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Friday 11th June, 2021

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MEMORIES

“Ethan, help me!”

“Hold on, Brian!”

“I can’t swim anymore. My legs...they’re tired... I’m going under.”

“Try to stay above water. I’m almost there.”

“Ethan...hurry...please...help me!”

“Bri, I can’t see you. Where are you? Hey let me go!”

“Come with me kid. I gotta get you out of here. The tide is coming in quick.”

“No. I have to get my little brother...He went under the water! I gotta save him!”

“His father will get him.

“Briiiiaan!!!!...I have to get my brother!”

“Jay, I got Brian. Let’s go.....Elise, he’s unconscious!”

“Lay him here, quickly Todd! Come on my baby boy...stay with mommy.”

“Bro...please get up.”

“Hi. Someone here called 911? Give us some space please... Start compressions on him, Hill! Are you related to this child Mam?”

“Yes. He’s my son. I’m Dr. Elise Webster.”

“Damn it...he’s not responding...Keep trying Hill.”

“Come on bro... mom I’m sorry...mom why isn’t he waking up?”

“Why would you two sneak out of the house and go in the water after I said you couldn’t?”

“It doesn’t look good mam...I’m sorry. We need to get him to the hospital now!”

“Nooooooooooooo!!!! Not my baby...Not my Brian!”

Ethan’s body jolted upwards as his eyes flew open. He breathed heavily. Seconds later his head hit the pillow again then turned towards the wall to stare at Brian’s photograph with teary eyes. A WhatsApp message came in on his cellular phone. He took a deep breath and turned to reach for the device. His eyes focused:

Calister: Yo bro, I need ten minutes extra alright. Got to handle some business right before we meet. See you at 5.10 instead of 5.

Ethan’s lips formed a small smile. Calister’s message was a welcomed distraction from the dream. But this was no surprise; Calister had always shown up in his life at the right moment. He remembered what it had been like, all those years ago:

A week after Brian's funeral he started sneaking out of the house with a blanket to go sleep next to Brian's grave. When his mom found out, she was frantic and got him into a therapy program at the hospital where she worked. The therapy did nothing, of course, while he sank further and further into a world of death and despair. By the end of that summer, he stopped all of his usual sports and social activities while his mom tried everything she could to eliminate his grief. During the first three months of school, he spoke to no one. The teachers and students who were aware of the situation tried to offer support however they could. But nothing worked. Then one day at recess, while trying to defend some poor scrawny kid from a beat down, he came up against McDonald and his wannabe goons. He was tall and tough in body but there were six of them. His usual odds of ninety percent were reduced to fifty. Still, he clenched his fists and got ready for action. Never in his young life had he been the type to back down from a fight, and he wasn't about to start then. He hadn't started the problem but he would finish it! McDonald and his gang got their fists up and eagerly enclosed him in a circle. He steadied himself and got ready to swing. All he needed was one good hit for each of them: move quickly, take advantage of their blind spots and go for the kill. As they started closing in on him, he heard a voice from outside the circle.

"Six against one huh McDonald? You've always been a coward."

Looking beyond the gang, Ethan saw Calister, who was standing just in front of the terrified scrawny kid. He

was tall and tough like Ethan. “Move back kid,” Calister said to the scrawny boy. “Things are gonna get rough.”

Ethan then immediately began throwing punches from the inside of the circle while Calister began throwing punches from the outside. That morning two overgrown ten-year-olds went where no other ten-year-old had gone before. And by the end of the fight, they sent all six from the McDonald gang to the school’s medical infirmary. Afterwards, the parents of all the children were called into the principal’s office to discuss the incident. After the meeting, while Ethan’s and Calister’s mothers introduced themselves, the two boys also conversed. It was then that Ethan spoke for the first time in a long time, asking Calister why he got involved. Calister responded that his dad taught him big guys were supposed to fight for those who couldn’t fight for themselves and he liked what Ethan had done that day. The two went down a path of friendship and partnership. Ethan found out that Calister was also going through a hard time, having lost his father to a rare form of cancer during the same summer. He tried to be there for him and eventually helped Calister overcome his pain. And Calister, in turn, got Ethan to finally open up about his brother’s death and begin the process of healing. As the years went by, the two grew up together as brothers. They eventually joined the military and fought at each other’s side.

Ethan broke himself away from his thoughts of childhood and arched his back a little. He was still a bit jet lagged from last night’s midnight flight into Los Angeles. But he was happy to be home; six years overseas had been

too long. He tossed the covers aside and got out of bed. It was now 3.45 pm, which gave him about 45 minutes to bathe and get ready. He passed a hand over the horizontal scar on the left side of his chest before heading to the shower.

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Calister Holmes sat leisurely scoping out the restaurant's environs. He managed to make it for five o'clock after all. The waitress brought over his drink. He accepted it courteously and took a sip. The years had been good to his immediate family: his mom and sister were both successful psychiatrists, he was an instructor and they were all happy and healthy. He had kept his promise to his father to take care of the family; the memory of their last conversation came to him.

