# Scapegoat

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# Author’s Note

I have just one quick thing to say: yes I have used a bit of my own life and inserted it into this novel. DON’T read into it. I want no analysts staring at this book and thinking “Is she saying what I think she’s saying, or is there something more?” There is nothing more. Specifically: there’s nothing I hate more than analysing so don’t you dare do it to me.

# Acknowledgments

This is the first year I won NaNoWriMo. For those of you who don’t know, that word stands for National Novel Writing Month. Due to the fact that I’ve written over 50,000 words all in November I think plenty of thanks are needed to the people who have helped me get through the month.

Firstly thanks to the NaNoWriMo website and the people who make it work (even if it did have its off days and was alarmingly full at times) without you people I would have never been able to get to where I am now. The frequent pep talks, forum chats and videos were distracting at worst but inspiring at best which helped to make the challenge all the more fun. I’m sorry I couldn’t donate to such a worthy cause but I’m 15 and still don’t have a bank account.

Secondly thanks to all my friends. Amy, I know you weren’t too keen on the idea that we’d be doing it for the second year in a row, but you put up with the constant plot talk so thanks for that. As for the rest of you, you know who you are, thank you for the Skype chats every evening as we typed on with our novels. Similarly to the website you were encouraging, if distracting and it was always good to get feedback and to know that I wasn’t alone in this huge task. I know my high word count was a bit intimidating at times and I apologise for that but you all pulled on through. I’m pretty proud of my fellow Wrimos. Thank you especially to Emily as I feel you’ve been very supportive through this time, if you were intimidated by my word count, you didn’t seem to show it and for that I am grateful.

This year’s writing was certainly good fun to research so I thank my parents for not looking at me too strangely when they saw the drug website on my laptop and for giving me plot ideas. Of course I mustn’t forget to mention my brother in here. He put up with my constant begging for him to ask me any question about my story (in a vague hope to fuel its development). If I remember correctly I did that a lot.

Generally I spent most of this year trying not to be a hypocrite. I remember last year’s NaNo novel progress. All my writing buddies, including me, were insanely jealous of Tara’s word count and never failed to mention it. She was a good sport with the sarcasm. However this year I’ve had to experience what that feels like so I was trying not to moan too much. I feel kind of guilty about laying it on so thick last year Tara, so thanks for putting up with that.

All in all it was a busy month. I turned 15, had my first GCSE exam (I get my results in a few days’ time!) and of course had to attend the regular business of school. It was not easy to find time for NaNoWriMo. I’m not quite sure how I managed to stay on target but somehow I did. I just prayed that I could keep it up, I know for a fact I’m not the only person with those difficulties but that doesn’t mean we couldn’t make it through the month. Someday we will all manage 50,000. Go us!

# Prologue

“Oh my god!” screeched Cally. “I’m so sorry, it was an accident!”

It was a bit late for apologies now.

Diane’s body lay splayed out on the pavement, her guts wrenched from their original positions and her neck flexing at a disgustingly unnatural angle. Blood poured from her side like she was a glass being emptied; a dark black liquid dripped from her eyes and it trickled down her pale chin to form a small pool of the substance by her head. Her eyes which used to be as bright as sparklers on bonfire night were now a mushy brown colour, tainted by the foul liquid.

All in all the limp remains of the friend were a little too much to take in. Cally closed her eyes; she felt sick. Whether that was due to the gory state of her friend or the hysteria gripping her she did not know; it was probably a combination of the two. She remembered the laughter, the insanely high pitched giggling. The kind of noise that whined through the air in the most piercing of manners, the kind of sound that deserved to be locked up in a lunatic asylum and never let out, the kind of scare you were often startled by in horror films. Then Cally realised, it had been her.

“Did I do this?” she murmured to herself frantically.

She wanted to scream, she wanted to curse the world for what it had led her to, but most of all she needed a scapegoat, somewhere to shift all the blame. She leant on the wall beside her and shook off the dizziness. When Cally opened her eyes the first thing she saw was the dull grey walls of the car park. How typically atmospheric that her friend died in such a gloomy place! She glanced at the body and winced, it was thoroughly mutilated. Still leaning heavily on the wall she staggered around the corner and tried to hold down the bile that threatened to overpower her throat. Vomiting was not going to prove anything and neither was cradling the dead victim to her chest like they did in the movies. She banished the very thought from her head. This was real. After all, there was no doubt about it that Diane Metters was dead.

“Cally? Cally! Where are you?!” cried a familiar voice.

The sound reverberated through the empty parking spaces. The worried voice was repeated a million times over in a rather creepy fashion. It took Cally several minutes to work out through the hazy fog of shock enveloping her that the voice belonged to her sister. Sure enough, Joanne raced around the corner of the grotty car park and as Cally laid eyes on her younger sister a small smirk crossed her face. This was just what she needed: a scapegoat.

# Chapter 1

Jo was simply glad to see her sister. She’d been concerned when Cally had left the party so early on, that wasn’t like her. She usually drank till she dropped and then Jo had to face the trials of getting her home somehow. It was very difficult to keep their parents in the dark with Cally’s drunken body language splurging all over the front couch as soon as they arrived. But this was not right; for once Cally hadn’t had a drop of alcohol at the weekend. When she’d left Jo’s concern had only deepened. Now she was glad that she had followed. Cally was in some state.

Her skin was as a pale as the bones beneath them and she clung to the wall as if it were a life support. Jo sprinted towards her and skidded to a halt.

“Cally what’s wrong?”

Her sister let out an ear splitting laugh verging on hysterical before replying.

“What isn’t?”

Jo winced slightly at the high pitched noise of her laughter and frowned as Cally clutched the wall again.

“Let’s get you home.”

To be honest, her sister looked ill.

“I’m not letting you take me anywhere!” Cally screamed.

“What! Why?” Jo asked in bewilderment.

“IT’S ALL YOUR FAULT!” Cally yelled into her sister’s face.

Jo closed her eyes and sighed. She was beginning to get annoyed.

“What is?”

Cally pointed a quivering finger at the body behind her. Jo followed her sister’s distraught gaze. She too spotted the disfigured corpse and screamed. She turned and joined Cally against the wall. She wasn’t clinging onto it for support; she was simply trying to back away from the gruesome sight.

“Oh my god. Oh my god!” she whispered. “That’s – that’s Diane!”

“Yep.”

Jo stuttered; lost for words to describe the sudden ache she felt in her heart and the sick feeling in her stomach. They both knew Diane well; she was Cally’s best friend for a reason and Jo got on with her too. She gave far better advice than her older sister did. Cally and Di had gone to primary schooltogether. Now they were in year 11. Emphasis on the *were.* But of course, all of that was over now. Jo gulped for a few seconds trying to form words to express the impact it had on her but all she could do was gasp panicked questions. Her mind felt hollow. In this case that meant completely devoid of the ability to construct full sentences.

“What did she-how did she - ?”

“How should I know? All I know is that it’s all your fault.” said Cally in a surprisingly calm voice, considering what she had just witnessed.

Jo stared at her sister wondering why she was accusing her of all people! She’d only just found the body. Then again, they were both in shock and Cally was not exactly in a sound state of mind at the moment.

“How is this my fault?!” Jo spluttered.

“It just is.” Cally confirmed.

Jo tried to ignore her sister’s frustrating persistence and dropped the subject.

“We should call the police.”

“NO.”

Jo frowned in confusion. Why did her sister not want the police to know about this disturbing death?

“Cal they can help find out who did this to Di. They can punish them.” Jo pointed out.

“Just don’t.” she said, pausing for a minute before adding “Do you want to be put in jail?”

Jo growled, there Cally went again blaming her younger sibling for all her problems. Even in horribly disturbing, life changing moments such as this her older sister found a way to blame Jo for everything. She swallowed her anger and put her hand on Cally’s shoulder. Much to Jo’s surprise she noted that her sister was shivering. Her anger lessened a little.

“Listen to me, this is not my fault. How could I have done this?” she asked soothingly.

“You make me sick.” replied Cally backing away.

She violently thrust Jo’s hand off of her shoulder. Her sister cradled her hand, Cally didn’t know her own strength but Jo did.

“Did you even see what happened?” Jo asked sceptically.

“It only takes one witness to prove that you’re guilty.”

Cally sounded so – for lack of a better word – confident when she said that; despite her faint, strangely peaceful tone. As soon as the thought crossed Jo’s mind she was alarmed to see her sister do a perfect eye roll and slump backwards onto the wall by her side. Her head knocked gently against the hard concrete as she collapsed and her arms drooped limply to her sides, trapping the one she’d been using to stay upright. It was not the most graceful faint Jo had ever seen, but she couldn’t care less. She ran over to Cally, knelt beside her and started to panic further although that was barely possible by this point.

“Cal? Can you hear me?”

She slapped her sister’s face like she’d seen actors do in soap operas, but just like the TV shows it was not very effective. She drew her hand away to find it coated in cold sweat from Cally’s cheeks. She wiped it off on her jeans in disgust. Jo reached for her mobile ready to dial 999 just like her sister had warned her not to. After all, neither of them ever did as they were told. It seemed to run in the family; or at least, her mother’s side.

The beeps the touchscreen made rang out loudly in the silent car park. Jo glared at the phone, wishing she knew how to change the settings to a quieter one. But the sound of footsteps stopped her mid-dial. They echoed through the lonely car park.

“Who’s there?” she called.

It was only afterwards that Jo remembered it probably wasn’t good to announce her whereabouts to the world when there was most likely a killer on the loose somewhere in the car park. She gave herself a good mental kicking and waited to see if there was a reply.

Nothing.

The footsteps appeared to have stopped for the moment. Jo waited but all that remained was silence. She shook her head. Maybe she’d imagined it? Yes, that had to be it. It’d better be it otherwise she and Cally were dead meat. She glanced down at her phone. All she needed to dial was one more number. Then the footsteps rang out again. She dropped the phone onto her lap in shock. Fortunately the material of her jeans muted the phone’s thud unlike the pavement would’ve done. Jo thanked god that she hadn’t been able to dial the final number; the frustratingly loud beep would’ve lead the quiet stranger straight to them. All the same the footsteps were approaching. Every second they got nearer. Finally Jo decided she couldn’t just sit here in fear and wait for this person to brutally murder them. She put away her phone, grabbed her sister’s arms and attempted to drag her unconscious body to her feet with little success at first. After a few more tries and rude hand gestures that she knew she’d only be able to get away with when Cally was out cold Jo finally had some luck. Cally was standing. Well, drooping by the younger sibling’s side. Jo moved in front of her sister and let her fall gently onto her back. She hitched her arms round her sides so Cally was now held in place and crept to the side of the wall. The coast was clear. For the moment. The steps drew nearer. Jo slowly walked towards the other side of the car park. Every step was a struggle: she had to judge her speed, strength and noise carefully in order to escape from this budding nightmare. Her body screamed at her to run but her mind told her to relax. If she ran she’d drop Cally, plus it would give her away to this murderer, whoever the git was. Jo started to count her steps in an attempt to focus on her progress, rather than panic. Left, right, one, two, step, step. The steady rhythm seemed to calm her slightly but not enough to make her forget the danger she and her sister were in. They had to get out of here before it was too late. If the stranger caught up to them - if they didn’t make it – if that person realised -

Soon she was by the door. Jo turned to scan the car park one last time. As she analysed the distance she had just travelled she was amazed that she managed to make it this far. Carrying her heavy sister in what was effectively a piggy back position took a lot of effort. She shrugged in response to her thoughts, adrenaline did amazing things.

“Goodbye Di.” she whispered.

She lugged Cally over to the lift. They were currently on level three; the sooner they made it out of the disturbing hell hole the better. She pressed the button and waited. It took a painful amount of time for the lift to arrive and Jo could feel the panic threatening to overwhelm her. *Diane is dead. I’ve just seen a dead body.* Her thoughts were like a stuck record. She simply couldn’t comprehend what had just happened. Suddenly she felt tired and sagged under the weight of her sister. That was when the lift arrived, just in the nick of time. Jo fell through the open doors and dumped Cally on the floor. She pressed the ground floor button and sank down beside her sister. Cally was pretty heavy. Putting her down felt like a weight had been taken off of her shoulders - in this case literally.

Jo felt herself relax a tiny bit, they were safe. Her stomach lurched as the lift jerked into motion. She closed her eyes briefly and took a deep breath. She was exhausted. Jo felt drained both physically and emotionally but she had to make one last call. It couldn’t wait. Jo grabbed her phone and dialled the final nine.

“Hello?” she said hesitantly.

“Which service do you require?” asked a cool female voice.

“Erm… police.” said Jo and then glanced at her sister. “On second thoughts make that an ambulance as well. My sister has collapsed and – and we just found a body.”

“Okay.” acknowledged the voice. Jo could tell that this person was trained to remain calm and professional. It was no comfort to the caller if the person on the receiving end was equally distressed. She felt slightly ashamed that she herself was so scared. “Where are you?”

“In a lift, but that’s not important. Diane is up on the third floor of the London National car park.”

“I’m sorry, who is Diane?”

“She’s the person who’s d-dead.” Jo stuttered slightly on the final word unable to admit it to herself. “I – I couldn’t stay up there. I heard footsteps and I think it was the person who killed her. Whoever it was would’ve got us if I hadn’t -” she trailed off as her mind began to conduct vivid imagery concerning the possibilities of ‘what if’.

“Okay, please get yourself out of the building. The police will be right with you.”

“Thank you.” said Jo.

She started to sob, the trauma finally breaking through.

“Is there anybody I can call for you?”

“Call my mum please.” Jo pleaded and started to recite her mother’s phone number.

There was a pause. For a minute Jo thought that she’d shaken the lady but she decided that it couldn’t be that. The woman was simply busy calling her mother. Several minutes passed and she cried into the phone. Eventually the lift jolted to a stop. “I’ve got to go.” she said to the lady and with that she hung up and dragged her sister out by the arms, no longer afraid of making loud noises.

She rested Cally so she was sitting up, supported by the wall behind her. As she made it to the pavement Jo realised that the majority of her panic had faded during the lift journey, now all that remained was the pain. Tears trickled down her cheeks like miniature waterfalls. Despite their size they were every bit as gushing as the real thing. She leant back on the wall of the car park entrance and put her face in her hands. She cried openly as she tried not to remember what had just happened. Strangely enough the thing that upset her the most was the fact that her sister had blamed her for it all. How dare she!

Jo glared down through the film of tears at her unconscious sibling. What was she even doing in that car park in the first place? All of a sudden Cally had just snuck off for no reason whatsoever. Jo sniffed. Cally usually stuck around for the drinks. She groaned internally as she remembered something vital. The lady on the phone had called her mum and contacted the police for her. Everything about their weekend parties was going to come out in the open. That could be awkward.

Jo sighed. Cally loved a good drink and made the most of it when she could get one. The parties were her idea, but Jo came along of her accord. Cally never forced her into anything. She knew that in her parent’s eyes they’d think she was just as bad as her sister. Jo enjoyed a drink from time to time plus she wanted to keep an eye on her “oh so independent” sibling. Cally had a knack for getting herself into unusual scrapes, mainly due to what people could manipulate her into when she was drunk. Despite being younger than her sister Jo felt she was way more mature. Cally simply needed a chaperone. However Jo knew that no matter what happened part of the blame was going to fall on her for not telling anyone. It wasn’t like she’d never told anyone, in fact she’d been instructed to invite her friends but she knew that if she used that excuse in an argument her mother would only grow angrier. She got angry enough with the sisters without the extra baggage of what they got up to at the weekends.

The sound of a siren cut through Jo’s trail of thought and she was glad, if she wasn’t careful she’d start thinking about her parents. That was never a good subject to dwell on. A police car swerved round the bend and screeched to a stop. Uniformed men got out from the car, one giving orders to the rest before coming over to the sisters. On closer inspection Jo realised that this person was actually a woman. She felt herself go red. But then again with the lady’s hair tucked up in her hat like that how was anybody meant to tell what gender she was from the back?

“What’s your name kid?” she asked.

Jo was still crying but managing to keep her sobbing to a minimum in order to respond.

“Jo. That’s my sister Cally.” she responded nodding in her sister’s direction.

“You two need to stay put. My men are going to check out the building.”

“Okay.”

Jo glanced at her sister, staying put for once would not be so tricky. The policewoman caught her sideways glance and her expression softened.

“Don’t worry; an ambulance is going to arrive soon. But for now you need to wait.” The lady turned and yelled a command. “Rory can you keep an eye on these two for me?”

Rory did not look too pleased about having to babysit but walked over all the same. He reminded Jo a lot of Cally when she was in a sulk. Her sister was renowned for her spectacular sulking skills; Jo admired it from a distance as it generally meant that Cally was in a bad mood for weeks.

“Fine.” he agreed reluctantly.

“Don’t give me that look. If this girl is right there’s a murderer up there, you owe me. I want you on your best behaviour.”

The man curbed the urge to roll his eyes and nodded meekly instead. The woman turned and directed the other policemen into the car park. As soon as she was out of sight Rory started grumbling.

“I swear she’s doing this on purpose.” he muttered to himself. “Why couldn’t Greg babysit? He’s even good with kids! I swear she’s-“

“I’m fourteen.” interrupted Jo, angry at being referred to like she was a toddler. “I’m not a baby.”

Rory looked affronted.

“Who said you could talk?”

Jo rolled her eyes.

“Who said I couldn’t? My point is I don’t need someone to look after me.”

“Well it’s just as well you have someone anyways. People with that attitude find themselves needing help the most.”

If this was said by any other person it may have sounded like an insult, but this policeman sounded grim and slightly sad. It reminded Jo that she *was* a kid and he was an adult. He was only keeping an eye on her as instructed.

“Sorry. It’s been one hell of an evening.” Jo apologised wiping her eyes with her sleeve.

Rory looked slightly bewildered.

“Now I’ve seen everything, an apologetic teenager?” Jo frowned at his stereotyping but decided not to comment. “What was it exactly that happened in there?”

“You mean you came out here but you didn’t know?”

“That pretty much sums it up.”

Jo found herself going over the story, delving into such detail that Rory shuddered as she described the body.

“O-okay I’m sorry for belittling you can you please stop with the gore?!” he spluttered after Jo had gone on a tangent about the angle of Diane’s neck.

She gave him a watery smile and moved on. Despite his initial ignorance to the ways of teen-kind he seemed surprisingly good at listening. By the time she’d finished the ambulance arrived and she was distracted by the medics attending to her sister. They needed to know how long Cally had been out for and details like that. Jo went on autopilot from there on and Rory left her to it.

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The policewoman emerged from the entrance.

“There’s a body up there. Pretty mutilated.”

“Tell me about it.”

The lady frowned but decided to leave it.

“Did you get anything out of her?”

“Everything - a little too much if anything. I think she needed to vent.”

She smiled.

“Well that’s something. I know you are our newest recruit but you’re the best interrogator I’ve ever met.” she said warmly. Rory grinned at the praise. “I just hope for your sake that the stuff you were mumbling earlier about me was part of the act.”

His smile abruptly faded. He hoped that the lady was joking but it was virtually impossible to tell with this woman. She smirked and went to talk to the medics leaving Rory slightly lost for words.

“How is she?” asked the policewoman.

“Still out cold, but she’ll live.” replied the nurse. “There were a few other things worth noting about her symptoms however, we’ll need to take her to hospital to do a few tests which we can’t do without parental consent.”

“Their mother has been contacted, she’ll be here soon. Don’t leave until she’s arrived.” she informed the medics. “How long will we have to wait before we can interrogate her properly?”

The medic looked slightly shocked at the suggestion. She had to remind herself that the kids had been at the site of a murder most brutal although Rory described it as yucky when he examined the pictures later.

“At least a day. Never mind the tests, those kids will need a little time to get over the physiological trauma of seeing the remains of a good friend.”

“They have two hours.”

The nurse’s mouth fell open. It didn’t take a genius to realise that timescale was ridiculous.

“But-“ began the woman.

“My husband died, I got over it.”

“In two hours?” said the nurse dubiously.

For a moment the strong policewoman seemed broken. For a minute the nurse saw through the cracks in her disguise and the defiant lady before her seemed depressed and downtrodden. But soon the hood of the disguise was back up.

“In less.” retorted the policewoman and with that she strode off towards the curb.

She pretended to be looking at the photos but was really keeping an eye for the girls’ mother in an attempt to distract herself from the thoughts of her late husband. The sooner the mother arrived the better, the policewoman wanted to get this case done and over with. She felt her stomach twist at she glanced briefly at the gruesome photo in her hand. This case felt all too familiar. But then again, her thoughts were never straight with Michael on the brain.

Thankfully the sound of screeching tyres brought the policewoman out of her reverie. A red Peugeot squealed to a halt by the roadside and a woman in her mid-thirties stepped out from the car. Her striking red hair dangled down her concerned face as she raced over to the ambulance.

“WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED?” she shouted.

The policewoman frowned; this was obviously the girls’ mother. The likeness between her and Jo was clear already, as they both shared the vibrant auburn hair tones. She could see Jo trying and failing to explain what had taken place in the car park. The girl looked genuinely scared, more so than she’d been when the policewoman had first seen her. Rory who had also been watching this exchange decided he should go over to calm things down a bit. The last thing Jo needed was her mother’s yells giving her an earful.

“Please calm down Miss.” he said nipping over to the ambulance.

“CALM DOWN? ONE OF MY DAUGHTERS IS UNCONSCIOUS!”

“I know it’s a lot to take in-“

“THAT’S A BIT OF AN UNDERSTATEMENT!”

“I will explain everything right here and now if you’ll shut up for a second. If you want to keep your other daughter from collapsing the least you can do is stop yelling.” said Rory, a hint of irritation creeping into his voice.

The mother’s chest swelled up, she heightened herself slightly, her face reddened and Rory winced in preparation for her rage to overflow. But much to everyone’s surprise she enveloped Jo in a tight hug. Jo was equally shocked; she managed to force a smile as she peeped over her mother’s shoulder. At such a close proximity it was only her who could hear the sigh of relief the woman emitted.

“Mum I can’t breathe.” Jo gasped.

“Oh. Sorry darling.” She let go. Jo massaged her arms where her mother’s grip had cut off the blood circulation. The woman turned to face Rory. “Explain.”

“Well we got an emergency call from – what is your name Miss?”

“Aileen.” she replied impatiently rolling her eyes at the question.

Jo however could see through her act. Her mother was annoyed on the outside but on the inside she was just relieved that her daughters were okay. Well, in some respects. Jo could also tell that Aileen was enjoying Rory’s obvious nervousness around her. The policeman started to launch into an explanation and as he did so the policewoman in charge strolled over casually to join them. However halfway through his account of the story Jo had told him they were interrupted by a medic who wanted to talk to the police.

“Now the girl’s mother –“

“Her name is Cally.” interrupted Aileen.

“Now Cally’s mother –“

“My name is Aileen.”

Jo smiled slightly. Despite everything her mother had still retained the ability to be extraordinarily difficult; she was spectacular at winding people up. Not so different from a certain sister she knew. Although many people told her she was the mirror image of her mother Jo knew that Cally acted a lot more like her: a hothead with an attitude of her own.

“Anyways, now you’re here Aileen we need your consent to run Cally through a few tests once we arrive at the hospital.”

“You’ve got it.”

On hearing this news the policewoman felt she ought to intervene.

“Aileen, you do realise that when your second daughter is conscious we will need to interrogate her.”

“Can’t you give her some breathing space?” argued Jo’s mother.

“Do you understand me?”

Something authoritive in the policewoman’s voice seemed to take Aileen by surprise and she found herself replying meekly.

“Yes.”

“Call us when she’s awake.”

And with that the police officers stepped back, the double doors of the ambulance closed and Jo found herself being whisked away from the scene of a crime.

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After the Doctor’s verdict Cally had to stay at the hospital. As Aileen drove her other daughter home there was an awkward silence in the car. It was rather stifling in fact. Being the mother Aileen felt she ought to say something, but was unsure of what. After all, she was every bit as upset as Jo. On the bright side she hadn’t known Diane too well. Except for the occasional play date with the girls she’d never really met the friend properly. Plus Jo had finally stopped crying. As for Cally, she’d be fine. She had to. She was a strong girl. Her occasional tantrums proved that much at least.

“It’s going to be okay.” she murmured in what she hoped was a reassuring voice.

Jo nodded but said nothing. Normally Cally filled up this silent space with her loud chatter. Without her the car felt empty.

Both mother and daughter were relieved when they arrived at home. But the house seemed haunted by Cally’s absence. Jo jumped when the doorbell rang. It was probably a friend from the party wondering where she’d got to, making a house call to check that she wasn’t chickening out of another night out. It wouldn’t be the first time.

“I’ll get it!” Jo called and ran to the door. She was glad for the intrusion; anything that would take her mind off everything else was welcome. However when she opened it she was surprised to find Cally’s boyfriend standing at their doorstep. “Dolph? What are you doing here?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know!” he sneered. “Where’s Cally?”

“I’m not telling you until you tell me why you’re here.” Jo retorted.

She had never particularly liked her sister’s taste in men. This boyfriend was a few years older than Cally and was in sixth form. The age difference wasn’t what bothered her however.

“She disappeared from the party.”

“You only just noticed?” Jo said raising an eyebrow.

“Well yeah, she promised that afterwards we’d –“ he paused. “never mind.”

Jo sighed. As far as she was concerned Dolph was a jerk. Sure he was hot, with his spiked up black hair and chocolate coloured eyes, but looks aren’t everything. He was the classic bad boy stereotype you read about in books and who were littered in clichéd films, the type who only wanted one thing. One thing that wasn’t even legal at the age of fifteen for his girlfriend.

“So you came down here to find her. How touching.” she remarked mockingly.

“Yep, so where is she?” he responded totally missing Jo’s sarcasm.

“She’s at the hospital Dolphin.” she replied using the nickname she loved to taunt him with.

He glared at the use of it but ignored her.

“What’s she doing there?” he asked stupidly.

Jo analysed his facial expression in amusement. It was a cross between a pained look, a worried one and the gormless expression usually present on his face.

“Getting better.”

“She seemed fine at the party.”

“Well she wasn’t afterwards. Goodbye Dolph.”

Jo started to shut the door on him but he put his foot inbetween her and the door as it closed. He winced in pain as it slammed against his foot and hopped away from the doorstep clutching it.

“Please Jo; I have to know if she’s okay. I’m her boyfriend.” he pleaded.

She sighed. Maybe Dolph did love Cally but he had one hell of a way to show it. She opened the door a tiny bit wider so she could see him through the gap.

“I don’t know if she’s okay.”

“But you said-“

“I don’t know Dolph!” Jo snapped.

“Great. So much for tonight.” he said and stormed off.

“If you want to see her so much why don’t you go to the hospital?” Jo called after him.

“She can’t kiss me if she’s sick.”

On hearing this Jo slammed the door properly.

She raced upstairs to her bedroom. Her mother watched her in confusion and followed. Aileen poked her head round the door and saw her daughter crying into her pillow with a fresh set of tears. She didn’t know how to deal with this. Cally she understood. When she was angry, frustrated or upset she threw things and lashed out at everybody around her. However Jo was a lot more like her father. If she felt any one of those emotions instead of exploding she’d implode until the feelings came rushing out of her bottled up insides. In Jo’s case it was in the form of tears. In her father’s case it had been leaving. Aileen decided to leave her daughter to it, if she said anything she had a feeling she’d only make it worse. She knew she wasn’t the best mother in the world. So generally she left her kids to do what they wanted unless it was something bad or stupid like smoking. The mother walked away from her daughter’s bedroom and went back downstairs to get on with filling out her divorce papers.

Meanwhile Dolph was on his way to the hospital. It wasn’t too far a walk from Cally’s house. He had decided that maybe Jo was right. Despite her irritating way of putting things (especially his name) there was a certain depth of reasoning behind most of it. Cally lacked that. A lot of what she said made little sense to him but she was beautiful and she was his which made up for it. He owed it to her as her boyfriend to go visit, maybe if he was lucky he’d get a sympathy snog for all the effort he’d made to walk over. He grinned at the thought of that before remembering his counter argument for not visiting in the first place. If Cally had some kind of disease maybe she could pass it on to him? He hoped she didn’t. That could put a real downer on their relationship. He’d have to start seeing other people.

Finally Dolph arrived at the hospital ward. He was a little unsure of what to do or say; despite his bad boy reputation he hadn’t visited the place since he was born. He walked awkwardly through the white entrance halls. The colours were all one blinding shade as you’d expect at such a place. Finally he came across a white reception. He was surprised by how far away it was from the entrance. He pushed up to the front of the queue much to most people’s annoyance and waited patiently for the receptionist to finish on the phone. Eventually the woman hung up and turned to face him. Fortunately for Dolph the woman hadn’t seen him push in and ignored the loud grumblings behind him, taking it as the people simply complaining at how slow the line was today. After all, the hospital was extremely busy.

“Hello how can I help you?” she said, looking slightly worn out by today’s amount of visitors.

“Erm…I want to see Cally Sanders.”

“Okay,” the woman started to flip through a list of names next to her. “What injury does she have?”

“I don’t know.”

The lady paused.

“You don’t know?”

“Her sister wouldn’t tell me anything useful.” Dolph replied groaning at the memory.

“How are you related to this patient?”

“I’m not. I’m her boyfriend. I need to see her.”

“I’m sorry but at the moment its family visits only for that girl.” she said. “This place is crowded enough as it is.” she muttered quietly to herself.

“Look lady I need to see her!”

“Well you can’t.”

Dolph slammed his hand down on the desk in anger. The receptionist barely flinched. The people behind him however jumped.

“I am practically family!”

“Do I need to call security?” she sighed, a slightly bored tone to her voice.

