

## Middle of July

### A series



### Synopsis

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*For Luna and Star, growing up without fathers was their shared reality. But on July 16th that year, a man walked into Luna's life, claiming to be her father. As secrets unravel, their friendship—and everything they believed about family—hangs in the balance*

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## VII

### Luna's POV

#### **96 Hours Earlier**

The rage in my soul burned so fiercely I could taste it on my tongue. A metallic bitterness, like betrayal itself had taken form inside me. I trusted my mother. But I didn't know if I could ever get past this.

They had been in contact for six years? Six whole years? How did I not know this? How could she do this to me? To us?

My hands trembled as I dialed his number.  
One ring. Another.

"Hello? Who's this?"

I froze. Then, without thinking, I ended the call.  
Almost immediately, my phone lit up. He was calling back.  
I didn't answer. I couldn't. What was I supposed to say? Where would I even begin?

I decided to send a text instead. My thumbs felt stiff, reluctant. But I pressed on.

"Hi, this is your daughter, Luna. I'd like to meet and talk if you don't mind."

His response was immediate. I didn't anticipate that.

"Hi, Luna. I'd love to meet up too, but I'm out of town right now. Here's my address—when I'm back, we'll talk about anything you want. Just let me know when you're coming."

I gritted my teeth.

There had to be a reason my mom stayed silent for six years, and I was going to hear it from him—since I could no longer trust her version of events. But something about his tone—so casual, so light—unnerved me. Like he hadn't been missing all my life. Like I hadn't spent years trying to fill the gaps he left behind.

I started heading to my boyfriend's place, away from all the chaos at home, hurt that Star wouldn't even look at me when she woke up. Then a thought slipped in, uninvited.

This man just gave me his home address.

Maybe I should take a look around, get a feel of the neighborhood. He was my father, after all. Getting a sense of his world didn't seem unreasonable.

I hesitated, then changed the destination on my Uber ride.

Two hours later, I arrived.

The estate was quiet—eerily so. Tall gates, neatly trimmed hedges, luxury cars parked in pristine driveways. The kind of neighborhood where wealth spoke in whispers, and people had more money than purpose.

I paid the driver and stepped out, my stomach twisting with unease.

The main gate was locked. I walked around and found a smaller one at the back. I hesitated, then pushed. It swung open.

Weird.

The houses here weren't close together—his nearest neighbor had to be at least ten minutes away on foot. The silence pressed against my skin.

I walked to the front porch, hesitated, then peeked through the window. Marble floors, glass furniture, a chandelier so massive it could probably crush a person.

On impulse, I twisted the door handle.

It opened.

I froze.

Who the hell leaves their front door open?

Probably rich people who think they're untouchable.

I stepped inside. The air smelled like pine and something floral. The decor was modern, cold.

I moved further in, drawn to the richness of it all despite myself.

I didn't see the cameras—not the one above the door, not the one in the living room, not the tiny one blinking in the hallway.

I wandered towards a bedroom and eased the door open.

Minimalist. Too clean.

The scent of female perfume lingered in the air. The kind Star used.

A headtie—the same type I'd bought for her last month—sat on the dresser.

My mom probably had the same kind.

I pulled open a drawer.

Hair clips. So many.

Condoms. Typical.

I turned to the wardrobe, opened it, then shut it—but something caught my eye. I opened it again.

A cream-colored gown.

The exact one Star owned. The same red ink stain at the hem.

More of her clothes lay scattered inside.

Shivers ran down my spine.

Why were they here?

I stumbled to the bathroom. My breath hitched.  
Star's shampoo. Her toothbrush.  
What the hell was going on?

Had she been secretly meeting with our father?  
No. Impossible. She was just as shocked as I was few hours ago. Maybe even more shocked—she passed out.  
I needed to leave.

Now.

There had to be an explanation. A good one.  
I turned quickly, but as I passed the bookshelf in the hallway, something caught my eye again.

A manuscript.

It looked like the one Star had been working on. She'd been writing a story—about what, she never said.  
Was it about our father? That seemed like something she would do.

But how? When did she even meet him? She'd been working on this for over a year, and he had just shown up weeks ago.

A storm of thoughts crashed through my mind.  
Why would she keep this from me?  
Why pretend to be just as shocked as I was today?  
Nothing made sense.

I picked it up, heart hammering.  
No, it wasn't a manuscript. It was a bunch of patient files.

#### Case Study 19

Patient Name: David Kasim Jr

Date of Birth: March 4, 1967

#### Diagnosis:

- Schizophrenia & Bipolar Disorder
- Dissociative Identity Disorder
- Patient is mentally unstable and requires round-the-clock medication
- Patient should be under observation in a psychiatric facility
- Patient is suspected of indulging in illicit and inappropriate sexual relations with family members.

