

The Maze Of Dreams

I rub my temple in frustration. My teachers have been piling on homework to help us study for our SAT's. I have my own way of studying. I read every page of each textbook front to back. Then, I write my own practice test and take it. If I don't get everything correct, I read the same textbooks over and over again. To do this I need an entire two weeks, but now I can barely spare a minute of my day. "Samela! Dinner's ready!" My mom's angry voice echoes through the house. "Coming!" I frantically scribble down four more answers before she yells up to me again, "Samela Jones! If you don't come down here this instant, you'll get no dinner at all". I squeeze my stress ball to lower my anxiety and the contents fly into the air, spreading across my papers and my dog, Oreo. I'm extremely nervous, if I don't finish this work, my grade will surely be down to an A-, which won't be much help when I fail my exams. No study time, unfinished homework, enraged mom... how could my life possibly get worse.

My mom is halfway up the staircase before I realize the terrible condition of my room. Oreo still lays motionless on the bed, covered in sand, my papers are sprawled across the floor, crumpled and dirty. Unwashed clothes and bath towels pile up behind the door. My mom storms in, with red eyes and tattered clothes. There's an awkward silence as she glances around the room from the doorframe. She squeezes her eyes shut and rests her rough hand on her forehead. "I am sick of you Samela," she whispers. In seconds she's gone, and the door slams behind her. What a dramatic day, a voice screams inside me, everything is happening so terribly and so fast. I sigh and rest my tense muscles. Taking a dab of lotion I spread the white gloss across my face, my arms and my legs. I stroke my long brown hair, taking out the tangles that have been struggling to come loose for weeks, and glance over at my pathetic dachshund. "Come on buddy" I say. Oreo springs up onto his feet and leaps off the bed, only then realizing all of the sand imbedded in his fur. He shakes multiple times, spraying sand everywhere. It sticks to the rug, the lamp, the beanbag, but I don't care anymore. Then he follows me down to the kitchen.

A light flickers above the table and a hole in the roof lets raindrops fall straight into my mom's soup. "Mom?" I say. Her nails pinch the back of her scalp and she sits hunched over, taking small sips of her soup filled with dirty rain. How did she get this mad and... and weird? I was only late for dinner. Maybe she had a bad day at the shop, I should probably comfort her. I walk further into the kitchen and tap the back of her shoulder. "M-mom?" My breath falls on the back of her prickly neck making her hair stick up. My heart begins to race. I'm scared now, really scared, I don't want to leave her here, but at

the same time I'm too afraid to stay. I take a step back as my mom starts slurping down her soup as fast as she can. She won't stop; she's crazy, what's wrong! I start to yell at her, "Mom stop, stop it". Then, out of nowhere, she freezes. She sits completely still, one hand gripping her spoon and the other holding her bowl. The room is completely silent, other than the drops of rain falling onto the metal roof and flowing down into the hole above the table. Mom doesn't move an inch. Her bowl is held near her face and the hand holding the spoon is partially extended in an awkward position. I hold my place as well, too afraid to break the silence.

More seconds pass, then minutes. That's when I start to wonder if the lady in front of me isn't just my insane mom. Maybe... Maybe she's some kind of intruder, I don't know. But, she does look like my mom. Wait. I haven't seen her face yet. She's not my mom, she can't be. It's still completely silent, and she remains in the exact same position. I need to escape, now. I take one tiny step back, and the smallest cluster of creaks emerge from the old, wooden floor and boom in my ears. The woman whips her head around instantly, exposing a hideous face without eyes, or a nose, only a mouth and ears. A screech escapes my lips and for a second I stand petrified, but as soon as the creature shoots up from her chair, I'm on my feet following Oreo up the stairs in panic. When I reach my room the creature has crawled to the bottom of the stairs.

What do I do? There's no way to escape. Oreo stands at the top of the stairs barking his head off as the thing struggles to make its way up. It must have never encountered stairs, which is a good advantage for me. As if it was an instinct, I begin to thrust everything I can at it, but nothing I throw slows it down. It reflects the items instantly and crawls faster in anger and desperation, digging its' nail into the cracked wood. When it finally makes its way up the stairs it regains its feet. That's when I really begin to examine its features. It has extremely long, skinny fingers with pink, pointed nails. Cut up feet with webbed toes. Blond strings of hair slither down its back in thin, poorly treated locks. It's camouflaged as my mother, but only from the back. What is it? How did it get here?