"Dad I don't want you to die!"

"I don't want to go either son. But no one can determine when they die. You have to be strong right now."

"I can't! I'm sorry"

"Calister, look at me. Wipe those tears away. You are the man of the family now. You have to take care of your mother and sister. You hear me?"

"I'll try."

"You don't try, boy. You do it! You want to be a SEAL, right?"

"Yes Sir. But you won't be here to continue training me."

“You will continue your training by yourself for now. You know everything I’ve taught you over the past year. Just keep practicing it. And when you get to the navy, the officers will give you the real training. You’ll make it, just like I did. You have my body, my mind, my strength. I know you will make it. Always remember that a SEAL never gives up. Never! So, you should never give up. You will succeed in the military. And you will be there for your mother and sister. Is this understood?”

“I will. I promise. I love you so much dad.”

“I love you too son, with all my heart. Don’t ever forget that. And if it’s at all possible, I’ll be watching over you, all of you, from the other side. Be strong Cal. Always believe in yourself.”

“OK Daddy.”

His hand brought the glass upwards again and he let the alcohol wash over the painful memory. The summer of his father’s passing had been the most challenging summer of all their lives. After the exit of family members, he, his mom and sister had been forced to get back to their not so normal routines. It had of course been hardest on he and his mom since Kimberly’s understanding was minimal at the time, because of her young age. She had, however, still been asking where ‘daddy’ was months after the funeral. He had been particularly depressed during the times he would catch his mother crying silently in her room. It was only after meeting Ethan that he had begun to feel better. And although they had vacationed in Cannes last January, he now found himself eager to see his brother again. His mind went to their lives together, growing up as family,

handling things side by side. He had been a little bummed about Ethan's decision to move his company to Europe for more prestigious job offers. But then again, he had also been bummed after E's retirement from the military. In the end, he had accepted it as a solid decision. During their last assignment together, he had seen the signs of dissatisfaction in him; therefore the news of branching out had not been entirely surprising. But now, with Ethan being home, they could see each other and hang out more often; as often as their jobs allowed them to anyway. His mom and sister were definitely happy to have E back as well, not to mention Elise. Just then Cal observed Webster quickly approaching. He wore a modest pair of denim jeans with a black vintage dress shirt and jacket falling loosely over it. "For a man of financial means, you sure don't dress like it sometimes. Bring it in brother." Calister stood up and put both arms around Ethan.

Ethan patted Cal's back affectionately. "What's up Sherlock?"

"You got jokes. Good to have you back man." Cal smiled and signaled the waitress to bring over three more of the same drink as he sat back down.

Ethan sat himself in the opposite chair. "Damn good to be home man. I missed you bro." He observed the waitress placing three glasses of his and Cal's favorite alcoholic drink on the table. A hand reached for one of them and he took a mouthful. "What's been going on around here?"

Calister eased back into his chair. “Santa Barbara’s the same as before man, nothing new. You found a space for the company yet?”

“Yea. I managed to get the same space I had in the past. It became vacant again about two weeks before I called Ford to ask about it. Good timing, I guess.”

“The building is in a good location for your kind of work so I’m glad you were able to get it back.” He finished the first drink then grabbed another.

“How’s Jasmine?”

Calister grinned. Just the mention of that woman’s name could enhance his entire mood. “She’s cool.”

“Any wedding plans in the near future?” Ethan smiled from behind the glass he had just brought up to his lips.

Calister gave a deep throated laugh. “I will when you will, Webster.”

“Ha ha. How’s Kimberly?”

“She’s...wait a minute, there she is coming up fast behind you. So, I guess you can ask her yourself.” Holmes pointed lazily with his finger.

Ethan immediately stood up and turned in Kimberly’s direction to see her almost at their table. “Kimberly Holmes.”

“Ethan Webster. Come here boy.” She ran up to the table, threw herself into his arms and rubbed the back of his neck affectionately.

He got hold of her and held on. “Hey.” His body stiffened. Wait. Did his dick just move? (Get it together Webster. Your sister’s not on the menu tonight.) He severed the embrace and took a long look at her five feet, six-inch figure; she was wearing a white, double-breasted

pantsuit. The pattern, which may have made another woman appear a tad masculine, exuded femininity thanks to Kimberly's abundant curves – from bosoms to hips she had enough to make more than a few men stop and pay attention. Silver, cylindrical earrings dangled from her ears and sparkled against her milk chocolate complexion. The hair, still completely natural, was styled into a bob.

Kimberly grinned joyfully. "I'm so glad you're back. But listen I can't stay. Gotta head back to the hospital. Linda and I need to go through some files together and organize two group therapy sessions for tomorrow. Let's meet soon. OK?"

"Count on it, little sis. Your digits are still the same right?"

"Yup same number."

"Great I'll be in touch soon."

