

Fictional Histories: Short Stories Exploring Historical Events of the 1970s

by

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Abstract

This creative project is composed of four short stories exploring and dramatizing key historical events of the 1970s—the Jonestown massacre, the Kent State shooting, the Candyman killer, and Patty Hearst’s kidnapping. Through a third person point of view, these stories follow characters who have witnessed traumatic event. Each character’s dramatic, unique experience and story brings a significant historical moment to life.

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Introduction

In the fall of 1969, my maternal grandparents moved from Oklahoma to a small town in Ohio called New Vienna. Their entire family had been uprooted so my grandfather could attend graduate school in Oklahoma. He received a job at Wilmington College teaching mathematics, so my grandparents and their two small sons were uprooted again to move back to Ohio, though not close to all the people they had left behind.

That spring, my grandmother was almost five months pregnant when four Kent State University students were killed, and nine others injured. My maternal grandparents were born and raised in Warren, Ohio, a town only thirty miles east of Kent in northern Ohio. My extended family members still live in the Akron area. Though their new home was over three hours away from the shooting, the tragedy still felt very close to home.

When my grandmother heard the news, she wondered how she was supposed to bring another child into a world where something as terrible as this tragedy could have occurred to such young people. Her sons were six and four at the time, and she was only in her twenties. She never believed that a tragedy like the Kent State shooting could hit so close to home. Of course, she ended up bringing that child into the world. My mother was born October 16, 1970.

I heard this story numerous times growing up, both from my grandmother and my mother. Many other childhood tales from my mother and her two older brothers are explained away with the excuse that the 70s were a different time. The attitudes and beliefs common in rural southwestern Ohio have changed over the past fifty years, and so have those in the rest of the world. History shapes culture. The challenges faced by those

who lived through the 1970s affected them and shaped American culture. Even though many of the stories of my mother's childhood aren't directly linked to historical events or tragedies, they still changed the world she grew up in. History exists in the background of these personal stories.

When my mother was four, she occasionally had to go with her father to work at the college. Her older brothers were at elementary school, and her mother was working. She would usually sit in a chair and color in the back of the largest lecture hall on campus. This itself wasn't a problem, except my grandfather's office building was not built with women's restrooms. When female students were eventually admitted to the school, some of the men's restrooms were changed into women's restrooms. The way my mother tells it, the second floor, which had a restroom designated for women, was dark and intimidating. There was a huge mammoth tusk that loomed over her. One of my uncles convinced my mother that they kept dead cats and dead corpses up there. My mother refused to go to the second floor until it was a dire emergency. When I asked my mom about her experience now, she rambles about her fear, all too real for her, as if this story happened only a few years ago.

My mother's story occurred during the 1970s and was affected by the history before it. One historical event doesn't occur without context or within its own vacuum. The childcare situation, as well as the expectation that my four-year-old mother go to a restroom on a different floor alone, may not happen today. However, based on how prevalent this memory is and its retelling, these events from almost fifty years ago still impact her and her choices today. My mother's story also takes place within the history of the campus. A classroom building built in the 70s on a coed college campus would

likely have restrooms for both sexes built on every floor. Events of the past build the foundation for the future, even as today our society deals with issues surrounding gender neutral bathrooms. History is a story of continuity and change.

Within each of the following stories, I explore history through a third person point of view surrounding an individual living their own story at a particular point in time. By focusing on each character's story within the context of the broader historical moment, history becomes more important and poignant through the emotional connection created by each character's dreams, desires, loves, and losses. It is through these emotional connections that order can be made of the broader historical context, even connecting these issues from the past to modern day. My short stories will cause a reader to wonder what it would be like to experience these events. The experiences and stories of the individual characters matter, and they connect history with the reader's experience of the modern world.

In my stories, I explore each of the following 1970s tragedies in individual stories: the Kent State shooting, Patty Hearst's kidnapping, the Candyman Killer, and the Jonestown massacre. In "On a Lovely May Day", I explore the character Rose as she walks through her college campus with her best friend and her crush. Rose serves as a witness to the Kent State shooting as she experiences the drama of her story—what she did on that day and how the shooting impacted her. "Sisters Forever" explores Anne Hearst who is confined to her childhood home after her arrest and trial on drug charges. She eavesdrops on her parents' conversation about her older sister Patty who has been missing for the past twenty months. Anne deals with her own emotions and trials, relating to but separate from her sister's tragic kidnapping and arrest. My third story, "The

Halloween Dream,” tells a fictional account of Lizzie O’Bryan on Halloween day as she anxiously waits to go trick or treating with her family. This story focuses on how Lizzie feels and acts during the night, witnessing but not comprehending events that lead to her brother eating a poisoned Pixy Stix from the Candyman Killer. “Under the Scorching Sun” tells David’s story upon his return to the Peoples’ Temple settlement in Jonestown. This return comes after playing a basketball game with his teammates and explores his anxieties throughout his experiences viewing the aftermath of the massacre.

The short stories I have composed each tell the story of one person involved in a memorable historical event. These individuals are characters, and therefore are fictionalized. I wrote stories built upon historical events and created a fictional story out of the reality of the situation. These four stories are connected through the 1970s, even though the characters are uniquely different. In their creation, my main characters all have different goals, hopes, and values. For example, Anne from “Sisters Forever” is an heiress, the granddaughter of a newspaper tycoon, while David from “Under the Scorching Sun” spent time living on the streets of San Francisco. These backstories were both created by me and found in the history. I explored the history surrounding these events, including primary resources from the 1970s to create my characters and their experiences. This helped to build realistic characters based on the 1960s and 1970s to be in the situation to experience these events, including looking at college students in 1970 and what they experienced before that to create who they were. This created personalities and desires for the characters, which I tried to retain through the voice of the close third person narration. Creating individual characteristics of each character to shine throughout their experience while remaining distinct from the other stories proved difficult.

I found managing each story as its own entity was important, even while working on multiple stories simultaneously. Each character has their own unique story—regardless of the “official” or generally accepted history of the 1970s. The agreed-upon interpretation of events does not align with every experience of the witnesses. Through these stories, I wanted to focus on a single character, which included how their experience both varied and remained consistent with the overall “story” of these events. It was hard at times to focus on the individual character and the drama of their experiences instead of focusing on the history surrounding the event. While the history is important, it is within the context of the individual character’s story that the history remains relevant.

Throughout the context of the history, my young characters come of age and material throughout the events of their own story, separate from the history itself. I chose the four historical events of the Kent State shooting, Patty Hearst’s kidnapping, the Candyman Killer, and the Jonestown massacre because of the emotions I experienced when researching these events. Through telling these stories, I hope that you, as the reader, engage with the history through the lens of the character’s experience and their personal story and find a similar emotional connection to the one that called me to telling these stories when I started this project.

On a Lovely May Day

The two girls walked across campus, their footsteps hitting the red brick path almost in unison. Freshman year was almost over, another year in their forever friendship. They had gone to elementary school together and been friends even longer than that. Even with that, Kent State had been so different. They had freedom here, something Rose had not realized she was lacking until moving into a dorm. Midnight trips to get slushies would never fly at home. These freshman year adventures were only the beginning. Rose could hardly wait to see what the fall semester had in store for the two of them. But right now, even with finals looming on the horizon, nothing could bring her down on this beautiful day.

