

I had a weird feeling when I woke up, like it was a bad day to get out of bed, if only I listened to those feelings. I rolled off my mattress, not surprised to see that my roommate, Charlotte, had already left for the bathroom. I grabbed my towel and toiletries, and headed down to the communal bathroom that was run in my dorm. I remembered my first day here at University of California in San Francisco, with me coming from Stinson Beach, California, 746 people and counting, I was terrified of entering the bathroom, and just about everything else at the school. As I walked down the hall, I took a quick glance at the hallway bulletin board, "Looking for young healthy adults to embark in a study on how college life affects one's mental stability. Pays \$250."

"Too bad I can't do it," I muttered to myself. My parents would never let me take part in a study that studied my behavior, not with my past. I had to promise to go up and visit every weekend, and to see a therapist twice a week, for them to let me come down here to study Forensic Anthropology. It's been two years since the incident happened, and they still treat me like a bomb that's going to explode any minute. But I guess I understand why they're so worried, it was kind of a messy situation. I can still remember the horrified look on my mom's face when she walked in on me trying to literally cut my hands off, all the blood that surrounded me. The pain that spread through my body was like nothing that I had felt before, and it felt exhilarating. However, my mom didn't feel that way. I still think about that scream that escaped her lips and the sound of my dad's feet pounding up the stairs, prepared for anything, except for what he saw.

I hated seeing my parents so upset and distraught, but I hated my life even more. School was hell, and I was terrified that even in a new place, people would still hate me, call me disgusting, degrading names and having no one to turn to made it ten times worse. I still remember the first time it was decided "cool" to make me the subject of everyone's torture; Kelsey Thompson had "accidentally" spilled cherry cola all over my shirt on picture day. With the tears stinging in my eyes, and my face flushed red, I asked what I had done to deserve it, and all she said was "Because. It's, Fun," and walked away, her crackle of a laugh ringing through my ears.

I was in the ICU for two weeks while they tried to figure out what was wrong with me, and when they discovered that I had Major Depression, my parents were shocked. They set me up with a psychiatrist, got me medicated, and I haven't had an "episode" since. I'm still convinced it was just a simple meltdown of graduating high school, but they won't listen. When I said I was still going to be attending UCSF in the fall, they all freaked. But my psychiatrist promised that it would be good for me to get away, and I think my parents finally let me go when they heard that. They believed that all the bullying was what caused me to hurt myself, and they didn't want me to get hurt again. Maybe it was the bullying, or the anxiety of leaving to a new

far place, but now I'm a junior, and that everything was going well, I didn't seem to care anymore.

As I entered the bathroom, Charlotte was coming out of the shower, completely disregarding the one rule of the communal bathroom: cover up. Not that anyone minded, star tennis player, as well as having the lead in almost every school theatre production since her freshman year, she was proud of what she had, and wanted everyone to know. I lowered my gaze as she pulled on her bathrobe and gave her a quick wave. She rubbed my frizzy red hair, "Wassup Frizzle?" calling me by the nickname that I acquired my freshman year here as she left the bathroom. "See ya later, okay?" I quickly hopped into a shower, soaking in all the heat. When I got out, Charlotte was already gone, but left me one of her famous notes, the ones that she left just about everywhere. "I see mystery in your future," was written in her elegant penmanship. I rolled my eyes, crumpled it up, and left the bathroom.

The rest of my day when by in a blur. First, Bioarchaeology, followed by a two hour break, then Human Anatomy and Osteology, and finally, just for fun, Homicide Investigation. I was taking all graduate classes, but I loved every minute of it. Just the possibility to help those in need, even after death, made me smile. During my two hour break, I headed down towards the psychology building, mentally preparing myself for yet another intensive meeting with my psychiatrist, Dr. Richard McKenzie. He was the one that my old psychiatrist recommended would help the most. He's a good guy and all, but he can sometimes be a bit...eccentric. He can get off topic at times, and is strangely obsessed with the supernatural. It's sometimes a little hard to take advice on how to live my life from a crazy guy, but he has somewhat helped me since I started to see him. During the visit, he had me talk to him about my day, that's usually what we end up talking about.

