

**WHAT
YOU
DON'T
HEAR**

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What you don't hear

Camila Tacchi

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Are you afraid?

Allie looked at me with her big brown eyes, the only part of her face that still held a bit of life. I did not even want to look at the rest of her features for fear of reality setting in. Breath in, breath out, like mom had taught us. I kept on the breathing cycle as Allie sat straight on the beige carpet, her eyes never leaving mine as I went from lying down to copying her posture. She gave me a small smile, one I was not able to replicate, as she raised her hands to answer my question.

Can't stop it even if I wanted to.

My eyes tingled and my chin quivered, but I inhaled deeply to reabsorb any tears that might have shown my sister I was not ready for what was coming. We had prepared for it our whole lives, but the older we got the stronger our relationship became, and each day it became harder to wait for what was coming. I would never be prepared, but I could not show her that, she would go on a three-day explanation on how everything was fine. It was not, and she could not transmit me the same acceptance she had of the topic. As she waited for my answer, her delicate fingers dog eared the page of the book she was reading, of which she still had more than half to read. I wondered if she would ever finish it, and if she did, I begged she would not start another one. Her life would end before the book did. I kept repeating mom's breathing technique and waited until her eyes found my hands to ask her a question.

Would you, if you could?

Her chest expanded for a few seconds, and as it contracted she took her skinny pale arm to her mouth and started to cough. Quicker than the wind I crawled to her side, putting my hand on her back and rubbing her purple shirt on her skin. My eyes were stuck to the dry patches on her face and baby pink lips as the coughing softened, but my hand stayed on her back feeling the way her chest inflated and deflated. Once the rhythm became normal, I let go and moved once again to my spot in front of her. With each cough it seemed a year was taken of her face, much duller eyes and fallen lips. Either way she was always able to hide her agonies when talking to me, as if I was not able to see past her shiny shirts and cheery words.

I can't, so I try not to think about it.

My view dropped to the ground, and I swallowed a big tension ball on my throat before regaining the power to control my breathing. When I looked up again, her eyes were like miniscule cameras that could enter my eyes and read every single one of my thoughts, inspecting what I was thinking. I wished she was not able to know what was going through my mind right now, I would not want her to see what my head imagined as I laid awake at night. Her fingers played with each other on the carpet, and only stopped moving when I raised my hands, her attention fully on me.

How can you forget about it?

She looked at the roof, putting her hands behind her and tilting backwards a tiny bit. The few straight chestnut hairs she had left were so long they reached the floor when she took her head back, her throat extending and lines appearing across it because of how thin her skin was. I could not see my sister like this, but I would regret it for the rest of my life if I did not provide her my full attention while I could. Trying to grasp onto the last of life she had

was like trying to hold onto water, slipping through my fingers each time I closed my fist. Allie returned to her sitting position, and she sighed before responding my question.

If it hasn't taken my life away yet, why would I want to ruin my last moments thinking about that?

Easy for her to say considering she would only have to leave me and never think of it again. Meanwhile I had to continue for the rest of my life grieving the only best friend I had ever had. Her last moments would not be my last, but how much I wished they were. How much I wished I could go with her wherever life took her. If I was with her, I did not care where we would end. I only needed to have my sister by my side, because imagining a life in which I was living with her absence was like trying to picture what her afterlife would look like.

I'm afraid.

She sucked in her lips and started nodding her head slowly as her eyes found the beige carpet. Beside us where empty glasses of sweet lemonade mom had made for us, but the fresh flavor had vanished from my tongue as soon as I had started this conversation. It was not uncommon for us to talk about this, but each day it became more real. Recognizing how near we were to it created a bitter flavor on my mouth worse than drinking lemonade with no sugar. I knew that after it happened, I would never be able to enjoy mom's lemonade again, so every day I begged her to make us big jars that I would sip on, and Allie would cough on. Not even our favorite things were fun anymore, and desperation grew in my stomach like a monster soon to break out of my skin. Allie's eyes were the only thing that would make the monster smaller, but I could still feel it kicking as she placed her chocolate pupils on me.

Don't be, for me. Promise you'll live a life even if I'm not by your side. Don't ruin your life because you don't have me anymore.

She extended her pinky finger, which looked more like a pencil than a part of her body because of how thin it was, and I put mine out for her. She interlaced our pinkies together, and I was careful not to apply much force, for fear her bones might break. I wished that after she was gone she would not be able to see what I was doing, because in no way was I keeping the promise. I would promise to try my hardest, but all my strength came from Allie, and without her around me I did not know how much it would take for me to give in.

I opened my eyes, and a gasp escaped my throat. My hands almost reached out to grab her, but reality pushed me back onto the mattress. I had not had a dream so real in a long time, but she always found a way to get into my head. Silence wrapped me in a tight embrace, and even if I was used to it, sometimes it could become too much for me to handle. Especially when I had her beautiful face on my head and trying to push my feelings down by distracting myself with something else did not seem to help.

There was a vibration near my head, which turning around I realized was the alarm on my phone. Taking my arm from under the sheets, I turned it off and disconnected my phone from its charger. She used to tell me that sleeping with my phone on my mattress was a habit I should quit for the sake of my health, but four years had passed, and I still did it every single night. Back home I did not have an excuse, but now that I had an adult life, there was no other way I would be able to wake up every day.

07:15 in the morning. No notifications on the screen. No need for me to unlock the phone, so I placed it on the bedside table. With my tired muscles I took the comforter from my body and sat on the side of my bed. My feet

touched the cold wooden floor, sending chills up my spine. Sitting up from the bed was the hardest part of the day. That moment of hesitation in between starting my activities or returning to the comfort of my warm sheets. The latter option would bring me more pain than joy on the long run, so I placed my weight of my feet and restarted the routine I repeated every single day.

I walked three steps to the bathroom, small and vintage. The blue tiles were not my style, neither were the bronze decorations, but renting this apartment meant I could not change anything even if I had the will to do it. A cold shower took all the morning sluggish out of my joints and muscles, and I felt renewed as I walked out clean and cold. Even how I looked in the mirror was better than the five minutes earlier puffy face, the look on my eyes the only thing not changeable no matter how many showers I took. They were better than months ago, but nowhere near how they were with them.