“Quite possibly.” he muttered and skulked off. He headed up the stairs despite the receptionist’s warning. “Looks like I’m just going to have to find her myself.”

Now that Dolph had made the effort to get here, he was determined to actually see his girlfriend.

The place was a maze filled with twisting white corridors. At the very least the wards were labelled but Dolph found this was not enough to make his way round the hospital. What he really needed was a “you are here” map. After a considerable amount of time wandering, asking for directions and having tired feet he found Cally. Or rather, she found him.

“Dolph!” she cried in surprise.

“Ah.” he said, turned round and rushed over to her. He frowned. “You don’t look too good.”

“Well duh, I’m in a hospital bed.” Cally pointed out. “It’s good to see you, have you brought me anything?”

Dolph paused to think of an excuse for not bringing her something, one which didn’t suggest that he simply didn’t care enough about her to be bothered. He knew that would be what her sister would say.

“I only just found out!” he said. “Give me a break.”

“Well, you came and that’s the main thing.”

Cally patted the bedside. Dolph sat down and attempted to snuggle up to her as much as he could. It was not the easiest job, but perhaps if he pretended to enjoy cuddling he’d get a little more than that. Cally giggled.

“You know you said that after the party –“ he began.

Her smile abruptly faded.

“Dolph, look at me. I’m not exactly in the state for it now.” He looked at her reluctantly and couldn’t help but agree. “I’m tired. Aren’t you even curious about what happened?”

Dolph glanced at the room around the hospital bed. It told him everything he needed to know.

“All I can tell is that it made you upset.”

There was a trail of broken things littered throughout the room. It was one of the clear tell-tale signs that Cally was unhappy. He knew from experience.

“You know me so well.” she sighed, completely unaware of the mess around her.

Then again, she didn’t remember making much of it. The doctors had had to sedate her after that particular outburst.

“So what happened?” asked Dolph, a hint of frustration added to his voice.

He’d come up here for a reason but it looked like Cally wasn’t in the mood. He wished she’d follow up on her promise; every time he brought it up she put it off. This time round he had thought that maybe things would be different - apparently not.

“Jo killed Diane.”

Dolph squinted in an attempt to remember who Diane was. He hadn’t been with Cally for *that* long and he preferred not to fraternise with the friends.

“Is Diane that girl who hangs around with you at school and is always saying shit about me like your sister?”

“Yeah.”

Dolph was tempted to say good riddance, it was certainly what he was thinking but he had a feeling that wouldn’t go down too well with his girlfriend. He groaned. He really hated patience. Cally took it for a sympathetic groan.

“What did she do that for?”

“How am I supposed to know?” she snapped.

“She’s your sister!”

“I guess.”

“How can you be unsure of whether she’s your sister!? Is she actually adopted?” Dolph asked.

Cally laughed, assuming it was a joke. He frowned. If it was a joke it was completely unintentional. All the same he decided to go along with it and laughed along with her.

“I just meant she’s so unlike me it’s difficult to imagine we are family.” She grinned slightly at their misunderstanding. “You always know how to cheer me up.”

“I’m not surprised it was Jo who killed her, she can be pretty mean.” he added.

“Yeah. She’s so judgemental! She’s always keeping an eye on me – like I can’t look after myself and she never even tries to appreciate my brilliant boyfriends.” Dolph frowned at the plural of boyfriends but said nothing. “That was the one thing that me and Diane argued about: my choice in men. Jo is so good at turning people against me. It’s not fair. I know for a fact that you care about me.” Cally said.

Dolph smiled, this was the perfect opportunity. He leaned towards her. Their faces were barely an inch apart.

“I second that.”

Then he started to kiss her. Cally’s eyes widened in surprise but she began to kiss him back too. He moved his hand down her back slowly but the call of a doctor made them stop.

“What are you doing here?”

Dolph glanced behind him and groaned. This was just typical.

“Dolph? Didn’t the receptionist let you up?” Cally asked, curious as to the doctor’s surprise at the presence of her boyfriend.

“Okay so I sort of snuck in, so what? I needed to see you babe.”

A beaming smile covered her face at the use of the ‘b’word.

“You snuck in just for me?”

But this exchange had the doctor striding towards them.

“Got to go. Love you later.” Dolph said.

He felt mildly disappointed. What a dismal visit! It had been rather dreary and it seemed like the only thing Cally wanted to talk about were her feelings. What about his? He walked all the way over to visit her and barely got a mention. But footsteps reminded him that he had other things to focus on.

Dolph span around on the spot to face the doctor looming over him. He was a rather tall man, with an overbearing moustache that made his head look tiny in proportion to the rest of his body. Dolph ducked past the man’s arm and made a race for the exit. He thought he could hear footsteps chasing after him so he made a mad dash for the silent ward he’d been in earlier. Nobody was allowed to make any noise in there. He ran through the corridor ignoring the shushes coming at him from people in all directions down in the ward. He could hear the doctor’s footsteps fade to a stop. Dolph felt rather smug and slowed to a walk at the end of the corridor, to tease the man in the white coat further. Then he glanced behind him. The doctor was speed-walking with an angry but determined look on his face. Dolph started to run again however the doctor had the advantage of knowing his way around the hospital properly whilst Dolph was simply guessing. He felt a little like he was going round in circles. He was trying to find the route he’d used to come up in the first place. After what felt like ages (and probably was) he found the staircase he’d climbed up initially and raced down it. As he reached the ground floor of the hospital the receptionist who’d denied him entrance to see Cally in the first place noticed him.

“What are you still doing here?” she called.

Wasn’t it obvious? Dolph thought to himself. He was running.

“Running.” he yelled to her.

The receptionist glared at him, sighed to herself and started to call security. Dolph sped up considerably.

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Rory knew it was getting late but he had to finish this report. He hated being stuck in the office, but it wasn’t like he had anything better to do. He sighed and continued to write things up. He knew he wasn’t terribly good at it but the woman in charge always left him with this work. He swore that she did it on purpose but couldn’t really prove anything much to his annoyance. Rory glanced at his superior’s office. It was empty. So why was the light on? He sighed and went to turn it off but as he opened the door he saw the policewoman asleep with her head on the desk. Her brown hair that was normally tied into a neat bun cascaded over her face. She looked peaceful when she was asleep, instead of the strict woman she was during the day. He’d never really noticed it before but with her hair down she looked - pretty. However the circles under her eyes detracted from that a bit. There was a cup of coffee on her desk. As he entered she awoke suddenly, jumping up from her seat.

“Oh. It’s just you.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to wake you. I didn’t realise you were still in here in fact.“

“Why are you still in the department? It’s close to midnight.”

Rory wanted to ask her the same question.

“I had to finish off that report.” he explained dangling the paper in front of her face. “It’s still not done yet.”

“Oh. Right. Well, I can do that. You go home and get some sleep; it’s been a busy day. I want you ready for tomorrow.”

“Alright then. If you’re sure…”

“I’m sure.”

The policewoman took the paper from his hand.

“Thanks.” said Rory, mildly surprised by his superior’s behaviour.

# Chapter 2

He felt that he caught her in a vulnerable moment and it was quite a bizarre feeling. He started to leave but halfway out of the door he turned.

“Yes Rory?”

“Linda –“ He paused realising his mistake. Nobody ever called her by her first name. He moved on quickly hoping to detract from it. “are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” she assured him with a tired smile. “And if you ever use my name again I’ll see to it that you get demoted.”

Rory left the room abruptly. He knew he was lucky to get off with that warning.

She smiled after him. He was a good policeman. She liked him more than she’d care to admit, especially to herself. Not that she’d ever let him know she thought of him that way. He made dumb mistakes sometimes, but generally ones that couldn’t be helped.

One that could’ve been helped however was the time he arrested a five year old for murder. That was back when he’d only just become a policeman. When she had come to investigate it turned out that the kid was just trying to make a dramatic tea party through killing off her dolls. It was a rather embarrassing mistake but you’d think that the man would know better than to listen to the word of a five year old and take her seriously without a pinch of salt. She’d covered for him that day, because she liked him. Linda thought Rory had potential and just needed a little experience to prove her right. As a result he owed her which came in handy from time to time. But the best part was that Linda had been right. She loved it when that happened.

Anyways she needed to get this report done. Tiredness was no excuse although she often wished it was. She hated today’s case. Not only was it disgusting but the death rang true. This wasn’t the first person to die in such an aggravatingly horrible way. The sooner they could interrogate that other girl the better. They needed information if they wanted to catch this killer. Linda sighed and read over what Rory had written so far. He’d barely got half way through the story of the day but at least what he had said was thorough instead of the ramblings she sometimes received in reports. That was one of the main reasons why she chose Rory to write these things out. What he wrote made a certain amount of sense. He was able to get his head around things. Linda knew she’d always been rubbish at this but started to write all the same. Something had to go down on the paper, whether she liked it or not. They needed to catch this vile hooligan and unfortunately for her every detail was important.

She picked up the photos attached by paperclip to the report and looked at them. This was the worst murder victim picture she’d seen in a long time. It made her shudder. Linda started to write. Slowly but surely the words tumbled onto the page. It wasn’t exactly how she wanted things to be conveyed but she knew that no matter how gory the image a little description had to be provided. She rushed through the report and read it through to check the content. Her internal editor cringed. The difference between what she’d written and what Rory had done was painfully clear. But it would have to do. She read through it a second time, this time to check spellings. She’d once been given a report that misspelt the word capture. Silly mistakes like that were embarrassing to look back on and awkward to hand in. Since she was tired she knew that she’d probably made plenty of spelling mistakes. She sipped her coffee and started to look back through it but noise outside her office distracted her. The light had been turned on. She frowned and put down the paper. She walked out of her office.

“Hello?”

“Hi.” said Rory. He looked worried. “I think I left my house key here.”

Linda restrained herself from laughing. Instead she responded with a simple comment.

“Clever.”

Rory glared at her.

“I didn’t do it on purpose.”

He started to search his desk for them. She felt a bit guilty that she was just standing there.

“Do you need a hand?”

“Yes please.” he replied.

“What does it look like?”

Rory gave her a look.

“Like a key.”

Linda rolled her eyes and joined him on her hands and knees to find it.

“I see you still have to finish my report.” he commented, attempting to make light conversation whilst they searched. She nodded. “Maybe I’m not the only person who needs to go home and get some sleep.”

“No, I need to get this done.”

“Linda how are you meant to focus on anything if you’re tired enough to fall asleep in your office? It’s a big day tomorrow. We’ll be interrogating the other girl.”

She was too tired to notice the way Rory was using her own words against her.

“She’s awake?”

“You’re obviously not. I used your first name. Aren’t you going to demote me?”

“Oh.”

She rubbed her eyes. Maybe he was right. Then her eyes widened as she caught a glimpse of dull grey metal. Rory noticed her reaction.

“What is it?”

Linda reached under the desk carefully, laying down on her belly and then dragged her arm back. Her hand was clutching the key. She sat up.

“Look what I found.” she said proudly. She dangled the key in front of his face teasingly. “I’m not tired enough to miss what’s right in front of me.”

He tried to snatch them off her but she jerked away.

“Come on!” he moaned. “Of all the times to act like a kid you choose now?”

“I’m not hyper; I’m on a caffeine high which has just hit. That’s how I stay awake half of the time. Now catch me if you can!” He rolled his eyes. “Do you want your key or not?” she added before racing off into the darkness of the police department.

Rory grinned a little despite himself and chased after her.

It was just those two officers left in the entire place. It was silent apart from their footsteps. Rory could only imagine the shocked looks on the other policemen’s faces if they were here to witness this truly remarkable event: the event of Linda relaxing a little. When she wasn’t being strict she was busy with work, when that wasn’t the problem something else always managed to get in the way. He had to admit that it was good to see her happy, even if it was only for a few minutes because of a caffeine high.

Rory raced through the darkness of the dimly lit offices. He was making good pursuit as far as he could tell and could just about make out Linda in the distance. She proceeded to lead him in circles around the department. Rory was about to catch her when he tripped over a bin he was unable to spot in the dark. She stopped running and came over to him.

“You alright?”

“Yeah. Stupid bin.”

She chuckled and went to turn on the light.

“Looks like I win.” she said and looked down at her hand but it was empty.

Rory held up the key. He’d snatched it off her just before she went to turn on the light. In the darkness she didn’t notice.

“I don’t think so.” he announced triumphantly.

“You know, in different circumstances you would make a good pickpocket.”

As she walked over to help him up she felt the tiredness weigh down on her. She stopped.

“You okay?”

“I think the caffeine is wearing off.”

“Let’s go home then.”

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The next morning was the day of the interrogation. Linda didn’t know how Rory had found out that the girl was conscious, but she didn’t particularly care. This had to be done as soon as possible. Her grip tightened on the driving wheel in anticipation.

Aileen’s grip was also tight on her daughter’s hand as they arrived at the hospital. Jo quite frankly just wanted to get the whole thing done and over with, hoping that maybe Cally would’ve come to her senses by now and wouldn’t be blaming her for such a horrific crime. Her mother was trying her best not to lash out at anyone, preparing herself mentally for the interrogation. She knew that she was angered easily but didn’t want to do anything stupid during the interview. They joined the queue stretching out from reception and waited. After a good five minutes or so they finally got to the front and were able to talk to the receptionist.

“Hello how can I help you?” the woman asked.

“We’re here to see Cally Sanders.”

“How are you related to the patient?”

“I’m her mother.” replied Aileen.

“I’m her sister.” said Jo.

“Okay, she’s on floor 3 in the Dresden ward. You’re not her first visitors.”

“The police must have already got here.” sighed Aileen.

“Police?” said the receptionist in surprise. “No, she had a visitor yesterday. He wasn’t family so I didn’t tell him where she was but he found her all the same. He claimed to be her boyfriend, but didn’t even know what her medical problem was.”

“Dolph.” said Jo and her mother in unison.

“I hope he didn’t cause too much of a commotion.” Jo said half-heartedly.

“He ran down a ward which has to be kept silent at all times.” said the receptionist raising an eyebrow. Jo was not terribly surprised. It was safe to say that Dolph was good at causing trouble. “Doctor Rogers discovered him kissing the patient. When he asked what the boy was doing there he ran off.”

“That sounds like him.” Jo murmured to herself.

“Come on Jo, let’s go see Cally.”

She thanked the receptionist and they set off.

Aileen was still holding her daughter’s hand. Her clasp however had tightened considerably as they made their way up the stairs.

“Mum you’re going to break my hand at this rate.”

“Sorry.” But her grip did not lessen, if anything it grew stronger. Jo could tell that she was seething. “I’m going to have a word with that boy if it’s the last thing I do!”

“Let’s focus on the interrogation first.” Jo reminded.

She took her mother’s silence for agreement and they continued to go up the stairs. Eventually they arrived at the right floor. It took them nowhere near as long as Dolph had to find the right ward.

On seeing her sister Jo ran over to the bed she was laying in but to her surprise Cally simply glared at her. When Jo reached out to take her hand she shied away. From the look on her face Jo could tell that Cally seemed to be repulsed by the idea of being touched by her own sister.

“Cally?” she said in confusion.

However then her mother came to Jo’s side and Cally’s reaction to her was a complete opposite to how she’d been towards her sister. She pulled her mother in for a hug much to Jo’s surprise. Cally was not a hugging kind of person as far as she was aware. Aileen was also startled but happy to embrace her daughter.

“Thank god you are alright!”

“The doctor said I could come home today.”

“I thought they said they had to do tests?” Jo pointed out.

“They didn’t take as long as the doctor thought they would.” Cally replied with an unusually smug tone to her voice.

Aileen smiled at this, but then remembered the news she’d been fuming about on the way up.

“We heard about Dolph’s visit yesterday.”

“More like a break in.” Jo muttered.

At the mention of this Cally beamed.

“Yes, isn’t it sweet of him?”

Aileen seemed mildly shocked by this point of view, and re-thought her anger to find herself agreeing with Cally. In a way, it was rather romantic. Jo, who knew his real motives, wasn’t impressed.

“Did he even bring you anything?” asked Jo.

Cally glared at her.

“He’d only just found out I was in hospital.”

“I’ll take that as a no.”

“Well I don’t see you bringing me anything!” Cally snapped.

Jo was hurt by her sister’s accusation and reached into the bag she’d brought with her to the hospital. She pulled out a card she’d made herself and a box of chocolates before placing them on the bedside.

“Home has been –“ Jo paused trying to think of a word to describe it. “- weird, without you.”

Cally picked up the card and examined the front of it, squinting at Jo’s bad attempt at drawing.

“What’s that supposed to be?”

“You, all better.”

“Congratulations, you’ve managed to make me look like a giraffe.” Next Cally turned her head to look at the chocolates. “And within a few days’ time I’m going to be a really fat giraffe.”

“Now Cally, it’s the thought that counts.” said her mother.

Cally didn’t look convinced. Jo looked down, trying to avoid her sister’s eyes.

“So did the doctors work out why you collapsed in the first place?” Aileen said eager to change the subject.

“Something about exhaustion, but my symptoms were weird so they’re not entirely sure about anything at the moment. That’s why they had to do the tests, but they didn’t really confirm anything.”

Cally’s eyes widened as she caught sight of policemen walking into the ward.

“What are they doing here?”

“I don’t like it either darling but they have to interrogate you.”

“What?! NO. I’m not answering any of their questions.” Cally protested.

“You’ve got nothing to hide, so what is the big deal?” said Jo.

Cally shot daggers at her sister when she made this remark.

“I don’t exactly want to re-live the experience.”

Jo was unsympathetic. She already had.

“Tough.”

Before Cally could retort the policewoman was by her side, accompanied by the man who had been on ‘babysitting duty’ with Jo yesterday at the car park.

“Is it okay if we ask a few questions?” said the policewoman.

“No. Bog off!” Cally exclaimed.

The lady’s expression hardened into a frown.

“Let me rephrase that, we need to ask you a few questions.”

“Go ahead. I’m not going to give you any answers.” said Cally stubbornly.

“Cally please.” said Aileen.

Her daughter sighed in irritation.

“Fine. Make it quick.”

The policewoman nodded to the man beside her.

“Why were you in the car park at the time of the incident?” he asked.

“I was following Di.”

“Why were you following her?”

“Because she told me to.”

Rory and Linda exchanged glances. The policewoman jotted this new information down on her notepad that had seemed to have suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

“Okay, did she say anything to you before –“ Rory began.

“Yes and no.”

“Care to expand on that?”

Cally didn’t look like she wanted to but did all the same.

“She started talking to me, saying how she wanted to come somewhere quiet to tell me about things, her last words were: it was Jo.” Everybody stared at Jo. She felt herself shrink a little at the looks she was attracting. “And then –“ Cally trailed off.

“I know it’s going to be painful to remember but how did Diane end up like that?” Rory asked hesitantly.

“What, dead you mean?”

Jo shivered. At least her sister wasn’t afraid to say the word.

“Yes.”

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

“Try me.”

“She started screaming. It was like something was sticking its hand inside her and pulling at her organs. Then her neck snapped, her side seemed to rip open and she collapsed. She writhed for a few minutes then stopped moving.”

Cally was right, Rory did find it difficult to believe. However the look in the girl’s eyes told a different story, she seemed to genuinely believe all of this. He looked to the policewoman for back up, she had countless experience. Surely she’d know whether Cally was telling the truth. She gave him a slight nod. He sneaked a glance at her notepad.

*Story backs up forensics.*

*Check CCTV cameras.*

That was a good idea. He wondered why he hadn’t thought of it before. He wrenched his mind away from the more practical side of the investigation and went back to his questioning.

“Where were you before the incident?”

“What do you mean?”

“You said Diane wanted to come somewhere quiet to talk to you, which implies you were somewhere loud beforehand. So where were you?”

Linda smiled. She hadn’t picked up on that detail. Cally and Jo exchanged panicked glances.

“I – I was at a friend’s house.” Cally stuttered.

Jo relaxed slightly, that was true. In a way. Rory didn’t miss her hesitation however or the worried looks. He sensed that he was onto something the girls wanted to keep quiet.

“What were you doing at the friend’s house?”

“Girl stuff.”

Rory frowned. She was definitely hiding something.

“Girl stuff?”

“Chatting about boyfriends, life, makeup, things you wouldn’t understand.”

“Then tell *me* about it.” cut in Linda.

After all, the policewoman was a girl. Cally hadn’t been expecting this and looked frantically at Jo for back up.

“I was there too.” Jo added. “A lot of people were there.”

Cally stared at Jo in shock.

“Why were you there?” asked Rory.

“For the same reason everyone else was, we wanted to relax at the weekend with a little party.”

“A party about girl stuff?” he said sceptically.

“Yes! It was a slumber party!” exclaimed Cally but she was gripping onto loose straws at this point.

“You girls didn’t tell me anything about a sleepover!” said Aileen suspiciously.

“What are you not telling us?” questioned Linda.

Jo turned to Cally. Enough was enough; there was only so much lying she would allow.

“We have to tell them.”

“No.”

“They’re going to find out one way or another.”

“NO.” Cally said more insistently.

“If you won’t tell them I will.” Jo turned to face the police again. “We have parties at the weekend, Cally organises them, picks a friend to host it and tells me to invite my mates over. This week it was at Diane’s house. Dolph was there and everything-”

“Whoa back up there, who’s Dolph?”

“My boyfriend. He came to see me yesterday.” Cally explained.

The dreamy look on her face made Jo want to throw up.

“Anyways,” Jo continued. “When Cally left I was surprised, she hadn’t drank anything-“

“Drank anything?”

“Not one drop of alcohol, that was seriously unlike her.”

“WHAT!?” Aileen said, almost yelling across the ward.

At her yell the Doctor came rushing over asking her to keep her voice down. She agreed reluctantly. Jo couldn’t bear to look at her mother. She could feel the betrayed eyes boring into her.

“Wait, where did you get the alcohol from?” interrogated Rory.

“Shops, like everyone else.” said Cally scathingly.

He did not look impressed by her attitude. Jo filled in the extra details for him.

“Cally’s friends have older siblings, it’s easy enough for them to get their hands on it and bring it along.”

“Okay, one last question and we’re done. Can you give me the full name of your boyfriend please?”

“So you can go harass him? I don’t think so!” Cally exclaimed.

“Dolph Andrews.” Jo said, happy to annoy her sister’s boyfriend further.

“Thank you.”

With that the police left leaving an awkward silence between the three family members. Jo was so glad that they would be spending this week with their father instead of their mother. He had a different way of showing anger. Then again, that meant their mother’s anger towards them had a week’s time to build up.

Aileen was disturbingly silent as the Doctor came over for a second time to inform her of her daughter’s mysterious condition and remained dangerously quiet as the family left the hospital. Eventually they arrived home. However as soon as the front door to the house was closed she exploded.

“HOW DARE YOU!” she screamed.

“Mum I can explain –“ Jo began.

“DON’T EVEN TRY! YOU WENT ALONG WITH IT ALL! I THOUGHT I COULD TRUST YOU TWO! APPARENTLY NOT. HOW LONG HAS THIS BEEN GOING ON FOR? A FEW WEEKS? A FEW MONTHS? A FEW YEARS?!”

“Ever since you and dad split up.” Jo whispered.

“I CAN’T HEAR YOU!”

“I CAN’T IMAGINE WHY!” Cally yelled back sarcastically at her mother, her blaring voice matching the strength of Aileen’s.

“HOW LONG HAS THIS BEEN GOING ON BEHIND MY BACK FOR?”

“LONG ENOUGH FOR YOU TO BE AS GOOD AS BLIND! YOU’RE A RUBBISH MUM AND YOU KNOW IT! I DON’T KNOW WHAT I’D DO WITHOUT DOLPH BECAUSE HE’S THE CLOSEST I CAN GET TO REAL COMFORT AROUND HERE!” Cally ranted.

Aileen looked as if Cally had just punched her. She was not the only one; Jo was hurt too by this announcement.

“What about me?” Jo said, her voice was barely audible but Cally’s ears picked up her tiny complaint all the same.

She turned on her sister.

“WHAT ABOUT YOU!? YOU ARE ALWAYS DISSING MY BOYFRIEND, YOU TREAT ME LIKE I CAN’T LOOK AFTER MYSELF, YOU GIVE ME CRAPPY PRESENTS AND YOU CAN’T EVEN STAND UP FOR YOURSELF! OH AND I FORGOT; YOU KILLED MY BEST FRIEND!!!” Cally bellowed.

“She was my friend too.” Jo said her voice a little louder this time.

“OH LOOK AT THAT, I DIDN’T THINK IT WAS PHYSICALLY POSSIBLE FOR HER TO ACTUALLY SPEAK LOUDER THAN AN ANT. I’M IMPRESSED.”

“I didn’t kill her.” Jo said, firmly this time.

“DON’T YOU DENY IT SHE TOLD ME HERSELF!” Cally roared.

Jo could tell that Cally was close to throwing things. She took a step back before her sister could do anything rash. But Jo was a little too slow in moving and Aileen was too busy absorbing Cally’s insult to react in time. Cally picked up her mother’s heels from the shoe rack beside her and threw them at Jo. The shoes hit her hard in the face and she fell over backwards. The force of the throw was far beyond Cally’s normal strength. It looked like anger gave her that much more of an advantage.

“Joanne!” her mother gasped. Jo pushed the heavy heels off her face and got to her feet. Aileen was relieved that her daughter was standing. She turned to Cally. “GO TO YOUR ROOM!”

“I’m not staying here.” announced Jo whilst her mother was occupied with the task of yelling at her sister. She took this opportunity to walk out of the door whilst Cally went in the opposite direction.

As soon as she got outside Jo started to run. It would be a while before her mother noticed she was gone, her sister was a big handful when she was angry. Gradually Jo slowed to a gentle walk as she explored London. She knew exactly where she was going although the pain in her head made it difficult to concentrate. When the throbbing streaked through her the streets went temporarily blurry. This made it considerably difficult to read signs but Jo knew the route like the back of her hand. The noise and bustle of the London streets made her feel claustrophobic and lightheaded, plus she didn’t like the concerned looks people gave her as she walked by. Jo decided to take the path through the park. It almost felt like she was drunk. She had to focus carefully on putting one foot in front of the other but still managed to sway as she went. She walked (well, wobbled is more of an accurate word) past a happy family having a picnic. A little kid was running around the group playing with a friend. As she walked the child accidentally bumped into her.

“Sorry.” the kid apologised but then scrutinised her face a little more closely. “Are you okay? You’ve got a big purple thing on your face.”

At this news Jo felt a little more worried and sped up. It wasn’t long until she made it out of the park. By now her mobile phone was ringing. She knew it would be her mum but she wasn’t going to answer to her just yet. She stumbled along the streets until she turned a corner and finally arrived at her destination. Jo walked up through the front garden and rang the doorbell. The door opened to reveal a tall man. Dark, untidy hair reminiscent of Harry Potter’s spiked up from his head which was quite a contrast compared to his posh, black business suit.

“Hello dad.” she greeted.

“Jo what are you doing here? I’m meant to pick you and your sister up after dinner.”

She swayed a little on the spot much to her father’s alarm.

“Cally got angry. Just let me in and I’ll explain everything.”

His eyes widened as he too noticed the huge purpling bruise that stretched across Jo’s face.

“Oh my god what happened to your head?”

“Cally threw mum’s heels at me. I couldn’t stay there. Please just let me in dad.”

“She what!? Come in.” Jo’s father led the way inside. “Let’s get something cold on that head of yours.” Jo slumped onto the living room couch as her father went into the kitchen. He soon came back with a cold compress and laid it on the side of her face. Jo winced but said nothing. For a few minutes they just sat there in silence. She liked her father for this reason; he was willing to wait for her to be ready to tell him what he needed to know, unlike Aileen who wanted to understand things instantly. “I’ve told your mother time and time again that Cally she should see a counsellor so she can deal with these anger issues. But will she listen to me? No.”

Jo didn’t like it when he brought up Aileen. In fact, she didn’t like it when either of her parents talked about each other. The pair seemed to have difficulty saying anything nice when it concerned the other person. They’d split up barely a month ago yet it was hard to believe they had ever been a married couple happily in love. Jo sighed. She wished things had stayed the way they were, but she knew for a fact that life just didn’t work that way.

“I suppose I should probably tell you what happened this weekend. It’s –“ Jo paused, trying to think of words to describe it. “- a long story to say the least.”

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Back at the scene of the crime Rory was analysing CCTV footage of the car park as instructed. Since the place was connected to a shopping centre there were cameras present at several different angles. The third floor of the car park had been sealed off naturally, after the murder a full police investigation was launched. Linda was head of the operation of course and saw that everything went as smoothly as it could. This was considerably difficult and had her in a bad mood for most of the day. Rory admired her skills from a distance. The curious thing about the level of the car park was that the camera which looked directly down on the murder stopped working when the girl started to scream. The footage showed Cally following Diane into the car park and they talked briefly, however then fuzzy static enveloped the screen before the camera returned to normal to show the girl’s mangled body. He then watched the end of the footage to see Jo come in, Cally collapse and Jo escape with her sister to the lift. However none of the other CCTV cameras had been able to spot the approaching person Jo claimed that she ran from.

“Any luck?”

Rory jumped and span round.

“Oh it’s just you.” Linda laughed and he sheepishly began to answer the question. “Not really, the camera fuzzes out just when we need it most. You can see Cally and Diane talking beforehand and Jo and Cally’s escape afterwards but nothing else of use.”

“Strange. I wonder what could’ve caused that.”

“I was hoping you’d know.”

“Well, we should try to work out what Cally and Diane are saying to each other before she dies, that will at least give us some insight into whether Cally was telling the truth this morning.”

“How do we do that? This thing has got no sound as far as I’m aware.”

