

(Static fades in. Cuts. Comes and goes for a few pulses. Then silence for a few beats. Music fades in.)

Dad has this... Smile about him that I used to not think anything of. But now I'm kind of creeped out by it. It's not the sort of thing he pulls out all the time. In fact, he hardly ever does. He's somewhat notorious for never smiling. I mean, he never smiles. He never pulls out a smile or reacts to something in a smiley type way. No matter what it is. I used to say he has absolutely no concept of joy because it's frivolous, but no, there's more to him than that. I see that now.

He knows what joy is. He just sources it differently than the rest of us. And I don't exactly know what that will mean for me. But I know it can't be good.

And I don't know exactly why I'm telling you this. (more emotional) Assuming you or anyone is listening to me. But I have to say it. I--But if something happens to me, even if I look okay, (inhale) as long as I'm not broadcasting anymore, I want someone to know it was him. Because it was him. Even if I can't prove it.

(Pause)

I know Dad's lying about wanting to be a family man now, about turning over a new leaf. I know he is. I know. (sigh)

Okay, I can't--I can't-- I can't prove he's lying, and his explanations make sense. And I probably sound absolutely crazy for insisting that he's some sort of monster. That he's this evil man who did something to me. Or to Dr. Alexson. I know. I know. I know it's-- it's fine... It's fine for a dad to be around his kids. In fact, it's probably a requirement, right? Like it's the morally upstanding thing to do, and he failed at that. But

character development. So he's going to be better now. Because I got overwhelmed one day and fainted in his office. That's--(sigh) That's what he been telling people when I say something, however innocent, about the change at home or when they just notice.

But there's-- There's something else. (exasperated breath)There's an answer.
For me. For... me...

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

I've been thinking about Mom more and more. Or the lack of Mom in my head, in my memories. And when I feel like I'm going absolutely crazy, that's what gets me through this. Because that's something that he nor anyone can explain away. Or I won't let him. Look, I was a teenager when she went away. I was a teenager she was gone. An older teenager. The kids were babies but not me. I was old enough that I should be able to remember her. Or remember something about her. Her voice, her face, her name, or how she left. Like, that would have been a devastating event, why is that not at the forefront of my mind?

We see plenty of mothers and daughters in the practice. The daughters always remember their mothers. You don't choose to forget your mom, whether she was good or bad. It's too fundamental of a memory.

I... I am broken, yes, (inhale) but this is the break. The break is that I don't remember my mother. That's something. It's... It's not that I don't trust him. I don't have to trust him. Even if he's telling the truth. He screwed me over a few times. I am a human being. We aren't known for being all that trusting, are we? Even of our own family.

Dad still hasn't given me a debit card without a limit. I can only spend a couple hundred a day. And this is my card for my account that my paycheck goes into, we're talking about.

It's a security issue, he says. In case someone steals the debit card number. That way they were limited in how much money they could take, but that's the sort of safety measure I should be the one to spell out, right? It's my account; it should be my choice how secure it is.

I did ask him about that once. Or I side-stepped it a bit.

He tries to cook breakfast with me in the morning now, which is not entirely unappreciated, I admit. I feel less threatened knowing he's struggling to make toast. In the pan, mind you. I don't know if he doesn't know that we have a toaster, but I want to see if he realizes. So I don't help him with the toast. I only do the eggs. But one morning last week, while I was working on the eggs, I brought up the debit card thing.

And he responded... Well, it was a demand to know why I would ever need a higher spending limit.

In case, the kid needs something, I said.

To that, he pointed out that he would take care of the big purchases for his children.

Emergencies, I said.

To that, he pointed out that I should be calling him regardless. As the dad, he should be the one handling emergencies.

I need a new laptop, I finally said. It got dropped a few weeks ago in a childhood mishap.