It took me five minutes to change into my uniform; skinny black jeans, white shirt, and a beige coat. On top I put my black windbreaker and then leather boots to protect my body from the freezing wind. Physically ready, with five steps I was on the kitchen, having fifteen minutes to make breakfast. I was not even outside and I already felt cold, so oatmeal it was, just like most days. Three minutes to boil the milk, three minutes stirring in the oats and cinnamon, two minutes to place it on a bowl and top with caramelized pecans, six minutes to fill my stomach, one minute to place the bowl on the sink and go to the entrance. With thirty seconds to spare I was out the apartment.

I walked to the wooden stairs two feet to my right and started going down the five floors. One of the reasons I had not been fully convinced to rent this place was the lack of elevator, but I had convinced myself that these three minutes of cardio were helping my health. Aside from walking, not much exercise filled my routine. I had the time, but not the energy to do it. The only

deciding factor on renting this place was that it had the best location I had found within two weeks, and I had no more time to debate moving here. As fast as I had found it I put my name on it.

Once I got to the first floor, I opened the wooden door and immediately got hit with pain. The cold wind entered every single pore on my face, so I closed my eyes to protect them from the ice in form of air. Half a second of doubt before I opened them back up again and stared at the city in front of me. The same view I had been watching change the tiniest bit each day I opened the door, and suddenly those hot summer days with warm rays of sunshine illuminating the streets seemed like an eternity ago. The smallest smile appeared on my face at the fulfilled dream, even if it was not mine, and I walked out to this world that used to only live in our imagination.

New York was almost absolutely covered in white snow, every single tree and car sprinkled with white ice. There were little mountains of snow on the pavement that would soon turn into mud. Cars drove on the streets like they were rushing late for work, luckily no water on the road that would splash. People run past me to their destinations, not even second glancing at those around them. I could recognize which were the tourists by their slow pace as they took in every single detail of the city, fascination on their eyes as if they had found wonderland. Meanwhile true citizens look annoyed at the weather, disgusted at the snow as if it were venom covering the city.

No matter how many months or years I would get to spend there, I did not think I would ever get tired of the world around me. Would never dare feel disgusted by the opportunities I could live that others could not. That she could not. My plan to move here had not been supported by my mom, who told me it was a very busy city and that I would not be able to get one moment where everything was quiet. I rolled my eyes at her comment, knowing she

had put my sister's face on me when warning me about that. Maybe she would have been bothered by a nosy city, but that was not a problem I had to deal with. I was deaf, and one might think my mom would have realized her daughter had been deaf for the past twenty-one years of her life, but her head was so scrambled she would make any excuse to prevent me from coming here. No matter what she said I would still cross the only thing on my bucket list off. So, in absolute silence and fully aware eyes, I started my daily walk through the city.

2

Christmas was tiptoeing its way through our calendar, only a week for the great holiday to arrive. I was personally not thrilled at all about the season, which had lost my love when I could no longer celebrate it with the people I wanted next to me. This year was even worse, being miles away from my mom on the most cherished time of year. I would have thought not being with my mom would make me even sadder, but the last months had proven that I could do better without her beside me on every step I took. It made me wish no one could read my thoughts when I said I was even glad not to have mom with me, seeing how much I struggled on this time of year.

Walking my last steps to the shop where I worked, I realized we were having more clients than usual coming out from the bookstore. The shop was quite small, which was why everyone loved it, because it felt homy, warm and almost as if one had entered a fairytale. It was located on a not so busy area, so it was a store mostly known by citizens, not loud and annoying tourists. Funny I thought that, considering I was not a citizen myself. However, six months here could at least give me one step outside the tourist door. Soon I could be considered a local, after all I even had a job here. I got to the front door and peeked through the top part of the wooden door, where there was a window with painted gold letters reading 'Live another Life.' A sign behind the letters read 'OPEN,' and when I pushed the door it ringed a bell over my head. Not that I could hear it, but I saw as people turned their heads to me, and then went back to their books.

The only eyes that did not leave me were from the person behind the wooden counter in the center of the shop. Lilah stared at me from the cash

register as I started unzipping my windbreaker, the warmth of the shop allowing me not to turn into ice. There were tall bookshelves on the walls around me, but the best books were found at the back of the shop, where most of the costumers were, all with books on their hands. I walked around the counter and smiled at Lilah, whose spirits were always so high I could almost see glitter coming out of her pores. Today she smiled at me from ear to ear, and her happiness did start to improve my groggy morning mood.

Hello Julia, how are you?

I read her lips and smiled, hoping the way I was feeling would increment by the end of the day. Mornings were the hardest, but I felt a lot better when surrounding myself with the few people I knew in the city. As a matter of habit, I immediately grabbed the notebook and pen from a drawer under the counter and opened a brand-new page, indicating the start of a brand-new day. I started writing down my words, the only way Lilah and I had of communicating with each other.

I'm fine, how about you? I can see there are more people than usual here today.

I handed her the notebook back and stared as she read what I had written. She looked much different than months ago, on the summer season. Her tan skin had been replaced by a white tone, and her brown hair was now completely dark. The only part that had not changed were her brown eyes, which now did not contrast as well with her hair. She grabbed the pen from my hands and started writing down her reply, making her long straight hair fall onto one side and blocking my view of her face.

The new crime novel of Jeremiah Smith came out this morning.

I read when she handed me back the notebook. I nodded my head at the answer to all the people who were there. That author was one of the best at writing crime novels, so people could not get enough from his writing. His latest book had been announced a month ago, and everyone got excited when they heard it was about the mystery of a house fire.

Guess I'll have to get one for myself too.

Despite not being fan of crime novels, that book had caught my attention because of how many people were waiting for it. It made me want to put my personal likings aside and give it a read, but I doubted it would not sell out before my shift ended. My interest were romance books, where on most cases the ending was happy and hopeful. No matter the ups and downs, the ending of a good romance had to be an up. I would always know how they were going to end, and that gave me the push to finish it. Crime novels were always dark and depressing, failing at cheering up my mood, but that was not the real reason why I disliked them. The truth was that they were the favorite genre of my sister, and I only thought about her when reading about detectives and mysteries. It only worsened my mood even more. But maybe this book could be good enough to distract me from her. Or maybe be it would not, and I would end up crying before finishing the first page, or paragraph. Lilah took me from my thoughts as she slid the notebook to me.

It could be your Christmas present from the store.

I huffed as I read her response, then looked at her and rolled my eyes. Garret, the owner of the bookshop who was also Lilah's grandfather, would never let us take a book from the store for free. No even his granddaughter got a discount for the books, he said it was not business if we did not pay the sale price. Lilah laughed with me, knowing very well he would fire us both if

he ever heard a book had been taken out without his permission. Before I could give her a response, Lilah continued writing down on the notebook.