Linda chewed her lip. Rory knew that look, she had an idea.

“Know any lip readers?”

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As Jo finished explaining to her father he stood up and went over to the phone.

“Dad what are you doing?”

“Calling your mother.”

“What!? No! Please don’t!”

“She needs to know that you are safe.”

“Oh.” Jo let out a sigh of relief. She thought that he was going to call her and just have a go at her. They argued enough as it was, she didn’t want to hear any more of that. Then again, it was far more likely that her mother would have a go at him. Personally she thought her father had much more reason to do so when Aileen hadn’t even told him about Cally being hospitalized.

He picked up the phone and started to dial the numbers. Just as he was about to leave the room Jo sat up.

“Dad?”

“Yes?”

“Can you ask her if I can stay over here? It’ll be just one extra afternoon.”

“Jo you know how she is about these things –“

“Please?” she begged.

Jo had a go at her best puppy dog eyes attempt. Her father laughed at the bizarre resulting expression, but whatever she’d done seemed to work.

“I’ll try.”

He walked into the hallway that lead out from the house entrance and started talking into the phone. Jo strained her ears to hear the conversation but quiet chat slowly turned into shouting and she no longer tried. She hated this. But it was always the way things turned out. If anything it was making her head feel worse.

Finally the conversation (if you could even call it that) came to an end. Her father walked back into the room looking rather drained of energy.

“What did she say?”

“You didn’t hear it?”

“Yelling through a phone is not the same thing as yelling here and now.”

“Oh right.” he said sheepishly. Clearly Jo’s father had forgotten that she only heard one half of the conversation. “She said you could stay here for the night. But as you could probably tell she wasn’t very happy about it.”

Jo was relieved. There was no way she could go back to face Cally. Her sister had been right about one thing; she couldn’t stand up for herself. She relaxed onto the sofa and reached for the TV remote.

“Okay.” she sighed.

“You just rest, have you had any lunch yet?”

“Nope.”

“Right.” Jo grimaced at the thought of her father *cooking.* He had even managed to make the microwave explode once. He noticed her expression. “Don’t panic, I’ll order some pizza.” he assured her before turning to the kitchen.

Jo switched on the TV but it was difficult to focus on any of the programs for too long, partly because the screen appeared to be blurred and secondly because she simply couldn’t keep her eyes open. After ten minutes of this her father nipped back round the corner holding a cup in his hand.

“Tea?”

She smiled. It was the one thing her father could make in the kitchen without encountering disaster, which was just as well considering that John Sanders was a tea addict.

“Thanks.”

He passed her the cup along with a small plate he’d been holding by his side.

“I’ve phoned the pizza delivery guys, they should be round in fifteen minutes or so.” John sat down beside his daughter. “You look tired.”

“I feel tired.” Jo acknowledged.

“Maybe it’s those parties you told me about.” he said, his voice taking on a disapproving tone.

“Dad, I told you, the past few weeks I’ve been trying to get out of them. Besides I was distracted by Cally before I had the opportunity to get drunk this time round.”

“Darling your mother has probably already told you this,” he paused before continuing, being careful with his word choice. “- rather forcefully, but neither of us want you destroying your liver at your age.”

“Dad if I was destroying my liver I think I’d realise.”

“Life isn’t that simple.”

Her father’s gentle lecturing affected Jo more than her mother’s yells had. He seemed sad and disappointed with her.

“I’m sorry. I won’t do it again.” she apologised in a small voice.

“That’s my girl.” The doorbell rang. “And that’s probably the delivery men.”

The tension that had built up between the pair shattered as John jumped to his feet and rushed back into the hall. A few minutes later he returned with the box.

“That smells good.”

Together they sat on the sofa, watching the end of a Simpsons episode, snacking on Margherita pizza. Jo supressed a laugh at the guzzling sounds her father made when he ate. From the excessively pig-like noises he was making she guessed he was trying to make her smile at least. She laid her head on his shoulder and was on the verge of falling asleep when he spoke.

“You know I got the bed all warmed up for you upstairs before calling the delivery men, do you want a nap?”

Jo was touched. She wasn’t entirely sure why though: it was her father’s job to look after her.

“Dad, don’t fuss. It’s just after midday. If I go to sleep now it’ll be impossible to get to sleep at bedtime. Plus my body clock will get all messed up.”

“Come on, you know you want to!”

Jo raised an eyebrow.

“You know how they always lecture us about peer pressure at school dad.”

John rolled his eyes.

“Fine. But in that case you have to do something active before dinner.”

“Okay.”

Jo grinned, she could compromise. But for the moment, she was quite happy resting her face in front of the TV. She was beginning to feel better all ready. That sick dizzy feeling she’d had earlier was virtually gone. Maybe she’d just been hungry?

“I’ve got to have a conference call soon darling so try not to interrupt me unless it’s urgent.” John informed her before leaving the room.

Jo watched the television and started to pay attention to what was actually going on in the news.

“Only yesterday a mangled body was found in London’s main car park. Police are not commenting on the matter at this time but the CCTV footage from the area allegedly shows two young girls escaping from the aftermath. Now we go to Charlotte on the scene.” said the calm newsreader.

Jo sat up instantly on hearing this. The news cut to a reporter at the car park entrance. She was part of the paparazzi crowd trying to interview the policewoman Jo had met again only this morning. The lady seemed to be trying to say as little as possible.

“Thanks Mike. Here I am with Linda Porter, head of the police department and this investigation.” The woman with the microphone turned to face Linda. “What can you tell us about the two girls seen escaping on the CCTV?”

Linda frowned. How did the reporter know about the CCTV footage? She sighed. Did things really get out that quickly?

“I can tell you that they’re none of your business. I’m sorry but this investigation is off limits to the press.”

Linda had decided a long time ago that no newspaper should be allowed to get their hands on crimes like these. Call her paranoid but she didn’t like the rumours the stories sparked. The reporter ignored this and continued to probe the irritated policewoman.

“Do you know how the victim: thirteen year old Diane Vickers died?”

“Firstly her name is Diane Metters and she’s fifteen, secondly as I said this investigation is off limits to press.” Linda replied angrily pushing away the microphone that the reporter kept jabbing in her direction.

The reporter however only seemed encouraged by the policewoman’s response and continued to follow her to the car park entrance to ask more questions. Then the policeman who’d interviewed Cally that morning stopped the reporter.

“Sorry lady, you can’t come in here. This area is closed off.”

The story went back to the newsreader in the studio.

“We are lucky enough to have a recording of the CCTV footage everyone is so concerned about-“

Jo turned off the TV in shock. Everyone watching the news was going to see her escape with Cally. Tomorrow was a Monday. A school day. How would they ever be able to escape the rumours?

Her body drooped in dismay and she held her head in her hands. Unfortunately Jo had forgotten about the huge bruise across her face.

“Ow.” she muttered and proceeded to remove her hands.

She had to find some way to cover up this bruise by tomorrow.

# Chapter 3

Linda was not happy. But then again, that went without saying. Rory had just finished and left the reporters to his fellow policemen. Hopefully they’d deal with the nosy interviewers. He chased after her, sensing that she needed someone to talk to.

“That stupid woman hadn’t even got her facts right!” she fumed. Rory slowed down a little. Maybe she just needed someone to yell at. Perhaps this wasn’t such a good idea. He contemplated what he should say for several minutes but took a little too long. “Well? What is it?”

“Erm - nothing. Sorry to bother you.”

Rory hurried away as fast he could. Linda glared after him.

He joined his fellow cops at the car park entrance. It looked like they had managed to fend off the majority of the crowd. Most of the reporters were leaving with sulky looks on their faces but a few stayed, staring at the police from a distance. It seemed like they just needed to watch the perimeter for the moment. His friend Mark smirked at Rory’s return.

“What did I tell you? She’s not in the mood to have a civil conversation.”

Rory rolled his eyes.

“All in good time.”

The policemen under her charge admired Linda grudgingly but were always ready to have a good bitch about her the minute her back was turned. Initially Rory had joined in quite happily, knowing it was part of the job but since last night with the caffeine high he couldn’t quite bring himself to insult her. Now he knew that the strict exterior was only one part of her. For just a few minutes he’d managed to catch Linda when she was relaxed, cheerful and – vulnerable. He would’ve told Mark. But Mark would’ve got the wrong idea; he tended to do that a lot. Besides, his friend probably wouldn’t believe him in the first place. He could understand that. After all, even he hadn’t believed it until yesterday night.

“You’ve been talking to her a lot lately.” Mark commented.

“What about it?”

“Nothing, just saying.”

“You know this is the kind of case I’m interested in.” Rory said, in an attempt to steer his friend from the conclusion he thought he was coming to.

“Yeah right. Grisly murder? When I first saw you looking at the photos of that body you looked ready to faint. This case isn’t your thing.” Mark remembered mockingly. “So it’s something to do with Porter.”

“No it isn’t.”

“Yes it is. Why so defensive?” Mark teased.

“Just leave it.”

“Ah I’m onto something then!”

Rory groaned. Sometimes he didn’t know why he was friends with Mark when he could be so annoying.

“She’s been getting me to do a lot of work on this case and to be honest I owe her.” Rory retorted. “You remember that time with the five year old-“

Mark winced at the memory.

“Only too well mate. Don’t go there.”

“She bailed me out then, so I owe her. The worst part is she knows it too.”

“If you say so.” said Mark, he didn’t sound very convinced though.

Rory looked at his friend and braced himself.

“Say it.” Rory commanded.

“Say what?” asked Mark trying to act like he didn’t know what Rory was talking about.

Rory was not fooled.

“Say what’s on your mind.”

“Why should I? I get the impression you don’t want to know.”

“I know you.” Rory sighed. “If you don’t say it you’re going to yell it out at an inappropriate moment. Let’s just get it done and over with.”

“You fancy Porter.”

Rory sighed, relieved that Mark wasn’t going to shout that out at an inappropriate moment. Then he continued to deny it.

“You sound like you’re still in high school. No I don’t.”

“Then why do you keep talking to her?”

“Is it really so wrong to have a friendly relationship with your boss?”

“No, but this is Porter we’re talking about.”

“Did someone say my name?” asked the policewoman as she stepped out from the car park entrance.

Mark shook his head.

“No ma’am.”

Rory supressed a chuckle; Mark was afraid of Linda if anything.

“Rory come with me. I just got us our lip-reader.” she commanded.

Mark gave Rory a look but Rory ignored him and followed her as she lead the way back up to the room which contained the CCTV footage.

“How did you find the lip-reader exactly?” he asked.

“It took a lot of phoning round.” she dead-panned.

He decided not to probe any further, Linda still looked angry about that interviewer and he had a nasty feeling she’d explode in his face if he stated any more questions.

Eventually they arrived at the room. A young woman was sitting inside. She looked slightly nervous.

“Thank you for coming. We just need you to tell us what the two girls are saying at the start of the tape.” Linda explained.

The woman nodded and Rory rewound the video. Together the group watched. Rory was full of anticipation but Linda just wanted to get it done and over with. She was in a bad enough mood already without this woman taking ages to do her job. The screen started to fuzz over with static and Rory paused the video. For a few moments there was silence; then the lip-reader spoke.

“At the start the girl who isn’t dead-“

“Call her Cally for the purpose of this exercise.” Rory cut in to prevent further confusion.

“Okay, at the start of the video Cally says to her dead meat friend: what’s going on?”

“Just call her the victim.”

“The dead meat friend or the other girl?”

“The dead meat friend.”

The lip-reader blushed slightly but continued.

“The victim replies: Cally I’m scared; I just wanted to talk to you somewhere where we could be alone and where it’s quiet. Cally says: did you really have to drag me out here just for a chat? The victim says: yes, it’s about Dolph. Cally asks her what her problem is, saying that everyone is picking on him. The victim says that Dolph is not good for her, that he’s been doing some horrible things that she doesn’t know about. That nobody knows about apart from her. Cally gets suspicious and asks her what. The victim tells her that it was Jo who warned Cally about him and that Cally should have listened. She says that it was Jo who – but then the static cuts in.”

Rory and Linda exchanged glances.

“Thank you. That was most….revealing.” said Linda.

“Can I go now?”

“Of course.”

The woman promptly got up and left the room.

“So Cally’s story was accurate, from a certain point of view.” Rory remarked. “Technically she didn’t even lie.”

“But she withheld information from us. That’s just as bad.” Linda added.

“I think we should meet this Dolph.”

“I think you’re right.” Linda agreed. “But we can do that tomorrow; you have one huge report to fill out.”

She smiled at his groan.

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On Monday Jo’s father drove her to school and she was glad for the transport. By now everyone she knew would’ve seen the video of the CCTV footage on the news. The last thing Jo wanted was to feel the stares as she walked down the streets of London. The car acted as a shield. She’d rather face bad traffic than the whispers. Cally however wasn’t as lucky.

Aileen had given her a lecture on laying low for a few days. The pair had seen the news and her mother insisted that Cally should make an actual effort not to get into trouble. Maybe then people would forget about her more easily but Cally strode down the street as per normal, refusing to hide or duck her head as her sister would’ve done. In fact, she held her head high. She was proud of who she was. The people had it wrong. Jo had killed Diane, not her. The stares weren’t so bad on the street, they were just from strangers and Cally could kid herself that they were insane anyways. She didn’t mind the attention. But when she arrived at school the attention suddenly seemed unwanted and the stares became irksome. She tried to ignore them but it was difficult work that distracted her easily. The first lesson she had that day was science. She marched off to the room and queued outside with everyone else. She could hear people exchanging gossip and small talk but all their chattering gradually faded to silence as she joined the line. Cally was a lot more effective at quieting the class than her science teacher would ever be. Nobody was sure what to say to her. Eventually Kaela, one of her friends, tried to strike up a conversation.

“How are you?”

“I’m alright. You?”

Cally knew what she was saying was a severe understatement but couldn’t care less. She wasn’t going to give the queue the satisfaction of hearing how she really felt.

“Yeah I’m good.”

Cally glimpsed someone in the queue doing the awkward turtle sign as the silence returned (don’t ask. It’s just a phase the pupils went through).

“Did you do anything interesting at the weekend?” Kaela asked hesitantly.

“You were there for the party, you should know.” Cally replied.

“Oh yeah, that was fun.”

“Glad *someone* enjoyed it.” sighed Cally.

The teacher arrived at this point and let the class into the room. They sat down in the seating plan and got out their science exercise books. Almost as soon as the teacher started talking Cally was in daydream mode. She was homing in on what people were talking about behind her. The entire row seemed to be having a whispered debate. Well, it was more of a whispered speculation than anything else.

“Do you think she did it?” hissed Katie.

“Cally would never do that. She’s my friend.” replied Kaela defiantly.

Cally smiled warmly, it was nice to know that someone was going to defend her other than her boyfriend.

“You sure about that? That’s what Diane thought.”

“Am I the only person here considering the fact that Jo could’ve done it?” said Josh who sat next to Kaela.

Cally found herself agreeing with him.

“She’s too much of a goody two shoes. Asides from attending parties; she simply isn’t bad enough to do something like that.” cut in another boy.

“But she’s quiet. You never know what goes on in a quiet person’s head.” Josh argued.

“Don’t be stupid. Ben’s right, whatever she thinks Jo just hasn’t got it in her to murder someone. As for Cally –“

“Why are we even considering this? Just because they were there doesn’t mean they did it!” Kaela exclaimed a little too loudly.

“Kaela, do you have something to contribute to the lesson?” asked Mrs Richardson.

“No Miss.”

“Then don’t talk over me.”

“Sorry Miss.”

For a few minutes there was silence. But then a different voice spoke up. This one belonged to one of the popular kids. Her name was Jasmine and as far as Cally was concerned the girl was evil.

“No doubt about it, Cally’s the reason why Di is dead. You know how easily she loses her temper. Besides, just listen to the name: Di – she had it coming.”

Cally’s head whipped round at this comment. She felt herself launch out of her seat. It was more of a reflex than anything else. She found herself towering over Jasmine. So much for laying low.

“HOW DARE YOU!” she yelled and raised a fist but then her science teacher interrupted her.

“Cally!” screamed Mrs Richardson. “Sit down NOW.” Cally eyed the teacher defiantly. “I said SIT. Don’t make me treat you like a dog.” There was some sniggering at this comment. Cally narrowed her eyes, was Mrs Richardson calling her a bitch? All the same she sat down. “Jasmine what did you say to her?”

“Nothing! I was just minding my own business! She overreacted to nothing.”

“That’s not true –“cut in Kaela.

“That’s the second time you have interrupted me today Kaela, one more time and it’s a detention. I was not asking you.” Kaela was silent. The teacher turned to face Cally. “Detention. Be thankful it’s not more. If I ever catch you treating a student like that again it will be a suspension.” Cally felt her hatred steadily growing. As the teacher continued to explain the exercise they were meant to be working on Cally felt her anger focus into one hot white point that converged on the teacher. Mrs Richardson stood at the front of the classroom complete unaware of the death glare. “Has anyone seen where my stapler went?”

The class said nothing. Mrs Richardson looked irritated.

“Oh. It’s here Miss!” called Ben waving the stapler in the air.

“Watch where you’re waving that!” exclaimed Josh.

Mrs Richardson quickly swiped the stapler from Ben’s hand and went back to the front of the classroom.

“You get on with your work, I need to staple this poster up.” she informed the class and turned her back to them.

At first everything seemed normal but then Mrs Richardson heard a rather bizarre high pitched giggle coming from behind her.

“Can whoever is making that noise stop? You’re too old to sound like you belong in a nursery school.” she snapped. The person laughing ignored her. The laughter was slowly turning into an ear splitting screech as the pitch rose higher. It seemed more like the kid belonged in an asylum. But the teacher had a feeling she’d get into trouble if she voiced her true thoughts. Mrs Richardson sighed and whipped round to face the students. The laughter stopped abruptly as she shouted at the class. “I told you to be quiet!”

This was not the first time she had caught the kids laughing behind her back. Last time it had been because that gormless idiot Dolph had stuck something on her. Fortunately the technician had pointed it out before she could walk down any corridors and embarrass herself fully. Mrs Richardson narrowed her eyes and groped around her back. Nothing was there. The kids stared at her innocently. They certainly weren’t this good at acting normally. They looked confused.

“I think Miss has finally lost it!” Katie whispered.

Her friend nodded in agreement.

Mrs Richardson blinked. She was hearing things. That couldn’t be good. She shook her head and turned around but the laughter was back, this time it was not alone. A cacophony of creepy childish shrieks made her turn around. Now she was scared. She seemed to be the only person in the room who could hear the disturbing noises. All the same, there was no harm in checking.

“Kaela can you hear that?”

“Hear what?”

“I’ll take that as a no. What about you Josh?”

Josh looked equally perplexed.

“Erm…is this a trick question?”

Mrs Richardson backed away from the students and put her hands over her ears. The noise was so loud it was almost painful.

“Leave me alone!” she whispered in panic.

All of a sudden the teacher felt a warm liquid on her forehead. She touched it with the tip of her finger and was shocked to discover a dark red substance on her skin. She backed away further and bumped into the whiteboard. That was when the projector crashed down just in front of her. It made a crunching noise as it impacted onto the classroom floor making several pupils jump and a few girls squeal in surprise. Then the screams of terror came as they examined the projector a little more closely. It was oozing a horrible oily substance like the one that had dripped onto the teacher’s forehead. On the bright side, the childish laughter had stopped abruptly as the projector hit the floor. The students started to talk anxiously amongst themselves as Mrs Richardson stood at the front of the class frozen in shock. The disgusting liquid was leaking from the machine itself and was making an icky mess on the floor. The liquid seemed to gravitate towards the teacher as it spread and this reality helped to bring her to her senses. Nervously she leapt over the substance and went towards the door.

“Children get into a line outside the classroom. I’m going to get the technician.”

But as Mrs Richardson started to walk away she heard the mysterious laughter again. She refrained from placing her hands over her ears and bit her lip instead. She was shaking.

The news was all over school that lunchtime. Mrs Richardson had completely freaked out, with good reason for a change. Rumour had it she was still in the nurse’s office being given treatment for shock after the antics of the previous lesson. Word quickly spread of the bleeding projector and the teacher’s ability to hear voices. As per usual the story became even more warped through the passing on of the tale and by the time it got to Jo it made very little sense. Her friend Yasmine was telling it to her at the lunch table.

Yasmine was one of Jo’s best friends. But Jo still refused to tell her anything in detail about the weekend. Don’t get her wrong, Yasmine was a brilliant friend, but she couldn’t avoid gossip no matter how hard she tried. Not that she had ever tried.

“So basically Mrs Bitchardson went mental and attacked a student!” Yasmine finished, with that insane grin on her face that always came with her re-telling of a good story.

“Don’t call her that.” Jo sighed.

“What, mental?”

“No I mean Mrs Bitchardson.”

“Why not? The nickname suits her.”

“Even if she doesn’t hear you call her that I bet you some other teacher will. Plus it’s not very nice.”

“But it’s true!”

Jo couldn’t argue there. She’d never got into serious trouble with Mrs Richardson but she’d seen enough to know people who had. Quite frankly the woman terrified her.

“That doesn’t make it right.”

“Oh whatever. So what do you think?”

“It’s certainly a sensational story.” Jo commented. Yasmine’s grin grew. She seemed to take this as a compliment rather than a remark about the tale’s accuracy. “But where did Mrs Richardson manage to get a crowbar from?”

“How should I know? All I’m sure of is that she went crazy.”

“Remind me how?”

“Were you even listening!?” Yasmine made a show of looking irritated but barely managed to hide her glee at the joy of repeating the details to Jo again. “She started yelling at the class to shut up when for once the group wasn’t even talking! Which is impressive considering Katie is in that group-“

Jo sensed a tangent coming.

“Yas, focus.”

“Oh yeah right, sorry.” she continued. “Then she backed into the whiteboard covering her ears and shrieking before the room’s projector fell down in front of her. Except it was oozing blood.”

“I wonder what the technician said about that.” cut in Ally who had also been listening to Yasmine’s story.

“I don’t know! Ask him!”

“I heard that she was yelling at someone for nearly punching Jasmine before she started hearing things.” added Zoe, another member of Jo’s friendship group who sat at the table beside her.

“Good for whoever that was. That popular is a bitch if I ever saw one!” Ettie piped up.

“Oh yeah, I think it was your sister, Jo.” Ally mentioned.

By this point Yasmine’s face had turned a powerful hue of red. She didn’t like her gossip powers to be upstaged in the slightest. The others took the hint and stopped talking to allow Yasmine time to get back on top of the story.

“As I was saying – the projector was covered in blood and guts-“

Jo winced at the gory description her friend was producing as did the others. She decided to daydream until Yasmine’s face returned to its regular colour. She rested her head on one hand and stared blankly into space. Although thanks to the bruise doing that hurt at little Jo didn’t stop. Finally Yasmine appeared to have calmed down a little. She liked to be on top of things. Jo sat up a little straighter and removed her hand from her face.

“Oh my god Jo what is that?” exclaimed Ally.

“What’s what?”

“On your face!”

Her friends were all staring at her intently.

“What are you talking about?”

“Jo you can’t seriously tell us you haven’t noticed the purple mark covering your cheek.” said Ettie dubiously.

Jo glanced down at her hand. It was covered in foundation. Now half of her bruise was revealed to her friends.

“Oh that! It’s nothing.”

“That is not nothing. Look me in the eyes and tell me that’s nothing.” Jo didn’t look up. “See! It’s something.” Yasmine concluded triumphantly.

“Look I don’t want to talk about it right now.”

“When will you talk about it?”

“When we’re in a less public place. For now I need the loo.” she lied. “Back in a mo.”

“I’ll come with you, I’m desperate!” said Ally.

Jo restrained a groan. Going to the loo was her means of escape; she needed to reapply her makeup. But never mind. Her friends were going to find out sooner or later.

Jo tried to get her makeup done quickly in front of the mirror whilst Ally spent her time in the stall. But she was having difficulty concentrating and couldn’t cover up such a large area of her skin in such little time. Ally came out, washed her hands and took Jo by surprise.

“What are you doing?”

Jo lowered her foundation carrying hand to one side abruptly.

“Nothing.”

“You know you look fine without extra makeup.” Ally remarked.

This distracted Jo long enough for Ally to grab the foundation from her friend’s unsuspecting hand. It only took Ally a few moments to put two and two together.

“Why are you trying so hard to cover this up?” she paused briefly as a new idea dawned. “How much more of that purple mark is already covered up?”

Jo glanced around her. The girl’s toilets were surprisingly empty for this time of day.

“Fine! I’ll tell you. Yesterday Cally got angry.”

“Uh oh.”

Ally knew of her sister’s rage. When it got out of control you needed to be at least a mile away from her to avoid the aftermath.

“Yeah, she got really angry. At first it was with mum, but then she turned on me. This purple-“ Jo stroked her cheek gently, still wincing. “is part of a bruise that covers my face. I got it from when she threw mum’s heels at me last night.”

Ally’s mouth gaped open.

“Jo you can’t hide this! Have you told your dad?”

“Yes, but he’s busy with work. He’s concerned but doesn’t have the time to help. I’m staying the week at his house.”

“Well at least that’s something.”

Jo sensed the disapproval in her friend’s voice.

“There’s nothing I can do about Cally, siblings will be siblings.” Jo sighed.

“But what if this happens again? You can’t let her get away with it! Next week you’ll be at your mum’s house and then what?”

“I’ll improvise.”

“No Jo. That’s not good enough.”

“Don’t tell the others. Please?” she begged.

“Jo I’m definitely telling the others. You can’t keep this a secret forever!” Ally was honest; it was one of the reasons why Jo liked her, however sometimes it came across rather bluntly. “You should tell a teacher.”

“No!”

“Jo you’re the goody-two-shoes out of my friends, what’s the harm? You tell teachers stuff all the time.”

“Contributing in class is different.”

“What about that time when Ettie was getting bullied? You told the teacher about that. Next thing you knew Dolph was in so much trouble! You need to get help. Hell, Cally needs help if she does that kind of thing when she gets angry.”

“I don’t know…”

“Well I do know; you’re coming with me to the nurse’s office right NOW.”

Jo knew there was no arguing with Ally when she had her mind set on something. Ally took her arm and tugged her out of the toilets forcefully.

It didn’t take them long to get to the nurse’s office and soon they were waiting outside. Ally stayed with Jo to ensure that she didn’t try to sneak off but they found that they were kept waiting for a while. Eventually Mrs Richardson came out of the nurse’s room.

“Looks like part of Yasmine’s story was true.” Ally whispered.

Jo nodded. Mrs Richardson truly looked as if she’d just encountered a ghost and from all the stories currently circulating the school she might well have done.

“What are you two doing here?” the teacher snapped.

“Waiting for the nurse.” said Ally. Mrs Richardson looked like she was about to say something else to Jo but then the nurse called the pair in. “I’ll see you later.” Ally told Jo.

“What! Aren’t you going to come in with me?”

“You’re a big girl Jo. I’m sure you’ll manage.”

Jo glared as her friend walked off, but part of her knew Ally was right.

Jo walked into the cream coloured room and picked a spot to sit down. The nurse sat on a swivelling chair beside her desk. Quite frankly it creeped Jo out, it looked like something out of that James Bond movie. She was just waiting for the nurse to spin round stroking a cat.

“How can I help you?” she asked.

For a minute Jo was puzzled, couldn’t the school nurse see the problem? Then she remembered that she had covered up the majority of her bruise with makeup.

“Oh erm…have you got a sink?” she asked. Looking slightly confused the nurse pointed round the corner to another set of toilets. Jo rushed over, found a sink and began the painful process of washing off the makeup. When she returned the woman let out a gasp. “You see my problem.” said Jo.

“When did you get that bruise?”

“Yesterday.”

“*How* did you get that bruise?”

“It –it was an accident.” Jo lied.

The nurse did not look convinced by the teen’s stutter. She approached Jo and gently stroked the purple on her face with the tip of one finger.

“Does this hurt?”

Jo winced.

“Yes.”

The nurse sat back down.

“Have you been feeling dizzy or disorientated at all since the time you received this bruise?”

“A little. On the way over to my dad’s house I found it difficult to put one foot in front of the other.” Jo remarked.

The nurse looked concerned at this news. She sighed.

“How did it happen?”

“My sister accidentally threw my mum’s heels at me.”

Jo put emphasis especially on the word ‘accidentally’. She knew for a fact it hadn’t been an accident but that didn’t mean she had to tell the world. Things would only get worse between her and Cally then. As if their sisterly relationship wasn’t bad enough.

“How can you ‘accidentally’ throw shoes into someone’s face?” questioned the nurse, Jo could hear the quotation marks in her speech.

She knew it was a rather clumsy cover up but it was the best she could come up with for now.

“Ask her. Anyways, it’s probably fine. My dad put some ice on it yesterday and I just relaxed on the couch. I’ll just go now-“ Jo began and stood up to leave.

“Wait.” said the nurse. “I don’t think you’re telling me the entire truth. Do I need to call back that friend who was outside with you?” Jo reluctantly sat down. “Right. First of all, tell me your sister’s name.”

“Cally Sanders.”

“Ah.” That wasn’t good. The nurse knew plenty of children who’d been sent to her office as a result of Cally’s temper tantrums. She had heard of the girl on a fairly frequent basis. “Has your head been aching at all today?”

Jo frowned.

“A little.”

“Have you been finding it unusually difficult to concentrate in lessons?”

“Yes.”

“I think you have a mild concussion. So I’ll give you a mild painkiller to counter any symptoms you may be feeling.” The nurse stood up and got a box out of the cupboard above her desk. She then removed a tablet from the packaging and passed it over to Jo. “Chew it thoroughly before you swallow.”