I don't dare to move. Obviously it can only sense where I am by hearing me. Oreo stands petrified too, but still poised to attack if necessary. It jerks unnaturally and opens its' mouth occasionally revealing a slimy, blue tongue with a slit in the middle that reminds me of a snake. Of course! It can smell me with its tongue. Then suddenly, as it begins to creep forward, a hand reaches from behind me, covers my mouth, and another grasps my hand yanking me towards the window. I whip around and gaze at the handsome figure. He looks about my age but a lot taller, with blond bangs and deep blue eyes. He throws open the window and although I have no idea who he is, I'd rather trust

him than that monstrous thing. The boy is determined to get us both out. "Come on!" he yells, urging me to go with him. I follow him down the vines that extend across the side of the house, but the plants break under his feet leaving me with weak and broken vines to descend. He jumps the last 8 feet down and I jump the last five.

Looking up I can see that the creature has no trouble utilizing its way down the house and it makes its way onto the soft grass at once. We sprint now, but the monster is almost as fast on all fours. I have won several medals in 100 and 200 meters for track, but we run much farther than that, into the depths of the woods, without any protection on our feet. I trip on tree stumps and snag my hair and clothes in the snarled twigs. The boy is quite far ahead when I yell, "Hey, I, I can't go any farther, I'll just hide if it catches up with me." He glances at me "You can't hide, it can smell you, come on we can outrun it" He responds. "No, I really can't" My feet have been stabbed with sticks and they are stiff from in the cold of the night. Without hesitation he sprints to me and scoops me up without effort. The beast has made its way into sight and in response he sprints off with me in his arms.

My stomach aches with cramps and my feet bleed from the cold, so I simply close my eyes and feel how he swiftly moves through the tufts of thorn bushes and knotted plants. Then, all of a sudden, there's a harsh falling sensation. It turns my stomach and the boy's frightened yells fill my ears with terror. There is a huge impact as we hit a stone surface. Oreo falls onto my legs and whimpers in pain, and I partially fall on top of the boy that just saved my life, but he lays as motionless as a rock. I'm just about to wonder if he's dead when I see his breath turn into curly waves of fog against the air. Where are we? I carefully observe the surroundings. We lay on a gray, stone path. We seem to be located in a modern looking neighborhood and identical houses surround us on either side. What a strange place, I think.

The boy's eyes flicker open. Specks of gold splatter the ocean blue surrounding his pupils. "Are you okay?" I ask. He stares up at me, we stay like this for a while. He seems to be losing it, staring into my eyes for what seems like an hour. "Yeah" He clears his throat "Yeah, I'm fine, I didn't expect such a long fall," he says. Oh yeah, we fell into this place. That's odd. "Who are you?" I ask, "My name's Jeydo, Jeydo Hartting". Jeydo... I feel like I recognize the name from somewhere. "Well, thank you... for saving me" I say. "It's the least I could do," he says sitting up. He brushes the dirt and rocks from his sweatshirt. "I'm" I start "You're Samela Jones" he says. A speck of curiosity crosses his face. "You are Samela Jones, correct?" I look at him puzzled. "Y-yes, but... how do you know that?" He smirks and shakes his head. "Your name was on the wall of your room, as big as an elephant, and you go to my

school.” Now I feel bad that I don’t know him. “Oh, sorry, I just... forgot.” I didn’t really forget, I never knew.