Or your gift from me.

I smiled at her words but shook my head, denying any type of present she would like to give me.

No, it's fine, really. I can read the book here though.

If we bought the book, then he would let us read it in the store, as long as we had attended all costumers first. She tilted her head side to side, then scurried her words on the paper. I believed there was always so much energy going through her veins her arm could not keep up with it, ending in quite a messy handwriting.

There is nothing like reading a book at your own place, you have to agree.

I looked up at her giving me a funny look, raising her eyebrows with an 'I am right' expression. I giggled and continued writing.

Obviously agree, so I might purchase the book on my tablet then.

Reading my words, she looked funnily offended, as if I had criticized one of her favorite childhood books.

I will gift you a book only so you can fall in love with reading a physical book again, the tablet takes away the whole experience.

I mean, the whole experience of a book is to submerge us into these fictional lives, and I'm pretty sure I can do that no matter where I read the words.

She started shaking her head, not agreeing with me in the least.

If I could, I would ban you from ever reading a book again, but for now all I can do is prohibit your entrance into my book club. After the millions of times I have invited you to it, now there is no way you will ever get in.

I would not know what I was missing from.

She lightly knocked her shoulder to mine before writing a response.

The best book club of the whole wide world, and if you came you would see my opinion isn't biased.

Lilah's book club did seem fun, but it was impossible for me to enjoy it when I was not able to hear what others had to say. I knew Lilah would make me feel included and would not have a problem on me only reading, but I did. I did not like to feel like the weird one out, especially in front of strangers. It was easier to hide in my normal daily routine than do something which might cause me more harm than good.

You know I would love to go, but I wouldn't get as much from it as everybody else does. It's easier for me to read alone.

Her chest fell reading my answer, and I did feel like I hurt her. But that hurt did not compare to what it would feel like for me to go out of my way to change my day.

You should try something new one day, you know. I don't know why you love stillness so much, when there are so many fun things to do around you.

My routine felt comfortable, even if I did not want to admit it. I was disappointing someone besides Lilah when choosing to stick to my daily plans, but could not bring myself to do something about it. I could not bring myself

to imagine facing unexpected opportunities that with my luck would shatter my life into even smaller pieces.

I have fun with my routine, that is why I like it. Someday I might try something new, but for now this feels right.

Lilah twisted her mouth at my answer, and the pace of her handwriting slowed as she put her hand on the paper.

Sure, whatever you say. But if you ever need someone to take you out of your boring life (no offence), I would love to help you out.

I had learned soon after starting to work here that Lilah did not hold back on her comments, and often she wrote ‘no offence’ at the end of her sentences. I never took her comments the wrong way, after all, she was right in most cases. Just like my first week here, where she commented the way I dressed was boring and plain, compared to her colorful clothing picks. Despite her comment, my wardrobe’s most outgoing article was still a dark purple jacket.

Obviously, I would not want anyone but you to take me out of my comfort zone. We might even start with your coffee tour.

Upon reading my words, excitement rushed back to her, and her hand ran through the page as she wrote. She was always excited to write about her coffee tour, a map she was following to try every single coffee shop in New York. Her plan was to later post it on a blog, with specific reviews that only a coffee lover like her would write. You could give her two cups of coffee from the same machine, and she could still find differences in both of the flavors. While she liked to explore with her tastebuds, I had one specific drink I would order from one specific coffee shop. Since I had arrived here I had not tried

any other coffee except that one, but had never told Lilah for fear she would sedate me to pour coffee down my throat.

Yesss, please come with me soon, you don't know the places I've been finding. The other day I literally almost passed out from how good a coffee was, and when I ordered it again it tasted different than the first cup. I was planning on going to day to see if I can get them to make it as good as the first time.

No matter if I had plans or not, I already had an answer to this. It was not as if I did not want to go, but after work my body would always be prepared to go home, not go on and about in the city. I had to mentally prepare myself for something that would fit Lilah's plans, and today was not the day.

I'll have to raincheck today, but maybe next week we can make plans.

Her slow handwriting returned.

As long as you don't say that same thing next week too.

I can't promise I won't, but I'll try.

She gave me a side eye before writing down.

I hope so.

When I finished reading, I closed the notebook as Lilah stood straighter than before, ready for any costumers that might have wanted to buy a book. I placed our notebook on the drawer and waved at her before making my way to the back of the store, finding someone who would like my help getting to their next favorite book. I was still feeling bad about rain checking on Lilah, like so many times before, but hoped she understood that soon the day when I go with her to an adventure would arrive, I only had to prepare for it first.

To avoid thinking about my own life, I buried myself in the costumers and books.

Whenever there were no more costumers to attend, I would read the blurb of books that looked interesting, to already have my next read. If I finished a book and did not have another one to start, I feared I would not open one again. And not being inside books meant I had to be in my life, which was as terrifying as accepting one of Lilah's plans.

My hours at this job passed like minutes, because guiding costumers to their next favorite books was like my life long's passion. Whenever someone would find a book that piqued their interest, and then returned to the store two days later to find a new story to fall in love with, my heart got a bit bigger. It felt nice for everyone to love books as much as I did, but I did not know if the rest of the world treated stories in the same way.

For me, it was a way to escape reality and get myself into lives that were already solved, already written. My life had become sort of like book, because when I woke up I already knew the way my day will continue. No unexpected events occurred, because my routine did not change. The smallest of decisions outside my comfort zone could maybe create a chain reaction of changes that I was not yet ready to face. Challenges could only be met when the destiny of my character was already decided, and that only happened in books.

Noon rolled around, and I had helped numerous costumers find stories they were looking for, the majority wanting the same book, the newest Jeremiah Smith novel. As I was putting away some other books that had not been sold, I felt a light tap on my shoulder, causing me to turn around and see a familiar face. It took me five seconds to recognize Madison, my building's neighbor who lived downstairs. She was staring at me with a kind expression, and a genuine smile appeared on her face as she began speaking.

Hi, I don't know if you remember me. I live in your building, my name's Madison.

She extended her hand as I read her lips. Everyone who knew me always tried to articulate their words exaggeratedly, as if trying to make it easier for me to understand what they were saying. Although it helped me, it also made me feel uncomfortable to see them trying to accommodate to me. When she stopped talking, I shook her hand and smiled, nodding my head, hoping she would understand I did know who she was.

