

Palace

Kayla O'Brien

Dakota

From the back of the class you can see everything and everyone. The note that Clarissa Evans had given to all the girls around her was moving quickly, but it hadn't reached me yet. Carter Vinishe was texting under his desk. I didn't care what the note said. I didn't care who Carter was texting. You see, I get disinterested quickly. I sat next to a window and there was a beautiful black mass moving towards us. It lit up occasionally and filled me with wonder. What was it like to float in the sky? Did you feel guilt or pride knowing that you could destroy someone's life with the crack of a white hot whip?

"Dakota!", Mrs. Girren said with a hint of undermine in her voice.

"I see you're more interested in a cloud than your education." Mrs. Girren was a young, newly married European woman who was visited constantly by our principal, a man of 63 and in great shape for it. The children called him Grandpa, ironically. He never gave anyone candy, attention or sympathy. The one exception was Girren. There was a rumor floating around that perky Mrs. G was to get a considerable raise soon from Grandpa.

"I'm sorry, ma'am." I said, thinking that was enough.

"Tell me, Ms. Marr, do you want to end up on the street begging for basic human essentials?" Her smug attitude made me want to throw a chair at her throat.

"This is Junior level Calculus ma'am." She looked completely dumbstruck for a split second, then it disappeared into annoyance.

“Do you think I don’t know what class I’m teaching?”

“You said I’d become a bum, ma’am.” It took all the strength I had not to insult her.

The boys snickered behind their hands and the girls giggled then turned away, blushing. I looked Mrs. Girren right in the eye and she looked back. She did something then that I will never forget. She sat down. What!? She never left an argument without saying the last word! I guessed she didn’t want to get in trouble before she got her raise. Everyone turned to face me, wondering what I’d done to quiet her. I didn’t know what to do, so I just turned back to the window.

The sky had been taken over by the storm, and it was glorious. I don’t know how long I had been staring, but the bell to end the day woke me up. I grabbed my things and went to my locker. Other girls decorated their lockers with lights and organizers and pictures of their best friend and them at a movie. All I had in mine was a few books I’ve been meaning read, a dead flower I got from my Nana for my birthday, and a newspaper clipping with a story on what money can do to your brain. I left all that there and put my stuff in my backpack. I went over to our foreign exchange student from India, Surri Kuthropalli, and flung my arm around her shoulders. “I’m starting to feel like you want to break my neck.” She said. Her locker was so colorful it made a rainbow look lazy.

Surri had transferred at the beginning of the school year, but about a week after school had started. She was already fluent in English when she got here. Her accent made her voice sound like an angel. She had boys swooning over her for the first month she was here. She didn’t have any friends either, so I put my arm around her when I saw Carter walking over to her one

day. I've been protecting her from boys ever since. She doesn't even like boys.

"Will you walk home with me?" I said, giving her a hug.

"Why?", she said it as if it were a statement.

"I need you to help me study for the semester exam. Also I want a good reason to avoid my brother." My brother Austin was 16 and gave me the attention not wanted by a freshman. Everytime he or a buddy of his saw me in the hall, they stuck old gum (that they always seemed to have a large supply of) to my back and laughed hysterically. It would start a train of nervous laughter throughout the hallway. They didn't do it when Surri was with me because they thought she would put some voodoo curse on them or something. Since she's from India.

"Let's not take the path through the woods, okay? I don't want to be struck by lightning, and please wear your jacket. It's November." She was more concerned with my health than my own mother.

"But the street's longer! And I know to wear my jacket, I'm not two." She finished packing up and we went down stairs to the lobby. Hardly anyone had left yet. They were saying emotional goodbyes to their friends that they were going to see again on Monday. We stopped at the door and I put my jacket on. I had tricked my father into buying it saying that I was going to give it to Austin as a peace offering, but later I'd told father Austin didn't get me anything and that he didn't want to seem selfish. It's a simple brown leather jacket with knitted cloth cuffs and a collar.

The rain hadn't started pouring, but there was the occasional drop. We went outside and walk down the side of the road to the school gate. It was open all school day and securely closed

at 5:00 everyday, and opened at 8:00 every morning. An hour before school started, and an hour after. Students used to sneak in and vandalize the sides of the school, drink, smoke and do drugs on the property.

I grabbed Surri's hand and pulled her across the street to a sidewalk. We halfway to my house when it started raining bullets. We threw our bags over our heads and ran the rest of the way. When we got to the driveway, I pressed the call button on the intercom and waited for an answer. One of our maids, Serene, let us in. We walked up the driveway, past the front door around the house, and finally underneath the living room deck on the side of it. My room was in the back, but the deck went to the edge of the house.