I stare at the ground picking at a piece of dirt, disappointed in myself. He still sits beside me staring around at the houses, then he looks at me. I continue picking at the floor pretending that I don’t notice him. “Your eyes.” He says, “They’re so big”. I do wear a bit of mascara and blue eye shadow that makes my eyes look larger. “I get that a lot,” I say flatly. “I know,” he says instantly, as if he knew what I was going to say. Jeydo pushes a bit of my hair from covering one of my eyes then looks away. He has strong looking hands but they move so softly. It’s so weird, I barely know him, though he seems to know everything about me, and, and I kind of admire it. “Well, Mr. Know-it-all, Where are we and how did we get here?” I stand up and make a small circle, observing our surrounding, from a better angle. “Well, I guess it’s just another checkpoint in the maze,” He says. Maze, I think. That doesn’t sound too easy to get out of. “What maze?” I ask. He picks at the hole in his jeans and sighs. “Umm, well I guess I’ll start from the beginning. I was walking outside after playing soccer with my friends, and I saw this sign, and of course me as the curious kind of guy went to read it. It was old and weird, and it said, maze below, and there was an arrow pointing down. I wondered what it meant by below when I fell straight down. It was a bit like this fall but it wasn’t as long and I landed on a soft patch of grass behind your house.” He pauses thinking thoroughly, to make sure that all of the information escaping his lips is true. His eyebrows wrinkle in concentration and his eyes flicker repeatedly. “There was another sign a few yards away that said, monster ahead, escape through the forest.” He looks at me. Of course, the monster that was in my house, I think. “You screamed a bit, and I heard your dog bark so I climbed the house. Seeing you stuck with that thing, I, I couldn’t just leave you. And you know what happened from there, although you probably didn’t see the sign in the woods right before we fell into this place” He stands up. “So, how are we going to get out of here?” I ask. He glares around and thinks. “I guess, we’ll just have to get to all of the checkpoints and soon enough we’ll get out”. I pick up Oreo. I think he’s broken his leg but I’m not sure, maybe it’s only a fracture or sprain. “Well let’s go,” I say, “the sooner we get to all of the checkpoints, the sooner we can get back home.” He nods in agreement, and I follow him down the stone paved path.

There’s a mysterious mist in the air, it gives me the creeps, like something is crawling down my neck. I glance around everywhere to make sure nothing is following us and cradle Oreo in my arms like a baby. All I can do is hope that he won’t slow us down, because the faster we go, the faster we can get him medical help.

Soon enough we come across another sign. It doesn't say anything; it only consists of an arrow directed to the left, pointing to one of the white houses. "We should go in," Jeydo says. "If we don't we'll have nowhere else to go." I nod, and we approach the house in silence. The door is gray like the others, but there is one thing that defines this house as different. The doorknob is wooden and sleek but the others are a silvery metal. Jeydo traces the knob with his thumb, observing its interesting features. When he takes it off his thumb is covered in flakes of dust and splinters. "That's weird," he says. He twists the doorknob slowly and we step into a brightened room with nicely plated flooring and hot tea boiling in a kettle. "Wow," Jeydo says, "I didn't expect such a nice place." I smile and laugh. "Yeah, this is a big surprise." We wander around in search of the next checkpoint, in hope that we can soon leave. Although this place is nice, there is something that tells me this is a trap, it's luring us into something. That's when we hear a quiet squeaking noise. It's constant and slow. It could be a swing or some type of broken object. "Hello?" Jeydo says loudly. The noise stops, and Jeydo looks at me in fear. I put Oreos on the ground because he seems as though he can walk again and maybe protect us. Jeydo grabs my hand and pulls me behind him. When he begins to loosen his grip, I squeeze his hand tighter, unwilling to let go. He looks back at me and tightens his grip as well. The sound starts again, but this time it's loud and quick. Jeydo takes a step towards the sound, and I'm forced to follow. "Jeydo, no" He keeps walking forward and doesn't look back. Now I want to let go, but his grip on my hand has tightened even more. We enter a dark room where the sound has now grown extremely loud and fast. You can just make out the rocking chair but no one sits in it. "Who's there?" I ask. Jeydo turns around to put his finger against my lips when his eyes widen and he gasps. I turn slowly and a small wrinkled figure stands inches behind me. I spring back and fall into Jeydo then run behind him. We stare at the woman for a long time. Standing on my tiptoes I whisper in Jeydo's ear, "Jeydo... her eyes". Jeydo stares blankly at the old woman and the rocking stops instantly as she drops her tray of moist, freshly baked cookies. "We have to get out." He whispers back. He must have noticed that no white surfaces her eyes. They are completely black and unsure of our presence. Abruptly, she sprints towards us and I scoop up Oreos, afraid that he won't be able to outrun her if we have to sprint. Jeydo throws me to the ground and my thigh begins to throb in pain, it has been punctured with a metal rod sticking up from the floor, which digs deeply into my flesh. When I pull my leg from the depths of the rod, blood covers my hand from the broken tissue. Suddenly, the world begins spin unnaturally. I can only make out the copper stick that Jeydo swings at the old woman, and her thick fangs before I black out from the world.