Oh, that's great. You see, I was looking for a book for my boyfriend. He is really into crime novels, and I thought you would be able to help me find one for him.

I did not have to think twice before nodding and turning around, expecting her to follow me around the shop. When I saw her short body copying my steps, I walked us to the 'Catching Fire' pile of books, Jeremiah Smith's novel. If her boyfriend liked crime novels, he would for sure know who the author was. The book was selling like gold because of gift season, and most readers were probably asking for this read.

The pile of blue covered books was less than half the size it had been this morning, and I was glad Madison had made it just in time to get one before the sold out. I picked one up and turned around, where Madison received the book with a thankful smile. She flipped the book and started reading the description of the story, her short ginger hair falling in front of her face as she slightly moved her head to her eye's direction. A blue scarf held tightly around her neck, and a white coat hugged her body to protect her from the cold outside. I was slightly taller than her, so when she finished reading she had to look up to meet my eyes, a glad smile on her face.

Thank you, I think he will love this. I'll tell you what he thinks of it when he finishes reading it.

I nodded and smiled once again at her words, not being able to do much more. Her pink cheeks raised one last time before she the book to her chest and turned around, walking straight to the cashier where Lilah was attending the costumers. She still held that warm smile on her face as she talked to Lilah, giving her the book and then paying for it. Her charisma made her stand out like a flower in the middle of a field, and she did not even have to try to do it. It was natural.

Madison had been always nice to me whenever we crossed paths, even if that did not happen often. I could count with my hands the times I had seen Madison for more than five seconds, and her boyfriend, Nathaniel, had been beside her most of those times. I had met them a while back on my first week at the apartment. It was a hot summer day, and I was grabbing some boxes that the move in truck had left as I saw them walk towards me. They were hand in hand, a fainted smile still on their lips left from the happiness they brought each other. He was tall, slim and had dirty blonde hair, whereas she was short, a bit chubby and her shiny ginger hair danced under the summer sunshine. They had been kind enough to help me move the boxes to my apartment, and to not ask questions about my disability. Since that day I had only seen them a few more times, but that faint smile was often on their faces. They always seemed happy together.

3

The walk back to my apartment seemed endless. Even though I lived ten blocks away from the store, midway through my frozen feet could no longer move my body. I pushed through the pain, hugging my arms around my body, squeezing tightly. I could feel my nose turning redder by the second, and the tips of my fingers started feeling numb from the cold. The sky was already turning dark despite it being a reasonable hour for the day to continue. What I despised most about winter, was that it brought shorter cold days, where the sun could only be seen from seven to six, and the hours of hot rays the sun provided did not help to keep my muscles alive.

The closer I got to my apartment the less I could feel my joints, but as soon as I walked through the front door of the building, the tiniest amount of heat brought me back to life. As I walked up the stairs, I could see the cold air coming out from my mouth from every short breath I took. My throat felt raw, and I was already planning on making myself a hot coffee as soon as I got to my place.

However, halfway up the fourth floor, I felt the stairs slightly tremble, and it was not because of my steps. I looked up to my apartment's door, and on the entrance, there he was.

Hello neighbor.

A grin appears on James's face as he greets me in sign language.

Hello, James. Where are you going?

I signed back slowly, hoping he would understand. He was my upstairs neighbor, and upon meeting me and knowing I was deaf, he had taken an

interest in learning sign language. At first, I thought he would give up a week in, but he was quite committed on learning, and enjoyed talking to me. He was the only person in New York that I knew who spoke sign, making him the closest person I had in this city. Communicating with him was quite fun, because I could either understand what he was signing or laugh at his mistakes. He helped me a lot to distract my mind.

Out to buy some presents for my family, I need to ship them before tomorrow if I want them to arrive for Christmas.

His family lived in Oregon, and he had moved here a year ago because of how much he loved this city. We shared almost the same story.

I should follow your steps and start buying some presents too.

I signed, shortening the distance between us by going up the last few steps to my apartment. He was much taller than I was, and his broad figure made me feel very petite in comparison. A short-grown beard made him seem older than he was, and the kindness in his green eyes made everyone like him instantly. He had been my first best friend after everything back at home. The person who came closer to how I felt about my sister.

I could go with you someday, and we could sneak in a sign class.

He suggested one of our weekly classes, where we would go to the café across the street, and I would teach him more sign words. However, he absorbed all my classes like a sponge, and I did not know what other words he needed to learn.

Today I'm a bit tired, but tomorrow sounds perfect. Pun intended.

Just like I had rain checked on Lilah, James was not an excuse. Often he was, but today I felt like the world was crushing down on me. More than it always did. I knew a good nap would fix all my problems, meanwhile going out to the cold would probably give me three times the headache I had.

Tomorrow it is.

He gave me one last smile showing the base of his white teeth before passing past me and to the stairs. Zipping his black puffed windbreaker, he glanced at me one last time before disappearing from my view.

I got the key to my apartment out of my pocket and opened the door, being welcomed by a warmer and very tidy space. My apartment was a one room place, with a window in front of the door, my bed on the diagonal corner and the kitchen to my left. I had a kitchen table in the middle of the room and an orange couch placed looking at the window, as well as a small wooden table by the couch's side, making a sort of mini living room. I would spend most of my day there reading, eating meals, watching a movie on my tablet, or just staring at the window, admiring the world outside.

I left my jacket on the hangers screwed on the side of the door, then walked slowly to the kitchen. Grabbing a yellow mug from the wooden cabinets on the wall, I tried to prepare the best coffee I could, failing miserably at the task. Suddenly, hanging out with Lilah did not seem as bad as it had on the bookstore. But it was too late now, and she was probably already returning to her place while I grimaced at every sip of the bitter coffee I took. The only thing it did well was warm my hands as I wrapped them tightly around the ceramic, wanting to burn my skin rather than feel cold.

I walked with the mug to my couch, sitting down on the uncomfortable cushions. I had found this couch in a website for cheap, and the color made me buy it. It was definitely out of my comfort zone, and my eyes took days to

adjust to the bright orange furniture in the middle of the old apartment of dirty white walls and wooden floors. It took me a week to realize that the real reason I had liked the couch was because it reminded me of my sister, who used to wear these bright colored shirts all the time. Somewhere in her closet laid a shirt this exact shade of orange, but I would turn my eyes away from it if I ever had it in front of me. Overload of memories.