"Morning Emma! How was your day? Anything noteworthy?" he asked enthusiastically, his hand ready to start scribbling down everything that came out of my mouth.

"Um.... nothing really. Woke up, saw a naked girl, went to class, the usual." I said with an airy tone of indifference in voice. I knew my comment about Charlotte would freak him out.

"Naked girl?!?! Emma! Why haven't you mentioned her before? I was unaware that you were in those types of relationship. What's her name? Where's she from? When did you two meet? What's she majoring in? Do you have anyone else I should know about?" he started to trail off, confused by what I said.

"Don't worry Dr. McKenzie, it was just my roommate Charlotte, it was by accident when I went to my dorm bathroom, we're close, but not that close," I chuckled. Dr. McKenzie is really

protective over me, I think it's because his own daughter had died a few months before I started to see him, and now he saw me as his own daughter.

“Don't do that to me Emma!” he exclaimed as he held his chest and breathed out. His bright blue eyes crinkled in the light, completely opposite of his tan skin and dark black hair.

The rest of our meeting was pretty boring, I talked, he wrote, and-that was it. By the end of the day, I was ready to crash into my bed. However, as I approached my dorm building, I was bombarded by students and faculty, and the flash of a bright red siren filling the dark sky. I saw one of my best friends, Lisa, in the midst of the crowd, tears running down her face.

“Lisa! What's going on? Are you okay?” I asked as I ran up to her.

“Emma! Thank god! I thought it was you! I couldn't find you, and I can't find Charlotte, and I started to freak out, and they wouldn't tell us anything, and, and, oh Emma!” she exclaimed as she wrapped her arms around me and cried into my shoulder. After I comforted her for a few minutes and she calmed down, I asked again what was going on. The crowd had grown thicker, and we were slowly being shoved towards the building. Through the mass of people, I was able to catch a glimpse of the paramedics pushing someone on a gurney into the ambulance, their arm hanging out of the unzipped body bag. From what I could see, three long claw marks ran down the arm, blood dripping from the gashed and onto the floor.

“Lisa, Lisa!” I yelled as turned and grabbed her shoulders to get her attention. “Tell me, was someone murdered here?” She looked up at me, her brown curls falling over her shoulders, and her big brown eyes filled with tears. She slowly nodded her head, “In the forest behind the dormitory, a student was attacked by something.”

“Oh my god. How is that even possible? That forest is completely dead; I thought it was impossible for anything to live in them after the fire last year.” Last spring, a couple of idiotic stoners were smoking their pot in the Sycamore Forest that was behind the school. One stupid mistake and the entire campus ended up paying for it. The forest was deemed unlivable until the smoke and ash completely disappears and the trees had a chance to grow back. It was obvious that anything that could kill a man wouldn't be able to survive in it.

All around me, people were freaking out. I could hear whispers running through the crowd.

“I wonder who it was.”

“Jerry! Jerry! JERRY!”

“Babe, calm down, I'm right here.”

“I need to tweet about this.”

“Are we safe?”

Are we safe? I didn't know, but I was determined to figure out what happened. I left Lisa with a few of my other friends, knowing that they would be able to keep her calm while I searched for some information, as well as looked for Charlotte, I knew she had to be around. I headed towards the front of the dormitory, and saw our school Dean talking to the police.

“....all that we can determine is that it was some type of beast, Dean Reynolds.”

“Thank you officers, now I have to figure out how to tell my school that our star tennis player is dead...” He rubbed his temples with his fingers, sighing at the very thought of it.

His words rang through my ears, *school tennis star dead*. Charlotte, **dead**. I had seen her just that morning, and now she was dead. I couldn't believe it. It couldn't be true. I slowly turned away, but not before Dean Reynolds saw me.