I wake up snuggled in the hoodie that Jeydo was wearing the last time I saw him. He sits across from me in a simple white t-shirt. His skin is exposed to the misty cold air, and we sit in the darkness of the night behind one of the white houses. I glance down at my thigh, afraid of what I'll see, but it has been tightly patched up with a jean material. When I look over at Jeydo again, his jean is partially ripped and he tends to a poorly lit fire a few feet away. I can see his thick muscles shiver from the cold as he pokes at the flame with a large stick. How is he surviving this weather? I ask myself. I try to sit up but instantaneously a sharp pain crawls up my leg and I squeal. Jeydo sees that I'm awake, and his face brightens. "You're awake." He says a little too happily. "Lay back down". I wince, do as commanded and rest my head on the patch of grass that Jeydo has made for me as a pillow.

When I wake up again, the sun rests against the horizon. It subsumes orange streaks mixed with a variation of red and pink. Jeydo sits inches away from my face waiting for my awakening, his eyes look tired and he carries two wooden items. "Good morning beautiful," he says. I fake a nervous smile. Does he really know me enough to call me beautiful? It feels kind of... weird. "I have something for you." I look up in surprise at what awaits. Jeydo presents a nicely carved pair of crutches. He must have gotten the wood from the forest opposite the houses. The slit in my thigh seems to have sealed, but my leg is swollen stiff and I can't feel the muscles above my kneecap. But now these will help a considerable amount. "Wow," I say in astonishment, "How did you carve this?" He looks at the left crutch and feels the wooden texture with his fingertips, "Carving is my hobby, I did it with my pocketknife that I carry for self defense, I love wood, the feel of it." I trace the crutches with my nails as well. No splinters stick up, threatening my constantly irritated hands, the wood is smooth yet thick and strong to hold my entire body weight. Jeydo must have spent ages creating this for me, the entire night perhaps. "Thank you" I say. I look deeply into his eyes. They are so pretty and innocent. "Come on, let's try them out, we have to get out of here sometime. Then I promise you can rest forever," He says. He helps me sit up and props my leg on a small log. It's easier to move because I can't feel the pain in my thigh. "Great, that's good" Jeydo says. He hands me a crutch and after some struggle and his help, I manage to make my way onto my feet. With both crutches I can make a few limp steps. "Nice" Jeydo says, but he sounds unsure of himself.

After some practice, we manage to walk on along the path, but at an extremely slow pace, and after a minute or two Jeydo just decides to carry me, and he slings my crutches over his shoulder. After an hour or so we reach another checkpoint. It is the same as the last one but points to the right and says, "Watch out for monkeys". Jeydo looks down at me cradled in his arms and slowly puts me to the floor

and hands me my crutches. I grasp them and lean over the left one with my complete body weight. Without a word we enter the white house that the sign points to. The doorknob is blood red, but remains metal like most of the others. As we enter, an extravagant smell fills our nostrils. The room is ginormous, entering the house is like entering another world. In the middle, clear blue liquid flows in a river. When I see the pretty water lap onto the sandy bank, I can't resist dragging myself as fast as I can to the riverbank, in desperation to rehydrate myself. I soak in the pleasure of the breeze and lean over carefully to take a sip of water. When the tips of my lips are about to skim the surface of the stream, it turns blood red like the doorknob outside of the house and Jeydo pulls me back from the stream careful not to irritate my leg. He lifts me up into his arms and that's when I see the band of monkeys splashing across the river in our direction, warding us off with their sharp nails and fangs. Jeydo looks around in panic, trying to find somewhere to escape, seconds before the monkeys reach the bank, Jeydo eyes a small room and runs into it, Oreo follows. When we enter, Jeydo locks the door and I pet Oreo. The monkeys scream and scratch at the door but Jeydo simply lays me down on a metal bench and tries to find a different passageway out.