To blur the moments coming to my head, I tried to focus on the view of my window. Now the city was illuminated by the lights that came from the buildings, yellow windows that indicated someone inside was alive. I could only see the building in front of my window, and the trees that were covered in snow. Exactly like we had seen in the movies. I waited a few seconds to see if the world would be kind enough to let snow fall so I could feel even deeper into a Christmas show, but nothing moved except for the leaves as the wind shook them. I sighed, then left the half drank cup of coffee on the wooden table by the couch and grabbed the tablet that I had left there the night before.

Opening my latest read, I submerged myself in a world where everything was planned, everything got solved, everyone was happy. Far away from what my life had looked like. However, after months, I could feel the same peace I got from reading an already written book as I moved along my same routine. Cozy as the couch let me be, I prepared for my next hour session of love scenes that were pure fiction but excelled at transporting me into another world. A world where my problems did not exist, and others were the main characters of a story. My life had hit an unwavering wave, and I was happy nothing was trembling the waters.

4

I opened my eyes and turned my head to the phone beside me. Except this morning it was not vibrating, and something else must have waken me up. After two seconds, the blinking lights of the living room turned on, disrupting my need of sleep. James had helped me connect the doorbell of my apartment to the lights on the roof, in case someone visited me and I was not able to notice them at the door. However, almost no one had ever used the doorbell of my apartment. The only times I remembered it being of use was when James would come pick me up for our coffee sign classes. But those always happened in the afternoon, and when I checked my phone, it was 6:47 in the morning.

I grabbed my black hoodie from the floor and put it on, covering my body from the cold morning. I yawned as I got up from the bed, not prepared for whoever was at the other side of the door. I thought it could have been some sort of prank, but then the yellow light flickered again, and curiosity filled my head. Along with a side of fear. With slow steps I walked to the door, and when I got to the entrance the lights blinked again. I placed my hand on the knob, took a deep breathe, and opened the door to find the last person I would ever think would be waiting there.

A police officer was standing outside my door, looking directly at the floor. Her left hand scratched the side of her face as her head shook from side to side. When she noticed I had opened the door, her eyes met mine, and pure concern was written all across her expression. In less than a second she dropped her real emotions and put on a serious face, making her look more professional and intimidating, even if she was shorter than me. A black cap

held her hair from falling on her face, and the black police uniform looked big on her body. As I focused on her small, rounded face, her thin lips started moving.

My fogged brain could barely keep up with what she was articulating, and because she had stopped ringing the doorbell, my apartment was in complete darkness, making it more difficult for me to keep up with her lips. Only a dim white light from the stairs illuminated her back, not helping much on the situation.

...sorry...wake...has been a...downstairs and I was...I... talk to you.

Confused by her words, I pointed at my right ear and shook my head, hoping she would understand I was not able to hear what she was saying to me. I saw as her thick brown eyebrows lifted upwards in surprise, and then she spoke again, over articulating like everyone did.

Are you deaf?

I nodded my head, and she stood still for a moment, calculating what she could do. After a few seconds, she fumbled her hands to her uniform and took out a pen and a small notebook. Using her left hand as a surface, she quickly scribbled down words on the paper. I waited anxiously for her to finish, moving my weight from one foot to the other, unable to remain still. Worry built up in my chest remembering the officer's face as soon as I had opened the door, and I started wondering what could have happened that would require speaking to me.

When she finished writing, she extended me the notebook but then took it back to her chest, doubting giving it to me. I could not even come up with incidents that would make an officer doubt their moves. She stood straight and once again handed me the notebook, my eyes incredibly impatient to read

her words. The little light hurt my eyes, because I could not read clearly. Before forcing my eyes, I quickly turned on the lights of the apartment from the switch beside the door. The yellow light illuminated her quite bad handwriting, her message barely readable.

I am officer Franko, and I wanted to talk to you about an incident that happened downstairs.

I felt blood drain from my face, and my legs turned into jelly. My heart started beating so strong I could feel my hoodie move as the worst possible scenarios flashed through my mind. My hand with the notebook went to my mouth, and my eyes darted to the officer, who no longer looked intimidating, but now compassionate. I was used to that look, and never had I ever wanted to see it again on people when they talked to me. I tried to use my mom's breathing technique, but my lungs failed at the easy task. I quickly extended her the notebook and stepped back from the door, letting her in.

As soon as she stepped inside, blue and red lights coming from the window started illuminating my apartment. I had the urge to run to the wall and peek to see what was happening, but I contained myself. Instead, I closed the apartment door and walked behind the officer as she approached the kitchen table. She turned around and pointed at one of the chairs, asking me for permission to seat, to which I nodded my head. She took her cap and left it on the table, revealing short black hair sleeked back onto a short ponytail at the base of her head. Meanwhile, I walked to the kitchen drawers and opened one to grab a bigger notebook and a pen. These two objects were always in hand, for any visitors that might come. Never did I thought it would be using them with a police officer.

She sat on the shorter side of the table, facing my bathroom, meanwhile I sat beside her. Placing my chair diagonal to the living room, my eyes were

captured by the lights bouncing on the furniture. It was not a pleasant sight to see those disturbing police colors in my apartment that previously gave me a personal space. I felt invaded with more unwanted situations that I had tried to prevent by sticking to my routine. Apparently that was not enough, problems always had a way to find me. Taking me out of my thoughts, the officer grabbed the notebook I had placed on the table and opened it on a blank page.

She started writing while I waited, wishing I had served myself a glass of water to help my dry throat. My right hand scratched hard on my left, the skin turning a light shade of red by the time the officer finished her writing. My eyes were pinned on the page as she slid the notebook to me, and I doubted reading her words in case they would be my life's next ruin. However, once the words sat there almost dancing for me to read them, I could not help doing so.

Could you tell me your name?

Okay, at least that question would not kill me.

Julia Kelley.

She nodded her head, then continued writing as my hand's skin got redder by the second.

Good morning Julia, I'm sorry to wake you up. We are investigating something that happened in this building, but first I need you to ask us some questions.

My hands trembled as I wrote a response.

What happened? Is everyone alright?

The officer sighed and looked up at me, holding her serious face as she took the pen from the table and looked down once again to answer.

I'll go onto that later, but first answer what I ask. Do you live with someone?

I wrote hurriedly my response, trying to take them off so we could get faster to what had happened. I needed to know if my life would be affected again.

No.

