Chapter 3: Clocked Out.

The hospital gave Sara fresh scrubs, but they couldn’t replace the lovely Scooby-Doo ones that her fiancé had given her. He hit the nail on that one, seeing as how she loved the show, but their demise had left a void in the form of an unsolved mystery: what the fuck had just happened? With the campy cartoon scrubs in the disposal, there was no gang left to solve the mystery except for Sara herself. However, feeling the labor of her frenzied shift, she left that ugly question unanswered and clocked out. Padding down the hallway in her newly acquired throw-away slippers, she brushed past security and tried to avoid any looks from the inept guardians of her ward. As Sara strolled to her parking spot in the furthest vicinity of the hospital grounds, she flicked through her phone to send her daily text to Jason signaling that she was on her way home. However, Sara’s fingers failed to type any sort of message to her cozied fiancé, and a torrent of uneasy thoughts prompted her to close the phone and refrain. Jason was never awake at this time, and the usual check-in would not bring her comfort after the morning’s events.

Distressed, Sara fumbled through her endless array of keys, and managed to find the right one. Of course, the recently-defective driver’s side door refused to open, so she had to crawl through the passenger’s side, crumpling layers of school papers and fast food wrappers as she went. The engine sputtered on and with it came the blast of boisterous talk show hosts, and the scrapping of rusty windshield wipers. With a tired cry, Sara shut off the annoyances, and sank her head onto the steering wheel. Cold air brushed her face from the car’s vents and she expelled any of the energy she had left. Why did she choose this profession, she thought? Sara’s last night shift was supposed to end with a celebration, but her mind couldn’t bridge the endless gap to freedom which took form in her future studies, and her next position at the hospital. She would be back in that emergency ward, but thankfully during the day shift.

After a brief moment of relaxation, Sara’s mind snapped back to the sluggish tadpoles she had seen and she jolted her from her stupor. Gazing hazily back at the entrance to the hospital, she thought of the writhing creatures; squirming in their pile of decay, coming from God-knows-where. Sara hadn’t the faintest idea of what the hospital would do about what she had seen, but as the entrance gazed back, she knew she had to get away from that building and everything it contained. Without hesitation, she put her decrepit Honda into drive, and veered out of the area as fast as her wheels would allow.

The ride home was as manageable as possible for a dingy October day, and the little rain she encountered hardly made the trip difficult. As per usual with her cruise back from the city, she saw little opposition in the form of other cars, and when she did, their driving was as distracted and dulled as her own. On drives like these, Sara’s focus would lull to the point of relying solely on muscle memory to get home. Her mind bounced from thought to thought; stuck in a whirly daze as thick as the fog that enveloped the road, and her attention would only return when oncoming headlights pierced the confines of her vehicle. After some scratches and disruptions, a dull static replaced the morning jazz on her speakers as she escaped the public station’s range and furthered her distance away from the city. Sputtering into a warm crackle, the humming volume of the airways, coupled with the roaming stretch of road, coaxed Sara into a renewed stupor and she sagged into the seats with increasing lethargy. The crumpling Michigan roads plodded at her tires, and vibrated throughout the vehicle, joining in with the perpetual white noise which reverberated throughout the cabin. Sara’s eyelids sank in conjunction with her posture, and she lost functionality by the minute. Thinking back to her cuddly fiancé, and the ecstasy of a warm bed, she became content with closing her eyes, just for a second. She didn’t seem concerned. However much time she had closed them, she was unaware, but it seemed nothing more than a flash. The rumbling sound of road strips clawed Sara from her REM state, and was followed by the roaring sound of an egregious truck horn. Shaken, Sara looked up to find that her car had begun drifting off the shoulder of the road, and a large truck was bearing down behind her. The with tense arms, Sara corrected her vehicle’s path and let the vindictive driver pass her. Wind shook her car as it brushed past, and the driver doubled down with another punch on his horn as he drove into the distance.