To that, he went silent. I glanced at him from the corner of my eye as I poured my mixed up egg into my own pan. And I could see that Dad was biting his lip and biting it in a certain way. He was keeping something in. Earnestly fighting his impulse to speak. I know that feeling rather well. I guess he and I had that same impulsive tongue that sometimes operates separate from the brain, from the source of wisdom. A tongue that sometimes has to be put in place by the brain directing the rest of the mouth to curb the impulse to speak. His teeth were clenched, and his poor lips were trapped in the vice. I even saw a droplet of blood.

To that comment about the laptop, he finally said, "I'll have the IT guy look for some sales."

And that was there. As if that made any sense. We had plenty of money. Or I had plenty of money. Or so I think I do. Maybe there was some sort of money trap sucking it dry. If Dad can set the card limit then he has access to the account as a whole. That's just how it works. The bank doesn't just let anybody dictate how much a customer of theirs can spend or utilize their services. Dad must be the manager on my account. And that isn't so unheard of. A lot of young adults have an arrangement like that. They build their financial health off of whatever good will their parents have with a bank. But there's a time to spread your money wings and fly. And I have hit that point.

(sigh) But it's not like I haven't found ways around it, right? Take this broadcast. Well, maybe don't take this broadcast. It's not a great example. I just found this equipment in the practice one day when I was cleaning.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

It was in a secret room in the supply closet. Okay actually it wasn't that exciting. There was just a fake panel along one of the walls. Or is that exciting? It just seems more efficient than anything else. I mean, not everything needs to be readily available, and when you realize that, you find some great ways to converse space. I smuggled everything home bit by bit. Some pieces of equipment were harder than others, but regardless Dad wasn't really paying attention.

So now everything is set up and still in the maid's quarters. A room that Dad might not know even exists. But I can't be sure, can I? Not with him. Regardless, I took some precautions. I changed the lock on the door. That bought me some time. Okay, it's not a true change though. I couldn't make that happen because that would require money.

And even before this, it bothered me that he had access to my bank. It bothered me that this is the sort of problem that is all encompassing and hard to work around. Any attempt to solve it tips my hand that I'm doing so. Assuming he checked the balance frequently. Which I've always assumed he does.

Anyway, I switched this lock with one of the locks in the shed. It turns out there's two parts to our shed. The inner door and our doors in the house apparently all use the same sized locks, so I made the most of it. I made the most of it because the world

outside is his to control. But this home and his office. And all the secrets. Well, those are my secrets. And I am going to fight back with them.

(Static starts up again. Music cuts)

I'm going to fight. Frick---

(Keyboard typing. Static cuts. New music fades in)

I need to get to the point, don't I? Anyway, I have this key. I need to use this key. But the way I see it, there's... There's two mysteries here. One is the picture. And the key. Those are all part of one puzzle. And the other... The other is my mom. And I have to figure out when one I need to prioritize.

Does it make me a bad person if I've prioritized the key? Maybe. I don't care if it does though. I mean... I mean, that's within my control. But I have no clue how to find my mom. And if I couldn't find the filing cabinet for this key. Then maybe it would be different. But it's not different. It could have been different. But it's not.

Lucent.... Lucent, I'm sorry that I doubted you. But a filing cabinet? Seriously. What filing cabinet could we both have had access to? And why couldn't you have used that overlap to talk to me directly? Or do something less drawn out and horrifying.

Or that's what I thought I should ask you. That's what I thought this was going to be. But I see now. The connection wasn't the filing cabinet. The connection was Dr. Alexson.

So I should probably tell you. I should probably tell you that I haven't seen him. And in some ways, I won't feel better until I do. But he did manage to get a message to me. And it wasn't a text.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

Last week, Dad came up to the receptionist area while I was troubleshooting the front computer. “Make sure you clean Dr. Alexson’s office,” he said to me. “He doesn’t want it to get dusty.”

That last bit was said mockingly. Or as mockingly as he could do it with his voice. And it wasn’t like I couldn’t understand why he would be frustrated. The office was professionally cleaned daily. It’s a medical facility after all. What choice do we have? We can’t cut corners on the cleanliness front. That’s somewhat illegal. Potentially super illegal. It all depends on the what and how.