Today's weather reminded Rose of the first time she had visited the campus. There was so much green from the fresh growth of the grasses and trees, making the red brick of the buildings and pathways stand out. It was a subtle sort of beauty. She couldn't help grinning at her surroundings when she walked out of her dorm that morning. Of course, the lilac bushes weren't nearly so subtle. Their light purple flowers were vibrant, standing out against the dark green leaves. This entire walkway on their path to math was surrounded by these bushes. In the winter, the bushes weren't so lovely with only branches and dead brown buds. That was all forgotten come the breathtaking beauty of the first bloom.

Valerie laughed as she shoved her best friend. "Oh please. Everyone knows that you have a crush on him."

Rose tried to laugh it off, even as she felt her face turning as red as her namesake.

“I do not!”

“I won’t tell him or anything, but you really should think about it because Adam totally likes you back.”

“He does not! He’s just a really nice guy.”

Valerie rolled his eyes as she flipped her long black braid back over her shoulder.

“Honestly, you’re both have moon-eyed for each other. It’s so gross it makes me sick.”

“You think we’re gross? Have you met yourself and—?”

Rose cut herself off before she finished the sentence. She might not be sure where she stood with Adam. That didn’t mean she had to be defensive or target her Val’s relationship. The other girl had cried for weeks when Eugene received his draft notice. There were so many boys who were supposed to be in their graduating class who had never made the return trip from Vietnam. High school graduation had never been more depressing with all the empty seats that should have been filled with kids who instead had gone off to die. Rose found it hard to manage. She had to worry about her best friend, and she also worried about Eugene. Rose missed his easy laugh and jokes. She missed the way he could make Valerie smile brighter than anyone, even Rose.

Val’s hand came up to touch her stomach. Rose flinched. She didn’t mean to hurt Val. It was hard to avoid Eugene. It felt like he, or at least reminders of him, were everywhere. Rose was one of the few people who knew the truth. She and Val were so

close they were practically sisters. There was no way Valerie could keep something this big a secret from her. After all, marriage and a baby were a big deal, even bigger when the new husband was in a different country.

The pair eloped the day after Eugene received his draft notice. Val's parents still had no idea, and Rose knew they would find out eventually. Val was keeping the baby and was ready to raise her own family. Even with that, she couldn't afford to lose her parents' support. Val had dreams, and college was the key to achieving those dreams. Rose might not know how Valerie could accomplish these things. No matter what, she'd support her friend. She didn't know what would happen when Mr. and Mrs. Westing found out about their future grandchild. Even with the questions, Rose was excited to become an aunt to this new little baby. She would be at Val's side, no matter what happened with Eugene or the baby. She kept walking with Val, trying to shake those negative thoughts away from her. Those thoughts would lead her nowhere but to trouble.

A shoulder knocked into her own and Rose stumbled forward a few steps before regaining her balance. She really should be used to the common greeting from her new friend by now. Before Rose could even turn to face him, a broad grin had already taken over her face. There was only one person who would knock into her, and she would always be excited to see him. "Hey, Adam," she said, through a smile that was impossible to wish away.

She wished Valerie was right about them, that they had a mutual attraction. There was no way Rose would risk their friendship on the off chance Adam returned her affections. There were no signs to indicate his feelings ran deeper than platonic. Not

counting Val, Adam was her best friend at college, and she wanted him in her life. They could ramble on about their passions and have random conversations about topics from ZotZ candy to the Cold War to younger brothers, with no prior indication what they would delve into even as they both spoke with passion. They went bowling after Val swore that she would never step foot inside a bowling alley again, even though Rose was pretty sure he didn't love it either. It was better to have him as a friend in her life than not at all.

Adam grinned back. "You ready for some derivatives?"

"As always, definitely not."

Even as she rolled her eyes, Rose couldn't keep the smile off her face. Being around Adam always improved her mood, even when she was already feeling good. And maybe that was why she would never tell him the truth about her feelings for him. Adam was one of the best people she knew. Maybe that was why she was always so entranced by his presence. Valerie coughed behind her, causing a slight red flush to rise under her freckles. She relaxed her body posture, stuttering a step to fall into line between Valerie and Adam instead of fully focused on her crush.

Rose loved Kent State, and not only because it had let her meet Adam and become her friend. She loved having Val at her side as they took on more adventures than they ever could back home. Kent State provided her with so many opportunities to explore herself and learn about life outside of her dinky little hometown. It wasn't too far from home. It was still far enough away that she didn't have to worry about her parents

and the girl they expected Rose to be. Here, she had enough freedom to enjoy herself and was close enough she wasn't homesick.

As Rose walked along the familiar paths, Adam's hand brushed against her own. The girls lived over in Allyn Hall, while Adam lived in Manchester. Both dorms were sequestered in the same corner of campus. It did make the walk to some of the classrooms a bit far. On a day like today, she couldn't bring herself to care. They weren't in a rush as they made their way to class shortly after noon. Daffodils filled the green spaces between the brick walkways. Even though it was getting past their prime, that didn't stop the light, cool scent from adding to the air. The daffodils and the oak trees spilling out with the green of spring made things feel full of hope and new beginnings. The maturity of those trees felt like a friendly reminder that summer break was around the corner. They just had to make it through another week of classes and finals. She and her friends had almost made it through an entire year as college students, which was wild and wonderful to think about. She knew that next year would have its own challenges. In this moment everything was perfect.

"What are you doing after finals?" Rose asked Adam, trying to ignore the absence of space between them when she knew it meant nothing.

They hadn't started finals yet. It was the first thing on everyone's mind. It was impossible for it not to be, considering the inevitable stress. It was almost funny that they could all get so stressed about the idea of being stressed so soon. Either way, Rose was confident that her group of friends, including herself, would get through finals week. A

part of her couldn't wait, even though she was sure the week would be full of stress and too little sleep.

Shouting echoed across the quad. Even though it was only a few hundred feet away, Rose ignored it. Sometimes, college students were complete idiots. That didn't mean they needed the audience they so badly desired. Val sped up. Rose could hear the sound of her friend's feet pounding on the bricks as she almost reached a jog. It left Adam and Rose to walk side by side each other. Rose swore she'd have words with her best friend later. Right now, she couldn't think of that, not when she was all-consumed by Adam.

"Hey," he said, his voice low. Rose struggled to make out the words between the echoed shouting and her heart pounding in her ears at Adam's proximity. "I want to talk to you later. Alone. What are you doing tonight?"

Rose could feel her blush returning, accompanied this time by a wide grin. "Nothing besides studying. Where do you want to meet?"

"How about after we eat in the dining hall, we come back to the quad? It's usually pretty empty in the evening."

"I'd like that," she said, her sea green eyes meeting his deep brown ones.

How could that simple invitation send such a thrill through here? Even if things never worked between them, Adam and Rose had something special. Rose thought that might be enough. They had so much in common. It felt like Rose had known him for

years. In some ways, Adam knew her better than even Valerie ever could. They had such similar backgrounds. Val and Rose grew up in the same town, and they still had such differences. Val was an only child with well-off parents. Rose was the third of six. If she had gotten pregnant, telling her mom would have been one of the first things she did, even if she was going to keep the baby. Adam had that sort of trust with his large family, and it was refreshing to have a friend who grew up with similar values drilled into him.