"Isn't your room on the second floor?", asked Surri. "Yeah, but father's having the fountain rebuilt, so there's this really tall ladder. We can get to my room without being seen." The fountain was a hundred year old moldy, crumbling mass of two angels holding harps. It was older than the house and it certainly looked it.

We grabbed it and set it on the balcony to my room. Surri went first to get out of the rain, while I waited at the bottom. I loved the rain. To feel it wash my face, to feel the drops on my skin, for it to drench my clothes. The one downside was what came after: my clothes would stick to my skin and make me really cold. If I didn't change quick enough, I would get sick and I couldn't feel the rain anymore.

I started climbing. The steps were wet and slippery, and shined in the faint daylight. I know I should've been cautious, but our dog, Geane, walked into the living room. and I bolted up the ladder. Geane was a four year old St. Bernard and barked at anything he saw. It was a low, tremulous roar that shook the house. My mother had gotten him to enter in shows and make

money off of him. She didn't work, but she called it her job. He hated me. I had read in a book that dogs take after their owners.

I made it out of sight of the big window just in time. The ladder started teetering and tilting back. I jumped to the railing and grabbed on. Surri gave me her hand and pulled me up.

“Can I borrow some clothes?”, she asked, out of breath.

“Yeah, of course.” I got some clothes from my closet and went to the bathroom to change. Surri was sitting on the bed with her computer open, wearing pajama pants and an orange T-shirt. I got my books from my bag and sat next to her.

Surri was gone when I woke up. She had left a note. I checked to see if your mom was home, she wasn't, so I'm going out the front door. Love you. She always said “love you” after a message. I didn't mind because I loved her too.

I ate a breakfast of plain toast and water while watching HBO. Nothing special was on but I was on my phone the whole time anyway. My brother came down, had a glass of milk, and went back upstairs. It seemed he hadn't noticed me in the least bit. He usually glares at me or chews noisily right in my ear. He thinks that because he's older he can do anything, it's just two years. After eating I went to my room and studied for a while.

Serene came in in the afternoon and said my father wanted to see me in his office. I got up, hesitantly. Did he know Surri had been here? She walked out the front door, it couldn't have been that hard to see her. Was he mad about the ladder? I got to his office and knocked. “Come in.” His deep voice said. His office was a beautiful mix of maroon and mahogany. The ten foot

walls were lined with old novels that he had read before, and a stone fireplace was ready to be lit. The dark wood flooring had a rectangular carpet, on which sat a huge desk filled with paperwork that was neatly stacked and facing the fireplace. He sat there with his head down, looking at papers.

“You wanted to see me, sir?”, I tried to say it without trying to sound nervous. I didn’t partic“Why do you keep sneaking that girl in?”, he said angrily. This was what I was worried about.

“My apol-”

“I mean, honestly, we have a front door. Wouldn’t it be easier to just walk in?”, he put his hand on his chin, thinking, and leaned back in his chair. He sounded annoyed. He didn’t understand. My mother, Kimm, was a thirty six year old conservative that thought everywhere in the house that Surri breathed should be quarantined and incubated. She made me walk Geane(which I was happy to do) when she found out she had been here. Luckily, she had a hair appointment at 8:30 this morning, so Surri walked out.

I was bored and wanted to go see her, but mother was home and wouldn’t let me leave. I didn’t want to upset Kimm, but there was no use asking.

“I’ll be back in a few hours.” I said slowly.

“Don’t stay out to late.” Father said, still thinking.

I went into the hallway and to the main entrance. Kimm was yelling at our new server, a young boy of 17, in the dining hall for something I couldn’t hear. I went out the door quickly and down the steps to where I kept my bike. I put my phone in my pocket and kicked up the stopper. The gate was open for the repair crew, and I went right past it. Surri lived on the other side of

town in a one story house and a nice neighborhood. It would take a while to get there on a bike, but I liked the fresh air. I got to the end of the driveway and took a right.

It had been around forty minutes by the time I got to the intersection to her huge neighborhood. There was a stop sign on the street, so I didn't bother looking. Neither did the woman on her phone driving at fifty miles an hour.

I tried to move, but my pant leg got stuck. She hit me in the abdomen and broke my upper thigh. My head slammed into the hood of the car and broke my nose. The hood ornament was stuck in my abdomen. She was still on her phone when she hit me. She drove over me and pinned my left leg under the bike. She ran over my fingers and shattered them. She moved the car to where I could see the exhaust pipe. There was a ringing in my ears as my nose swelled and blood rushed to my hand. My throat was filling with blood as I noticed her get out of the car with a hand over her mouth. She was crying as she called for an ambulance, using her blonde hair as a tissue. That was all I saw.

I woke up in a silver room. There was a spotlight over me, but there didn't appear to be a ceiling. I laid on a bed that was draped in the silver and connected to the floor. I could hear wind chimes. When I sat up, I noticed where the sound was coming from. The room was as large as a stadium. There were what looked like DNA strands twisting around large shiny spheres made of

the same silver as everything else. Ropes of the DNA twisted and curled to the bed were I sat. They continued to twist as I put my legs over the side of the bed.

