

The cold, windy night cut through my jacket and nipped at my skin. My backpack was giving me some protection from the wind, but not much. The full moon was overhead and illuminated the ground. A light, white blanket of snow covering the ground gave the illusion of an angelic landscape. The building in front of me, however, was a stark contrast; it emitted an ominous feeling. Dead leaves crunched underneath my feet as I walked up the cobblestone path to the main entrance of the building. As I got closer, the details of the structure became less nebulous. The home was enormous; it had to be at least three stories tall. The details put into the house were sublime; it was like the St. Stephen's Cathedral with its diamond-patterned tiled roof. As I walked towards the furnished porch, I noticed small, stained glass windows lined the upper story of the house.

As my foot hit the first step on the short staircase leading up to the porch, the front door swung open. "That wretched man! That ungrateful, deceitful human being." the old lady, in front of me, shrieked. She began to pace, back and forth, across the patio.

The woman seemed to be fuming and oblivious to my presence. She wore a very modest, knee-length, black collared dress. Small strands of grey peeked out from underneath her black hair. She looked to be in her late forties. I moved very cautiously towards her. "Umm, excuse me. Hi, my name is Jessica. Are you the owner of this house?"

"Oh, I'm sorry dear. I didn't even see you standing there." The woman stopped her pacing and stepped closer to me. "I am not the owner of this house, but I am the maid. Did you need something sweetie?"

"Yes, I'm look for someone named William Ames. My father was his brother, Alexander Ames. William is my uncle." The color drained out of the woman's face, as if she saw a ghost. Her face was mixture of shock and fear. Her voice lost its former pep and cheeriness when she spoke again.

"Mr. Ames does not have any nieces or nephews. I don't know who you are, but I suggest you leave and never return."

"Look, I think you have it wrong. I have nowhere else to go. My uncle never knew about me and he's the last relative I have. My father died years ago and my mother just died as well." The maid looked nervous. At that very moment, a burst of wind blew against my back, nearly knocking me onto my knees.

"It's much too cold for you to be standing out here. Come on, let's discuss this in the

foyer. My name is Leslie and I have been working for Mr. Ames for nearly ten years. I know him quite well, and he isn't very fond of kids. If you're looking for a home, I don't think you'll find it here."

Leslie waved for me to enter and hastily shut the door behind us. The inside of the home was peculiar. The foyer was dimly lit by the moonlight through the skylights in the ceiling and some lit candelabras on the wall. I looked to my left, and found myself faced with a large 3-D sculpture of a snake jumping at me, with its fangs bared.

"Oh that's just a coat rack, nothing to be afraid of. Mr. Ames just has a peculiar taste." Leslie said.

"That's a very unique coat rack. I've never seen anything like it..." I turned to face Leslie. She was gone. A man dressed in an all black suit strutted through the archway connecting the living room and the foyer.

"Who are you? What are you doing in my house!?" his loud voice boomed throughout the room.

I looked at him. His hazel, light-brown eyes were identical to mine. "My-y-y-My name is Jessica. My mother died two weeks ago, in a car accident. My social worker said that according to my records, you're the last living relative I have."

"And how am I related to you, might I ask?" His eyebrow raised and his eyes took on an even more menacing hue.

"You're my uncle. Your younger brother, Alexander, was my father. My parents separated before I was even born and your brother wanted nothing to do with me. My mother raised me by herself. I don't even have my father's last name as my own. Now that my mom is dead and Alexander is dead, you're my last hope. I'm only looking for a place to live for a couple more months. In April, I'll turn eighteen. Then I'll be out of your hair."

He stared at me with a sort of childish curiosity and wonder. He seemed to contemplate the situation I was in. His spotless, white, button-up shirt and black pantsuit didn't seem to fit in with the surroundings. The house was very antique, yet he seemed to be more like the modern businessman, from the pristine collar to the leather Italian shoes.

"Please, I'm desperate. It's either this or a foster home for the next five months." I put on my biggest puppy eyes hoping to break his resolve.

"Alright, alright. I never knew Alexander had a child. I suppose I wouldn't have found

out anyhow, seeing as we were estranged siblings. You look so much like him, your eye color and light brown hair are the exact shade that runs in the Ames family.” He squinted to try to inspect me closer.

“So is that a yes?”