Jo did as she was told.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I know you don’t want to tell me everything but if you ever need to talk you have your friends and form tutor for that.”

Jo barely managed to stop herself from rolling her eyes, what a school nurse thing to say. So she had a bruise on her face, it didn’t mean she needed counselling.

“Okay.”

And with that Jo left the room.

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Cally felt bizarre. Ever since that lesson with Mrs Richardson she’d suddenly felt ill. She knew it wasn’t because of the bleeding projector, she’d watched horror movies far grosser than that. She was exhausted but unsure as to why.

She’d met Dolph at lunch and he’d been nice enough to carry her tray for her. She ignored Kaela’s protests that he was putting something in her food. Everyone seemed to be out to separate the couple. Why didn’t they understand that they were perfect for each other? Cally would never admit it in public, let alone to herself but part of her was starting to love her boyfriend. Every time she saw Dolph she felt warm inside and happy no matter how rubbish the day had been. But after that lunchtime she had definitely begun to feel sick. During lunch she’d felt like she was on top of the world. She’d been wide awake, confident and her friends couldn’t help but notice she was almost on the point of hyperactive. Cally had been willing to take any risk, although the amount of risks you could take in a canteen were rather limited. She smiled to herself.

“It must just be Dolph withdrawal.” she remarked.

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Rory had managed his time better yesterday and had got the report done before midnight. Linda too had managed to get home before midnight. Through their cooperation, although the pair was unaware of it, they managed to avoid another amusing chase through the police department yet both smiled fondly when they remembered that night. Today they were going to interview Dolph. Rory had got the address for his house only this morning and had looked up his record. The boy had already received several cautions for stealing but other than that had done nothing serious as far as he was aware. This little house visit would determine if he’d done anything else since his last offence, which was why it had to be done once school was finished for the day. If they wanted to interview the boy they had to at least arrive at the right time. It was this series of choices that led the pair to stand in front of number nineteen’s door.

It was a rather grotty door that needed a new coat of paint. Linda knocked and a little more of the green colouring flaked off from its surface. They waited for several minutes then exchanged glances. Linda was about to knock again when the door opened. Dolph stood in front of them.

“What do you want?” he asked bluntly.

“Is this the Andrews residence?” asked Linda ignoring his rude attitude.

“Yeah. Why?”

“Are you Dolph Andrews?”

“Maybe. Who wants to know?”

“I’m Officer Porter, this is Rory.”

Rory was mildly surprised that she didn’t refer to him by his surname as he would her, but he merely gave her a look to indicate his feelings instead of saying anything. Dolph eyed the policemen nervously. This was not good. He’d didn’t think he’d done anything wrong lately but sometimes he did these things automatically. Once he’d started the occasional shoplifting it was difficult to stop, similarly to a lot of other things he did.

“Is it okay if we ask you a few questions?” said Rory.

“Actually I’m kind of busy at the moment –“ Dolph began, using his answer as an opportunity to escape from the policemen.

“Let me rephrase, this is a rather urgent matter. We need you to answer a few questions.” Linda cut in.

Dolph would have shut the door in their faces if his mother hadn’t come up to him at that point.

“Oh, hello officers! I hope Dolph hasn’t been causing any trouble-“ she greeted in a friendly tone. Mrs Andrews paused to give her son a withering look. “-again.”

Dolph groaned internally, now his mother was involved there was no way out. Linda however smiled; it was nice to meet somebody cooperative in her line of work.

“We don’t know whether your son’s involvement in our case is serious yet but we need to ask him a few questions.”

“Okay, step right in. I’ll make some tea.”

Rory frowned at the mention of tea, he’d never liked the stuff but he felt it was rude to refuse. Linda stepped inside and led the way to the couch in the living room. Rory followed her. He’d never interviewed somebody in their home. Sure he’d done it on the scene, in the interrogation room reserved for such things at the police department and in the hospital (as of yesterday) but never at the person’s home. This would certainly be a new experience.

As soon as the policemen were out of earshot Dolph’s mother heightened herself and stared into her son’s eyes.

“Dolph Geraint Andrews if you have been stealing so help me I will ground you for a month – understand!?” she snapped.

“Yes.” Dolph replied nodding meekly.

His mother was the only person who could make him behave. So naturally he tried to ensure that she never had to discover what he got up to at school. Letters sent home got shredded before she could get her hands on them, the school didn’t have the correct phone number for Mrs Andrews and even their address details were incorrect. Dolph was thorough; he liked to make sure no stone was left unturned. However he couldn’t affect a criminal record no matter how hard he tried. So his solution was to not get caught in the first place. This interview was going to be brief but vitally important. Dolph knew he had to choose his answers carefully however that didn’t mean he would. As a rule, he virtually never thought before he spoke.

He joined the policemen on the armchair next to the couch. Linda had produced a notebook and was scribbling in the top right hand corner of the page in an attempt to unnerve Dolph. So far it seemed to be working.

“How is your relationship with Cally Sanders coming along?” asked Rory.

“What’s that got to do with anything?” Dolph asked faking bewilderment.

He knew exactly what it had to do with him but wasn’t about to admit that. The safest option for him right now was to feign innocence.

“Answer the question.”

“I like her and she likes me. It’s as simple as that.”

“How well do you know her friends?”

“I try to avoid them most of the time. Especially Di, god that girl is irritating!” Dolph replied a little too honestly.

He realised only afterwards that he’d let slip his dislike of Diane. Linda’s hand was writing ferociously producing an unintelligible scrawl many people at the police department knew her well for.

“Why did you not get on with Diane?”

It was too late to backtrack now.

“She always said shit about me.” Dolph muttered.

“Care to expand on that?”

Dolph didn’t particularly care. But he knew he had little choice. His mother was probably watching him from the kitchen now. She always knew when he was lying. If he didn’t give himself away she would.

“Di said I shouldn’t go near Cally, told me I was a jerk all the time and then accused me of something stupid.”

“What did she accuse you of?”

“She said I was bloody drug dealer! Can you believe that?” Dolph exclaimed.

Rory couldn’t. The kid was a little rude and aggressive but he was not the type to deal drugs; at least not as far as the he was aware. However Rory knew he couldn’t afford to judge people in these situations. That was what he’d done with the five year old murder case and look where that embarrassing mishap had got him.

It was at this point that the boy’s mother walked into the room armed with tea. Rory eyed it distastefully but took a cup all the same. Linda gladly took hers and started to sip it instantly.

“You’re thirsty.” commented Mrs Andrews.

# Chapter 4

“Mmm, that’s some really good tea.” The mother smiled. “I think we are pretty much done here but I just want to make a few final checks. Is it okay with you if we search the house?”

Mrs Andrews pursed her lips and gave her son a look but sighed.

“You might as well.”

“Thank you. Don’t worry; we’ll be out of your hair in no time.”

Linda started to go upstairs and Rory followed. Dolph watched them wistfully. The last thing he wanted was to be left alone with his mother. He pretty much knew she’d been watching them.

“What do you think?” Rory asked Linda.

“I think we should check his bedroom first.”

“Together? Wouldn’t it be faster if we did separate rooms?”

“Yes but we cover things more thoroughly when we do it together. That’s why you’re assigned to this case in the first place. I make mistakes that you need to keep an eye on, or at least correct.”

Rory sighed. That answered Mark’s rather insistent question. Part of him had been hoping that maybe she kept him around for more unprofessional reasons. Rory had been hoping that maybe she just liked his company, as much as he liked hers. Perhaps that was a little too much to hope for.

Dolph’s room was marked clearly with a keep out sign decorated by childishly scribbled ammo shooting down a would be intruder on the paper. They ignored it and opened the door to reveal a mess. The room looked like a hurricane had just blustered through it. School clothes, casual clothes, comics, stationary, toys and pretty much everything Dolph owned seemed to be scattered about the floor. You couldn’t even see the carpet underneath. Rory wondered whether there was a carpet underneath. How could this kid sleep at night? He wondered quietly to himself. Linda was thinking along the same lines. She knew that if she was a mother she would be horrified, and she already felt a little disgusted. How could someone live like this? She winced. This could take longer than she’d thought.

“Better get started.”

Rory ducked down onto the floor and started to delve through a nearby pile of rubbish that seemed to have gathered next to the bedside instead of a bin. After several minutes of this he was able to see under the bed. There was nothing of interest under it but the bed was always a prime suspect for hiding unwanted items in these cases. He started to search through the mattress, removing the layer of junk that covered it and placing the pile in the corridor where there was actually space. As they worked Dolph’s mother came upstairs and watched their progress with a bemused expression on her face.

“Good luck.”

“Is his room always like this?” Rory exclaimed.

“Pretty much. Hopefully having his stuff dumped in the corridor will force him to tidy up his room. I’ve tried everything, honestly he seems to hate cleanliness as much as a –“ she paused trying to think of a metaphor.

“A very mucky dog?” Rory suggested.

The woman laughed.

“I suppose that comparison will do for the time being.”

“We might be a while.”

“I guessed. You can stay for as long as you like, but I’ve got to go to work in a few hours’ time.”

“Ok. Thanks.”

She stood there for a few minutes watching the police search through her son’s room before going downstairs.

Rory started to peer through a pile of comics as she left.

“Beano! I remember these! You can’t go wrong with a good comic.”

He began to flip through the pages.

“Rory do you want to be here for the entire day?” Linda asked.

“If I spend the entire day reading these then yes.” he replied stubbornly.

As he glanced at the pile of comics he realised there was enough of them for him to stay the day.

“Well I want to go home.”

“Oi! You never know, you could find drugs inbetween the pages. That is what we’re looking for right?”

“Right.” she said sounding a little sad.

“What’s up?”

“My husband loved Beano too.”

“Oh.”

Every policeman in the department knew about Linda Porter’s tragic marriage. Linda and Michael Porter had been soul mates. The pair had truly loved each other and nothing was able to tear them apart. Except when her husband’s body turned up in a ditch in the middle of nowhere mauled horribly. It had broken Linda’s heart when her husband died, it happened on the way home from the school he worked at. She hadn’t stopped crying for several days. But she still came into work, so everyone saw. That is, until her co-workers ganged up on her and forced the woman to take a few days off to recover a little from the emotional trauma. Linda returned after those few days looking slightly more rested. She looked worse for wear on the day of his funeral undoubtedly but that was only to be expected. Ever since her husband died she was determined to stop anyone else from suffering a similar fate. However after several weeks in the office Linda realised that wasn’t physically possible with the amount of crime in London and her behaviour seemed to return to normal. Her armour had hardened. But occasionally you could still catch glimpses of the old, more carefree, vulnerable Linda. It was rare and you had to catch her at the right moment but Rory knew it was worth it. Her grieving had begun when he arrived at the police department about a month ago but it was barely a day ago he’d seen her smiling as she chased him.

“He just loved comics in general. Michael was a bit of a geek sometimes. He wanted to attend conventions for them and everything.” She smiled a little at the memory. “Of course he forced me to come with him and against my will I found myself enjoying it all.”

Rory felt rather uncomfortable as Linda continued to pour out her heart to him. She shouldn’t be talking to him about these things. He was just around at the right moment, that didn’t mean he was the right person to tell. He flipped through the comics a little more frantically looking for a distraction. Since he was not really reading the pages properly he got through the pile far quicker than he would’ve done normally. He was near the bottom when a packet fell out from the comic annual he was skimming. Glad for the excuse to steer the conversation away from Linda’s past love life he jumped at the opportunity to point out the white powder.

“Look at this!”

She wandered over to his side.

“Is that cocaine?”

“You tell me, you’re the expert.”

She took the packet from his hands and fingered the plastic material housing the substance curiously. After a little more close examination Linda came to a decision.

“That’s cocaine.”

“Maybe Diane was right.”

“Either way we need to bring that boy into the police station. If he possesses this kind of drug we can’t simply let him stay at home and get away with it. This is illegal.”

“Whoa we don’t know whether it’s on him!”

“In his bedroom then. It’s worth searching him as well though either way.”

“We need to tell his mother.”

“She’ll see us search him and will put two and two together. She’s not stupid.”

And with that they set off downstairs. By the time the pair got to the couch in the living room however there was no sign of Dolph. They followed the sound of clattering plates into the kitchen but only found his mother washing up.

“Can I help you officers?” she asked glancing up to look at them from over the sink.

“Where is your son?” questioned Linda.

“Oh he said he was just going out for a bit.” Mrs Andrews replied.

“He’s under arrest. Next time you see him you call us.” Rory informed her.

Mrs Andrews sighed wearily but it was clear to the pair that part of her had been expecting this.

“Oh dear. Okay. Why is he under arrest?”

“We found cocaine inside one of his comics.” Rory informed.

“WHAT!?” she exclaimed.

Rory jumped. However Linda didn’t react. She was relatively used to this whereas Rory was effectively a newbie in this kind of situation. Linda liked to think that she was Rory’s work experience. Anyways, she had dealt with overprotective parents before; this one simply seemed startled and worried for her son’s wellbeing. In a way this made their job a lot easier. Mrs Andrews was a lot more manageable if she wasn’t in denial. Linda gave the woman a few seconds to calm down before asking her another question.

“Where do you think he would go if he knew someone was onto his little secret?”

“Probably to see Lolita. He goes to her flat all the time.”

“Lolita?” Rory and Linda said in unison.

“She’s his sister.” The pair exchanged glances. “Is that a bad thing?”

“No of course not.” Linda reassured.

Rory thought his superior was lying. Lolita’s case was still talked about in the police department when he arrived. She had been jailed for a couple of years as a result of an offence similar to the one Dolph had committed. They’d found out in court that her druggie boyfriend hadn’t been helping matters. He too had been put in prison. But that was all in the past now. It was an old record but quite memorable. Rory had been sure to do a little ‘research’ on Dolph’s family when Linda told him they’d be paying a visit to the Andrews. Hopefully the girl had moved on from her boyfriend and her dodgy activities. Her criminal record had been suspiciously quiet ever since that incident.

“Where does Lolita live?” questioned Rory.

“A few blocks away: number 12, Golding Road.”

“Thank you for your help Mrs Andrews. We’ll be sure to inform you if there are any other developments.”

The mother nodded, still looking shocked that Dolph had dared to defy the law in such a way, and the pair left.

The police officers walked down the street. It was not the prettiest of sights, what with the rain pouring down in torrents. It darkened the skies, greyed the houses but worst of all, it drenched their uniforms. It truly was miserable weather. Rain never failed to annoy Linda. In fact she was an easy person to irritate but unfortunately for Rory it was difficult for him to keep his distance considering he had to stand right next to her if he wanted to see to Dolph and his sister. As they made their way through the gloomy streets the occasional car drove past splashing the dirty water at passers-by. Since Rory and Linda were the only people stupid enough to be out in the weather without some kind of coat they found that their trouser legs quickly became saturated. Linda let out a low rumble of a groan and Rory shook his fist at the car as it drove off into the distance. They were glad when they finally spotted the street sign for Golding Road. It was well hidden by surprisingly grey greenery. This was due to the dull lighting of the clouded skies. Fortunately it did not take them long to find number 12 in amongst everything. They stood outside the flat and fought for the sheltered position on the doorstep. By this point Rory didn’t care if she was his superior, he just wanted to get out of the rain. After several minutes of this Linda won and pressed the appropriate button.

“Hello who’s this?” came a voice through the small speaker.

“I’m Officer Porter, here with a fellow policeman. Is Dolph Andrews with you?”

“Nope.”

“Is it okay if we come in and ask you a few questions?”

“Actually I’m kind of busy at the moment.”

The officers exchanged glances. That was exactly the same excuse Dolph had used. It could just be coincidence, but what if it wasn’t?

“We’ll only be a few minutes.”

“Sorry you’re not coming in.”

“We can get a search warrant if necessary.”

“Good for you.”

Lolita stopped paying attention to the pair.

“Hello? Hello!” Linda turned to Rory. “She’s not going to let us in willingly.”

“By the time we are able to get a search warrant Dolph will have gone. Our best bet is to wait outside the flat for him to leave.” Rory suggested.

“A stakeout in this weather?” Linda spluttered.

“You go back to the station and get our coats. I’ll wait here.”

“Rory you’ll get pneumonia.”

“I’ll survive if you’re quick.” He flashed her a grin. “Go on.”

“Fine. But if you die from hypothermia it’s not my fault.”

Linda set off at a run and Rory began the wait.

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Lolita closed the curtains to the flat windows and turned to face Dolph. Her dark hair hung over her eyes in a side parting but he could tell that underneath the strands she was glaring at him through the smoky fog of the flat. Now the windows were all closed along with the curtains the swirling smoke from her cigarettes were confined to the room. She walked over to Dolph.

“Wanna tell me why you’re on the run?” she asked her little brother blowing a waft of smoke into his face.

“Nope.” Dolph said stubbornly, before coughing.

His eyes stung but he was used to the stench by now.

“I just covered for you I think it’s my business now. Tell me. It’s a statement not a question.”

Dolph knew he should tell her. His sister could get pretty scary if she didn’t get what she wanted.

“Fine. You know back when you were dating Roy-“

Lolita’s eyes widened. She’d dumped that jerk a long time ago but despite all of his flaws he’d been a very influential git.

“Oh please tell me you didn’t!”

“You know I got along with him well. Plus you know how huge his stash was. Don’t act so surprised.”

“So the cops are after you for illegal drug possession. Great. What made you think I wouldn’t turn you in?”

“Because you know how it feels.”

Dolph could tell from the look on her face that he’d won that side of the argument.

“Well you can’t camp out here forever. You heard those cops; they’ll get a search warrant. Where are you going to go?”

“Where did you go?”

“I didn’t have to run. You know that. Your girlfriend was the person who convinced me I needed help!” Lolita said angrily. “She’s too good for you anyways, why are you dating her?”

“Why does everybody keep saying that!?” Dolph exclaimed.

“So I’m not the first to notice then. I know what you’re like Dolph, hell I know what men in our family are like, dad’s a right player. Although mum pretends not to notice. So are you. Yet you’ve been stuck to Cally like a leech, care to explain why?”

“Maybe I love her!”

Lolita gave her brother a scorching look.

“Nope, I’m not buying it.”

“Worth a try.” Dolph sighed. Part of him knew that Lolita wouldn’t have been fooled that easily. “Look I’ve been working on something with her, it’s important.”

“Does she know any of this?”

“God you’re worse than mum!” he complained.

“I’m the big sister. It’s my job.”

“If I told her I was only interested in her for two reasons she’d dump me in an instant. Or - do something worse.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve been setting her up for all of this; I should know what happens when she gets angry.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Look, can I stay here for a while? I promise I’ll be out of your hair as soon as possible.”

Lolita narrowed her eyes.

“How soon is as soon as possible?”

“I’ll stay the night.”

“Nope - too long. The most time you’re getting out of me is an hour max and you’ve already used up most of it.”

She turned away.

“Please Loli!” Dolph begged.

Lolita whipped around.

“DON’T CALL ME THAT.” Dolph knew he’d crossed the line using that nickname. Only Roy ever called her that and to be honest it was obvious that despite her druggie jerk of a boyfriend she was still hung up on him like he was on crack. She knew the man was no good for her, but that didn’t make getting over him any easier. “Get out.” she snapped.

“What?”

Dolph didn’t know why he sounded so surprised. Even he knew that he had that coming.

“You heard me.” She grabbed him by the collar and shoved him towards the window. “Is the coast clear?”

He drew the curtains to one side and stared down through the glass.

“No.”

Dolph could clearly see the policeman who’d come to his house that afternoon shivering in front of the entrance gate in the cold. Lolita rolled her eyes.

“Then deal with him! You’ve gotten into enough fights to know how.”

“This is different, he’s an adult.”

“Oh for god’s sake!” Lolita shrieked. She stormed over to a cupboard and retrieved a wine bottle. She pushed it into Dolph’s hand. “Use your imagination!”

After that her brother made a run for it. He knew if he stuck around whilst his sister was in such a rage he wouldn’t like where he ended up. The policeman was alone and looked pretty cold anyways. Lolita was right; it wouldn’t take much to overpower the man.

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Rory was freezing. Part of him was beginning to believe that Linda was right. At this rate he was bound to catch some kind of cold and it would be his own fault. He stamped his feet in an attempt to warm himself. It wasn’t very effective. He started to pace up and down the pavement beside the gate. But this meant that for a few seconds he had his back to the flat. So he didn’t see the teenager leaving the house, he didn’t see the boy charge towards him and he didn’t see the bottle raised above his head until it was too late.

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It took a while for Linda to get back to the police station. She’d got a bit lost on the way there; her navigational skills weren’t the best the department had to offer. But her proudness ensured that she didn’t ask for directions. She didn’t want to give anyone the excuse to ridicule her. By the time she finally arrived it had been at least five minutes. She felt rather guilty about leaving Rory out in the torrential rain for that long. Linda grabbed the coats and then set off in her car. In any other circumstance she would’ve gone for a police car as the bright siren and lights guaranteed a clear passage through London but since they were aiming for stealth this time she drove back to the flat in her regular car. Naturally, she got caught up in traffic and every minute she spent just sitting there waiting for the queue to budge allowed her another minute to worry about Rory. She knew she was being silly, he was a grown man; he knew what he was doing. But she just had this bad feeling. Linda couldn’t define it but she felt like something was wrong. Then again, she got the same feeling whenever she went to the toilet (she saw too many horror movies as a child, long story). It was probably another case of pointless paranoia that she seemed to get far too often these days. This thought calmed her down considerably and she felt herself relax in the driving seat. Eventually the line moved and she was able to get to the flat. She parked on the side of the pavement (one of the advantages of being head of the police department is that you’re far less likely to get tickets) but her heart sank as she saw Rory sprawled out on the wet pavement. She ran over to him. Judging by the saturation of his uniform he’d been lying there for a while. On the bright side at least she knew it wasn’t pneumonia that had felled him. There were shards of glass strewn around his head. One chunk clearly read: white wine. Using her shoe she kicked the stray pieces away from him before kneeling at his side.

“Rory can you hear me?” He let out a low moan. Linda let out a sigh of relief. “Thank god. Are you okay?”

He tried to sit up but fell back.

“What does it look like?” he groaned. “I feel like an upturned turtle.”

She smiled. That was more like it. She placed her arm around his back for support.

“Up in three okay? One, two, three!” With her help Rory stood up. He swayed slightly as he came to his feet. “Whoa, easy. Did you see who hit you?”

“Dolph.” he murmured.

“That boy’s in big trouble now. Drugs is one thing, but assaulting a police officer is going to have the department a lot more committed to finding him.”

“Yeah.”

Linda could tell he hadn’t processed any of the information she’d just told him. His eyes had that unfocussed look to them that meant he was far away.

“Come on, let’s get you cleaned up.”

Together they stumbled over to the car. Linda helped Rory get into the passenger seat beside hers and he did up his seatbelt as she sat down in the driving seat.

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Aileen had just got home from work. Cally was still not back from school yet. She was probably taking the long route with her friends. That was not unusual. She sighed as the phone rang and glared in its vague direction. She’d only just got home herself! She pondered whether she should pick it up or not as she collapsed onto the sofa. Finally the irritating ringtone stopped and the answerphone took the message.

“Hello. This is Doctor Snelling and we’ve belatedly found out something rather alarming in your daughter’s test results. Please call me back as soon as-“

Aileen’s eyes widened, she ran towards the phone and grabbed it cutting off the doctor mid-sentence.

“Hello, sorry I was just in the kitchen.” she lied. “What were you saying?”

“I was re-analysing your daughter’s test results and we’ve found traces of a rather dangerous drug in her system.”

“WHAT!?” Aileen yelled down the phone. Finding out about her daughter’s weekend parties had been worrying enough but now? What else had Cally been keeping secret from her? There was silence on the other end of the line for a few minutes. “Sorry, continue.”

“It was cocaine. Has your daughter been showing any of the following symptoms lately?” Aileen listened carefully as the man started to list them. “Mental alertness, increased energy, mood disturbances, confidence, paranoia, irritability, aggressiveness or careless risk taking.”

Aileen frowned. It was virtually all of the above.

“Aggressiveness and mood disturbances most definitely, paranoia yes,” she said as she remembered how Cally seemed to think everyone was out to get her and her boyfriend. “irritability yes, confidence yes,”

She would’ve continued but the doctor interrupted her.

“I think it’s safe to assume your daughter has been taking cocaine.”

Aileen was speechless. But it didn’t last long.

“What do I do?” she asked.

“I would suggest searching her room and confiscating the drug if you find any of it.”

“What does it look like?”

“It’ll most likely be a form of white powder.”

“Okay, any other suggestions?”

“Talk to her, and I don’t mean yell, I mean hold an intervention if necessary. Talk about the impacts drugs can have on your life, lecture her about health and remind her that you’re only telling her this because you love her.” Aileen frowned. That was more of her husband’s way to go about things. She did the yelling, he did the understanding but between them they both shared out the care. Aileen didn’t always show it however. “Ask her about her friends, quite often peer pressure forces kids into these things.”

“Okay. Thank you for your help Doctor Snelling.”

Aileen hung up. She’d only just put the phone down when Cally entered the house. Just typical; well, better get it done and over with, she thought to herself. Aileen ran round to the front door and stood in front of her daughter.

“Cally I need to talk to you.”

“Not now mum.” she croaked.

“Cally this can’t wait.” On hearing this news Cally ducked underneath Aileen’s outstretched arms and started to run. “Cally are you taking drugs?” Aileen blurted out.

She didn’t even think her daughter had heard her. Cally ran upstairs. Her mother sighed. She wasn’t very good at this. It was all about finding the right moment. So she went into the study, sat down and started to research the best ways to help her daughter. Aileen thought Cally was going to her bedroom but she couldn’t have been more wrong.

Cally skidded into the bathroom, locked the door behind her and hung her head over the toilet. She felt REALLY sick. Sick enough to be sick which was why she was kneeling in front of the loo. The exhausted feeling seemed to overwhelm her. She sagged over the toilet seat, her neck touching the cool surface. It was shockingly cold in comparison to the warmth of Cally’s skin. Finally she threw up into the toilet. She closed her eyes, not wanting to examine the contents. When she opened them again however she was disturbed to notice that the filth her stomach had produced was pitch black. That was not normal. She got to her feet dizzily and flushed the toilet. Cally staggered to the mirror. Her face was pale and sweaty and she felt *so* tired. Her reflection seemed to blur in the mirror before her and then everything went black.

Downstairs Aileen heard a loud thud. She shook her head and wondered what her daughter was throwing about the room this time. She’d obviously not had a very good day at school from the way she’d reacted to her mother when she entered the house. Aileen hoped she wasn’t wrecking anything expensive.

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Dolph was still running. He needed to find a way out; somewhere to go. He knew that by now there was only one option and he just had to hope the police hadn’t visited her yet to warn the family of the danger he posed. He knew for a fact that she’d be in a pretty bad state by this point. He knocked on Cally’s door, desperately hoping that Jo wasn’t there to kick him out but to his surprise instead of one of the girls opening it their mother did.

“Hello Dolph.” she greeted.

He frowned slightly; the girls always beat their mother to the door.

“I need to see Cally.”

Aileen’s eyes narrowed. What if this youngster was part of it all?

“Why?”

“She’s my girlfriend. She said she was feeling a little poorly after lunch. I want to see her.” Dolph explained.

Of course that wasn’t his real reason but it made him sound a lot more caring. Aileen’s expression softened.

“Come in. She’s in her bedroom.”

He smirked, he was getting better at this whole lying thing. Dolph dashed inside not bothering to keep the caring façade up. Fortunately for him Aileen mistook his determination for wanting to see his girlfriend. In a way, she was right.

Dolph walked into Cally’s bedroom but to his surprise there was no sign of her.

“Cal?” he called. No reply. He checked several other bedrooms before trying the bathroom, knocking on the door first. “Cally? You in there?” Again there was no reply. He tried the door handle. It was locked. Aileen was downstairs and now that he thought about it he remembered Cally saying something earlier that day about her no-good sister staying at her father’s house. The only person who could be in the bathroom was Cally. So he started to pick the lock. There was a reason why he got away easily with most of his thefts. After a few minutes the door swung open to reveal Cally lying on the floor unconscious. He sighed in irritation. It had begun. He just hoped his plan worked before she dried herself out. Dolph walked into the bathroom and locked the door behind him. It was just them now.

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“Linda stop fussing I’m fine!” complained Rory. “Don’t you have a case to solve? Or a murder suspect to catch? You need to tell Cally’s parents about her boyfriend.”

She eyed the bandage wrapped round his head.

“Are you sure? That was one nasty knock you took.”

He sighed. This was not the first time they’d had this conversation.

“It was one lousy bump don’t worry about it. Can I go home now?”

“Okay. But I’m driving you.”

“What?! I’m not a baby!” he exclaimed.

“Well that’s news to me.” Linda teased. “Didn’t the doctor tell you not to drive anyways?”

“Yes.” Rory admitted.

“Then come on.”

“Oi!” he protested. Then he paused, perhaps he could use this moment to his advantage. “I’m only letting you drive if you promise to go give Cally’s parents a house visit. Each.”

Linda groaned but agreed.

“Let’s get you home.”

She took him by the hand and started to lead him out of the police department. Mark, who sat only a few desks away, raised an eyebrow. Rory simply rolled his eyes. Linda was acting a little overprotective as far as he was concerned and she knew it, but in doing so she was letting her guard down a little and the professionally strict feel about her was melting away. Trust Mark to get the wrong idea.

Eventually they were stepping into Rory’s car. He gave her the car key reluctantly and she put it in the ignition. The engine started to rumble and they set off.

“Linda?” he asked.

“Yes?” she responded.

“Why am I assigned to this case?”