I looked down. The shimmer was so bright, I was momentarily blinded. Something in the brightness had moved. A perfectly sculpted arm reached from the floor, slowly. I didn't move. It stopped about a foot away from my chest. It opened its fist and held out its hand, as if to say, "Come with me." I waited several minutes because I didn't know what to do. I sat there on the table, looking at it.

It closed itself eventually and went back to the silver. I placed my feet on either side the arm had been.

I tried to set my foot down. I sunk into the pool without a sound. It was a thick liquid that filled my body until I froze. No more wind chimes. I felt myself hit a bottom. *Where am I?* I couldn't see anything. I felt a sharp pain in my face, and the silver disappeared.

I was standing on a beach. Colorful glass was shaped like wings standing upright. What is that? They surrounded the inner island. Dark clouds partially covered the sky. Rays of light shone thru where they weren't, and made the glass look like it was on fire.

I cautiously walked to the center of the island. A path cleared as I walked further in. I don't know how long I had been walking, but the sun was gone now. Fantastical plants bloomed in the night and illuminated my way. I went slower to admire the beauty of the light. The light danced on the glass in a rainbow of colors. Green, blue, purple, yellow, cyan, pink, and others I had never seen. They made me tired, so I sat down. The radiating heat from the light warmed. I fell asleep soon enough.

It was still dark when I woke up. It seemed as if no time had passed. I got up and walked farther. The light from the sky was at full blast when I found what I thought was the center.



Stones spiraled to a black rose. The glass created a bud-like structure around the stones and flower.

I touched the glass. It was smooth and had a reflective quality. I looked away from my hand and saw the most horrible thing standing in front of me. A black eyed monster with a purple face and body. It was covered in callused skin that had fallen off in some places. Its vein's ran red through its body. Bone was showing where its legs bent backwards. They led to backwards facing feet that were bleeding a white liquid. One of its arms had a giant scaly black hand with claws half the size of its body. The silhouette of the bones on its insides could be seen through what was left of it. A huge red hole dominated most of its stomach.

I tried to run away, but it caught me by the hair with it's good hand. It's going to kill me! It pulled me to the ground and stood over me. I tried to scream but couldn't. What good would screaming do? I'm the only person here.

“Get away from me!”, I yelled.

A sudden wind picked up and blew its hair into its face. Its skin started falling off. It slashed at itself and moved backwards. It made sobbing sounds as it tore itself apart. I stood up just in time to see it be completely overtaken by huge scars.

It saw me. Thick red blood ran from every open wound. It stared at me with those beady black eyes.

The wind continued as the creature began to dissipate. The skin-like material evaporated into the air. There was no muscle. Only bone was left underneath. The wind suddenly stopped and the skeleton fell to the ground.

I ran down the path I had come. I need to get out of here! I could swim! Only a matter of seconds passed when I reached the water. I jumped in without thinking. I hadn't seen any other land. I dunk my head and open my eyes. There wasn't a bottom. I start to panic. I resurfaced my head. I'll swim back to the island. Only, the island wasn't there anymore.

I was in the middle of the ocean, treading water. I felt a light wind on my face. Tiny drops made plop sounds when they hit the water. The calm water started to make waves. The wind got rougher and the drops got harder, as the waves got bigger. Lightning and thunder roared all around me. I could see everything. The sun was still out and shining. I only caught a glimpse of it, though. A massive wave tumbled over me and pushed me under. I swam to the top, but another wave got me. This continued until my muscles gave up. A wave, three times as big as the last one, submerged me. I was too weak to swim. I drifted through the water for a few moments. *I'm going to die.* My body started to convulse. I needed air. I shook violently onto my front, and my body stopped. My vision rattled and blurred. I was suspended deep in the water. *I can't die. Surri needs me.* She would have a major freak out if I disappeared from her life. She wouldn't take care of herself. *She'd fall apart. And for what? Me? I'm not important. I love her. I couldn't do that to her.* I don't care if anyone is disappointed. I need to live for her.

I'm waking up. I can see the bottomless pit bellow me. *Would I rather go down there? Or up there?* I turn to my back and look at the raging storm above me. I start swimming. I can't feel my body but I don't care. The surface is a long way away. I let what remains of my air out. I break the water. I take so many deep breaths, I don't see what's going on around me. The enormous clouds have parted to make a small opening miles above me. The light shines on me, creating a small cylinder.

The storm continues. The wind blows, the rain pours, the thunder roars, and the waves crash.

They crash into the cylinder. I still can't feel anything, but I'm not drowning. My face isn't getting windburnt. No more bullets.