Were you here last night?

Yes.

Have you ~~heard~~ seen something unusual these past few days, or yesterday in this building?

I swallowed a big lump of saliva sitting on my throat.

No, why?

Are you sure?

Yes.

Did you see someone who you don't know enter this building? Maybe on the stairs?

I tried to remember the past few days, which were a repeat of the same schedule. Nothing had caught my attention. I would have noticed even the smallest changes.

I don't think so.

Could you try to remember a bit more?

Done. No, nothing unusual.

My feet tapped fast against the floor, waiting to read the messy handwriting again.

Any weird interaction with or in between any of your neighbors?

No. Most of them left for Christmas break.

She slightly nodded her head.

Yes, we know that. That is why we are finding it difficult to come up with information.

My heart's pace raced up.

What happened?

She scratched her face at my question, then rubbed the place where her nails had previously been in. This time she took longer to respond, and her handwriting improved as she thought every single one of her words. I wished I could have read her words upside down, but if they were barely readable when facing me, now they looked like symbols more than letters. My feet tapping, the scratching of my hand and my uncontrolled breathing stopped when she slid the notebook back to me.

We are gathering information about an incident that occurred to your downstairs neighbor, Madison Stevenson. Is there any information that you would like to share about her or your relationship with her?

I looked at the officer with furrowed eyebrows, not expecting Madison's name to appear on the page. I did not know exactly what I was expecting, but her words took me by surprise, erasing her question from my mind as I wrote the only thing I was thinking of.

Is Madison okay?

I gave the notebook back to the officer, and she sighed deeply at the question. She neared her pen to the paper, but took a few seconds to write her answer, thinking every word she would give for me to read. I thought of my mom's breathing technique to distract me from everything going through my mind, but it did the bare minimum. When she extended me the notebook, her intimating expression was gone, and the pity face I despised so much reappeared. But I could not focus anymore on her, the words were more important.

Madison suffered an attack last night. Her boyfriend found her and called the police, but she wasn't breathing when we arrived.

My hands went immediately to my mouth as a gasp escaped my throat, worsening my dry throat. This could not be happening. This was now supposed to happen. No one should have been hurt. Everyone was supposed to be safe. I wanted to be safe. I looked at officer Franko's brown eyes, but tears started blurring my view. The blue and red lights were now only bright spots, flickering on the water coming from my eyes. I barely saw as the officer took the notebook again and quickened her writing while I wiped the tears from my cheeks and eyes. I took a few deep breaths while she finished writing, but not even my mom's face could distract me from the realization that I found myself once again uncertain of what the future held. When the officer slid the notebook back, I had to blink a few times to clear my view.

I need to know of any information you have about your neighbor.

I took the pen and wrote however I could, not really making understandable letter because of the way my chest shook and my hands could barely grab onto the pen.

Will she be okay?

Dumb question, but I wanted an answer. I needed to know if another life had ended only for being near me. I attracted death's spirit whenever I went, and it always hurt those around me, but never the person responsible. Me.

She is on the way to the hospital, but we aren't sure she will make it.

I wanted to tear the page off, shred it onto pieces and cry on the floor until I lost consciousness. My lungs expanded for the biggest breath of air I could have, and when I exhaled it came out shaky and with tears. While I repeated the breathing technique over and over, the officer wrote down on the notebook now wet with water drops.

Can you provide us with any information about her? Were you two friends?

The magnitude of the incident could not possibly enter my head, let alone any other information concerning Madison. My brain was like a scramble of thoughts, blurry memories, grief and routines I would fail to follow. No matter my planning, something always had to go wrong. An incident had happened meters under me, and I had not been able to stop it. I grabbed the pen with a shaking pulse, my fingers wet with sweat and tears, making the pen slip from my hand as I continued avoiding her questions.

What happened to her?

The officer sucked in her lips, scribbling down her response as if she had the response already prepared.

I'm sorry miss, but I can't discuss that with you.

My chin shivered as I got the pen with the little strength of my fingers.

I need to know what happened.

This time she shook her head and looked up at me while twisting her pale lips.

That is information I can't disclose with anyone, I am not authorized to. But if you have information, you can help us figure out what happened.

I gave up on asking her what had occurred, knowing I could later push someone to give me all the information I needed. I did not even know if I could handle more about Madison right now, so maybe it was best if she did not tell me. I followed her words and tried to control my breathing while giving the officer what she needed.

She came to the shop where I work yesterday's afternoon.

That was all I could write before tears came once again. Remembering how kind she had been yesterday, how alive she looked. She had to continue looking like that, there was no way something had happened to her. While trying to deny the past half hour of my life, the officer read my words and nodded.

Where do you work?

I had a hard time even answering that question, taking ten seconds to come up with a response.

A bookshop a few blocks away.

What is the name of that bookshop?

Live another life.

The officer nodded her head again, as if she knew which place I was writing about.

And what did Madison do there?

My memories felt like they were being deleted, because I never thought five minutes of my life would be questioned by a police officer. I squeezed my brain in hopes that clear details would come out.

She went to buy a book for her boyfriend.

Every word I wrote made the officer a bit more hopeful, her bushy eyebrows lifting each time she finished reading.

Did she buy any?

I was lucky she had bought a book that yesterday had been engrained in my memory.

Yes, she took Jeremiah Smith's new book, 'Catching Fire.'

And did she specify the book was for her boyfriend or did you assume?

Less tears blurred my view the more I felt I was helping on this case, like maybe I could provide something that would not hurt any others.

I remember her telling me her boyfriend was a fan of crime novels, and that is why I recommended that book for her.

Was she with anyone?

This question took longer for me to answer, blurry details coming my way.

Not inside the store, however someone might have been waiting for her outside.

Did you see anyone you knew or that looked like they had come with Madison?

No, I couldn't see the entrance from where I was.

Any other detail from yesterday you found interesting?

None interesting enough for me to remember.

She took a few more seconds to write her next question.

Were you close friends with Madison?

Definitely not, but it did not make the news hurt any less. I could not tell her Madison's favorite color, her comfort movie or even where she worked. But her death still hurt as if she was my sister. Maybe because it reminded me of my real one. I grabbed the pen and scribbled whatever came to my mind.

Not really, just friendly neighbors. Of the few times that I saw her she was often with her boyfriend.

Any details about her boyfriend that you would wish to share?

I tried to think of the moments I had seen them, but few were the details that resurfaced.