I sighed. “When did he tell you this? And how soon do I need to get it done.”

“Just do it today. The facility called. He keeps asking about this. Maybe take a picture of yourself in his office.”

Lucent, I should tell you, and maybe you already know, but I know every filing cabinet in that office. I know what each of them hold and how often they are accessed because each is a part of the rhythm of the office. A rhythm I know all too well. But Dr. Alexson’s office isn’t a part of the facility in many ways. It and he are deliberately kept out of the way. He’s deliberately out of sight and out of mind. Supposedly so he doesn’t get disturbed, but neither would the things in there, then. Everything would be untouched.

Dr. Alexson hasn’t tried to contact me since the last broadcast. His timing might have been a coincidence. Sometimes I think it might have not been. But I... But that

doesn't matter right now though. I have to go on. He's-- He found a way for me to go on. I can't throw it away.

Dad only glanced at me while I was getting the cleaning supplies. That was it. That was as far as he took it. Once he knew that I was actually going to clean, that was that. He went back to whatever it was he was doing. (more airy) And I guess it... And I guess it helped me that I didn't immediately realize what was happening. (normal delivery) At least I had started wearing the key around my neck. To make sure it wasn't found but also the ribbon was the perfect length to fit around my neck. Comfortably. And the key itself fell out of sight, beneath the neckline of the medical grade attire. I tend to wear undershirts too. Because you know, in medical facilities sometimes people throw up or bleed and then it gets on you. And changing with other staff is so much less awkward when you've got a layer or two to spare before you're completely naked. (Music fades out and new music fades in)

Maybe it wouldn't have been a big deal if Dad saw the key because it's a filing cabinet key, but I'm glad I didn't take that chance.

Dr. Alexson's office was just like he left it. So I guess he had some valid concerns on that front. I thought the offices were included in the janitorial plan, but I guess I was mistaken. Or maybe Dr. Alexson's office was the exception. That would have made more sense because he doesn't see patients anymore. Or maybe it's something--

(Knocking. Music cuts. Static fades in. Static Cuts. Static fades back in. Static fades out.)

The kids still come to me when something's wrong. (Music fades in). And I doubt that will ever change. The boys are willing to give Dad some sort of chance, though. Albeit hesitantly. The tree branch did help his case, though. And fair enough, that's tangible evidence that something could change. But Roslyn's still scared. I don't know how much of that fear is her reading my energy and copying it or is just her being... being her or set in her own ways.

She is the oldest of the littles, as I think of them. As for the olds. It's me and only me. I don't necessarily understand the family dynamic that leads to such a gap. But whatever. It's not my problem. It became my problem, but the conception was not my issue. So not my issue. But whatever. She's set in her ways. I mean. She remembers more of Dad's bad behavior than the boys do. And if she wants to hold him to his behavior and not his promises, well, I, I can't criticize her for that.

But honestly, I am irritated that she came to get me. And I hate that I feel that way. Because I do love her and those feel like mutually exclusive feelings. I feel like when I say I'm irritated or annoyed it's me saying that I don't love her. Or it sounds that way. Or it negates that I love her because I should be there to help and serve her without limitations. Like a mom would. But I'm not her mom. I didn't choose in any way, shape, or form, to be a mom. But that's what I am.

Anyway Roslyn thought she saw a ghost, and that's why she got me. But to come get me, she had to walk past the ghost. So like... I don't... I don't... (sigh) I don't get it. You weren't scared enough for that, right? Or--Or maybe I'm being really unfair about this. I mean, I'm scared of this, but I'm pushing through it.

It's not that, is it? You know what someone said to me the other day. Of course you don't. Also it was one of the babysitters we were interviewing. Because yes, we are apparently getting a babysitter, it's just taking a while to find the right one. And no, I don't know how much of this is dad being an overprotective parent or if he's genuinely trying to screen for something I haven't noticed yet.