After the weight of the incident settled onto Sara’s already heavy situation, she knew that she needed to get off the road and rest. The poor girl decided to stop, and pulled into a nearby park which she recognized from attending an old friend’s birthday party. It was a small, murky lake which held grounds to a rusty playground, and a saggy pavilion for events. Crushing leaves as she went, she crossed the run-down parking lot, and came to a stop at closet point to the lake, where she gleamed at the heaps of lofty steam rolling off the water. She shut the engine off, reclined her seat, and closed her eyes. Opting to leave her keys in the ignition, the radio continued to produce soothing static throughout the cabin. The strain throughout Sara’s body faded with every second, and she found herself face to face with peace for the first time in her day. Finally catching sleep, darkness consumed her consciousness, and she drifted away.

Sara woke to a sound. Something ugly. The sound of a warbling pit with gurgles and belches perforating the air in every direction. Sara popped her seat to the upright position, rubbed the exhaustion from her eyes, and noticed that her car’s battery had shut off to preserve its juice. In doing so, it had wrought her of the drowning white noise her relaxation had relied upon, and in its wake, was a horrible torrent of organic groaning, moaning, and croaks which coarsely vibrated throughout the atmosphere around her. The sounds hit Sara like a wall when she realized what produced them. They were frogs. The God-awful animals had infected the wilderness and smothered the night with their belching, croaking tunes. “Nope, nope, nope,” Sara stuttered to herself, “Not today, nuh, ugh.” She frantically started her engine, and peeled the car out of the lot towards her home.

The rest of her journey went by fast, and Sara made it home safe with an alertness brought on by the bestial scare. She came home to a dark apartment, and a rising sun. The clinking of her keys alerted her dog, and as the door cracked open, she was already being greeted by the ecstatic Pitbull. Seeking a little affection, she reached down, and tried for a hug. “Hello, Molly,” she quipped, but the dog retreated from her arms, and ran towards the food bowl. As usual, the dim-witted thing refused socialize on an empty stomach. Sara threw her bag to the floor and fed Molly before making herself a bowl of cereal. She shuffled into the bedroom, being careful not to wake Jason, and changed out of her used hospital garments. Sara settled into a small spot on the bed beside her sprawled, snoring fiancé, and curled into a ball with the comfort of what little sheets she could grab. Thoughts came and went, but sleep struggled to find its mark. Sara reflected on the incident from earlier that day, and she found herself frozen with panic to the point where she couldn’t blink and was stuck staring off into the darkness of her value-sized bedroom. Why did she choose this field? Why didn’t she do something easier? And what the fuck had just happened? Why? Why? Why? Rays of sunshine crept through the cracks in her blinds, and Sara resigned to her need for sleep. Turning her shoulder, she latched onto her fiancés arm, and cuddled up against his warm skin. He murmured in his sleep, and eventually, his easy breathing lulled Sara’s own, to the point which she finally achieved rest.

Strangely, grand dreams of adventures during the summertime occupied her sleep. Sara found herself lost in a dream chasing her dog Molly through the wake on a beach somewhere with Jason watching from the shore. The dog happily splashed about, and ran between her and her fiancé as they threw her toy ball back and forth. She felt at peace. No worry, no trouble. Just her man, and her dog. The afternoon came, and Sara woke to an empty bed. She instinctively reached beside her, but found nothing but cold, empty sheets. Jason had left for work hours ago, and being considerate per usual, he did not wake her from her slumber. Sara ached for him. Opposite work schedules had caused a rift between them which was only bridged between the hours of 6PM to 10PM, and it was horrible. She whistled for her dog, but received no answer, and no companionship barring the blankets on her bed. Sara had homework to do today, but in her current condition, she was not capable of focusing on anything besides her own misery. She wrapped the comforter between her legs, and clinched them with the shaky grip of anxiety. Alone, and tucked away in her room, Sara began to weep. Her faint sobbing could be heard through the paper-thin walls.