Part of her wanted to reach out and take Adam's hand, only inches from her own. She could almost feel the electricity between them. Rose didn't dare act. She couldn't handle it if he rejected her here, in an act born only of closeness. She didn't know what he wanted to talk about tonight. Even without that information, Rose could almost be sure her hopes were too high. She couldn't stop her heart from soaring, not on a spring day when even the air itself seemed ripe with opportunity. Even though she might not know what Adam wanted to talk about, breathing in the fresh air, made it was impossible to assume anything bad.

The yells from the quad seemed louder than they were before. Since their route to class had taken them closer to the protests, she couldn't be sure. Something seemed off. Though, it wasn't like Rose had been around a protest before or knew what was supposed to happen. She frowned, looking back up to meet Adam's face, already turned downward so they could meet eyes. "Do you think everything is okay over there?"

He shrugged. "Honestly, I'm not sure. My parents would kill me if they ever found out I took part in something like that. But I get it."

Rose smiled. Just another thing they had in common, both the good and the bad. “Yeah, mine too. It’s not even about the cause, anything like a protest. My daddy would want me to keep my head down.”

“I mean, I get it. Especially when you hear about some of the crazy stuff that’s been going on with the feds. I’m going to be a doctor. I don’t need that kind of stuff on my record. But even if I didn’t have my specific future to worry about.... It seems excessively risky.”

The war had started over five years ago. Rose was in middle school then and it hadn’t really bothered her than much. It was another thing in the news, not really pressing to the worries of any eighth-grade girl. If someone had told her how many of her classmates that year would be fighting overseas or dead by the end of their teens, she wouldn’t have believed it. Sometimes, she didn’t want to. It was hard to believe that this war would go on for longer than either world war. Part of her felt guilty for not helping her peers in the protest. She agreed with the cause. The war had been too hard on all of them, even the people left behind. Maybe she should help and be out there marching and holding a sign. She couldn’t. She was Rosalind Estes, a sweet girl who kept her head down and avoided attention. Most of all, Rose had to be practical. Protesting or getting arrested would do nothing more than get her name on a government list.

The yells erupted into earsplitting screams. Rose jerked her head towards the sounds of pain. She had to know what was going on. Adam turned to face the same direction before he turned back to face Rose. He ushered Rose ahead of him. “Listen, I’m not sure what’s going on, but we really have to—”

It was in that moment that her world changed with the bang, bang, bang, cracking through the air like an explosion. In her mind, the explosion of screaming and sobbing because indistinguishable from the gunshots as they blended into a cacophony. She might not recognize each individual voice or separate shot. It didn't matter. Even looking back, it was all a blur of chaos and fear and pain. Everyone was screaming, the girls and boys, both the large group in the quad and everyone who had only been trying to walk to class. Colors blurred as everyone shot off from the squad, the reds and blues and greens of shirts blurs as they raced away, trying to get away from the scene. She stared for a moment, at the armed National Guardsmen, their guns raised. Some of them were smoking. It was hard to see through the crowd of her classmates sprinting away from the violence. Rose was afraid of the bodies far too still lying on the other side, closer to the figures in uniforms of drab olive.

Rose took off in a dead sprint, away from the quad and the smoking guns. She didn't know what was going on. Her thoughts were tangled and intertwined so closely Rose couldn't separate one thought out from the mess in her head. All she could think was to run, as the sky collapsed on her. It was hard to breathe, gasping in a way that wasn't from the exertion. The usually comforting campus blurred around her as red brick and green leaves of oak trees all became the same. Rose wasn't sure where she was going, making one foot pound against the brick after another, the jolts hitting up her legs. The familiar sight of campus blurred through her tears. She couldn't tell if people were still screaming, or if the echoes were rocketing through her brain. Either way, hearing any specifics were impossible. Rose knew the treads of her tennis shoes were scraping off the rough brick. From what she could see here, she could be all alone, or any number of

people could be behind her. She couldn't escape the sounds of the violence in the quad, no matter how long she kept running. Her mind was focused only on chaos and panic.

She didn't know where anyone was. Val had vanished to give her time alone with Adam. But could she even run fast or far enough while pregnant? Rose wanted to stop, to find her friend. She couldn't. If the guardsmen kept shooting after the retreating protestors, it would take only a second for a bullet to kill Val. Or she could be trampled, unable to keep up with the crowd until she tripped, and they ran over her in their desperate attempts to get away. Even if it was selfish, she kept running. Rose always said that she would do anything for her best friend. She couldn't do this. For all she knew, everything could be okay now. She doubted it.

Tears streamed down her face freely now, no longer trapped in her eyes. She wanted to be brave and strong. That was impossible. Adam had been behind her. Between her tears and the ghosts haunting her from the quad, it was impossible to tell if he was still there. Was he okay? They had to get out of here. She had to pray that he was there too, that everyone was going to be okay. She couldn't even imagine what had happened back there to cause something like this. It didn't stop her tears and her feet competing in some sadistic battle for which could run the fastest.

Rose didn't know where she was going. At this point, anywhere was better than the quad. There was no good reason for there to be screams of pain and anguish in the middle of an otherwise beautiful day. She didn't want to think of it. She kept replaying those moments in her mind, trying to make sense of it even though Rose wasn't sure she wanted to know the truth. If she could pretend this was a dream, she would in a heartbeat.

But the screams were too real to be anything except reality. Even her dream self never would have imagined gunshots on campus. Despite not knowing what happened, the little Rose saw replayed in her mind in Technicolor and surround sound. She and Adam, standing there with his dark hair hanging in his eyes and his grin as big as ever against a background of blue sky and puffy clouds meeting recently cut grass and lilac bushes. Rose couldn't tell if the next part was her imagination. In the distance, she could almost see the guns raising, firing with an explosion as they shot into the crowd of young protestors. The next moment was full of screams, originating from the crowd before the scream expanding, consuming the rest of campus as everyone ran from the tragedy.

After turning past the next building, Rose stopped, forcing each breath in with a wheezing gasp. She couldn't remember the last time she ran for this long. Even then, she had nothing to run away from before. Even though it hurt, she forced her hands onto her head to steady her ragged breathing. At least that could return to normal, even if nothing else ever would.

Rose jumped when a hand touched her shoulder. As soon as she recognized the hand's owner, Rose leapt into Adam's arms, burying her face into his shoulder. Her tears kept flowing, her entire body rocking with her silent sobs. Tears dripped into her hair, and Rose squeezed the boy in her embrace as if she would never let him go. Part of Rose always wanted this level of intimacy with Adam. But the fantasy of having the boy she was half-in-love-with in her arms never was supposed to be like this, when they both were falling apart.

Rose stared up at the white clouds against the picturesque blue sky. She tried to imagine what she would usually want to do on a day like today. Right now, it was impossible to consider normalcy, as if nothing could ever be normal again. There was no right thing for them to do next. Rose buried her face back into Adam's chest, hoping to deny reality for a little longer before it hit them like a freight train.