After an hour or so the monkeys still bang on the door in anger. "Samela" Jeydo says. "I found something. He pops his head up from under the beanch that I lay on. "It's a secret passageway to escape." He says. "Great! We can escape now!" I jump up but as soon as the gash in my leg makes contact with the bench, I cry out in agony. Jeydo bounds up to my aid, and lays me back down. He sighs. "See, that's the problem with the escape route. It's a fall." I must look worried because it makes Jeydo say, "No, we're not going" I look at him full of disappointment, "Of course we are," I say. Jeydo barely has any time to object before I stand up slowly with the help of my crutches. "Together?" I say. It takes awhile for Jeydo to respond. Then he holds my hand and squeezes it a bit "Together." In seconds we fall and I scream excessively. The fall is repulsive, and when we hit the ground my heart drops. Jeydo again has taken the most of the fall, but this time we land on a soft pink cloud filled with glitter and animated features. Jeydo gets up and watches Oreo as he springs across the clouds. "Where are we" he say's in a dreamy type of voice. I glance around. "I-I don't know, but it's absolutely wondrous. I look down at my leg and it has almost healed completely like magic. I jump up in happiness and not a wisp of pain contracts from the ripped tissue. "Jeydo, it's amazing!" I swirl around and dig my sweaty face in the creamy, gossamer clouds. I look over at Jeydo; he is entering a hole of sorts. Its dark, but I don't expect too much danger from this place, so I let him go. The air smells peachy and smooth. I could live here forever. That's when I see the sign a bit to the right. It's another checkpoint in the

maze. When I approach the wooden plate, I see that it says something different than the rest, "FINAL DESTINATION, beware of dreams." Dreams? I think deeply of what the sign means and turn around to tell Jeydo when out of nowhere, I begin to be hypnotized. I start to have uncontrollable dreams. I dream of Jeydo and I, being together forever. We present each other with two rings made of wood, which Jeydo carved. When I shake myself back to reality, I wear the ring that was in my dream, and now Jeydo does as well, but he's still walking forwards. The glitter from the clouds must be forcing us to have dreams that then come true. Before I can scream to Jeydo, the glitter pulls me back into another dream. There is a man in dark clothing, following Jeydo into the depths of the hole that he was walking towards. The man draws knife. I have to strain a lot, to be released from my dream and when I am, I whip my head to Jeydo's direction, "Jeydo!" I scream. When he turns around, the man that was in my dream stabs him next to his stomach with the knife. "Jeydo!" I scream again, and again, and again.

I wake up sweaty and in panic. I'm at my home, covered in the wet sand from my stress ball. Oreo lays flat on the bed and my leg is perfectly fine. It was all a dream. I can't convince myself that none of that was true. I'm not wearing the ring that I had dreamed of and my mom is completely sane. "Samela, time for school!" I wander downstairs and everything is as it was. No water leaks from the roof and the light doesn't flicker either. "Mom," I say, and I run to embrace her human-like self. "Honey," she says and laughs, "You have to drive to school now." I look at her with tears in my eyes. I missed her so much, and in result, I do as she says. I must have slept in my clothes and I decide to stay like this and make my way to school. For some reason the material for the tests have sunk into my brain over night, even without my study techniques, so now I'm ready and awake. But there's one problem. The one, who I dreamed would stay with me forever, isn't real. Nothing was. I turn sharply around the corner afraid that I'll be late, when a wooden ring slips from the inside of my sleeve. "The ring" I whisper to myself. I speed up the car and zoom into the parking lot next to the school. Sprinting into the building, I see that the seniors are having their early lunch. I stare across the lunchroom filled with delicious delicacies, frantically looking for the boy that risked his life for mine. And there, across the room staring straight into my eyes, with a punctured torso and a wooden ring slipped tightly on his finger, is Jeydo. It was real, it was all real. When Jeydo and I embrace, I am positive that the best dream of my life has come true.