allen with the CAPD. I need you to come in and answer a few more questions as well as to speak with your brother-in-law about a few things. Would it be possible for you to come to the station this afternoon to speak with me."

He heard her draw in a shaky breath over the line, before she muttered out, "Of course detective. I'll be there soon, anything I can do to help you find this person." He exchanged a few more words with her, ironing out the details before bidding her farwell and hanging up. The second he did he slumped, burying his head in his hands, hating himself for being suspicious of her as he heard how destroyed she sounded, obviously barely holding back tears as they spoke. But he had to investigate the leads he had and the affair was the only thing he had to work with right now.

As the agreed upon time approached he stood from his work and headed to the front of the building to meet with the two and ask him his questions. Moore walked up and continued towards the front by his side, having already been filled in on the discoveries and even finding some additional evidence of the affair himself as he looked over what he had found. "So, how



are we doing this? Confront them together or talk to them separately and try to get them to contradict their story?"

He barely had to think about it before saying, "Split them up, confront them, and get them talking. Figure out if the affair had any part in the murder or if it was a coincidence. You talk with Angela since she knows you better and might slip in her comfort, I'll talk to Gary. " Moore nodded along to the plan and headed directly to Angela as they reached the front. It was the best strategy to use, but he had to admit that part of the reason he took Gary was that he just couldn't face Angela. Not after suspecting her of killing Dan, the guilt would be too much for him to bear.

He took Gary to the interrogation rooms, and as they sat down he looked at Gary, seeing him glancing around wildly and fidgeting with his hands like a child caught elbow deep in the cookie jar. But past the nerves his eyes were clear, not a single hint of red to show that he had cried or grieved for his dead brother in any way. He was nervous but not upset, and that set off all sorts of alarms in his head. He started asking his questions and the story they were told last night remained consistent, however he wouldn't share who it was he was trying to get the construction job from, eyes darting around the room as he fumbled to answer the simple question. Then the second Allen asked about why his car was at the house that night all blood drained from his face. He started to shake all over and hyperventilate, shocking Allen. He was about to press Gary for answers when suddenly a knock sounded through the room.

He turned to see why someone would interrupt him in an interrogation when he saw Laurel, a technician in their forensics department who specializes in fingerprints. She had an urgent look on her face and had even interrupted an interrogation so he knew it had to be important. He felt a sense of dread as he marched over to her, and it only doubled when she lifted

a file and said, "Prints from the knife came back. There was a match in the database so we can move to arrest immediately."

Allen felt relieved, if they had the prints then it couldn't have been a member of the family as upstanding as they were, he had to have been wrong. That hope crashed down as Laurel continued, "The prints match one Gary Wilson, formerly arrested as a teen for vandalism and spending six months in juvie where his prints were collected and added to the database."

He felt such disappointment as he turned back to the interrogation room, marched inside saying, "Gary Wilson, you are under arrest for the murder of Daniel Wilson-Davis, you have the right to remain silent..." He cuffed the man as he continued to recite the Miranda rights to him, leading Gary from the room to a holding cell further in the building. They passed Angela and Moore who were leaving the other room and he saw the moment she released what this meant as she crumpled to the ground sobbing, screaming out to Gary, "Why? Why would you do that? He was your brother! Why?"

And that's when Gary responded, sounding crazed, "You were supposed to be mine! He stole you away! I did this for us, I got rid of the obstacle to our happiness!" Allen continued to drag him away as he listened to them rave and scream at each other, knowing that Gary would go away for this for a long time.