Sisters Forever

Anne sat on the ornate couch, so pale a pink it looked almost white in the sitting room that was too fancy to live up to its purpose. As she strained her ears to her the conversation hidden in terse whispers from the other room, Anne couldn't stop herself from picking at her fingernails. The rhythmic motion was all she had left to sooth her anxieties these days. It did nothing to alleviate the emotions swelling up and threatening to consume her while she listened to the intense voices of her parents, barely able to make them out in the other room. If they had wanted her to be part of this conversation, then they wouldn't be having it in the dining room without asking her. Honestly, that was most of the conversations in this house. Usually, Anne would only listen for a bit before floating away to another room. This time was different and had been as soon as she heard her sister's name.

It was over a year and a half since Patty was kidnapped. The length of time was easier to forget when the drugs took it all away, turning the passage of time passing into a haze where one day was indistinguishable for the next. Since she got sober, Anne woke up every morning to face the fact that her older sister was gone. Her mother's voice was sharp and tinny from the other room, almost a full octave higher than it normally was, contrasting with the deep rumble of her father's. Anne scooted closer across the couch, perching on one arm of the chair as she craned her neck backwards, trying to make out the individual words beyond the general feeling of unease. Something was wrong, Anne was sure of it. And if this was about Patty, Anne needed to know.

Anne lost her balance from her perch and barely caught herself, her hands clenched into white fists as they gripped the chair before she fell off the elaborate arm of the couch. Why did a couch look like this in the first place? It looked like it belonged in a dollhouse. It didn't look like it was meant for anything to sit on, especially not on the armrests. The whole sitting room felt like a dollhouse, complete with gaudy lace trim and chairs more cold than inviting with harsh angles and cushions Anne knew from experience were not fun to sit on for long periods of time. She couldn't remember if they had ever used this sitting room in her childhood. Anne couldn't imagine the picture. Five little girls in fancy dresses, mostly lace and ruffles, that cost more than a new car as they sat on furniture that cost more than some homes. Now, there was one twenty-year-old who had messed up her life.

The other sisters were successful away from this house if not from this life. Victoria, the baby of the family, was the last to leave when she moved to Los Angeles a few months ago. A spike of jealousy rose in her stomach whenever she thought about it, no matter how hard Anne tried to push it away. Tori deserved to be happy. Patty, Anne, and Tori were the youngest of the Hearst sisters, all born in two and a half years. When they were little, the three were inseparable, hiding from cameras together to try to stay out of the limelight of their legacy. Things changed as they got older. Tori dreamed of becoming a movie star. Patty Ann was engaged and in college. And Anne's time was spent in a blur, moving from one party to the next. She had been attending college in Colorado. After the mess she had gotten herself into this year, Anne had no idea if she'd ever go back.

She shook her head, hoping she could shake her regrets and memories almost as easily as she tuned back into the kitchen and her parents' words within. "—with the lawyers," her father was saying, which wasn't all that shocking considering the amount of business he did with lawyers.

Anne hadn't been back in this godforsaken house for very long, but she was already tired of hearing about the legal system. It didn't help when she was dealing with her own court case, which was thankfully over with. That didn't mean she was going to forget it anytime soon. Anne knew she was lucky to have her family, flying out to New York for her trial while she was allowed to stay at home. Of course, she only got probation despite taking all responsibility for the accident. Being the daughter of Randolph Hearst did that. Sometimes, Anne wished it had gone differently, even though she knew how lucky she was. Everyone kept telling her that and maybe someday, she'd believe them.

"I know, I know," her mother said, her words spilling out of her mouth too fast, the syllables blending into one word. "But Rand, I have to see her. I'm her mother. I should be allowed to see her."

For a moment, Anne wondered if they had a conversation like this about her after her arrest before dismissing the thought out of hand. Anne burned so many bridges as she leapt headfirst off the side. Part of Anne was still surprised that she was allowed to still live in this house. At the same time, if the last year and a half had taught her anything about her parents, it was that they didn't give up on their daughters that easily. This wasn't only about Anne's copious mistakes. They refused to forsake their belief in Patty

coming home safe and sound, or even acknowledge the rumors of Patty abandoning the family, either by dying or joining the terrorists.

Her father's low, rumbling voice muttered mindless platitudes, the empty words allowing Anne's mind to fly through the possibilities. She couldn't tell if it was really about Patty Ann, or if that was only what every ounce of her soul wanted it to be about. It had to be about Patty though, right? Especially since it involved lawyers and her mother so upset. Anne was the sister most likely to commit a crime, and she hadn't done anything as far as she was aware. The lawyers from her crashing-a-car-while-stoned-out-of-her-mind incident were all well and dealt with. It seemed unlikely that Tori could get into this much trouble in only a month since she moved out. Technically, it could have been one of her oldest sisters, Catherine or Virginia. That seemed unlikely. They always seemed more mature and sophisticated than the younger trio of sisters. Besides, Anne doubted that either of them would go running to their father for lawyers. They were responsible and managing their own lives and finances. The little voice in the back of Anne's mind reminded her how unlike her that was.

Whatever. She was probably getting her hopes up for no reason. The family legacy, started by her grandfather was seemingly endless, even though he died before she was even born. That legacy meant nearly countless reasons why her father would need to be dealing with lawyers. Not everything had to be about her or her sisters.

She heard the echoes of footsteps from the kitchen, growing louder as they made their way into the sitting room. Oh no. Anne jerked backwards, away from the sound. Her overreaction sent her body flying backwards onto the couch, whacking her head on the

polished wood armrest from the other side. She scrambled upwards, running her hands through her hair to tame the mess as she was careful to avoid the rapidly growing goose egg from the contact with the couch. Seriously, no couch should be hard enough to spring up a lump like that. Even though Anne loved her parents, it still felt impossible to act like a lady all the time, including being made up all the time and her hair always perfect. Honestly, how was something like that even to be expected? It was impossible for someone like Anne, like how her fingers moved far too fast, brushing against each other, and fidgeting when she tried to stay still and ladylike.

Anne closed her eyes, forcing a placid expression on her face. She was trained to deal with the press as a little kid to keep up appearances. As a little girl, it was her job to stand there in lace and silk that cost more than the reporters' suits, without a single stray hair or smudge on her face. All these years later she used the same skills in an attempt to convince her parents not to worry about her.

The click of heels on linoleum brought Anne back to reality. She forced her eyes open, expecting to find the familiar picture of her mother. Anne forced the corners of her lips to curve upwards. They immediately fell back down upon the sight of her mother. Catherine Wood Campbell Hearst was the most well made-up woman Anne had ever known. Her makeup was always done to perfection, her hair flowing up and over with impossible amounts of hairspray. She was shorter than the rest of the family, even with her usual heels. Still, her mother had always worked hard to be the best version of herself, the paradigm always set for the girls. Now, she looked more like a frumpy housewife than anyone else, her eyes streaked with red and wetness.

Anne's heart dropped so hard she wouldn't be surprised if she could feel it in her stomach. "Anne," her mother choked out.

She prepared herself for the moment she had been expecting for the past year and a half. Even though Anne had expected the story was going to end with Patty's body found, she still felt the sting rise in her eyes. Anne stood up from the couch, taking two quick steps forward to catch her mother in her embrace. She hugged her mom, feeling so small and so big at the same time. Anne had never gotten used to her new height, especially when this close to her mother. Standing here, Anne felt gigantic as she wrapped her arms around her mother, even as it felt like the world was closing in on her.

