

The Last Day

Only one person knew the truth.

That was the worst part. No matter how badly she wanted to talk, only one person knew what she was going through. Of the billions on Earth, only a single person knew the depth of her pain. There was no comfort to be found in that. How could there be? Delilah had practically no experience in soothing others; she had nothing to apply to herself.

At first, she revelled in her isolation. For years people meant pretending. I'm fine, I'm all right, it's okay: these little lies that people told one another in passing felt insidious to her. With every greeting the truth was being buried deeper and deeper inside her soul, where it settled. Delilah had once thought that being alone meant that she didn't need to lie anymore, but it wasn't the same as telling someone. She kept pretending.

The truth was that Delilah wasn't *okay*. She wasn't *fine*. Crying at sudden noises, whether it was a car alarm or the scraping of a chair against the floor, wasn't the sign of a stable mind. Healthy people didn't find themselves sweating and shaking with fear at the mention of their brother. Delilah didn't eat once a day because she was trying out a fad diet; she ate once a day because she hated being seen. She hated how other people looked at her, their attention grating like barbs on her skin. The few friends she had wore their weirdness as a badge of pride, but this was different. Surely this would be too much for them, the same way the truth would be too much for her parents.

The night before she moved into her dorm, her father had taken her aside. He was the quiet type, the kind that kept everything on a tight leash, and in that moment her father was

smiling like he'd won the lottery, all because of her. "I'm proud of you," he'd said. Those words were a salve to her traumatized mind – but then he went on.

"Not many people could go through what you did and turn out normal. ...I'm just so relieved you're okay."

Guilt and fear froze Delilah to the spot. A heavy knot in her throat kept her from speaking. Even when she swallowed it away she didn't know how to tell him that he was wrong. She didn't have the right. In telling him the truth she'd be taking that elusive openness of her father's, his happiness and pride, and throwing it back at him. Her father had protected her; how she could she repay him like that?

For over a year that night held Delilah back. Her daily walk to class led her by a bulletin board plastered in coloured signs about mental health, awareness and self-care. Next to it was a door covered with a large poster of smiling, conventionally generic young adults. All she needed to do was reach out and tear a blue strip away from the poster of Dr. Clay Williams, a psychologist who worked on campus every Wednesday and Friday. Or, she could take it one step further and go through the door, walk past those smiling faces, and make an appointment in the counselling offices. Her friends had, and they said the counsellors were nice, but this was different, wasn't it?

She walked through that hallway every single day. Her eye would linger over that blue poster, look over those smiling faces, and she'd think of her father. She would think of his smiling face and his proud, tired eyes and she would keep walking.

But that was then. Now, as Delilah looked at the faded paper, coffee in one hand and phone in the other, she thought of the picture her mother had sent her that morning, of her four-

year-old self beaming at the camera, her face covered in cake and frosting. She thought of that little girl and the dreams she'd had. That child had no idea what her life was going to become, and she deserved better than what she was going to get. Delilah wanted to give her better.

The truth was that Delilah wasn't well. Only one person knew. But, as she reached out to tear the last strip off the poster for Dr. Clay Williams, PhD, she promised herself this would be the last day that was true.