She sighed.

“I already told you, it’s because you correct my mistakes and you owe me.”

“Surely *you* owe me by now.” he pointed out. “After today-“

Linda winced. He was using the guilt persuasion technique and it was working. She’d left him alone for five minutes and look what had happened.

“Sorry.” she apologised.

Rory backtracked, maybe that wasn’t such a good point to make.

“It’s not your fault, it was my idea.” Linda still felt responsible however. He was her partner. She was meant to keep an eye out for him and vice versa. He hadn’t failed his part of the bargain. Rory sensed that she was unconvinced. “You can’t be responsible for everything.”

“It’s a bad habit of mine.”

“Well you need to stop it.”

“I’m head of the police department it’s my job to be responsible.”

“You need to relax once in a while though.” Rory insisted.

“If I relax something gets past me.”

“You were never like this before Michael died.”

“Don’t say his name.” Linda snapped.

Rory gulped. He had a feeling he’d crossed the line.

“Sorry.” he apologised.

“*I’m* sorry, you’re right. I just miss him so much. When I first saw that girl’s body I recognised the injuries. It was mauled just like his was. I want to capture the person who’s responsible so badly.”

“You can only do that if you give yourself a break.”

“I guess you’re right. But that’s not going to happen.”

They continued in silence for a bit.

“Why did you really get me on this case Linda? Answer me honestly. Please.”

“You remind me of my husband in many ways, you know how to cheer me up, you know how to calm me down, everything. I know, it’s selfish but there’s the reason. Having you round keeps me sane.” Rory found that he had very little to say to that. He reminded his superior of her husband? That was…freaky and slightly annoying. He wanted to be himself, unique, not a copy of some guy he was jealous of anyways. Jealous? Where did that come from? Was he jealous of Michael? He knew the answer was yes almost instantly but he wasn’t sure why. The guy was dead for Christ’s sake! The car came to a stop. “Here you are.”

Linda parked it in the drive.

“Thanks.” Rory said.

He got out and proceeded to walk to his house. He had a lot to think about. Maybe, just maybe, Mark was right.

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It was done. Dolph slapped her face. Hard. At this gesture Cally’s eyelids flickered open.

“Dolph?” she gasped. “What are you doing here?”

“I came to see you. Duh!”

“W-what am I doing on the floor?” she stuttered and got to her feet.

Dolph remained sitting on the tiles watching her totter towards the bathroom door.

“I dunno.” He shrugged. “Look, listen to me I need you.”

To Cally this sounded romantic, but that was not what Dolph had in mind.

“I need you too. Dolph, I think I –“

His eyes widened in alarm at the thought of incoming commitment and he quickly cut her off.

“Can I hole up here for a few days?”

Cally was surprised by his request but pleased nonetheless. Maybe he was having Cally withdrawal symptoms similar to her own for him that afternoon?

“You can stay here for as long as you want.”

“Great.” he said getting to his feet.

Dolph strolled past her and out of the bathroom. Cally staggered after him. She was beginning to feel confident again, like she was on top of the world. Now he was by her side she could take any risk. Letting him stay was going to be a big one, making sure her mother didn’t know would be easy enough but when her bratty sister came back to stay at the house in a few days’ time things would get difficult. But Cally was willing to go through it all. Her Dolph was addictive.

“I’ll try and make space for you in the bedroom but sleeping arrangements could be fiddly…" she started to explain.

“I’ll sleep with you.” Dolph announced abruptly.

“What?!” Cally exclaimed.

She was just a teenager and despite her will to risk anything attitude even she thought that was a bad idea. School was constantly preaching about stuff Cally didn’t particularly want to think about, this was one of those things. The rumours constantly going round gave her a feeling that Dolph had knocked girls up before.

“You promised me that at the party on Saturday anyways.” he reminded.

“I was drunk Dolph.”

“But you meant it.”

“Fine! You can sleep in my bed. But no funny stuff! You can keep your clothes on too thank you very much.”

Dolph groaned. He felt cheated of a good night. At least he was halfway there. Besides, once the stuff he’d given her in the bathroom kicked in he’d be able to do whatever he wanted with her whether she liked it or not.

“CALLY! Dinner!” yelled Aileen.

“Got to go. You make yourself at home. I’ll tell mum you’ve left.”

Cally kissed him lightly on the cheek before she went downstairs.

As she joined her mother at the dinner table suddenly Cally felt extreme happiness. Her boyfriend was staying over for the night! Why shouldn’t she be happy? Maybe she should even celebrate! They could play music loud and dance together and - Her mother noticed the way her daughter seemed to flounce about the room as she came over. Mood disturbances. Just like Doctor Snelling had said. They started to eat.

“Cally. You know that thing I was trying to talk to you about earlier,” Aileen began.

“What thing? Oh and by the way Dolph has left.” Cally chirped.

Aileen raised an eyebrow, she didn’t particularly care about Dolph’s disappearance, and it was completely off topic. Suspiciously off topic, but it was probably just part of Cally’s strange drug induced mood swings. In a way it was nice to know that this behaviour wasn’t just hormones. This reminded her, time to get back to the point.

“I tried to tell you when you came in, oh never mind. I’m telling you now. Doctor Snelling phoned.”

“Who’s she?”

“He. Doctor Snelling is the person who analysed your latest test results.”

“That must be such a bo-ring job!”

Aileen ignored this comment.

“Well interesting or not, the results were quite important.”

“What did she say?”

“That you’ve been taking Cocaine.”

“She’s loopy!” Cally giggled. For some reason she just couldn’t take that statement seriously. “You don’t believe that do you mum?”

“Cally he’s a doctor. He knows what he is doing.”

“So do I. I’m not stupid mum.”

“Cally you’ve been showing all the symptoms, don’t lie to me. Tell me honestly, have you been doing drugs?”

Cally almost laughed aloud.

“Don’t you trust me?”

But then she felt angry. She wanted to hit something. How dare her mother accuse her of such a thing!

“After this weekend, no. Now answer my question.”

“WELL FOR YOUR INFORMATION NO, I HAVE NOT BEEN TAKING DRUGS!” Cally screamed.

Aileen took a deep breath and reminded herself of what the website said. It was only to be expected that her daughter would launch into some form of denial, or in Cally’s case: explode, but at least one of them had to remain calm. Aileen was the adult, which meant she had to be the mature one. She sighed, this could be difficult.

“Cally you’re in denial. Drugs kill.”

“SO CAN CALPOL!”

“I’m only saying this because I love you.”

“IF YOU LOVED ME MAYBE YOU WOULD TRUST ME! DOLPH LOVES ME, YOU DON’T! YOU’VE BEEN DOING RESEARCH HAVEN’T YOU? YOU JUST DON’T TRUST ME! NOBODY DOES! EVERYBODY IS OUT TO GET ME! NOBODY CARES!”

“Then you won’t mind me searching your bedroom.”

Uh oh. Cally started to protest as loudly as she could in the hopes that maybe Dolph would hear her from upstairs.

“You can’t SEARCH MY BEDROOM MUM. That’s MY OWN PRIVATE SPACE that YOU ARE INVADING!”

Aileen ignored her daughter and began the climb up the steep staircase. Cally ran after her frantically hoping that Dolph had got the message.

It wasn’t long until her mother opened the door to her bedroom. Cally held her breath and peered over her parent’s shoulder. Dolph was nowhere to be seen. She let out a quiet sigh of relief.

“Thank god.” Cally whispered. But the danger wasn’t over yet. Aileen began to search the room. “You’re not going to find anything!” Cally announced loudly.

Aileen threw up the covers of the duvet. A small transparent packet containing white powder lay under it.

“Then what’s this?” She approached her daughter trying not to let the anger show. “Would it really kill you to tell me the truth? This can kill you if you don’t.”

She remembered what the website had said. If she got angry then she should leave the conversation for the time being and come back to it later. So she stormed out of the room. Cally sat on the bed as her mother slammed the door.

“Dolph you can come out now.” Her boyfriend fell out of the wardrobe. “Would you care to explain to me what that packet of drugs was doing on my bed?”

“Your mum’s got the wrong idea.” he said getting to his feet.

“Then what is it?”

“Flour.” he replied lamely. “I needed it for food tech today at school; it must’ve fallen out of my pocket.”

To his relief Cally seemed stupid enough to buy his excuse.

“I knew you wouldn’t do something that idiotic.” she smiled. Then her eyes bulged. “Uurgh I think I’m going to be sick!”

# Chapter 5

“Just think of swans.”

“What?!” she exclaimed.

“Any distraction will do.”

“Oh.”

“For example the food fight I’m planning for tomorrow.”

Dolph knew it was careless but he was still going to school in the morning. He needed to. His plan was slowly unfolding; he knew Cally was sufficiently prepared. Now he just needed to force her to face his enemies in the school canteen. If the police showed he could turn her on them.

“Food fight?” she murmured and swayed before him. He smirked. Looked like what he had given her was finally starting to kick in. It had taken long enough. “Dolph I – I – don’t feel –“ She fell backwards onto the bed. “What’s happening to me?”

He smiled and came towards her with a leering expression on his face.

“Don’t worry Cal, I’m going to make it all better.” he whispered.

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Jo was late. By the time she arrived at her father’s house it was getting dark. She crept inside wondering if she could pass off a lie about her having got back ages ago and him simply not noticing. Probably not. It was harder to look into her father’s eyes and lie to him than it was with her mother and if she looked away he’d know she wasn’t telling the truth. She’d just needed some time to think on the way home, unfortunately it had taken a little longer than expected due to unforeseen difficulties. Jo had a little more on her mind than she realised. So she decided to put together a little list:

1. A good friend of mine died a few days ago and I saw her corpse.
2. Cally blames me for it all.
3. Mum knows about the parties.
4. Cally collapsed at the weekend.
5. My parents are one paper away from being officially divorced.
6. Cally gave me a concussion.
7. My friends are suspicious of me.

Jo thought that just about covered everything. Now she had something new to add to the list.

1. Dad’s going to be pissed off with me.

It was at times like these when she really missed Diane. Diane had listened, a trait most of Jo’s friends were not known well for and she’d given really good advice. She knew it was selfish, but Jo missed her advice almost as much as she missed her friend. Jo found herself thinking back over the good times, when Diane was alive, before Cally had her temper tantrums, back when they’d been one happy family and prior to when Cally had been dating Dolph. Funnily enough her temper tantrums seemed to arrive barely weeks after she met him. Strange that.

Jo slipped her shoes off and placed them on the rack before tiptoeing up to her bedroom. She was amazed that she’d got this far. If she was at her mother’s house by now Aileen would be looming over her tapping her foot in anger and demanding to know what had kept her. She dumped her school bags in the bedroom and was considering whether she should do homework or not when her father popped his head around the door.

“Dinner’s ready.”

“Oh. I’ll be down in a sec.”

“Don’t be too long.” he warned and set off downstairs.

Jo sighed. It didn’t look like he’d even noticed her lateness. Her father was too busy with work. That was part of the reason why their parents had broken up. Aileen claimed that John didn’t have enough time for her. This dissolved into the usual arguments and Jo would hide under her bed covers as the two adults yelled downstairs. She missed the way their parents used to look at each other, with love in their eyes and happy smiles. Now when their eyes met they seemed to fill with angry fire and their faces had foul frowns written all over them. Cally would refuse to hide, but that didn’t mean it wasn’t affecting her. She told everybody she was fine, but around the same time the pair split up she started organising the weekend parties. Jo saw this as her new way of venting although Cally only got angry when her sister brought it up.

Her father never said much about his work and his study was strictly off limits to all those not wanting to die a painful death of guilt. John Sanders had such a way with that emotion. He could force it onto you no matter how little reason you had to feel it. Jo often wondered what could be so important it could split him away from her mother. Now she felt the wounded curiosity consuming her body more than ever. She walked out of her bedroom. Her father’s study was just a few rooms away from hers at the end of the hall. The coast was clear. What did she have to lose?

Jo crept towards the door glancing nervously at the stairs every few minutes. Finally she was in front of it. Her hand reached out to the doorknob. She was sweating. It was ridiculous how much of an adrenaline rush she got from this one simple action.

“I need to get out more.” Jo murmured to herself.

She opened the door. Its loud foreboding creak made her hold her breath but her father did not come rushing upstairs. She stepped inside.

The room seemed to be a miniature laboratory. It gleamed a bright white even without the light on. Test tubes were lined up neatly amongst the scrunched up piles of paper on the desktop. The multi-coloured liquids in them glowed fluorescently giving the work space a rather eerie lighting. She took a step inside and noticed a dusty red helmet hanging off a coat hanger on the wall alongside goggles and lab coat. She would’ve explored further but then her father’s voice made her jump.

“Come on Jo! Dinner’s out.” he called.

She grabbed a smaller piece of scrunched up paper from the bin (which was filled to the brim with them), stuffed it into her blazer pocket and raced downstairs closing the door carefully behind her so it wouldn’t emit the same loud squeak it had on entry.

She sat opposite her father at the dinner table. In an attempt to act casual she kept her eyes down, focussing on the table. It was new and the oak wood surface was so shiny it reflected her face. She glanced up and raised an eyebrow.

“Dad have you been polishing the table?”

It was not unknown for her father to do this.

“I might have.” he said teasingly. Then he frowned. “Is it that obvious?”

Jo laughed.

“It makes a damn good mirror.”

He stared at the wood and started to beam.

“Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?”

At this a smile began to cover Jo’s face. Her father’s grins were rather infectious.

“Angelina Jolie?” she suggested.

Jo knew for a fact her father had a huge crush on the actress. It was the reason why the only films starring the her that they owned were kept a secret from Jo’s mother. Aileen got jealous very easily.

“I was going to say you silly, but now you mention it-“ he trailed off into a daydream.

“Dad?”

“Yes?”

“Food.”

“Ah right.”

With that brief reminder they started to chow down on the pie laid out before them. It looked like her father had finally got the settings on the microwave right. The pie was not too burnt and was even edible! Jo was impressed. John Sanders was notoriously bad at cooking even on the simplest levels. It was a little embarrassing sometimes. She had learnt the hard way never to invite friends round for tea at her father’s house. That incident happened after shortly after John Sanders moved into his new house.

A wave of nostalgia hit her at this memory and brought along a flurry of others. She remembered that time Cally had come home to her father’s house, yelling about her day. Jo and Cally shared a bedroom and when her sister had barged in she prepared herself for the throwing of furniture (her preparation consisted of standing beside the wardrobe so she could use its wooden doors as protection) but instead Cally simply continued to shout. She glanced briefly at the light bulb on the ceiling. After a few minutes Cally went silent and it started to ooze a rather disgusting liquid. This memory reminded Jo a lot of the warped story Yasmine had described at lunchtime. By the time John Sanders came upstairs there was a puddle of the gunge on the floor. He attended to Cally first however, with one huge hug. She virtually fell into his arms, all of a sudden crying and exhausted. Once she was fully comforted he came over to the liquid on the floor. He dipped a finger in it and said that the light bulb was leaking oil. Jo had believed him at the time, knowing nothing about light bulbs, but even now she could remember spotting a knowing look in his eyes. He hadn’t told them everything. This knowledge made her think back to her father’s study she’d intruded on barely a few minutes ago. Her free hand clenched on the paper in her pocket as she swallowed her mouthful of meat.

“Dad what is your job like?”

John glanced up at his daughter mid-chew.

“Boring.” he mumbled.

Having had practise at understanding her father when he had his mouth full Jo was just about able to translate his word.

“Come on tell me something about it!” Jo insisted.

“Why so interested all of a sudden?” replied John who had neatly polished his plate with his mouth.

Jo supressed a smile, her father had a most unruly appetite. This was rather unfortunate considering his cooking skills. Plus he was not known for his table manners. Eating was more of a race against time than a time for conversation so it was only natural that he was going to spray his lovely new table with stuff that didn’t bear thinking about.

“Why so defensive?” she asked as he reached for seconds.

“Touché.”

“Well?”

John gestured at the remainder of pie sitting on Jo’s plate. For the moment it was rather neglected.

“Aren’t you going to eat that?”

She rolled her eyes. He was avoiding the subject completely. As per usual.

“Maybe when you tell me a little about what you do for a living! You just disappear into your study for hours on end and I’m getting tired of it.”

“Can I have your pie please?”

She could tell from the grin on her father’s face that he was fooling around but this simply bugged her.

“NO. Dad why are you so secretive? It’s just a job.”

“I’m not being secretive; I just don’t want to bore you with the details. Trust me; my work bores me on a day to day basis.” he lied, shoving another spoonful of pastry into his mouth.

Jo didn’t believe him. Her father was just as bad a liar as she was sometimes.

“Then why do you bother with it? You spend hours locked up in your little study.”

“Don’t call it that, study sounds oppressive. Think of it as my little studio.”

“But it is oppressive! I virtually never see you because of that damn room!” Jo felt an edge of desperation coming into her voice. This was ridiculous. “Dad the most I know about anything you do is that it’s something to do with the government.”

“Well that’s true.” John remained infuriatingly calm.

“Oh come on! It’s not like it’s top secret!”

“Actually I think you’ll find it is.” Jo’s mouth hung open in a small ‘o’ shape. He surveyed her, in a way that made her want to apologise instantly for ever daring to protest, before pushing away his plate. “Speaking of work I have stuff to be getting on with. You can finish off my pie, I’m not really hungry.”

He stood up and left the table. Jo was tongue tied. She had not been expecting that, of all revelations. She sighed. Jo had seen the look on his face, he was upset and she had a feeling he’d gone up to the study for more than just simple work reasons. Not that his work was that simple as far as she was concerned.

She finished his slice of pie which only made her feel guiltier before going up to her bedroom. There, in the confines of her room, she took the sheet of crushed paper from her blazer pocket and unfolded it but before she could examine any of its content the doorbell rang. Knowing her father was busy, most likely avoiding her, Jo went to answer the door.

“Hello?”

She was surprised to find herself greeting Officer Porter.

“I need to talk to your father.”

“Is it about his work?” asked Jo with sudden interest.

“No.” Linda noticed how the girl seemed to deflate when she heard that reply. “It’s about your sister’s boyfriend.”

“Really?”

Jo’s eyes were suddenly twinkling.

“Yes. Is your father available?”

“Erm…” Jo glanced upstairs. “Not really. I can take a message.”

Jo felt a little like an answerphone on saying those words but ignored the feeling and listened eagerly.

“Okay.” said Linda reluctantly. “Dolph is on the run at the moment for criminal reasons. If any of your family see him please contact us.”

“Criminal reasons?”

“We found cocaine in his bedroom.” At the mention of ‘we’ Jo couldn’t help but notice the absence of Rory by the officer’s side. As for the cocaine situation she wasn’t terribly shocked. In fact she felt rather smug. Hadn’t she told Cally that Dolph was bad for her? Yes she had. Repeatedly. Now she’d finally be able to tell her sister to her face “I told you so”. This visit from the police would unfailingly prove her point. However bearing in mind that she still had the bruise on her face from the heels she had a feeling that mocking Cally would be a bad idea. “You don’t look that shocked.” Linda commented.

“I wouldn’t put it past Dolph to be *that* stupid.” Jo replied.

“Well please tell your father. I’m just about to pay a visit to your mother’s house.”

“Sure.”

Jo closed the door and walked back over to the dinner table. She knew she should probably tell her father about it straight away but she was also aware that facing him now would not be fun. As if she wasn’t feeling guilty enough! There was no harm in looking at the crinkled paper she’d been on the verge of examining before. She flattened out the material on the shiny surface of the table and gasped. On the paper before her was a picture of a stranger’s head. The person’s eyes were leaking a disgusting black liquid that Jo thought seemed all too familiar. She found herself wincing at the sight of it.

The picture was labelled in great detail. It was an old diagram. Jo wondered why her father had thrown it away in the first place as he’d obviously gone to a lot of effort with the annotations. She squinted at the small, squished blocks of handwriting and tried to read her father’s words. The first thing she read was the title as it was the largest bit of writing on the sheet and therefore the easiest part to read, although not necessarily to understand.

*Ocular discharge*

Jo guessed that this meant eye leakage in a more scientific language. Then she started to look at the labels.

*Haemohydro (haemoglobin-hydrocarbon) is present.*

Those bracketed words seemed familiar. Jo was sure they’d been mentioned in at least one science lesson at school. She thought about it in a bit more depth. Jo wasn’t expecting to be successful so she surprised herself with her own scientific knowledge as she remembered that a hydrocarbon was a kind of fuel such as oil and that haemoglobin was something found in the blood.

*Tear glands have been infected by telekinesis. Or something tele-like.*

What? Now that made no sense whatsoever. Jo was beginning to understand why her father had thrown this sheet away.

*Calculations show the person implicating the damage will have struck from approximately a metre away without physically touching the victim.*

Below this were various sums scrawled into the page corner. Jo couldn’t understand a word of it.

*0.16 recurring people out of 10 suffer from this medical problem. Does that mean that 0.16 recurring percent of the population are made up of people capable of telekinesis?*

There was a huge question mark scrawled over this section of the paper so the sentence itself was barely readable. Then underneath he scrawled the answer.

*NO.*

This comment was obviously added at a later date.

*See medical records for evidence of supernatural influences. Doctors claim it is a genetic disease but data disproves their theories and backs up mine. Melinda claimed to hear a high pitched giggling that nobody else could, not uncommon with this situation.*

At the bottom of the page Jo could just about make out the conclusion. There was not much space on the page left for it and the tiny writing was difficult to decipher.

*Conclusion: Melinda Edwards was victim to telekinetic influences. She displays similar traits I have researched from other records. The woman who murdered her was the second to be given the chemical but it was a strong overdose and her own powers killed her from the inside out as they did to Edwards.*

It seemed that the more Jo read the less she understood. What chemical? Powers? None of it made any sense. She felt rather concerned about her father’s mental health by this point.

Jo turned the paper over checking to see if anything useful was written on the back. There was. It was one of her father’s to do lists he always wrote when he was panicking about something.

*Cally - Keep a close eye on her after that leak.*

*Check chemicals for contamination.*

*Make sure Jo hasn’t been infected.*

This time Jo had a better idea of what was going on. Some time ago, after her parents had split up her father spent more and more time in the study. One day Jo was in the middle of doing her homework and she heard violent coughing from the room. Cally had insisted that they go and check it out. So her sister had led the way. Together the girls had stood outside the door cautious of whether they should or shouldn’t enter but then their father rushed out from the room spluttering. His clothes were covered in grey smoke and more of the substance wafted out of the air. He was wearing a helmet much to their surprise. The substance wafted right into Cally’s face. John had warned them both to get back and closed the door behind him. Whenever the girls referred to that incident he said it was just a minor leak, of what they had no clue, but he always looked at Cally in concern when the leak was mentioned.

Now Jo understood a lot more of that. The chemicals he talked about constantly in his notes were the fluorescent liquids in the test tubes and judging from the helmet he had been wearing at the time and the gear on the coat hanger that Jo had seen when she investigated her father’s study, there was high risk involved with handling them. Somehow these chemicals were related to the supernatural powers her father mentioned. Telekinesis; surely he had to be joking!? But then again if the substance that Cally had got a face full of that day was the result of a chemical experiment gone wrong did that mean that she too had these powers? Jo thought back carefully. Had her sister ever shown evidence of being able to move or control things with her mind?

“Yes.” she gasped. “I don’t believe I am genuinely considering this!”

Jo felt crazy for thinking it but the time that light bulb had leaked supposedly oil in their bedroom Cally had been angry. Really angry. But when John came in she’d been distracted and the leak had stopped. She’d been exhausted afterwards. The only decent excuse for this was that the disturbing leak had been a drain on her powers. Then there was today with Mrs Richardson. The teacher had been yelling at her before she started hearing voices and the leaking projector fell down. Yet that was by far a drastic change in Cally’s powers when compared to the meagre light bulb incident. Something must’ve boosted her power. But what?

Then Jo started to consider the disturbing options. What if Cally’s boosted powers could kill? What if Cally had killed Diane that fateful weekend? What if Cally had killed Mr Porter, that friendly substitute teacher whose remains were found in a ditch a while back? He had always got on Cally’s nerves but personally Jo had liked him. She felt a shiver of fear weave its way through her body. Could her sister have done all of this? Jo knew it was all very well to speculate, but she had to know what was boosting her sister’s powers (if she had them, but by now Jo had herself convinced) if she wanted to know the facts.

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Dolph leered over his girlfriend. As he’d thought, she was totally helpless.

“D-Dolph I feel – h-help me!” she squeaked.

He could do whatever he wanted. Then the doorbell rang, interrupting his thoughts and actions.

“Back in a sec Cal. Don’t you move a muscle.”

“I – I don’t think I can!”

I should hope so too, Dolph thought to himself. It had taken a lot of bargaining and unreasonable promises to get that kind of drug off Roy. Although he was rather impressed by the pain factor, that something supernatural about his girlfriend made things like these ten times worse. He crept over to the stairs and watched Aileen answer it. Unfortunately his fears were correct: the policewoman from earlier stood on the doorstep.

“I suppose you have more questions to ask my daughter?” huffed Aileen.

“Actually I was here to inform you that her boyfriend has been doing drugs but that sounds like a good idea too.” Linda agreed.

“WHAT!?” Aileen screeched. She’d been on the verge of an explosion ever since her near shouting match with Cally. “I BET HE WAS THE ONE WHO TURNED HER ONTO THEM!”

“Excuse me?”

“I GOT A CALL FROM THE DOCTOR TODAY SAYING THAT TEST RESULTS SHOWED CALLY HAD BEEN TAKING COCAINE!”

At this Linda frowned.

“In that case do you mind if I search her bedroom.”

“I ALREADY DID! FOUND A PACKET OF THE STUFF!”

“Well, my search methods may be more thorough.”

Aileen seemed to deflate a little at this news and nodded. Dolph rushed over to the bathroom door and locked it. Hopefully that would convince both the policewoman and Aileen that Cally was on the loo instead of being hidden in her own bedroom by her runaway boyfriend. He ran back inside the bedroom with barely any time on his hands. The policewoman was in the house. He groaned. So much for the perfect opportunity to get into Cally’s pants at long last! What a waste. He sighed and loomed over her once more.

“Can you move Cal?”

“N-no.” He couldn’t be bothered to fake concern. He picked her up and simply slung her over his shoulder. She let out a scream at this. “It – it hurts.”

Startled by her yell, he dropped her. She screamed louder. Both the policewoman and Aileen ran upstairs. Dolph could hear their hurried footsteps on the staircase outside the bedroom.

“Damn!” he swore. He knelt down beside his girlfriend. “Cal I need you to be quite for me yeah? It’ll be over soon.”

“O-okay.”

Despite everything Cally still trusted him. It wasn’t his fault he was clumsy. She knew she loved Dolph and that was all she needed. Cally found it difficult to form words as the paralysis took over but she could still yell or make guttural noises if she tried hard enough. Realising this Dolph ran to the laundry basket in the corner of the room and opened it. He took out the top layer of smelly clothing and dumped Cally in below it. Then he piled the rest of the laundry on top of her to hide the girl sufficiently and muffle her cries. She gagged slightly.

“Don’t move!” he hissed and forcefully closed the lid.

Dolph ran over to the windows sill, jumped up onto the ledge and pulled the curtains in front of him. He was just in the nick of time.

Aileen brutally wrenched open the door. From the noise it made Dolph felt a little sorry for it.

“CALLY? Are you okay?”

Dolph closed his eyes and prayed that Cally would do as he had told her to. Much to his relief she said nothing. Or at least if she did maybe his muffling technique had worked effectively. The policewoman scanned the room.

“She’s not in here.”

“But I heard her scream –“

“I heard her too. Maybe she’s in the bathroom?”

Aileen sighed in relief at this option.

“Yes, new spots never fail to annoy her. That has to be it.” She nipped into the corridor and tried the door handle to the bathroom. The door was locked. “Cally are you okay in there?” No reply. Aileen relaxed visibly. “Okay well I’ll leave you to your sulking.” With that she re-joined Linda who had already begun to search the room. Dolph held his breath as he heard the clattering of the policewoman moving about objects in the room. She opened the laundry basket and delved into it slightly but did not dig far enough to find Cally fortunately for Dolph. Now he could hear her coming in his direction as she checked different items and pieces of furniture. She was virtually right next to him! Her hand stroked the side of the curtains much to Dolph’s dismay. “I still have the packet if you want to look at it.“ commented Aileen.

Linda turned.

“Yes that would be useful.”

“It’s just downstairs.” Together the pair left the room but Dolph waited for at least ten minutes until emerging from his hiding place. He crept out to the staircase once more and listened in on the conversation. “Will you need to do anymore searching?”

“No, this packet is more useful than you realise. How long will Cally be?”

“A good few hours when it comes down to moping.”

“Too long to stick around for then. I will come by tomorrow morning for questioning. Thank you for your help.”

Dolph waited until he heard the front door close and then returned to the room. He opened the laundry basket and started to chuck Cally’s dirty clothes around her room. He knew Aileen would just assume she’d had another one of her temper tantrums and wouldn’t question the extra messiness at all. Finally he got to his girlfriend. Her body lay limply amongst the clothing. Her legs and arms rubbed against the rough edges of the basket leaving sore red marks on her skin. Cally was barely conscious. Her eyelids opened and closed slowly as if she were in a daze. He knew she probably was.

“D-dol-ph-” she muttered.

“I’m here. Sorry about that.”

“S-s’okay.”