"It's okay, Mom," Anne said in a small voice, wondering if the words were even real, if they had even managed to make it past her lips to find another person. It wasn't okay, but there wasn't anything else to say.

"Anne," her mom said, choking. "They— they found her. She's alive."

Anne blinked. "I'm sorry?"

Her voice came out an octave higher than usual, fringing on shattering all the glass vases in the large window of the room. Anne blinked again, the tears starting to blur her vision. This wasn't her. Anne had never been the girl who cried. Her mother wasn't the woman that cried. And yet, here they both were, letting the tears stream down their faces in a wild free-for-all. Mother's face found its way into Anne's shoulder, as shoulders of both mother and daughter started shaking. After nearly twenty months, Anne

thought it was over. She never expected to hear this news. Now that she had, it was like everything had changed, leaving Anne with no idea what to do.

Anne's voice felt gone, like all her breath was stolen. She swallowed the lump in her throat as she forced her voice to appear, even as it came out as a raspy whisper. "Where is she?" Her voice cracked on the last word.

Mother reached up, stroking Anne's wild hair that she hadn't bothered to brush that morning. "Don't worry about it, okay, Annie? Papa and the lawyers are going to take care of all of it."

Usually, Anne would complain about being called Annie, something no one had called her in years before she was struck by another thought. As far as Anne was aware, victims of crimes usually didn't have to get their own personal team of lawyers involved. That was the point of law enforcement and the judicial system. "Wait, lawyers?"

Her mother's hand stuttered in its path through her hair. "Don't worry, Annie. It's all going to be okay."

If there was one sentence that wasn't going to quell her nerves, it was that. She hadn't been worrying, more perplexed than anything else. However, if her mother told her not to worry, that had to mean something, probably that Anne should be worrying. People didn't come out and say those words unless they had cause to do so. And Patty had been missing for months! She needed a hospital and rest, not to worry about the legal proceedings. Anne clenched her hands into fists, squeezing until they hurt as her fingernails dug into her palm. She let her mother squeeze her. Anne couldn't shove her

mother off her and press for answers. Especially as Anne was growing more and more concerned that she had a legitimate reason to be crying into the shoulder of her younger daughter.

Despite her initial tears, Anne wouldn't cry again. This was a time to get down to business, not to waste time on such frivolities. Patty was in trouble. Anne couldn't do much, especially with her status as the rebel child with an addiction. She still had to do something, somehow. It might not mean much, anything that Anne could accomplish. Despite that, she was not going to let herself waste away into a ghost in this house already full of them. Action was necessary to save the sister she thought was lost forever.

Anne had no skills to help. She was a twenty-year-old kid on probation from drugs. Right now, that didn't matter. She would do anything for her sisters, especially Patty, who had always deserved the entire world. This was the time to fight, not to keep crying. Anne would work on that, despite no idea where to start, as soon as her mother's tears dried up and Anne could stop shaking.

The Halloween Dream

Lizzie stared down at her plate full of tangy pasta salad. She hated the meal under the best of circumstances. The dressing tasted gross, making the pasta all mushy. As soon as Lizzie had drained her glass of milk, she was done with eating, especially with the promise of something else to fill her belly later. Each taste of the overly rich dressing required a drink to get the taste out of her mouth. Of course, it didn't look like anyone else at the table had those reservations, since they were still eating. Maybe it wouldn't take so long if the adults would eat their food instead of kept talking, the same conversation topics about the same neighbors every single time the two families were forced to get together. Here they were, on Halloween night, not trick or treating. Instead, they had to listen to the adults talk about work and gossip about other neighbors.

Her leg bounced up and down under the table. Lizzie was careful not to let it hit the underside of the table. She'd get in trouble for fidgeting if she made any sort of sound. Plus, she didn't want to get her princess dress dirty. Her crown was still perched on her head halfheartedly, which she supposed was some sort of motivation to keep her head upright instead of slumping into her plate at the injustice of it all.

Lizzie stared at her brother across the table, trying to figure out what he was thinking. He was scooping up pasta with his spoon, slurping the twisted noodles into his mouth. As if he could sense her staring at him, Tim looked up and met her eyes. He immediately glanced over at their parents and the neighbors before rolling his eyes. Lizzie's face split into a grin, showing off her two missing front teeth.

Tim was in his pirate costume, the eyepatch currently sitting lopsided on his forehead. They had both been ready for hours to go trick or treating. Lizzie wanted to

whine about it. However, there was no way she'd act like that in front of company. She was worried that she'd get in trouble and end up missing Halloween altogether. These hours were tedious enough.

Lizzie leaned back against the strong wooden chair, straining to hear something besides the conversation topic, which was as mind-numbingly dull as ever, since her parents seemed incapable of talking about anything excited with the Bates. Unless she was imagining the shrieks of excitement, it sounded like not all parents were forcing their children to go through this tonight. They were probably running from house to house, picking up full-sized chocolate bars and cackling at their luck. She'd love to be out there right now. By the time she got to those houses, all they'd have left would be apples and toothbrushes. She tried to imagine what their living room floor was going to look like tonight once she and Tim had covered it with candy of every kind from the entire subdivision. At this point, they'd be lucky to hit every house in the cul-de-sac.

When it felt like hours had passed since the moment they had first sat down to this meal, Mommy and Mrs. Bates got up, heading into the kitchen. Lizzie rushed after them, dumping her plate on the counter, half eaten food strewn about to make it look as though she had eaten more than she had. She scrambled back out of the kitchen to go find her shoes. Lizzie was interrupted before she even made it up the stairs.

“Lizzie!” her dad called.

She hopped off the first step before rushing back into the dining room. Daddy was sitting with Mr. Bates and the boys, her brother among them. Lizzie smiled up at him.

“Go help your mother with the dishes.”

Lizzie wanted to roll her eyes, though she tried to stop herself. She didn't want to get yelled at, not in front of everyone. She might not like her neighbors, but it would be humiliating.

Her mom smiled at her when Lizzie entered the kitchen, one foot dragging after another. It didn't make Lizzie feel better, even though her mom may have meant it to. Lizzie was so excited about the holiday and no one else seemed to care enough to start the real celebration of the holiday. She took a deep breath before taking her place at her mom's side. At least she was in costume, one step closer to going out. However, Lizzie was pretty sure that real princesses didn't have to do dishes, at least not in poufy pink dresses.

At least it was quieter in the kitchen. While the occasional boisterous laugh erupted from the other room, the women got to work. Despite their gossip earlier, the tone was far more subdued during the chores. Mrs. Bates would give a gentle smile whenever Lizzie looked at her. Lizzie's skirt swished against her legs as she moved, getting in her way when she stretched on her tiptoes to put the newly clean plates back into the cabinet. The movements were repetitive, almost soothing in their simplicity. While this wasn't how Lizzie wanted to spend tonight, it could have been worse. That didn't change the level of disappointment seeping through her. She was only five. The situation was out of her control, even on a holiday focused on kids dressing up and collecting candy.

Mommy laid a soft hand on her shoulder. "Go ahead and get your shoes honey. We can finish up in here."

Maybe tonight could still be saved in the name of Halloween after all.

