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A Horrible Cliché

11th Grade

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I yearn for the sky. I haven't been able to view it in almost a year now. I'm supposed to get out of my cell for a few hours every day, but the guards keep forgetting and I don't try to jog their memory in fear of what they might remember. They enjoy keeping me in solitary because that means they don't have to acknowledge my presence at all. As long as I'm out of their sights, I'm easy to put out of their minds, too. On Thursdays, I have to go see my therapist. He's supposed to make me feel better and make it easier for me to accept the things that I've done, but I know he doesn't want to be in that tiny, windowless room any more than I do. Last week, he thought it would be a good idea for me to go back to the night that led me to being here. He brought in the crime scene photos for me to look at and the police reports for me to read over.

It was a hot night last summer. The sky was speckled with stars and the only sound was the sound of my Converse slapping against the sidewalk as I hurried towards my sister's house. I avoided the pools of light that were being thrown out by the streetlamps, wanting to stay as hidden in the shadows as much as I could as I approached my destination. I retrieved the key from its hiding spot among the hanging plants on the porch. Letting myself inside, I quietly made my way through the house undetected by my nephew's golden retriever, Elliot. Silently reaching the kitchen, I carefully selected a blade from my sister's handsome cutlery block. The cleaver was a little bit too extreme for what I was about to do, so I ended up selecting the chef's knife instead, although I knew it was going to be a ghastly cliché when the press released the grisly story about what happened on that night.

My first trip was to the bedroom down the hall to where my seventeen-year-old nephew slept. His room was typical for a teenager. His green walls were plastered with music posters and his dirty clothes from the day before were forgotten in a heap on the floor. I stepped carefully, maneuvering my way through the room, until I arrived at the side of his bed. Squatting down

next to him, I could see him snoozing calmly with a slight smile on his face. He was probably dreaming about winning the state basketball championship tomorrow night. I thought about waking him up, but knew that would risk alerting the rest of the family if he were to shriek. Instead, I sliced the blade horizontally across his throat. I watched as his eyes sprang open. It was a gorgeous mixture of agony, surprise, and confusion that stayed engraved on his face as the life slowly drained from his body.

When I was sure that he was gone, I left the room as silently as I had entered it, making sure that I closed the door firmly behind me. I proceeded to head up the stairs to visit the twins, although neither my therapist nor I had the strength or the heart to go over precisely what I had done to my sister's two lovely eight-year-old daughters. With the children hushed and out of my way, I was free to pursue my true purpose.

Creeping towards the master bedroom, I approached my brother-in-law's side of the bed first. I don't remember the precise order of events, but he ended up with sixteen stab wounds, slashed hands from where he had strained to shield himself, and severed toes. The crime scene snapshots displayed what seemed like masses of gore. Their king-sized bed was saturated with the crimson fluid. At that point, my sister screeched. She seized the alarm clock, smashed me over the head with it, and I blacked out. After rendering me unconscious, she frantically phoned 9-1-1 and hysterically expressed to the cops what I had done to her family.

I can remember her sobbing uncontrollably in the courtroom and questioning me about how I could do something like this to my own family. The trial was a brief one. My own attorney hardly put up a fight. It took them less than twelve hours to convict me. Life in prison without the possibility of being released on parole. I slowly learned to accept my fate. It's hard for me

sometimes though, especially when I think about the sky. A year has been long enough for me. I can't imagine spending the rest of my life without ever seeing it again.

I've always believed that if I'm continuously on my finest performance, they'll let me go outside for a little while. Unfortunately, it seems that I'm meant to suffer. I'm regularly attacked in the showers and at meal times. Half of the time, the guards keep me in insolation for my own safety so that they won't have my death on their hands. I've had everything from black eyes to broken bones to cracked ribs. It seems like there's always a bruise somewhere on my body. There are spots in the common area where my blood has been spilt and stained the concrete.

When I'm taken to infirmary, the nurses give me the same amount of compassion and consideration that they give to everyone else. Only the bare minimum is given to me before I'm hauled off to be isolated again. If I'm out of their sight, then I'm out of their minds. Recently, I've been studying the law books in the penitentiary library. I just found out about something called an 'appeal' that I'm thinking about trying. Nobody told me that I could appeal my case.