“Hmmm, sure. I will hold you to your promise to leave once April comes. Come with me now, I will show you the house.” He began leading me through the foyer and into the living room. “There are rules that must be followed in this house. My work is very important to me. You must remain quiet and in your room by 10PM every night.” He led me into the kitchen next. “Dinner will be at 7PM sharp. Do not be late, or you will not be receiving any food. Let me show you the second floor, there are two sets of stairs leading up to the second floor. One here in the kitchen and another one in the hallway.” We traveled up a black, winding metal staircase next. With every step, you could hear the metal groaning and moaning beneath the weight.

He began to walk down the hallway and stopped at the last door at the end. “The majority of the rooms are here on this floor. I have my cleaners keep all the guest rooms ready. They usually come once a month, but since it’s so close to the holidays, they won’t be coming around till the week after New Year’s.” William pushed open the door to reveal a very simplistic bedroom. There was a bed in the middle of the room with white sheets. The walls were painted a very deep shade of purple and the curtains were black. One simple armoire was on the right wall, next to a door leading to a bathroom.

“Don’t you have a maid?”

“What do you mean? I’ve never had a maid.” He gave me a puzzled look. “Anyhow, this is where you’ll be staying for the remainder of the time. I will leave you now to get settled. My room is upstairs, the entire third floor. If you need me, I will most likely be up there doing work. The door right across from the staircase we came up from leads to a staircase that will take you up to my room.”

“Okay, thank you. It’s been a long day. I think I am just going to skip dinner if that’s alright with you?”

“I can send something up for you. Good night.” He left the room and nearly slammed the door shut.

I slumped down on the bed, exhausted from the whole day. My canvas backpack hit the floor with a thud. I pulled the papers out of my bag. I scattered my collection of newspaper

clippings across the bed. They were all from the same newspaper press, the *Savannah Morning News*.

COLLEGE STUDENT FROM SAVANNAH, GEORGIA GOES MISSING -

January 3, 1994. Elizabeth Caulden, a 21-year-old college student at the Savannah State University, goes missing while at home during the holidays. Authorities are searching the area for any signs of the missing woman. According to friends and family, Caulden went out to a party with friends on January 1, and she never returned home. However, she has not return home since. Caulden has appeared to disappear without a trace, her cell phone and other belongings remain at her home. There are no current witnesses in this case. Caulden is described as a white female, 5 feet 4 inches tall, about 135 pounds, with light brown, shoulder-length hair and brown eyes. She was last wearing a red collared shirt and black skirt. Please call the local police if you have any information.

KIDNAPPING VICTIM FOUND! - August 15, 1994. A 21-year-old college student, Elizabeth Caulden, who had been missing for nearly six months is finally found. Just yesterday she was discovered, by tourists, about thirty miles outside of Savannah, Georgia. Caulden is currently hospitalized due to injuries sustained during her captivity. There are no current leads as to who was behind the crime.

KIDNAPPING SURVIVOR MAKES LUDICROUS CLAIMS AGAINST LOCAL MILLIONAIRE - September 4, 1994. Just one month ago, Elizabeth Caulden escaped from the wrath of her kidnapper. Very little was known about this kidnapper and the police has no leads. However, Caulden has made startling new accusations against William Ames, claiming that he abducted her on the night of January 1. William Ames, the richest man in town, states that he does not know Caulden nor did he kidnap her. Ames held a New Year's Party that night and was in attendance the entire evening. Multiple witnesses attest to his claim.

KIDNAPPING TRIAL BEGINS, ELIZABETH CAULDEN NOT PRESENT - November 24, 1994. The trial of William Ames begins today. Elizabeth Caulden, the

kidnapping victim, claims that she was abducted at William Ames' party on the evening of January 1, 1994. Accusations against William Ames include multiple accounts of rape, and sexual and physical abuse. Along with kidnapping, possessing criminal tools and one count of aggravated murder for allegedly beating Caulden so violently that she lost a pregnancy. Caulden claims she was held captive for 6 months in Ames' beach house along the Atlantic Ocean. Evidence was found at the beach house by police officials that may indicate that Ames played a role in this abduction.

WILLIAM AMES AQUITTED, ELIZABETH CAULDEN LEAVES TOWN -
January 28, 1995. William Ames was acquitted of the crime, kidnapping and holding hostage Elizabeth Caulden, this morning. The jury found him not guilty on the grounds of insufficient evidence. The victim of the kidnapping, Elizabeth Caulden, has fled the city. Her whereabouts are only known by close family members.