“Emma, wait!” he shouted for me to turn around, I guess to comfort me. Charlotte and I had been really close, she was my best friend, and now she was gone. When I had first started school, my parents were reluctant to have me dorm with some random person. Dean Reynolds assured them that Charlotte, who had gone through something similar, would be able to help me. And she did. She was the only person who knew what I had gone through; she too attempted to commit suicide, by overdosing. She is, or was, a part of me, the one who I told all my secrets, fears, ambitions, everything too. Even Dr. Richards knew that she had helped me more than he was ever able to. And now she was gone.

I walked towards the edge of the decaying forest, the smell of ash filling my nose. Before the fire, students would come back here to relax and admire the beauty. The smell of sweet mongolia and lilac flowers used to fill the air, and the radiant sun setting was one of the most stunning mixtures of yellow and orange one could ever see. Those same colors filled the sky the day of the fire. The orange and yellow flames dancing across the treetops, performing a dramatic ballet and creating a horrific yet beautiful swirl of death, as it burned the forest to the ground. I paused for a minute before stepping onto the black ash that covered the ground. I carefully walked through the forest, weaving through the corpses of the trees. The once thriving forest was no more. As I went farther and farther, the sounds of the crowd slowly began to die out, and the flash of the sirens withered away, and I soon was surrounded by darkness. Darkness, that was what I felt two years ago, when I tried to take my own life. Charlotte had showed me the light, however cheesy it is, and it was like my candle had just been snuffed out. I stood there for a few

more minute, tears gradually made their way down my cheeks, and I began to sob, big ugly sobs that made it hard to breathe, hard to live with that pain. I sat down on the dry black ground, and just sat there and cried. I didn't know how long I sat there, but the harsh cold night wind began to rip through my skin, burying deep in my bones. I got up and made my way back to the school.

As I walked, the forest's eerie silence engulfed me. All of the sudden, I heard the sound of a branch snapped, and I wildly turned, "Who's there?" I asked stupidly, as if anyone, or anything, would respond. I stood in silence, terrified of what I didn't know. Before I knew it, something slammed me to the floor. I skidded across the remains of the leaves and trees, getting covered in soot and ash. I looked up, and gasped at the sight I saw. The creature that just attacked me, the one that murdered my best friend, stood a few feet away from me. It was some type of beast, at least 7 ft tall on its hind legs, its black fur shining now visible in the moonlight. Its teeth and muzzle were covered in blood, not mine, but Charlotte's. However, its eyes were what really got to me. The bright blue in its eyes that gleamed in the light, they were familiar to me. It was suddenly impossible to breath as terror ripped through my skin, and I gasped for air, struggling to stay sane, as the monster stepped towards me. I kicked it in its knee, and I roar of pain escaped from it. A screamed burst out of me, but I couldn't stop, didn't stop until the beast grabbed me by the waist and threw me over his shoulder, rendering me unconscious.

I woke up with the flash of fluorescent light on my face. I opened my eyes and squinted at the bare bulb that hung above me. I looked around, taking in my surroundings. Besides a broken chair in the corner, and the memory of a once live fire place on the wall across me, the room was completely empty. Once again, the smell of ash filled my nose, and I figured that I was in an old shack that had been in the forest fire. I tried to get up, but I found myself handcuffed to the radiator that I had been leaning against. I pulled on the cuff, but all I accomplished was a cut on my wrist where I rubbed against my skin. I looked around once more, and remembered the pins that were in my tangled hair. I reached up with my right hand, only to realize that it was completely covered in blood, my blood. The same three claw marks that were on Charlotte's arm were on my own, and I stared at it, because it didn't feel like it was my arm. Disregarding the gagging sight, as well as the pain that began to boil over, I found a pin and pulled it out of my hair. "Success!" I jimmied the lock until it clicked open, and tore my dirt and blood crusted cardigan off, and wrapped it around my arm, hoping to stop the bleeding as I made my way out of the room.

By the time I got back to campus, the sun was starting to come up. The pink and orange hues filled the sky, and I felt a calming wave run through me. I made my way up to the administrative building, preparing to tell the police of what happened. As I passed by the psychology building, I was surprised to see Dr. McKenzie walking out, a limp in his leg that wasn't there before. He glanced up when he heard my footsteps, and what I saw will forever haunt me; his bright blue eyes.