I attempted to write to my mother yesterday, but I had to stop due to my handwriting. Last night a couple of the other inmates cornered me while I was in the shower and they beat me up really good. They busted my hand, so I'll have to write with my right hand until my left hand heals itself up.

Speaking of letters, I don't receive letters here either, so the letter I received this morning seemed foreign to me. I took the letter from the guard with shaking hands and slid down the wall into a sitting position on the floor. I carefully unfolded the letter and began to read:

*Dearest Layla,*

*At exactly 8:17 P.M., your cell door will unlock. You need to open it and run as fast as you can to the end of the hallway. Turn left. Halfway down the left hallway, there will be a casually dressed woman waiting for you. She will take your hand and whisper, "Run!" Go with her. Go as far and as fast as you can. She's going to help you prove your innocence even though the prison will cover up your escape by staging a suicide. Your mother will be devastated by this, but you will see her again, I promise you. In fact, I'm sitting at her kitchen table with the scratch running down the middle from the time you got angry with her when she wouldn't let you go out to the movies on a school night. Don't worry, the real murderer will get their time in jail, too. Note to self, Layla: You're not crazy. Please, don't worry about any of that right now. Just remember to run with her. Run fast and don't turn back around. The guards will give a good chase, but she knows all of the escape routes. After all, she is an older version of you. Good luck out there, kid. I'll see you in ten years.*

*Love,*

*Future Layla.*

Of course I didn't believe the letter at all. I thought it was a huge joke that one of my many enemies thought would be humorous. I got a good chuckle out of it, but the idea that the letter writer knew so much about that scratch on my mother's kitchen table bothered me. I must have mentioned it to one of the inmates before, right? That had to be what happened. I just mentioned it and now they were trying to mess with my head.

Around 8 I reread the letter again, but this time I felt a little false sense of optimism. I paced back and forth in my cell until 8:16 and then held my breath, stupidly wishing that the letter might hold some inkling of truth. The clock struck 8:17 and nothing happened. I stopped

holding my breath and began to laugh loudly. Well, I laughed until I heard the unmistakable sound of my cell being unlocked. My breath caught in my throat and my eyes darted to the clock. It was 30 seconds past 8:17. I strode confidently across the cell and put my hand on the door of the cell, but I froze. My thoughts began to overwhelm my mind.

My sister came to visit me for the first time yesterday. I hadn't seen her since the trial, what happened to her family had deeply aged her. I told her that I was remorseful and that I don't remember anything about what I did. I don't know what made me do those dreadful things to her beautiful family. I thought she was going to be angry with me. I thought she'd bellow and shout, or maybe just leave without saying another word to me. Instead, she had placed a reassuring hand on my busted one and stated that everything was going to be alright. She promised that one day I would be able to remember everything, and when I did, I'd finally feel better. She told me I was thoughtless, and that thoughtless people make blunders. I guess that should have offended me, but she was right. She was the clever daughter that Mom and Dad adored. I was the one that they had to stick in the special classes and make sure I didn't cause any harm to the other students.

Last night, I did recall what really happened. Maybe it was just seeing my sister that jogged my memory, because all of the memories of that night came rushing back to me like a downpour. I remembered going to the house because she had called me and urged me to come over immediately. I remembered seeing all the blood and the bodies of her husband and kids...and I remembered her holding the knife, still dripping with the blood of her victims. I remembered her picking up the alarm clock. I remember her swinging it at my head. I remembered the exact sound it made when it made contact with my head. Then, I couldn't remember anything else.

We're all secretly something different on the inside.

My sister killed her own family.

I'm blameless. I shouldn't be in here. I'm truly an innocent person. I shouldn't be locked up like a caged animal. I needed someone to believe me.

*Note to self, Layla: You're not crazy.*

I shook my head to clear my thoughts and glance over at the clock. 8:18. Without wasting one more minute, I jerk my cell door open and peak out into the hall. No one is around. So what do I do?

I run.