The amount of candy she was lugging around in her bag did not disappoint, practically needing to drag it along the sidewalk with how much her arms were straining at the weight. Between the waiting and the dishes, she had worried it wouldn't be. She was afraid their late start would be a disappointing in their loot. The memory of trick or treating would stay with her, maybe even past next year's Halloween. So many people had complemented her on her dress, especially when Lizzie would twirl for them, sending her skirt bellowing out as she spun.

It wasn't perfect. Tim was acting like he didn't like her, which was most definitely annoying. It was also par for the course these days, especially if they were around someone his age or might run into someone he knew. Sometimes he almost convinced Lizzie, but then she'd remember the way he would hug her after she had nightmares, sneak her a piece of candy when he got some at school, or even make her smile like he did at dinner. Sometimes it hurt when he ignored her. Lizzie wouldn't let that bring her down tonight as she skipped along the sidewalk, weighed down by the copious amounts of sugar. If she thought her bag was heavy now, then it was nothing compared to how heavy it would have been if she hadn't lightened her load.

It was going to be a good night and tomorrow with all the candy. Maybe even the rest of this week! Tim had whispered something to her about something this weekend and Lizzie knew that their family didn't have plans which meant it would be the two of them, which was when they were at their best. This was her family and life. Part of her was scared about next year when she finally got to go to kindergarten. Everything would change. Even with that fear, she was mostly excited. Tim had changed a lot while he was

at school. That didn't mean that school was a bad thing or that Lizzie would do the same. She loved her older brother, even if he was silly sometimes. He didn't get the same things Lizzie did, even though she was a whole three years younger.

Those fears could wait for tonight. Lizzie, Tim, and the Bates boy all walked up to the next house together, their fathers a few paces back. The next house was dark, no porch light or lit windows. Lizzie could feel her face fall as she looked at it. Sure, they had managed to get candy from practically every house before it. That didn't make this one any less disappointing. That was kind of what Halloween was all about, wishing for as much candy to collect as their bags could hold.

The Bates boy rang the doorbell anyway, and even though Lizzie rolled her eyes at his stubbornness, she was hopeful anyway. Who knew what type of person might be living here? Some adults dressed up or had spooky decorations in their yards, even ones that scared Lizzie, not that she would ever admit it. She was already a lot younger than the boys she was trick-or-treating with. There was no way she would let any of them know she was scared, even if she was pretty sure that Tim already knew. That was what big brothers were for.

"No one here," Bates scoffed, kicking at the door before making his way back down the walk, Tim at his side and Lizzie only a few steps behind the boys.

They took the lead to the next house. Lizzie followed, even as she tried not to get too close. Sometimes, boys were annoying, and she didn't want to have to put up with it any more than she had to, even on such a wonderful night.

She assumed the two dads were behind her, except when Lizzie looked back to see her dad, he was nowhere in sight. She frowned. “Where’s Daddy?” she asked Mr. Bates.

The man smiled down at her. “He went to check something at the last house and said he’d catch up with the rest of us by the time we finish at the next house.”

Lizzie nodded even as she tightened her grip on her bag of candy. It wasn’t that she had anything against Mr. Bates. She just missed her mom. Mommy was the one who helped her and her brother most of the time, even with their costumes. She was busy tonight, passing out candy to the other neighborhood kids. It felt wrong. Lizzie was always with Mom. It was weird to be out with only Daddy. She shook her head. There was no way that Lizzie was going to let anything bring her night down, even dad’s running off or missing her mom.

When Lizzie turned at the sound of footsteps, she couldn’t help her grin. “Dad!” she called, running towards him.

As she hit him, her dad stumbled back with an oof, staggering a step backwards. “Elizabeth! You’re getting awfully big for this, kiddo. But it turns out there were people at that house and look what they got for you kids!”

Her dad brandished three extra-large Pixy Stix, and Lizzie felt her mouth drop open as she reached for one. Sure, they had collected great candy tonight. This giant stick was still like hitting the jackpot. Lizzie stuck the tube inside her bag as the two boys each grabbed one. Their overall candy collection was gigantic. Even though Lizzie was afraid that Tim may have collected more, she couldn’t be upset with her haul tonight. There was so much sugar! She’d be bouncing off the wall for weeks.

The group made their way around the neighborhood, stopping at house after house. Lizzie had to start sitting her bucket down when they stopped, careful to lose any candy as they continued their quest. Of course, their trick-or-treating was delayed by church people. Lizzie liked church, for the most part. She liked Sunday school and wearing a fancy dress. Since Daddy worked at the church, she spent too much time talking to people who told her how big she had gotten. And Lizzie already knew that. She didn't need anyone else telling her the same thing repeatedly. Well, she would accept compliments about her dress right now, from however many people would talk about it.

The dark night crept upon them as the moon rose. Lizzie tried her best to ignore the scary stories. She couldn't help her relief that it was time to turn in for the night, especially on this Halloween night. She felt a lot safer at home, like nothing bad would ever be able to get her there.

Lizzie yawned the entire walk home from church, stumbling and tripping over her feet even though the sidewalk was clear. The walk through their neighborhood dragged on, with no more houses to trick or treat. The porch lights were already off, their residents having already gone to bed and pulled their candy. It made Lizzie's exhausted mind wonder how late it was. Certainly, a lot later than she normally went to bed. The streetlights still stood bright, casting an eerie glow around them.

Tim acted like he still had energy as he bounded ahead of the group, even as Lizzie's legs felt like they were walking through syrup, as she struggled to keep up with the group of men and boys.

Halloween was awesome. She loved it. Lizzie couldn't wait to see how much candy she had gotten. That would be an issue for later because right now, the only thing she could really think of was sleep.

Lizzie was half gone by the time they got home, not even bothering to say goodnight to the Bates. She lugged her candy up to her room, just in case. She might be falling asleep on her feet, but there was no way she could let Timmy get into her candy and have more than her. That wouldn't be fair. There would be plenty of time for counting tomorrow, to gorge themselves on far too many sweets. The festivities could stretch out for one more day. Because for tonight, Lizzie was asleep almost as soon as her head touched her pillow.

Lizzie startled awake. Everything was too loud. Noise echoed everywhere as the sirens blared.

Lizzie pulled her blanket up to her chest. She tried not to cry, even though she was confused and scared. It was unbearably loud, and nothing made sense as to why.

She didn't move despite the noise, frozen in her bed. Lizzie needed to know what happened, but it was too scary and overwhelming.

The noise changed, and Lizzie forced herself to calm down, taking tender steps out of her room, her blanket still clutched in her tiny fists, as if she'd never let it go.

"Timmy?" she called out, tentatively.

Looking back, it was all a blur. She could still remember the moment in perfect clarity when she was told that her big brother was dead. Poisoned, in fact, with an extra-

large Pixy Stix, a match to the one in her very own Halloween basket, also laced with cyanide.

How could she ever come to terms with the fact that her own father killed her eight-year-old brother and tried to kill her five-year-old self for the insurance money?

Under the Scorching Sun

David squeezed his eyes shut. He didn't want to see the jungle that had become so familiar over the past year and a half. It had been his home. The leg of one of his teammates, Joey's, pressed up against his own, the skin sticky with sweat from the heat. David made no move to scoot away from the sensation. It was oddly comforting, despite the gross factor. He and Joey were roommates, foster brothers, or whatever other way could define their relationship. The first time they met was on the van ride out of the San Francisco streets to the Peoples' Temple. They had been sitting like this when their lives had changed to the better as they found a new home. It was almost poetic that they were sitting like this again as this was the end of this part of their lives.