The list went on and and on.

My stomach churned. What the hell was this?

My hands shook as I flipped to the next file. The header was different. A different hospital.

Patient Name: Star Duru

Date of Birth: March 5, 1992

Diagnosis:

- Peptic ulcer
- History of multiple sexual partners
- Depression and Anxiety
- History of alcohol dependence
- Abandonment Issues
- Herniated disc and traumatic brain injury at 16
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

A chill crawled up my spine.

I didn't want to keep going, but I had to.

Miss Julianna Jonah

Date of birth : September 7, 1970...

I blinked rapidly, my breath catching in my throat.

What was the meaning of this?

Why did he have these?

The papers looked old, the ink slightly faded, but they didn't resemble official records. They seemed stolen—so why were they left carelessly on the shelf, almost as if they were meant to be found?

And if he was keeping files on us, where was mine?

A deep unease settled in my gut.

I shut the folder and dropped it back on the shelf, resisting the urge to wipe my hands on my jeans.

I shouldn't be here.

I never should have come.

A suffocating fear wrapped around me, pressing down on my chest.

I turned towards the front door, but hesitated, peering through the window first.

The car parked at the end of the street was still there.

It had been there before I arrived.

The windows were dark, but the way it was positioned— angled, half on the curb, like the owner parked in a hurry— felt eerie.

I swallowed, exhaling shakily.

Probably nothing.

I reached for the door handle and stepped outside, walking swiftly down the porch towards the gate.

As I walked, I pulled out my phone to check the time—6:28 PM. I needed to order an Uber fast. My fingers hovered over the screen, but before I could tap the app, a notification popped up. A text.

From an unknown number.

“Please don’t contact your father.  
Don’t tell anyone about this message.  
Don’t even reply.”

He’s dangerous. He’s capable of anything.  
Whatever you do—DONT CONTACT HIM”

A wave of nausea rolled through me. My grip tightened around my phone.

Coming here had been a mistake. A terrible, reckless mistake.

My hands trembled as I reached for the gate, desperate to get out of here. I pushed it open—  
And froze.

My phone slipped from my fingers, clattering onto the pavement.

He was standing there.

Like he’d been waiting for me to come out.  
A slow, twisted sneer curled his lips.  
“Did you enjoy reading the files?”

Ice spread through my veins.

What files? I whispered.

His smirk widened.

“You really shouldn’t snoop through people’s things, Luna. I would think your mother raised you better than that.”

My breathing turned shallow.

- Patient was mentally unstable...
- Star’s clothes...
- The text I just received...

The realization slammed into me.

The text wasn’t random. It was a warning. A desperate one.

Was it from Star? Did she know about the file? Did he threaten her? Had he done something to her?

Everything crashed down at once.

If she knew... why hadn’t she told me? Why let me walk into this?

No. That wasn’t fair

Maybe she thought I wouldn’t believe her.

I wouldn’t have believed her.

Oh, God.

I needed to run, but my heart was pounding so violently I was convinced he could hear it. I had to be smart. Careful.

Forcing a shaky step back, I mustered a weak smile.

“I’m sorry we’re meeting again like this,” I said, forcing my voice to stay even. “Well, you gave me your address, and it’s been 22 years, Dad. You can understand my curiosity, can’t you?”

I swallowed hard, my throat dry.

I didn’t dare ask how he knew I’d read the files. Or where he had been since I arrived.

“I didn’t mean to snoop. I just wanted to see the neighborhood. I’m really sorry about this, but I have to go—Mom just called,” I lied.

His expression didn’t change.

“Oh, that’s fine, Luna. I’m not angry at all. In fact, the timing couldn’t be more perfect.”

He took a step closer.

“Your mom will understand if you tell her you can’t make it back home tonight. Just send a quick text.”

No. I had to get out of here. “It’s getting late—I really need to go. I’ll come back another time, I promise I’ll be in touch—”

His hand shot out, clamping around my wrist.  
Tight.

I sucked in a sharp breath.

“I insist.”

Panic flared inside me. I wrenched my arm back, scrambling to grab my phone, but he was faster.

He pressed his foot over it, pinning it to the ground effortlessly.

“Guess I’ll have to hold on to this for now.” His tone was almost casual. “I’ll send the text myself.”

His grip on my wrist tightened.

“Now, let’s go inside and have a little chat, shall we?”

The finality in his voice sent pure terror coursing through me.

Giving me his home address had been a trap.

And I had walked right into it.

This wasn’t just a mistake.