The last newspaper article had a photo of William Ames, walking down the steps of the courthouse with a smile on his face. In the bottom corner of the photo, there were townspeople cheering him on, happy that he was a free man. No one knew that three months later, I would be born. Only Elizabeth Caulden knew that William Ames had a child. Her child. Me.

The aroma of the food from downstairs was extremely aromatic. I could smell the garlic, onions, and sausages. A moment later, there was a knock on my door. I quickly shoved the news articles into my bag and kicked it underneath the bed. I went to open the door. There was a tray on the floor with pasta and a glass of water. I picked up the tray and set it down on the desk in the corner adjacent to my bed. The food tasted amazing. The sausage and fennel ragu was heaven. With every bite I could taste the saltiness of the sausage and parmesan cheese, the sweetness of the fennel, and the juiciness of the tomatoes. With every bite, I could feel myself getting tired. I clambered over to my bed, and with the images of the newspapers in mind, I finally fell asleep.

For the next week, everything went by fast. I told William that I didn't need to go to school; I graduated with my GED last year. I spent my days exploring the house, learning every turn, every crevice, and every room layout. I wanted this to be perfect. I wanted William to feel what my mother felt when she was being tortured and abused by him. I wanted him to suffer. A

quick death would be too nice; a slow one would be just perfect.

Tonight was the night I was going to do it. I was finally going to avenge my mother and get my revenge on William. The analog clock on my desk struck 10PM. My switchblade knife was stored securely in my back jean pocket, the soaked rag was in my left hand. On my right wrist was kevlar bracelet, it was at least 25 ft of rope. I made my way out of the room, and prowled my way over to the door leading up to William's bedroom. Cautiously, I opened the door, careful to not make any loud noises. I crept up the staircase, attentive of the spots where the stairs moaned under the pressure of my weight. The light began to grow as I ascended the stair. My heart began beating faster as I was getting closer and closer to my goal. At the top of the stairs, I turned right to face the open room. In the very back of the space, there was a small study. I quietly stalked over to the entryway of the study. Through the door, I could see a small fireplace lit. He was facing the opposite direction of me, looking through a window overlooking the expanse of the neighborhood. My grip on the drenched rag tightened. As I crept behind him, I noticed his body stilled.

"I know who you are, Elizabeth. I know what you are planning on doing." He didn't turn around from his stance.

"Good, then you won't mind me doing this." I launched myself towards him. The rag landed on his face. He tried clawing at my hand, to remove the rag, but the effects of the drug were stronger than his own brute strength. Within seconds, he slumped over the edge of the chair. I dragged another nearby chair, one without wheels, closer to myself and dragged his unconscious body onto it. Using the rope from my kevlon bracelet, I began to tie his arms and legs to the metal bars of the chair.

An hour later he was awake. The fire in the fireplace roared with life as I fed it papers. I was in the process of burning some of the money he kept in his wallet when I heard him yell. "HEY, GET THESE THINGS OFF OF ME!" I turned around to face him. His face was red with anger and embarrassment from being outsmarted by a teenage girl.

"Give me one good reason why. You kidnapped my mother. You tortured her, hit her, starved her, and impregnated her." "I never even knew who my father was until she died two weeks ago. I never knew that the only reason I existed was because YOU raped her 17 years ago." "So here's how it's going to work; I am going to make you suffer until you wish you were dead. And then, I'll leave you, here, to slowly die." I took my switchblade out of my backpocket.

“Do you see this? You and this knife here are going to become very close friends.

My first target was his fingers; one by one I chopped them off until they each became little stumps. Each scream of pain was music to my ears. An hour had passed by the time I finished sawing off the fingers on his hands. All ten fingers laid lifelessly on the floor, oozing blood.

Then, I took the bloodied knife and made a large, vertical cut down his wrists. His cries of agony only fueled my desire to make him feel the pain that he dealt out to my mother. I repeated the process on the other arm. Slowly, I backed away from him. The stack of newspapers was still in my bedroom downstairs. I ran down to grab my bag and the papers. I returned upstairs to where he still remained, bleeding from his slit wrists. His face was tense and he began to waver in and out of consciousness while screaming profanities at me. I left the newspapers on his desk, in front of him, and made my way of out the house.

The authorities to this day still don't know who killed Mr. William Ames. I've never been caught and I never will be caught. I changed my name and my appearance. I could be your best friend. I could be your lover. I could be anyone, anything that I wanted. Why? People aren't always who they say they are.