Roslyn came home from school while Dad and I were interviewing this candidate in the front room. And on her way out, this woman looked me right in the eyes and said, "Wow the two of you look... a lot alike."

And I know she did not mean anything by that. But it's hard to ignore, if I'm to be honest. I don't like that Roslyn looks like me. And it's not that I don't think I'm attractive or anything like that. (Pause) Or maybe it is. I don't know. It just hurts to look at her sometimes, and I don't understand why.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

But back to the story, I went into Dr. Alexson's office with cleaning supplies in hand. And... (more emotional) And it was hard to be there, I won't lie. (Deep breath) I could see where he stumbled. I could map out every moment of his, and it started when he was sitting in his chair with this cup of herbal tea that--fun fact--was absolutely disgusting to clean up. It went moldy; it must have had sugar in it beca--

Wait, no. I've... I've gotten him tea before. He doesn't... He doesn't put sugar in it. Does... Does tea go moldy without sugar? It can. Of course, it can. Yes. Don't.... (inhale) Don't be stupid, Zaneta. Don't be stupid.

But Dr. Alexson must have stood up from his chair. His hand hit the top of the desk where he had some medical journals. He still likes to browse them, even if the information contained within doesn't have the same applicability to him anymore. But the knowledge in those journals couldn't steady him. The somewhat glossy covers gave way and slipped off the table, falling to the floor with a stack of papers and Dr. Alexson in tow. His body was sprawled on the floor between the desk and the wall. His feet would have pointed to the window, and his eyes would have been facing the door. So the door must have been shut. But even if it wasn't, and it usually isn't, it's always hard to see him when he's in here. But if the door was shut, at least, he wouldn't have had to watch the void before him, watch that help really wasn't coming. Not right away. Not soon enough.

Then they--a mysterious they--lifted him off the floor and took him to the hospital once they found him some time later. But they only took him and left everything else lay as it fell.

It had been weeks, and no one touched anything in that office. (sigh) And who knows when else someone will go in there. No one knows if or when Dr. Alexson is coming back. I guess I could text him. But I'm too scared to. Maybe his(inhale) phone has already been confiscated, but if it hasn't, I can't be the one to blow his cover. So I just have to wait. And cry from the stress. But mostly wait.

Setting aside the cleaning supplies, I gathered up the papers strewn about the floor. It seemed like the most natural starting point. And, And that's when I saw it. My

heart stopped. I had never seen it before. And--Well I don't know how I knew that it was the filing cabinet I needed, but I knew.

And it's not like it was too much trouble to take the key and try the lock. It was a quick gesture. With a glance to the shut door, I crept around the desk. And sure enough, the filing cabinet needed a key.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

The metal was cold to the touch when my fingertipss grazed the handle, and it was a shock to my senses. I had never felt more alive than I was right then as that coldness shot through my body like electricity. My breathing was a bit heavy and labored. And the ribbon felt like it was choking me now. Perception and all that. I slipped it off and put the key into the lock. And then it was just a matter of turning my wrist. A simple turn of my wrist and the drawer opened.

I saw the bundle waiting there. It was like the heavens opened up and the angels were singing. But I couldn't tell what it was, so (nasal inhale) maybe it's not for me. But Lucent, I think it's for me. I know it. I put my hands around it. Both hands. The bundle was much too big for one. And there was the problem. The bundle was about the size and shape of a newborn baby, and so I can't easily sneak it out. And it was late in the morning, so the office was alive with a bunch of people walking about. I couldn't take it then. I wanted to, but I couldn't. I had to wait. I cursed under my breath because of course I had to wait. I couldn't even tell what was there. But that can't be my only chance to grab it right? It's in Dr. Alexson's office. It's so close.

(Pause)

I just. I just have to be careful. I think I know what to do. (softly) Just wait Lucent.

Please. Just wait.

(Static starts. Music cuts. Static fades out).

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