I only remember them both being very kind to me. They helped me carry boxes when I arrived at this building.

How long have you been living here?

Only a few months, around five or six, I guess.

And how many times have you seen Madison or her boyfriend in that time?

I tried to count but left out the less than a second glimpses I had of them. They were my neighbors after all, I obviously saw them around.

Not more than ten, and it was possibly just a moment on the stairs or something. The most I have ever talked to either of them was yesterday's morning to Madison

So, nothing weird or red flags I should know about?

No, I don't think so.

Are you sure?

Yes.

She nodded her head quickly, then looked up at me with such intensity I felt like she was counting each pore of my face. The moment I started to feel uncomfortable she looked down at the notebook and continued her writing.

Okay, I think that might be it for now. Do you mind giving me your phone number? So, we can contact you if we need anything else.

I wrote down my number and gave the notebook back to her. Satisfied with information, she teared out the pages we had written in and folded them in fourths, then put them on her jacket's pocket. Before standing up to leave, she wrote one last thing.

I will be visiting you soon, either here or at the bookshop, I'll text you when I do. If you remember anything you think I could use as information, call me.

And she wrote down her number. I did not correct her on the fact that I would probably text her instead of calling her, minor detail. She stood up and walked to the apartment door as I tried to stand with legs that had lost their bones. While regaining my strength and walking to the door, I noticed the police car's lights were no longer on. My apartment did not feel like a crime scene anymore.

She opened the door and walked out, and while I grabbed the door handle, she turned around to give me one last nod. She then started walking towards the stairs as I closed the entrance from anyone who might have wanted to come inside.

I placed my back on the door and glared at the apartment before me, and once again tears flooded my eyes. This time I let them spill, not stopping them from soaking my face as I slid my back on the wood and fell to the floor. I needed to let it all the emotions out, because that was the only way it could get better, my mom used to say. It never helped, but maybe this time it would. I was not so hopeful, but crying until my eyes hurt did relieve some of the pressure on my chest.

5

I was sitting at my kitchen table, staring straight ahead at the wall beside the window. There was a lukewarm cup of tea in my hands, not a sip taken. I had been using it more as heat for my cold skin than my throat. I could feel dry tears on my checks, but I felt too drained to wash them. Too tired to stand. Too exhausted to think. My mind was going thousand miles an hour and filled with cotton at the same time. I had not received more news in the last two hours, but the small amount of hope I held had vanished thoughts earlier.

I had already texted Lilah telling her I was not go into work today but did not specify the reasons. I could not make myself tell the news. I could barely tolerate them myself, others did not need to know. My routine for the day had been thrown off the window, and all I had accomplished today had been raising myself from the floor, making the cup of tea and sitting on the same spot I had been when the officer came. There was nothing on my mind, which felt great compared to nostalgic memories appearing in my head every second of the day. What was not great was the reason why my mind had taken a vacation from ruining my mood, because now other things could.

Suddenly, the living room light started blinking again, making me spill tea all over my hands. The drink was not hot enough to burn, so I dried it on the black hoodie and stood from my seat. I had no idea who could have been behind the door, but I only hoped it was not the officer again. I did not need another roller coaster of emotions that would crash to the ground before the ride ended. It took more braveness than earlier to take each step to the entrance, or maybe more energy. The hoodie was like a pulling force to the floor, daring to bring me down before I made it to the door. When my hand

reached the knob, a three-hour nap was needed, and when I turned it, five seconds passed before it was revealed who was behind it.

James was standing there, red cheeks and puffy eyes. He had probably been crying too. His big heart would even sob for the death of a mouse, I imagined Madison's news had hit him as much as they had destroyed me. Somehow, his presence made the closest thing to a smile appear on my face, even if it felt like it would take me more than a week to move the muscles of my mouth. His presence cheered me just like she could, and even on the darkest of days they brought light into my life. His green eyes looked deep into mine, and he sniffled before looking down.

I moved aside from the door to let him walk inside, and steps as slow as if his feet were tied to chains made him enter. He had been a few times inside, whenever we took sign classes here instead of our usual café, so he walked straight to the wooden kitchen table. I closed the door and then followed his broad figure as he took a seat where the officer had been in the morning. I sat beside him and looked at his glossy eyes as those focused on the table, where the purple notebook was still opened on the officer's number.

He met his hands on top of the table, and sat straight before looking up at me. I was crossing my legs on the chair, not putting the minimum effort of sitting correctly. He was wearing a dark olive hoodie that matched the color of his eyes, and his brown hairs that were all over the place complemented the earth palette of colors. Only the red veins on the white of his eyes did not match his look, standing out. We sat in silence for a few seconds, which I did not mind, because I needed the company. It felt good not to be alone. I had never been with anyone besides my mom when feeling this way, and maybe another's human reaction to the news could help me move forward easier.

The apartment was still illuminated by the living room's yellow lights, because the white winter brightness coming from the window was not enough to illuminate the apartment this early in the morning. It was a terrible lighting, which only worsened my mood, because all I wanted to do was go back to normal. At this time of day, I was never here, I was always at work, and being stuck here only reminded me of how not normal my life had become again. How problems followed me everywhere, no matter how hard I tried to skip them.

I saw James move, which made me focus on his hands instead of the guilt running through my mind.

I guessed you heard the news.

He signed, and for once I was selfishly glad he had learned the language. Today was not a day I had the energies to read lips or write on paper anymore. I nodded and took my hands from my lap to the pocket of my hoodie, a clear sign I did not want to speak. To match my warm hoodie, I was wearing black sweatpants and white socks that I placed on the chair when I brought my knees up to my chest. I was closing myself from the world, trying to contain all that I was feeling inside my curled-up body.

How are you doing?

I shrugged my shoulders in an undefined motion, looking down at the table while I thought how to respond. He did not sign again, waiting for my answer. After a couple of seconds, I took my hands out from the pocket of my hoodie.

I'm shocked.

He slightly nodded at my answer, making his long brown hairs move along. He bit the inside of his cheek before responding.

I feel the same way.

Seconds passed before I moved.

Did the police visit you?

He sighed through his mouth while resting back on the chair.

Yes, a couple of hours ago. I assume they came here too.

I nodded in response, then signed.

What information did they give you?

He looked down at his hands on the table before answering.

That Madison suffered an incident last night, after midnight but before the early morning.

Her boyfriend found her and called the police.

They told me the same thing.