He grabbed her by the arms and lifted her out of the basket, more gently for fear of her screams raising the alarm for a second time. He could tell from the expression on her face that the movement still hurt a lot. Cally felt as if her joints were slowly rusting. He hooked her up into a position you often saw in movies where her back and legs rested on his arms and her own arm was dangling over his shoulder. It was less dramatic than it was in the films considering the fact that Dolph was barely strong enough to carry his semi-conscious girlfriend. He took a few steps towards the bed, tripped and fell onto the covers. At least they both got a soft landing. Dolph glanced nervously at Cally. Her eyes were closed and she was breathing heavily. It looked like the drug had finally knocked her out. He wished it hadn’t taken so long but smirked all the same.

“Now, where were we?”

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Rory was having a day off unsurprisingly. Linda had a feeling that when he got back he’d milk the guilt out of her for all he was worth but for the moment she envied him. It was Diane’s funeral today. The last time Linda had seen the girl’s mother she’d looked pretty upset along with her husband. She didn’t want to intrude on the ceremony but it was the only way she’d be able to interview the parents properly about their daughter. She would have done another house visit but when she came last time she had barely been able to step inside due to fear. This couple had a pet snake. Snakes had always terrified Linda, ever since she was a little girl and caught a viewing of Snakes On a Plane on the television by accident. The way they slithered about the place, the sheen of their scales – everything about them petrified her. She knew that she was head of the police department and could get someone else to do it for her, but she wanted to get this done herself.

The last time she had seen Mr and Mrs Metters she’d only been able to tell them the bad news. She also managed to stutter a little reassurance saying that they would find who murdered Diane and would bring him or her to justice. It had sounded like a line out of a cheesy movie and rather unconvincing to say the least. Linda sighed and hoped that not too many reporters had had the same idea as her. Since she was going for a more discreet look she was dressed in her casual clothing instead of uniform and took her regular car to the church. Linda hoped that they wouldn’t recognise her, or at least that if they did they would assume it was just because she was a friend of Diane’s. She didn’t want to alarm the distressed couple further. Surely they’d been through enough by now. Part of Linda knew exactly how they felt. She wouldn’t interrogate them directly, she’d just engage with polite, curious conversation. If they asked her who she was she would tell them the truth. It was as simple as that. She didn’t want to give the parents any more reason to avoid her.

These thoughts whirled about her head like violent gusts of wind as she sat on the pews. She was painfully aware that Mr and Mrs Metters were on the row just behind her, sobbing their eyes out along with many others as Jo Sanders read out a poem about her friend. She’d written it herself for the occasion. She stood at the front nervously.

“I-I’m not very good with words so I’m sorry if it comes out a bit blabbery.” she told her audience. Then she started to recite the rhymes she’d spent ages meticulously writing out.

*“I met you through my sister,*

*Now I can’t help but miss ya.*

*Please give me a sign.*

*I keep hoping you’re alive.*

*Now we’re all struggling*

*I feel like I’m juggling*

*All these thoughts round and round and round in my head.*

*So from me,*

*And everybody here*

*Goodbye Diane*

*It’s a shame your game plan*

*Didn’t work out.”*

Jo stepped down, the tears streaming across her face. The audience applauded and her father gave her a big hug. He had work he should be doing but he was due a day off and his daughters needed him; today more than ever. John made a brief scan of the church. Where was Cally? He knew Aileen would have work but it was unlike his daughter to not show.

Linda applauded along with everyone else at Jo’s performance. It had been very sweet; she hadn’t realised that Jo had known Diane that well. She had assumed that Cally was the best friend. Now Linda found herself re-thinking that view. Where was Jo’s sister anyways?

Diane’s coffin was lifted up and two men carried it down the aisle. Linda started to blend into the crowd as everyone stood up and filed after them. It was easy; she simply had to mill about along with everyone else. They were slowly exiting the church building so they could stand by and watch the coffin being buried. This was her opportunity to talk to the parents. She ensured that she kept close to them as the mob swarmed about the church at a sluggish pace. Linda stepped after them through the ornate doors covered in intricate, yet religious patterning. The mark of Jesus’ sacrifice was repeated a million times on its surface, idolised in a golden print. As the crowd shuffled into the church graveyard Linda found herself stretching her neck to look back at the door but it was too late now. That wasn’t what she was there for anyways. The group of people slowly gathered around a pre-dug grave. The coffin bearers lowered Diane into the ground whilst everybody remained respectfully silent. There were a lot of people at the ceremony which only made it more upsetting; Diane had had a lot of friends.

There was a crunch as the coffin hit the bottom of the grave and people started to file away. Most of them stopped to say how sorry they were to the parents about their daughter but many simply walked off to leave the pair in peace. There was a long queue stretching out in front of Mr and Mrs Metters. Linda decided to stick around until it had shortened and wiped away the tears. She always cried at funerals, it didn’t matter whether she knew the victim or not. Besides, nobody this young deserved to die so early.

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Cally slept strangely that night. She dreamt about the most bizarre situations. As she snored the dreams were already well under way. In the first part of it she ate dinner with a walnut and a surprisingly large squirrel. The walnut seemed disturbingly suicidal and was insisting that Cally should eat it, but she was disgusted by the very thought of eating her new friend. The squirrel was backing up the walnut unsurprisingly. Then it changed scene and continued to flit between different ones for the rest of her time sleeping. But, constantly throughout each scenario, there was a girl called Heather who seemed to be warning her about something and telling her what to do, although Cally couldn’t work out what. The blonde sounded like she was speaking French, so it was difficult to tell what she was saying. All Cally could work out was that whatever the girl was telling her she was being bossy about it. Then there was something rather weird about an ancient cheese grater but it dissolved into a dirty liquid that seemed to consume her lungs. This woke Cally up with a start, as she felt like she was choking.

When Cally sat up she put her hand on her forehead instantly. She felt hung over. She glanced at the clock and found she’d slept in by a good few hours. It was too late to think of a decent excuse for why she was late for school. She could tell from the silence of the house that her mother had already left for work. She had a splitting headache and could remember little of what happened the previous night other than Dolph staying over, although thought of her boyfriend filled her with glee.

“Good morning sleepy head.” greeted Dolph.

He was perched on the end of her bed.

“Why didn’t you wake me up?” she questioned angrily.

Dolph attempted to hide his frown. He had. Repeatedly. But she refused to even open her eyes. The stuff he’d given her last night must’ve have been stronger than he’d thought. So much for his food fight plan, it would have to wait for another day. On the bright side at least he’d got what he wanted last night.

“You looked so peaceful, besides I think we’re due a skive.”

She sighed.

“You’re right.” Cally smiled. “As always.”

She glanced at the clock again and gasped.

“What is it this time?” he moaned.

“I’m half an hour late for Diane’s funeral! It’ll be over soon!”

“Well come on then!”

He held out a tray of cooked breakfast before her.

“Dolph did you do this?”

“Well duh.”

“For me?”

“Well, I did it for myself first.”

She giggled.

“Thanks. But I don’t have time to eat much.”

She took the tray from him and gulped down the bacon at a record rate.

“You should eat more than that.” Dolph insisted.

He needed her strong if he wanted her to be sufficiently ready for the food fight tomorrow. She waffled down the baked beans before getting out of bed.

“I’m going to get changed now. Don’t look.”

“Seriously? Cally you’re my girlfriend for crying out loud!”

“Fine I’ll get changed in the bathroom.” she huffed.

She grabbed some clothes from the wardrobe and left before Dolph could protest. After a few minutes she returned.

“Let’s go.”

As soon as Cally got out of the door she started to run. It was difficult for Dolph to keep up with her.

“Why so speedy?” he asked.

“I’M OVER HALF AN HOUR LATE DOLPH WHY DO YOU THINK?” she bellowed.

He held up his hands in a defensive gesture.

“Okay! Don’t take it out on me.”

“You were supposed to wake me up!” she grumbled and sped up.

Dolph started to sprint in order to talk to his girlfriend.

“Can – we – slow – down?” he panted.

“No. I thought you were good at sports!” she complained.

“Not – running.”

“Evidently.” Cally agreed.

“Isn’t – the church – really – close to your house – anyways?”

“That’s my dad’s house.”

“Oh.”

From then on Dolph didn’t say much. He just tried to keep up the pace he was going at. They got a few odd looks as they raced towards the other side of town but the pair finally made it to the church graveyard. It was next to empty. Only three people remained on the grounds. Diane’s parents and a woman who looked familiar but Cally couldn’t work out where she’d seen her before. Diane did have a rather extensive network of friends. Cally hurtled towards the grave where the remaining people stood. Sure enough, it was Diane’s grave stone. It had her name on it and the year she was born in and died in as traditional but there was a quote that made her smile. It was just so – Di.

“For some moments in life there are no words.”

It was a quote from Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory. Diana and Cally been in a particularly boring ICT lesson which consisted of spread sheets. So they’d looked up gravestone quotes when they got tired of the class work. This had been one of them.

The parents came over to her.

“Cally can you thank your sister for us, the poem she read out was very – good.” said Mrs Metters.

Tears still streaked down her face and her voice was a little wobbly but it was easy enough to understand her words. It looked like Cally had missed the entire ceremony. Yet, although she wished it had been her reading the poem instead of her sister, she found that she couldn’t summon any anger. Dolph was surprised about this but Cally wasn’t. She was too busy being upset about the fact that her dead friend lay barely centimetres away from her underground. She sat down in front of the grave and Dolph joined her. He was rather alarmed and unsure of what to do when she started to cry, her body shaking. He reached out nervously and put his arm around her. Her sobs did not lessen but she hadn’t hit him which was good. He shook his head. Cally just didn’t make any sense, but then again the drugs probably didn’t help.

Linda turned to the parents. Now was the time to seize the opportunity. She felt like a traitor, but work was work.

“I’m so sorry for your loss. It must’ve been so unexpected.”

Mrs Metters nodded slightly but was too busy crying to reply. Instead her husband replied.

“Not really.”

“What do you mean?”

“You know what society is like these days. The police could do a better job.”

# Chapter 6

He narrowed his eyes as he mentioned the p-word. Linda could feel him seeing right through her disguise and repressed a shiver.

“Honey stop it. They’re doing their best.” argued Mrs Metters who had managed to stop crying enough to retort. “It was the head of the police department who came to see us remember?”

“Doesn’t mean she’ll do any better than an average officer.”

Linda was getting increasingly more uncomfortable and tried to shift the topic of conversation without sounding completely tactless.

“Where were you when you found out the news?”

“I was home when the policewoman came round to our house. It was my day off.” Mrs Metters whimpered.

“I was at work. I was barely a few blocks away can you believe it? I could’ve stopped it.”

“There was nothing you could’ve done.” Linda reassured.

“We could’ve stopped her going to those parties! You even knew what she was up to didn’t you!” he exclaimed turning on his wife. She simply sobbed. “TELL HER WHAT YOU TOLD ME YESTERDAY!”

Linda stepped inbetween the pair. This was getting out of hand.

“I don’t want to know.” she said firmly.

Mr Metters ignored her.

“GO ON, REMIND ME!” he yelled.

“No.” whispered his wife. “I – I don’t want you ordering me about.”

At this announcement Mr Metters started to stride towards her. Linda found herself stuck in the middle of his path. Now she had to quit pretending.

“Sir please step away.”

“MAKE ME!”

“If you don’t step away I will make you.”

He snorted. Linda kicked him in the groin and he let out a moan of pain as he fell to his knees. Linda gestured to his shocked wife. The woman promptly moved a little further out of harm’s way. She was trembling.

“I’m sorry, he’s upset. He always gets like this when he’s upset.”

“Just how many times has he tried that?” asked Linda in an appalled tone.

From her silence she gathered more than once. That was when Mr Metters grabbed her legs and pulled. Linda fell backwards. As her head hit the ground she saw stars. But then the beautiful night sky was interrupted by Mr Metters’ head as he loomed over her.

“Mind your own business.” he hissed. “GAYLE TELL HER!”

Cally tensed in Dolph’s arms at the yelling going on behind her. How dare they shout in a graveyard! They were disrespecting all the people at rest on the grounds! But most importantly, they were disrespecting Diane. Cally turned and Dolph quickly let go of her. She stared at the scene. Linda was on the floor and slowly getting to her feet; Mr Metters was marching towards his wife and she looked terrified. Cally felt her anger concentrate into a small white spot. It was focussed on Diane’s father. Cally smiled. After that time with Mrs Richardson she understood a little more about what she was doing. This time round she knew how to aim.

Mr Metters was only a few paces away from Gayle when he collapsed. He writhed on the ground. Sensibly his wife kept her distance. Linda ran over to him. A disgusting, oily liquid oozed from his gaping mouth. She grabbed her phone and called an ambulance. On hanging up she glanced at Gayle.

“You can come closer if you want, whatever this is he’s not faking.”

She shook her head. Then her eyes widened in recognition.

“You’re that policewoman aren’t you?” she asked in a tiny voice.

“Yes. I’m sorry I had to interrogate you that way.”

“I-I’m glad you were here.” she squeaked.

Linda remembered Cally and glanced behind her. She was standing in a venomous pose. But suddenly she looked frail and weak. More importantly Dolph was by her side. He was gazing at her in awe.

“Hey!” she called.

They ran. Linda groaned. She should’ve brought more people with her so she had backup on the scene. She reached for her phone again to call for more police to chase after the kids but they’d probably be too late to catch them. Linda knew that she couldn’t leave Gayle alone with her husband. Although he looked in no state to hurt her there was no saying how long he would stay like that for. Mrs Metters came over and sat by her husband’s side.

“I- I told him that she was our daughter and if she was going to go to these parties we should trust her to look after herself. She came back late every weekend but she was cautious enough to have a good time without going over the top.” she said. “I know it’s pathetic that I let him push me around like that but I can’t leave him because then he’ll be alone with Diane.”

Linda sensed that Gayle had been bottling this up inside herself for a long time. The words seemed to rush out of her mouth, impatient at the long wait to be spoken.

“Diane is dead now. You don’t owe her that protection anymore.” As Linda said this she looked down upon the still Mr Metters. A pool of the horrible oily substance was gathering underneath his chin as the remains dripped from his mouth. It was no longer a steady flow of the vile stuff. Funny how it had stopped as soon as Dolph and Cally had left, Linda had a strange feeling that the liquid was something to do with Cally. She’d looked so powerful, and then so fragile. Anyways, if Mr Metters survived to tell the tale, he was a new suspect. He seemed upset enough about his daughter, but if he treated his wife that way then who was to say he didn’t do the same to Diane? “Gayle, has your husband ever hurt you?”

“No, Charles just got angry. I think he may have gotten close to it a few times but all he did was scare me.” She looked down at her husband wistfully. “This is the most he has ever scared me.”

Linda sighed. At least that was something, if the woman was telling the truth.

“How did he act towards Diane?”

“They had a rather off and on relationship.” Gayle replied cautiously. “Sometimes they’d argue and sometimes they’d enjoy themselves. One minute they’d be laughing the next they’d be shouting over a silly little thing like misunderstandings over homework.”

The sound of multiple sirens cut through her trail of thought. The ambulance was there and so were the police. Or rather, Mark. The paramedics rushed out from the white vehicle to see to Charles and Linda stood to meet her backup.

“So what do you need me down here for?” he asked.

“Before this man collapsed I saw Dolph standing by his girlfriend.” Linda informed him.

“He’s the teenage druggie who assaulted Rory, right?”

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you chase after him?”

Linda gritted her teeth.

“Because I couldn’t leave Gayle alone and you didn’t turn up fast enough.”

“He’s her husband for Christ’s sake! Surely she could have kept an eye on him fine by herself!” Mark exclaimed.

“He scares her. Look, Dolph went that way,” Linda pointed in the direction the couple had fled in. “you take that route I’ll take this one; we’ll stay in contact via phone.”

“Fine.”

“Good.”

They set off at a run on their individuals routes.

After a few minutes of this with no sight of Dolph or Cally Linda felt her phone vibrate in her pocket. She picked it up and answered the call.

“Hello?”

“Any luck yet?”

It was Mark.

“No, you?”

“Nope.”

“Then why are you calling me?”

“It’s boring running down the streets on your own. People give you funny looks. I just want to chat.”

“Well we’ve had a chat so why don’t you just get back to it?”

“I can run and talk at the same time surprisingly enough.”

Linda groaned. Mark smiled.

“What do you want?” she asked.

“I want to talk about Rory.”

“Ok-ay.” He was after something. Whether it was information or just a glare Linda had no idea. She had a feeling he would have both by the end of their conversation and was beginning to wish she hadn’t called for backup in the first place. Mark was quiet for a while. “You still there?”

“Yeah, thinking.” Linda snorted. “Do you like Rory?”

“Of course I like him otherwise we wouldn’t be working on so much of this case together!” she replied.

“Uh huh.”

“It’s really difficult to work with someone you hate.”

“So you hate him then?”

“What? I never said that.”

“You act different around him you know.”

“Really?” Linda deadpanned.

She was completely unconvinced.

“Linda I’m not the only person who’s spotted it.”

“Don’t call me Linda!” she snapped.

“See? You let him call you by your first name. That has to mean something.”

She struggled to find an argument for that.

“Maybe I’m just forgetful when I’m with him.” she retorted.

When Mark next spoke she could hear the smugness coming at her in waves.

“Sure you are.” His voice was practically dripping with sarcasm. “Answer this question, honestly. Do you *like* like him?”

“What on Earth are you talking about?”

“You know what I mean.”

“How old are you?!” Linda exclaimed finally getting his meaning. Mark’s phrasing made him sound like a school child. “Our relationship is strictly professional.”

“Oh come on at least think about it.”

At this point Linda hung up only to receive another phone call barely a few seconds afterwards. It was Mark, again. She sighed and answered for the second time. She had a feeling she was going to regret it.

“What now?”

“I’ve found them.”

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John Sanders sighed. Jo had at long last remembered to tell him about Dolph’s drug addiction. To be honest he wasn’t terribly surprised. From what Cally had told him about Dolph (she did tend to go on about the boy a lot before they finally got together) his bad boy reputation was part of what made him so attractive. He just hoped that it wasn’t affecting Cally. Next time he saw her they needed to have a serious talk. Whether it was about anger, drugs or grief something needed to be said. He knew from experience that although Aileen may care, she just couldn’t find the right words for these matters. John was both surprised and confused by Cally’s absence at the funeral. But again, he couldn’t do anything about it unless he saw her.

He sighed as he entered the study. Jo was back at school and most likely still in tears after the depressing start to the day. He hoped that her friends would be able to cheer her up. It was just as well that she wasn’t in the house; she’d be far safer that way. John opened the creaky door and put on his helmet and goggles for safety. Today he was going to do a very important experiment. If it succeeded it would provide vital information for his boss and his family, although the latter wouldn’t realise it. He put on a pair of rubber gloves. It was exceedingly important that he did not let one drop of the filthy Haemohydro chemical touch his hand. The substance was contained by a test tube, in a separate cupboard of its own for health and safety reasons.

When John opened the door to the cupboard he could barely see the chemical because its black colouring blended in so well with the darkness surrounding it. He turned the light on in the study and reached out for the liquid. His sweaty fingers closed around the test tube and he removed it from the cupboard. He was nervous but it was only to be expected. If he couldn’t even cook there was a pretty good chance that a simple experiment, such as this one, would go wrong. John’s hand shook as he held the test tube above his desk. He brushed the scrap paper off of it to make space for the Haemohydro and picked up a diagram he had made earlier. He glanced at it. This was too important for words, everything had to go perfectly.

John leant over to grab the test tube on the other side of the desk. It contained a luminous liquid. He had nicknamed the fluorescent blue chemical ‘Frost’. It wasn’t hard to guess why. The substance was freezing cold, even at room temperature. It made little sense, but that wasn’t unusual in his job. John was used to it by now.

He grabbed a beaker from his equipment drawer and poured the contents of the blackened test tube into it. It slowly dripped out from its containment. The Haemohydro had grown rather gloopy over time; John dreaded to think what would happen when it started to rot inside Cally. Then it had the potential to block up god knows what. On the bright side at least it wasn’t corrosive. Well it was a little, but it wasn’t a threat to his daughter just yet. He tipped the Frost into the beaker. It poured out much faster than the Haemohydro. The fluid trickled into the beaker almost as soon as John tilted it, yet he knew one touch could give him frostbite. His boss had sent it to him along with the other chemicals in a rather securely sealed box. The man knew that John was doing the experiment of course; he could only go ahead with it if he had sufficient permission.

And then all there was left to do was watch. So John watched. He’d gotten through the main stage of the experiment without contaminating himself or anything but the beaker. That was pretty good. He took the test tubes and went to wash them in the kitchen whilst the concoction did its business. John knew from countless experience these mixtures took a little time to sort themselves out. He’d tried so many different combinations since Cally had been contaminated. This was the most dangerous by far, if he had mishandled either substance it would’ve been the end for him. But he hadn’t. John let out a deep sigh, he could breathe freely now.

He dried the equipment and brought the two test tubes back up to the study. He dumped them in the drawer amongst the rest of the chaos in there. John made a mental note to clean up that drawer at some point. Then he returned to the mixture on the table. The concoction had formed into layers. The top layer of the Haemohydro was frozen. The icy blue sheen that surrounded it was rather pretty due to its reflective surface. John sighed. It didn’t look like it had worked.

“There goes another possible cure out the window.” he murmured.

He reached out for the beaker but was startled by a strange cracking sound that came from the Haemofrost compound. The Frost seemed to be working its way through the Haemohydro towards the bottom of it. John gasped as the pressure of the Frost made the Haemohydro below give way. The substance crumbled into tiny pieces with a loud groan yet the beaker remained intact. John grinned; he’d been working on this for so long. At long last he could finally save Cally from her impending doom! Just in the nick of time too, her symptoms had been getting worse the last time he’d seen her. John now knew that he could crack the Haemohydro inside her without even hurting her body with any luck. But how to give it to her? If the Frost was added separately he’d give her throat frostbite. He had to add the chemicals together. He could do it tonight. That was when he’d next see her anyways. She’d be just in time for dinner.

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Dolph was running. He’d never run so fast in his life, it was a shame that his girlfriend couldn’t keep up. A policeman had spotted them barely minutes ago and had given chase. They had to lose him. Dolph didn’t care how, they just had to. Cally, however, was slowing him down.

“Come on Cal!”

Ever since she used her powers on Charles Metters she’d seemed a bit out of it. Then again, she was always like this after using them.

“I-I can’t!” she gasped.

Cally took a few steps, then tottered into the pile of dustbin bags piled up on the street beside them. At least it was a soft landing. Dolph groaned. He was really getting tired of her constant collapsing. It was irritating. But the boost that strong drugs gave her powers always seemed to make her even more exhausted after using them. Dolph glanced behind him. He could hear Mark coming around the corner. He looked back at Cally. Maybe her collapsing wasn’t such a bad thing after all. He dived into the pile of dustbin bags outside the bins and pushed her underneath with him. He put his hand over her mouth, he doubted she’d make any noise but there was no harm in being cautious. Dolph peered through the gaps inbetween the dustbin bags and wrinkled his nose. The smell was disgusting. He had a nasty feeling that he was going to stink of it afterwards. He watched Mark rush past. The policeman was talking into his phone.

“I think I’ve lost them. Yes I know, well what do you suggest?” he snapped.

His voice faded into the distance and Dolph began to climb out from the pungent pile of rubbish, dragging Cally with him.

“Dolph?” she muttered.

“What?”

“I need to tell you something.”

“Okay.” Dolph let go of her shoulders and she slid onto the ground in a sitting position. He sat down beside her. “Shoot.”

“I – I think I’ve got these powers. It’s almost like telekinesis - I can make horrible things happen to, well; anyone or anything I want.”

He rolled his eyes. Had it really only just occurred to her?

“I know.”

“You what?”

He wanted to tell her that it was blindingly obvious but decided to opt for the more romantic response. Or at least, it was romantic in Cally’s eyes.

“I know you better than you do.”

“I guess.”

“Doesn’t it feel good?”

“Pardon?”

“Never mind.”

“No, what did you say?”

“Does it really matter?”

“Fine.”

Cally got to her feet. Dolph sensed that she was a little annoyed with him, he had to change that. If she’d finally realised that she could do whatever she wanted to whoever she wanted he didn’t want to be in her bad books.

“I’m sorry Cal; I just don’t like seeing you like this.”

Her face still looked stormy but Dolph could tell that she was hiding a smile at his concern.

“Let’s go back home. Mum won’t get back from work for hours.” Dolph nodded with a smirk, mission accomplished. They started to walk back in the direction they had come in. “Why was that policeman chasing after us anyways?” Dolph frowned. He knew he had to be careful the way he said this. “Dolph have you been stealing again?”

The way Cally said it made her almost sound like she was squealing in delight. Dolph knew for a fact that his bad boy behaviour turned her on to a certain extent. He decided that he might as well play up to his reputation.

“It was just a little thing.”

“Go on, tell me.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“It’ll spoil the surprise.”

“Is it for me?”

Dolph sighed. Now he was going to have to steal her something to cover up the lie he was about to create.

“Maybe, maybe not. You’re not going to see it until tomorrow.”

Cally pouted.

“Oh come on Dolph!”

“No.”

They continued to walk into the distance but Cally was tiring fast. She seemed dead on her feet much to Dolph’s annoyance but it was for this reason that she was letting slip a little more information than intended.

“I’m meant to be staying at my dad’s tonight. Do you want to come?”

“Course I do.” Dolph lied. He’d had enough time with his girlfriend for one day, but it wasn’t like he had anywhere else to go. “But you can’t tell your dad I’m staying over.”

“Why not?”

“Just trust me.”

“Your eyes are pretty.”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

They continued walking for a bit in silence.

“How far away is your mum’s house?”

“My dad’s house is closer. I’ll text mum to say I’m going straight to his or something.” Cally brought out her phone and did so. They kept walking. “Dolph I need to tell you something else as well,” she began.

“What now?”

He wondered if she’d had another stupidly obvious revelation such as realising her mood swings were ridiculous half the time.

“I think I love you.”

“You think?” he asked in horror.

“Well I don’t know, I’ve never been in love before. Is this what it feels like?”

Dolph felt the urge to back away from her desperately. He forced himself to stay close. If she loved him, then she wouldn’t turn on him with her powers.

“Yes.”

“So…” she trailed off, but when she spoke again her words came out so fast they were difficult to make out. “do you love me back?”

Dolph hesitated, this was one huge lie he was about to pull off. He wasn’t sure whether he was up to the challenge or not.

“Sure.”

That was a good response. That could go either way. It could stand for sure I do, or sure I don’t. Dolph definitely knew what it stood for in this case but Cally didn’t seem to get the gist. This confirming one word answer was enough for her.

“Really?”

“Sure.”

She put one hand on his cheek and leant over to kiss him. Dolph knew that this was it; he’d have to start seeing new people soon. After all, all work and no play make Dolph a dull boy.

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Jo was upset and stuck at school. She couldn’t help wondering where her sister was. She knew that there was a good chance Cally was bunking for today. At least she was smart enough not to weep her eyes out at school but Jo had at least expected to see her at Diane’s funeral. Cally had known Diane since primary school for god’s sake! On the bright side, the anti-biotic the nurse had given Jo the other day seemed to have done its job well and her friends were constantly finding new ways to make her laugh. It was just as well, the depression of Diane’s death had really come crashing down around her after that funeral. It was only now that the events truly hit home and Jo still felt like she was in shock from it all. A few days was not enough to get over someone being completely gone from your life and today’s ceremony did nothing but enhance that fact. Although her friends did their best to comfort her part of Jo wished that her father was at the school. She wanted him to give her one of his big bear hugs and swear to her everything was going to be alright. No such luck. Jo felt hollow inside. It was rather awkward when Yasmine tried to strike up a conversation.

“Did you hear about what Josh did to –“

“Yes.” Jo deadpanned.

“Oh. Okay, well did you hear about –“

“What Katie did next?”

A few of the friends surrounding her smiled at the unintentional pun.

“Okay. Maybe you’ve heard that one too.” Yasmine allowed.

“Do you know where Cally is?”

“How should I know? She’s your sister.”

Jo remained silent at that news. She and Cally didn’t exactly have the best sisterly relationship in the world. Yasmine gave up at her attempt to make Jo grin and stepped back to let one of her other friends give it a go as they walked down the busy corridor. Zoe came forwards.

“I heard Cally was bunking with Dolph.”

Zoe had given up on the joking around. She was very bad at that, so she decided to just talk about what Jo was asking for. It was the third lesson of the day and her friend was still looking upset. Maybe what she needed was a little information. Zoe was renowned amongst her friends for hearing the truth. When Yasmine entered a crowd she tuned into the gossip, however Zoe managed to filter out the mean lies when she listened to a group of school kids and picked up on what actually happened. This required a lot more talent.

“I didn’t hear anything about that!” muttered Yasmine quietly with a hint of jealousy in her voice.

“Bunking with Dolph!?” exclaimed Jo.

“Well he is her boyfriend. I know you don’t like him and I sure as hell know *I* don’t like him but can you really blame the guy for wanting to get a little quality time with Cally?” piped up Ettie.

Jo was mildly surprised by the way her friend stood up for him. Last year Dolph had bullied her. Despite Ettie’s outspoken nature she had said nothing to her friends, but Zoe had picked up on it and when she pointed it out to Jo she told a teacher first thing. After that the bullying stopped pretty fast.

“No, you don’t understand.”

“Then help us to.” added Ally.

Jo stopped walking abruptly and the others banged into her. She spun round.

“Dolph’s doing drugs.” she whispered.

“What!?” her friends chorused.

Yasmine’s eyes lit up at this news.

“Keep it down! A policewoman visited my dad’s house to tell us to call her if we got any news of him.” Jo eyed Yasmine warily. “Yas you can’t go spreading this around. Same goes for the rest of you. This is a secret now.”

“But you hate Dolph just as much as we do, why not spread it round a little?” said Ettie.