It was one that could cost me my life.

## **Today**

The room was dark—too dark. The only light came from a dim bulb hanging overhead, casting eerie shadows on the table. Toasted bread, fried eggs, orange juice, avocados. My favorites. Of course, he knew. But I had no appetite.

Four days. I had spent four days locked in this room, force-fed truths I would give anything to erase from my memory.

The goriest.

David Kasim. Jude. Star’s boyfriend.

Everytime I thought about it, nausea crashed over me in relentless waves.

A deranged psychopath.

He had escaped from the mental facility his parents locked him in. His father—one of the wealthy Emirs of the North—had disowned him for brutally raping and killing their first daughter. He stole from them, ran away, and built a life of his own.

He had once cared for my mother. Or so she believed. But when she got pregnant, she no longer mattered. Still, he never truly left. He had been watching.

Waiting—for us.

We weren't people to him. We were his possessions. My mother was just a vessel to deliver what was rightfully his. A replacement for what he lost.

He told me everything. How he never meant to kill his sister. How she kept resisting. How she left him no choice. How he had vowed never to have children, but when he realized a daughter meant reincarnation, he saw it as fate.

How it happened when she was sixteen. How he waited patiently until we turned sixteen before he started observing, planning, carefully preparing to meet us.

Each day, I was forced to listen as he unraveled these horrors. Again and again. His voice was a lullaby of terror, his eyes sharp, amused, studying my every reaction.

I needed to talk to Star.  
How was she coping?

I was terrified she would try to take her life again. My boyfriend, and my mother—they must have called a hundred times by now. Were they searching for me? Did they even know where to start?

On the fourth night, he returned—agitated. His jaw was clenched, his movements stiff with suppressed rage. Something had happened.

I braced myself, expecting the worst. But then, his expression softened, his lips curving into something that mimicked concern.

“Looks like your mother finally knows about me and Star” he murmured. “Everything is falling into place.” He pulled my phone from his pocket, holding it up between two fingers. “She’s been calling non-stop. So, I’m going to let you answer.”

My breath caught.

He crouched beside me, leveling his face with mine. “When she calls, you’ll pick up. You’ll tell her you’re with me. That you’re having a great time.” His smile widened. “Tell her you’re not angry anymore, that you understand why she kept the truth from you.”

The phone buzzed in his hand.

“Do you understand me?” His voice was low, calm—the kind of calm that made my skin crawl. I nodded stiffly.

He pressed the answer button and held the phone to my ear.

“Luna? Luna, can you hear me?” My mother’s voice was frantic, choked. “Where are you?” My throat tightened.

“Mom, hello. I’m fine.” My voice was shaky. I clenched my fists.

“I know you’re angry, but please listen to me. Don’t try to contact your father, do you hear me? Just come back home. I’ll explain everything. I promise ”

I gritted my teeth. If only she had been this vocal that Sunday, maybe I wouldn’t have stormed out in a rage. Maybe I wouldn’t be here now. Why was it always so hard for her to open up to her own daughter?

I swallowed hard. “Mom, I’m with Dad. I’m fine. He’s taking good care of me, and I—” “You’re with who?” she screamed.

“Luna, please. You can’t be there. You need to leave—now. Tell me whe—

Before she could finish, he snatched the phone from my ear.

“Hi, Julie,” he said smoothly. “It’s odd that you think our daughter wouldn’t be safe with me. I’m disappointed.”

“I want to see my daughter!” she screamed. “I want a video call.”

David sighed dramatically. “Fine, Julie. Of course. She’s your daughter. You can see her.”

The moment he switched to the video call, I caught sight of my mother’s face. She was a wreck—her eyes swollen, her lips trembling.

I forced a smile, trying to keep her calm, trying to think of a way out.

David wrapped an arm around me, keeping the phone steady with the other. My throat tightened, bile rising.

How much longer could I endure this?

Then, I saw it—the knife tucked into his back pocket. Small, sharp, just within reach.

His arm tightened around me. A silent warning.

I wasn't sure when I lost control.

I wasn't sure when I decided I had had enough.

I locked eyes with my mother and screamed, "Mom, I'm not safe! Please come to Crystal Avenue, No. 1 Dove Park—"

His expression darkened. A curse left his lips.

He lunged. The phone clattered to the ground. My mother screamed.

I moved faster. My fingers closed around the knife.

A struggle—his weight against mine, hands around my neck, breath hot against my skin.

Then—blood.

Warm, sticky. Everywhere.

Whose blood was it? Mine or his? I couldn't tell.

A sharp inhale. A strangled sound.

The last thing I heard was my mother's scream tearing through the speakers.

Then—nothing.