His eyes found the table once again, then started tapping his fingers on the wood. I took my arms on top of my knees and hid my face behind them, finding the position comforting. Sitting in silence – or not signed – did not feel uncomfortable with James. If I could, I would have begged him to stay here just sitting on his place while I only blinked. I did need someone's presence beside me, even if we stayed in silence. My curiosity made me lift my hands again.

Do you know what happened to her?

Maybe he knew more information than what I had been told. It was probably easier to communicate with a hearing human than one who needed

everything to be written down. He bit deeper the inside of his cheek, making his jawline even more sharp before raising his hands.

I asked the officer that same thing, and she told me they were still investigating the evidence but could not make any assumptions or share information.

Before I could sign something, he continued.

I did look for information on the internet.

I raised my head to meet his, suddenly more awake than before. If the case was important enough to be covered in the news, then something very bad must have happened. Crimes happened often in New York, and not many got media coverage. I would never read news online, but this one had occurred meters below me, and I had a bad feeling about it.

What did it say?

He took big breath before responding, his eyes glimmering again.

She is dead.

The phrase was enough for tears to start resurfacing, and this time they were harder to keep down. I already knew Madison's destiny would probably take that turn, but the news still hurt. I could not wrap my head around the fact that I had seen her yesterday, had talked to her, and now she was... gone. She did not exist anymore. Only in our memories. Exactly like they did. Remembering them tore me down every second of the day, and I wondered if the same would happen with Madison. Maybe I could have an easier time forgetting about her, but her family would not. Guilt closed its hands around my throat, and I started breathing in short gasps.

James looked up at me worried, and leaned on the table to get closer to me. I closed my eyes and shook my head, trying to dissolve the guilt away and return my breathing to normal with mom's technique. My chest found a steady rhythm, but the blame still had its fingers wrapped lightly on my skin. I continued signing, but this time it took extra strength to move my hands.

What else did the media cover?

James shrugged his shoulders, his eyelids barely open when he signed.

What the officer told me, that the police needed more time to fully investigate what had happened.

Then what was covered? What happened that made everyone give it attention?

My feet found the floor, I was desperate to know what had made the media's head turn. This had clearly been an attack, but muggings – unfortunately – occurred frequently here. This had to have been more important than that.

It is believed she was murdered. By her boyfriend.

I fell back on my chair, mouth open as James' head nodded while looking at me. I had to look away, trying to swallow this information on my own. Her boyfriend, Nathaniel? They loved each other. They were happy. Why would her boyfriend kill her? I could not come up with one rational thought to explain everything that had happened, it did not seem real. It made no sense in my head, and now I only craved to know more. A thought then came to my head, and I must have looked paranoid because James started nodding when I looked up to him.

Yes, he is in custody.

I took my hands to my chest and exhaled, closing my eyes in relief he had not fled. Even though they looked like the least dangerous couple to ever exist, if he was free, I would have not been able to sleep tonight. Or any night until he was found. With Nathaniel caught I could find peace in the next few days, and then return to how my life was. New neighbors would rent the apartment below me, and my routine would be normal again. Peace could be found once again. Knowing the first phase of the murder was solved, now we had to move onto the next one.

What do you think happened?

My mind was now going in fast circles trying to find a reasonable explanation, and none that came up were situations I could even picture. James took a second to respond.

I don't know, maybe he went like, crazy?

It was more of a question than an answer, but that same assumption was the one I had made up in my mind. No reasonable person would do something to their girlfriend out of the blue. Especially not someone as kind and lovable as Nathaniel was, from the little I knew him. James continued signing.

We can't ever know what is happening in other people's lives. Maybe he did it for a reason that everyone will find understandable.

Although I understood his thinking, I did not agree. What could have happened in their relationship that made 'understandable' the fact that he had killed her? No one deserved to die, it could harm the people around them in unexplainable ways.

There is no reason good enough to explain this.

He scratched the back of his head, licking his lips before responding.

No, I didn't mean that. I just thought that their personal life is something of their own, we can't possibly know what was happening in between them.

I took my knees up my chest again before moving my hands.

What, have you ever heard a fight between them?

I would not have been able to hear anything going on below me, but maybe he had. James always complained about how thin our floors and walls were, and that you could hear every single thing going on inside people's lives. He scratched his beard while looking upwards, then took a few more seconds to respond.

No, nothing intense or anything, but normal couples always fight, and if you could hear you would realize how dumb those are. I mean, no one would kill someone over not folding the laundry. Whatever his reason was, he must have kept it private.

I was grateful I could not hear if they ever fought, I did not think I would be able to achieve the same peace I wanted if people fought like I saw on TV. I felt lucky to be able to close my eyes and shut off the world around me, even if sometimes that did not work on my favor. Some moments I wanted something to hear and distract my thoughts from, especially when my memories become too real to feel like memories. But I could always find visual distractions, and this time it was looking at James' olive eyes as they focused on me.

I wish I could know what happened last night, even if that sounds disturbing.

James leaned on the table, getting closer as his eyes went from my hands to my eyes, while mine did vice versa.

The officer told me they were hoping you would have heard something. Madison's downstairs neighbor is out on a holiday vacation to see his family, and you were the only person close enough to hear what happened.

Those words were like a sword to my stomach. The sword of guilt. Maybe Madison's story could have been different if I were not deaf. I could have heard her voice, or maybe her screams. A chill went down my spine. Although I had never heard a scream, I had seen them in movies, and only their faces could make me have a restless night. I could not picture that expression of pain or fear on Madison's soft face. She was too pure to ever need to cry out for help. Too good to have a neighbor who did not hear her cries.

Tears dared spill again, but this time they were not for Madison's death, but for the possible outcomes if she were to have another neighbor. Her story would have been different if my hearing worked. This was not the first time I could have saved someone if I was not deaf. I could have now saved two people if my ears allowed to receive the need of help from others. Two stories could have turned entirely different.

I stopped myself from going down that path. The past could not be changed, no matter how much I would give for that to happen. I tortured myself enough for past events, this one did not need to be added to the list. This time it was not my fault, and even if I could have helped stop it, I did not. I could not. There was not more to do about it. I closed my eyes and focused once again on my breathing before signing the only thing going through my mind.

I feel sorry for her.

James forced a small pity smile at my words, but it vanished quickly as he looked down at his interlaced hands on the table and hid his face from my eyes.

I do too.

There was not more to share.

Madison was gone.

Nathaniel had killed her.

He had been caught.

We were safe.