Okay, maybe she wasn’t standing up for him.

“Because I don’t want to hear people whispering stupid stuff behind my back about Cally! As much as I hate it, what applies to Dolph applies to her as well in a stranger’s eyes. The rumours could get nastier and spread to the rest of my family. Do you remember that incident with Eve?”

The group groaned in unison. Ally put her hand over her eyes.

“Don’t remind me!”

Eve was a nasty example of how rumours could destroy a kid’s life.

“Exactly.”

“So is Cally not taking them?”

“Wha-“ Jo began, she hadn’t even considered it.

They were told on a frequent basis at school that drugs, peer pressure and underage sex was bad. The occasional sessions they had about the issues always emphasized the consequences, Jo dreaded to think what would happen to her already broken family if Cally was already living it. But before they could discuss the matter any further a teacher ushered them to their class, irritated with the way the teens were dawdling in the corridor.

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Cally was glad when they arrived back at her father’s house but she was also slightly nervous. Sneaking her boyfriend into the house under her mother’s nose was one thing, but with her father it was a completely different matter. She felt so much guiltier about doing it, but she did it nonetheless. She let herself in with the house key and scanned her surroundings to make sure the coast was clear. It was. Her father was probably upstairs in the study doing god knows what. Cally turned to Dolph.

“When I say go make a run for it as quietly as you can. Head upstairs to your left, I share a room with Jo but don’t worry, we should be able to manage around that somehow.”

“How exactly?” asked Dolph dubiously.

“We have a pretty big cupboard.”

“What?”

But before he could protest Cally shoved him inside the house.

“Go.” she whispered. Dolph started to run, but he wasn’t as quiet as Cally had hoped. She ran upstairs so she was in front of him, ready to protect her boyfriend from her father if he emerged. Sure enough she could hear the door opening. John Sanders was leaving his small sanctuary. Dolph however still seemed oblivious to all of this. She opened the door to the airing cupboard and stuffed her boyfriend inside it. Dolph’s eyes widened. For a minute he thought that she was turning against him and he struggled in panic. She gave him a worried look. “Dolph stop it! Dad’s coming! Since when are you afraid of the dark?”

On hearing this Dolph backed into the cupboard quite happily. Anything was better than Cally using her powers on him. Now she was aware of them she seemed to know a little more about what she was doing. He watched nervously through the crack of the door as John Sanders came out from his study labelled with a large, rather tattered looking keep out sign.

“You’re home early Cally.” said her father looking rather startled.

“Well yeah.”

“Is everything okay?”

Cally took a moment to think back over the day. Dolph seemed to take over her mind at this point. She’d told him she loved him, he’d said it back, sort of. Well, he’d definitely acknowledged it. Plus she’d told him about her newly discovered powers and he was supporting her all the way, so far. She dreaded to think what would’ve happened if she’d told her sister. Dolph was a far better choice.

“Everything is wonderful!”

“I didn’t see you at the funeral today.”

“Oh. Well, I was late. But I did get there.”

“You just don’t seem very upset.”

“Do you want me to be?”

“No; of course not darling.” John was puzzled but knew if he pursued the subject she’d only get angry. “Look, I have to tell you something.”

“Shoot.”

“A policewoman came to our house yesterday.”

“What are you telling me this for?”

John sighed. He was going to have to be careful about how he said this. He knew how his daughter could be when she got angry. He was so close to putting a stop to it but this kind of news simply couldn’t wait.

“Cally darling I’m only telling you because I’m concerned. I know you’re not stupid, you know what you’re doing.”

“What is there to be concerned about dad?”

Cally was nervous now. Maybe he knew that Dolph was in the airing cupboard. Maybe the policewoman had told him some lies about her.

“Do you promise me you’ll stay calm if I tell you?”

“Fine.”

“Show me your fingers.” Cally held up her hands to show her uncrossed fingers. Her father always did this when he made people promise things. He sighed. “She told us that Dolph was taking drugs.”

Cally had prepared herself, but nothing could prepare her for that bombshell.

“SHE WHAT!?”

“You promised you’d stay calm!” exclaimed John with a hurt look on his face.

“MY TOES WERE CROSSED!” Cally barked sarcastically. “WHAT DO YOU HAVE AGAINST DOLPH!? WHAT DOES EVERYONE HAVE AGAINST MY BOYFRIEND? WE ARE MEANT TO BE TOGETHER GET IT? I LOVE HIM AND NOW I KNOW HE LOVES ME!”

Cally felt her anger focussing on her father. Part of her had no regrets, the other half however pulled away from it.

“Cally listen to me, I’m not saying you shouldn’t love him. I’m just saying maybe you should use that to help him quit. I’ve been asked to phone the police station if I even catch sight of him.”

But she was no longer listening. Cally screamed as the two opposing forces inside of her competed like shoulder angels for and against her powers hurting her father. He sighed and closed his eyes. He knew what was coming. He’d just hoped that it wouldn’t happen so soon. Cally’s anger descended on her father and he fell to the floor as his eyes began to leak like Charles Metters’ had. After a few minutes of watching him writhe Cally couldn’t continue, she looked away from him and that seemed to break the connection. John lay still. He groaned slightly. Cally walked over to his side and towered over him.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know how to stop it.”

John wanted to yell to her that he did, but he didn’t have the energy. The darkness consumed him.

Cally turned to face the airing cupboard. Dolph came out warily.

“Wow.” he remarked glancing at her father.

“I’m a monster.”

“No you’re not, you just don’t know how to control it properly yet.” He sensed this was not enough comfort to make her trust him. So he tried again. “You stopped didn’t you?”

“Yeah.”

“And you’re not collapsing for a change.”

At this point Cally brightened up considerably.

“Oh yeah.” Then her face turned green. “Oh no.”

Dolph held out his arms as she fell into them. He dragged her into the bedroom to the left of the corridor.

“Now you said something about a big cupboard in the room right?”

He got out a packet of cocaine from his pocket; it looked like Cally needed a boost.

It was around this time that Jo got home. Dolph heard the door open downstairs and raced down to stop her from entering. Too late. Jo opened the door.

“Dolph!”

“Er- Jo!”

“What are you doing here? Get out! You’re not welcome.”

“I’m welcome wherever my girlfriend is.” Dolph retorted.

“Where is Cally?”

“In her bedroom.”

“Leave her alone. She may be deluded into thinking that you care about her but I know better!”

Jo reached for the landline phone but he slapped her hand away.

“What do you want the phone for?” he asked with an evil grin on his face.

“DAD!” Jo yelled. “DAD! DOLPH IS HERE!” No reply. “What have you done to him?”

“He’s busy in his stupid room.” Dolph lied.

Jo glanced at him. He was barring her way and forcing her to back towards the open door. If she wasn’t careful then she’d be locked out of the house.

“What’s that over there?!” Jo exclaimed squinting.

Dolph looked over his shoulder and she used that opportunity to duck underneath his arm and race upstairs.

“Come back here you bitch!” Dolph yelled after her.

Jo kept going up the stairs. She took one look at her father, who was lying on the floor unconscious and ran into her bedroom to find her mobile phone. What had Dolph done to him? There she saw her sister lying on the bed and the packet beside her. She fingered the plastic of the package.

“Cally you’d never do this, what has he done to you?”

Then her eyes widened in realisation. He hadn’t had to change Cally’s mind about anything. He’d been force feeding her the drugs just waiting until she was vulnerable and wouldn’t remember it in the morning. Jo saw her mobile phone on the desk beside the bed and grabbed it. But then she felt him grab her. She dropped the phone into her pocket and struggled against his grip as he tugged her back through the bedroom door, past her unconscious father and into the airing cupboard. She screamed as he threw her into the back of the cupboard. As her head hit the wall she saw stars. Dolph smirked. He had been wanting to do that for a while now. The door closed on her and Jo was dazed and trapped in the darkness. He took her confusion as an opportunity to find something to block the door. There was a shoving sound from outside the cupboard. Finally Jo came to her senses. She pushed against the door violently but heard a groan. It was at this point that Jo realised the thing keeping it shut was her father’s unconscious body. She stopped abruptly, not wanting to hurt him. Jo peered through the keyhole and found Dolph leering back at her.

“If I hear a peep out of you tonight or tomorrow you’re dead meat. You hear me?” Forgetting that he couldn’t see her Jo nodded. He rapped loudly on the door and she jumped in fear. “YOU HEAR ME?”

“I hear you.” Jo replied meekly. She hated this but she had her own way of irritating him. “I hear you Dolphin.”

“Don’t call me that!” he bellowed. There was a thud but it was more muffled and came from lower down the door this time. Jo had a sickening suspicion as to what Dolph had just done. “Don’t call me that or I’ll kick your old man again.”

“Okay.” Jo said quickly.

But being Dolph, he kicked John Sanders again for good measure.

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Rory could be a right couch potato when he wanted to. It was a hobby of his to see how long he could stay on the sofa for. His record was two hours, but then it was lunchtime so he’d had to have a break. However today he simply wasn’t in the mood. He couldn’t get his mind off of the case. Rory fidgeted in front of the TV unable to focus on the cheesy show he was forcing himself to watch (as he’d managed to lose the remote. Again). He hated to think that he was missing out on more of the action. The fact that Dolph had clubbed him just made the situation more interesting – he winced at the memory - as well as painful. He remembered that moment only too well; although he had a feeling he dramatized it somewhat. Plus Mark was right; he wanted to spend more time with Linda despite the bizarre conversation they’d had yesterday about why she put him on the case with her.

# Chapter 7

She’d said he reminded her of her late husband, well he needed time to show her that he was his own man. Spending the day at home was wasting a lot of that valuable time. Rory had got so bored just sitting around that he went upstairs to the loft where he rediscovered an old Lego set he used to play with when he was just a kid. Since he wasn’t planning on going out he’d spent the rest of the day in front of the TV playing with the stuff. Rory glanced down at his creation, only noticing what he’d built now. It was a miniature version of the police station. Pleased and slightly embarrassed by his childish work he took a picture of the model using the camera on his phone. For a minute he considered sending it to Mark but then decided against it. A picture like this one could only be used for blackmail. After he tired of this activity Rory decided to do something one of his old English teachers had suggested. He’d always thought that the old crone of a woman wouldn’t catch him dead doing this, but now he had nothing better to do. He read a dictionary. In it he discovered a new word, well a word he didn’t know at least, that meant small, or possibly brave. Dictionary language was a bit too posh for Rory to understand at times. The word was: bantam. He should use that on Mark just to see his confused expression. After that Rory had managed to find an old toy kitten his sister used to own as a child, it too was hidden away in the loft. Just looking at the play thing made him smile. He had dropped the kitten named ‘Ginger’ in the toilet a few weeks after his sister had got it. To this very day its fur was extremely ruffled up from that incident. Rather amusingly the result had been that the hair partly covered the cat’s eyes giving it a permanently angry expression. That, along with the pungent stench put his sister off Ginger for a good few years. He stroked the toy fondly before placing it on the windowsill to keep watch. Playing with a toy kitten, Lego and a dictionary?

“I really am bored.” he murmured to himself.

Fortunately he could tell from the dark sky, whose shadow loomed through the window onto Ginger (it made the cat look even more menacing, like a warrior of the night in Rory’s eyes), that it was getting late. Rory yawned and was about to start getting ready for bed when he remembered something. He’d left his watch at work.

To anyone else this may not have been a problem, but for him it was a major one. That watch was the sole reason he got up in the mornings. It was his alarm clock. So Rory set off for the police station. As he walked through the chilly air admiring the royal navy of the darkening sky part of him wondered if Linda would still be in her office at this time. Half of him hoped she was so he could make a start on not being Michael, whilst the rest of him hoped she wasn’t so she could give herself a well-deserved rest. That woman was far too responsible for her own good.

Rory arrived. The place was silent. It seemed that as soon as people could escape they did. In a way it reminded him a little of high school. He wandered over to his desk. Sure enough, the digital watch lay there. He picked it up, attached it to his wrist and was about to leave when he heard a strange noise. It was coming from Linda’s office. Slightly unnerved he picked up the taser lying on his desk amongst paperwork. His hand clutched it securely by his side as he approached the door. He opened it suddenly and held the taser up. But nobody had broken in. Rory now knew that there was no danger, only his paranoia acting up. He quickly brought down the taser. He could feel his cheeks burning scarlet. Linda looked up. The skin around her eyes was a blotchy red. She was crying. He’d never heard the fierce officer sob before. He felt like he was intruding on something immensely personal. So Rory left the office briefly and dragged up a chair so he was sitting beside her in the doorway. She was not going to escape this counselling session.

“What’s wrong?”

“It, it just hits me sometimes.” Rory was confused but gave her the time to explain. “T-the funeral today, I went there to interview Diane’s parents and it j-just brought back a lot of bad memories.”

“Like what?”

“Like Michael’s funeral.”

“Oh.” Rory had somehow managed to forget that she was still getting over Michael’s death. She always acted so strong and independent; he’d never seen her like this before. “Tell me about Michael.”

“He was a bit of a geek, he worked as a teacher and he was the sweetest guy. I-I’ve ever-“ Linda trailed off, unable to continue due to sobbing.

“Hey, hey look at me.” Her head glanced up so her eyes met his. Rory moved his chair so he was sitting right next to her, there was barely enough space for it in the small office, but it was only from this position that he could hug her properly. He did it without thinking; it was a reflex which was just as well otherwise he would have never worked up the nerve to hug her in the first place. Her body convulsed in his arms as she cried and her breath felt warm against his shoulder. Rory was almost reluctant to let go but managed to pass it off as an amusing remark. “I suppose I’d better stop now before you get snot all over my shirt.”

She laughed and wiped away her tears absent-mindedly.

“I take back what I said yesterday, you’re nothing like Michael.”

Rory smiled. Exactly. But he was curious to understand how he’d succeeded in making her say those four words.

“In what way?”

“When I think of him I- I get depressed beyond belief, when I think of you I’m happy.”

Rory wasn’t quite sure what to say to that. He wanted to tell her that he knew the feeling but seeing as he hadn’t even known Michael it would be insensitive. Plus he would be talking about understanding how it felt to be happy when she saw him, which would make him seem a bit arrogant. What he meant was –

“I feel the same whenever I see you.” Linda smiled, her cheeks reddening slightly. It had been a long time since anyone had said something that sweet to her. Rory suddenly felt incredibly awkward. “Anyways, I only came here to get my watch; shouldn’t you be getting home at this time?”

“Probably.” she sniffed.

Up went the armour. Nice the moment had been, but now it was gone.

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Jo was exhausted. She couldn’t stand this. First there’d been the emotional turmoil of the funeral, but now her current situation was on a whole new level. She was stuck. In an airing cupboard. With her injured father blocking the door and her unconscious sister trapped with a dangerous sixth former. She was in a mood for hyperventilating but knew it wouldn’t help anyone, least of all her. She fumbled about in the dark as she reached for her mobile phone. Thank god it was on vibrate. Jo felt so tired; she rested her head against the wall wearily and closed her eyes. She wouldn’t go to sleep - she was just resting her eyes. However when she opened them light was creeping in through the door cracks. She was awoken by Cally’s alarm clock. Uh oh.

She could hear Dolph’s grunts but there was little noise from Cally. This did nothing to ease Jo’s tense mood. She had to call the police now, before he woke up fully. She started to dial the emergency services number.

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Rory didn’t particularly want to come into work today. It was too early to get up in his opinion, his headache made him just want to take everything slowly. Weirdly enough it hurt worse than it had yesterday. However he forced himself to take an aspirin and set off. It was this attitude that made him slightly late. By the time he arrived at work Linda was waiting for him with an angry expression on her face. She was holding her phone next to her ear. Then she put her hand over it.

“Where have you been!?” she exclaimed gritting her teeth.

Startled by her tone Rory held up his hands in defence.

“What’s the rush?”

Linda removed her hand from the phone.

“Hold please.” Jo was thankful to not speak, Dolph was up now and she was afraid that if she made any noise he’d carry out his threat to kick her father further. Meanwhile however, back in the police department Linda stalked over to Rory and started to yell. “I JUST GOT PATCHED THROUGH TO JO SANDERS VIA THE EMERGENCY SERVICES! SHE’S TRAPPED IN AN AIRING CUPBOARD BY A BALLISTIC BOYFRIEND, HER FATHER’S BODY IS KEEPING THE DOOR CLOSED AND SHE’S HEARD NO SIGN OF HER SISTER SINCE SHE SAW HER THE EVENING BEFORE! AND YOU SAY WHAT’S THE RUSH!?”

“Okay, okay I’m sorry.” he apologised hastily.

“YOU’RE ON THIS CASE FOR A REASON YOU KNOW! AT LEAST SHOW A LITTLE COMMITMENT.”

Rory frowned. That made no sense. He knew that the only reason he was on this case was because Linda said he reminded her of her husband – but wait. Since the conversation they had last night he didn’t remind her of Michael anymore.

“Why am I on this case Linda?”

She ignored him and started talking into the phone again.

“Don’t worry; we’ll be there as soon as we can.”

“Please hurry.” Jo whispered.

Linda hung up and stormed out of the police department. Rory noticed that every man and woman in the police station was staring at him. Mark was smirking. Rory rolled his eyes.

“Nothing to see here.” he announced.

The people tittered quietly and reluctantly swivelled their eyes away from the scene. Rory started to chase after his partner, wondering why she was so angry all of a sudden. Okay he’d been a little bit late, but her reaction was a lot louder than he’d expected it would be. Plus she hadn’t answered his question.

By the time he caught up to her she was already in the police car, lights flashing, whilst giving him a powerful glare. Rory could see she wasn’t the only one. There were several other police cars filled to the brim with uniformed officers, many of whom he recognised. It looked like they were going to surround the house. He got into the car and decided that maybe it was wisest to say nothing.

“We’re getting back-up this time round.” Linda growled.

Rory nodded. She stepped on the pedal and the car screeched forwards. A smile tugged at the corner of her lips, one of the advantages to being a policewoman was that she was allowed to speed when she was in the right car. Rory gripped the sides of his seat tightly. When Linda drove like this it was scary. After several minutes of swerving wildly through London traffic and narrowly missing a removal van he’d had enough.

“Did I do something? Why are you being so reckless!?” he screeched, in perfect tune with the loud noise the tyres were making. Linda turned on the radio, still refusing to listen to him. His groan was barely heard over the loud opera of radio three. The volume was ridiculously high and was making his headache worse. “Oh real mature, go into strop mode will you? You’re as bad as Mark! Won’t you just tell me what’s wrong?” Rory yelled. Once again she pretended not to hear him. “IF YOU DON’T TURN THIS MUSIC DOWN DOLPH WILL HEAR US MILES AWAY!”

No response. This time round it had got to a very loud point in the opera and he didn’t think that Linda could even genuinely hear him. He moaned quietly as his head pounded and closed his eyes. When he did this the radio turned off. So she’d decided to take pity on him at last then. If his head hadn’t been so sore Rory would’ve started to yell again.

“We’re here.”

He opened his eyes and stepped out of the car. As he did so he was puzzled by Linda’s expression. She looked kind of sheepish. She stared at her feet and mumbled something indistinguishable.

“What?”

“I-I’m sorry.”

“Huh?”

But now she’d turned and was confronting the other members of police giving them instructions on how to surround the house and everything. She turned back to meet his confused gaze.

“Come on, we’re going in.”

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Jo could hear her sister getting up. That meant she had to be okay, right? Dolph walked out onto the landing and kicked her father.

“Remember what I said!” he hissed menacingly through the keyhole. Jo said nothing. He backed away from the door and joined Cally as she left the room. “Remember what I said Cal, just don’t look.”

“I’m not.” Cally said, her voice wavering slightly. Jo peered through the keyhole and was able to just about see him accompanying her sister to the staircase. She was still wearing the clothes she’d worn yesterday and, from what Jo could tell, looked absolutely knackered. “Where’s Jo? Did she come home last night?”

“Don’t worry I dealt with her.”

“Good, I don’t want her accusing you of more ridiculous things. Dad included. It was her fault. Everything was her fault.”

Jo narrowed her eyes. Cally was in denial. Then the doorbell rang. Jo saw Dolph and Cally exchange panicked glances.

“We’re not home okay?” Dolph said to Cally.

She nodded. Jo decided now was the right time to make some noise.

“HELP! I’M UP HERE!”

There was the sound of loud banging and a sudden crunch as Linda broke down the front door. Rory grinned. Now he could say his favourite line. This was the reason why he’d become a policeman.

“Freeze! Put your hands up!” he called.

He wasn’t particularly expecting them to listen. Linda raced up the stairs but Dolph beat her to the airing cupboard. He kicked Jo’s father out of the way, opened the door and dragged Jo out of it. She was putting up a pretty violent struggle but he had the advantage of being so much taller than her. He was also a little stronger. Jo let out a piercing scream.

“Get off me you Dolphi-“

He bent her arms back and she yelled harder. Dolph lowered his head down to her height.

“You finish that sentence and I’ll break your arms. I’ll twist them so far back that even in Australia they’ll hear the click as your shoulder snaps!” he whispered then he raised his voice to yell at the police. “Stay away from us! Or I’ll-I’ll strangle her if I have to!“ he finished lamely.

Linda raised an eyebrow, she’d heard far worse threats than that but this one was still dangerous for Jo. Realising this wasn’t the most productive threat Dolph put his arms under Jo’s chin and tightened his grip just to show the police what he was capable of. Jo started to gasp. Her mouth opened and closed in a panic reminiscent of a goldfish’s expression. Cally watched, but did nothing. Linda could only watch helplessly. Rory, however, had had enough. First the boy clubbed him, now he was strangling an innocent girl. He lifted his gun and aimed. Rory pulled down on the trigger and the bullet came whizzing out of the gun hole, hitting Dolph’s shoulder. He yelped in pain and his arms fell to his side. One was bleeding and fell limply, whilst his uninjured arm cradled the other. Jo staggered away, recovered her breath and took the opportunity to kick Dolph in the crotch before joining the police triumphantly. Cally’s eyes narrowed and she stood in front of her boyfriend.

“HOW DARE YOU! HE’S A BETTER HUMAN BEING THAN YOU’LL EVER BE!” she snarled at the group.

Dolph was the only person she felt could accept her for who she was. A monster. It was his “love” for her that helped her start to believe what she was capable of causing. She stared at the policemen and one by one they started to clutch their ears.

“Rory can you hear that?” said Linda, yelling over the noise of high pitched giggles only they could hear.

Neither of them noticed the large light above dripping an oily black liquid onto their foreheads. The wiring that rooted the light into the ceiling was shaking along with the rest of the bulb. Fortunately Jo who had been released from Dolph’s clutches barely seconds ago saw this development. She leapt at them and pushed the pair to one side. Together the trio narrowly avoided the blackened light bulb that crashed to the ground where they’d all been standing previously. Cally was still angry but Dolph used his free arm to tug her away from it all.

“Don’t waste your strength.” he said, knowing that he’d still need hers.

Jo glanced at Rory and Linda. They both looked rather disorientated from what they’d heard. She stared after Dolph and Cally as they made a run past her for the back door. Without adults on her side she knew she didn’t stand a chance. Jo had no choice but to watch them escape, she was utterly helpless. She looked down. Her father lay squashed against the banisters from when Dolph had shoved him out of the way in order to get to her. She ran over to him and knelt by his side.

“Dad?” He remained immobile. “Dad please tell me you’re okay!” He mumbled something incoherently. “What?”

“Do I look okay?” he repeated, his eyes half open, half closed. Jo felt a wave of relief wash over her. At least he was now able to talk. “I’m – so sorry. This is all my fault.”

“What? Dad how is this your fault?”

“The contamination –“ but he trailed off.

“Dad? Dad! Stay with me!”

Jo felt all the soap opera lines flooding through her as if they were natural speech.

“Don’t panic darling – I’m fine –“ he reassured ineffectively.

“Dad you’re a rubbish liar.”

Jo could feel the tears pricking her eyes like tiny needles.

“- go into my study.”

“What?”

“You – heard.”

“But-“

“I’ve made an antidote – for Cally’s condition – Haemofrost – she has to drink it –“

“Don’t talk dad, you’re not making any sense. You’re not well.”

“ - well – duh –“ he muttered before his eyes closed for the last time.

“Dad!” Jo screamed. The tears gushed from her eyes. This seemed to snap the police out of their strange trance. “I need an ambulance. I need one NOW!”

Even to Rory’s untrained eye he could tell that John Sanders was dead. He cautiously approached Jo and put his hand on her shoulder.

“He’d dead.” He said gently.

“ARE YOU A DOCTOR?”

“No, but –“

“SO SHUT UP. GET AN AMBULANCE HERE NOW!”

Rory didn’t know what good it would do but went out to see if any of the policemen surrounding the house had caught Dolph and Cally as they left. Linda dialled for an ambulance.

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When Rory stepped outside at first everything appeared normal. Mark was there with prepared sarcastic comments about the argument Rory and Linda had had earlier.

“Looks like you two are going to break up before you even get together!”

“Mark shut up.” Rory sighed.

He wasn’t in the mood for his messing around.

“Hey what’s wrong?”

“A man’s just died. Please tell me someone caught the culprits.”

Mark’s teasing grin faded and was replaced with a serious look.

“I heard nothing from the other guys.”

“Let’s check on them then.”

Together the pair walked round to the back of the house. The men looked drunk from the way they were stumbling about. Rory stared at Mark questioningly.

“What happened?” asked Mark, equally surprised.

One of the nearer officers made her way over to the pair. Rory knew the lady; she was a good policewoman. Mark had accused him of fancying her too (although this time it was partly out of jealousy) so he had been steering clear of her lately. If anything he thought Mark fancied her.

“They came out of the house and we were all ready, but as we started to go in there was this high pitched giggling, I couldn’t get it out of my head, it took over everything I just – by the time it was gone so were they.” Mark stared at the officer incredulously but Rory understood exactly what she meant. The policewoman stared at her feet. “I’m going to lose my job aren’t I.”

It was a statement, not a question. Mark looked ready to nod.

“No. Look around you El; you’re not the only person this affected.”

She followed Rory’s instructions and this cheered her up slightly.

“What do you want us to do?”

“Shouldn’t you be asking Linda?”

El and Mark exchanged knowing looks when they heard Rory say the name ‘Linda’. Rory rolled his eyes. So he didn’t use her surname the whole time, what was the big deal?

“She’s not here and you are.” pointed out Mark.

A little startled by his sudden position of authority Rory was unsure of what to say at first but then it became clear.

“Erm…get everyone to patrol the area. We’re looking for Dolph Andrews and Cally Sanders. You already know who Dolph is and you should recognise Cally from the news. Understand me?” El nodded. “Good. Spread the word.”

El started to walk back into the crowd.

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Aileen received the call in the middle of an important meeting. It was rather embarrassing. Everyone stared at her as her ringtone loudly went off in the hall. The head of the table looked at her with an expression that could shatter the strongest of nerves and spoke. Her boss was not known for his sympathetic behaviour.

“You’d better answer it then.”

Aileen picked up her phone. The longer the conversation, the more humiliated she would be by the end of the meeting.

“Hello, this is a really bad time.” she hissed.

“There’s no good time for bad news.”

“Stop talking in riddles and get to the point before I hang up on you! Who is this anyways?”

“This is Linda Porter speaking, head of the police department.” That made sense, Aileen recognised the voice. “There’s no easy way to say this so I’ll just come out with it. Your husband is dead.”

“Oh my god.” Aileen felt numb. She no longer got on with John but she had once loved him and she’d certainly never wished this upon him. The worst part was the irony. Today, after work and everything she and John were finally going to get their papers signed together and they’d be officially divorced. It looked like her ex hadn’t even made it that far. Aileen could feel the tears start to trickle down her cheeks but the shock limited their impact. Linda was simply glad that the woman wasn’t yelling yet. “What happened?”

“We’re not entirely sure yet but we think it was something to do with Cally and her abusive boyfriend.”

“YOU FIND OUT THIS INSTANT!” Aileen yelled, forgetting she was still in the meeting.

“We will try our best but it will take time. Jo is with me now.”

“What’s Jo doing there?” she questioned in horror.

“Crying mostly, she needs picking up.”

Aileen wondered what made Linda think that she was any different.

“I’m in the middle of a meeting!” she exclaimed.

“We can keep Jo at the station until you get home. What time will you get back?”

“It depends.” Aileen sighed glancing at her angry boss. She had a feeling he was going to make her pay for this interruption. “I’ll phone Jo as soon as I’ve finished.”

“How about you come to the police station to pick her up once you’re done?”

“Okay. Goodbye.”

Aileen hung up. The hall was silent. She put her head in her hands as everything came crashing down around her. She started to sob. Everything was going wrong. First it had been the parties, then there’d been the drugs, then there’d been Dolph and now this? It was a combination of her worst fears combined. One of her more friendly co-workers who sat beside her nervously patted Aileen on the back.

“There there.” she said soothingly but her alarmed eyes told a different story.

Aileen’s boss remained unforgiving. His glare was unfathomable.

“Aileen.” She said nothing. “AILEEN.”

She looked up.

“Yes?”

“Do you have an excuse for being an insufferable interruption?”

Many of Aileen’s co-workers took a sharp intake of breath at his harsh question. They all knew that she didn’t get on with him. They also knew that when Aileen disagreed with someone she tended to explode. Easily. They watched her with bated breath but to their surprise she did no such thing.

“My husband is dead.” Aileen deadpanned; her expression as blank as her tone.

It was too much effort and pain to feel the conflicting emotions writhing about her insides so she’d decided to simply ignore them. Maybe if she blocked them out they would stop existing.

“Oh.”

The man’s expression would have been almost funny if it weren’t for the circumstances. Whatever he had been expecting he had not been expecting that.