Kimberly went over to her brother's side and bent down with a kiss. She then reached into her purse and pulled out a cell phone. "Here's your work phone. You forgot it at mom's yesterday. I just came from the house."

"Thanks doc." Calister accepted his cellular with a smile. "Mom still at work?"

"Naturally. Anyway, I'll catch you two later. Good to see you E." She gave her brother another kiss on the cheek and quickly made her way to exit through one of the restaurant's side entrances.

"Same here Kimy." Ethan watched her exit, and then sat back down. "I see she's still the same."

"Yup." Calister put the phone in his pocket. "But her work environment isn't."

Ethan furrowed his brow. “What are you talking about?”

“Some strange shit’s been going on at their Psychiatric unit. For the past few months someone’s been messing around: trashed a few offices and wrote disturbing messages on the walls. The person’s also broken into and trashed a few of the doctors’ homes. A wreath was left at each place that was trashed. And last month one of the unit’s lead doctors, Gregory, was beaten almost to death while working late in his office one night. He’s in a stable condition now but he’s gonna need extensive rehab.”

Webster’s furrow went deeper. “OK. Have they singled out Kimy in any way?”

“No. Just Gregory and the four other doctors whose homes were also broken into. Still, it doesn’t make me too comfortable that this kind of person is near her. I checked out her home security system and found it to be a bit inadequate. I recommended a few better companies to her but she’s been with this company for ages and thinks it’s fine for now.”

“I’ll check it out next week.”

“That’s what I was thinking. Your company deals with surveillance among other things so I think you could do a much better job than me. She doesn’t want another security package but if you could help her tighten up this current one, it would put me more at ease. And mom too.”

“This is Kimberly we’re talking about, man. Consider it done.”

“Great. My mind will be free knowing you’re here looking out for her.”

“When are you heading back to base?”

“On Wednesday. Gotta start training new groups on Thursday. You ever miss it?”

Ethan smiled and finished his first drink. “Nah.”

“Yea. I thought you’d say that.” Calister took another sip of alcohol and smiled back.

Friday 11th June

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THOUGHTS

They were still wild; those cat-shaped eyes were still wild and unconquered. Fierceness still emitted from them, with a stare which could pierce through the coldest heart. He had grown his hair to neck length. She hadn't been expecting that. It made him look even more ferocious. Last week when her brother Calister had told her Ethan was returning home her heart had almost leapt out of her chest. And seeing him this afternoon had confirmed her secret concern: still having feelings for him. As Kimberly slipped into the tub of steaming hot water, she pictured his tall muscular stature, his chiseled jaw line and naturally flirtatious smile. She had forgotten how captivating he could be and how much love he could fill a room with just by being in it. Her head rested on the neck pillow fixture, allowing the mind to go backwards twenty-five years.

“Hey Dr. Webster is Ethan here? I got something for him.”

"Yes he is Kimberly, but today is July 10th; you know what day that is...so he's not in a good mood."

"I know. That's why I brought this to cheer him up...I don't want him to be sad anymore about what happened last year."

"Aww this is so sweet of you Kim."

"Mommy said dwelling on the past can be harmful."

"Aha. Pretty big words for a six-year-old."

"I've been learning from mom and the other psychiatrists."

"Well, you are clever beyond your years so I guess it's good that you have people around who can help you learn quickly. Go on in, he's in the living room."

"Thanks...Eeeeeethaaaaaan, where are you?"

"Hey Kimberly, I'm here sitting behind the couch."

"Whatcha doing down there?"

"Nothing. Just relaxing on the rug."

"Oh OK. I know you're feeling sad and all, so I wrote this for you...maybe it will make you smile a little."

"Let me see."

"Here."

"Thanks Kimberly."

Her fingers ran along a side of the bathtub. She remembered that he had read the note with a frown but had managed a small smile afterwards. This small smile had filled her with hope that her friend would get better someday. At that moment she had decided to keep bringing him notes and other things every year on the anniversary of Brian's death in order to try to cheer him up. Even at that young age, her desire for therapy had been developing; her

need to foster people's mental health and make them whole again had already begun to take root.

She rubbed her legs together beneath the sudsy water as the night time sounds outside helped relax her; the crickets were a bit soft tonight; this was just the level she needed to hear in order to suppress the stress she had been storing up because of the current situation at work. That place had always been fairly normal. Now everyone was on guard because of some psychotic. Images of Gregory flashed through her mental channels: streams of blood had been stuck to all parts of him, especially his face. The smell of it had still been fresh in the early morning air. His skull had been cracked. Many lower bones could have been seen jutting out, indicating that they had certainly been violently broken. Linda had been the one to find him on the floor. Kimberly squeezed her eyes tightly; it was her usual "go to" amateur repression technique. She hoped the police would get a handle on the situation soon so things could return to normal. Opening her eyes, her mind forced itself to revert back to Ethan. Why hadn't he informed her that he was returning home? Should the news really have come from Calister? Maybe it didn't matter; what was important now was that he would contact her soon and they could make up for lost time.