The other boy's leg kept bouncing up and down, jostling David's own. He kept his leg where it was, despite the pulling of sticky skin. Doing anything felt like too much after the weight of the world crashed down on their shoulders. They were what remained of a settlement that should have lasted for eternity, or at least for the rest of their natural lives. David wanted to believe that if he, Joey, and the rest of the boys were together, they could do anything. They were a team, reading and trusting each other on and off the court. Trusting your teammates was key in basketball as they relied on one another to move up and down the court and defend against attackers. It felt like it was years since they last played together, not only a few days ago.

The day they had left the settlement for Georgetown, everything had been buzzing with the anticipation of the congressman's visit. Most of the women were cleaning. A large group of them had lugged every article of clothing not being worn down to the

river. The woven baskets they had been carrying must have weighed as much as the women did. They lugged the baskets back up the hill towards the rest of the settlement before the women hung the clothes to dry on what must have been a milelong stretch of clothesline. The men were split into smaller groups as they worked on repairing any perceived fault or crack in the building facades. Others worked on the agriculture and warehouses, organizing rows of everything from shovels to medicine. No one knew what the congressmen would be looking for. Father said they would be looking to take the settlement down. Everything had to be perfect. The kids, or at least the most musical among them, were standing in one corner of the compound as some of their teachers tried to wrangle them into order. The music echoed in David's ears now, songs those kids would never sing again.

The van hit a bump and David skidded into Joey across the bench seat. He murmured a terse word of apology, scooting back while sticking close to the other boy. It was reassuring to feel his friend's presence, to know that in a world where everything has fallen apart, at least the two of them were standing. He didn't know if that did them any good. At least it was something, since not all the boys on the team were making the trip with them. Stephen had been arrested, accused of the murder of a Temple family back in Georgetown. Feeling anything now hurt too much to be concerned for the other boy. At least he was alive. That was better than most of his peers. David couldn't afford to care anymore. All he could focus on was the bumps underneath the tires or the air so humid, even inside the van, it weighed the boys down almost as much as life.

When they had moved to the settlement all those months ago, everything was gross and odd. They didn't belong here. Guyana was a different world than California, where David was born and raised. He had been homesick all hours of the day and night, even as he sometimes threw up from the heat and labor as they built the structures and lay the groundwork for a community. He had never imagined he'd be living in a jungle, where howling capuchin monkeys scared them, and the fierce jaguars were an ever-looming threat. When the first settlers moved here, there was nothing but wildness. They feared everything and knew nothing. At least most of the laborers expected nothing that became their reality. Somehow, this place he despised had grown a place in his heart as it became a home. As more Temple members started making the pilgrimage down to Guyana, they forged a home out of the trees that had stood there before. The imposing height of the remaining lush carapa trees with their large brown pods became comforting and incorporated into the borders of their new home.

Even though so many of the same people in the van were with him as they built their new home, it wasn't comforting. Spaces that were supposed to be filled with more of his brothers were instead marked by soldiers. The youngest soldier, who had to be in his early twenties if that, resembled Theo, another one of his closest friends with his high cheekbones and almost golden skin. David silently prayed Joey was too preoccupied with his thoughts to pay attention. It was the last thing his foster brother needed right now, as they waited to see what had become of all they had loved and lost. If it stung for David to look at this kid, he couldn't imagine how much harder this pain would hit Joey. The resemblance to his boyfriend left behind in the settlement when they departed for Georgetown might be too much to bear.

The van slowed before braking to a halt. The ease of the stop was almost gentle compared to the rest of the trip along unpaved roads through the middle of the dense jungle. David closed his eyes, taking a deep breath, like maybe if he focused hard enough, he could skip past this. Joey's hand found its way into his own. On any other day, the thought of holding hands with Joe would be weird. Now, it was grounding. It sent the message that he wasn't alone. David squeezed the hand in hopes of helping the other boy in return. The thought of everyone in their community who had died while they were enjoying themselves on the basketball court made his heart hurt like he was being stabbed over and over. David felt like he had aged years since then.

He heard the sliding doors lock open, the sound echoing in his mind in a way that had to be fake. There was no way that the sound of a door was so loud. Neither was the sound of his heartbeat pushing the blood through his ears and David could hear that fine. Joey squeezed his hand before dropping it. His wrist had never felt so weak as it fell to his side, as if it had no bones or tendons to hold it up. David knew he needed to climb out of the van. Even without seeing his surroundings, he knew the carnage had to be bad. David could see it in everyone around him, in the way the soldiers kept looking at the ragged group of boys with their eyebrows drawn softly at the bridge of their noses and forced half-smiles. He didn't know if that pity was deserved. Every member of this team would have died alongside everyone they abandoned for basketball.

Even though David was frozen to his seat with his eyes glued shut, the movement of bodies as his teammates spilled out of the van was obvious as their pants brushed against his own as the other boys climbed around him. Even though witnessing the scene

outside was inevitable, he still wanted to defer, as though waiting a few minutes longer would change the outcome of what the settlement members had done to themselves and their families. Names kept running through his head, names that matched faces he had seen daily for over a year in the Guyana settlement alone. That wasn't even to say he loved all those left behind. There was that boy a few years older than him who liked to check his shoulder whenever he saw him, sending David stumbling a step or two, sometimes even falling into the dirt. One time after a push, David had fallen hard onto his hands and knees, scraping his hands and knees. It was one of the few times he had to seek help from the infirmary to clean up his gravel-embedded knees. He couldn't remember the boy's name anymore. God, what if no one remembered him? No one deserved to be forgotten like that, no matter who they were or what they did.

David pried open his eyes and flinched as they locked with the young soldier's. The one who looked like Theo. His eyes were all wrong though, which somehow hurt more than if they had matched. The shape was rounder, the color lighter than Theo's eyes, which were the color of bronze. These eyes were also drawn and full of pity. Theo had never looked at him like that. David hated that there wasn't anything he could do about it. If he was honest, he pitied himself too, for right now and everything that was going to happen in the future. In the ways that mattered, he didn't even have a future anymore. He couldn't stand it. Seeing what lay outside the van would be better than studying not-Theo and his pity. Maybe the sooner he forced himself out into the place he had called his home and examined the corpses of those he had called his family, the sooner it would be over with. The soldiers hadn't shared details of the tragedy. David could still imagine it with striking clarity. This wasn't the first time they stared death in

the eye and waited to be called up to God. It was the first time David hadn't been with them, and the first time the drink was laced.

Grabbing the handle above the door, David hoisted himself out of the van before he could change his mind. The urge to throw up intensified at the sight. The jungle grass, usually so green and bright, was patchy and dulled in the few remaining clumps. It was so much easier to focus on the mottled grass than the patchwork quilt of hundreds of shirts lying on top of it, belonging to the community that once was. All those shirts were more or less cared for, while the bodies that wore them were scattered everywhere like a kid had dropped their dolls. The members of their community were already decomposing and becoming one with the earth. David didn't know how he could be so stupid. He knew it had been days since they died. After all, he had spent four days in house arrest after the team got back from some stupid movie, one he was so delighted to have the opportunity to see. He couldn't remember the plot now. Whatever he had imagined this would be like, it was different to see it in front of him. The jungle had never smelled pleasant. Those vibrant smells in the humid air had become familiar, something he could rely on throughout his entire time in the country. It was gone now, like it had never been there at all, replaced by a putrid stench that reeked into his clothes. David would never be able to wash the smell off him or out of his nose. He pulled his shirt up over his nose, trying to pretend it alleviated the smell. The air was full of the stench, the fetor of decay smelling like rot, plain and simple.