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Jo sat in the police department staring into space. The ambulance had eventually come as promised but she could tell from the looks on the paramedics faces that her father stood no chance. Her worst fears were realised. He was gone. Jo couldn’t even cry anymore. She just sat there watching people flit past her, part of a life she felt she could never have again, Jo felt like she was stuck in slow motion. She was trapped in a place far crueller than the airing cupboard.

Rory peered through the blinds of Linda’s office at Jo. She looked so dejected. It was understandable really; this was the second death she was suffering from in only a few days. Occasionally police walked past, giving her sympathetic looks but it made little difference to the outcome. Linda cleared her throat and he reluctantly turned to face her. They’d been doing this for a good twenty minutes at the very least and he still felt like they were going round in circles.

“Where would they go?”

“Linda we’ve looked at all the options! We’ve got police patrolling Aileen’s house, John’s house, Gayle’s house, Lolita’s flat and streets in general around the area! A lot of people are on duty. All we can do is wait.”

“Well I’m not going to sit around whilst our possible culprits escape! Yes we may have been scouring the records for a while now but for all we know there might even be a third person to the murders. You heard that laughter just as well as I did.”

“I don’t think there was anyone laughing, I think we just heard it.” he pondered.

“Rory if I was crazy I wouldn’t be head of the police department.”

“Hitler became the German prime minister.” he argued.

Linda groaned.

“Let’s go over this again shall we?”

“Fine.”

“They could go to school, which is highly unlikely because it’s way too obvious and stupid a plan –“

“No wait, that’s the only place Dolph *can* go.”

“Don’t be stupid Rory.”

“Listen to me, everywhere else whether it’s houses of family or not, will be expecting them and will be surrounded. School is the one place we’re not patrolling because we didn’t think he’d be stupid enough to turn up after the day’s antics.”

“Your point is?”

“I’m not done yet! They’ll go to the school because it’s the only place we won’t be expecting them.”

She sighed.

“Don’t make me yell at you again.”

“I’m serious, they could be there. Why were you yelling at me earlier anyways?”

“For reasons I thought were obvious.”

“Okay so I was a little late, big deal. You’ve never flown off the hook at me like that before.”

“Let’s get back to the point. There’s no way they’d go to school! They’re kids. They’ll make the most out of bunking when they can!”

“At the very least we should notify the school.”

“Fine!”

Rory watched as Linda picked up her phone and dialled the school’s number.

“How do you know what number to call anyways?” he asked.

She gave him a withering look.

“My husband was a teacher!” she snapped.

There was no doubt about it, Linda was angry about something extra, she just wouldn’t tell him what. Feeling slightly hurt he decided to leave.

“I’ll just leave you two alone then!” He walked out of the office and closed the door behind him. He couldn’t help her if she refused to tell him what was wrong. It was quite frustrating really. To make matters worse Mark lay in wait for him. The irritating friend opened his mouth, ready to make a sarcastic comment but Rory cut him off. “If you’re not going to say anything worthwhile then don’t speak.”

Mark’s grin disappeared.

“If you’re upset with Porter don’t take it out on me.” he huffed.

Rory sighed heavily. He knew that his friend was right for a change.

“Sorry. Look did anything happened this morning or yesterday that really annoyed Linda?”

Mark shrugged.

“Not that I’m aware of. Maybe she’s on her period.”

Maybe Mark was right, but Rory didn’t think so. He was about to ask his friend another question about their boss but then Linda came out of the office.

“Rory!” she called.

He could feel everyone’s eyes boring into him.

“What have you done now?” whispered Mark.

“Shut up.” he hissed back.

Rory walked forwards half expecting a slap from his superior.

“You were right. I notified the school and they said that Dolph and Cally had arrived a few minutes ago, their excuse being that Cally collapsed on the way there and Dolph had managed to hurt his arm somehow. But its break time now so it’ll be virtually impossible to find the kids amongst the crowd of them in the canteen.” Rory could feel the smugness radiating out from his chest and smile. “You were right once, don’t get too cocky.” said Linda as she strode towards the exit but then something made her stop and stare.

“What is it?”

“Where’s Jo gone?”

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Jo had snuck out of the police station at least ten minutes ago now, wanting to go back to her father’s house. She still had the key on her. The department wasn’t too far away from the place and she’d been watching the route taken carefully through the windows of the police car on their way to the station. Despite the empty void inside her one thing had kept on circling her mind. Her father’s last words had been “- well – duh –“, not the most poetic, but he’d been trying to tell her something before that. His words echoed in her head. “I’ve made an antidote – for Cally’s condition – Haemofrost – she has to drink it –“. As these thoughts cascaded through Jo’s mind she found herself in front of her house but a policeman stepped in her way.

“What are you doing here? I thought Porter took you back to the station?”

“It’s my house; I’m allowed to visit aren’t I?”

The man didn’t look convinced.

“Sorry but this is a crime scene now.”

“I forgot something okay? I have Porter’s permission to go in. Or would you like me to tell your superior you didn’t listen?”

The man nervously stepped aside at this point. Jo smirked, the right words worked like magic. She made her way through the front door ready to use the same excuse if she was stopped by anyone else. However her impact on that man must’ve spread as the other officers seemed to be obviously avoiding her. She got inside with no trouble at all. Jo took a deep breath. She was afraid of going back near that airing cupboard. The memories would be too much. She ran for it. Jo sprinted up the stairs and into the study. She slammed the door behind her and leant on it whilst she regained her breath. As she panted she scanned the room for the mysterious Haemofrost her dad had mentioned. She didn’t know why he’d been working on a cure in the first place but from the diagram she’d seen earlier she knew that he had found out a lot about Cally’s condition. Not for the first time she wondered what her father’s job had been, but it was pointless worrying about it now. It wasn’t like he was around anymore to hide it from her. Jo swallowed her grief temporarily and started to search the room. She longed for her father to come out from the shadows, to hug her and ask her whether she’d really been that easily fooled by his death. She wanted him to tell her that his job had been working on an immortality potion of some kind, but Jo’s desperation was merely creating fantasies. She knew that what she wished for would never happen. But she could at least put a stop to Cally’s powers. That was a reality she was willing to manipulate.

Jo wiped the papers from the desk, examined every single test tube and started to ransack the cupboards until finally she found a purple container. It was labelled Haemofrost and two nozzles came out from it, the ends covered in Clingfilm. Whatever her father had been up to, he’d been determined enough to design his own little contraption. Jo grabbed it and set off for school. She had a bad feeling that she knew exactly what Dolph wanted to do. His plan was unfolding and she seemed to be the only person who could see it clearly. If only Cally could. If her sister realised what her boyfriend was really up to he’d be dead meat.

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Dolph grinned despite the pain in his arm as he and Cally made their way into the canteen. It was filled to the brim with pupils. On the way out of John’s house he’d grabbed a set of school uniform for Cally to wear to help them blend in with the crowd. He didn’t need to worry about uniform, he was a sixth former. So far it was working out perfectly. It was a shame that he hadn’t had time to grab a cloth to bandage up his arm with. But never mind, phase one was complete: they’d just bought a couple of cakes from the canteen. In fact, Dolph had bought Cally’s for her. As he left the till he handed it to her.

“Thanks Dolph, you’re so sweet.” Cally cooed.

But he hadn’t done that just to be nice. He’d done it so he could slip a little something into her food. It was a very powerful something this time round, now all he needed was to get her annoyed at the right time and place and all his enemies would be obliterated. Timing was everything.

They walked slowly round the canteen in circles searching for a free table but as per usual there was little space. Dolph winced as schoolchildren pushed past him in the crowd. It made the pain in his arm worse, but all the same he led the way, waiting until he saw Mrs Richardson on duty. Once this was done he could get all the treatment he needed with Cally’s inevitable threats to the hospital staff if they didn’t fix him up good. Sure enough there the teacher was by the door leading out of the place. He grinned and picked a stupid place to stand as he noticed Jo’s friends walk past. They glared at him but split around his attempt to block them. Several of them knocked into him on purpose, it hurt but he no longer cared. There was something much more important at stake now. Dolph had just effectively herded them towards Mrs Richardson. Then he gaped. He couldn’t believe his luck as Callum Fields walked over to the exit holding a bowl of half eaten pasta. This kid had bettered him in badness, reputation and girlfriends for the majority of Dolph’s time in secondary school. This sixth former was going to pay for his position. Dolph glanced behind him to check that Cally was still by his side but spotted the two members of police from earlier. They were by the tills questioning staff and watching the students closely. Maybe his luck was starting to run out. He had to get this done quickly. Dolph turned his focus back to the crowd of people by the exit.

“Cally?” he called just to double check she was still standing next to him.

No reply. Dolph turned around again. The police were coming this way. He started to speed walk in the opposite direction.

Jo was finally managing to talk to her sister. This was the closest she’d ever get to chatting to Cally alone. She eyed the hoard of pupils present in the canteen. This was not one of her most impressive feats, but it would have to do. She knew she had to be careful about what she said. Accusing Dolph of things, no matter how solid the evidence was, would get her nowhere. Jo knew from experience.

“What are you doing here!? You kicked Dolph!” exclaimed Cally.

Jo bit back the retort of: you killed dad, and forced herself to reply with the answer she’d prepared on the way over.

“I’m sorry. I messed up. You are right. You and Dolph have always been right. I’m just the little sister who gets in the way, I can see it now. I just wanted to apologise to your face.”

For a few moments Cally said nothing. Then she smiled. It was all working out.

“Thank you for finally coming round. Now will you admit that you killed Diane?”

Jo gulped, this was the biggest lie of all time but she knew it was vital to win back her sister’s trust.

“Y-yes.”

“Then I’ll have to turn you in. The police are here you know.”

Cally turned to walk over to them but Jo put a hand on her shoulder.

“Wait! Can’t I at least give you this small peace offering?”

She held out the Haemofrost container. She’d ripped off the label however so it simply appeared to be a strangely shaped purple box with nozzles coming out from it.

“What is it?” asked Cally eyeing the small contraption incredulously.

“I got it from Liza.” Cally’s eyes widened. Liza was a sister of a friend; she provided a lot of the alcoholic supplies for the parties she held before her parents had found out about them. “Do I really need to say anymore?”

Jo was screaming inside for her sister to take the bait, Cally considered it slowly.

“No, you don’t. Just give it here.” Cally snatched it from her sister’s hand and moved the nozzles carefully so they were both pointing into her mouth before gulping the liquid down. She pulled a face. “Well thanks for the tainted batch!” she snapped at Jo and continued to move towards the police but this time Dolph intervened, pulling her away from the crowd of people gathering by the exit. The police were interviewing Mrs Richardson.

“Aren’t you going to eat your cake?” asked Dolph.

“I’m not really that hungry.”

It was true, that drink Jo had given her made her feel rather full and rather cold. Her teeth were chattering.

“Come on, I bought that thing especially for you.”

“Okay then.”

Jo watched the pair from a distance, crossing her fingers. This had to work. It had to be quick too, from the looks of things she didn’t have much time before Dolph tried the next stage of his plan.

Cally bit into the cake and Dolph smiled as he clutched his wounded arm. It was working.

“Dolph how is your arm?” asked Cally, noticing the way he was holding it.

“Painful.”

“You should go to hospital.”

“No, no not yet I’ll survive.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah.”

“You should at least put something on it.”

“I’ll be fine.” he said, before giving her a strange look. “Why are you shaking?”

“Because it’s freezing in here!” Cally complained.

“No it isn’t.”

“Well at least someone is warm!”

# Chapter 8

Dolph stood in front of Cally, blocking her view, now was the perfect time.

“Watch out!” he said to her.

Then he threw his cake at Callum. Cally of course could see none of this. She only saw Dolph duck as Callum retaliated with the throwing of his pasta. The food hit her square in the face. She screamed in a mixture of disgust and anger as the sauce dripped down her chin. Callum looked genuinely scared. Dolph grinned as he stood and moved to one side. All attention was on Cally. Her eyes narrowed and she tried to focus her anger, but the white dot that normally appeared on her victims all the times before refused to show itself. Jo smiled. Mission accomplished. Suddenly Cally felt a lot warmer and healthier. The sheen of sweat from her last collapse seemed to fade away. Unable to fathom why her powers had suddenly disappeared Cally threw her half eaten cake at Callum. It missed and hit Ettie. From there on all hell was unleashed. Mrs Richardson started to yell at the children but simply got smothered by a pile of sandwiches thrown in her direction. Jo armed herself by grabbing a bottle of orange juice from a nearby kid’s hand. The police decided now was their chance to move forward but found themselves caught in the midst of a huge food fight.

Dolph realised that Cally’s powers no longer seemed to work. His face turned red at first, then purple as he started to run from the incoming police. All that work, for nothing! Cally turned when she realised he was leaving.

“Dolph!” she called. He span round on the spot. “Where are you going?”

“Anywhere that isn’t here! Oh and thanks for announcing my name to the authorities!” he yelled over the chaos of the food and screaming children.

“I’ll come with you.”

“NO. Don’t you get it?”

“Get what?”

“You’re clingy, shout-y, high and annoying!”

“What? High?”

“Yes high you bozo! I put cocaine in your cake after all!”

But he could tell from her expression that she still didn’t understand.

“Dolph what are you trying to say?”

He was angry, he wasn’t really thinking anymore.

“I DON’T LOVE YOU IDIOT! WE WERE OVER A LONG TIME AGO AND I ONLY STUCK AROUND FOR YOUR POWERS.”

At this yell the canteen went silent. Miraculously Jo had managed to get through the majority of the food fight with only a sauce stain on her clothes. She put the orange juice bottle down to one side and stopped spraying with it. Everyone was frozen listening to the angry couple’s yells.

“A-are you breaking up with me?”

“YES!”

Then a look of realisation crossed Cally’s face. At first her expression displayed the hurt inside her, and then it darkened to a look of rage.

“Were you drugging me to boost my powers?”

“YES!”

“Were you using me?”

At this point Dolph’s confidence began to fall. He remembered his wounded arm. Of course, he had been using her but if he admitted it she would go mental. Jo sensed his hesitation and stepped forwards.

“Yes he was Cally.”

“STAY OUT OF THIS JO I WANT TO HEAR IT FROM HIM.”

“Cally you need to listen to me. Dolph has been using you to get rid of his enemies.” Jo decided to ramp her speech up a little and jumped up onto the table top so everyone could see her. “WHO REMEMBERS MR PORTER?” Linda gasped. Rory looked at her. They both knew the girl was talking about her late husband. Several hands flew up into the air. Jo felt a little like she was conducting an assembly. “Good. Do you remember how he ended up?” The hands rose into the air again, this time with a little less enthusiasm. How could anyone forget that horrible news story? She turned her attention back to Dolph who was backing away from his angry girlfriend. “Dolph never liked him, Dolph never liked Diane and he’s definitely never liked Mrs Richardson. What’s the connection? I’ll tell you: two out of three ended up dead and Mrs had a near death experience with that projector.” The crowd of schoolchildren started to murmur in agitation. “And now he’s killed my dad.”

“Jo this has nothing to do with me!” Cally exclaimed. She turned on Dolph again. “It’s all his fault.”

“It has everything to do with you! He manipulated you! He made you love him. You admitted it on more than one occasion. You were there on the night when Diane died why don’t you tell us what happened?”

All eyes were on Cally.

“It’s none of your business.” she said quietly.

“Liar. She was my friend too! Or did you forget?” She paused to make sweeping eye contact with every member of the audience, remembering what her English teacher had taught her. A tiny part of her was enjoying this, she felt like a detective and now she could finally catch the criminals. “I wasn’t the person who killed Diane, *you* were.”

“WHAT? I’D NEVER DO THAT!” Cally yelled, but her panicked darting eyes told a different story.

“Dolph always hated Diane because she told the truth about him. It didn’t take a genius to realise that he was spiking your drinks at the weekly parties. She wanted to warn you, but in doing so she accused Dolph and that’s one thing you just can’t take Cally. Criticism.” She paused before saying the next part in a quieter tone. “Then you used your powers.”

“I DIDN’T KNOW WHAT I WAS DOING!”

“I’m not finished yet. After I found you I heard footsteps. Dolph was checking up on his dirty work. But I knew Diane. I know what she would’ve said. Diane’s last words weren’t ‘it was Jo’, she hadn’t finished talking. She was going to say ‘it was Jo who was right about him and I’m just passing on the message’. ”

Cally repeated her earlier argument but this time with a bit less oomph.

“I didn’t know what I was doing.”

“Ignorance is no excuse. You’re both under arrest.” interrupted Linda. She stared at the kids. “What are you looking at? Haven’t you got food to be eating?”

The normal canteen atmosphere resumed as the children attempted to avoid the policewoman’s stare.

Rory who had been watching Linda’s expression throughout the entirety of Jo’s speech was worried. She’d wanted revenge on Michael’s killer for so long, what would she do now she knew that the culprit was just a confused kid? Jo jumped down from the table and went over to join the policeman.

“You worked all of that out?”

“I’m not a baby.”

He smiled.

“I never said you were.” Then he hurried after Linda. She snapped the handcuffs around Cally’s wrists. Cally barely struggled; she simply stood there staring at Dolph and then her sister, unable to believe the truth. Rory found himself dealing with the more evasive Dolph who was trying to run out of the canteen. It was easy enough to stop him though as the fellow students rallied round to help the policeman. Three year elevens barred the door whilst a year seven stuck out his foot and tripped Dolph up. He fell over hard onto the floor and moaned as his arm throbbed in reaction. Rory used the opportunity to cuff the teenager and dragged the boy to his feet. Linda wasn’t glaring at the girl much to his surprise she simply looked lost like Jo had earlier that day in the police station. Linda felt like she had lost Michael all over again. Rory walked over to her. “Come on; let’s get back to the police station.” He glanced at Jo. “You too. Your mum will be waiting for you by now.”

Jo waved goodbye to her friends who stood by the door, covered in food splatters. They waved back and as one, the group left.

On the way to the police car Cally’s anger finally took over. She ran at Dolph and started to pummel him with her handcuffed fists. She kicked at him too. He yelped in pain as she clawed at his arm.

“This is how you made me feel when you ruined my heart!” she hissed in his ear.

“Get her off me! She’s mad!” Dolph yelled.

Linda watched the pair for a bit longer than necessary before telling Rory to separate them. Rory did so, but it was hard work. It seemed Cally was tricky to restrain. Eventually Linda pitched in when it was clear he was getting nowhere and together they got to the car. The pair exchanged glances as they realised it would be difficult to keep them apart when they got inside the vehicle.

“I’ll call for back up shall I?” suggested Rory.

“Yes. You do that.” agreed Linda.

Within minutes of the call the separate car arrived. It was driven by Mark.

“Look who it is, surprise, surprise.” mumbled Rory. He shoved Dolph into the car before his friend could say anything and told him to take Dolph to the police station. Mark looked affronted at not being given any time to speak but did as Rory said anyways. He turned to the others. “Let’s go.”

Linda drove and Rory sat next to her reciting the legalities.

“You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.”

Cally chose to remain silent. She sat next to her sister saying nothing whatsoever. Jo had a feeling that Cally would never admit that her younger sister had been right. That just wasn’t her way of doing things. Besides, because of Jo she’d probably end up going to jail.

Thanks to traffic Mark had got Dolph to the station before the others arrived. Cally was put with him, which they all thought was a bad idea but there wasn’t enough space to separate them again. On the bright side Cally hadn’t launched another attack on Dolph. Yet. Jo found herself sitting in the waiting room but this time her mother was there to greet her. She finally let out her feelings about her father and together they cried on the bench. Rory explained what had happened to Aileen and was surprised by the lack of yelling. Maybe her temper had been kicked out of her after receiving Linda’s phone call about her husband. He certainly hoped so. He turned to find himself facing Mark.

“What do you want?” he asked wearily.

“First, an explanation.” Rory launched into the day’s antics and by the end Mark had a much better understanding of how his friend felt. When Rory finished speaking Mark glanced in Porter’s direction and then spoke. “I know you’ve had a long and busy day so I’m not going to say much, other than look at Linda.” Surprised by the maturity of his friend’s response Rory did as he told him. The head of the police department looked like she was wilting like a dead flower. Linda didn’t just feel her tired, sad feelings, she emitted them. “I don’t care what you say; you need to talk to her.”

“Okay. You’re right.” Rory admitted.

Mark patted him on the shoulder and went over to El. He pecked the policewoman on the cheek, she smiled and they both watched as Rory approached Linda.

“Thank you, my partner in crime.” he said to her.

“My pleasure.” she replied.

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Rory stood by Linda. She stared at the bulletin board, fingering the pins. She was trying hard not to look at him. He felt uncomfortable; this was too formal for his liking.

“I’m so sorry Porter.” he said.

“Don’t call me that.” she said softly.

“What?”

“Call me by my first name.”

Well that was an unusual reaction to say the least.

“O-kay.”

“I’m sorry about yelling at you earlier by the way, I was thinking about things in a little too much depth. Jo’s conclusion wasn’t far off mine.”

“Oh.” So that explained it. “She’s a clever girl. I wouldn’t be surprised if she became a detective when she’s older.” Rory said to fill the awkward silence between them.

“Yeah…”

Mark and El, overlooking the conversation from a distance, exchanged glances; this was not going as well as they’d hoped.

“Look if you need to talk –“ Rory began.

“I don’t.”

Rory looked at her. He’d had enough of this.

“Yes you do, can’t you see? You said yourself the reason I’m on this case is to correct your mistakes. It is my duty to give you a decent counselling session if you need one because quite frankly you do.” Rory felt the words come tumbling out of his mouth as soon as he thought them. “You are too responsible, your mood swings are – well – irritating to say the least and you need to learn how to let go. Michael isn’t here anymore. I’m sorry, but moping about it will get you nowhere. Thanks to our capturing of the two teenage delinquents who killed him in the first place you should consider the guy avenged! You’ll meet someone else. That I’m sure of but the prospect is never going to occur if you don’t lighten up!”

As soon as Rory finished speaking he put his hand over his mouth. He tensed. He was bound to be fired within the next few seconds now. But the condemning words never left her mouth.

“Thanks.” she said.

“For what?”

“For putting me straight.”

“Huh?”

“You’re the first person to tell me that to my face.”

“And that’s a good thing?” questioned Rory in amazement.

“I like it when people are honest.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

In fact, the more Linda thought about Rory the more she realised how he’d always been there for her. Even on the latest of nights at the office he’d managed to lose something and they’d wound up chatting. He had comforted her then and was doing it now, although sometimes he didn’t even know it. At first she’d thought he was like Michael but then she realised he was so much more - Rory was alive for starters. Linda found herself thinking back to the irritating conversation she’d had with Mark and his voice seemed to echo through her head.

*“You act different around him you know.”*

That day she’d been ready to deny everything and anything but now – maybe, just maybe Mark was right. She looked at Rory, analysing him almost and immediately noticed how she’d begun to look at him differently. In many ways Rory had grown up. He was no longer the inexperienced young policeman who’d accidentally arrested a five year old for murder. He’d matured, plus he was pretty handsome on closer inspection. Linda couldn’t believe she hadn’t realised this before, but that friend of his had. She glanced in Mark’s direction and saw he was standing with El. Ah. The pair were holding hands. He’d had help then.

Rory however was still worried about Linda. This pondering silence had lasted several minutes now and he felt it was getting to the extreme end of what he liked to call The Awkward Scale. He felt like his head was a ticking time bomb waiting to explode as he tried to think of things to say. She was obviously upset about Michael, yes that had to be it. Maybe she just needed a little space. Her eyes looked unfocussed and far away as she stared at him. Rory smiled, her eyes were pretty. He mentally shook himself out of that idea and tried to focus on saying something appropriate to her.

“I’ll just leave you to it then.” he said.

Linda seemed to come out of her trance.

“Sorry, leave me to what?”

“Erm…your staring.”

“What? Oh sorry.”

“It’s alright; you’ve got a lot on your plate. Are you okay Linda?”

“Yeah I was just thinking about something.”

“Michael I’ll bet.” Rory muttered.

“Actually no.”

“Oh.” Rory shuffled his feet sheepishly. She wasn’t meant to hear that, she was allowed to think about her dead husband after what they’d just discovered. “What were you thinking about then?”

“I was just considering something.” Rory opened his mouth. “It wasn’t about him before you ask.” He closed it again. “I was thinking about this.”

Linda stepped forwards, closing the space between them, his eyes widened in anticipation. He was half wondering whether he had annoyed her so it came as a pleasant surprise when she kissed him. At first his eyes widened in shock but then he closed them and melted into it. When Linda finally pulled away she was smiling. However the moment was spoiled slightly by the call from the corner of the police station behind them.

“It’s about time!” said El.

“Yeah, but get a room you two!” Mark added.

Much to his surprise Rory noted a light blush appearing on Linda’s cheeks. He took her by the hand and led her towards her office.

“We’ve got some time before we have to interview those kids.”

She grinned.

# Epilogue

Ten years later.

Jo was ready, it would be awkward in every manner of the word, but the important part was that she was mentally prepared. She just needed to not think about it. She would just think about travel arrangements, the tube should sort that out. She stepped into the crush of people and tried to avoid going on autopilot. If she focussed on every little detail instead of mixing it up into a vague blur then maybe she’d be able to avoid the thought of what she was going to -*family get together.* Too late.Jo slapped her head in annoyance. She had to stop doing that.

Cally was on parole. This was the only reason the whole dinner get together was happening in the first place, it would be one of those rare times when all of them would be able to meet. Not including her father of course. It wasn’t that Jo didn’t like seeing her family, it could be quite fun sometimes but usually a member of the group would manage to accidentally bring up a topic related to why Cally was in prison in the first place. Jo knew her sister was getting better at controlling herself and in many ways she was proud that the rehabilitation was so effective but she still had a lot to work on. Ordinary prisons couldn’t and wouldn’t accept her, Cally attended somewhere special and it seemed to be helping. Anyways, any time that subject got brought up, well; let’s just say the result last time hadn’t been pretty. Cally was doing well, but when she exploded there was nothing within a ten mile radius that wasn’t affected. It seemed that the bottle her father had given her wasn’t a proper cure; it merely numbed her powers to a less dangerous, more manageable state. They were no longer fatal, but had grown up with her and that didn’t stop them from causing damage. At least they were no longer boosted by the drugs Dolph had force fed to her once upon a time, Cally went quiet whenever he was brought up. She knew better than him now. But he’d been giving her the stuff long enough for it to have a lasting effect on her powers. So far, every time she got out on parole she would have one of her moments and get dragged back into the prison. It was clearly a painful process for her, so Jo had learnt to dread these days.

She shook her head in an attempt to rid herself of the memories and realised she was standing in front of her mother’s front door. She felt a wave of nostalgia coming on and quickly knocked on the door before it could sweep through her. Her mother opened the door almost instantly with a beaming look on her face. She looked happy, but Jo could simply not get used to the grey locks of hair that framed her face now.

“Jo it’s so good to see you!” Aileen exclaimed giving her daughter a big hug. Jo was a little surprised but went with it. Her mother had changed a lot after her father died, she’d desperately tried to take over his job as the caring parent, but this willingness to hug was clearly a recent development.

“Erm…it’s good to see you too mum.” Jo said.

Finally she let go.

“Come in, come in, it’s freezing out there!”

Jo stepped into the hallway and shrugged off the snowflakes that rested on her shoulders. The place was just as she remembered it from her teenage years, although now the walls were painted a different shade of cream. She started to take off her coat.

“Is Cally here yet?”

“Yes, she was here early too!” Jo raised an eyebrow. “I know I wasn’t expecting it either.” Aileen admitted.

Jo placed her coat on the hanger, removed her shoes and let her mother lead her into the dining room. The table was decorated with tinsel, a miniature Christmas tree and a festive table cloth.

“Wow mum, you’ve really gone all out this year!” Jo commented.

“Well, I thought we ought to celebrate.”

Jo eyed the tree; it could very easily get in the way of conversation. In fact, that tree was the sole reason why she didn’t spot her sister, as Cally was sitting directly behind it.

“Hi Jo.” said Cally, startling her sister as she stood up.

“Hi Cal.” Cally virtually skipped towards Jo and gave her a hug. Jo was shocked to say the least. Cally, like her mother, did not do hugs. “What’s this for?”

Cally broke away.

“Didn’t mum tell you?”

Cally’s eyes sent daggers at Aileen.

“Don’t look at me like that, I only found out when you arrived!” her mother protested.

“Tell me what?” asked Jo.

She was curious now, what with all the hugging.

“I am officially out of hell!” Cally announced.

“Huh?” Jo spluttered.

When was Cally *in* the afterlife in the first place?

“No going back to that prison, I’m free to go!”

Oh. She meant she was officially out of jail. That made a lot more sense.

“So you’ve managed to control everything?” Jo double checked.

“Yeah! It’s brilliant! Aren’t you happy for me?”

Jo felt a smile start to stretch across her face to mirror the one on her sister’s. She hadn’t seen Cally this happy in a very long time. Ironically the last time she’d seen her like this was when she met Dolph. Everything had gone downhill from there, but now things were finally starting to look up.

“Of course I am, just a little surprised by all the hugging.”

Aileen chuckled.

“Starting from now I’m going to be a new person. No more mistakes.”

“Cally if you want to be a person you have to make a mistake from time to time.” Jo reminded.

“Yeah I know. Just not a dangerous one this time round.”

Jo sensed a hint of doubt in her sister’s tone. She couldn’t be unsure of herself, not after all she’d been through, all she’d managed to withhold.

“You won’t.” she reassured.

“I did before.”

“It’s not going to happen again.” Jo put her hands on Cally’s shoulders. “I trust you.”

**The End**