David stared down at his feet, the closest corpse too close for comfort. There was no way he was moving it. He couldn't even tell who it was, the corpse bloated and

twisted, the face not even looking like a face at all. It could have been anyone. There were hundreds of bodies here, maybe even a thousand. David swiped at the sting in his eyes before focusing on this one. It felt impossible, to block out everything else. That didn't matter because he had to figure out who this was. No one deserved to be forgotten. The remaining boys of Jonestown were here to bring closure to everyone else, so the rest of the commune could get their proper burials. This wasn't about him. David was standing here breathing while everyone else was dead. Nothing he did here was going to bring anyone back. They needed to know who died. Maybe someone had managed to get away into the jungle and hadn't been found yet. Even though the hope was foolish, at least something to work towards. It was more optimistic than any other possibility.

The stench of rotting bodies was overpowering, almost like in addition to the flesh, cabbage and garlic had been rotting alongside them. He wouldn't throw up, no matter how much he felt he needed to. He had to be strong. There was no one else to rely on. Most of the people David had grown to trust were dead. The few remaining were grieving. They didn't need to support him, not while they were looking for their own found families among the wreckage. It was off putting that the buildings stood as strong as they had always been as they cast their imposing shadows across the living and dead alike. David had helped build them with his own hands, and somehow, they had survived. An arts and crafts project had survived when so many people didn't.

David forced himself to look back down at the bloated corpse, already decomposing on top of the dirt paths. Underneath the body would be the trampling of a thousand feet of different sizes, pounding the soil into itself with each step around their

home, getting everywhere. The longer they had lived here, the more worn the paths looked. Now, instead of symbolizing the lives of over a thousand people for over a year, it had one life, taken far too soon. Within a few years, it would be like no one had ever lived in this settlement in the middle of a rabid jungle. David had no idea if he knew, or if he should have known, who the body was. It was impossible to tell, the facial features coated with maggots and half-eaten away. It could have been anyone, and he would still be stuck here, unable to tell. The task felt as if they had been put to pushing Sisyphus' rock up the hill only for it to come tumbling down each and every time. But David couldn't stop. It would have been impossible to match each name and face, especially when the faces looked like this.

He took a deep breath through his mouth, steeling his nerves to move onto the next body. David wanted to help everyone here, even though it was too late. All he could do was all he could do, and that meant moving onto bodies he might have a chance at recognizing. It wasn't easy, especially since the clothing was communal. A shirt he recognized could have been worn by anyone close to that size. Very few community members owned personal possessions; clothing was shared among everyone. Even though the system worked, it was broken now, as they tried to identify rotting bodies in unidentifiable clothes.

David looked up at the grounds, instant regret flooding over him. Bodies lay everywhere there was room, filling the paths and greenspace of the entire settlement. Some were in clusters, corpses tangled up in one another. David squeezed his eyes shut when he realized those people must have been embracing each other in their final

moments. Others were flat on their backs, totally alone in these moments after death. He didn't know if death took them alone like this or if they had been pulled apart from their loved ones. David wasn't sure which was worse. Everything about the situation was tragic, regardless of the differences between each death.

He tried to take stock of his teammates as he considered the only remnants of a place that believed in peace and God and love before the fear had consumed everything in its path. David hated how his heart rate picked up when he realized he couldn't see everyone from his current vantage point. Part of him was afraid that he wouldn't see them again. That was what happened with everyone now lying cold and bloated on the dirt paths, grass, and everywhere else. The harsh sun beat down on them, causing glare from the bright sunlight as David kept moving, getting into the motions as he tried to identify each person left behind. The National Guardsmen were keeping notes and tagging the bodies for their later removal. Too many bodies were left untagged, even after David and some of the other boys had made their rounds. Both hurt: knowing who the corpse used to be and not knowing who had died. They had lost so much, things that David would never be able to get back. He should have spent more time with the little kids. He loved chasing them around whenever they were allowed to play, scooping up tiny figures and tossing them over his shoulder as other tiny fists beat on his back. He couldn't remember the last time he had played with them, or even which of the kids had been there. He should have done better for the kids while they were still chasing each other around, the echoes of laughter bouncing off the stark white buildings.

David wiped sweat off his brow as he studied the buildings more carefully for Joey. They were still brothers, no matter anything else that happened. David didn't know what would happen next. Would they stay here, in Guyana? Maybe move to Georgetown? Move back to the complex in California? Or even go back to the streets of San Francisco? Whatever it was, David still wanted to have Joey at his side. They were adults now, even if it didn't feel like it. In the settlement, they never had to make any adult decisions for themselves. Now, the possibilities were endless and yet so limiting. David didn't think he would ever forget the bodies stacked every which way, like the nine hundred deaths were too much for this place. They were too much for him.

Joey was winding his way around a stack of bodies. David watched as he leaned down to check another corpse, before standing up, shaking his head. Not who he was looking for. He had to be looking for Theo's body. It was irrational to think that he may have survived. At the same time, wasn't all hope irrational? Until a body was found and identified, then Theo could still be alive. Part of him was still alive now, beyond their memories of him. They had already lost so much. David got back to his task, trying to speed up. Joey didn't need to see Theo's body, didn't need to remember him in a half-decomposed state. He obviously hadn't been privy to the couple's goodbye. Even so, that was probably a better last memory to have than staring down at a body that had been rotting away in the jungle heat and humidity for days. David didn't want to see it either. His heart wrenching pain had dulled to an ache, the edges on everything dimmed away after staring so much death in the face. It was too late to protect anyone from the reality of this situation. The last few hours razed any innocence David still had. There had to be lines, and one of those was letting Joey see and identify his boyfriend's corpse. David

didn't want to see the apparition of his old friend's rotten body haunting him for the end of time. This was about Joey though, and David would do anything for his brothers. He was the one who had known the most about their relationship, had helped the boys sneak around and mediated on their behalf to avoid anyone's suspicions. Privacy was important for all couples in a place like this. Personal relationships were dangerous. They might walk around and call each other brother and sister while listening to Father; however, sometimes more than that got tricky. In a life where everything was public, things held close were as precious and dangerous as a glittering dagger.

Each body after another held its own story, and a part of David hated himself as he didn't listen. There wasn't enough time. The heat was as scorching as ever, even as the sun slowly made its way down the horizon. David kept pressing forward to find Theo, or what used to be Theo. The task was insurmountable as David worked through the endless stream of flesh and rot. He was surrounded by the corpses, hardly distinguishable as one of the living. The last time he had been surrounded by the people they used to be, he had been home. Now, he wanted to cry, to lose it, to scream at the sky why them, why not him. It was dumb luck. He would have drunk the poison alongside his friends and family, scared, but not as scared as he was now, without a clue of what life would offer him next.

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